



Qualitative E-Interview Tips

Building a Web Presence for Building Interviewer Credibility

Online researchers are often concerned about how to verify the identities of participants recruited online. At the same time, participants may be similarly concerned about the credibility of the researcher. Why should someone take the time to participate in your interview? Can they trust you to protect their identities and the information they might share? If potential participants search for you online, will they find a digital identity that supports your role as a respectable and trustworthy researcher?

All research needs to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the researcher (Bulpitt & Martin,

Locating the right people and recruiting them to participate in a study is a challenge for any researcher. Central to the challenge for online researchers is the avoidance of sending or receiving unwanted messages, commonly known as spam. If the researcher posts a recruitment message or advertisement on a public website, networking community, or e-mail list, a deluge of unwanted responses may result. On the other hand, if the researcher sends unsolicited e-mail requests to potential participants, the message may be perceived as spam.

You can start by creating a recruitment statement so all posts or requests use consistent language to describe the study and convey the same message to potential participants. It is important to create a statement that explains the researcher's approaches and expectations on the matters discussed in this chapter. One benefit of such a statement is consistency of language and message, so all potential nominators or potential research participants begin from the same common view of the study. The statement can be summarized when a briefer post is needed, or in the case of a heterogeneous or extreme case sample, the researcher may refine some elements of the statement to appeal to diverse audiences. A succinct but comprehensive recruitment statement may include these elements:

- ◆ **Purpose of the study:** Research questions, reasons for conducting the study, and the researcher's goals for the results should be outlined. Is the researcher conducting dissertation or thesis research, if so, note institution. Such academic purposes assure potential participants of some level of faculty oversight of the study. Is the researcher assessing needs for programs or services? Creating the basis for a larger survey research project? How will the researcher disseminate the findings? What



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aspects of the researcher's goals will draw in potential participants and motivate them to contribute?

- ◆ **Ethics and privacy:** Offer assurances about ethical conduct of the study, confidentiality, protection of privacy, and private data storage. Indicate appropriate ethics, institutional, or other review board approvals granted for the study. If the study anticipates an international sample, indicate how you will address multiple sets of requirements.

Researchers can create an online space where the recruitment message can be posted online: a website, blog, or virtual space in immersive environments. In addition to text description of the call for predication, the researcher can create a video clip or audio excerpt of the recruitment message to increase interest and make more personal contact with site visitors. Links to the researcher's academic institution or other publications can convey integrity and authenticity of the study. Provide means for contact, such as a link to an e-mail or messaging address. (Avoid using the researcher's primary or personal e-mail address to avoid excessive spam or privacy violations for the researcher. Free e-mail services are ideal for this purpose.)

Cassell suggests that the interviewer and interviewee are doing 'identity work' as part of the interview process. We use identity as a tool to present ourselves in a way that is appropriate to the interview process, managing impressions of those factors we have some control over – for example, our attitude and responses to the interviewee – and accommodating those we have no control over – for example, our age, gender or ethnicity (Cassell, 2005).

- ◆ Because online posts will reach a very general audience, a very specific recruitment message should be used to better reach the target population. The researcher can direct the call to potential participants or ask for nominations of research participants. Links to the message can then be posted in briefer announcements in relevant online spaces or communications with colleagues.
- ◆ The researcher can share a recruitment statement or link to recruitment site through e-mail discussion lists. If relevant to the topics of the list, the researcher can initiate a discussion about the nature and importance of the study. Similarly, the researcher can interact with others in a social networking space. The best practice is



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to approach the moderator of the list or discussion group directly to get permission for the recruitment posting and respect any norms or guidelines.

- ◆ Another way is by using the networking possibilities of the digital milieu: the researcher can offer a webinar or host an online event or discussion on issues related to the study. By doing so the researcher creates an opportunity to interact with individuals who are interested in the subject of inquiry and may be potential participants or people who can nominate participants.

Bulpitt, H., & Martin, P. J. (2010). Who am I and what am I doing? Becoming a qualitative research interviewer. *Nurse Researcher*, 17(3).

Cassell, C. (2005). Creating the interviewer: Identity work in the management research process. *Qualitative Research*, 5(2), 167-179.



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