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# Improving Data Quality and Avoiding Pitfalls of Online Text-Based Focus Groups: A Practical Guide

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### Abstract

Despite the fact that there are several practical advantages of online typed focus groups, this type of group questioning has not spread as widely as had been expected when it appeared as a new research option. One of the reasons for that might be that a major risk of these text-based focus groups is inadequate data quality. Unless certain measures are taken to prevent this, an analysis can face the problem of not being rich enough and not digging deep enough – which are often important criteria for good qualitative analysis. This article discusses how to deal with the problem and other possible pitfalls of this type of group discussion, and gives practical advice on how to obtain the best results from such discussions. It also gives suggestions which can be useful if a free chat platform is being used to conduct these groups. It argues that even nowadays with other online techniques available, online text-based focus groups can be useful – if executed properly.

### Keywords

Qualitative Research, Focus Group, Online Focus Group, Text-Based Focus Group, Data Richness

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*Despite the fact that there are several practical advantages of online typed focus groups, this type of group questioning has not spread as widely as had been expected when it appeared as a new research option. One of the reasons for that might be that a major risk of these text-based focus groups is inadequate data quality. Unless certain measures are taken to prevent this, an analysis can face the problem of not being rich enough and not digging deep enough – which are often important criteria for good qualitative analysis. This article discusses how to deal with the problem and other possible pitfalls of this type of group discussion, and gives practical advice on how to obtain the best results from such discussions. It also gives suggestions which can be useful if a free chat platform is being used to conduct these groups. It argues that even nowadays with other online techniques available, online text-based focus groups can be useful – if executed properly. Keywords: Qualitative Research, Focus Group, Online Focus Group, Text-Based Focus Group, Data Richness*

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Over the past decades, different kinds of online focus groups have appeared where group participants communicate over the Internet with a moderator leading the discussion – offering an alternative to the originally used face-to-face settings. At first, text-based versions of online groups were used, where participants communicated in writing. Some focus group researchers embraced this format enthusiastically, citing numerous advantages (Siklaci, 2005), such as money-saving, or benefits of anonymity to get answers which are less influenced by group pressure or social desirability. Some researchers were vehemently against it. Greenbaum (1997; 1998a; 1998b) for example, argued that this format could not be considered a focus group and that it lacked several elements very important for focus group research – such as non-verbal input from group members – or that it was “very difficult, if not impossible, to create any real group dynamics” (Greenbaum, 1997, para. 7).

Graffigna and Bosio argued in 2006 that the academic community had not embraced online typed focus groups outside of the field of qualitative health research. It seems that the situation has not changed much since then. If we check for studies using online text-based focus groups on Google Scholar - which collects scientific writings - it can be seen from the results that whilst in the nineties and the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a number of writings were published which were looking at the differences in results between text-based and face-to-face groups, since then only a limited number of studies can be found in Google Scholar even nowadays for basic research outside of health studies.

I have also seen that some of the researchers who originally took a positive view of text-based formats of focus groups, after a while became somewhat disillusioned with the method and stopped using it. It was true that it had many practical advantages, but at the same time they often experienced problems with data richness and quality. Their experience was that the group members often gave short answers, the discussions did not go deep enough into the issues, fewer details were given and there was less explanation of why participants held a certain opinion. Data quality was compromised because of “threading”: there were instances where some participants were reacting to the previous question, whilst others were

already answering a new question, and in some cases it was unclear which contribution someone was agreeing with in their answers, etc.

Studies which compared the use of text-only focus groups and face-to-face focus groups also mainly found that less depth can be reached with text-based groups and that understanding the communication can be made more difficult because of threading (Abrams, Wang, Song, & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015; Franklin & Lowry, 2001; Grady, 2000; Newby, Soutar, & Watson, 2003; Schneider, Kerwin, Frechtling, & Vivari, 2002).

Meanwhile, other online alternatives to text-based formats have also appeared, including online webcam groups, where participants can see and hear each other (Link & Dinsmore, 2014) and which seem to have a better potential for data richness than the typed versions. For example, in a recent research Abrams et al. (2015) found that online audiovisual groups were similar to face-to-face focus groups in terms of data richness, whereas text-only groups which were held for a similar amount of time were less rich in data (data richness was measured in several ways, including word count and researchers' subjective rating of data richness).

So should we forget typed focus groups? In this article, I argue that this type of focus group should still be considered a viable option, even nowadays when other online interview options are increasingly available. Text-based focus groups are not necessarily all the same with respect to data richness and quality. There are ways to enhance data quality. Over the years, I have started to experiment with options to improve results. I have found that there are some solutions which can help with these problems in many cases. Some authors (Graffigna & Bosio, 2006; Underhill & Olmsted, 2003) have also argued that if text-based discussions are organized in certain ways it can lead to better end-results. This point was also demonstrated recently in one of my classes when we had online focus group simulations. The students were divided into two groups; each group had a different guide. In the formulation of the guide and in the execution of the first group the moderator adhered to many of the suggestions that will be made here later in the paper. This was not the case with the second group. As the groups were progressing I checked the progress of both. It was very interesting to see how these two groups, which took place simultaneously with participants of similar characteristics, could evolve in so very different ways. Almost every contribution in the first group was longer than those of the other group. The first group discussion reached greater elaboration and depth.

In the paper, I show different solutions to how data quality can be improved, as well as giving practical advice for researchers on how to realize the opportunities this kind of research tool offers. Before discussing these issues in detail, first I give a short overview of variations of text-based groups and discuss the benefits and disadvantages of text-based focus groups.

In my argumentation, besides building on the literature, I also draw on my own fifteen years of international experience as a focus group researcher and moderator and on discussions with other researchers involved in applied and basic research worldwide.

### **Variations**

In the case of synchronous focus groups, participants are present at the same time, whilst this is not necessary with asynchronous groups (Burton & Goldsmith, 2002; Rezaabek, 2000). Synchronous text-based focus groups resemble a special form of chat: a difference between this and a regular form of chat is that here the discussion is led by a moderator for research purposes. Asynchronous focus groups can have a format similar to bulletin boards or forums, lasting over a longer time, participants not being present at the same time (Cook, Jack, Siden, Thabane, & Browne, 2014; Taylor & Macdonald, 2002; Walston & Lissitz,

2000). Again one of the differences compared to an ordinary forum is that the discussion is led by a moderator who has a research agenda and the duration of the forum is set by the moderator. Asynchronous groups can last typically for a few days or a week, in some cases even extending to longer time periods.

Contributions can be of a different nature in the two kinds of typed settings: Grafigna and Bosio (2006) found that in the asynchronous group more well thought, rational arguments appeared; contributions were longer; and there was a lower degree of interaction than compared to what was the case with the synchronous option. The chat setting contained more spontaneous reactions. According to them this could be thought of as a kind of brainstorming situation, where a range of issues are brought up, but not elaborated. In this setting it can happen that discussion does not flow in a linear way: a question raised by the moderator on a new topic may still be followed by comments of participants referring back to previous topics.

Some researchers question whether asynchronous discussions can be considered a group at all because of their different dynamism and lack of immediacy (Fox, Morris, & Rumsey, 2007).

Other variations of text-based focus groups differ in the degree of anonymity and the amount of information the participants know about each other: whether the focus group participants know who the other participants are and whether they receive information on the group members such as age, gender, etc. Anonymity can be a question also in relation to the researchers: do the researchers know who is behind each nickname in the discussion, or for example do they just know who participated in the online group without knowing who wrote which contribution?

There can be differences between text-based group discussions with respect to the platform used: whether a platform which is freely available on the Internet, such as a chat room (Schneider et al., 2002), or special software which has been developed specifically for online focus groups (Franklin & Lowry, 2001). There is even the possibility to conduct text-based focus groups with the help of e-learning programs such as Blackboard (Hughes & Lang, 2004).

### **Advantages**

An online text-based focus group has several practical advantages and strengths. It is fast and saves time. It is especially fast if a synchronous data collection method is used. Often in the case of qualitative research, we like to have a typed text of what has transpired in an individual or a group interview. With this type of focus group we have the transcript ready instantly which saves time (Franklin & Lowry, 2001; Walston & Lissitz, 2000). If for our research purpose it is good either to conduct individual interviews or online focus groups, then it is an advantage that it is faster to hold an online focus group with six people having common characteristics than to conduct six individual interviews with the same people. It also saves time as the researcher does not have to travel.

Text-based focus groups can be cost effective/cheap. It can be cheaper than a face-to-face focus group or an online webcam focus group because, no typing costs are involved, and there are no costs for renting a room, paying for the video recording, refreshments or travel. The low cost is especially true if we are not using special software designed for online focus groups that has to be paid for. Some authors argue that even if special software is used which has to be paid for, the costs can still be lower than in the case of face-to-face focus groups (Newby et al., 2003). Participants are often paid an incentive to participate in focus groups. However, as people can participate in online focus groups from their home, it takes less effort to participate, so it has been argued that less money needs to be paid (Maulana, 2002), it can

be even easier in some cases not to have to pay incentives. My colleagues and I have conducted basic social science online focus groups several times completely free that worked just fine: we used freely available chat platforms and did not need to pay a fee for the participants (as the participants were otherwise motivated to participate, for example because they were interested in the topic; Vicsek & Nádas, 2016). The focus on cost effectiveness however should not lead to neglect of the goal of collecting data that is useful for our research.

Text-based focus groups can gather data in a way that participants remain anonymous and unseen by others, which can be useful for certain goals. Some participants might prefer to discuss a topic in a way that other participants do not know who they are, so they might volunteer more for this kind of focus group than where they can be identified by other members. People with appearance-related problems – such as chronic skin problems – might prefer to participate in groups where they are not seen by other participants (Fox et al., 2007). Not being seen in some cases can help with the disclosure of some sensitive issues (Graffigna & Bosio, 2006). Focus group researchers have also argued that group pressure and/or the degree of conformity is lower in online text-based focus groups because of anonymity, than in face-to-face discussions, thus helping in some cases the appearance of a wider range of opinions and ideas in the discussions, and also for minority opinions, experiences to surface more (Ho & McLeod, 2008; Taylor & Macdonald, 2002). It has also been argued, based on empirical findings, that admitting to a behavior which is socially condemned can be more likely in text-based sessions, and that social desirability effects play a larger role in face-to-face focus groups (Graffigna & Bosio, 2006; Walston & Lissitz, 2000). Besides anonymity, another factor which can contribute to getting answers which deviate from the group majority is that it can happen that the participants are typing at the same time. In this case they only see what the others have written after finishing their own contribution (Newby et al., 2003) and what the others were typing at the same time could not have influenced their formulation.

There are indications that compared to a face-to-face group; there are fewer problems with more vocal and dominant participants controlling the debate (Franklin & Lowry, 2001; Newby et al., 2003; Schneider et al., 2002; Taylor & MacDonald, 2002; Walston & Lissitz, 2000). Some of this can be traced back to the lack of visual information about each other. Sometimes the dominance of for example charismatic and high status people stems from what we see about them: how they dress, how they look, what tone and style they use when speaking and what kind of non-verbal communication they engage in (Walston & Lissitz, 2000). Another aspect to consider with respect to dominance is that even if there are some participants who write a lot this does not prevent others from being able to communicate simultaneously: they can type their contributions at the same time. Thus, even from a technical aspect the dominant writer is not limiting the others.

Group members can participate comfortably from their own home. This can also be useful for populations which have problems with transportation – for example, people with certain health problems, medically fragile populations (Cook et al., 2014; Turney & Pocknee, 2005), or children who would need parents to escort them to a site (Nicholas et al., 2010). It can bring together into one group people who are located in different cities, regions, even countries. This can be helpful in the case of geographically dispersed populations.

If we are studying an online phenomenon then using this type of research method can be a good idea as in this case the measurement method resembles the natural environment of the topic of the research (Gaiser, 1997). Some regard these groups as especially useful for opinions on online web pages, as focus group members can look at the pages during the focus group (Maulana, 2002; Schneider et al., 2002).

Text-based options need less technical requirements from the users' side than online webcam focus groups. The technical requirements needed for the latter are still an

impediment to participation for a considerable segment of the population even in advanced societies, as some segments of the populations are less likely to have the kind of Internet connection which enables good quality webcam groups (Link & Dinsmore, 2014).

In the case of asynchronous groups the flexibility of when respondents can answer questions within a day can be a useful factor (Turney & Pocknee, 2005).

For some shy people conducting a text-based focus group can be potentially easier than a face-to-face group. One of my students who held online text-based focus groups commented that she probably would not have volunteered to moderate a face-to-face group as she is too shy, but that in the text-only situation she felt comfortable. Also having more than one moderator in online focus group situations can prove to be useful in some cases (see more on this later), and these moderators can lend support to each other, can even be in the same room with each other during the group (Walston & Lissitz, 2000).

### **Potential Problems**

It can happen that when online text-based focus groups are used a less rich and deep analysis can be made than with face-to-face focus groups or online webcam focus groups. This issue has been raised as a problem in the focus group methodology literature (Abrams et al., 2015; Newby et al., 2003; Schneider et al., 2002). In my experience one of the most important potential setbacks of the method is the existence of problems of data richness.

I argue that: (a.) there are ways to increase data richness and depth (to be discussed later), (b.) in the case of certain focus group compositions low data richness is less likely to occur – for example groups with experts, and (c.) in the case of certain research goals the fact that we cannot dig so deep is not so problematic (e.g., when we just want to hear a wide range of ideas or opinions on a topic). Thus, my opinion is that text-based focus groups can be regarded as a viable option even if online audiovisual groups are increasingly available for utilization. However, care needs to be exercised over what research goals it is used for, and in how the groups are organized and conducted. In this way the method can yield more effective results (Graffigna & Bosio, 2006).

Several factors can contribute to a low degree of data richness and depth in synchronous online focus groups. As discussed earlier, there are often shorter answers, the topic is frequently discussed in less detail and many people give less explanation for why they have a certain opinion (Franklin & Lowry, 2001; Grady, 2000; Schneider et al., 2002). It is often harder for a moderator to ask spontaneous questions reacting to what was written in a contribution – which could deepen the discussion. The non-linear mode of discussion can be harder to follow, it also works against going into topics very deeply, and can mean that some of what is written is not understandable for the participants or the analyst (“threading” can happen). Gaiser (1997) argues that in these groups the contributions can remain on a more superficial level partly also because people are used to superficiality and playfulness in their chat discussions and it can be unusual for them to communicate differently in a focus group that is held on a chat platform.

As typing is slower than speaking, if we have the same amount of time for a text-based and an offline focus group, this can result in obtaining less information on our research topic within the same amount of time. Schneider et al. (2002) have found that in their synchronous text-based groups there were fewer words per minute than in the face-to-face variation. Nicholas et al. (2010) found in their research with chronically ill children, that based on the face-to-face group discussions they were able to construct more codes for analysis than based on the asynchronous focus groups which lasted for one week. Their face-to-face groups contained more elaborate answers and enabled richer, more in depth analysis than their asynchronous discussions. The fact that often less interaction occurs in

asynchronous groups (Graffigna & Bosio, 2006) and that sometimes fewer illustrations and examples are given by participants (Nicholas et al., 2010) can contribute to the lower data richness of online asynchronous groups compared to face-to-face groups.

The communication medium in case of both types of text-based groups is held to be less rich than face-to-face groups where we can see the people we are conversing with (Schneider et al., 2002). “Media richness refers to the ability of a communication medium to foster immediate interaction and feedback and to permit people to communicate with many kinds of cues, using multiple senses” (Schneider et al., 2002, p. 33). In the case of text-based discussions we cannot see some meta-communication signs, such as body motion signals. Greenbaum (1997) regards this as a big problem. He emphasizes that non-verbal communication can give the moderator and the person doing the analysis of the discussion important information in traditional focus groups. Posture, facial expression, etc. can give clues on why somebody is remaining silent in the group: shyness or disagreeing with the group majority being some of the factors to consider.

Besides issues of data richness and communication medium richness, there are a range of other potential drawbacks of typed focus groups that need to be considered. These include: only those who have Internet access and can use the platforms applied can take part in such groups; those who type more slowly can be at a disadvantage and can contribute less (Franklin & Lowry, 2001; Walston & Lissitz, 2000); we cannot tell if all the participants are giving their full attention to the focus group or are at the same time doing other things (Grady, 2000; Greenbaum, 2000); there can be technical problems during the groups; there can be problems that relate to not knowing the real identity of who is actually participating in the group – there can potentially be people taking part in the groups who are not who they say they are, who do not have the characteristics we wanted for people of that group; misunderstandings can happen (Oringderff, 2004); confrontations can take place in some groups; there can be data security issues – that maybe somebody gains unauthorized access to the material of the group and there is the potential that someone may be identified who wants to remain anonymous (Gaiser, 1997); and in the case of asynchronous versions it can happen that some participants stop taking part in the group after a while (especially if it lasts over a long period) or are less active in certain periods because they are busier (Rezabek, 2000); some might find it a challenge that they cannot “put a face to the name” of other participants (Nicholas et al., 2010).

### **How to Organize the Groups to Avoid Pitfalls and Reach Better Results?**

As we have seen text-based focus groups can have serious drawbacks. Some of the problems mentioned in the previous section can be avoided and there are measures that can be taken to improve data quality:

1. To achieve longer answers: Several measures can be taken to achieve longer answers and greater data richness. At the beginning of the group the researcher can explicitly ask participants to try to make longer contributions, and during the group ask them questions to go into more detail reacting to specific contributions. It can even be useful to give a sample answer to the first question to demonstrate that longer length is preferable. In the case of a synchronous group, the moderator can emphasize the differences between a chat situation and the online group. It is important to test beforehand the platform used for the group discussion to check that it does not make longer contributions more difficult (some chat platforms limit the length of contributions, or it can be hard to write a longer contribution as the writer does not see the beginning of the contribution after a while, etc.). If it is too difficult to write longer contributions on the selected chat platform, then it might be a good idea to try to find another chat platform or to think of ways to deal with the problem (one strategy could be that



we ask the participants if they are not finished with what they want to type but there is a space limit, to end the first contribution with "...", and then begin typing the next with "...". In this case because of the time that elapses between the sending of the two contributions there can be texts of others sandwiched between them). It is also important not to have too many participants in one synchronous group: otherwise besides problems with being able to follow the discussion (Hughes & Lang, 2004), participants might feel that they are left out of the discussion if they write too lengthy answers (from my experience usually it can be good to have six or fewer people in the group). Care should be taken that the questions in the guide are open enough. In face-to-face situations, sometimes even less open questions can deepen the discussion, as participants add additional details in their answers. In contrast, in my experience in online typed groups these kinds of questions often result in short answers.

Length of answer seems to be a bigger problem in the case of synchronous groups than in asynchronous settings (Burton & Goldsmith, 2002; Graffigna & Bosio, 2006). Thus, if we want longer contributions, organizing an asynchronous discussion can also be an option. Even then it can be useful to mention that participants are invited to give even longer examples in their accounts.

2. To be able to ask more questions which react to participant contributions: In synchronous groups, it can be a good idea to have the questions of the guide and some possible moderator contributions ready for copying and pasting, so that typing these does not take up time and the moderator can concentrate more on reacting spontaneously to what comes up in the discussions. It might also be a good solution to have two moderators with their tasks clearly divided (Walston & Lissitz, 2000). The task of one of the moderators could be to put in the questions of the guide for the discussions, whilst the other can pay attention to asking follow-up questions for some of the answers and can manage group interaction, check who has not been communicating recently and ask for reaction from them, etc. If there is only one moderator, there might not be enough time for the moderator to be able to write both follow-up questions and the questions of the guide.

3. Help with "threading": It is a good idea to choose a platform that similarly to GoogleHangouts shows when others are typing, that way the moderator can know better when it is good to start on a new topic, or when it is better to wait because someone is still typing their contribution to the previous theme. It is also useful if the moderator draws attention to the fact that in the answer it should be clear which other contribution it is a reaction to (if it is indeed a reaction to an earlier statement). It can be easier to properly refer back to previous contributions if all contributions are numbered.

4. Dealing with fewer possibilities for meta-communication: Research subjects can be asked to use emoticons, punctuation and other signs to signal tone and mood. Many are already familiar with these and use them anyway (Terrell, 2011), but if the group is very fast some might not take the time to use them unless we explicitly ask for it. There can also be differences in terms of age and other factors determining how likely groups are to use these without prompting.

5. To get more personal information: In some cases it can be useful even if we are preserving anonymity to give some information about the participants at the beginning, especially if they share certain characteristics – for example we are discussing sexual harassment, and we give the information that the participants are all young girls. There are indications that people might open up more in a situation when they receive this kind of information, than in a group without any information on other participants (Taylor & McDonald, 2002).

6. Giving a face to the name: For some research purposes where anonymity is not important, it might be useful if participants put up short bios or introductions of themselves, including photos for the others to see. In this way members might become more attached to

the group which might also lower the drop-out rate that can be a problem in asynchronous groups.

7. Dealing with the fact that typing is slower than speaking: We need to decide what is more important to us: going deeper into fewer issues or asking about a wide range of issues. If we want to go deep into the themes, we should have fewer themes that we bring up in a synchronous group than in a face-to-face situation taking into consideration that typing is slower than speaking. We might also have a strategy for ensuring that only people who type to a certain speed can become participants in our groups and leave out those who type very slowly (or put these people into asynchronous groups instead of synchronous ones). For many people, using phones or tablets to give typed answers can prove to take even more time than using computers. We should encourage people to use devices which enable faster typing.

8. Achieving more interaction: Usually, in face-to-face focus groups it is enough to mention at the beginning of the group that we would like a group discussion in which participants react to each other and often the rate of interactions is acceptable. In text-based groups we might need to reiterate this aspect later during the discussion as well. It can often happen that we ask a question and everybody writes their answers without reacting to what others have written – especially as some of the participants were typing at the same time. In this case we might also consider asking more about what group members think of some aspects that other participants raised.

9. Achieving more complete discussions of a topic: A useful strategy to achieve discussions with a higher degree of completeness and articulation can be to combine synchronous and asynchronous discussions within one research (Graffigna & Bosio, 2006: 70), with each respondent taking part in both types of groups. We can ask participants for example first to take part in a synchronous group. Then we can go deeper into the range of issues mentioned there in an asynchronous setting, as well as asking on threads that died off too early, that were unclear, etc. It is also possible to have the asynchronous group start before the synchronous one, and also continue after it. In this way the asynchronous setting can also encourage participants to get to know each other and the topic. Graffigna and Bosio (2006) utilized this way of organization on a sensitive topic (HIV/AIDS) and found that in their research “the combination of the two communication styles allowed the integration of the two settings’ potentials” (Graffigna & Bosio, 2006, p. 66). From the forum-type settings, longer, more reflexive contributions emerged, with abstract and rational argumentation used, whilst within the chat-type setting, personal experiences featured strongly. It was also notable, that where the synchronous groups were held combined with asynchronous groups, the discussions in these chat-like settings were “more organized” and “less fragmentary” than in the cases where group members only took part in chat-like formats and did not meet via the asynchronous group before the discussion. They conclude that the combined application of the online groups is particularly useful “when a broad and multidimensional description of the phenomenon is sought” (Graffigna & Bosio, 2006, p. 70). Disadvantages of using a combined method include that it is more time-consuming, more work to organize. Participants have to be found who are not only willing to take part in a one-time discussion, but who are open to asynchronous discussion as well in the time frame provided. Also analysis can be more complex because of the fact that two kinds of communication were used.

10. Dealing with the problems of people dropping out of the groups: Drop-outs are more likely to pose a problem if we are conducting an asynchronous group over a longer period of time. Thus, we need to consider holding these groups for shorter time frames. In certain cases we can check to see who have not contributed for a length of time and then write them follow-up emails, asking them why they have not been contributing and to consider continuing their participation. Another strategy can be to have a larger group of

people participate in these groups from the outset, so that even if several drop out the final group number will not be too small.

11. Dealing with technical problems: It is important to test the platform before using it, to try to see what kind of technical issues might come up. It is good to test it at different times, because for example in case of some free chat platforms certain popular Internet using times might cause problems (e.g., Friday night). Even if we do test the platform, we must be prepared for the possibility that technical issues might arise during the groups, such as some people being shut out for a time from the chat discussion (because of connection problems), etc. so it is good to have a strategy for dealing with technical problems. It can be good to have a person available who can be contacted in case of these technical difficulties (even if it cannot be solved, this is still helpful, because the moderator does not have to deal with this during the group and those with technical problems do not feel that they are left alone with their problem).

12. Dealing with data security and anonymity issues: Password protected access for the focus groups can help with security problems. Anonymity of the participants can be preserved by participants checking into the chat room with a nickname of their own choice.

### **Conducting Text-Based Groups on Free Chat Platforms**

Professional platforms developed especially for focus groups often have a few extra features compared to freely available chat platforms. These include: (a.) display of participant information (socio-demographic data), (b.) easy communication between moderator and clients ordering the research, the latter can easily ask for extra questions to be put during the group discussion, (c.) a clear difference in the appearance of what the moderator writes compared to the participants' typing (for example different color), and (d.) easy way to show stimulus materials. However, especially if you are conducting your own non-profit research and you are not working for a client – free chat platforms can be a good solution. Already in the previous part on the organization of online typed groups, we have written about several points that you should pay attention to with respect to platforms (seeing if others are still typing, not constraining long input, etc.). Another important issue is to make sure the moderator's comments are properly distinguished from those of the rest of the group. If the chat platform you are using does not enable switching colors, then it can be a solution if the moderator writes in capital letters (the questions of the guide that you cut and paste into the focus group should also be converted then to capital letters before copying them into the group). Another thing to pay attention to is not losing any of the text of the conversations. In cases where there are two moderators it can be a good idea for the second moderator to copy the text of the discussion at different time points into an offline file, so that nothing is lost in case of a technical problem.

### **Conclusion**

There can be great differences between text-based focus groups in terms of data richness and quality: implementing some of the suggestions of this article in how focus group research is executed can contribute to better performance in these respects.

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