



VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Virtual Ethnography is an approach to investigate how people interact with one another in online communities. When doing it, designers can decide to become part of a community, only observe (non-participant virtual ethnography), only document own experiences (self virtual ethnographic), or get in touch with specific participants to 'shadow' their online activities.



PREPARATION:

2-4 hours

DURATION:

1-3 hours per round

FACILITATORS:

1-3, design team members

RESOURCES:

Computer, notebook, software for screenshots or screencasts

PARTICIPANTS:

Users, employees, or other stakeholders

EXPECTED OUTCOME:

Field data such as notes, photos, videos, audio recordings, screenshots

DESIGN PHASE:

Insights

TEMPLATE OR GUIDELINES:

Create own guidelines

By using the virtual ethnography tool, designers collect data from online cultures and communities where interactions are technologically mediated. The subjects are often users, employees, or other stakeholders, who are observed in situations that are relevant to the design challenge.

1. START:

Define the focus of what you are interested in and consider what you want to do with the findings (build personas, journey maps, system maps, etc.).

2. IDENTIFY:

Based on the selected focus area, define the criteria for selecting suitable on-line communities, considering not only who you observe or interact, but also when – best times and situations to do the virtual ethnography.

3. PREPARE:

Think about how you will approach the participants, what expectations will be set up-front, how you will start and end, and how much time is planned for the observation. Write up observation guidelines based on what you want to find out. Decide on how the observations will be

documented, e.g. videos, voice recordings, photos, screenshots, and field notes.

4. CONDUCT:

After deciding the best times, length and depth of the virtual ethnography study, you should immerse yourself on the on-line community whilst documenting their and/or your experiences (e.g. through screenshots or screencasts, journey maps, or simply field notes).

REPORT:

Right afterwards, write up the key learnings. Start organizing the data with the affinity diagram tool. Review all the data and highlight important issues whilst trying to find patterns within the data. Make a short presentation that includes the key findings and examples from the data that exemplify these, e.g. quotes, photos, or videos.

