

Explorando lo empresarial en la era digital: netnografía como herramienta de investigación

Exploring business in the digital era: netnography as a research tool

Explorando os negócios na era digital: a netnografia como ferramenta de pesquisa

Elizabeth Mora Moreno

Instituto Tecnológico de Mexicali, México

elizabethmora@mexicali.tecnm.mx

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1831-948>

Blanca Margarita Aguilar Rodríguez

Instituto Tecnológico de Mexicali, México

margaritaaguilar@mexicali.tecnm.mx

<https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0009-0008-8498-2262>

Daniela Gracia Montaña

Instituto Tecnológico de Mexicali, México

daniela.gracia@itmexicali.edu.mx

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7897-7919>

Resumen

Este artículo presenta a la netnografía como una alternativa metodológica innovadora dentro de un diseño cualitativo respaldado por herramientas digitales para la investigación científica en organizaciones con escasa disponibilidad de tiempo para participar como informantes en los procesos convencionales de investigación. El objetivo consistió en explorar el uso de la netnografía como estrategia metodológica viable para la recopilación de información en empresas con limitada disponibilidad para ser encuestadas y entrevistadas debido a las altas cargas de trabajo.

Ante la necesidad de recabar información genuina del interior de las empresas, se propuso esta técnica de investigación basada en la observación y análisis de interacciones en entornos digitales. La investigación se desarrolló bajo un diseño cualitativo de estudio de caso, enfocado en describir las prácticas comunicativas entre empresas con alta carga de trabajo y una institución de educación superior utilizando la netnografía. Los

resultados mostraron que la aplicación de la netnografía como estrategia metodológica permitió obtener información interna de las empresas, superando barreras de acceso y enriqueciendo el análisis metodológico cualitativo.

Se concluye que la estrategia metodológica pertinente para acceder a organizaciones altamente ocupadas es la que implique una combinación de factores tales como el tiempo del informante, las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación (TIC), las redes sociales digitales, los métodos documentales y la figura clave del *gatekeeper*. Finalmente, se discuten las ventajas, limitaciones y recomendaciones para la aplicación de esta estrategia en futuros estudios con contextos empresariales similares.

Palabras clave: Netnografía, investigación organizacional, metodología cualitativa.

Abstract

This article presents netnography as an innovative methodological strategy within a qualitative research design supported by digital tools involving companies with limited availability to participate in face-to-face interviews or surveys. The objective was to explore the use of netnography as a viable methodological strategy for data collection in companies with limited availability due to heavy workloads.

In response to the need to gather authentic information from within organizations, this study proposed a research technique based on the observation and analysis of interactions in digital environments. The research followed a qualitative case study design focused on describing communicative practices between companies with heavy workloads and a higher education institution through the use of netnography. The findings revealed that applying netnography as a methodological strategy made it possible to obtain valuable internal information from companies, overcoming access barriers and enriching the qualitative analysis.

It is concluded that the pertinent methodological strategy for accessing highly time-constrained organizations is one that involves a combination of factors such as the informant's time availability, information and communication technologies (ICTs), digital social networks, documentary methods, and the crucial role of the *gatekeeper*. Finally, the article discusses the advantages, limitations, and recommendations for applying this strategy in future studies within similar business contexts.

Keywords: Netnography, organizational research, qualitative methodology.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta a netnografia como uma alternativa metodológica inovadora dentro de um projeto qualitativo apoiado por ferramentas digitais para pesquisa científica em organizações com tempo limitado para participar como informantes em processos de pesquisa convencionais. O objetivo foi explorar o uso da netnografia como uma estratégia metodológica viável para coleta de dados em empresas com disponibilidade limitada para serem pesquisadas e entrevistadas devido à grande carga de trabalho.

Dada a necessidade de coletar informações genuínas de dentro das empresas, esta técnica de pesquisa, baseada na observação e análise de interações em ambientes digitais, foi proposta. A pesquisa foi desenvolvida sob um projeto de estudo de caso qualitativo, com foco na descrição das práticas de comunicação entre empresas com grande carga de trabalho e uma instituição de ensino superior, utilizando a netnografia. Os resultados mostraram que a aplicação da netnografia como estratégia metodológica permitiu a obtenção de informações internas das empresas, superando barreiras de acesso e enriquecendo a análise metodológica qualitativa. Conclui-se que a estratégia metodológica mais apropriada para acessar organizações com alta demanda de informações envolve uma combinação de fatores como o tempo do informante, tecnologias de informação e comunicação (TICs), redes sociais digitais, métodos documentais e o papel fundamental do intermediário. Por fim, são discutidas as vantagens, limitações e recomendações para a aplicação dessa estratégia em estudos futuros com contextos empresariais semelhantes.

Palavras-chave: Netnografia, pesquisa organizacional, metodologia qualitativa.

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Introduction

The most valuable organizational knowledge is rarely found in formal documents or public repositories. This knowledge is often built and transmitted through everyday conversations, implicit practices, operational decisions, and internal information flows that are rarely recorded systematically. This internal knowledge is fundamental to organizational research, as it allows us to understand how decisions are made, how information circulates, and how internal dynamics are structured—dynamics that cannot be explained solely through formal structures.

However, accessing this type of knowledge presents a significant methodological challenge. Organizations, particularly those with heavy workloads, have strengthened their access filters, internal controls, and mechanisms for protecting sensitive information, which limits the participation of their members in external research. These conditions

have been widely recognized by organizational access studies that analyze how researchers negotiate their entry into institutional spaces and how *gatekeepers intervene* in knowledge production (Shenton, 2004; Feldman et al., 2021).

Contemporary working conditions reinforce these barriers. Companies operate under constant pressure related to meeting performance indicators, the increased use of digital technologies, internal reorganization, and responding to external contingencies. In this context, the time availability of informants can become a significant limitation for conducting fieldwork, particularly in environments with high institutional and work demands (Striepe & Cunningham, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic further accentuated these restrictions. Health measures, limitations on physical access, and the priority of operational continuity displaced much of the in-person research and forced a reconsideration of traditional fieldwork methods (Lobe et al., 2020; Howlett, 2022). As a result, the use of digital tools and remote observation modalities increased. The latter are understood as forms of fieldwork developed through digital platforms, video communication, and online environments, which allow researchers to observe, document, and interact with participants without their direct physical presence (Keen et al., 2022).

In this context, the literature has highlighted the need to adopt flexible methodological strategies that reduce the burden on informants and adapt to contexts of restricted access (Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2014; Bonevski et al., 2014). Among these alternatives is netnography, understood as a digital adaptation of ethnography that retains methodological elements of naturalistic observation and contextual interpretation, but transferred to interaction spaces developed in digital environments (Kozinets, 2019). Although it has been used primarily in the study of digital communities, recent research has begun to explore its potential for the analysis of contemporary organizational dynamics (Smith, 2023).

This study adopts a qualitative perspective based on the case study approach, widely recognized for its usefulness in exploring complex and contextualized phenomena in specific organizational settings (Yin, 2018; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2020). This methodological combination is relevant for analyzing companies with high workloads and limited access to the field.

Based on this framework, the present article aims to explore the use of netnography as a viable methodological strategy for collecting information in companies with limited availability to participate in traditional interviews and surveys due to their high workloads.

Finally, the document is organized as follows: first, the problem statement is presented; then, the theoretical basis and state of the art are developed; next, the methodology adopted is described; then the findings and their discussion are presented; and, finally, the conclusions and recommendations are presented.

Problem statement

Despite the recognized importance of situated organizational knowledge, methodological limitations persist for empirically investigating the internal processes of companies operating under conditions of high workload and restricted access. In these contexts, traditional qualitative research strategies face operational difficulties that affect their viability and reduce the analytical depth of organizational studies.

The limited time available to key stakeholders, the prioritization of operational objectives, and the existence of institutional controls on participation in external research create scenarios in which access to the field becomes intermittent or conditional. These restrictions influence the selection of informants, the topics that can be addressed, and the time allocated to interaction with researchers, thus limiting a comprehensive understanding of organizational dynamics.

Furthermore, access to organizations is often mediated by *gatekeepers* who interpret and evaluate the relevance of research from an institutional perspective. These mediations introduce power and legitimacy dynamics that condition knowledge production, especially in organizations where protecting time, information, and institutional reputation is paramount (Shenton, 2004; Feldman et al., 2021).

While the incorporation of digital technologies has expanded the possibilities for asynchronous interaction and remote observation, their use in organizational research has not been accompanied by sufficiently systematic methodological development. In particular, there is a gap in the literature regarding how to rigorously employ digital methods to address field access challenges without compromising analytical validity or the ethical principles of research.

In this context, netnography emerges as a methodological strategy with potential for analyzing organizational practices mediated by digital environments. However, its specific application to researching companies with high workloads and restricted access has been scarcely explored. This lack of consolidated methodological frameworks constitutes the central problem addressed by this study, which raises the need to analyze how netnography can contribute to organizational research in scenarios where traditional methods are limited.

Research question

How can netnography be used as a methodological strategy for gathering information in companies that have limited availability to participate in traditional interviews and surveys due to their high workloads?

General objective

Explore the use of netnography as a viable methodological strategy for information gathering in companies with limited availability to participate in traditional interviews and surveys due to their high workloads.

Justification

Organizational research currently faces the challenge of generating relevant empirical knowledge in contexts characterized by restricted access, heavy workloads, and complex operational dynamics. In this scenario, it is necessary to critically review the methodological strategies used to study the internal processes of organizations, particularly those that depend on the direct and sustained participation of key stakeholders. The relevance of this study lies in the need to expand the methodological repertoire available for organizational research, adapting it to the real-world conditions in which contemporary companies operate.

From an academic perspective, this study is justified by the existing gap in the methodological literature regarding the systematic use of digital methods in organizational research. While netnography has been widely used in the analysis of digital environments and practices, its application in business contexts, especially as a response to challenges of access to the field, has received limited attention. Analyzing its methodological feasibility in organizations with high workloads contributes to strengthening the debate on adapting qualitative methods to increasingly digitized and less physically accessible organizational environments.

Methodologically, this research offers insights into the possibilities and limitations of netnography as a strategy for gathering organizational information. By situating its use within a qualitative case study design, the work explores how observing interactions, discourses, and practices mediated by digital environments can complement or, at times, replace traditional techniques that are difficult to implement. This reflection is relevant for researchers facing similar scenarios of restricted access who are seeking alternatives that do not compromise analytical rigor or the ethical principles of research.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers implications for understanding

organizational dynamics in companies with high workloads, where the time of the stakeholders and the protection of information are strategic resources. By proposing methodological approaches that reduce the workload of informants and leverage digital channels already integrated into organizational life, the research contributes to generating knowledge more aligned with contemporary forms of work, communication, and decision-making in organizations.

Furthermore, the study's justification rests on its epistemological contribution. By problematizing access to the field as a condition that shapes knowledge production, the research invites a reconsideration of traditional assumptions about observation, interaction, and the researcher's presence in organizational studies. In this sense, the work not only proposes a methodological alternative but also questions the ways in which organizational knowledge is constructed in contexts where information is fragmented, mediated, and difficult to observe directly.

Finally, the study's relevance lies in the need to generate methodological guidelines that can be replicated and adapted to different business contexts. By focusing on organizations with limited access, the work provides useful elements for researchers in the fields of accounting, economics, management, and organizational studies. Thus, the research is justified as an academic and methodological contribution that addresses current challenges in organizational research and contributes to strengthening more flexible, contextualized, and relevant research practices .

Conceptual framework

The business world: a conceptual review

The roots of this concept lie in the classic vision of Peter Drucker (1954, 1999), who asserted that the central purpose of a company is to create value and contribute to social well-being. Despite the passage of time, this notion remains relevant in contemporary studies that affirm that organizations are obligated to integrate an authentic social purpose to be legitimate (Hollensbe et al., 2019; Henderson, 2020). Henderson (2020) argues that in the current context, companies not only produce goods and services but also shape economic and environmental systems. Thus, both classic and current definitions agree that "entrepreneurship" transcends the logic of profit.

From a traditional administrative perspective, Koontz and Weihrich (2012) and Chiavenato (2006) defined the firm as a rational structure that organizes resources and processes to achieve objectives. However, more recent research nuances this rationality. Robbins and Judge (2022) and Daft (2021) argue that contemporary organizations function more as adaptive social systems, highly dependent on culture, leadership, and

human interactions. Both approaches agree that while the firm is based on formal structures, its actual functioning depends on social processes, emotions, perceptions, and power dynamics.

The strategic dimension of business has been profoundly influenced by Michael Porter (1985), who highlighted the importance of occupying unique competitive positions. This view remains relevant, but today it is complemented by perspectives that emphasize agility and the capacity for transformation. Teece (2018, 2020) points out that the concept of dynamic capabilities redefines business as an organization's ability to innovate, learn, reconfigure itself, and anticipate change. Along the same lines, more recent authors such as Stadler et al. (2022) and Wilden & Gudergan (2021) reinforce that competitiveness depends not only on static strategic decisions but also on the organizational capacity for continuous updating. A clear common thread emerges here: it requires strategic coherence but also fluidity in the face of uncertainty.

On the other hand, resource-based theory (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984) has inspired an interpretation that remains highly relevant: a firm is a set of internal capabilities that determine its competitive advantage. Currently, this view has been revitalized with contributions focused on knowledge, creativity, and innovation. Nonaka and Takeuchi (2019) assert that firms are living systems of knowledge creation, while Grant (2023) and Björk et al. (2021) point out that continuous learning and collective intelligence are the true strategic resources of the 21st century. Thus, these authors converge on the idea that business success is based on the ability to generate and mobilize knowledge that is difficult to imitate.

On the other hand, institutional approaches continue to offer fundamental insights for understanding organizations. Simon (1956), Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), and Williamson (1975) explained that firms exist as mechanisms for dealing with uncertainty and coordinating transactions and expectations. Recent research by Scott (2020), Greenwood et al. (2017), and Smets et al. (2022) concurs that entrepreneurship today should be interpreted as a response to the institutional complexity imposed by norms, regulations, professional cultures, and social expectations. The authors' points of agreement are clear: entrepreneurship is not isolated but rather integrated into a broader normative-social system that both conditions and enables organizational action.

Weick (1995) and Sonenshein (2022) point out that organizations are meaning-makers. Maitlis and Christianson (2014) and Helms Mills et al. (2020) agree that the company is sustained by narrative, interpretive, and symbolic processes that allow people to find coherence in their work. This theoretical convergence reaffirms that the business world is inseparable from the meanings constructed by those who participate

in the organization. More recently, technological advancements have profoundly transformed the concept. Researchers such as Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014), Matt et al. (2015), and Verhoef et al. (2021) assert that the contemporary company should be understood as a hybrid organism, where the digital, the human, and the material constantly interact.

In this regard, Sebastian et al. (2022) and Susanti et al. (2023) argue that companies are being redesigned around digital ecosystems, intelligent automation, and new ways of working. Furthermore, the sustainability approach has also broadened the definition of business. From Elkington's (1997, 2018) "triple bottom line" proposal to the recent work of Hoffman (2018), Haigh & Griffiths (2020), and Williams et al. (2023), it is asserted that modern companies are responsible for their environmental and social impact. This idea aligns with Drucker's ideas on the social function of business and with current perspectives on corporate responsibility.

Finally, contemporary authors such as Gulati (2022), Foss & Klein (2023), and Aguilera et al. (2021) argue that entrepreneurship should be understood as a set of relational processes, where companies interact with external networks, communities, institutions, and global actors. Thus, organizations cease to be isolated entities and become nodes within interdependent systems. Taken together, the various perspectives (economic, strategic, institutional, cognitive, technological, and social) converge on one essential idea: entrepreneurship is a multidimensional phenomenon that integrates value creation, human interaction, continuous learning, strategic adaptation, and social responsibility. This conceptual convergence reflects the evolution of organizational thought and offers a robust framework for modern studies that analyze entrepreneurship as a living, changing, and profoundly human space.

Methodological tools for organizational research

Organizational research has established itself as an interdisciplinary field that demands methodological rigor and sensitivity to understand the social, cultural, structural, and symbolic complexity that characterizes organizations. To explore these phenomena, researchers have a wide range of quantitative and qualitative tools at their disposal, which have been refined over decades and allow them to build valid, contextualized, and useful knowledge for both academia and professional practice.

Bryman (2004) argues that methods in organizational studies are not merely instrumental techniques, but epistemological decisions that reflect how we understand organizational reality. Similarly, Buchanan and Bryman (2009) assert that methodological tools should not be viewed as isolated boxes, but rather as part of a

reflective framework in which theory, context, purpose, and ethics shape the research approach.

Documentary research and content analysis

Documentary research constitutes the starting point for virtually any organizational inquiry, as it allows for understanding the state of the art, constructing conceptual frameworks, and situating the research problem within a broader context. Campos (2015) emphasizes that the review of literature and institutional documents forms the cognitive basis of the research process, offering a systematic overview of existing work. Creswell (2014) complements this view by stating that documentary research not only serves an informative function but also an analytical one, as it allows for the identification of theoretical gaps, inconsistencies, and opportunities for conceptual innovation.

From this perspective, content analysis, as a systematic method of coding and extracting meaning, helps to articulate disparate concepts and prepare for fieldwork. Thus, document analysis becomes a bridge between theory and practice, an essential step before applying other techniques such as interviews, observations, or surveys.

Observation

Observation, whether participant or non-participant, allows us to record facts, dynamics, and behaviors that do not always emerge through discourse. As explained in the methodological literature, this technique is useful for capturing tacit phenomena: unwritten norms, rituals, interaction patterns, and power relations. In this sense, Clifford Geertz (1973), from the perspective of interpretive anthropology, argues that observing involves a dense description of human behavior, that is, understanding it within its cultural and symbolic context.

This idea has been incorporated into organizational studies to interpret internal cultures, symbolism, collective narratives, and meanings constructed by the actors. When observation takes place within the work environment as participant observation, it becomes especially powerful, and in this context, Yin (2018) suggests that this type of approach allows the researcher to penetrate organizational reality, understanding the internal logic of processes and contrasting actual behavior with the formal structure.

Interviews

Interviews are one of the most valued instruments in organizational research due to their ability to gather the experiences, emotions, perceptions, and rationales of informants. Ruiz (2012) points out that the interview is a bridge between the theoretical framework and subjective experience. Creswell (2014), for his part, defines the interview as a directed conversation in which the aim is to obtain information that is not directly observable. The classification into structured, semi-structured, and open interviews aligns with the typologies found in classical literature.

Strauss and Corbin (1990), from a grounded theory perspective, highlight the emergent nature of the interview: rather than simply obtaining answers, the goal is to generate categories, concepts, and theoretical relationships. This is especially relevant in organizational studies where phenomena are ambiguous, fluid, or underexplored, such as informality, resistance to change, or work identities. Thus, interviews not only provide information but also allow for the construction of theory.

Surveys and questionnaires

When seeking to measure organizational variables in large populations, such as organizational climate, satisfaction, leadership, and motivations, surveys are a central tool. In this regard, Bryman (2004) emphasizes that their standardization allows for comparability, objectivity, and rigorous statistical analysis. Furthermore, Eisenhardt (1989) notes that, although known for her advocacy of case studies, surveys are particularly useful when broad patterns are needed to complement a deep understanding of specific cases.

In mixed-methods approaches, surveys allow for the verification of quantitative trends, which are then interpreted using qualitative methods. In this context, the author emphasizes that questionnaires, as structured instruments, rely on carefully designed scales, indicators, and items. Their strength lies in their efficiency in collecting large volumes of data with high reliability.

Advanced qualitative methods: case study, ethnography, and grounded theory

Yin (2018) is one of the most influential authors in the field of case studies, a method that allows for the investigation of contemporary phenomena within their real-world context. He argues that the value of case studies lies in their ability to address complex phenomena whose meaning is constructed in close relation to the organizational context, making their analysis as isolated elements unfeasible. Furthermore, regarding organizational ethnography, authors such as Geertz (1973), who offers an interpretive perspective, have been key to studying organizational cultures.

Ethnography allows us to understand the meanings, shared values, internal narratives, and symbols that structure collective identity ; while grounded theory has been supported by Strauss & Corbin (1990), who argue that theories can be constructed from field data through open, axial, and selective coding processes. This approach is ideal for studying emerging, new, or under-theorized phenomena within organizations. This relates to Kathleen Eisenhardt's (1989) assertion that it is a rigorous strategy for building theory from multiple cases.

This approach is especially valuable in organizational research, where comparing different companies, departments, and work groups allows for the identification of cross-cutting patterns. Likewise, authors such as Creswell (2014) and Bryman (2004) agree that, when dealing with complex organizations, mixed methods are an integrative strategy that allows for a more complete understanding of the phenomenon under study; the combination of surveys, interviews, and document analysis strengthens the validity of the results through triangulation.

Therefore, organizational research is characterized by its methodological pluralism and its commitment to a deep understanding of complex phenomena. Traditional tools such as observation, interviews, surveys, and document analysis remain fundamental pillars. However, the incorporation of theoretical contributions from authors such as Creswell, Yin, Strauss & Corbin, Eisenhardt, and Geertz allows for a broader perspective and enriches knowledge construction. The challenge for contemporary researchers lies in selecting the most appropriate tools with discernment, ethics, and epistemological clarity, integrating them when necessary to generate profound, contextualized, and relevant knowledge that contributes to both organizational theory and professional practice.

Netnography

Within the diverse approaches that characterize qualitative research, netnography emerges as a particularly flexible and versatile methodological alternative. This research strategy relies on the use of Information and Communication Technologies, integrating both the accumulated experience in their use and the theoretical foundations that support their application in the field of scientific research.

Netnography, as a science, studies social life in digital environments . It is a theoretical and methodological approach used to address marketing strategies in large cities (Gebera and Washington, 2008).

In this sense, netnography, as a research approach on the internet, enriches the aspects of the innovation and social improvement approach that promotes active and participatory methods within the qualitative spectrum (methodology and social practice), integrating itself into the important transformations that the internet has brought about in our daily lives. (Gebera and Washington, 2008, p. 83)

The information gathered is interpreted using the elements established by the netnographic strategy; it is culturally reconfigured information (Gebera & Washington, 2008). However, it has proven especially valuable in contexts where face-to-face interaction is limited or even impossible, as occurs in communities located in scenarios of structural violence. In such environments, its use has made it possible to overcome significant communication barriers, particularly in the educational field, by ensuring the continuity of children's school activities. Likewise, it facilitates collaborative and group work, enables the secure and efficient exchange of documents and multimedia materials, promotes spaces for virtual interaction among informants , reduces costs, and shortens geographical distances, which highlights the broad potential that these types of technologies offer for communication and research in complex environments (Alfarah & Bosco, 2018).

According to Kozinets & Gretzel (2024), netnography consists of the systematic observation, interpretive analysis, and ethical participation of the researcher within online communities and social networks, with the purpose of understanding the dynamics of behavior, consumption, communication, and identity construction that emerge in the virtual space. The authors point out that netnography does not represent a simple transfer of ethnography to the digital environment; rather, it involves a reinterpretation of fieldwork. That is, the researcher inserts themselves into digital communication flows such as forums, social networks, collaborative platforms, or professional spaces, with the purpose of capturing how cultural meanings are

configured in technology-mediated contexts (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024; Langer & Beckman, 2021). Its flexible nature allows it to be used in both exploratory research and organizational or market studies, where physical access to informants is limited.

According to Costello et al. (2017), netnography combines classic ethnographic techniques, such as participant observation, discourse analysis, and social contextualization, using digital tools for data collection and management, while maintaining the interpretive and reflective principles of the qualitative approach. Its fundamental contribution lies in its ability to access genuine information generated spontaneously in digital environments, thus expanding the researcher's possibilities compared to the limitations of traditional field research.

Finally, authors As Mkono & Markwell (2014) point out, netnography has become established as an ethically sensitive and epistemologically rigorous method for understanding digital culture and contemporary organizational practices. Thus, it positions itself as a strategic tool in scenarios where informants, due to time or distance constraints, cannot participate in face-to-face interviews, allowing for the construction of up-to-date knowledge about social realities mediated by technology.

In this field, qualitative research entails the need to adopt and/or develop specific instruments for data collection from this perspective (Hein, Cárdenas, Henríquez, & Valenzuela, 2013), such as video calls via WhatsApp, Zoom, and Teams, as well as Google Forms for questionnaire design. Currently, these digital platforms stand out for their widespread adoption among users, due to their versatility and the possibility of using them from various electronic devices with internet access, which facilitates their integration into diverse social and organizational contexts.

Business, organizational research, and netnography as an emerging methodological approach

Contemporary understandings of business reveal that organizations are complex, dynamic entities deeply embedded in social, symbolic, digital, and institutional networks. This view, informed by both classic and recent contributions, shows that a company cannot be reduced to formal structures or a functionalist logic, but must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon where value creation, human processes, continuous learning, and strategic adaptation converge (Drucker, 1954, 1999; Robbins & Judge, 2022; Daft, 2021; Teece, 2018, 2020).

In this sense, the business world constitutes a dynamic space marked by technological transformations, sustainability demands, institutional pressures, and interorganizational networks (Henderson, 2020; Scott, 2020; Gulati, 2022). This

conceptual richness requires methods capable of capturing such complexity without losing sight of the subjectivity, narratives, and meanings constructed by those who participate in the organization. In line with this need, methodological tools for organizational research have diversified precisely to respond to the challenge of understanding business phenomena that are not only structural but also symbolic, emotional, and relational. Techniques such as interviews, observation, document analysis, case studies, ethnography, and grounded theory allow us to approach organizations from multiple angles, recognizing their hybrid, social, and contextual nature (Bryman, 2004; Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2018; Geertz, 1973; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

This methodological pluralism becomes indispensable given the realization that companies not only operate, but also create meaning; they not only manage resources, but also construct meaning; they not only respond to their environment, but also shape it through practices, discourses, and interactions that require flexible and sensitive observation. It is precisely at this intersection, between the complexity of business and the need for methodological tools capable of capturing it, that netnography acquires relevance. As organizational environments become digitized and work dynamics transform, understanding technology-mediated social practices becomes as important as studying face-to-face processes.

Netnography, conceived as a form of ethnography adapted to digital contexts, offers a highly relevant methodological alternative for investigating business spaces where workloads, lack of time, or institutional restrictions make it difficult to conduct interviews, surveys, or direct observations (Langer & Beckman, 2021; Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). Furthermore, as a method that recovers spontaneous, situated, and culturally significant information in digital environments , netnography provides access to discourses, interactions, and practices that would otherwise be beyond the researcher's reach (Costello et al., 2017; Mkono & Markwell, 2014) . This not only enriches the understanding of the business phenomenon but also offers a viable and ethical methodological approach for studying organizations that operate at a fast pace and where informants have limited availability.

The relationship between these three concepts becomes clear when considering the objective of this research: to explore the use of netnography as a viable methodological strategy for gathering information in companies with limited resources for traditional surveys or interviews due to heavy workloads. Business, understood as a multidimensional and digitally mediated phenomenon, demands flexible methods; organizational research provides the epistemological framework for selecting them; and

netnography emerges as the most appropriate tool to address the access barriers inherent in certain contemporary companies.

Organizational access as a methodological and theoretical problem

A central concept that allows for a more precise articulation of the relationship between business, organizational research, and netnography is that of organizational access. Several authors have pointed out that access to the field is not merely an operational phase of the research process, but a social and relational phenomenon that reflects power dynamics, institutional priorities, and the internal logics of organizations (Feldman et al., 2003; Buchanan et al., 2014).

From this perspective, access to companies depends not only on the existence of formal agreements or academic interest, but also on ongoing negotiation processes in which researchers must interpret and adapt to the conditions of the organizational environment. Feldman, Bell, and Berger (2003) argue that access is a social construct that is constantly redefined during fieldwork and is mediated by the organization's perception of the costs, risks, and benefits of participating in research.

In business contexts characterized by high workloads, these access dynamics intensify. Buchanan et al. (2014) explain that organizations tend to restrict access when they perceive that research may interfere with operations, consume critical time, or expose sensitive information. In this sense, the difficulty of access observed in the present study should not be interpreted as resistance to knowledge, but rather as a consistent manifestation of contemporary business logic, oriented toward efficiency, operational continuity, and risk management.

A key element in the organizational access scenario is the gatekeeper, understood as the person or entity that controls the researcher's entry into the field and regulates contact with informants (Creswell, 2014; Reeves, 2010). The literature shows that *gatekeepers* not only facilitate or block access, but also influence the type of information available, the selection of informants, and the timing of fieldwork. In organizations with hierarchical structures and fast-paced work environments, this role becomes especially important, as it concentrates decisions related to time management and institutional exposure.

In this context, netnography can be interpreted as a methodological strategy that reconfigures the problem of access by partially shifting the reliance on direct physical access to digital spaces where organizations already interact on a daily basis. As Kozinets & Seraj-Aksit (2024) point out, observing online communities and practices allows researchers to access organizational information without having to overcome all

the formal barriers of the physical field, thus reducing the burden on *gatekeepers* and informants.

This reconceptualization of access aligns with contemporary approaches that understand organizations as relational and digitally mediated systems (Gulati, 2022; Verhoef et al., 2021). Instead of viewing access as a door that opens or closes, the netnographic approach conceives of it as a gradual, distributed, and negotiated process across multiple spaces, both physical and virtual. In this way, access ceases to be a methodological obstacle and becomes a source of analytical information about how companies manage their openness, their time, and their external relationships.

Integrating the concept of organizational access thus allows us to understand why netnography is not only a practical solution to the time constraints faced by informants, but also a methodologically coherent response to the current nature of business. This connection reinforces the objective of the present study by positioning netnography as a viable, ethical, and conceptually aligned strategy for addressing the complexities of researching contemporary organizations with limited resources.

Previous research on organizational access

In scientific research, accessing populations or institutions with limited availability due to heavy workloads often becomes a silent tension between the need to generate knowledge and the informants' right not to be interrupted. In this regard, Bonevski et al. (2014) addressed this dilemma through a systematic review focused on identifying how different researchers managed to establish connections with populations considered "hard to reach." Although their study focused on the health sector, their findings are transferable to any field in which informants are reluctant to participate.

The authors conclude that this resistance is not solely due to disinterest, but rather to various factors, including lack of time, institutional distrust, and the perception that research offers no tangible benefits. Among the most effective strategies they identified were building strong institutional alliances, using reliable intermediaries, and explicitly respecting participants' time through clear and concise instruments. Overall, the study suggests that access is not obtained through formal requests, but rather by generating value and demonstrating empathy.

From a complementary perspective, Shenton (2004) argues that access to organizations that strictly protect their information, as is the case in industrial or high-productivity environments, is not granted automatically but rather built progressively. He emphasizes that access should be understood as a relational process, in which

academic credentials are insufficient without trust and reciprocity. Recommended strategies include actively listening to *gatekeepers*, offering useful products such as executive reports or brief diagnostics, and maintaining honest communication from the first contact. His main conclusion is that research primarily involves establishing human relationships based on mutual trust.

Along these same lines, Meho (2006) introduces the role of technology as a methodological ally when organizational schedules do not align with those of researchers or when geographical distance hinders face-to-face contact. He pioneered the analysis of email as a medium for conducting qualitative interviews, proposing an asynchronous exchange that would allow informants to respond at their own pace. His results showed that email interviews could generate more reflective and detailed responses, especially among professionals with busy schedules. However, he also cautioned about the loss of nonverbal nuances and the reliance on informants' writing skills. Meho concludes that the most appropriate method is not necessarily the most innovative, but rather the one that best suits the informants' actual circumstances.

Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014) took survey design to a highly refined level by developing the Tailored Design Method. Through multiple empirical studies, they demonstrated that response rates depend less on persistence and more on the quality of the methodological design. Aspects such as the tone of the invitation, clarity regarding the time required, the visual design of the instrument, and the possibility of choosing different response modes proved crucial. In business contexts, where time is a scarce resource and attention is limited, these principles become especially relevant. The authors conclude that personalizing the methodological approach not only increases participation but also improves data quality, suggesting that methodological courtesy also constitutes a form of scientific rigor.

More recently, Patrick et al. (2020) evaluated the effects of web-based invitation surveys compared to traditional paper-and-pencil mailed surveys. Although their study was conducted outside the business sector, the results showed equal or higher response rates with lower logistical costs. Beyond the quantitative indicators, their main contribution was demonstrating that facilitating participation and respecting respondents' time is not a methodological concession, but rather a condition for data validity. The authors conclude that respondents are more willing to collaborate when the survey design is integrated seamlessly into their daily routine.

In a context closer to the organizational sphere, Endres et al. (2024) analyzed the use of *push-to-web strategies* combined with QR codes as a mechanism to improve response rates in work environments. Their results indicated a significant increase in

participation, particularly among smartphone users. The authors argue that, in contexts where every minute counts, reducing the effort required to access a questionnaire can make a substantial difference. They conclude that technological innovation in research should be geared toward simplifying the participant experience without losing sight of its human dimension.

In addition, Sammut et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review of strategies to improve response rates in web surveys. Their findings show that there is no single formula for ensuring participation, but rather a combination of practices based on respectful communication: clear advance notices, brief reminders, and explicit thanks. The authors emphasize that symbolic, non-monetary incentives and careful follow-up significantly influence willingness to respond. They conclude that people participate when they perceive that their time is valued and their contribution is acknowledged, underscoring that brevity and courtesy can become key methodological tools.

Finally, Mavhandu-Mudzusi & Mwanda (2022) explored the use of WhatsApp as a data collection tool in a phenomenological study with vulnerable populations, such as LGBTQ+ individuals. Although their research was not conducted in a business context, their findings are relevant for scenarios where informants cannot attend formal meetings. The authors observed that instant messaging fostered convenience, spontaneity, and, in some cases, greater honesty in responses. The use of voice notes allowed for the recovery of some of the emotional richness that is often lost in purely text-based formats. However, they also pointed out ethical challenges related to privacy and data management. Their main conclusion is that the methodology should not be rigid, as people's needs and ways of listening evolve over time.

Overall, the reviewed studies agree that the most effective methodological strategies for accessing people and organizations with heavy workloads are not necessarily the most complex, but rather those that are most thoughtful and adapted to the context. However, the literature on the use of netnography as a methodological strategy in organizational research, particularly in highly busy and difficult-to-access companies, remains limited. This gap justifies the relevance of the present study and its contribution to the contemporary methodological debate.

Method

This study was conducted using a qualitative case study approach, in which the case analysis consists of the experiences of researchers who have used netnography as a methodological strategy to access organizational information. Within this framework, netnography is addressed as the methodological resource under analysis, based on its use in research conducted in companies that face significant limitations for in-person fieldwork or the application of traditional methods, due to their heavy workloads and institutional access restrictions.

In this sense, netnography is not the method of this article, but rather the methodological strategy whose application is analyzed through the experiences of researchers. Based on this premise, the case study aims to understand how these researchers use netnography to develop strategies for accessing the organizational field and generating knowledge about internal dynamics that are difficult to observe using conventional approaches. Therefore, companies are not considered direct units of analysis; the analytical focus is on the researchers' decisions, practices, and methodological reflections when faced with restricted access scenarios.

Through interviews with these researchers, the study explored the use of netnography as a methodological strategy and contributed knowledge to the field of organizational access, particularly regarding the collection of information from within companies in contexts of limited availability. The case study, situated within qualitative research, is one of the most widely used tools in social research focused on the analysis of business organizations, as it facilitates the understanding of complex phenomena within their specific context (Yin, 2009). In this study, this methodology was developed in two main phases: the selection of informants and the collection of information.

Selection of informants

Given that this work is configured as a methodological case study, focused on the analysis of research experiences linked to organizational access, and not on companies as direct units of analysis, the selection of informants required establishing three criteria that had to be fully met:

1. Researchers belonging to the Technological Institute of Mexicali.
2. Have research related to business organizations.
3. Selection of netnography as a methodological strategy in your organizational research.

A tool was created using Google Forms to identify researchers at the Mexicali Institute of Technology who have specifically used netnography as a methodological

strategy in their organizational research over the past five years. Only two researchers were identified who collaborated on a project using netnography as a methodological strategy to gather information about companies with dual education partnerships with the Mexicali Institute of Technology during the year 2025.

Given the exploratory and methodological nature of this study, the analytical focus was not on sample size or the statistical representativeness of the informants, but rather on a deep understanding of methodological decisions situated in real-world contexts with restricted organizational access. In this sense, the selection of a small number of informants was based on epistemological relevance rather than the volume of cases, as the study prioritized intensive qualitative analysis of specific research experiences. This approach is consistent with the principles of qualitative case studies, where the interpretive depth and analytical density of the case allow for the generation of theoretical and methodological contributions transferable to organizational contexts with similar characteristics, without aiming for statistical generalizations.

Information gathering technique

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with informants who had previously used netnography as a methodological strategy in organizational research. This instrument was designed to explore the feasibility of netnography for accessing internal information in companies with high workloads and limited availability for traditional interviews or surveys.

The interview guide was structured around analytical categories derived from the theoretical framework and the study's objective, the methodological decision, the implementation of netnography, the quality of the information obtained, ethical considerations, the limitations of the method, and its methodological contributions. The questions were formulated in an open-ended manner to encourage reflection by the interviewee and the emergence of significant methodological experiences.

Table 1 presents the operationalization of the preliminary categories that informed the interview script. The interviews were conceived as a flexible tool, consistent with the qualitative approach and case study design adopted in this research. Data processing was carried out through a thematic categorization procedure, aimed at identifying patterns, convergences, and tensions surrounding the use of netnography as a methodological strategy in hard-to-reach organizational contexts.

Table 1. Operationalization of the preliminary categories for the interview script

PRELIMINARY CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	GUIDING QUESTION
Organizational access	Access barriers	What organizational conditions made it difficult to use traditional interviews or surveys?
	Workload	How did high workloads affect the availability of informants?
Methodological decision	Choosing the method	What factors led you to choose netnography as a methodological strategy for your research?
	Alternative methods	Why were other qualitative strategies not viable in this organizational context?
Implementation of netnography	Selection of digital spaces	How did you select the digital environments where you conducted the netnographic observation?
	Role of the researcher	What role did he assume as a researcher within the observed digital spaces?
Quality of information	Genuine information	To what extent do the data obtained through netnography reflect actual organizational practices?
	Complementarity	How did the netnographic data relate to other sources of information in the study?
Ethics and legitimacy	Privacy and anonymity	What ethical considerations guided the collection and use of information in digital environments?
	Organizational acceptance	How did the use of netnography influence the organization's willingness to collaborate?
Methodological feasibility	Reduction of burden for informants	How did netnography contribute to reducing the time burden for informants?
	Efficiency of the method	What advantages did netnography offer in terms of time, access, and flexibility?
Limitations of the method	Scope	What aspects of the organizational phenomenon did netnography fail to adequately capture?
	Need to complement	In what situations was it necessary to complement netnography with other techniques?
Methodological contributions	Transferability	In what organizational contexts would you recommend the use of netnography?
	Recommendations	What methodological lessons do you consider relevant for other researchers?

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

Results

Table 2. Analytical categories and methodological findings

ANALYTICAL CATEGORY	METHODOLOGICAL FINDING
Organizational access	Access to companies with high workloads is primarily conditioned by structural restrictions, such as time limitations, internal hierarchies, and operational priorities, rather than by a lack of willingness to collaborate with research.
	The existence of internal policies and formal authorization protocols acts as a filter that delays or limits direct contact with key informants, especially in qualitative studies.
Workload	The high workloads directly affect the availability of informants, fragmenting participation times and making the application of extensive face-to-face interviews unfeasible.
	Daily operational pressure forces researchers to respect organizational timelines and rethink the duration, frequency, and modality of information collection instruments.
Availability of informants	The participation of informants is characterized by brief, discontinuous and mostly asynchronous interactions, which limits the use of traditional data collection strategies.
	The possibility of responding at specific times encourages participation, provided that the instruments are flexible and non-intrusive.
Methodological adaptation	The suitability of the methodological design emerges as a necessary condition to sustain fieldwork in highly demanding organizational contexts.
	Flexibility in instruments, timing, and communication channels allows the research to be adjusted to the real context of the companies without compromising the study's objectives.
	Methodological adaptation does not imply a loss of rigor, but a strategic reorganization of the research process.
Netnography as a methodological strategy	Netnography is adopted as a response to the impossibility of face-to-face access and the existence of relevant organizational interactions in digital environments.
	Leveraging digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Teams, and email allows maintaining contact with informants without interfering with their workday.
	The non-intrusive nature of netnography favors obtaining relevant organizational information from pre-existing interactions.
Type of information obtained	Netnography identifies communicative practices, institutional discourses, and expectations of collaboration between companies and educational institutions.
	The information obtained includes spontaneous elements, such as comments, silences, response times and levels of interaction, which enrich the interpretation of the phenomenon.
Role of the researcher	The researchers primarily assume an observational role, with minimal and strategic interventions when it is necessary to clarify information.
	This positioning reduces the informant's reactivity and preserves the naturalness of digital interactions.
Authenticity and validity of information	The information gathered is perceived as genuine because it arises from interactions not directly induced by the researcher.
	The consistency of the data is reinforced by triangulation with interviews and questionnaires applied at other times during the study.
Ethical considerations	The use of public or previously authorized information is a guiding principle of the digital data collection process.

	Anonymizing individuals and organizations remains a core practice to protect the confidentiality of informants.
Methodological limitations	Some restrictions, such as the refusal to record interviews, require alternative recording strategies, such as simultaneous note-taking during interactions.
	The transcription and analysis process demands a significant time and cognitive load from the research team.
Methodological complementarity	Netnography needs to be complemented with other techniques, such as virtual interviews or questionnaires, to deepen and validate the information obtained.
	Its integration into broad qualitative or mixed designs strengthens access to the field and understanding of the organizational phenomenon.
Feasibility of netnography	Netnography is viable in companies with a high workload as long as it is designed under criteria of flexibility, relevance and sensitivity to the organizational context.
Methodological recommendations	It is recommended to adapt the methods to the real context of the companies, avoid forcing participation, and carefully document the methodological process followed.

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

Table 2 presents the categories of analysis and the research findings. The study results show that the difficulties in accessing organizational contexts with high workloads are not explained by a lack of interest on the part of companies in collaborating with research processes, but rather by a set of restrictions associated with their internal dynamics.

Researchers repeatedly pointed out that the accelerated pace of work, constant pressure to meet operational goals, and continuous attention to urgent situations significantly limit the possibility of dedicating time to activities that are not directly part of daily operations, such as participation in academic studies. This situation creates a scenario in which access to the field depends not only on the will of organizational actors but also on structural factors that regulate and condition its availability.

In this regard, internal hierarchies and institutional protocols play a significant role in regulating access to informants. The need for formal authorizations, the intermediation of key figures within the organization, and the existence of pre-established institutional channels decisively influence the possibility of establishing direct contact with informants. These dynamics, typical of organizations with heavy workloads, hinder the application of traditional fieldwork strategies based solely on in-person interaction, as they require management and coordination time that is not always compatible with the operational priorities of the companies.

It was consistently identified that heavy workloads directly affect the availability of informants, resulting in brief, intermittent participation limited by the time constraints of daily organizational operations. Researchers noted that, in many cases, informants could only participate at specific times, providing short responses or brief interactions,

thus restricting the possibility of conducting extensive face-to-face interviews or prolonged data collection sessions. This situation makes the application of rigid instruments impractical and necessitates a re-evaluation of how data collection processes are conceived and implemented in organizational research.

The fragmentation of available time not only impacts the duration of interactions but also the way in which they take place. The impossibility of coordinating prolonged face-to-face meetings leads to a preference for more flexible forms of participation that adapt to the informants' work rhythms. In this context, the researchers acknowledged that insisting on the application of traditional methods without considering these conditions can generate resistance, disinterest, or withdrawal from participation, affecting both the quality and continuity of the fieldwork.

Given this scenario, the findings highlight the central role of methodological adaptation in the design of research conducted in highly demanding organizational environments. Flexibility in instruments, timing, and interaction methods allowed fieldwork to be adjusted to the actual conditions of the organizations, facilitating the participation of informants without imposing additional demands on their workday. This adaptation was reflected in the selection of tools, the redefinition of interaction times, and the openness to communication methods that respected existing organizational dynamics.

Far from representing a loss of methodological rigor, this adaptation entailed a conscious reorganization of the research process based on the context. The researchers agreed that the ability to adapt the methodological design to field conditions proved key to sustaining the data collection process and achieving the research objectives. Flexibility thus became a central methodological criterion, aimed not at simplifying the process, but at making it viable and relevant in scenarios characterized by time and access constraints.

Within this framework, netnography emerged as a particularly relevant methodological strategy for accessing organizational information. Its application was not limited to observing interactions in digital spaces, but rather integrated the use of various digital tools for fieldwork, including messaging platforms, email, online forms, and synchronous virtual interviews. All these tools formed part of the netnographic approach, as they were developed in digital environments and adhered to the same principles of flexibility, non-intrusiveness, and adaptation to the organizational context.

Synchronous virtual interviews, in particular, were incorporated as a natural extension of digital fieldwork, allowing for direct exchange with informants without requiring travel or significant interruptions to their workday. Conducted on digital platforms commonly used by the informants, these interviews were organically integrated into existing communication practices, maintaining consistency with the adopted

netnographic approach. In this way, netnography emerged as a broad and integrative strategy, capable of articulating different modalities of digital interaction within a single methodological framework.

This strategy made it possible to identify communicative practices, institutional discourses, expectations of collaboration, and relational dynamics that would have been difficult to capture using traditional face-to-face methods. The observation and analysis of digital interactions provided access to situated information, linked to the real-world contexts in which organizational relationships develop, contributing relevant elements to the understanding of the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, the ability to analyze silences, response times, and forms of interaction enriched the interpretation of the data obtained.

The asynchronous and synchronous nature of digital interactions allowed for respecting organizational timelines, reducing the pressure associated with the researcher's physical presence, and fostering the collection of information perceived as genuine. By developing under conditions similar to the informants' usual communication practices, digital interactions facilitated the more spontaneous expression of experiences, perceptions, and discourses, contributing to the depth and richness of the information gathered.

Furthermore, the consistency of the findings was strengthened through the integration and complementarity of various digital tools within the netnographic strategy. The combination of digital observation, virtual interviews, and online questionnaires allowed for contrasting, deepening, and contextualizing the information obtained, fostering a broader and more nuanced understanding of the organizational phenomena analyzed. This complementarity not only strengthened the validity of the results but also demonstrated the potential of netnography as an articulating strategy within flexible research designs.

Taken together, the results demonstrate that netnography does not replace other methodological strategies, but rather establishes itself as a flexible and integrative approach within qualitative or mixed-methods designs. Its incorporation broadens access to the field and contributes to understanding organizational phenomena in contexts characterized by heavy workloads and limited access to informants, offering a relevant and sensitive methodological approach to the real-world conditions in which organizational research is conducted.

Data interpretation

The results show that access to organizational contexts characterized by high workloads is conditioned by structural constraints beyond the individual will of the participants. Internal hierarchies, authorization protocols, and the prioritization of operational goals define the actual scope of participation in external research. In this scenario, the availability of informants is fragmented and mostly asynchronous, which hinders the implementation of extensive face-to-face interviews and favors brief, intermittent interactions situated at specific times during the workday.

This fragmentation of time directly impacts the design of data collection instruments. The findings show that rigid formats tend to generate resistance or abandonment, while flexible instruments—in terms of duration, modality, and channel— increase participation without significantly interfering with operational flows. Methodological adaptation thus emerges as a necessary condition for sustaining fieldwork in highly demanding organizations. Far from implying a loss of rigor, this adaptation entails a strategic reorganization of the research process based on the actual conditions of the context.

Within this framework, netnography has become established as a viable methodological strategy for accessing communicative practices, institutional discourses, and relational dynamics that unfold in digital environments. The use of messaging platforms, email, online forms, and virtual interviews allowed for maintaining contact with informants without introducing additional time commitments. Observing pre-existing digital interactions made it possible to retrieve situated information, as well as relevant expressive elements, including comments, silences, response times, and levels of interaction, which enriched the analytical understanding of the phenomenon.

The researcher's role was characterized by a predominantly observational stance, with occasional interventions aimed at clarifying or expanding upon specific information. This approach reduced the reactivity of the informants and fostered natural interactions in the digital environments. The information obtained was perceived as genuine insofar as it emerged from habitual communicative practices and was not directly induced by the researcher's presence. In terms of validity, the internal consistency of the findings was strengthened by the complementarity between digital observation, virtual interviews, and online questionnaires.

This triangulation allowed for the comparison and contextualization of the data, providing a broader understanding of the organizational phenomenon. However, limitations were identified related to the inability to record certain nonverbal nuances and the cognitive load of transcribing and analyzing digital interactions, which necessitates

careful planning of analytical resources. Overall, the interpretation of the data shows that the viability of netnography in companies with high workloads depends on its integration into flexible methodological designs that are sensitive to the organizational context and articulated with other qualitative techniques. This configuration makes it possible to maintain access to the field and preserve analytical depth in scenarios where physical presence is limited.

Discussion

The results of this study, based on the experiences of researchers who used netnography as a methodological strategy to access companies with high workloads, allow us to interpret organizational access as a structural condition that shapes the research process itself. Rather than a circumstantial obstacle, restricted access emerges as an inherent characteristic of organizational contexts where time, information, and operational continuity are managed as strategic resources. This aligns with the arguments of Feldman, Bell, and Berger (2003) and Buchanan et al. (2014), who emphasize that access to the field is not limited to an initial phase of the study, but rather is configured as a relational process that is continuously negotiated throughout the empirical work.

From an organizational theory perspective, the findings align with the understanding of organizations as systems subject to constant pressures for efficiency, productivity, and performance. The limited availability of stakeholders to participate in prolonged in-person settings can be interpreted as a coherent expression of the organizational rationality described by Drucker (1954, 1999) and by Robbins and Judge (2022), in which time is conceived as a scarce resource that must be protected. In this sense, the observed restrictions do not stem from a lack of interest in academic research, but rather from institutional dynamics geared toward risk management, the prioritization of operational objectives, and the protection of sensitive information, as Scott (2020) argues in his analysis of contemporary institutional logics.

The results obtained also bear similarities to previous studies that have documented the difficulties in engaging informants with demanding schedules in research processes. Bonevski et al. (2014) and Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014) indicate that participation tends to decrease when research instruments are not adapted to the informants' actual circumstances, which coincides with the experiences reported by the researchers interviewed. In this study, the need to rethink formats, timing, and channels of interaction became a central element for sustaining fieldwork, reinforcing the idea that methodological adaptation is a condition for the empirical viability of organizational research in contexts of high workload.

Within this framework, netnography emerged as a relevant methodological strategy for addressing the identified access restrictions. The experiences analyzed show that observing interactions in digital environments, as well as using technology-mediated communication tools, allowed for the retrieval of situated information without imposing additional time burdens on informants. This finding aligns with the proposal by Kozinets & Seraj-Aksit (2024), who argue that netnography enables the understanding of cultural and communicative practices in digital spaces. Unlike previous research focused on open virtual communities or digital consumption contexts (Costello et al., 2017; Mkono & Markwell, 2014), this study applied netnography to a formal organizational environment, broadening its methodological scope and demonstrating its potential for studying organizations with restricted access.

Furthermore, the results reveal that digital environments function not only as instrumental channels of communication, but also as spaces where organizational meanings are produced and negotiated. In line with the meaning-making approaches proposed by Weick (1995), Maitlis and Christianson (2014), and Sonenshein (2022), technology-mediated interactions offer relevant insights into institutional priorities, implicit hierarchies, and relational dynamics. Elements such as response times, silences, and the choice of specific communication channels provided interpretive keys that enriched the understanding of the phenomenon studied, demonstrating that digital mediation does not necessarily impoverish the analytical reading of organizational life.

However, the results also reveal limitations that must be considered in interpreting the study. The small number of informants and the situated nature of the case analyzed limit the empirical scope of the findings and do not allow for statistical generalizations; nevertheless, the results offer analytical elements and methodological guidelines that may be relevant for business contexts with similar organizational characteristics. Furthermore, the research faced ethical challenges associated with the use of information in digital environments, particularly regarding the delimitation between public and semi-public spaces, privacy management, and informed consent—aspects that have been highlighted in recent literature on digital research (Mkono & Markwell, 2014). These limitations underscore the need to develop more specific ethical guidelines for the application of netnographic strategies in organizational contexts.

Based on these findings, several avenues for future research are identified, such as expanding the analysis to include comparative studies encompassing different productive sectors and types of organizations. This would explore how organizational access dynamics and the feasibility of netnography vary according to the institutional context and the degree of digitization of work processes. Furthermore, future research

could systematically incorporate the perspectives of managers and decision-makers to understand how organizations perceive the costs, benefits, and risks associated with participating in academic research. Finally, a key area of focus is developing ethical frameworks and specific methodological protocols for organizational research in digital environments. This aims to strengthen the legitimacy and quality of studies that employ strategies like netnography in restricted-access settings.

Conclusions

This study aimed to explore the use of netnography as a viable methodological strategy for data collection in companies with limited resources for participating in traditional interviews and surveys, based on an analysis of the experiences of researchers who faced restricted organizational access. The results suggest that access to the field depends not only on the willingness of organizations to collaborate, but also on a complex web of structural conditions related to time management, institutional protocols, and operational priorities that characterize highly demanding business environments.

In this context, it is clear that traditional methodological approaches, focused on prolonged in-person interaction and synchronous engagement, struggle to adapt to the actual work dynamics of many contemporary organizations. In response, netnography emerges as a relevant methodological alternative, as it allows for adjusting data collection processes to existing organizational rhythms, reducing the workload for respondents, and leveraging digital environments that are integral to everyday communication and coordination practices within companies.

A key contribution of this study is demonstrating that incorporating digital strategies into organizational research does not imply a loss of methodological rigor, but rather a reconfiguration of fieldwork geared towards its viability in contexts of restricted access. Based on the experiences analyzed, netnography facilitated maintaining contact with informants and obtaining relevant information for understanding organizational dynamics that would have been difficult to access through exclusively in-person methods.

Although the study was conducted within a specific organizational context, the conditions that led to the implementation of netnography—such as high workloads, restricted access to the field, and the centrality of digital environments in organizational communication—are not exclusive to any one type of company. On the contrary, these are characteristics present in a wide variety of contemporary organizations. In this sense, the methodological strategy analyzed in this work has the potential to be replicated in other business contexts with similar characteristics, provided that the institutional,

cultural, and technological particularities of each environment are taken into account. Rather than offering a closed model, the findings provide methodological guidelines that can be flexibly adapted to different organizational scenarios where access to the field is mediated by time constraints and the availability of informants.

Finally, the specific context of the case study and the small number of informants limit the empirical scope of the research, suggesting the need for further investigation to broaden the comparative base across different productive sectors and types of organizations. Furthermore, the use of digital environments for research raises ethical challenges that require systematic attention, particularly regarding privacy, informed consent, and the responsible management of information. Despite these limitations, the work provides valuable insights for methodological reflection in organizational research and underscores the need to design more flexible studies that are context-sensitive and consistent with the real-world conditions of access to the field in organizations with heavy workloads.

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Contribution Role	Author(s)
Conceptualization	Elizabeth Mora Moreno.
Methodology	Elizabeth Mora Moreno.
Software	Elizabeth Mora Moreno.
Validation	Blanca Margarita Aguilar Rodríguez.
Formal Analysis	Daniela Gracia Montaña.
Investigation	Elizabeth Mora Moreno.
Resources	Blanca Margarita Aguilar Rodríguez.
Data curation	Daniela Gracia Montaña.
Writing - Preparing the original draft	Elizabeth Mora Moreno.
Writing - Reviewing and Editing	Elizabeth Mora Moreno (same), Blanca Margarita Aguilar Rodríguez (same) and Daniela Gracia Montaña (who supports).
Display	Daniela Gracia Montaña.
Supervision	Elizabeth Mora Moreno.
Project Management	Elizabeth Mora Moreno (principal), Blanca Margarita Aguilar Rodríguez (equal) and Daniela Gracia Montaña (who supports).
Acquisition of funds	Elizabeth Mora Moreno (same), Blanca Margarita Aguilar Rodríguez (same) and Daniela Gracia Montaña (same).