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E-Interviews. A Review of Janet Salmons' Qualitative Online Interviews (2nd ed.)

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Abstract

This book was written by an experienced teacher, who's PhD in interdisciplinary studies shows. Salmons provides an easy to read guide to online interviewing. Her text presents complex issues in diverse fields in a very accessible way and encourages readers to think for themselves, as great teachers always do. This text introduces research to the digital environment, of information and communications technology (ICT). It introduces the digital environment, ICT to research. She explores the e-interview process in the Researcher's Notebook, in which shares her own research experience, and which enriches the text. True to the electronic aspect, ancillary materials are accessible via live hyperlinks on the book's companion website.

Keywords

E-Interview Research Framework, Information and Communications Technologies, Gardener Metaphor

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E-Interviews. A Review of Janet Salmons’ *Qualitative Online Interviews* (2nd ed.)

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This book was written by an experienced teacher, who’s PhD in interdisciplinary studies shows. Salmons provides an easy to read guide to online interviewing. Her text presents complex issues in diverse fields in a very accessible way and encourages readers to think for themselves, as great teachers always do. This text introduces research to the digital environment, of information and communications technology (ICT). It introduces the digital environment, ICT to research. She explores the e-interview process in the Researcher’s Notebook, in which shares her own research experience, and which enriches the text. True to the electronic aspect, ancillary materials are accessible via live hyperlinks on the book’s companion website. Keywords: E-Interview Research Framework, Information and Communications Technologies, Gardener Metaphor.

As a new community radio researcher/presenter, I was interested to read Janet Salmons (2015) *Qualitative Online Interviews* to build on my previous knowledge and experience of research and fill in the gaps in my knowledge and experience of Information and Communications Technologies.

In the preface, Salmon writes about using verbal, visual and textual elements in a digital milieu and she conveys something of this in the style of the beautifully structured chapters. Each begins with a quotable quote. I particularly liked “‘*The world told is a different world to the world shown*’. Gunther Kress (2003)”. There are dozens of tables and figures throughout the text. These appear in three shades of blue, which embeds visual variety without distraction. Key questions are provided for people who like lists and bullet points. It is eminently searchable because of its layout.

The book is developed around the E-Interview Research Framework, which is easy to understand and which provides a coherent structure within which to explore research, in the somewhat nebulous environment of information and communication technologies (ICT). Starting with a chapter on aligning research purpose and design, she carefully explains how everything that matters in designing face-to-face research matters just as much in designing for ICT. From explaining how we know what we know, to the theory, i.e. that which provides the only possible explanation for the data, to the methodology, methods and evaluation. It is also an evaluative tool.

The Researcher’s Notebook is an invaluable aid to elucidating the processes involved in e-interviewing. Salmons (2007) uses her own Taxonomy of Online Collaboration. She shares her own experience as an online researcher in two exemplar studies. One exploring instructional practices in collaborative e-learning and the other exploring the use of technology by women e-entrepreneurs. These offer real world examples of how an online researcher may establish credibility and rapport with online interviewees and nurture their participation.

She does not provide all the answers but she does ask those questions a research designer needs to ask and points her student readers in the direction of scholarly articles on specific topics (e.g., researcher bias and invites them to identify factors unique to the online environment).

Salmons seamlessly blends research processes with ICT capability throughout. She writes about reflexivity as an iterative process, which highly individualised though it may be, is easily encompassed in a blog, which generates a “chronological record of the study’s evolution.”

She describes the range of interview possibilities from text to video conferencing, and from online meetings to immersive virtual environments and the often pragmatic reasons for choosing one over another. Salmons is very strong on ethics, particularly important in an area where boundaries like privacy are being pushed.

She prepares the ground for interview by considering the pros and cons, in an online space, of structured questionnaires versus a more spontaneous approach. She discusses emoticons and electronic paralinguistic expressions and the risks of miscommunications, which may occur, with the use of digital shorthand. She considers synchronous and asynchronous interviews and the differing protocols necessitated by each. Moving from text-based to audio-visual and immersive techniques require the honing of a slightly different skill-set. Appearing natural on a webcam takes practice. Creating an avatar, an image to represent oneself requires a self-congruent image. Preparing for an interview requires self-awareness.

The mining metaphor, familiar to quantitative research, describes the digging down into data to extract its meaning. The travel metaphor, familiar to qualitative researchers, describes the accompaniment of a journey. The gardener metaphor encompasses both and adds a new dimension. Ideas are planted and grow as they are explored in a mutually fruitful process of discovery. It answers criticism of social research, of elitist conservatism, that it may bolster rather than challenge the status quo. It almost bridges the emic – etic divide. It engages the interviewee, without distancing or over identification. It acknowledges and values nurture and cultivation, which also tends towards minimising, as opposed to denying, the power differential.

Salmons is equally at home laying out the steps for interview process from a qualitative researcher point of view as from a technological feasibility point of view. Although this is a scholarly textbook, it functions like a work book, designed to be highlighted, dog-eared and used to its maximum potential.

The discussions and assignments suggested at the end of each chapter are designed to get students thinking and researching, for example, at the end of chapter 12 Online Communications, readers are invited, in an essay of three to five pages, to critically review the thinking of three futurists and identify one trend they missed.

This would have been a great book to have had when I was studying research methods and skills. I came away, after reading the book, feeling encouraged about the possibility of engaging in ICT for research, realising I knew more than I thought.

The book also prompted me to look at my radio interviewing style in a more structured way. Although, its purpose is not primarily research, and I am quite happy to discover and describe it as abductive style. I realised it would be very possible to transform some future interviews, using ICT, into a more investigative, documentary style and that I could confidently do so, following the E-Interview Research Framework.

The glossary is helpful. There are a lot of terms in both research and ICT, which benefit from concise repeated explanation. The textbook is supported by an online learning aid, which defines technical terms and more. It is available at www.sagepub.com/salmons2e

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Author Note

Una Ruddock, MA (Management: Pastoral & Voluntary Services, 2005), MSc (Social Research Skills, 2011) worked for over twenty years in the Community and Voluntary Sector. She currently presents a weekly one-hour community radio programme, Eco Ear on Liffey Sound 96.4 fm. She is an Apprentice with *The Qualitative Report*. Her paper, "Vincentian Spirituality and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society," was published in 2008 in *Managing with Heart*, edited by Joseph McCann and Moya Curran. Correspondence regarding this review can be addressed directly to: Una Ruddock at Email: uruddock@upcmail.ie or Phone: +00 353 872005696.

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