

Pagan Self-Representation Online

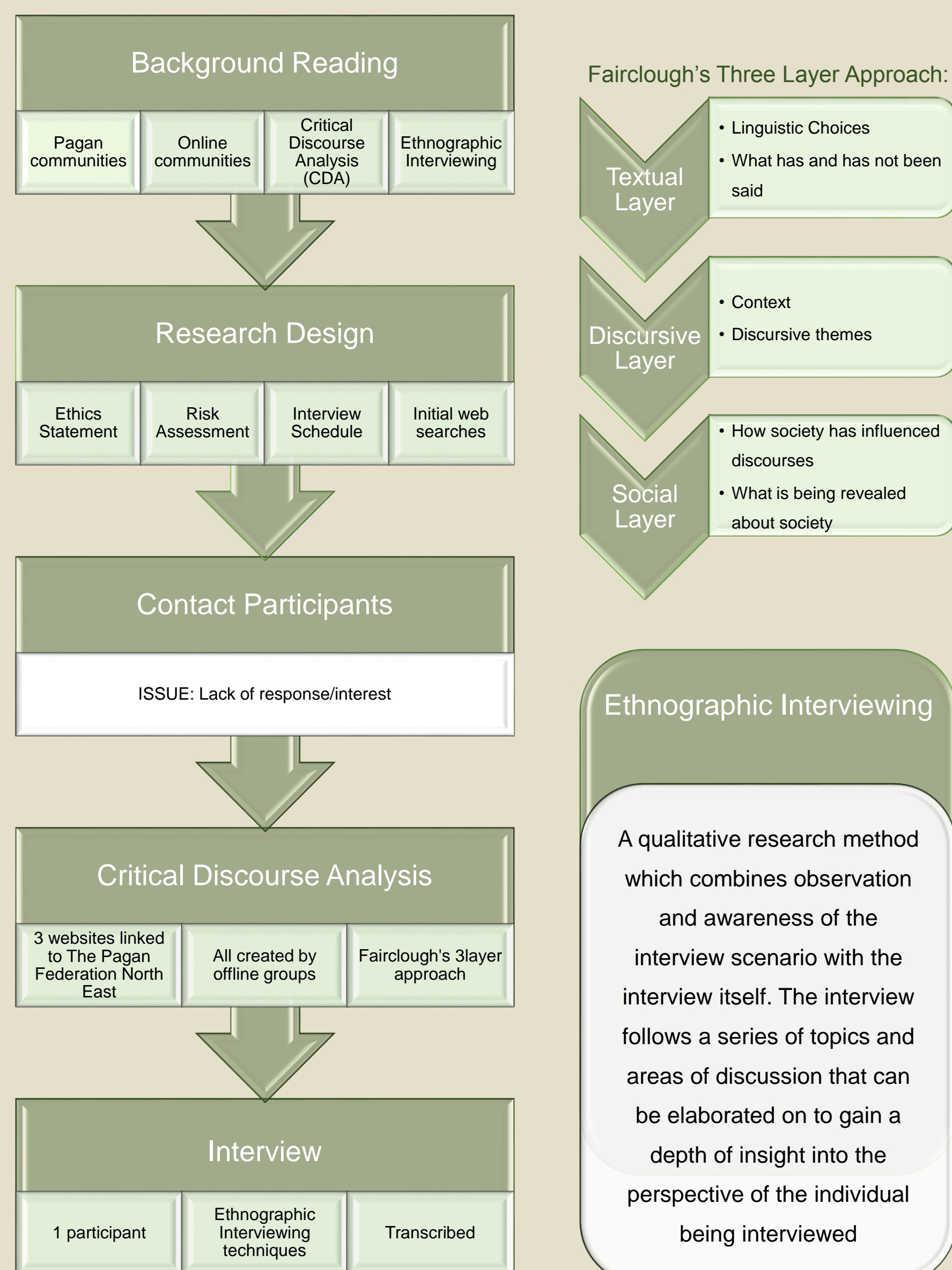
Introduction

The Pagan community has an (imagined) ancient history, often demonised and associated with a need for secrecy. However Pagans in all their diverse forms are starting to reveal themselves to the world via virtual online platforms which, in contrast are characterised by openness and transparency. This project takes a step towards exploring how and why the Pagan community use the Internet

Aims and objectives

- To gain an insight into the web presence of the Pagan community
- Explore the purposes of websites being created and used
- Identify themes and key issues within the Pagan community and their use of the Internet

Methods

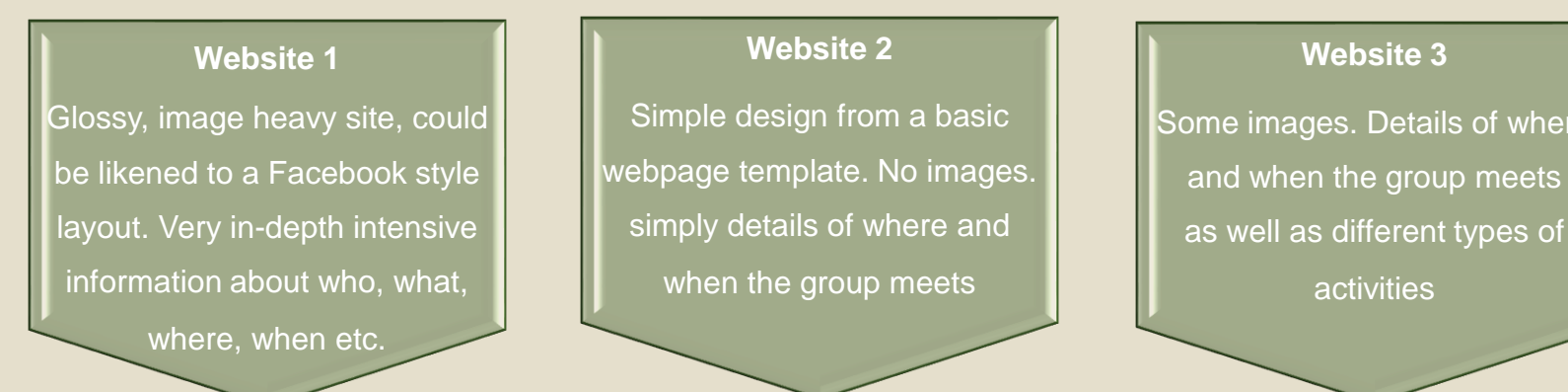


Data

General searches using the Google UK search engine showed that websites created by the Pagan community include:

The Pagan federation (top hit), information on Paganism, representation, charities, forums, dating, bookshops, shops, events, blogs, local groups, funeral services and training

Critical Discourse Analysis



All sites serve to:

- Describe and define the organisation of the group
- Welcome potential newcomers
- Act as a bridge between the individual and services within the Pagan community
- Portray the group as a friendly and sociable community
- Enable the group to authenticate itself through the use of images, affiliation with the Pagan Federation and group longevity
- Act as a record of events and activities for existing members

Ethnographic Interview

Forums act as:



Themes

Diversity Paganism differs from other Religions by its lack of a strict set of beliefs or organisational structure. Nonetheless all groups investigated emphasised an acceptance of diverse beliefs associated with spirituality, nature and the seasons

Access Forums enable Individuals who are unable to attend offline groups to have access to the Pagan community. They also enable a degree of anonymity for those who feel unable to 'come out' as Pagan

All websites had a members only area and varying levels of transparency and secrecy were found. Access to both online and offline groups are negotiated through the interplay of authenticity of both group and individual

Authenticity Throughout the groups, authenticity is a key theme surrounding Pagan identity. Groups authenticate themselves through the use of images, associations with other Pagan groups and the length of time they have been running. Individuals must then present themselves in a way that is deemed authentic by the group in order to gain access

Misrepresentation The Pagan community is often mistaken for New Age, associated with Satanism or trivialized in comparison to Christianity. The findings suggest Pagans have awareness of being inaccurately portrayed, in particular by the media but also by a minority of Pagans themselves

Conclusions

- The Pagan community has an internet presence that spans a wide range of services, products and platforms for making connections
- The primary purpose of a web presence is to bridge the gap between the offline Pagan community which is widely dispersed across the UK
- Gaining access into the Pagan community has to be negotiated via interaction between the individual and group whereby judgements of authenticity and trust are made

Implications

Whilst intentionally excluded from this study, Facebook was found to be a widely used platform across the online Pagan community offering a potential area for further research

There is a sense of mistrust towards the Media and the way in which they represent the Pagan community which requires further investigation