



**SIMA-SIM-BAM**  
**SCHOOL OF RESEARCH METHODS**  
**In collaboration with the Association for Netnographic Research**

**Summer Edition**  
***Netnography: Qualitative Digital Research in an Age of AI***

Hotel Hilton Garden Inn Firenze Novoli  
Via Sandro Pertini 2/9  
50127 Firenze

June 8-10, 2026

***Program***





### **School directors**

Rossella Gambetti, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore  
Maurizio La Rocca, Università della Calabria  
Matilde Milanese, Università di Firenze

### **School instructors**

Robert Kozinets, University of Southern California  
Ulrike Gretzel, University of Southern California  
Rossella Gambetti, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore



## INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHIES



**Professor Robert V. Kozinets** holds the Jayne and Hans Hufschmid Chair of Strategic Public Relations and Business Communication at both the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the Marshall School of Business at the University of Southern California. A globally recognized leader of social media research and theory, Kozinets is the inventor of the netnography research method, which he introduced into academic networks for qualitative consumer and marketing research in 1996. He was one of the first marketing researchers to theorize and explore online consumer communities, influencers, social media marketing, fans and fandom, technoculture, networks of desire, and digital platforms. Serving as Associate Editor of the *Journal of Marketing* and the *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, his prolific research includes over 150 written works, with publications in top-tier academic journals and ten

books, most recently *Fandom as Subculture*. Dr. Kozinets has extensive market research, consulting, and speaking experience with global companies and organizations like Heinz, Coca-Cola, Ford Motor Company, Merck, Campbell Soup, Pepperidge Farms, Nissan, American Express, and L'Oréal. His insights have been featured in major media outlets such as *The Financial Times*, *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Discovery Channel*, *CBS National News*, Germany's *Handelsblatt*, Brazil's *Bites Magazine*, and Australia's *Boss Magazine*. In 2023, Dr. Kozinets founded the Association for Netnographic Research and currently serves as president of the international netnography conference, Netnocon. From Italy and Australia to Brazil and Norway, he has taught and conducted research at some of the world's leading universities. Today, Dr. Kozinets is dedicated to advancing the field of netnography, exploring the strange new worlds where AI and LLMs meet cultures, fans, and identities, and working with an innovative global community of advanced digital researchers through the Association for Netnographic Research ([netnographicresearch.org](http://netnographicresearch.org)) and Netnocon ([netnocon.org](http://netnocon.org)).



**Dr. Ulrike Gretzel** is a Senior Fellow at the Center for Public Relations, University of Southern California, and Director of Research at Netnografica. She also teaches a course on influencer marketing at the IMC Krems University of Applied Sciences, Austria. She previously held appointments as Professor of Tourism, University of Queensland, Associate Professor of Marketing, University of Wollongong, and Associate Professor of Tourism, Texas A&M University. She has over 30 years of experience conducting academic and practice-focused research looking at the impact of technologies on consumer behavior and marketing strategies. She is best known for her early research on online travel reviews in collaboration with TripAdvisor and her seminal paper on smart tourism. Dr. Gretzel has published over 100 peer-reviewed journal articles and twelve books. With an h-

index of 95 and almost 45,000 citations, Google Scholar lists her as one of the most-cited tourism researchers in the world. She is an elected Fellow of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism and serves as a co-editor-in-chief of the *Information Technology & Tourism* journal and the *Journal of Smart Tourism*. Her research has been funded by national science foundations, governments, museums, and tourism organizations across North- and South America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. She is frequently invited to speak at academic conferences and tourism industry events on topics related to emerging technologies. Her work has been quoted in major news outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and *The Australian*. She has conducted netnographies on diverse topics, such as TV show fans, vanlifers, digital creator and influencer mental health, travel influencers, travel selfies, women entrepreneurs, Chinese cosmetics consumers, transnational daigou shoppers, Labubu collectors, and Pinterest use for travel planning and home improvement projects.



**Rossella C. Gambetti, PhD.**, is Professor of Branding and Consumer Culture at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan (Italy), where she is Director of Labcom (Research Laboratory on Corporate & Brand Communication). Rossella is a Research Fellow of the Jayne and Hans Hufschmid Chair of Strategic Public Relations and Business Communication at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. She serves as the secretary of the Association for Netnographic Research (ANR) and as Co-chair of NetnoCon, the global netnography conference. Rossella is an interpretive scholar whose research is focused on the interplays between consumer culture, technology and marketplace dynamics. She is specialized in netnography and has conducted several netnographic investigations both academic and applied to the business, exploring the social media worlds of amateur chefs, influencers and creators (human, virtual, pet), brand activism and consumer

resistance, youth tobacco branding and consumption and Chinese cosmetics consumption. Rossella's research tackles innovative topics tackling influencer culture and fandom, evolving consumer collectives in the era of internet participatory culture, technocultural consumption and marketplace mythologies. Rossella is author and co-author of about 100 academic publications, including books (e.g., "Influencers and Creators. Business, culture and practice", co-authored with Robert Kozinets and Ulrike Gretzel, published by Sage), edited volumes (e.g., "Netnography Unlimited", co-authored with Robert Kozinets, published by Routledge) and academic articles published in journals such as *Marketing Theory*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Marketing Management*, *California Management Review*, *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *Futures*, *Culture and Organization*.

## **COURSE OVERVIEW**

This course provides a rigorous, hands-on, theoretical and methodological foundation in netnography—the specialized qualitative research methodology designed for the humanistic study of digital traces. While rooted in ethnography, netnography adapts traditional participant-observation and immersive techniques to the unique affordances of mediated online and other digital environments. This is not a course on social media metrics, but an introduction to a rigorous approach for deriving contextual and (techno-)cultural understandings from digital data. Students will move beyond surface-level data collection to engage in deep, interpretive inquiry, emphasizing the human-centric analysis of digital traces, ethics considerations, observation of positionality and immersion, and elicitation of relevant experience.

### **Scholarly and Technical Expectations and Rigor**

- **Methodological Reflexivity:** A central component of this course is the development of a research immersion journal. Students will document their own positionality, the "interpersonal" nature of digital immersion, and the reflexive loop between data and interpretation.
- **Theoretical Preparation:** As an intensive, seminar-style course, students are expected to arrive having critically engaged with the foundational literature. The core textbook provides the methodological anchor, supplemented by contemporary peer-reviewed research.
- **Research Infrastructure:**
  - Access to social media platforms.
  - Use of collaborative digital environments for shared file management and interpretive synthesis.
  - Strictly academic and research-focused use of technology during class sessions.
  - Intensive incorporation of the latest analytical and generative-AI tools/LLMs.

### **Course Objectives**

- **Execute the 6 Movements of Netnography:** Learn and practice the contemporary procedural framework, transitioning fluidly between Initiation, Investigation, Immersion, Interaction, Integration, and Incarnation.
- **Cultivate the Immersion Journal:** Develop a rigorous practice of reflexive, thick description of deep data that documents the researcher's journey through digital spaces.
- **Navigate Complex Data Triangulation:** Learn to integrate archival digital traces with elicited data and reflexive notes to build a multifaceted cultural narrative.
- **Refine Scholarly Work:** Focus on the high-level synthesis of findings for academic publication, ensuring the research comes to life through evocative and theoretically grounded communication.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Monday, June 8

- **13.30-14.00 Opening of the school:** Brief welcome and introduction to the workshop's goals. This session establishes the structure and expectations of this interactive and intensive course, emphasizing the impact of cultural and contextual understanding in contemporary research.
- **14.00-15:30 From Ethnography to Netnography:** This session explores the anthropological foundations of netnography, tracing its evolution from traditional, physically embedded fieldsite ethnography to a systematic, mindful, and multimodal approach for gaining contextual and cultural understanding in digital environments. We will discuss how netnography differentiates itself from related approaches by offering specific operational and ethical guidelines that are continually updated for evolving technocultural realities.
- **15.30-15.45 coffee break**
- **15:45-17.00 Initiating the Netnographic Inquiry:** Focusing on the first movement, Initiation, this session covers how to focus research on a specific phenomenon or question and build the foundations for subsequent operations. Students will learn to define research boundaries—selecting sites, devices, and experiences—while addressing critical early-stage tasks like seeking ethical approval and formulating rigorous research questions.
- **17:00-17:30 Group research project:** Students will form research teams and apply these initial learnings.
- **20:00 dinner**

### • Tuesday, June 9

- **9.00-10:30 The Immersed Researcher:** Immersion is the mandatory core of netnography. This session focuses on the Immersion movement as a process of experiencing, observing, and reflecting on digital journeys. We will introduce the immersion journal as a rigorous filtering mechanism and a tool for "thick description" that captures the researcher's introspective journey and active engagement with the data site.
- **10.30-10.45 coffee break**
- **10:45-12.30 Tracking Digital Traces:** This session covers the Investigation movement, which centers on the search, discovery, and selective collection of pre-existing digital traces. Students will learn to navigate the deluge of raw digital traces to locate "deep data"—rare, culturally complex, and resonant online traces such as textual posts, images, and videos that reveal broader narratives and meanings.

- **12.30-14.00 lunch**
- **14.00-15.30 Interacting with Agents and Actors:** Focusing on the Interaction movement, this session explores data elicitation through dialogue with various types of social actors. We will discuss the dialogic nature of this data and how to manage various engagement strategies—including intellectual, emotional, and social engagement—with human participants, avatars, or even AI bots.
- **15.30-15.45 coffee break**
- **15:45-16:30 Integrated Intelligence:** The Integration movement is where the three different types of collective data become integrated into one form, and where analysis meets interpretation. Focusing on the current tensions between human and artificial intelligence, this session addresses the emergent and sophisticated synthesis of immersive, investigative, and interactive data. Students will learn to monitor cognitive offloading, restore empathic balance, and rotate micro and macro perspectives, using Alvesson's notion of "reflexive pragmatism" and Denzin's idea of triangulation as guides for transforming the three types of data into a sophisticated, holistic cultural understanding.
- **16:30-17:30 Group Research Project:** Dedicated netnography research time.
- **20:00 dinner**
  
- **Wednesday, June 10**
  - **9.00-10:30 Communicating Theoreticals:** The final movement, Incarnation, focuses on representing and communicating findings. This session guides students on how to produce high-quality research outputs suitable for academic journals or professional presentations, ensuring that the research is vivid, theoretically grounded, and provides appropriate ethical and methodological transparency.
  - **10.30-10.45 coffee break**
  - **10:45-12.30 Workshop:** A hands-on "workbench" session where student teams aggregate their findings and apply integration exercises. The instructors will be available to assist with specific data challenges, refinement of the immersion journals, and the final synthesis of team projects.
  - **12.30-14.00 lunch**
  - **14.00-15.30 Presentations:** In these two final sessions, teams present their findings and receive critical feedback from the instructors and peers.
  - **15.30-15.45 coffee break**
  - **15:45-17:00 Presentations**
  - **17.00-17.30 Closing of the school:** The school concludes with a final summary of netnography's role as a cutting-edge, adaptive tool for contemporary research.

## Teaching materials

1. Kozinets, Robert V. (2020), *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*, London: Sage.
2. Kozinets, Robert V. and Rossella Gambetti, eds. (2021), *Netnography Unlimited: Understanding Technoculture through Qualitative Social Media Research*, New York: Routledge.
3. Kozinets, Robert V., and Ulrike Gretzel (2024), "Netnography evolved: New contexts, scope, procedures and sensibilities." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 104 (2024): 103693.
4. Robert V. Kozinets & Mina Seraj-Aksit (2024), Everyday activism: an AI-assisted netnography of a digital consumer movement, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 40 (3-4), 347-370 (IF=4.4).
5. Kozinets, Robert V. and Gretzel, Ulrike (2023), "Qualitative Social Media Methods: Netnography in the Age of Technocultures," in Denzin, Norman and Lincoln, Yvonna, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. London: Sage Publications, 403-420.
6. Kozinets, Robert, and Ulrike Gretzel (2025), "Netnography and qualitative digital methods to advance service theory and practice." *Journal of Service Theory and Practice* 35, no. 4, 487-500.
7. Denzin, N. K. (2012). Triangulation 2.0. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 6(2), 80–88.
8. Gambetti, Rossella C., and Robert V. Kozinets (2022), "Agentic Netnography." *New Trends in Qualitative Research* 10, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36367/ntqr.10.2022.e519/>
9. Gambetti, Rossella C. and Robert V. Kozinets (2024), "From Killer Bunnies to Talking Cupcakes: Theorizing the Diverse Universe of Virtual Influencers," *European Journal of Marketing*, 58 (13), 205-251.
10. Gambetti, Rossella C., Robert V. Kozinets, and Silvia Biraghi (2024), "The Brand Behind the Curtain: Decoupling, Recoupling and Moral Conflict in Social Media." *Journal of Product and Brand Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-04-2024-5112>.
11. Kozinets, Robert V. (2023), "Immersive netnography: a novel method for service experience research in virtual reality, augmented reality and metaverse contexts", *Journal of Service Management* (IF = 9.45), 34(1), 100-125.
12. Lugosi, Peter, and Sarah Quinton (2018), "More-than-human netnography." *Journal of Marketing Management* 34, no. 3-4 (2018): 287-313.
13. Kozinets, Robert V., Daniela Abrantes Ferriera, and Paul Chimenti (2021), "How Do Platforms Empower Consumers? Insights from the Affordances and Constraints of Reclame Aqui," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 48(October), 428-455.
14. Marchuk, Anna, Stefan Biel, Volker Bilgram, and Signe Worning Løgstrup Jensen (2020), "The best of both worlds: Methodological insights on combining human and AI labor in netnography." In *Netnography Unlimited*, pp. 181-201. Routledge.

15. Kozinets, Robert V. (2024). Researching AI chatbots, platforms and the metaverse: Understanding today's netnography. In *Handbook of qualitative research methods in marketing* (pp. 185-196). Edward Elgar Publishing.
16. Collins, Jonathan (2025). The gift of gab: A netnographic examination of the community building mechanisms in far-right online space. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 37(3), 349-368.
17. Kozinets, Robert V. (2019), "Consuming Technocultures: An Extended JCR Curation," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 46 (October), 620-627.
18. Levy, Sidney J. (1996). Stalking the amphisbaena. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 23(3), 163-176.
19. Liu, S., Lai, D., & Li, Z. (2022). The identity construction of Chinese anime pilgrims. *Annals of Tourism Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2022.103373>
20. Costello, Leesa, Marie-Louise McDermott, and Ruth Wallace (2017), "Netnography: Range of practices, misperceptions, and missed opportunities." *International journal of qualitative methods* 16, no. 1, 1609406917700647.
21. Cheah, Chee Wei (2025). AI-augmented netnography: ethical and methodological frameworks for responsible digital research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 24, 16094069251338910.
22. Howard, Lyz. "An exploration of autonetnography as an eResearch methodology to examine learning and teaching scholarship in Networked Learning." *Electronic Journal of e-Learning* 14, no. 5 (2016): pp322-335.
23. González-Calvo, Gustavo (2025). Teacher Identity and Neoliberalism: An Auto-Netnographic Exploration of the Public Education Crisis. *European Journal of Education*, 60(1), e12910.
24. Kozinets, Robert V., Scaraboto, Daiane, and Parmentier, Marie Agnes (2018). Evolving netnography: How brand auto-netnography, a netnographic sensibility, and more-than-human netnography can transform your research. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 34(3-4), 231-242.
25. Wang, Shengang, Jiarui Sun, and Ge Zhang (2025) "Unveiling Digital Realms: A Systematic Review of Netnography Research in Library and Information Science." *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries* 14, no. 3, 407-429.
26. Coombes, Philip (2025). The study of consumption dynamics and sociodemographics in tourism and hospitality firms: a case for auto-netnography. *Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality*, 20(2), 229-235.
27. Walpersberger, T., & Gretzel, U. (2024). Illusion of inclusion:# BlackVanlife as counter-storytelling. *Tourism Geographies*, 26(1), 32-50.
28. Coombes, P. (2025). The study of consumption dynamics and sociodemographics in tourism and hospitality firms: a case for auto-netnography. *Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality*, 20(2), 229-235.
29. Roszak, Magdalena (2025). Between Outsider and Insider: Methodological Challenges of Netnography in the Context of My Own Pedagogical Research. *Journal of Modern Science*, 63(3), 853-874.

30. Leoni, Giulia (2026). Netnography for accounting and accountability research. In *The Routledge Handbook to Qualitative Accounting Research Methods* (pp. 218-231). Routledge.
31. Kuźniarska, A., Czakon, W., Jedynek, M., Mania, K., & Woszczyna, K. (2025). Advancing netnography—hybrid ways of coding social media content. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 38(8), 220-233.
32. Xu, J. B., & Wu, M. Y. (2018). Netnography as a new research method in tourism studies: a bibliometric analysis of journal articles (2006–2015). In *Handbook of research methods for tourism and hospitality management* (pp. 242-256). Edward Elgar Publishing.
33. Delli Paoli, A., & D’Auria, V. (2025). The digitalization of ethnography: a scoping review of methods in netnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 54(4), 559-587.
34. Delli Paoli, A., & D’Auria, V. (2021). Digital Ethnography: A Systematic Literature Review. *Italian Sociological Review*, 11(4S), 243. <https://doi.org/10.13136/isr.v11i4S.434>
35. Sadat, Amany, Elizabeth Green, Imogen Forsythe, Stacey Munnelly, Georgette Eaton, Matthew Wynn, Fiona Pearson, and Emma Dobson (2025), "Utilization of Netnography as a Health Care Research Methodology: Scoping Review." *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 27: e78025.
36. Bansal, R., Martinho, C., Pruthi, N., & Aggarwal, D. (2024). From virtual observations to business insights: A bibliometric review of netnography in business research. *Heliyon*, 10(1).