

## Hanging out on Snapchat

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## **Hanging out on Snapchat: disrupting passive covert netnography in tourism research**

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Tourism research is increasingly turning to online social media conversations as a data source, but seldom assigning space in research outputs for ethical appraisals or reflexive accounts of data collection. Many tourism researchers download conversations after they have occurred, but presence is central to gaining rich insights through netnographic research. We contribute to and disrupt online tourism research by critiquing, extending, and adapting existing methods to Snapchat, which in itself disrupts possibilities for online data collection. Hanging out with tourist Snapchatters highlights how privacy concerns are a primary motive to post on Snapchat. Snapchat is understood by our participants as more private than other social media sites due to the ephemerality of content and the notification of screenshots (when others save your snap). It is no coincidence that these same functionalities render established methods of digital tourism research difficult in the case of Snapchat. Snapchat users also problematise the notion of social media as public space, as they utilise the platforms for much more than communicating with the world. Snapchatters create, augment, and store memories.

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**Keywords: Snapchat; Netnography; Mobile-Virtual Ethnography; Research Ethics; Social Media; Online Privacy; Lurking; Online Participant Observation; Small Data; Virtual Spaces**

## **Introduction**

The post-television age has seen viral marketing mainstream and the advertising world increasing expenditure on the internet more than any other medium (Perez-Latre, 2009). As a reflection of this, businesses and academic researchers alike are increasingly turning to online volunteered information as data. One of the main attractions of the internet is tourist created content (TCC) a type of user-generated content (Munar, 2011), which has facilitated the investigation of tourist activities as researchers may never need to leave their desks. It is predicted that this growth in the use of the internet as the ‘field’ for data collection will only continue in tourism research (Chambers & Rakic, 2015).

For the tourism researcher, ‘post-visit narratives provided on these online platforms offer a window into tourists’ subjective travel experiences around the world’ (Mkono, 2011: 255). The sharing of experiences and emotions, in ways improbable or impossible years earlier, within the reflective space provided by online platforms is increasingly becoming the desirable, easily accessible, data for tourism researchers (Tribe, Xiao & Chambers, 2012). However, this is often only the case when we do not reflect on the ethical implications of digital data collection and carry out passive and covert forms of netnography. The primary purpose of this paper is to disrupt tourism netnographers, encouraging discussions of ethics and reflexive reporting on methods as has been promoted elsewhere (Lugosi & Quinton, 2018).

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After discussing participation and presence in tourism netnographic research, the paper highlights how participation is necessary if netnographies are to deliver rich and thick description and insights (Geertz, 1973). Increasingly accessed via mobile technologies, new social media platforms are themselves disrupting methods of observation, and it is becoming more and more difficult for netnographers to hide behind the computer screen. Issues of privacy and the use of social media for tourists are discussed before introducing the relatively new social media platform, Snapchat.

The paper links our critique of passive and especially covert forms of netnography, which we highlight could be synonymous with downloading conversations without watching them emerge, to Snapchatters. Following two months of virtual ethnographic fieldwork, where one of the authors ‘hung out’ and followed 15 Snapchatters on their international travels, interviews with the 15 participants were carried out in Dubai. The participants were between the ages of 19 and 30, typical ages of avid Snapchatters and belonged to at least three social media networks. Interestingly, the study highlights how, contrary to previous research (Parra-Lopez, et al., 2010), Snapchatters may be concerned by privacy. This case responds to Lugosi & Quinton’s (2018) call for research to explore the types of interactions afforded by social media through the explication of how our participants use the platform not only to communicate but to create, save, store and even augment memories, blurring the public and private divide.

### **Tourism Research and online ethnography**

The development of technology has revolutionized the traditional methods of sharing

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travel stories (White and White, 2007; Dickinson, Hibbert and Filimoau, 2016; Dinhopl and Gretzel, 2016). From postcard (White and White, 2007) to the present day, the method of communicating travel experiences remains pictorial (Pan, Lee and Tsai, 2014). Perhaps this continuity explains partly why many academic researchers have sought continuity in methods, attempting to adapt tried and tested methodologies to this new virtual space. Netnography and virtual ethnography, among a whole host of other methodologies adapted from ethnography, have become increasingly commonplace in academic journals (Lugosi & Quinton, 2018).

Netnography is a concept originally coined by Robert Kozinets to describe the appropriation of ethnographic methods for the online environment (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography has been said to excel over traditional qualitative methods (for example interviews) due to several factors: it can be less time consuming, more precise (as there is no need for transcription, comments can be downloaded directly), inexpensive, and honest (Mkono, 2011; Mkono, 2012 b; Mkono, 2013; Wu & Price, 2014). It has been argued that netnography allows uninterrupted access to freely posted public thoughts, potentially providing an ‘understanding of the discourse present in the community’ (Podoshen, 2013: 266).

Similarly, to traditional ethnography, netnography demands the researcher take a role in the online community, and Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen (2012) highlight four potential roles (see figure 1). The four roles are dependent on the level of participation and the openness of the researcher in identifying themselves and their role.

Place figure 1 here

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Within tourism research, there is a growing trend for researchers to take on the role of a lurker (see for example Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2012; Mkono, 2011, 2012 a, 2013; Tribe & Mkono, 2017; Wu & Pearce, 2014). Lurkers are both passive (not actively participating) and covert (not notifying the community of their presence), a role conceptualised as cyber stealth (Ebo, 1998). Contradictorily, even though many lurking researchers utilise the work of Kozinets to define netnography, Kozinets (2015) stresses that netnography must include participation.

The stated benefits of lurking include the limited interference of the researcher, as tourists decide to write comments and engage in the online environment without being recruited, and the possibilities for open and honest answers afforded by anonymity (Wu & Pearce, 2014). These benefits may come at a cost as researchers find themselves in a time marred by unethical data collection practices that have led to negative publicity towards commercial enterprises.

A time when social media companies, like Facebook and Instagram, and Big Data processors, like Meltwater and Crimson Hexagon, appear to be offering marketing and research treasures that will reveal everything, betraying secrets long held and opening the pathways to complete monitoring and complex spirals of social control. (Kozinets, et al., 2018: 231)

### ***The ethics of lurking***

Active participants (those who comment and share in the online community), who do

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not disclose their identity are deemed immoral spies by Kozinets (2002). The disclosure of identity and informed consent are key to Kozinets' (2002: 9) guidelines, which adhere closely to conventional ethnography:

(1) the researcher should fully disclose his/her presence, affiliations and intentions to online community members during any research, (2) the researchers should ensure confidentiality and anonymity to informants, and (3) the researcher should seek and incorporate feedback from members of the online community being researched. [4] [the researcher should] contact community members and obtain their permission (informed consent) to use any specific postings that are to be directly quoted in the research

These ethical guidelines have been previously critiqued for their rigour (Langer & Beckman, 2005). If upheld, they would negate the benefits of netnographic research, such as the limited interference of the researcher, and the affordance of honesty (Wu & Pearce, 2014). Similar to conventional ethnography, participant observation can create an 'observer-effect' where participants become aware of the researcher and change their content accordingly (Mkono, 2011).

Mkono (2013) acknowledges that the terming of more passive roles as netnography may be problematic, but still utilises the role of lurker under the term netnography. Informed consent is a basic requirement of most universities' ethics committees, but it poses both a practical and an ethical challenge for netnographers (Lugosi & Quiton, 2018). Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen (2012) also utilise the role of a lurker, acknowledging there may be ethical issues regarding a lack of informed consent, arguing that as the participants will not be identified there is little need for consent.

Other researchers assume that 'it is virtually impossible to verify the identity of

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participants who often post content anonymously or pseudonymously' (Tribe & Mkono, 2017: 106), but anonymity does not always equate to an inability of the reader to identify participants. It is easy to copy a conversation from a scientific paper into Google and identify the source (Kozinets, 2015). A lack of informed consent highlights how researchers consider personal data freely available for collection regardless of the users' intentions (Janta, et al., 2011; Zimmer, 2010).

It might be argued that online space is public space, which would mean that netnographers like ethnographers can ethically capture the lived experience in situ (Langer & Beckman, 2005). Geographers have struggled with the problematic concept of virtual space, initially understood as separate and distinct to 'real' physical space, a dichotomy now under scrutiny (Kinsley, 2014; Ash et al., 2018). Issues of privacy and presence may be less important for geographers who fail to conceptualise the digital, the virtual as 'real.' The argument concerning online space as public space might be linked to the way space is conceptualised, and here rather than space, researchers might be understanding the digital as a public archive. This is especially true when researchers are not present in the space when interactions occur (discussed in the next section).

However, public does not equate to consent (Kozinets, 2015), and there are various technological issues with the public/private digital divide. Within certain social media sites, the researcher may have access to data that others do not due to the way internal networks are configured (Zimmer, 2010). Moreover, the possibility of gaining consent has been evidenced in some netnographic research (Kozinets, 2015), which suggests a potential lack of an ethical awareness among some tourism researchers.

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Rather than arguments based on the public or the anonymous nature of the data, or the naming of methods as netnography but the utilisation of ethical guidelines that apply to a distinct method such as content analysis (Langer & Beckman, 2005), tourism researchers could base their arguments on moral philosophy. To some extent, Caliandro & Gandini's (2017) actor/issue centred divide of digital research is based on a moral philosophical argument. Issue centred research, which deals with large data sets, complicates ethical procedures, such as informed consent, but should not render the researcher outside a discussion of ethics argue the authors. They suggest that one way of upholding ethical standards is to ensure issue centred research returns value to the participants.

### ***Hanging out online***

Lurking is not the only role available for tourism netnographers, if participation is viewed as a continuum, lurking could be placed at one extreme and perhaps 'hanging out' at the other (Kendall, 2002; Germann Molz & Paris, 2015). Paradoxically, hanging out enables researchers to formalise their role with participants; they can become members of the virtual space and disclosing their identity, recruit willing participants (Germann Molz, 2013). The disclosure of identity allows researchers to follow up on interesting themes, to obtain informed consent, member check and inform participants of the right to leave the study (Paris, Berger, Rubin & Mallory, 2015). Hanging out allows researchers to develop co-presence with participants, which does not dissipate as the participants cross borders, seas, and continents (Germann Molz & Paris, 2015).

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Passive forms of netnography often entail downloading data after it occurred (Costello et al., 2017), not participating at all, and potentially tying the researcher to a desktop computer. Hanging out can be performed anywhere at any time without the need for heavy equipment, as social media advances, how we access data should do too. The multi-temporal, multi-spatial nature of social media and netnography (Lugosi & Quinton, 2018) demands researchers become increasingly able to move with the participants (Hannam, Butler & Paris, 2015; Paris, 2011). Snapchat is an example of a social media platform that is only accessible via a mobile device. Hanging out has previously been explored utilising mobile virtual ethnography, which ‘reflects our attempts to adapt ethnographic techniques to the study of the mobile and virtual social phenomena’ (Germann Molz & Paris, 2015: 172). Netnographer mobility may occur via a screen but also geographically and spatially if they are to gain rich insights into new platforms and communities.

One of the main differences between hanging out and lurking is not necessarily participation, but presence – hanging out can fall anywhere on the active-passive participation continuum, but the researcher is present. For all disciplines, the effectiveness of netnography (regardless of discipline) as a ‘qualitative methodology relies on the need for human presence and personal connections online’ (Costello et al., 2017: 1). Non-participant observation does not necessarily reflect actual participation, as even observers participate if they are to notify the community that they are observing. Observers must create rapport to be successfully allowed to observe the group, in contrast to lurking, observation may require an understanding of qualitative capabilities. In much tourism research, there has been a failure to fully explore the levels of

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participation or the ethics of online research, as researchers appear to solely focus on issues rather than actors (Caliandro & Gandini, 2017), or downloading conversations rather than observing them as they evolve. This can be intimately linked to how the virtual space is conceptualised as a simulated or artificial space (Ash et al., 2018).

### ***Primary or secondary data?***

The downloading of conversations without observing them emerge also has methodological limitations. In this instance, netnography can lend little to an understanding of the complex relationships between the actors and between the actors and the context because you were not there (Costello et al., 2017). Lurking netnographers share little with lurking ethnographers, where synchronic presence is key. In netnography, presence is often asynchronistic, occurring after the fact when the conversation has finished rather than synchronic. In addition to the limited understanding of context afforded by lurking, researchers may be naming their methods erroneously, as netnography also alludes to a more qualitative approach to the data that is often absent upon closer scrutiny.

Many researchers who do identify themselves in online communities do so abruptly without building rapport and are subsequently treated with disdain (Hewson, 2015). As identified by researchers utilising email interviews (Martini & Buda, 2018; Paris, 2011) and Skype (Adams-Hutcheson & Longhurst, 2016), qualitative protocols coupled with digital methods can empower participants, which has long been a desire in qualitative geographical research (McDowell, 2010). By simultaneously creating co-presence and distance ‘Power is reconfigured, whereby the participant can turn off, tune

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out or disengage, choosing to seamlessly reinstate their desired distance and space' (Adams-Hutcheson & Loghurst, 2016). Those who utilise the data as a secondary source may be missing out on the primary benefits of the virtual space, the ability to create co-presence and distance to empower participants to switch off.

### **Privacy, memory, and ephemerality**

As previously highlighted, the online environment poses ethical challenges for tourism researchers, which lack appraisal and consideration in many tourism netnographic studies. This is due to the affordances of technology to share often personal information, including data such as geographical locations, which is a potential threat to privacy (Gretzel, 2011). How as a society, we understand privacy is not certain, and much of what is shared online is done so by users who may lack an awareness of any potential risks (Turkle, 2011). As Urry (2002) emphasised, technology has dramatically shifted corporeal surveillance to digital surveillance, a pervasive disciplinary tool that, for the most part, remains invisible. The invisibility of surveillance and a lack of awareness of risks may explain why it has been found that privacy concerns do not dramatically influence travellers' intentions to share on social media (Parra-Lopez, et al., 2010; Berger & Paris, 2014).

In the digital age, information flows and is monitored instantaneously as power is de-territorialised and commercial actors (such as social media sites themselves) become increasingly prominent (Urry, 2002). Mobile technologies are not inherently good or bad; it is the actors who utilise social media for good or bad; the public, the social media organisations, commercial companies, governments, and researchers. As

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such, the flow of information in social media affords not only digital surveillance but also opportunities that may be considered more positive, such as memory and retrieval (Paris, 2012), as:

Persons leave traces of their selves in informational space, and can be more readily mobile through space, or simply stay in one place, because of a greater potential for ‘self-retrieval’, for the retrieval of their personally information at another time or place (Urry, 2002: 268)

Within the tourism literature, flows of digitised information are often conceptualised as communicative TCC, especially from the perspective of destination marketing. Social media is thought to have transformed content that would have traditionally been thought of as a souvenir to what is now e-word of mouth:

Photos and videos were mementos of tourism experiences and their physical manifestations (album, videotape, framed photo print) were important keepsakes. Now they are communication media and in the case of Snapchat they are ephemeral messages.’ (Gretzel, in press)

Tourism research is yet to fully explore the affordance of social media for ‘self-retrieval’ in general, and there is a paucity of research into the potentialities for ‘self-retrieval’ specifically when the content has a time limit. Snapchat has dramatically challenged traditional social media by creating a platform where users can share disappearing content. The popularity of the ephemeral feature has led Facebook’s photo-sharing application Instagram to launch a ‘secondary feed’ to share temporary content (Kofoed and Larsen, 2016), and Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp Messenger (also owned by Facebook) have quickly followed suit (Isaac, 2017a; Isaac,

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2017b). Snapchat has emerged as the fastest growing pictorial social media application (Vaterlaus, Barnett, Roche and Young, 2016), and is particularly popular among Gen Y (Piwek and Joinson, 2016). Little is known about the use of ephemeral content among tourists or their privacy concerns. As the popularity and provision of platforms based on ephemeral content sharing increases, it will also become important to identify appropriate research methods; passive netnography will not capture this disappearing data.

## **Snapchat**

Even though tourism academics are increasingly turning to online content as a data source, they still lag behind the latest developments in social media (Duignan, et al., 2017), such as Snapchat. In contrast to other social media sites, Snapchat provides an ‘ephemeral’ form of visual communication (Piwek and Jonison, 2016). The content shared on Snapchat can be viewed for as long as 10 seconds, and it self-destructs after 24 hours, this temporality is a primary factor in its popularity (Sashittal, DeMar and Jassawalla, 2015).

Content shared on social media such as Facebook and Instagram, has habitually been ‘polished’ (Kofoed and Larsen, 2016), for example, pictures are often planned and posed. Tourist photo taking is central to all aspects of tourism, while on holiday, ‘other activities are suspended, and people present themselves for future memories by posing’ (Larsen, 2006: 89). However, the ephemeral nature of Snapchat has led to lesser concerns about the quality of content being posted, and selfies and pictures of everyday activity are the most shared pictures on Snapchat (Kofoed and Larsen, 2016; Piwek and

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Joison, 2016). Location-based geo-filters have also facilitated the communication of location on Snapchat since 2014 (Tweedie, 2014), which could pose threats to security (Gretzel, 2011). Ephemerality may have disrupted the ways we take pictures, but there is little understanding of how it may impact the ability of picture taking to ‘construct travel memories’ (Baerenholdt, Framke, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004).

Snapchat’s unique ephemeral feature does not lend itself to the covert passive forms of netnography common among tourism researchers, as the data (in theory) cannot be saved or stored. If a user does attempt to save the data by utilising a screenshot the other user is informed, which could blow the cover of the covert netnographer. This creates a specific challenge for companies and researchers interested in monitoring or investigating Snapchat. It has been noted that in the future marketers will have to gain access and permission to join private conversations and learn new rules of engagement (Gretzel, in press), it can be logically presumed that researchers will also have to follow suit. The following section discusses how mobile virtual ethnography has been utilised in this study to explore the tourist use of Snapchat, potentially providing a framework for future social media researchers.

## **Methods**

The primary aim of the study was to explore tourist motivations for sharing content on Snapchat, the study was actor-centred (Caliandro & Gandini, 2017), incorporating mixed methods, and a multi-sited approach. Here, multi-sited refers to the various sites that the participants travelled to (Hine, 2011; Germann Molz, 2006) as well

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as online and offline researcher/participant interactions. The participants gave consent to being followed from place to place via Snapchat, the researcher delved in and out of the data from various sites in her everyday life and always via a mobile phone. Online ‘fieldwork’ involved two months of non-participant overt observation at the beginning of 2017, where the second author observed the content posted on Snapchat via a mobile telephone. As participants who Snapchat while travelling were sought, friends and family of the second author were approached before snowballing was utilised to recruit further participants in person.

Researching with family and friends can be critiqued as there is a prior relationship, which may shape the subsequent data, but there are issues of power within all researcher-participant relationships (McDowell, 2010). The intimate nature of netnography made approaching family and friends both essential and advantageous as they would normally share content on Snapchat with the researcher. However, before data collection, university ethical protocols were maintained, and participants were informed of the aims of the research, the observation techniques guaranteed anonymity and offered the right to withdraw at any time retaining their data, before being asked for their informed consent in person. The participants also share similar characteristics to typical Snapchat users; for example, they rely heavily on smartphones, they frequently use three or more social media networks (see figure 2) and share pictures instantly (Piwek and Joinson, 2016; Vaterlaus, et al., 2016).

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In contrast to other social media sites that allow the revisiting of data online (Germann Molz and Paris, 2015), the ephemerality of data on Snapchat as previously commented necessitates a variety of methods. An observational logbook assisted in taking notes conveniently and simultaneously (Creswell, 2009). Extensive field notes were taken to assure the depth of observation material. The minor details, for instance, the combination of filters, the audio in videos, the timings, captions, usage of Bitmojis, and Emojis were noted down for analysis. Additionally, respondents were requested to save their travel snaps and share them with the researcher. Rather than the researcher taking screenshots of the snaps, which might have interrupted and disrupted participants, this method was deemed more respectful of the participants' privacy. After the initial observation period, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person with the participants.

These interviews were key to exploring the use of Snapchat from the perspective of the participant (Caliandro & Gandini, 2017). The interview questions were initially shaped to develop a better understanding of motivations behind sharing travel snaps, and were informed by the 'Motivation, Opportunity and Ability Model' (MOA) (MacInnis and Jawoieski, 1989 cited in Sigala, Christou and Gretzel, 2012). The interview began by asking participants about their general usage of Snapchat, before a discussion of the participants' travel snaps, the motivation behind sharing the pictures and challenges they face while travelling and using the application (if any). Questions included: Why do you prefer using Snapchat over other Social media networks? How do you feel about the temporality of Snapchat? How do you feel about the screenshot notification? Thematic analysis utilising the initial codes motivation, opportunity, and

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ability allowed the themes utilised in the paper to emerge: privacy and savouring and saving the ephemeral. The privacy afforded by Snapchat became a clear motivation for sharing, and saving and savouring the ephemeral a motivation, and an opportunity.

This paper draws heavily on the analysis of the 15 interviews with the participants, but the observation period allowed insights into each participant's use of Snapchat, which shaped the interviews. Interviews after a period of observation can be likened to meeting up with an old friend, due to co-presence, it can feel as though you travelled with the participant. In the era of big data, researchers and corporate organisations are frequently turning to quantitative methods of researching digital spaces (Ash, Kitchin & Leszczynski (2018). 'meaningful, deep, and exhaustive insights' are analysed from small data (Caliandro & Gandini, 2017: 17) and are necessary if we are to understand how geographies are 'produced by the digital' (Ash, et al., 2018).

## **Discussion**

The primary motive of the study was to explore tourist motivations for sharing content on Snapchat, but the emerging themes are relevant to questions of ethics and online ethnography. Participants chose Snapchat over other social media platforms due to reasons of privacy, which was linked to the ephemerality of content and notification of screenshots. Perhaps unsurprisingly these are the two features that render covert passive netnography redundant on Snapchat. Interestingly participants also expressed a desire to save this content for themselves, which highlights how often the reasons for posting may not be to make public a private moment. The subsequent sections discuss more fully these emerging themes and how they relate to the extant literature.

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## ***Privacy***

A key theme that emerged from the interviews was related to the personal and private nature of Snapchat, which may appear to be an oxymoron but was often linked to a comparative evaluation of Snapchat and other social media sites. For example, respondent one contrasted the ‘public’ nature of Facebook with the privacy afforded by Snapchat:

I feel Snapchat is more private. On Facebook for example my post could be easily shown on anyone else’s newsfeed if one of my friends likes it or anything like that, whereas on Snapchat, as I said I have very limited people on it and those are people that I trust so yeah, I feel more comfortable posting pictures or videos on Snapchat because I feel Facebook is more public and out-there, but Snapchat is more private and limited.

Several other participants considered Facebook to be at the opposite end of the public/private social media spectrum, respondent 12 stated:

Yeah because I have limited people on there so like closer friends. So, I prefer posting it on there than Instagram and Facebook, especially Facebook, because I have so many people on there that I don’t even know anymore like from back home and stuff, so I don’t like sharing private things with them

Participants were aware of risks related to privacy, and it was a concern for them. The nature of Snapchat as a more private social media site was one of their primary motives for sharing content there, which challenges the notion that online users may be unaware of privacy risks (Turkle, 2011). This finding also contradicts previous research that has suggested that travellers are not concerned about their privacy when posting content

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related to their trips on social media sites (Parra-Lopez, et al., 2010; Berger & Paris, 2014). The ephemerality of content was also linked to increased privacy in comparison to Facebook, with respondent eight noting:

Yeah, it's the whole point of that I get to decide when I want to remove it. I get to decide whether I want to post it or not and it's there only for 24 hours and, like now after all these upgrades and all, I can see who screenshots my pictures, who views my pictures, who reads my chats and in the end, it goes away. Otherwise, on Facebook on Instagram it just there.

In addition to ephemeral content, this participant notes how Snapchat allows the visualisation of those who watch your content. Whereas, it can be argued that digital surveillance is primarily invisible (Urry, 2002), Snapchat certainly appears to be defying this trend. The identification of who is looking may influence the theorising of the digital gaze, but it will almost certainly impact digital researchers, governments, and businesses. Not only does this impact those who would want to utilise the data, but it also creates an implicit code of conduct among Snapchat users, and respondent three felt that:

It's kind of creepy. No one does it, except my friend has done it a couple of times just because she was there in the pictures (...), but I can't stalk people. It's good that I can see who screenshots my pictures, but I want to screenshot other people's picture as well.

The ability to screenshot and be screenshotted challenges the belief held by some users that Snapchat is inherently more private than other social networks, but also acts as a surveillance mechanism (Urry, 2002) to ensure that the actors behave accordingly. Most

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of the participants confided that only their very close friends screenshotted their snaps and that they were happy with that, but respondent three acknowledged that screenshooting is not the only way to save the snaps:

initially, I thought that it's so smart that you get a notification when someone screenshots and then I realized if someone's got an extra phone they could just take a picture of it, it's not too safe

Respondent 12 even questioned the role of Snapchat:

Because they can think that oh it's gone anyways, but then you never know how Snapchat itself saves them, and you know, anyone can take a screenshot it a bit dangerous for younger people.

The participants in the study were aware of the security and privacy issues related to using social media, and it was a concern and a reason to post on Snapchat over other social media sites. The notification of screenshots leads to visible and identifiable surveillance, influencing how Snapchatters interact but also creating an obvious barrier to research for covert netnographers.

### ***Saving and savouring the ephemeral***

As previously noted, Snapchat's success lies in its ephemeral functionality. As such perhaps unsurprisingly one participant acknowledged that this was one of the primary motives for sharing on Snapchat, suggesting 'that makes me want to post more because it won't stay there.' However, participants did acknowledge that ephemerality was not always as positive as first thought, and they had to employ strategies to save what they

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were posting, respondent one noted:

It has its positives and negatives. Negatives are that if you forget to save, then you don't get to see it in a few years or sometimes if you forget to save it and send it out you never get to see it unless the person takes a screenshot for you. But yeah, I like the temporary feature because like I said if once you post something, it doesn't have to have a point like you can post your entire day and it doesn't have to have a point like that.

Saving the stories for themselves became a prominent theme from the interviews, even when as previously suggested the content they were sharing was less 'polished' (Kofoed and Larsen, 2016). Some participants believed that ephemerality was a negative feature of Snapchat as it made saving content more difficult, and respondent three stated:

I don't like it; I have to save all my pictures. It goes away, so I have to save everything, all the pictures I post. Also, I clicked something, and it doesn't directly save to my camera roll. So now I have to do that and save it to my camera roll.

Other more arguably tech-savvy participants had identified a way to save the post as memories within Snapchat. Similarly, to analog photos before snaps become keepsakes (Gretzel, 2016) and Snapchat affords the construction of travel memories (Baerenholdt, Framke, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004), respondent four noted:

a lot of the times I use Snapchat and save, and I don't post things as well because I just like the memory, like now we have the option of just saving on your account randomly.

While we leave traces of ourselves online, which are virtually mobile, being shared

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across borders, these traces can also remain in one place and facilitate self-retrieval (Urry, 2002). The memory function within Snapchat as respondent six explains affords the saving of these traces in one place:

Snapchat has the feature now, the memories, so like you can save you pictures to memories, and so you don't necessarily have to save them on your phone, so I can post my pictures using that, in case I don't have internet access.

Participants also highlighted how certain features of Snapchat allowed them to augment their memories with respondent nine commenting:

I don't always use it but like, for example, I am overseas, and that place is different and obviously out of the normal for me then I put a geo-filter, so I remember and associate in the years to come if I save it, I'll know exactly where I was at that time.

Geo-filters enabled the addition of information as a layer over the picture to include details that would otherwise be forgotten, affording self-retrieval (Urry, 2002) and the promotion of a snap to a keepsake (Gretzel, in press). Respondent five highlighted:

you can put the time, you can put the location, you can put the temperature you can put different things like that, so I really think that adds to pictures when you're travelling cause sometimes you don't always remember the names of the places or you don't always remember what the temperature was at that time so having that all saved up as your memory and put up as your story is, I don't know, it's more of a personal touch to your pictures, it

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is more convenient because, at the end of the day, when I recently travelled I took like maybe 30 pictures and at the end of the day I saved them all.

Interestingly, notwithstanding the ephemeral nature of Snapchat, Snapchatters highlighted how they used Snapchat to create, augment, and store memories.

## **Conclusion**

The contemporary tradition of lurking in netnographic tourism research (passive covert netnography) or the downloading of conversations from social media sites attracts ethical scrutiny. The downloading of conversations in this way can be conceptualised as issue centred netnography (Caliandro & Gandini, 2017), which may involve the collection of mass online conversations. Tourism netnographers often justify their data collection on the nature of the space as public space, but the public/private distinction remains blurry as evidenced by the participants later in this study. We have offered two arguments for researchers based on teleological ethics, which would demand that the outcome of the research is more important than the process and may relate to the benefits of the research for participants (Caliandro & Gandini, 2017).

In contrast to ethnographic lurkers, netnographic lurkers may lack presence, and while participation can be viewed as a continuum, presence should be viewed as a prerequisite to rich insights. Snapchat disrupts the ability of passive covert netnography to collect data due to the disappearing nature of that data. As the popularity of ephemeral storytelling continues, both marketers and researchers will have to adapt to very new data collection possibilities. Hanging out online is much more apt for these new platforms as ultimately it demands presence (Kendall, 2002; Germann Molz &

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Paris, 2015). Social media sites such as Snapchat not only afford the mobility of the researcher but also demand it, making it harder to download conversations and TCC without participating. The research project presented in this paper included both online observation and offline interviews; the online observation occurred through a mobile telephone screen as both participants and researcher moved through separate physical spaces but were co-present.

The ethics of online data collection are intimately linked with arguments of public and private space alongside issues of informed consent. The Snapchatters interviewed in this paper were aware of privacy issues, and it was one of their primary motives for sharing on Snapchat. Interestingly, the tagging of physical locations in TCC has been identified as a potential threat to privacy and safety (Gretzel, 2011), but most of the participants had not considered the use of geo-filters as a threat. The ephemerality, alongside the notification of screenshots of their stories made the platform (at least) feel more private. The noticeable and identifiable acts of surveillance via screenshot meant that they were less likely to ‘stalk’ or be ‘stalked’ and has repercussions for how we collect data and theorise the digital gaze.

The paper contributes to the extant literature by highlighting how Snapchat can be used for private purposes such as the creation, augmentation, and storing memories. This finding could be furthered by future research on the use of social media for ‘self-retrieval’ (Urry, 2002). Future netnographic tourism research will be shaped by both the recent shift in EU law, and the affordances of new social media networks. Newly introduced GDPR demands all organisations obtain consent from European social media participants in the retrieval and analysis of their data (EUGDPR.ORG, 2018).

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This change means that non-participant, covert netnography must begin to focus specifically on ethics, and consent to remain within the law.

This paper responds to Lugosi & Quinton's (2018) call for explorations into the types of interactions afforded by social media and highlights how researcher participation is delimited by Snapchat, which renders covert passive netnography an impossibility. The notification when data is saved using Snapchat and other similar social media platforms will transform the way data can be collected. To negotiate this environment, netnographers can utilise 'small data,' engaging with the community on a deeper level, seeking informed consent, and adhere to qualitative research protocols.

While netnographers face challenges in their methods, qualitative researchers can view digital or virtual space as an opportunity to empower their participants. Both co-presence and distance are simultaneously created in on-line research, which can afford the participant an opportunity to switch off and disengage as and when they desire. While many tourism researchers have utilised sites such as Tripadvisor similarly to archival data to research tourists, generic social media networks such as Snapchat have received less attention. These networks should be understood to offer up an extension to the every day rather than a simulated or artificial virtual reality; they can provide researchers with meaningful data linked to a variety of issues such as work and employment in the tourism industry which has received less attention from netnographers.

Netnographers have adapted existing methods to take advantage of opportunities afforded by social media and the digital environment, but future netnographies should consider how these methods have traditionally engaged with issues of ethics. The future

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of netnography should not be dominated by big data and finished downloaded conversations, but by deep contextual understandings afforded by consensual synchronistic co-presence.

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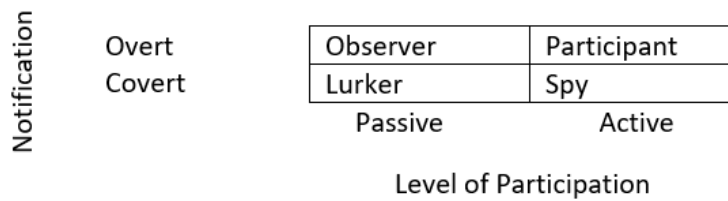
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Figure 1: Potential Roles for the Netnographer



Source: Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2012

Figure 2: participant profiles

Participant	Age Group	SM Networks	Place Travelled
Respondent 1	19 - 25	4+	Spain
Respondent 2	26 - 30	4	USA & Turkey
Respondent 3	19 - 25	4	Spain & Pakistan
Respondent 4	19 - 25	4+	India
Respondent 5	19 - 25	3	Qatar
Respondent 6	19 - 25	3	Spain
Respondent 7	19 - 25	4	France & India
Respondent 8	19 - 25	4+	India
Respondent 9	19 - 25	4+	Georgia & Hong Kong
Respondent 10	19 - 25	3	Spain
Respondent 11	19 - 25	4+	Spain
Respondent 12	19 - 25	4	Germany & UK
Respondent 13	26 - 30	3	Turkey & USA
Respondent 14	19 - 25	3	Spain
Respondent 15	19 - 25	4+	Spain

Authors' Final Pre-Proof Draft of paper for personal use. All references should be made to the definitive version:

Heather L. Jeffrey, Hamna Ashraf & Cody Morris Paris (2019) Hanging out on Snapchat: disrupting passive covert netnography in tourism research, *Tourism Geographies*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2019.1666159>