CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
3.1. Introduction

The current research is virtual ethnography among the Muslim community of Mysore. Virtual ethnography is a research approach for exploring the social interactions that take place on the Internet. As a long time tradition, ethnography builds on the principle of immersion of the ethnographer through an extended period of time to achieve in-depth understanding of a culture. Virtual ethnography aims to adapt this principle to the online space, networked communication practices and cultural formations which are emerged on the Internet.

Accordingly, in a virtual ethnography, in addition to occasional face-to-face meetings with informants, virtual ethnographers may use email or instant messaging for interviews, conduct textual analysis of messages, and carry out participation on social network (Christine Hine, 2000). The integration of traditional (offline and face-to-face) and online virtual ethnographic methods can help researchers who are interested to understand the relationships between online and offline cultural lives.

The main effort in this study was to collect a combination of online and offline data that together portray the dynamics of the Internet among Muslims of Mysore. The research was motivated by four major objectives; investigating the digital context among Muslims of Mysore, discovering how they conceptualized the Internet, describing how they used the Internet and finally to achieving an internal view about how online activities of Muslims were embedded on the context of their daily lives.

These objectives imposed several methodological challenges like how to integrate online and offline research strategies, how to clarify the boundaries of “the field” in a “multi-sited” research and how to confront with the Internet, at the same time as the topic, as the social space and as the data collection tool.

Such as any other ethnographic study, by the nature, this study was also a qualitative research, with descriptive approach. The fieldwork was conducted in three years from 2011 to 2014. The fieldwork was conducted on both, “online space” as well as
“real world”. The real world fieldwork was conducted on Mysore city and more precisely, on several areas on Mysore city where Muslims live.

### 3.2. Field entry process

Based on the conceptual framework of this virtual ethnography, the “field” was defined on two spaces, the real space – the physical world – and the virtual space on the Internet. Accordingly, the process of field entry paralleled on the both spaces; although it initiated on the real world. The field entry began by contacting several interviews with many Muslims – in the form informal conversations – through “pedestrian observation” in Muslim areas. These interviews usually were conducted in their mosques, restaurants, schools, shopping centers, Internet cafes. This process subsequently provided valuable information about the history and different social, cultural and economic properties of Muslim community in Mysore.

Parallel to these face to face interviews, Facebook was used as the virtual field entry platform. A Facebook account was created and gradually many Muslims who had participated on face to face interviews were added to that Facebook account. A feature in Facebook was used to expand the process of online-virtual field entry; after using Facebook for a period of time, based on the friends that a user has in his or her Facebook profile, Facebook suggests more similar friends. This Facebook feature was used for discovering more members of the Muslim community on online space. These parallel processes of offline and online filed entry provided a reliable framework for sampling process.

### 3.3. Sampling process

Above 250,000 Muslim live in Mysore. In this study, 517 members of Muslim community of Mysore were selected as the samples of study. Non-probability sampling method has been implemented to select these samples. Non-probability sampling methods are those methods in which all the units of analysis in the population do not have equal chance to be selected as sample; therefore the results cannot be generalized to the whole population (Bernard, 2006).
The major non-probability sampling methods are quota sampling, purposive or (judgmental) sampling, convenience (or haphazard) sampling, and chain referral (including snowball and respondent-driven) sampling. Non-probability techniques are appropriate for large surveys when, despite our best efforts, we just can’t get a probability sample. In these cases, researchers can use non-probability sample (Bernard, 2006). Among these different types of non-probability sampling techniques, “snowball technique” was used for sampling.

Snowball and respondent-driven sampling (RDS) are two types of “network sampling methods” – also known as “chain referral” technique – and are usually favored in studying hard-to-find populations. Generally, snowball sampling is used when the participants are difficult to locate in a general population (Bernard, 2006).

In the snowball technique, researchers use “key informants” to locate one or two [other] informants in the population and get handed from one informant to another informant and the sampling frame grows until the numbers of selected participants reached adequately up to the requisite sample size (Bernard, 2006); “it is like a snowball rolling down a hill”.

The parallel processes of offline and online field entry provided a list of selected “key informants” among those who were interviewed offline and were added on Facebook profile. These key informants introduced more Muslim individuals who accepted to participate in this study and the process continued until the numbers of selected participants reached 517.

Those Muslim individuals who accepted to participate in this study belonged to different age groups, gender groups, had different level of education and had different marital status. Here, the demographic properties of them are discussed in more details including age construction, gender split, marital status and their education level.

3.3.1. Gender composition of the studied samples

Looking at the gender composition of the studied samples reveals that Muslim men were more engaged on this study. Out of the 517 samples, 382 samples (73.88% of
the participants) were male and only 135 samples (26.12% of the participants) were female participants. Comparing with Muslim men, there were fewer Muslim women who accepted to participate in this study. Restricted Islamic cultural codes about the relation of men and women can explain such reluctance among Muslim women to participate in this study. Table 3.1 shows the gender composition of the studied samples.

3.3.2. Age composition of the studied samples

Looking at the age composition of the participants shows that the participants in this research were very young. Most of the members of Muslim community, who accepted to participate in this study, were below the age of 25. The fact that very big majority of the Internet users in this community are young can explain the age composition of the participant. Table 3.2 shows the age composition of the studied samples.

3.3.3. Marital status of the samples

Most of the individuals who participated in this research as samples were single. Out of 517 participants, 372 (71.95% of the participants) were single and only 145 (28.04% of the participants) were married. The fact that the majority of participants were young describes why most of them were not married. Table 3.3 shows the marital status of the studied samples.

3.3.4. Education level of the samples

Generally, the sample populations in this research were “educated”. The majority of them were students; there were also many participants who were university graduates. Most of the participants could speak English. Table 3.4 shows the age construction of the studied samples.

3.4. Data collection process

Interview and observation were the main data collection techniques in this ethnographic study. Both of these techniques were implemented on real world and virtual world at two parallel field of this study. The Internet provided highly valuable
possibilities for data collection. Accordingly, to know how to work with the Internet services in order to collect online data was necessary. It was also important to use a strategy to integrate offline and online techniques.

### 3.4.1. Interviews

Interviews were the main source of data collection in this study. Interviews were conducted both, in real world as well as online space; usually offline and online interviews complimented each other. Face to face interviews mainly were conducted in form of informal conversations; several sessions of group discussions also held by some of the participants and their friends. Along with informal conversations, face to face in-depth interviews also were conducted; comparatively, there were fewer in-depth interviews. Usually, informal interviews provided framework for in-depth interviews.

Virtual interviews were conducted on diverse online environments. Email address, social networking platforms and instant messaging services were the main online environments in which online interviews were conducted. Questions were sent through all or either of these online environments. In some cases, Google forms were used as the indirect interviewing; questions were sent in the form of small surveys and the answers of participants were compiled in Google spreadsheets. In rare cases, voice and video chats were used to conduct online in-depth interviews. In these cases, a time was fixed for online interviews and conversations.

### 3.4.2. Observation

Traditionally, “participant observation” was the key methodological strategy in anthropology. Virtual ethnographers need to redefine the concept of “participant observation” based on the features of the new research environment on the Internet. In this study, face to face participant observation was complimented by online observation.

An important observation setting in this study was Facebook; it is because of the fact that a great majority of the samples in this study were regular Facebook users. Many of members of Muslims community in Mysore who had Facebook accounts were added to friend list and for a long time, their online activities were observed on daily basis; this
daily observations were recorded by field notes. The processes of online observations were both in passive and active ways. Participating on their public online discussions as well was the main mean of active online participant observation.

3.4.3. Technical details

Since this study mostly has been conducted on the Internet, providing “technical detail” about the gadgets and online services that which were used during the online data collection procedure is helpful. A broadband Internet connection with the average speed of 512 kbps, and a Mobile 3G Internet connection with the average speed of 3Mbps were used in to provide Internet access. A laptop PC, a tablet PC and a smart phone were the connecting devices which were used during this study. The smart phone was very useful gadget; even in real work field studies, the smart phone was used to record voices, to mark places on the maps, to take pictures and videos.

In the case of online services, vast and diverse online services were used including email address, Facebook, Google+, Orkut, twitter, Youtube, Pinterest, Instagram accounts; Skype and Yahoo messengers; as well as WhatsApp, Viber and Line services. For conducting online structured interviews, Google Form platform was used which was synchronized with Google spreadsheet to automatically analyzing the answers of participants. Qualitative data analysis techniques were used to analysis the collected data.

3.5. Ethical considerations

In a virtual ethnography in addition to the traditional ethical considerations, there are some extra ethical considerations that need to be contemplated. These ethical considerations are added up due to the new technical possibilities in the new research environment of cyber space. A unique opportunity for ethnographers who study the Internet is the chance they have to be invisible observers. This is an important ethical consideration for those anthropologists who conduct virtual ethnographies to decide when they are ethically allowed to be invisible observes.

Another important ethical consideration is recognizing the boundaries of privacy of the participants. The private information which is being shared between Internet users
– usually between friends or family members – is an important part of ‘online traffic’ and an important source of information for any anthropologist who conduct virtual ethnography. Deciding about how to use the private information of the participants was another ethical consideration in this study. The other ethical concept that a virtual ethnographer needs to consider is watching out who and how uses the information that is provided in a virtual ethnography. A virtual ethnography can provide first hand and practical information about the Internet and online culture which is highly valuable for several political, social and economic entities (e.g. private IT companies or political figures or governmental agencies and etc). A virtual ethnographer should be cautious that the information is not misused by any of these entities and it should not harm the life, freedom and privacy of others.
TABLE 3.1: Gender composition of the studied samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male participants</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>73.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female participants</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>26.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the participants in this research were Muslim men. Out of the 517 samples, 382 samples (74% of the participants) were males and only 135 samples (26.12% of the participants) were females.

Figure 1: Gender composition of the studied samples
### TABLE 3.2: Age composition of the studied samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24 Years</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>54.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34 Years</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>22.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44 Years</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>11.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54 Years</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64 Years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 65</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>517</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants in this research were very young; Most of the studied samples were below the age of 25.

![Figure 2: Age composition of the studied samples](image-url)
TABLE 3.3: Marital status of the studied samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married participants</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>28.04 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single participants</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>71.95 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the individuals who participated in this research as samples were single. Out of 517 participants, 372 (71.95% of participants) were single and only 145 (28.04% of the participants) were married.

Figure 3: Marital status of the studied samples
Looking at the age construction of the participants shows that the participants in this research are very young. Most of the Muslim individuals who accepted to participate in this study were below the age of 25. The fact that very big majority of the Internet users in this community are young Muslims can explain such age construction. Table 3.2 shows the age construction of the studied samples.