An Introduction to Qualitative Interviews: Strategies, Challenges, and Practical Approaches

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Presentation Outline

Introduction

Overview of qualitative research methods

Ethical considerations

Why Interview?

Why Not Interview?

Misconceptions About Interviews

Accessing Interviews

Developing a Good Questionnaire

During the Interview

Follow-ups and Transcription

Q&A

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Introduction

Brief overview of qualitative research

Variety in qualitative methods: Ethnography, observations, focus groups

Ethics

Why interview?

Access to Behavioral Context: Interviews unlock understanding of people's actions and the reasons behind them.

Uncovering Stories: They reveal the narratives that underpin individuals' behaviors.

Meaning-Making: Essential for grasping how people ascribe meaning to their experiences.

Language and Experience: Interviewing taps into how language shapes understanding.

Utility for Social Scientists: Crucial for exploring the qualitative aspects of human behavior.

Beyond Descriptions: Helps in building detailed narratives and interpreting events.

Aid for Quantitative Research: Useful in identifying variables, developing hypotheses, and laying groundwork for data-driven studies.

Why not interview?

Time and resource intensive: Requires significant investment in both.

Thorough analysis in political science: Qualitative methods, including interviews, can face skepticism about rigor.

Publication and funding challenges: A perceived lack of rigor can affect acceptance and financial support.

Direct interaction: Requires engagement with people, which can be intimidating.

Barrier for introverted researchers: Direct involvement can be a challenge, especially with hard-to-reach groups.

Risk of rejection: Possibility of facing rejection during the research process.

Misconceptions about interviews

They are not just casual chats

Complexity rather than simplicity

Empathy vs. analysis

Selective attention

Analytical challenge

Quality over quantity

Role of the researcher

Accessing the interviews

Art of interaction

Preliminary research

Finding a representative sample

Identifying gatekeepers

Snowball Method for Elite Interviews

Using networks

Developing a good questionnaire

Recognize the complexity of interview data: It's not as straightforward as laboratory data and requires open-ended exploration.

Importance of pilot-testing: Essential to identify and rectify issues in the interview guide.

Allow freedom for exploratory responses: Encourage participants to share their stories without constraints.

Emphasize narrative freedom: Participants should narrate their experiences in their own terms.

Simplicity in question design: Use short, clear sentences and avoid multi-part questions.

Ask one thing at a time

Inadequate question: How would you rate government performance on economic policies and human rights issues?

Adequate question(s)

How would you rate the government's performance on economic policies?

How would you rate the government's performance on human rights issues?

Ask one thing at a time

Inadequate question: Do you think the country should reduce its military spending and increase funding for public health services?

Adequate questions:

Do you believe the country should decrease its military spending?

Do you believe the country should increase funding for public health services?

Avoid negative phrases

Inadequate question: Do you believe that the government should not intervene in the economy?

Adequate question: Do you believe that the government should intervene in the economy?

Don't use leading questions

Leading question: Don't you think the government should spend more on health than on defense?

Neutral question: How should the government prioritize spending on healthcare compared to defense?

Addressing sensitive questions

Inadequate question: Do you regret voting for the current president given their recent scandals?

Adequate question: How would you rate the current president's performance in office?

Addressing sensitive questions

Inadequate approach: What do you think of the government's recent decision to send arms to country X?

Adequate approach:

What do you generally think about the government's foreign military policy?

Asking specific questions

Inadequate question: What factors influence your decision to vote?

Adequate questions:

Can you explain to me how you decided to vote in the last election?

What information did you look for and what went through your mind in the days leading up to your decision?

Avoid inducing emotions

Inappropriate approach: Were you upset by the president's political decision?

Adequate approach: "How did you react to the president's political decision?"

Using interviews to identify other actors

Who accompanied you to the demonstration and what were their reactions?

Integrating quantitative data

How would you rate your level of satisfaction with the democratic process in your country on a scale from 1 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied)?

Leave demographic data to the end

Just to get a better idea of where you come from, do you mind if I ask a bit about your age and what you do for work?

During the interview

Be friendly and open from the start

Break the ice with a question about the person's life story

Utilize the first question to gather many answers

Ask about the interviewee's background

Inadequate question: Why did you become a farmer?

Adequate question: How did agriculture become a part of your life?

Be flexible

Emphasize flexibility in using the interview guide

Adapt and reorder questions as needed

Be willing to omit questions that aren't effective

Ensure the guide aids the interview flow, not obstructs it

Exert *some* control

Interview as a collaborative effort

Allow participants to lead with their stories

Stay alert to off-topic diversions

Gently guide the conversation back when needed

Interruptions may be necessary for focus

Redirecting the interview

Adequate question: It's interesting to hear about your current involvement. Could you take me back to the period before the electoral reform?

Getting out of the personal narrative

Adaptability to new themes/topics from interviews

Opportunity to explore unscripted questions

Leveraging insights gained from multiple conversations

Referencing other interviews

Adequate approach: Some people we spoke to highlighted the impact of local issues on their campaign strategies. I'm curious to know your perspective on this. How local concerns have shaped your approach?

Avoiding bias

Ensure openness for authentic articulation of experiences

Avoid interviewer biases shaping interview narratives

Avoiding bias

Inadequate question:

Interviewer: Changing parties must have been liberating, considering your disappointment with the direction of your previous party, right?

Interviewee: "Yes, it was a significant change."

Interviewer: "Because now you feel that your values are better represented?"

Respondent: "Uh, yes, that's part of it."

Effective approach:

Interviewer: "Could you tell me about your journey of changing political affiliation? What were some important moments or considerations for you?"

Interviewee: "It was a complex process...etc

Paying attention to body language

Observe non-verbal cues (sighs, worried looks)

Prompt discussion on observed reactions

Example

"You seemed relieved when mentioning the election results; could you describe what you were feeling?"

Asking for follow-up

Use follow-up questions for clarity and precision

"Did I understand correctly?"

"You laughed when you mentioned the protest. Can you tell me more about what that experience was like for you?"

Transcriptions

Immediate transcription post-interview

Note key impressions if full transcription isn't possible

Maintain original, translated, and edited transcript versions

Conduct thematic analysis, organizing data into broad themes

Utilize software programs for structured data analysis

Time for Q&A

Thank you!

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