



**Bo Xie**

## QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING IN INTERNET STUDIES

Playing with the media, playing with the  
method

*This methodological paper addresses practical strategies, implications, benefits and drawbacks of collecting qualitative semi-structured interview data about Internet-based research topics using four different interaction systems: face to face; telephone; email; and instant messaging. The discussion presented here is based on a review of the literature and reflection on the experiences of the authors in performing completed research that used those four interaction systems. The focus is on functional effects (e.g. scheduling and other logistics, data transcription and data management), as well as methodological effects (e.g. ability to probe, collecting affective data, and data representation). The authors found that all four methods of data collection produced viable data for the projects they completed, but that some additional issues arose. Five themes emerged that form the organization of the paper: (1) interview scheduling and participant retention; (2) recording and transcribing; (3) data cleaning and organizing; (4) presentation and representation of data; and (5) the detection/presentation of affective data.*

**Keywords** Qualitative methods; online interviewing; email interviewing; IM interviewing

### Introduction

As researchers consider using qualitative interviewing for their research, they are increasingly likely to use Internet media such as email and instant messaging (IM) instead of, or in combination with, more traditional interaction settings like face to face and the telephone. This is particularly true if the research explores an Internet-based activity such as e-learning or online community, where the research participants are already comfortable with online