Netnography as a Method of Lead User Identification

Abstract:
Lead users are rare subjects, which are difficult to detect. In theory and practice, mass screening is the main method of lead user identification. It is a standardized, quantitative approach, based on screening a large number of potentially relevant users. Shortcomings of screening are low sample efficiency, high search costs and the reliance on the self-assessment of respondents. Thus, the elaboration of lead user identification methods is still a major challenge to researchers in the field. In this paper, we propose netnography as a new method of lead user identification. Netnography, made up of internet and ethnography, is an approach to analyse online communities systematically. The empirical results of our explorative study of the online community utopia show that 9 out of 40 of the most active online community members possess lead user attributes (22.5 per cent). Hence, we may conclude that netnography is a viable method of lead user identification, which relies on external assessments instead of self-assessments and is probably less costly than mass screening.

Intellectual Contribution:
Discipline-based Research