

Interactive Event Proposal for IConference 2022

Title: Strategies for Qualitative Research Online in a Time of Crisis and an Uncertain Future

Type: Interactive Events- Workshop

Organizer(s): Organizer(s): Marie L. Radford, Kaitlin Costello, and Vanessa Kitzie.

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Abstract

This future-facing workshop focuses on conducting qualitative research in virtual environments. It is critical that qualitative researchers are not merely *reactive* to global challenges like the COVID pandemic, but rather *proactive* in anticipating and implementing changes in our research approaches. An expert panel addresses this shift, discussing practical concerns posed by social distancing, analytic questions on appropriately addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in ongoing studies, ethical questions surrounding online data collection, and coping with the pandemic's effect on our current and future research. Participants will be invited into breakout rooms organized by panel topics and moderated by the panelists. First, participants will join one of the panelists for deeper discussion and questions about their presentation. In a second breakout session, they will have the opportunity to connect with other qualitative researchers who have pivoted their projects online as a result of the pandemic to share strategies and cautionary tales.

Description

Purpose and Intended Audience

The past two years have posed unique challenges to qualitative researchers. From practical concerns posed by social distancing, analytic questions related to how to appropriately address the COVID-19 pandemic in our ongoing studies, ethical questions related to online data collection, and personal concerns of how to cope with the pandemic's effect on our own work and lives, qualitative researchers had to adapt in multiple ways. Using the pandemic as a lens, this interactive virtual event presents strategies for proactively responding to crises when conducting qualitative research.

Proposed Format

This workshop will feature a panel discussion with three experienced qualitative researchers. One of the researchers, Marie Radford, will also serve as moderator. Following the panel discussion, two interactive breakout sessions will be held, as described below. Here is the timeline for the virtual interactive workshop session.

3 min	Welcome, overview, introduction (Radford)
15 min	Qualitative semi-structured interviews in online environments (Radford) with Q&A
15 min	Sociotechnical challenges and advantages of digital methods (Kitzie) with Q&A
15 min	Social media research ethics (Costello) with Q&A
15 min	Breakout discussions 1
5 min	Report out from Breakout 1
15 min	Breakout discussion 2
5 min	Report out from Breakout 2
2 min	Wrap Up

Panel Discussion

Marie Radford will introduce the panel and provide a brief overview of the workshop. She will then kick off the panel discussion by giving an overview of conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews and qualitative research design considerations in online environments. She will draw on her experience both prior to and during the pandemic working with virtual teams to collect and analyze large qualitative data sets. Early in the pandemic, her research team, including two doctoral students (Laura Costello and Kaitlin Montague) from Rutgers University wondered what was happening to virtual reference services (VRS) in academic libraries. They designed and conducted two longitudinal Qualtrics surveys and a series of 28 in-depth semi-structured interviews with academic reference librarians and those responsible for VRS. Data collection ran from March 2020 to September 2020, and focused on the impact of COVID in the early days of the pandemic. She will discuss the design, implementation, and analysis process that was used for Zoom/WebEx in-depth interviews. The research team used NVivo qualitative analysis software to code the data, using a coding scheme that was developed and refined throughout all phases of data collection. Advantages and disadvantages to this method of data collection and analysis will be discussed.

Vanessa Kitzie will discuss the sociotechnical challenges and advantages of digital methods when working with people experiencing marginalization. She will frame this larger discussion with a case study in which her team shifted from in-person to online

focus groups when investigating the health information practices of LGBTQIA+ people and communities in South Carolina (<https://bit.ly/hiplgbtg>). Her talk will begin with a brief overview of what a sociotechnical lens entails followed by an application of this lens to identify the unique sociotechnical assemblages (composed of people, hardware, software, norms, and rules) of in-person and virtual research data collection methods. She will then describe her specific research project, identifying challenges and advantages of digital data collection methods. She will conclude with implications and lessons learned, as well as some insights on digital research project data and information management.

Kaitlin Costello will discuss research ethics when gathering and analyzing social media data from Twitter, Facebook, and online forums. Harvesting and performing automated or manual content analysis on social media posts was already a popular technique among qualitative and mixed-methods researchers at iSchools. Social distancing restrictions and the public availability of social media data made this method even more attractive during the pandemic. There are critical ethical questions about consent, anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality to consider when using social media data, especially when the research topic encompasses a health crisis like COVID-19. In this talk, Costello will offer examples from several of their studies on online health information behavior in a variety of contexts, including illicit drug use, mental health, chronic pain, and kidney disease to illustrate how to take an inductive, context-based, and reflexive approach to online research ethics. Using feminist ethics as an example, this short talk will also address the link between ethics, method, and methodology.

Breakout Discussions

Following the panel discussion, the participants will be invited into two breakout rooms organized by panel topics and will be moderated by the panelists.

For Breakout Discussion 1, participants choose to join one of the panelists for deeper discussion and questions about their presentation. They also have the opportunity to connect with other qualitative researchers who have had to pivot their projects online as a result of the pandemic. We'll then reconvene for a short group discussion with all of the attendees.

For Breakout Discussion 2, participants will choose which room to join to focus on a discussion of the following topics, each led by one of the panelists:

1. **Forecasting the Future:** Accelerated changes in qualitative research due to COVID-19. Do we imagine that these changes will be short-lived or enduring? What will be the impact of these changes over the next five years? (led by Marie Radford).
2. **Proactive Preparation:** The only constant is change, and there is a need for qualitative researchers to be *proactive* in preparing for changes, rather than *reactive*. How do we plan for change in our research proposals? And what skills do we need to

cultivate in order to center proactivity and reflexivity in our research practices? (led by Kaitlin Costello).

3. **Creating Diverse Teams:** A sociotechnical advantage of digital methods can be representing the perspectives and experiences of people experiencing marginalization, both as researchers and participants. However, challenges such as limited physical and social access threaten to silence some of their voices. How do we join and create diverse research teams? How do raise up voices of an even wider array of perspectives within virtual environments? (led by Vanessa Kitzie).

Engagement

Participants will be engaged during the workshop via two breakout discussions which will provide the opportunity for attendees to build community and network with each other, sharing their own experiences with qualitative research over the past two years. A shared document will be co-created with panelists and participants as a record of breakout discussions. Building on an initial resource list about virtual qualitative research provided by the presenters, participants will be involved in generating a crowdsourced bibliography of resources in the second breakout discussion.

Goals or Outcomes

Upon leaving this session, attendees will be able to:

- Think through some of the uses of virtual technologies for conducting research using a sociotechnical perspective.
- Modify research studies to accommodate for collecting and analyzing data virtually.
- Discuss key ethical issues and solutions related to gathering and analyzing posts people make on social media.
- Cultivate connections with qualitative researchers who have had to pivot their projects online as a result of the pandemic.

Relevance to the iConference

This workshop has great relevance to the iConference theme, particularly its focus on a “better world” and “future.” Topics addressed during the workshop examine how to foster a “better world” within qualitative research through increasing the diversity and participation of people experiencing marginalization through digital methods, as well as addressing process-oriented ethical concerns of these methods and how to guard against these concerns. The workshop is also future-facing. It is critical that as qualitative researchers we are not *reactive* to global challenges like the COVID pandemic, but rather *proactive* in anticipating and implementing changes in our research proposals. Each of the panelist discussions addresses this shift from reactive to proactive, and breakout sessions also directly engage with this shift as a prompt for conversation.

Duration: 1.5 hours