"Letter to Editor"

Electronic Interview in Qualitative Research

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Interview is one of the most common tools among many social and human researches, which has been increasingly taken into account in recent years by expanding the quality and integrative approaches. An interview is usually a deliberate pre-designed conversation about a specific topic in which at least two person are involved. The person who devise the interview questions is the interviewer and the one who answers the questions is the interviewee. In order to collect data in qualitative researches, the type of interview will be different according to the number of those involved in the interview, the spatial and temporal conditions, the research objectives, and characteristics of interviewees. One type of interviews is an electronic interview, which is an alternative to the traditional method. This method can be used, like others, to examine the attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and experiences of individuals in the study. These interviews can be done simultaneously and asynchronous. In the simultaneous method, the interviewer communicates with the interviewees simultaneously. Telephone conversations, webcam use, and chat on social networks are some examples. Asynchronous interviews are those that interviewer and interviewee take part in an interview at different times. Emails, online communities and Bulletin Boards or social network sites are examples of interviews that are asynchronous. Accordingly, these interviews can be ranged from structured to unstructured. For example, the researcher may send a series of questions through e-mail to the participants, or another researcher may conduct a semi-structured interview on the Internet, but it should be noted that the electronic interview also has advantages and limitations.

The benefits of electronic interview include issues such as long-distance removal, interview with people who are difficult to access, interview in the normal place of work or living with regard to their convenience, cost-effectiveness, saving information easily and quickly, deleting the impact of the presence of the interviewer and the privacy of individuals, and their anonymity (e-mail), interviewing vulnerable groups such as those infected with HIV, criminals, etc. Limitations of electronic interview included the reduced attention and concentration of participants, inability to use technology, insufficient Internet access, the problem of verifying the participant's identity and the lack of access to non-verbal reactions. One of the important challenges of electronic interviews is ethical considerations, which include the risk of disclosure of participants' information and how to obtain consent for participation in the study. This is more likely when interviewees are children, adolescents or people with mental problems. Another example is the inappropriate use of power to examine people's activities through technology without their consent, which is called Lurking; it is considered to be a violation of human privacy. However, during an e-mail interview, participants can easily ignore the collaboration. For this reason, there are rules and a set of norms for the usage of Internet and social networks, called netiquette, which combines the two terms of network and etiquette that both the interviewee and the interviewer should be familiar with. Regardless of ethical considerations, one of the challenges is data validity issues and findings which are gathered through asynchronous interviews.

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How can researchers be sure who the true participants are? How can they ensure that the electronic responses attributed to the respondent are answered by him/her? So, researchers should consider the benefits and limitations before using the new method in the interview. Then, they should assess their appropriateness to their research and then decide whether to use this method or not. Therefore, it is suggested to use face-to-face interviewing methods, if possible, then use electronic methods when there is a problem of the presence of the participants or distance. From electronic methods, it is better to use simultaneous and video interviews to establish interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee; otherwise, asynchronous interviewing methods should be used, such as e-mail, which may also be associated with unreliability to data collection. Today, information technology has entered almost every area of research, and interviews that are abundantly used by qualitative researchers are no exception. As noted, this method has its own advantages and disadvantages, which is inevitable in some cases. The authors of this letter have no claim to replace this method with face-to-face interviews, but according to today's conditions and technological advances, it is suggested as a complementary method, so an electronic interview can only be one of the forms of interview along with other methods for data collection. Electronic interviews may not be the best way to collect data in any circumstances, but given the increasing use of technology in social processes, as well as education and research, we hope that electronic interview will be a valuable option in the qualitative research toolbox. We hope this letter will be the first step to fulfill this wish and provide useful insights for researchers who may conduct future electronic interviews.

**Key Word:** Electronic Interview, Qualitative Research

**Conflict of Interest:** No

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مصاحبه الکترونیک در پژوهش‌های کیفی

نویسنده: محمد پرورش مسعود و شکوه ورعی

مصاحبه الکترونیک یکی از ابزارهای معمول و متداول در پژوهش‌های علم انسانی و اجتماعی است که با کمک الکترونیکی می‌تواند مصاحبه را با همکارانی که در کشورهای دیگر انجام دهند، انجام دهد. این روش مصاحبه می‌تواند به دو صورت همزمان و غیر همزمان انجام شود.

هر همین‌طور، مصاحبه الکترونیک نیز دارای مزایا و محدودیت‌هایی است. مزایا مصاحبه الکترونیکی شامل حذف بُعد مسافت، مصاحبه با افرادی که دسترسی حضوری به آنها مشکل است، مصاحبه در محل طبیعی کار یا زندگی افراد و توجه به نواحی آنها، صرف‌جویی در هزینه، ذخیره‌سازی اطلاعات به آسانی و با سرعت، حذف تأثیر حضور مصاحبه‌گر و حفظ حریم خصوصی افراد و بدون نام بودن آنها (روش نام‌های) می‌باشد.

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لورینگ، یک مصاحبه الکترونیک، ملاحظات اخلاقی است که در این مصاحبه‌ها به افراد مبتلا به ایدز، بزهکاران و مانند آن اشاره کرد. محدودیت‌های مصاحبه الکترونیکی، شامل نشان‌دهنده شرکت‌کننده و عدم توانایی استفاده در آینده مصاحبه الکترونیکی انجام داشته باشد. 

کلید واژه‌ها: مصاحبه الکترونیک، پژوهش کیفی
مصاحبه الکترونیک در پژوهشهای کیفی

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