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Module name/ title: In-depth Interview

Paper: Communications Research

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Component II: Description of the Module

Items	Description of Module
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Module 30: In-depth Interview

1. Introduction

An interview is an important qualitative research method in which the researcher collects data directly from the participants. Mostly paired with other research methods like survey, focus group etc., interviews are significant in unfolding opinions, experiences, values and various other aspects of the population under study. Interviews are always goal oriented.

With a purpose to extract the desired information from a respondent, an interview may be conducted at numerous places like school, college, market, home and others. Besides that, With the advent of technology, we have witnessed an increase in the number of methods through which an interview can be conducted. Unlike earlier, now, an interview is not mandatory a meeting. It can be conducted over phone or Skype or mail or through various other forms of the internet and telephone without physical presence. There are different types of interviews. An interview may be either formal or informal. The research questions determine the method of the interview to be conducted. There may be a business interview, job interview, TV interview, in-depth research interview and so on.

Structure of Interview

The format of an interview is again determined by its goals or objectives. On the basis of different methods of extracting information, interviews may be broadly categorised into three categories; structured, semi-structured and unstructured (non-directive).

If an interviewer follows a list of predetermined questions, the interview becomes structured. In the same way, if the interviewer has a list of areas or topics instead of specific questions, it becomes a semi-structured interview. There is no fixed sequence to be followed in this type of interview. The questions are asked about a specific area and as the conversation develops, different questions keep coming.

On the other side, unstructured interviews are moreover like a daily based conversation. There is no specific set of predetermined questions. They are regarded as open-ended or ethnographic interviews. If the interviewer doesn't follow the list of specific questions prepared for the interview, a structured interview may turn into a semi-structured or unstructured interview.

For Example You are conducting a research on the political economy of media in India. In this regard, you have scheduled an interview with

some news channel owner. You have prepared a list of some 10 simple questions about the functioning, financing and few other aspects of the Indian media. When you ask a question at the beginning, she reveals some very serious exit polls scam to you. It gives a twist to the interview. You don't follow the predetermined set of questions now. You are more interested in this new subject. You have also lost your predetermined subject. The whole interview now is going in some other direction.

Duration of Interview

The duration of an interview may vary. There are short duration as well as long duration interviews. A short duration interview may become a long interview or it may be the other way round. For example; you have fixed an interview for 10 minutes with a politician. But you go so deep into details that the interview crosses all the time limits.

On the other side, a long duration interview can become short. In an another example; If you are a TV anchor and you have scheduled an interview with some prominent personality for half an hour. From script to set, everything is ready and you have fixed half an hour slot from you TV programmes for the interview. Your TV anchors have been announcing about the interview since a week or more. Tickers on the TV have been frequently displaying the interview time, duration and other information. Just at the beginning of the programme, you ask an uncomfortable question to the personality. She gets irritated and leaves the spot. The interview is off. This way, an interview can affect the reputation of a TV channel or researcher.

The question here arises, is there any fixed duration of an interview? The answer is no. An interview may last from few seconds to several hours. A news byte is usually of few seconds and in longitudinal studies, interviews are conducted from the same subject over the period for several months and years. So, there isn't a fixed duration for an interview.

In-depth Interview

In-depth interviews (IdIs) are mostly long-duration, face-to-face, interviews conducted to achieve desired goals. In-depth interview also known as one-on-one is a method of extracting more detailed information or deep understanding of a subject or concept. Kvale (1996), suggests two alternative positions on in-depth interviewing; "Miner Metaphor" and "Traveler Metaphor." According to him, "Knowledge is understood as buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths the valuable metal."

The second position according to him is called "Traveler Metaphor." This position falls within the gamut of constructivist research model. In this position, the knowledge instead of given is believed to have been created. According to Kvale (1996) as quoted in Legard, Keegan & Ward (2003), The interviewer in Traveler Metaphor, "Is seen as a traveller who journeys with the interviewee. The meaning of the interviewee's

'stories' are developed as the traveller interprets them. Through conversations, the interviewer leads the subject to new insights..."

Participants in an in-depth interview are encouraged and promoted to talk in depth about the topic under study. As in-depth interview is considered a qualitative method of data collection, it is also called qualitative interviewing. According to Patton (1987), there are three basic approaches to conducting qualitative interviewing. These include; informal conversational interview, general interview guide approach and standardised open-ended interview. Being flexible and continuous, the interviewer in an in-depth interview asks the questions orally to the interviewee and record the answers.

IDs may also be of different formats. An in-depth interview may be semi-structured, unstructured (non-directive) or a mix of any two or all the three aforementioned models. For e.g.; Coffee with Karan is an unstructured interview. It is a conversation. He may ask anything at any time.

In-depth interviews are also called unstructured interviews. In fact, if we see, the researchers collecting data through this method, draft very keenly a list of specific questions to be asked. The researchers also keep in mind the areas and specific topics to be covered during the interview.

Based on these realities, we consider in-depth interviews conducted for the research purpose as a mix of all the three aforementioned models in this module.

Later on, while going deep into the details, sometimes they also go beyond the scope of the subject and ask some different queries and make it a conversation. With different goals and objectives, there is a difference between normal conversations and in-depth interviews (Kvale, 1996; Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

2. Significance of the In-depth Interview

Significance of the In-depth Interview

In-depth interviews are one of the most efficient methods of collecting primary data.

Unlike a simple questionnaire or rating scale, in-depth interview is conducted with an intention of uncovering in-depth details of interviewee's experience and perspective on a subject.

Being more effective and less structured, one of the most important benefit of in-depth interview is that it helps to uncover more detailed and in-depth information than other data collection methods like surveys. Unlike other formats of the interview, these are intensive interviews of individuals mostly conducted from small number of respondents. The interviewer needs to create a comfortable

environment for the respondent first and ask questions to uncover the best possible details from her.

In-depth interviews are used to explore concepts for further investigation and descriptive analysis. Interviewer needs to develop a relation with respondent to achieve a complete understanding of her perspective. Requiring interest in and respect for people as individuals, Thompson (2000) states that in-depth interviews are not for the people who can't stop talking about themselves. Despite appearing realistic, a good in-depth interview bears similarity to everyday conversation. According to Burges (1984) and Lofland and Lofland (1995) an in-depth interview is often considered as a form of conversation. Making it one of the most significant forms of data collection, not more than a total of some 10-15 people are interviewed individually in a study using an in-depth interview method of data collection.

This is a discovery-oriented method which may provide a more relaxed atmosphere for the collection of data. As per Spradley (1979), there are a number of stages in an in-depth interview. You can use this method to collect data from the participants who don't feel comfortable expressing their opinion openly in a group. Noting some of the key features, Legard, Keegan & Ward (2003) state that in-depth interview intends to combine structure with flexibility and is interactive in nature as material is generated by interaction.

As compared to survey interview, an in-depth interview which functions like a moderator guide, is moreover like a journalistic interview. Participants in an in-depth interview speak out their mind which is not a case in a rating scale or questionnaire. Unlike a rating scale or questionnaire, the researcher in an in-depth interview may adjust the order of the questions as per the situation. The latter methods mostly follow a printed scheme of close-ended questions.

3. Do's and Don'ts

3.1 Pre-Interview

1. Finalise your topic.
2. Identify participants. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word "participant" is a noun which means, "a person who takes part in something." Ask yourself what information is needed and from whom?
3. In case you don't know whom to talk regarding the issue, do some legwork and meet subject experts to get an idea.
4. Seek proper appointments from the participants. It's not always

like you will go to them anytime and they will be giving you an interview. The choice of venue must be left to the participants. They must be informed about the subject matter that will be discussed. Take care of the participants' convenience.

5. As the length of the interview depends on the type of study undertaken, a rough idea of the length of the interview should be given to the participant.

6. You need to do some background research of the topic or person you are supposed to interview. For example; if you have been planning to do an in-depth interview of a victim of domestic violence, you should at least have a glimpse of legalities of the issue.

7. After gaining ample knowledge of things, develop a questionnaire containing open-ended questions. Avoid close-ended questions in case of in-depth interview. There should be a scope of more explanation. Instead of asking questions like "when did it start?" ask "Please describe how it started."

8. Don't forget to take your audio recorder, pen, notebook etc. with you.

9. Reach the place of interview half an hour before the scheduled time. It will give create a good impression and participant may start trusting you.

3.2 During the Interview

1. Greet the subject well. If she asks to wait, don't get irritated. Keep calm and follow the directions. Let her gain more trust in you.
2. Don't forget to test your audio recorder. Testing is a must.
3. To put participant at their ease so that she may reveal even sensitive information, the researcher must assure confidentiality of interview or data collected.
4. Don't directly start with hard hitting questions. First you need to develop a friendly relation with the interviewee. Better is to start with introduction. Don't ask questions like how do you feel when your husband beats you? This is foolishness. Researcher must be fully trained in interviewing techniques.
5. To extract from detailed information from the respondent, build a comfortable environment for the respondent. Don't bombard the respondent with too many questions. Let her completely reply the first questions then only go for the other one. Don't jump to the conclusion. Let the interviewee complete her point.
6. Listen 90 per cent and speak only 10 per cent.
7. Avoid sensitive questions. Don't ask questions which may hurt her religiously, socially, politically, economically, morally etc.
8. It's not necessary to follow sequential list of questions framed. Try to draw questions from respondent's answers.
9. Once you feel such feasible environment has been created, start asking tough questions.
10. Go into the details keeping in mind respondent's convenience.
11. Don't repeat questions. If respondent declines to comment or answer a question, don't repeat your question. Instead try to reframe questions and ask

the same question in some other form. For example, if you directly ask someone's age, she may get irritated. Better is to do it in an investigative way. Ask her details like when did you complete your graduation? She will tell you the year. Ask, what was your age then? Or at what age you gave birth to your first child? In which year? You got the answer. Or at what age you married? When? Calculate the age at your own. She may never realize that you have done it. There are different ways to ask the same questions.

12. Participate in respondent's dialogue. It's not like you will ask a question and become a statue. Participation is important to keep the ball rolling. In-depth interview is not a one-way process.
13. As in-depth interview enables you to study the behaviour of the subject so try to analyse the facial expressions, gestures, body movements of the respondent. Try to read the non-verbal communication.
14. If the participant is speaking something irrelevant – not related to the topic, try to take to her back to the track cleverly. Don't ask her to stop immediately or rudely. She must be given a sense of feeling that all her points are important and have been noted.
15. Take care of all the ethical issues. For example; off-the-record means off-the-record. Never publicise such information.
16. At last, ask her if she wants to add something more.

3.3 Post-Interview (Data Analysis)

17. After the completion of interview, transcribe the data in written form to make it useful. To separate them from each other, assign different marks or numbers to each interview.
18. Arrange the data either as per the themes or questions or events or following some other sequence. For example, you asked the participant about the details regarding various incidents of domestic violence. This question will be answered at various points of time by the respondent during the interview. You have to follow a sequence and arrange them accordingly. You may also use a mix of both the aforementioned models. For example; you can start analysing your data following the question model but later may switch to a thematic strategy as themes emerge over the course of the interviews.
19. Enlist every new question and idea in a new paragraph. There is a paramount need of further categorisation of these paragraphs. For example; if the respondent is speaking about the "Problems" or "Methods of Coping", divide the recorded content accordingly and assign a different symbol to each category. You can further divide these categories into sub-categories like the "Problems" category may be further sub-categorised into "Family Problems," "Social Problems," "Economic Problems" etc. Also record all the related information about the category on the same file.
20. You can further arrange these categories alphabetically or following some other sequence. The information which doesn't fit any of the categories may be included in "miscellaneous" or "other" category.
21. Summarize or interpret these categories and write a report of the findings. No research is complete until reported.

4. How to Frame Questions?

1. Keep your questions simple. Don't use jargons. Keep in mind, you are framing questions for a layman not for a professor.
2. The questions should be clear, coherent and concise.

3. Don't write ambiguous questions.
4. Close ended questions must be avoided in case of in-depth interview.
5. Follow a logical order in arranging the questions.

5. Strengths of an In-depth Interview

1. This method provides much more detailed information as compared to other forms of data collection methods like surveys, questionnaire etc.
2. It's a qualitative method of data collection.
3. Being a method of collecting the primary data, in-depth interview enables researcher to study behaviour of the participant.
4. It enables the researcher to get an in-depth understanding of a concept or theme.
5. It becomes suitable for the participants who refrain from expressing their opinion publicly.

6. Limitations of an In-depth Interview

1. A very small sample size.
2. Due to its small size, sample is not selected through a proper scientific procedure like random sampling or others. So, there are concerns regarding the external validity or generalizability of the research.
3. It's a time consuming method. As in-depth interviews are conducted on a one-to-one basis, they extract ample time of the researcher for interview, transcribing, analysing and reporting the data.
4. It's prone to bias.
5. There are many ethical and generic issues in this type of interview. Allmark et al. (2009) conducted a study "Ethical issues in the use of in-depth interviews: literature review and discussion." They found that informed consent, privacy - as interviews probe unexpected areas, confidentiality and protecting privacy, potential for interviews to harm participants emotionally etc. have been some of the most serious problems of the in-depth interviews noted in the papers studied.

7. Summary

In this paper, we understood the importance of an in-depth interview method of data collection. The paper also explores the strength and limitations of an in-depth interview. Discussing the advantages of this method over the other forms of data collection like questionnaire and survey, the chapter enlists the do's and don'ts of the process of conducting an in-depth interview. Highlighting the issues to be taken care of during the execution of the method, the paper also focusses on the approaches to be adopted while drafting the questionnaire for the interviews. The paper finally delineates the procedure of analysis of the data collected through this method.

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