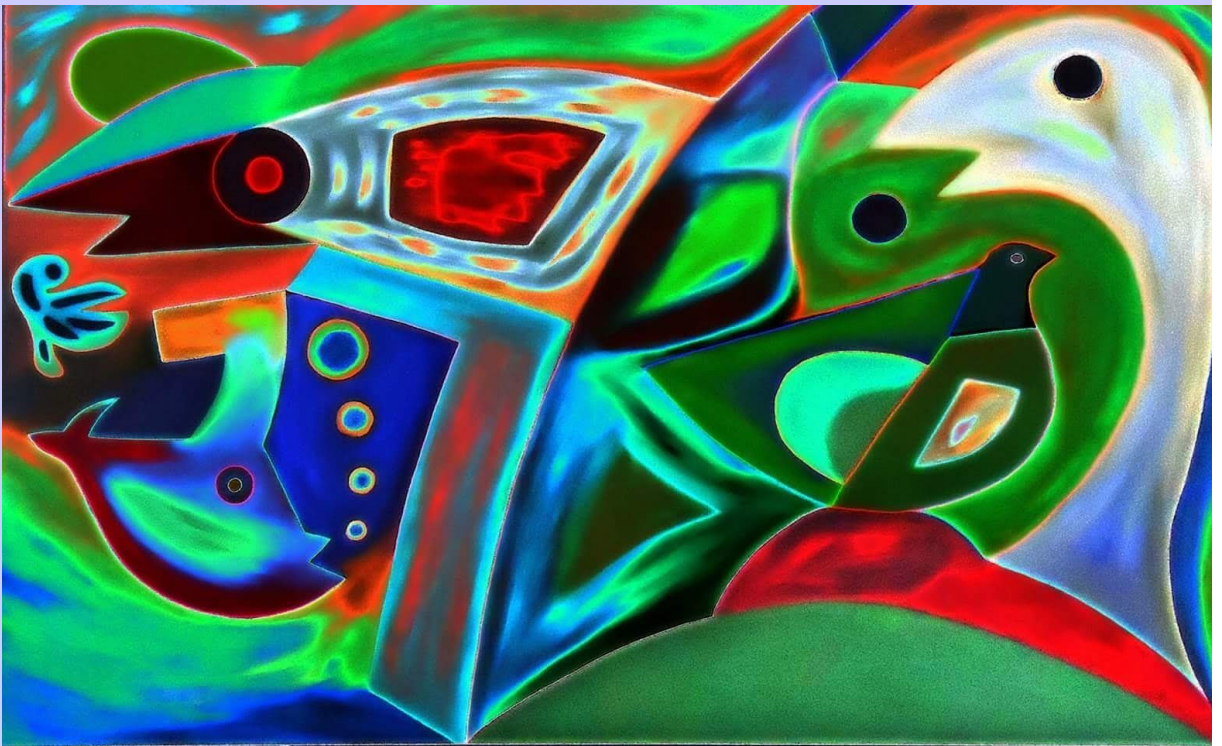


Journal of Digital Art & Humanities



ISSN 2712-8148

Volume 1 Issue 1

October 2020

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Impacts of Interview as Research Instrument of Data Collection in Social Sciences

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https://doi.org/10.33847/2712-8148.1.1_2

Received 05.08.2020/ Revised 05.09.2020/Accepted 07.10.2020/Published 08.10.2020

Abstract. This paper examined the implications of using interviews as method of data collection in social sciences with reference to researcher's experience during fieldwork. The paper is purely qualitative and documentary sources were source of data collection. The paper argued that interview as an instrument of data collection when compared to other data collection techniques like questionnaire is more powerful in eliciting narrative data that allow researchers to investigate people's views in greater depth. The paper indicated that interview as a tool for social science data collection research helps to facilitate in obtaining direct explanation for human actions through a comprehensive speech interaction. The paper concluded that although interviewing is a powerful way of getting insights into interviewee's perceptions, it could go hand in hand with other methods providing in-depth information about participants' inner values and beliefs. For instance, using personal observation as a supplement to interviews would allow researchers investigate participants' external behaviors and internal beliefs. Therefore, the paper stressed that using more than one data collection instrument (although it depends on the research questions) would help obtaining richer data and validating the research findings.

Keywords: Interview, Data Collection, Ethical Orientation, Social Research.

1. Introduction

Research in social sciences differs in a number of aspects but they do have some commonalities. For example, what do action research, evaluation research, ethnography, phenomenology and others have in common? One of the common aspects is the need to collect data. Data collection could be derived from a number of techniques, tools or methods, which include Interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Surveys, Telephone Interviews, Fieldnotes, Taped social interaction or questionnaires, thus, one has to select from any available tools which would provide data he/she seek for testing hypothesis or achieving the objectives of the topic under investigation (Heaton, 2004; Prabnat & Meenu, 2015).

Data collection is an essential component to conducting research. Data collection is a complicated and hard task. Indeed, it is also very difficult to say which the best method of data collection is. Collecting credible or valid data is a tough task, and it is worth mentioning that one method of data collection is not inherently better than another (O'Leary, 2004). Therefore, which data collection method to use would depend upon the research goals and the implications of the method.

In order to collect data, the researcher should be able to access the data that needs to be collected for the study. Data could be gathered from a number of sources including written documents, records, workplaces, the internet, surveys or interviews. Interview have long been an essential research method (Olthmann, 2016). It is the primary method used in qualitative research and the most direct, research focused interaction between research and participants (Doody & Noonman, 2013; Schultze & Avital, 2011). However, interview as a technique of collecting qualitative data has been written for decades, there is a curious juxtaposition between theoretical and practical experiences (performed in the course of fieldwork). Therefore, this current

article seeks to rectify this gap in the literature, by explicitly elucidating the researchers' experiences and examining the key component of the context. This paper discusses data collection from four types of interviews- structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews and non-directive interviews as well as examines some of the ethical issues involved in conducting an interview.

2. Defining Interview

Interview is a way of collecting data as well as to gaining knowledge from individuals. Kvale (1996:14), defined interviews as " ... an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data." Indeed, interviewing is expected to broaden the scope of understanding investigated phenomena, as it is a more naturalistic and less structured data collection tool (Hamza, 2014).

In this paper interview is seen as the verbal conversation between two people with the objective of collecting relevant information for the purpose of research. Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. The interviewer could pursue in-depth information around the topic. Interview is useful as follow-up to certain respondents. Interview is a two-way method which permits an exchange of ideas and information (Prabnat & Meenu, 2015).

In addition, interview is a systematic way of talking and listening to people and another way to collect data from individuals through conversations. The researcher or the interviewer often uses open questions. Data is collected from the interviewee. The researcher needs to remember the interviewer's view about the topic is not of importance. The interviewee or respondent is the primary data for the study.

Interviews are ways for participants to get involved and talk about their views. In addition, the interviewees (respondents) are able to discuss their perception and interpretation in regards to a given situation. It is their expression from their point of view. One could argue here that interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life alone, it is part of life itself, indeed, its human embeddedness is inescapable. The researcher has to know and select the appropriate method for addressing the needs of the research questions or the objectives of the study. Then, the researcher has to make a decision and choose the right method for that study. Data collection has its complexities and demands. This paper argued that (though subject to criticism) the right data collection method is interviewing, which has its own issues and complexities, and demands its own type of rigor and systematic methods.

However, it is the role of the researcher to ask questions. The questions ought to depict valid response from respondents. Hoyle *et al.* (2002) argued that questions have dual goals of motivating the respondents (interviewees) to give full and precise replies while avoiding biases stemming from social desirability, conformity, or other constructs of disinterest.

Interviewers that have been properly trained, and play the proper role of the interviewers along with well-designed questions could conduct a good interview. Thus, proper training and proper interviewer behaviour could help greatly in achieving the goals.

3. Reasons of using Interview for Data Collection in Research.

Gray (2004) identified the following reasons:

- There is a need to attain highly personalized data.
- There are opportunities required for probing.
- A good return rate is important.
- Respondents are not fluent in the native language of the country, or where they have difficulties with written language.

However, it is necessary for the researcher to prepare before the actual interview. The interview starts before the interview actually begins. This is the researcher's preparation stage. This is what is also referring to as training and sensitization stage before taking notes or recording of the respondent's opinions. Once the interview is conducted the researcher needs to make sure that the respondents have:

- A clear idea of why *they* have been asked.
- Basic information about the purpose of the interview and the research work of which it is a part.
- Some idea of the probable length of the interview and that you would like to record it (explaining *why*).
- A clear idea of precisely where and when the interview will take place (Gillham, 2000).

Also, the interview needs to be effective and this is the responsibility of the researcher. The researcher ought to have the following skills and abilities:

- An ability to listen.
- An ability to be non-judgmental.
- A good memory.
- Ability to think on his/her feet.

An interview guide is also an essential component for conducting interviews. An interview guide is the list of questions, topics, and issues that the researcher wants to cover during the interview. The interview guide should be clear and avoid ambiguity. The researcher ought not ask personal or illegal questions and be comfortable with silences and wait for the respondent to speak. The following are steps to devise an interview guide:

- Identify appropriate topics and questions.
- Decide on the level of detail.
- Draft the questions.
- Order the questions.
- List any probes or prompts; and
- Pilot the questions. Have the informant identify the problems during the pilot.

4. Summary of the Methods of Conducting Practical Interview

Rapport Building: Interviewer should increase the receptiveness of the respondent by making him believe that his opinions are very useful to the research, and is going to be a pleasure rather than an ordeal.

Introduction: An introduction involves the interviewer identifying himself/herself by giving him his/her name, purpose and sponsorship if any. An introductory letter from the organization goes a long way in conveying the study's legitimacy.

Probing: Probing is the technique of encouraging the respondents to answer completely, freely and relevantly.

Recording: The interviewer could either write the response at the time of interview or after the interview. In certain cases, where the respondent allows for it, audio or visual aids can be used to record answers.

Closing: After the interview, interviewer should thank the respondent and once again assure him/her about the worth of his/her answers and the confidentiality of the same.

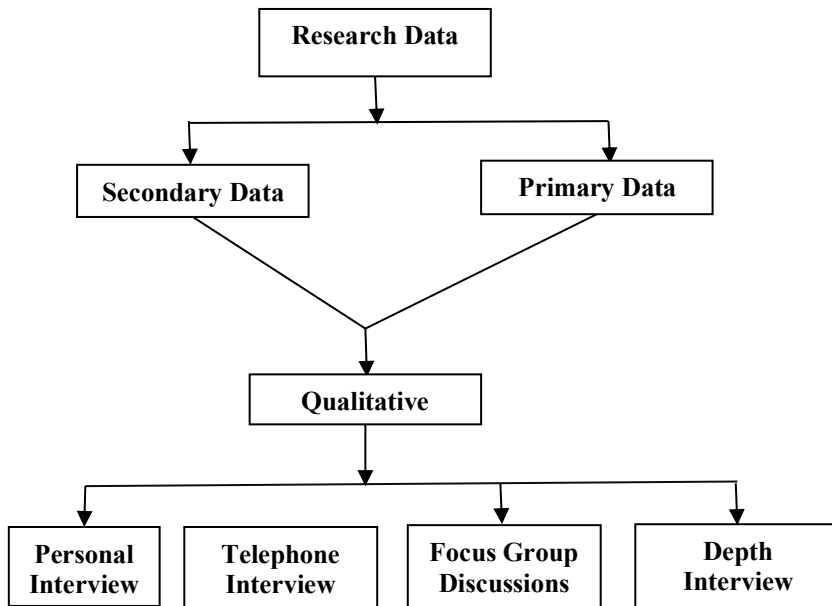


Fig.1. Qualitative Data Collection Techniques
Source: Configuration from the Author, 2020

Personal Interview: Is a face to face two-way communication between the interviewer and the respondents. Generally, the personal interview is carried out in a planned manner and is referred to as 'structured interview'. This can be done in many forms example door to door or as a planned formal executive meeting. A personal interview involves a lot of preparation.

Telephone Interview: Telephone interview the information is collected from the respondent by asking him questions on the phone is called as telephone interview. The combination of telephone and computer has made this method even more popular.

Focus Group Discussions Interview: Focus group interview is an unstructured interview which involves a moderator leading a discussion between a small group of respondents on a specific topic. Although focus groups can be suitable for investigating complex behaviors, it can sometimes be very time-consuming and effortful process.

Depth Interview: Depth interview is nondirective in nature where the respondent is given freedom to answer within the boundaries of the topic of interest.

5. Types of Interviews

There are many types of interviews, which include:

- Structured interviews.
- Semi-structured interviews.
- Unstructured interviews.
- Non-directive interview.

Structured Interviews

A structured interview is sometimes called a standardized interview. The same questions are asked of all respondents. Corbetta (2003:269) states structured interviews are "... interviews in which all respondents are asked the same questions with the same wording and in the same sequence." It would be ideal when questions could be read out in the same tone of voice so that the respondents would not be influenced by the tone of the interviewer (Gray, 2004: 215).

In structured interview, the key feature is that it is mostly organized around a set of predetermined direct questions that require immediate, mostly 'yes' or 'no' type, responses. Thus, in such an interview, the interviewer and interviewees would have very little freedom (Berg, 2007). Accordingly, it could be argued, that this type of interviews is like the 'self-administered' quantitative questionnaire in both its form and underlying assumptions (Hamza, 2014).

Bryman (2001:107) explains structured interview entails:

The administration of an interview schedule by an interviewer; the aim is for all interviewees to be given exactly the same context of questioning. This means that each respondent receives exactly the same interview stimulus as any other. The goal of this style of interview is to ensure that interviewees' replies can be aggregated. Questions are usually very specific and very often the interviewee a fixed range of answers (this type of question is often called closed, closed ended, pre-coded, or fixed choice).

This type of interview introduces some rigidity to the interview (Corbetta, 2002). For example, probing could be a problem area for structured interviews. Respondents might not understand the question and unable to answer it. Moreover, respondents could not have received sufficient information to answer the question. Bryman (2001) argued that:

The problem in either situation is obvious; the interviewer's intervention may influence the respondent and the nature of interviewees' ability in respondent's replies that does not reflect 'true' variation.

The strengths of structured interviews are that the researcher has control over the topics and the format of the interview. This is largely because a detailed interview guide is used. Consequently, there is a common format, which makes it easier to analyze, code and compare data. Again, a detailed interview guide could permit inexperienced researchers to do a structured interview.

According to David & Sutton (2004) remarked that structured interviews is prompting could be included with the questions and when a question is inappropriate, data on why no response was made could be recorded. Again, non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, gestures could be recorded.

On the contrary, weakness of structured interviews is they adhere too closely to the interview guide and may be the cause of not probing for relevant information. Also, since there is a set interview guide, the respondents may hear and interpret or understand the questions in a different manner. The researcher's verbal comments, and non-verbal cues can cause bias and have an influence upon respondents' answers.

Semi-structured Interview

On the other hand, semi-structured interviews are non-standardized and are frequently used in qualitative research. The interviewer does not do the research to test a specific hypothesis (assumptions) or theories rather achieving the questions or objectives of the study (David & Sutton, 2004). The researcher has a list of key themes (patterns and categories), issues, and questions to be covered. When

undertaking such interviews, researchers recommended to using a basic checklist that would help to cover all relevant areas (i.e. research questions or objectives). The advantage of such a checklist is that it allows for in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study (Berg, 2007; Hamza, 2014). In this type of interview, the order of the questions could be changed depending on the direction of the interview. An interview guide is also used, but additional questions could be asked as a follow up questions base on the respondent's further experience and opinions on the topic under investigation.

Corbetta (2003:270) argued that semi-structured interviews as follows:

The order in which the various topics are dealt with and the wording of the questions are left to the interviewer's discretion. Within each topic, the interviewer is free to conduct the conversation as he thinks fit, to ask the questions he deems appropriate in the words he considers best, to give explanation and ask for clarification if the answer is not clear, to prompt the respondent to elucidate further if necessary, and to establish his own style of conversation.

Furthermore, additional questions could be asked, and some may be questions that have not been anticipated in the beginning of the interview. It involves note-taking or tape recording documents interview. In fact, this type of interview gives the researcher opportunity to probe for views and opinions of the interviewee. Probing here is a way for the interview to explore new paths which were not initially considered (Gray, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). That is having key themes and sub-questions in advance lies in giving the researcher a sense of order from which to draw questions from unplanned encounters (David & Sutton, 2004).

The researcher conducting semi-structured interviews is freer one than conducting a structured interview (Kajornboon, 2004) in which the interviewer does not have to adhere to a detailed interview guide. Patton (2002:343) recommends that to "explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined."

To this effect, the strengths of semi-structured interviews are that the researcher could prompt and probe deeper into the given situation. For example, the interviewer inquires about using Information Communication Technology (ICT) like Card Readers and electronic voting machine in conducting elections in Nigeria. Some respondents are more advance and computer literate than others are. Hence, with this type of interview the interviewers are able to probe or asked more detailed questions of respondents' situations and not adhere only to the interview guide. In addition, the researcher could explain or rephrase the questions if respondents are unclear about the questions.

However, the limitation of this type of interview is that inexperienced interviewers may not be able to ask prompt questions. When this is the case, some relevant data could not be gathered. In addition, inexperienced interviewers would not likely probe into a situation. For example, when the respondents do not know how to vote electronically, the interviewer needs to probe and find out the reasons and ask for explanations.

Unstructured Interview

This type of interview is also known as open-ended. As the name implies it is non-directed and is a flexible method. Gubrium & Holstein (2002) argued that, unlike the structured interview, this kind of interviewing is an open situation through which a greater flexibility and freedom is offered to both sides (i.e. interviewers and

interviewees), in terms of planning, implementing and organizing the interview content and questions. Therefore, the interviewer here would be more “keen to follow up interesting developments and to let the interviewee elaborate on various issues” (Dörnyei, 2007 and Hamza, 2014).

Furthermore, unstructured interview is often use by novice researchers. It is more casual than the aforementioned interviews. There is no need to follow a detailed interview guide. Each interview is different. Interviewees are encouraged to speak openly, frankly and give as much detail as possible concerning the topic under investigation.

Usually the interviewer has received virtually little or no training or coaching about the interview process and has not prepared much. The interviewers ask questions that respondents would be able to express their opinions, knowledge and share their experience easily. This kind of interviews could create some problems because the interviewer may not know what to look for or what direction to take the interview. The researcher may not obtain data that is useful to the question of the study. The interviewer needs to think about what to ask and to ask questions carefully and phrase them properly and know when to probe and prompt. In an unstructured interview, the researcher has to be a good listener and note new or interesting data the interviewee gives. It requires good communication and facilitation skills.

The strengths of unstructured interviews are no restrictions are placed on questions. It is useful when little or no knowledge exists about a topic. So, background data could be collected. Unstructured interviews are flexible and the researcher could investigate underlying motives. The drawbacks of unstructured interviews are that they could be inappropriate for inexperienced interviewers. The interviewers could be bias and ask inappropriate questions. Also, respondents may talk about irrelevant and inconsequential issues. Consequently, it could be difficult to code and analyze the data easily.

Non-directive Interview

The structured and semi-structured interviews are somewhat controlled by the researcher who has set the issues and questions. In non-directive interviews there is no preset topic to pursue. That is questions are usually not pre-planned. The interviewer listens and does not take the lead. The interviewer follows what the interviewee has to say. The interviewee leads the conversation.

The interviewer has the objectives of the research in mind and what issues to cover during the interview. The interviewee is allowed to talk freely about the subject. The interviewer’s role is to check on unclear points and to rephrase the answer to check for accuracy and understanding (Gray, 2004).

The interviewer does not know which direction the interview will take. Non-directive interviews have their origin in dynamic psychology and psychotherapy with the objective to help patients reveal their deep-seated and subconscious feelings (Corbetta, 2002). The strengths of non-directive interviews are to find the deep-seated problem and the subconscious feelings. On the other hand, the disadvantages are that there are no directions or issues to explore which can cause some problems in coding and analyzing the data.

6. Strengths and Weaknesses of using Interview in Research

Interview compared to other data collection techniques like questionnaire is more powerful in eliciting narrative data that allows researchers to investigate people’s views in greater depth (Kvale, 1996). In a similar vein, Cohen et al. (2007:29) argued that interviewing is “a valuable method for exploring the construction and negotiation of meanings in a natural setting”. The value of interviewing is not only because it builds a holistic snapshot, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants; but also because it enables interviewees to speak in

their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings (Berg, 2007; Hamza, 2014). Interviewing is expected to broaden the scope of understanding investigated phenomena, as it is a more naturalistic and less structured data collection tool. Interview as a tool for social research help to facilitates in obtaining 'direct' explanations for human actions through a comprehensive speech interaction. The strengths and weaknesses are as follows:

Strengths of Interview Method

Opportunity for Feedback – Interviewer can provide direct feedback to the respondent, give clarifications, and help alleviate any misconceptions or apprehensions over confidentiality that the respondent may have in answering the interviewer's questions.

Probing Complex Answers – Interviewers can probe if the respondent's answer is too brief or unclear. This gives interviewers some flexibility in dealing with unstructured questions and is especially suited for handling complex questions.

Length of Interview – If the questionnaire is very lengthy, the personal interview is the best technique for getting respondents to cooperate, without overtaxing their patience.

Complete Questionnaires – Personal ensures ensure that the respondent will answer all questions asked, unlike in telephone interview where the respondent may hang up or in mail questionnaire where some questions may go unanswered.

Props and Visual Aids – Interviewers have the opportunity of showing respondents items such as sample products, graphs, and sketches, which can aid in their answers.

High Participation – Interviewing respondents personally can increase the likelihood of their participation, as many people prefer to communicate directly verbally and sharing information and insights with interviewers (Haris, n.d, Hamza, 2014).

Weaknesses of Interview Method

Cost – Personal interviews are usually more expensive than mail, telephone, and internet surveys. Factors influencing the cost of the interview include the respondents' geographic proximity, the length and complexity of the questionnaire, and the number of non-respondents.

Lack of Anonymity – Respondents are not anonymous in a personal (face-to-face) interview and may be reluctant to disclose certain information to the interviewer. Hence, consideration must be expended by the interviewer when dealing with sensitive questions to avoid bias effects on the respondent's part.

Necessity for Callbacks – When a person selected for interview cannot be reached the first time, a callback must be scheduled which result in extra cost and time spent.

Variance Effects – It has been shown that the demographic characteristics of the interviewer can influence the answers of the respondents. In one study, male interviewers had a much larger variance of answers than female interviewers in a sample of most female individuals.

Dishonesty – Interviewers cheat to make their life easier and save time and effort.

Personal Style – The interviewers individual questioning style, techniques, approach, and demeanor may influence the respondents' answers.

Global Considerations – Cultural aspects may influence peoples' willingness to participate in an interview (e.g. repressive Middle Eastern cultures discourage females from being questioned by male interviewers).

7. Ethical Issues and Interview Techniques in Research

In conducting interview most especially in social sciences which deals with human behaviours, ethical issues are one of the main concerns. Confidentiality must be given. According to Cohen et al (2007), as interview is considered an intrusion into respondents' private lives with regard to time allotted and level of sensitivity of questions asked; a high standard of ethical considerations should be maintained. Therefore, ethical issues should be considered at all stages of the interview process. That is, participants should provide their informed consent before participating in the interview: a key step that researchers should adhere to throughout the whole research (Hamza, 2014). Respondents "should not be harmed or damaged in any way by the research. It is also important to note that interviews are not used as a devious means of selling something to the respondents (Gray, 2004). For instance, when respondents are uneasy and become upset, the interview could be cancelled or postponed. The following is a list of some of the issues and suggested ethical solutions (Patton, 2000 and Gray, 2004).

- ✓ Explain purpose: Explain the purpose of the inquiry to the respondent.
- ✓ Promises and reciprocity: State what the respondent will gain.
- ✓ Risk assessment: Consider in what ways the interview might put the respondent at risk in terms of stress, legal liabilities, ostracism, or political repercussion.
- ✓ Confidentiality: Reflect on the extent to which promises of confidentiality can be met. (Confidentiality means you know but will not tell. Anonymity means you do not know, as in a survey returned anonymously).
- ✓ Inform consent: What kind of consent is necessary, if any.
- ✓ Data access and ownership: Evaluate who has the right to access data and for what purpose.
- ✓ Mental health: Consider how interviewer and interviewee mental health may be affected by conducting the interview.
- ✓ Advice: Appoint an adviser on ethical matters during the study.
- ✓ Data collection boundaries: How hard will you push for data? What lengths will you go to in trying to gain access to data you want? What won't you do? etc.

Among all, when an interview has been completed and is considered a good interview, the respondents ought to know more about themselves and their situation. However, the researcher must remember that the purpose of research is to collect data and not to change the respondents or their opinions (Gray, 2004). Again, to protect the participants' rights and to avoid causing them any harm, researchers should assure that the collected data will be strictly confidential and anonymous. More importantly, however, participants should be told that their participation in the interview is entirely voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time. Indeed, appropriate consent forms need be design; translated into languages of the respondents (if needed); and distributed among the participants to sign. Furthermore, a brief explanation of the study's nature and the participants' rights should be distributed.

8. Conclusion

This paper discussed interview as research instruments of data collection in social sciences. Interview is one way to collect data and to gain knowledge from individuals. Research method in social science research is an essential part of any research project as they determine its success, validity and reliability. The type of interview to conduct would depend upon the objectives of the research. Four types of interviews were discussed in this paper: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, non-directive interviews and ethical consideration in research. Some examples were given as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each type of interview.

However, it is worthwhile doing interview in social science research this is largely because it offers researchers the opportunity to uncover information that is probably not accessible using other techniques such as questionnaires and personal observations. Interview makes researcher to feel that the data he collected is true and honest and original by nature because of the face to face interaction with respondents. Moreover, interviewing is not merely a data collection tool; it is rather a natural way of interaction that could take place in various situations. Indeed, with the presence of the interviewer, mutual understanding could be ensured, as the interviewer could rephrase or simplify questions that were not understood by his/her interviewees. As a result, more appropriate answers and, subsequently, more accurate data would be reached. Therefore, one could argue here that although being a prevalent research instrument (mostly in qualitative research) it does not mean that interviews should not (steadily and cautiously) be shaped in terms of first how they are used, and then how they are reported. Thus, interview should not only be illustrative, but reflective and critical.

This paper concludes that although interviewing is a powerful way of getting insights into interviewee's perceptions, it could go hand in hand with other methods providing in-depth information about participants' inner values and beliefs. For instance, using personal observation as a supplement to interviews would allow researchers investigate participants' external behaviors and internal beliefs. Therefore, although it depends on the research questions, the paper submits that using more than one data collection instrument would help obtaining richer data and validating the research findings.

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95a Lunacharskogo str., Perm, Russian Federation

Journal URL: <https://ics.events/journal-of-digital-art-humanities/>

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