

## **An ecology of attention: recalibrating reflexivity in online qualitative inquiry**

Richard Longman

**Purpose** – This paper interrogates the demands that digital data makes on traditional understandings of reflexivity and argues for recalibrating reflexivity in the context of online qualitative inquiry. In doing this it connects with wider discourses pertaining to the legitimacy of online qualitative inquiry and seeks to enhance legitimacy through strengthening research practice.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper presents original empirical material derived from a netnographic study (Kozinets, 2015) in which the researcher maintained a commitment to write reflective fieldnotes—informed by Czarniawska’s work on ‘diary studies’ (2007). The paper draws on Citton’s (2014) conceptualisation of an attentional ecology to explore how researchers engage in reflexivity by paying attention to attention.

**Findings** – Analysis highlights how attention is directed towards three archetypal, reflexive questions, and acknowledges a central concern of online qualitative inquiry: ‘... how useful is this knowledge, and to whom is it useful?’. It develops understanding about the perspective of the self in the creation of knowledge, and the relationship between the personal and the universal. It argues that active attention, within an attentional ecology, can contribute to recalibrating reflexivity.

**Originality/value** – The value of this paper resides in its careful attention to reflexivity in online qualitative inquiry which has not benefited from previous scholarship. Its value is also articulated in the import of the work of cultural theorist, Yves Citton, to enrich understanding about the relevance of attention studies to reflexivity.

**Keywords** – Ecology, Attention, Reflexivity, Online qualitative inquiry, Research methods, Citton. **Paper type** – Research paper.