

Title:

Email Interviews: The Decision-Making Process for Utilizing Electronic Data Collection in Qualitative Nursing Research

Janice E. Hawkins, PhD

School of Nursing, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, USA

Session Title:

Innovative Technology in Research

Slot:

B 16: Saturday, 28 October 2017: 3:15 PM-4:00 PM

Scheduled Time:

3:35 PM

Keywords:

Electronic Data Collection, Email Interviews and Nursing Research

References:

Gibson, L. (2010). Realities toolkit: Using email interviews. Manchester, England: ERSC National Center for Research Methods. Retrieved from <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/1303/1/09-toolkit-email-interviews.pdf>

Gibson, L. (2014, August 28). What is email interviewing? Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTzJdFbaakg>

Glassmeyer, D. M., & Dibbs, R. (2012). Researching from a distance: Using live web conferencing to mediate data collection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 11(3), 292-302.

Mason, D. M., & Ide, B. (2014). Adapting qualitative research strategies to technology savvy adolescents. *Nurse Researcher*, 21(5), 40-45. doi:10.7748/nr.21.5.40.e1241

Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2014). *Essentials of nursing research: Appraising evidence for nursing practice* (8th ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Wolters Kluwer Health/Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Walker, D. (2013). The Internet as a medium for health service research. Part 1. *Nurse Researcher*, 20(4), 18-21.

Abstract Summary:

A discussion of the potential advantages, disadvantages, and methodological fit of electronic data collection in qualitative research will assist nursing researchers in determining when to use technology assisted interviews in their research. The presenter will share personal experiences from a recent qualitative study involving email interviews of nurse educators.

Learning Activity:

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	EXPANDED CONTENT OUTLINE
Describe the advantages of utilizing electronic data collection in qualitative nursing research	I. Introduction and background, using technology for qualitative research interviews II. Potential advantages of electronic data collection; Review of the literature Researcher's experiences

Describe the disadvantages of utilizing electronic data collection in qualitative nursing research	III. Potential disadvantages of electronic data collection Review of the literature Researcher's experiences
Discuss the methodological fit of electronic data collection in consideration of research aims and study participant characteristics	IV: Practical considerations for conducting technology assisted interviews Protection of data, establishing a connection and context, iterative dialogue, length and timing of email correspondence, research aims, participant characteristics. IV. Summary and conclusion Relevance to conference themes and objectives. Implications to nursing research.

Abstract Text:

Electronic data collection methods are increasingly more common in qualitative nursing research. Due to current technologies, nursing researchers are no longer limited to traditional face-to-face interviews. Researchers must determine the best method of data collection for their specific studies. Deciding between face-to-face interviews and technology assisted interviews is a necessary step that should be based on an assessment of several factors. Factors include such things as the research aims, type of information needed, time required to conduct interviews (for both the interviewer and the research subjects), costs and accessibility, researcher familiarity with the technology, and relative comfort level of the subject population with the technology. A discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of common electronic data collection methods, with an particular emphasis on email interviews, is the first step in providing a decision matrix for choosing the best interview technique for a given study. The purpose of this presentation is to assist nursing researchers in the decision making process of determining when to consider electronic data collection in their research. The presenter will share personal experiences from a recent qualitative study involving email interviews of nurse educators.

Semi-structured or structured interviews of representative participants are the most common method of data collection in qualitative nursing research. Historically, researchers have preferred face-to-face interviews (Polit & Beck, 2014). However, email interviews have been used successfully in qualitative research (Gibson, 2010; Walker, 2013). Nursing researchers are increasingly using technology to more efficiently and economically collect data, particularly when geographical barriers hinder face-to-face interviews (Walker, 2013). The written responses of email interviews, which are easily converted to transcribed data, save a significant amount of time and money over the typical expenditures for transcribing an oral interview (Gibson, 2010). In addition to the convenience and economical benefits of email interviews, researchers have found that technologically savvy participants may be more comfortable with electronic data collection methods and may respond more naturally to interview prompts (Mason & Ide, 2014). The more natural exchange contributes to the free flow of ideas and richer data collection (Glassmeyer & Dibbs, 2012). In some cases, researchers believe that the perceived anonymity of electronic interviews compared to face-to-face interviews increases the richness of the data collection as participants more willingly share intimate details of their experiences (Gibson, 2014). Another advantage of the email interview is that the participants are able to respond at their own convenience to email interview prompts at a time that is suitable solely to them (Gibson, 2014). The unique asynchronous nature of email interviews allows the participant more control in the level of participation and length of time invested. According to Gibson (2010), more participant control of the level of participation offers an ethical advantage over traditional synchronous interviews. In an email interview, participants are not limited to the time constraints of a scheduled interview. Participants have time to reflect on their answers before crafting written responses. Their written responses can be read and edited for clarity before sending. Therefore, email interviews allows for iterative, back-and-forth email conversations to clarify descriptive data, pursue further discovery, and ensure accuracy in describing the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants. Gibson (2010) believed this results in much deeper and richer data.

While there are numerous advantages to email interviews, there are also some potential disadvantages. A disadvantage of email interviews is that crafting the written responses is by nature more time consuming than oral interviews (Gibson, 2014). Consequently, another disadvantage of the email interview is the potential for short, concise answers and possible attrition as participants may discontinue the exchange. A lack of access or comfort with email communication would also inhibit data collection. Some researchers argue that the written responses of email interviews lack some of the social cues that contribute to a full understanding of the participant's experience. However, the previous is somewhat mitigated since unlike traditional face-to-face interviewing, qualitative researchers using email interview techniques have noted that participants employ other written cues, such as bold print, capitalization, emoticons, and abbreviations like LOL (laugh out loud) to communicate tone and inflection (Gibson, 2010).

The presenter's personal experiences of conducting email interviews as part of a recent qualitative study is consistent with prior research using email interviews for data collection. Participants typically responded sooner than expected with detailed and lengthy answers to open-ended questions. Traits and characteristics that were common to the targeted population of the presenter's study minimized the vulnerabilities of email interviewing for data collection. For instance, most, if not all, of the participants were involved with online learning programs and were likely even more comfortable with email communication. Additionally, participants were timely in their responses and seemed enthusiastic to share their experiences. All seventeen participants in this study continued to respond until follow-up questions were no longer initiated. Using a familiar and comfortable communication mode for both recruitment and data collection may have encouraged greater participation (Mason & Ide, 2014).

Because the participants were comfortable with email communication, email interviews proved to be advantageous and may have elicited a fuller experience than traditional face-to-face interviews (Glassmeyer & Dibbs, 2012; Mason & Ide, 2014).

As evident from the preceding discussion, the research aims, potential advantages and disadvantages of the data collection method such as time required to conduct interviews, costs and accessibility, researcher familiarity with the technology, and relative comfort level of the subject population with the technology are indeed important factors when considering the use of technology such as e-mail interviews for conducting nursing research. Providing information on electronic data collection methods facilitates appropriate usage of technology in nursing research and ultimately advances nursing science.