

# QUALITATIVE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH METHODS

## INTRODUCTION

The objective of qualitative research is to gather non-numerical data, to provide more nuanced accounts of the subject under study. This includes people's subjective opinions, beliefs and behaviours, which cannot be represented through measurement.

Ethnographic Research is the systematic, emplaced study of people and cultures to better understand existing and emerging societal and cultural trends. It is a form of research that relies on qualitative methods of data collection. An ethnography focusses on immersion in the culture of a particular group and represents findings on cultural phenomena in visual and written format. Traditionally an ethnography was conducted over a long term (months or even years), but recently academics have argued for the validity of shorter term studies of a particular culture (Pink and Morgan, 2013) which are common in 'design ethnography' (Lindley, Sharma and Potts, 2014; Murphy, 2016). Culture can refer both to traditional ideas of a group within a fixed location who share ideas, values and behaviours (e.g. a local or national identity), but also to shared practices, behaviours, or values which are distributed across space and time. This 'multi-sited' approach to ethnography, proposed by George Marcus (1999, 2005) reflects the growth of globally distributed cultures, connected by digital technologies.

In an ethnography the researcher must observe and interpret their experience of a culture. This can include things like the sensory qualities of the 'in the wild' experience (Pink, 2015), which may give new insight into the design of objects worn on the body.

## UNIT OUTLINE

The premise for this unit is for the students, working in small groups (approximately 3-5), to initiate, design, plan and carry out their own ethnography. This will be a qualitative research study of a group of people in their day-to-day environment, where the results of their empirical observations and other semi-structured data collection techniques (e.g. focus groups and interviews) could be used to inform a whole variety of creative schemes relating to growth and innovation within the fashion-tech industry: retail spaces, customer experience, alternative business models, business strategy, design and design thinking.

The aim here is two-fold, firstly for tutors to request the students interrogate an emerging trend in society e.g. a new aspect of human behaviour or a micro-movement they observe, and to gather data (images, film footage, transcripts etc.) by 'going into the field'. This trend becomes the 'culture' which they study in the field. E.g. a subculture, or a group of people with shared behaviours, understandings or approaches to the world. Then secondly, to analyse, evaluate and present their research findings as a short film/visual ethnography supported by a piece of written text – materials that could support future-thinking in the field of fashion-tech.



# QUALITATIVE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH METHODS

In their teams, the students should produce:

1. An ethnographic film (annotated and/or with narration/voice), evidencing visual management, analysis and interpretation of data in moving image format, accompanied by application for ethical clearance. The film should showcase the emplaced activities of the members of the culture under study, with narration to account for the students' interpretation of the data.
2. A critical evaluation of their qualitative research study undertaken for assignment 1, evidencing management, analysis and interpretation of data in illustrated written format, considering the human, social, psychological and economic contexts that surround their work (1,500 words max).

Prior to the students undertaking their field work, you should invest time in preparing/equipping them with the necessary tools for conducting an ethnography. See: 'Indicative Content' (below). In particular tutors should aim to cover topics such as observing, capturing, analysing and representing data. It is also essential tutors advise the students on research ethics and legal frameworks relating to the filming and documentation of people's daily activities. Crucially, ensure students do not film, audio record, or transcribe conversations, without receiving prior written consent from their participants. Furthermore, that they inform their participants of the purposes of the research they are taking part in and how the research data will be managed.

Additionally, as an essential part of the planning stage, and pre-conducting their primary research, encourage the students to undertake independent preparatory work. They could for example consult various secondary sources relevant to their cultural and creative research study e.g. key blogs and websites, books, magazines and publications, fashion, design and fashion-tech business.

## INDICATIVE CONTENT AND TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODS

In this unit, aim to introduce students to a range of qualitative research methods that connect to conducting an ethnography. Primary research methods should include:

- participant observation
- note-taking
- visual capture
- semi-structured data collection techniques
- interviews
- focus groups,
- methods of analysis
- ethics and consent

Include: Project briefings, lectures, seminars, tutorials, case studies, supervised studio or workshops, presentations or other formative assessment, assessment feedback tutorials, field trips and health

# QUALITATIVE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH METHODS

and safety.

As previously noted, you should prepare the students in advance of them conducting their firsthand research. This will mean that in your structural alignment for this unit, you will offer more formal input at the beginning and then open up the time for the students to explore the field. Then, at the point when the students begin to assimilate their research findings into creative output i.e. a film, you should bring in some sessions on handling and organising visual material effectively to present a strong visual argument.

Below are some suggested lecture/seminar titles in support of conducting an ethnography:

- An introduction to visual anthropology – communicating ideas through images and moving pictures.
- Observation methods and note taking.
- Depicting others objectively.
- The notion of spaces as sites for culture to materialise.
- Object Analysis and the ritual of material interaction.

You could also embed ethnographic film screenings into the unit, and invite expert input/offer a guest lecture with an ethnographic filmmaker to further advance understanding.

N.B. students should also be encouraged to watch ethnographic film and read ethnographies as directed independent study as part of this unit.

## ADDITIONAL TUTOR'S NOTES

This unit can be studied as a stand-alone workshop activity or over a series of several weeks to integrate with a wider curriculum. The research findings revealed in this unit could be used to inform the students' work in other units within the E4FT portfolio such as: Identifying Fashion-tech Opportunities, the Wearable Technologies Workshop and Entrepreneurship and Small Business Start-up.

To undertake this unit, students will need to be digital savvy, and have access to appropriate filmmaking and video editing software such as iMovie and/ Apps. They will need to either have pre-existing skills in filmmaking, video editing and computer presentation skills, or will require tuition together with technical support in these key areas. Tutors should consider these things in the organisation of the learning experience, the teaching input and resources you provide, and the length of time chosen to spend on the unit. It could be a short sharp response or a more in-depth study.



# QUALITATIVE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH METHODS

If the intention is to devote a longer period of time to this study, and to go more in depth, tutors could also cover more structured questionnaire design, phenomenological approaches, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), and grounded theory as part of your research methods.

See: Teacher's Toolkit, Tool 2 > 'Workshops', 'Research for fashion-tech', Tool 3 > Interdisciplinary group working and Tool 7 > 'Learning Through Research' (available at <https://www.e4ft.eu>) together with the 'Reading and Resource List' (below) for further support.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of the unit the students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate in depth knowledge of and rationale for applying a range of qualitative methods;
2. Design an ethnographic research study in the field of fashion-tech using primary and secondary methods to identify a culture for the emplaced study;
3. Collect, critically analyse, evaluate and interpret qualitative data and present findings in required formats i.e. visually, orally and in writing.

## ASSESSMENT METHODS

The assessment for this unit involves both graphic and written interpretation of research findings:

1. An ethnographic film (annotated and/or with narration/voice)
2. Critical evaluation of their qualitative research study (1,500 words max)

## READING AND RESOURCE LIST

### Essential Reading and Resources

Banks, M. & Morphy, H. (1997). *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*. Yale: University Press.

Collins, H. (2010). *Creative research: The theory and practice of research for the creative industries*. Lausanne: AVA.

Hockings, Paul. 2003. *Principles of visual anthropology*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Loizos, P. (1993). *Innovation in Ethnographic Film: From innocence to self-consciousness 1955-1985*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

# QUALITATIVE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH METHODS

Pink, S. and Morgan, J. (2013) 'Short-term ethnography: Intense routes to knowing', *Symbolic Interaction*, 36(3), pp. 351–361.

Pink, S.; Kurti, L. & Alfonso, A. (2004). *Working Images: Visual Representation in Ethnography*. London: Routledge.

## Further Reading and Resources

Bateson, G. & Mead, M. (1942). *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis*. New York Academy of Sciences. ([https://monoskop.org/images/8/8d/Bateson\\_Gregory\\_Mead\\_Margaret\\_Balinese\\_Character\\_A\\_Photographic\\_Analysis.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/8/8d/Bateson_Gregory_Mead_Margaret_Balinese_Character_A_Photographic_Analysis.pdf)).

Cresswell, J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). London: Sage.

Dancey, C. P., & Reidy, J. (2014). *Statistics without maths for psychology* (6th ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education.

DeWalt, K.M., & DeWalt, B.R., (2010). *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers* (2nd ed.). Lanham: AltaMira Press

Davies, M. B. (2007). *Doing a successful research project: Using qualitative or quantitative methods*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Gliner, J. A., Morgan, G. A., & Leech, N. L. (2009). *Research methods in applied settings* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Guindi, F. (2004). *Visual Anthropology: Essential Method and Theory*. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

Harvard (2010) Sensory Ethnography Lab, Harvard: <https://sel.fas.harvard.edu>.

Heider, Karl (2006). *Ethnographic film*. Austin: Univ. of Texas Press.

Lindley, J., Sharma, D. and Potts, R. (2014) 'Anticipatory Ethnography: Design Fiction as an Input to Design Ethnography', *Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference Proceedings*, 2014(1), pp. 237–253.

Marcus, G. E. (1999) 'What Is At Stake – And Is Not – In The Idea And Practice Of Multi-Sited Ethnography', *Canberra Anthropology*, 22(2), pp. 6–14.



# QUALITATIVE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH METHODS

- Marcus, G. E. (2005) 'Multi-sited Ethnography: Five or Six Things I Know About It Now\*', in Coleman, S. and von Hellermann, P. (eds) *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Problems and Possibilities in the Translocation of Research Methods*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 16–34.
- Moon, C. H. (2011) *Material Intimacies: The Labor of Creativity in the Global Fashion Industry*. Yale University.
- Murphy, K. M. (2016) 'Design and Anthropology', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 45, pp. 433–449.
- Murphy, Keith, M. (2015). *Swedish Design: An Ethnography*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Nicewonger, T. E. (2011) *Fashioning the Moral Aesthetic: An Ethnographic Study of the Socialization of Antwerp Trained Fashion Designers*. Columbia University.
- Pink, S. (2015) *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. 2nd edn. London: Sage.
- Pink, Sarah (2003) Interdisciplinary agendas in visual research: re-situating visual anthropology, *Visual Studies*, 18:2, 179-192.
- Ruby, Jay. 2005. The last twenty years of visual anthropology: A critical review. *Visual Studies* 20.2: 159–170.
- Ruby, J. (2000). *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Sanders, L. D. (2010). *Discovering research methods in psychology: A student's guide*. London: BPS/Blackwell.
- Sensate: A Journal for Experiments in Critical Media Practice: <https://sensatejournal.com>

