

An Alternative Method of Interviewing: Critical Reflections on Videoconference Interviews for Qualitative Data Collection

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Abstract

Qualitative research is an increasingly popular research approach for tackling the evolving complexity of social issues. With this rise in use, methods of qualitative data collection are becoming highly diverse, moving away from conventional approaches and welcoming more innovative and creative methods of data collection in a quest to produce critically and theoretically engaged new knowledge. Although traditional face-to-face interviews remain a compelling and popular means, modern innovative technology-based interviewing, such as videoconference interviews, can play a pivotal role in qualitative research. This article argues that this approach is pragmatic because video conferencing interviews are relatively affordable for research teams and, for many research participants, they are more accessible than face-to-face interviews. On the other hand, it provides a unique opportunity for researchers and participants by compressing the time-space divide, facilitating safety, reducing travel-related expenses, accessing transnational participants, maintaining social distance, and protecting personal space and privacy. Yet, this article also argues that videoconferencing can be dogged by practical challenges that might conflict with the holistic quality of qualitative research, such as dropped calls and loss of intimacy compared to traditional in-person interviews. This article presents the experiences of a young researcher, who reflects on how and why he conducted Skype interviews in his research. The article concludes that, despite the relative merits and demerits, videoconference interviews can be a useful supplement or replacement for traditional face-to-face interviews. However, more research is needed to gain a robust understanding of how this type of interview meets basic assumptions about the quality of interviews and affects the overall rigor of qualitative research.

Keywords

videoconference interview, face-to-face interview, qualitative research, qualitative data collection, pandemic, social distancing

Background

Qualitative research is an increasingly popular research method for tackling the elevated complexity of social issues, given the context of complicated and robust social systems due to rapid social transformation (Flick, 2018). With this rise in use, methods are becoming highly diverse, moving away from conventional approaches and welcoming more innovative and creative approaches in a quest to produce critically and theoretically engaged new knowledge. Traditional face-to-face (FtF) interviews, without the mediation of technology, remain a compelling and popular approach and are somewhat of “a gold standard” with respect to validity and rigor of the quality of data collection (Al-Yateem, 2012; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Irani, 2019; Roberts et al., 2021;

Sedgwick & Spiers, 2009). However, with advancements in information and communication technology, non-FtF interviews via computers and online, such as with email and videoconferencing (e.g., Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp), are increasingly used in qualitative research for one-to-one, group discussion, ethnography, and voice-based discussion/interviews (Archibald et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2020; Jowett

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et al., 2011; Lathen & Laestadius, 2021; Lobe et al., 2020; Walton, 2018). Of importance, videoconferencing (e.g., Skype or Zoom video call) can be resembled with in-person or FtF qualitative interviews (Irani, 2019). Despite a wide literature describing FtF interviewing as the most common and widely used qualitative technique in social research (Al-Yateem, 2012; Cooper, 2009), several pragmatic challenges exist with this method. These include geographically dispersed populations, time and financial constraints, inclement weather conditions, epidemic situations (social distancing), the participation of groups who are vulnerable and hard to reach, people with low socioeconomic status, and other logistic and ethical considerations (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Henrickson, 2007; Iacono et al., 2016; Jowett et al., 2011; Lathen & Laestadius, 2021; Neville et al., 2016; Richardson et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021; Sedgwick & Spiers, 2009; Walton, 2018). Although the use of online interviews has often been seen as a second choice, the use of multiple ways (in-person and online) of conducting interviews in a single study has become increasingly popular. As such, different modes of online interviews are being used in qualitative research across disciplines, including health, sociology, psychology, medicine, business, and market research.

Mixed views regarding the suitability of widespread use of online interviews exist. For example, some researchers argue that synchronous online interviews cannot explore meaning in terms of capturing the essence of individuals' life experiences in a wider socio-cultural and political context (Davis et al., 2004), and online interviews may undermine the "shadowing strategy" of data collection (Quinlan, 2008, p. 1482), where researchers observe gesture, posture, expressions, and emotions of a participant for a set period of time (Ferguson, 2016; Topping et al., 2021). However, online qualitative research can be seen as valuable in its own right, with merits that outweigh the challenges (Ayling & Mewse, 2009; Gray et al., 2020). Within the context of this broader argument, we endeavor to critically understand how online interviews can contribute to qualitative research.

A substantial body of literature exists on traditional FtF interviews (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Iacono et al., 2016; Jowett et al., 2011). Within the domain of online interview techniques, a plethora of articles focus on email interviews and questionnaire surveys (asynchronous approaches) (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Iacono et al., 2016; Jowett et al., 2011), yet relatively few scholarly articles highlight on online synchronous interviews in qualitative research, particularly when using video conferencing. The purpose of this article is to critically reflect on how video conferencing interviews are experienced in qualitative research and data collection. In particular, we focus on Skype, a popular service of VoIP-mediated communication systems that provides users with a way to send voice and video across the Internet via a synchronous (real-time) connection (Iacono et al., 2016). This critical reflection on videoconference interviews is inspired by a researcher's (lead author) past experience of using Skype

interviews as the best low-cost alternative for an international graduate student in Canada to collect data from his home country in Asia, as well as his ongoing experiences of conducting online interviews during the Covid-19 pandemic. These reflections were heightened by an experienced qualitative researcher's (co-author's) critical engagement in writing this article.

In this article, we contribute to discussions on an alternative method of FtF interviewing in qualitative methodology literature by presenting critical reflections on the use of videoconference interviewing. Rather than engaging in a debate about the viability of videoconference versus FtF interviews, we instead consider how conducting videoconference interviews can be useful in qualitative research for certain contexts. With this objective, we first describe the merits and demerits of FtF and videoconference interviews in qualitative research as documented in the existing literature. This is followed by our reflections on four major issues related to online interviews, which are illustrated with the lead author's research experiences of using videoconference for qualitative interviews that examined how Bangladeshi young men experience sex education. Within these reflections, we shed light on why (in what context and with what rationales) the qualitative researcher chooses video conferencing interviews. Then, we focus on the logistics of conducting video conferencing interviews, including recruitment, sampling, time, and space, and critically evaluate how videoconference interviews hindered or facilitated these undertakings. After that, we focus on the issues related to rapport building for the videoconference interviews, showing how it was interconnected with trust, researchers' social position and identity, nonverbal cues, data collection, and analysis. Finally, we discuss ethical issues arising from this kind of video conferencing. Of particular concern is how videoconference platforms as the third party pose risks to privacy and confidentiality. In addition, through the mentioned critical reflections, we also focus on the methodological insights on conducting qualitative interviews online in a context of pandemic-induced social distancing.

Videoconferencing as a Tool for Interviewing in Qualitative Research

Researchers have argued that video conferencing functions, such as Skype, have greater acceptability and recognition nationally and internationally than other available means for communication (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). For example, while telephone or email interviews are popular means of communication (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Opdenakker, 2006), Videoconference platforms facilitates a further nexus between researcher and participants by providing a video option (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014) that not only just provides an opportunity to talk to their participants but also to see them in real-time (Cater, 2011; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Hanna, 2012; Iacono et al., 2016). Skype and similar mediums have

compressed time-space distance to allow researchers to reach participants safely and regardless of geographical locations (Hanna, 2012; Oates, 2015). Thus, researchers may have easy access to those participants who are difficult to reach, as researchers and participants can choose their time and space that is most convenient to them, with no physical meeting location, only participants sharing their virtual spaces (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Oates, 2015; Hanna, 2012). Travel-related expenses are not incurred (Hanna, 2012; Khan, 2018a), and individuals at the opposite end of a call may find it easier relative to telephone interviews to communicate when each party can see how the other responds to remarks. In addition, interviewers and interviewees may feel less apprehensive during videoconference interviews (Iacono et al., 2016; Seitz, 2016) because they can see each other (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). This approach also ensures that the safety of the researcher is not in jeopardy when interviewing strangers (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Overall, interviewing via videoconference is affordable, accessible to many research participants, and faster than organizing a FtF interview (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Hanna, 2012; Oates, 2015). Therefore, it provides a unique opportunity for researchers and participants, by compressing the time-space divide, facilitating safety, reducing travel-related expenses, reaching out to transnational participants, maintaining social distance (due to pandemics, epidemics, and wars), protecting personal spaces and privacy (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Khan, 2018b; Khan & Raby, 2020; Oates, 2015; Richardson et al., 2021). For these reasons, qualitative researchers have strongly considered video conferencing approaches as a compelling tool in their methodological toolkit (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Hanna, 2012; Holt, 2010; Janghorban et al., 2014; Jowett et al., 2011; Weinmann et al., 2012).

Despite the advantages of videoconference interviews, they are also dogged by shortcomings and practical challenges, which might conflict with the holistic quality of qualitative research. These challenges include dropped calls, pauses, inaudible segments, inability to read body language and nonverbal cues, and loss of intimacy compared to traditional in-person interviews. These also deprive the researcher of valuable sources of information, such as the opportunity to visit the research location, make observations, and document field notes. As well, not all topics are appropriate for videoconference interviews. According to Sedgwick and Spiers (2009), videoconferencing is inappropriate for topics such as conflict resolution, planning, negotiations, and when nonverbal cues are a crucial ingredient of expressions. In addition, the necessity of high-speed Internet, familiarity with online communication, and digital literacy can pose a challenge for videoconference interviews (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Hanna, 2012; Janghorban et al., 2014; Sedgwick & Spiers, 2009). Participant absenteeism might be increased when using videoconference platforms because with only a click, and an uncomfortable participant can withdraw from an interview (Janghorban et al., 2014). Despite the challenges mentioned

above, several useful strategies exist to increase the success of videoconference interviews. These include a stable internet connection, quiet room, speaking slowly, repeating and clarifying questions, observing facial expressions, nodding and asking follow-up questions, and listening to the tone of the participant (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Hanna, 2012).

Choosing Video Conferencing Interviews in Qualitative Research: Context and Rationale

In a research design, decisions involve an explicit rationale, and as such, there is a “context” behind each decision taken. This context is of utmost important in qualitative research because very few decisions can be fixed in advance in a qualitative research design. In addition, in this approach, data is collected from human participants in systems where environments are not always under the control of the researchers; accordingly, mutation of the context regularly plays out during data collection (Rahman et al., 2021). As mentioned earlier, researchers may choose video conferencing interviews when considering their context and circumstances, such as reducing barriers of time and space, minimizing travel-related expenses, maintaining social distance, and in order to reach the international participants (Burkitt, 2004; Iacono et al., 2016; Rahman et al., 2021). In the following section of the paper, we provide an example of research that adapted videoconference interviews for data collection by examining the contexts that prompted this data collection approach.

This research was conducted in 2018 when the lead author was a graduate student and shed light on the sex education gap in Bangladesh by bringing forward young men’s narratives. Using the constructionist analytic (Khan, 2017c, 2018a, 2018b; Khan & Raby, 2020), this study addressed: how do Bangladeshi young men receive sex education during adolescence? Skype interviews ($n = 9$) were selected for this study for several reasons. First, as the researcher was based in Canada, conducting FtF interviews in Bangladesh was time-consuming, costly, and not feasible for the thesis. As well, Skype interviews were seen as giving participants private space and room to share their personal experiences in a study context where culturally sensitive issues were discussed, including sexual knowledge, learning processes, and sources of sex education, sexual experiences, and sexual abuse.

Recruitment, Privacy, and Logistics: Pragmatic Considerations

Recruitment, sampling, logistics, time, and space are five key issues that need to be worked out before starting the data collection. Although, in contrast to quantitative designs, qualitative researchers generally avoid predesigned, fixed, and rigid procedures, with videoconference interviews, some technical issues (beyond research skills) need to be considered. A striking advantage of videoconference interviews is

that it allows the researcher to include their participants from any corner of the world, thereby breaking down barriers of geography, time, and space and providing access to a wide range of cultures and societies (Burkitt, 2004; Iacono et al., 2016; Richardson et al., 2021; Rowley, 2012). This approach can facilitate broaden the scope and potential for qualitative research (King et al., 2018, p. 29). When the study sites are geographically dispersed, as was mentioned earlier, it also facilitates an inclusive and democratic way to recruit participants from any part of the planet (Fleitas, 1998; Irani, 2019; Kozinets, 2010; Richardson et al., 2021), with some exceptions, such as non-tech savvy people and underprivileged people who have no or limited access to technology (Irani, 2019). Although nearly 20 young men indicated an interest in participating in our illustrated study, we conducted only nine interviews (Khan, 2017b, 2018b). As with other recent studies, it may be that some young men did not follow up due to the lack of access to devices and internet facilities (Roberts et al., 2021; Sy et al., 2020). As such, these marginalized groups should be considered before designing a study using videoconferencing. With no digital access, these marginalized populations are the most striking shortcomings of videoconference-focused qualitative data collection (Hossian & Khan, 2012).

For the illustrative study, participants were recruited using an online platform, Facebook, and the interviews were conducted using Skype. Participants were sent “the informed consent form,” and the researcher obtained oral consent from the participants by reading this form before starting the interview. Despite the relatively accessible Facebook recruitment, an influx of potential research challenges existed. These included lack of access to the Internet and devices, poor expertise in using technology, lack of private spaces, and awkward timing due to time zone differences. A key bottleneck was accessing the Internet (which is not free of cost) and access to a smartphone or personal computer/laptop. These were also particular obstacles for the said study related to recruiting young people from a lower-income society, who were still students, and who mostly lacked funds to pay for an Internet connection (Irani, 2019).

Confidence in using Skype was another recruitment challenge. We found that, while some people were interested in participating, ultimately they did not agree to participate because they were not confident in using Skype and the Internet (Irani, 2019). This is somewhat similar experiences to other researchers’ reflections on their videoconference interview; for instance, some people may be reluctant to embrace technology, especially the elderly (Iacono et al., 2016).

Confidence and trust are of paramount importance in soliciting quality data. Several scholars have reported that online methods, that bring about “anxieties, challenges, concerns, dilemmas, doubts, problems, tensions, and troubles in terms of managing the interactions and creating effective and meaningful dialogues” (Abidin & De Seta, 2020). What is more—these new forms of digitalized interactions undermine

“participation and immersion” and do not capture the essence of individuals’ life experiences (Abidin & De Seta, 2020; Howlett, 2021). We acknowledge that the strength of some particular approaches is to emphasize “immersion” from the field sites. In this context, however, there is as yet no consensus among scholars about the relative value of technologically mediated interactions versus in-person methods for generating rich and high-quality data (Hine, 2013; Johnson et al., 2019; Jowett et al., 2011).

A private and silent space is important for interview settings, whether offline or online. The unavailability of such space can pose a barrier to videoconference-based qualitative interviews. It is a practical challenge for interviewers when their participant is in a place or environment that is noisy and distracting, as this may adversely affect the flow of an interview, interviewee concentration, and data quality (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). However, with access via mobile phones, videoconference interviews also provide the participant with the flexibility of bringing their device and attending interviews anywhere, such as work, home, on transportation. As the research talked about socio-culturally sensitive issues, participants had to prepare in advance for private space for interviews, in a context where a significant number of people of this age share their bedrooms with family members. For example, one study participant, who shared his bedroom with his younger brother, conducted his interview at night while he was loitering in a playground and holding an umbrella over his head, as it was raining. When this participant was asked why he was so keen to participate, he replied that he felt more comfortable discussing the research topic via Skype than in a FtF interview. As well, he did not want to miss the opportunity to share with a researcher (who is open-minded and educated) how he experienced his adolescence in terms of learning sex and sexuality.

Thus, in our view, videoconference interviews may increase the sample size in qualitative research for some sensitive fields of research, such as sexuality, vulnerable groups, criminality, and corruption (Ahmed & Khan, 2012). For example, some Australian researchers found high response rates during the Covid-19 pandemic because they used virtual platforms (Burke & Patching, 2021, p. 144): “... [for participants] more convenient for them, enabling interviews at any time that suited them, including after hours. [For investigators, it] opened up additional working hours with no travel time, and our initial concerns about not gaining insightful data and possible difficulty building a rapport on virtual platforms were unfounded.”

The timing was another pragmatic challenge related to recruitment and data collection because of the 12-hour time difference between Canada and Bangladesh. With the time zone differences, miscalculating of time differences, and different timekeeping cultures, it was often difficult to match convenient interview times with the participant. This time zone issue is consistent with the experiences of Jowett et al. (2011) ‘s study, which found that fixing a mutually convenient

time was a major barrier to interview through videoconferencing. To manage time challenges in the said research, the participants were invited to choose any time at their convenience, flexibility that might not have been possible in FtF interviews (Irani, 2019). Most of our interviews were conducted when it was nighttime in Bangladesh. On the one hand, the nighttime was far better for the participants as they were usually not occupied with any routine work outside of their home and had free time. In addition, the night is relatively quiet and conducive to discussing sexually sensitive issues as other family members in the home usually sleep during this time. On the other hand, it was convenient and comfortable for the interviewer as it was during regular office hours in North America. Overall, this had a positive impact on the data quality of the interviews and data. For example, in the case of interviewing nursing professionals during a pandemic, virtual platforms assuage to participate the research after their work schedule, which could be complicated for participants to meet in person with researcher during their working hour (Burke & Patching, 2021; Irani, 2019; Richardson et al., 2021). So, videoconferencing in qualitative research can be a double-edged sword, raising concerns over equitable voice and facilitating equitable scholarship. Yet, we view the barriers of video conferencing in qualitative data collection as often outweighing the benefits of FtF interviews in terms of recruitment processes, sampling, costs, and data collection period (from both investigators' and participants' perspectives). Thus, we argue that online platforms are a valid and legitimate means of qualitative data collections and that FtF interviews may no longer be the alleged "gold standard" (Hine, 2013; Howlett, 2021). However, technology-mediated interviews are still challenging because of ongoing issues with viability, utility, and operations (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Howlett, 2021).

Rapport and Data Collection

Rapport during an interview involves a feeling of comfort and confidence in the interviewer. How the interviewer ethically approaches and convinces a participant to solicit their internal views on a subject is an art. According to King et al. (2018, p. 48), "Rapport is. . . about trust – enabling the participant to feel comfortable in opening up to you." Similar to FtF interviews, rapport in videoconference interviews proceed through the stages of apprehension, exploration, cooperation, and participation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). It is well-recognized that trust is a key pillar of rapport building during an interview (Jowett et al., 2011; Mann & Stewart, 2000). Ultimately, a shared understanding is needed to conduct an interview, where trust helps to construct this connection between interviewers and interviewees (Jowett et al., 2011; Upadhyay & Lipkovich, 2020).

A substantial literature argues that building rapport in videoconference interview is more challenging and somewhat

tricky than for FtF (Cater, 2011; Chen & Hinton, 1999; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Hay-Gibson, 2009; Jowett et al., 2011; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Shaw, 2010). Critiques by scholars of online communication include that it is an impersonal, detached, and impoverished form of social communication, which may reduce the ability to form relationships with participants (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Hewson et al., 1996; Jowett et al., 2011). However, several scholars reported that there are no differences between FtF and videoconferencing-based interviews with respect to quality and levels of rapport, capturing the essence of ontological insights, and maintaining methodological and epistemological rigor (Irani, 2019; O'connor et al., 2008; Richardson et al., 2021). In a similar vein, variation in locations of interviewees (and interviewers), location of the interview (home, office, or neutral), and means of communication (laptop, laptop camera, or mobile phone) can have limited noticeable impact on the "feel" and potential depth of the interview (Richardson et al., 2021). Nonetheless, we acknowledge that ethnographic studies would lose the "wider cultural context" if done via videoconference (Richardson et al., 2021).

Impression management can be difficult to manage in videoconference interviews. The presence of a researcher as well as the focus of the research can lead participants to present ("impression management") themselves, their experiences, opinions, actions, and attitudes more favorably than they would under other circumstances (Goffman, 1978; Paterson, 1994; Sartre, 2001). This impression management becomes further complicated when these experiences, opinions, and actions are recorded (audio/video) because this forum might prompt participants to be even more aware and cautious about what they disclose and share during the interview (Al-Yateem, 2012; Paterson, 1994; Sartre, 2001). Despite these differences between videoconference and FtF interviews, other researchers have asserted that the quality of research conversations is not affected by these differences (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Denscombe, 2014; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Critical to the interview forum are further rapport-related issues, including the researchers' identity or positionality (e.g., social position) and personality, and also the interviewee's personality (e.g., reserved or introvert) (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019). When these are issues for videoconference interviews, certain strategies can help researchers to develop rapport (Wang & Liu, 2021). Roberts et al. (2021) asserted that the researcher's positionality (as an outsider) requires intentional actions to grasp the context of the study, which helps build rapport as these actions involve additional, creative, innovative, and purposive efforts. For instance, the researcher can communicate with the participant several times before the actual interview, using different mediums such as email, to achieve more comfortable interactions with participants (Al-Yateem, 2012; Jowett et al., 2011). In our study, the researcher used similar strategies. For

example, in our study, after the final selection of participants, the researcher added them to his Facebook friend list and then chatted with them via messenger about different issues, including academic (e.g., which discipline they are studying, what are career plans) and non-academic (e.g., whether they have intimate relations, how they maintain the relations, what is their future plan with their relations). Once participant's rapport was developed, he then conducted the interview. This strategy helped participants to feel more comfortable talking about issues than they would have without developing a prior social relationship with the researcher.

Rapport can also be challenged by the researcher's position in society (outsider status). As a faculty member of a reputed university in that society, where university teachers are revered, and Guru-disciple relations are practiced, the researcher wondered if his social identity might negatively affect the rapport-building processes. He was concerned that the participants, as university students, might not feel comfortable with him. Though Jowett et al. (2011) insisted on frequent e-mailing to participants before going to the original interview, they reflected that these early rapport engagements may not work in the time of actual interview because of the variation of circumstances in terms of time and spaces (Lee, 2008; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019). We agree somewhat with this point, yet the researcher did not face such issues in conducting interviews, likely because he maintained active contact with participants through Facebook messenger.

In addition to occupational identity, with respect to the research project, the researcher's intersectional position/identity, in terms of gender, sexuality, race, nationality, age, and then status in Canada, had profound impacts on how he obtained access to the participants, built rapport, and analyzed the interviews. As a Bangladeshi heterosexual young man, the lead author witnessed and experienced some of the issues around heterosexuality, masculinity, and an embodiment of sexuality that the participants experienced throughout their adolescence, and he shared some of his own experiences during interviews. All of these issues in common helped the researcher to build rapport with the participants. As he was the same gender as the participants, this assisted with gaining access to them. It is noteworthy that Bangladesh is a culturally conservative and sexually repressive country, wherein public talk about sexuality is normally taboo (Khan, 2017c, 2018a; Khan & MacEachen, 2021; Khan & Raby, 2020). Having the same national background as the participants likely strategically positioned the researcher as someone who could be trusted. Despite the researcher's occupational positionality, participants likely related to him as their almost contemporary in terms of age. In addition, with the researcher studying and researching in Canada, this might have helped participants to believe that the researcher would keep the details of the interview confidential and not use the contents of the interview to implicate them in any way, particularly because the researcher ought to have their interests at heart. Many participants repeatedly mentioned their concerns about

confidentiality when talking about their own or other people's relevant confidential sexuality issues. Before sharing their stories, they noted, "As you are a researcher and for the sake of research; otherwise, I would not share." Additionally, most participants had similar childhood experiences to the researcher in terms of how they were raised to think and talk about sex. Three participants mentioned that they did not talk or seek knowledge about sex and sexuality during their adolescence due to concern about the family reputation and self-reputation and the need to be an alleged good student or "good boy." In this regard, when the researcher shared the same stories or experiences, it helped the participants to feel comfortable about talking more and helped the researcher to understand the participants' experiences. In addition, cybersecurity issues pertinent to audio recording and storing, such as hacking, were considered; hence, a separate voice recorder was used to record the audio recording instead of Skype's in-built recorder. These measures, also used by others (Burke & Patching, 2021; Howlett, 2021; Irani, 2019), helped the participants feel comfortable with talking openly. These experiences are endorsed by several scholars with their empirical experiences (Burke & Patching, 2021; Howlett, 2021; Irani, 2019).

Researcher—Participant Power Imbalance

Minimizing power imbalances is another aspect of rapport. Initially, the researcher planned to introduce himself as only a graduate researcher instead of a Bangladeshi university faculty member, but he could not maintain this identity because the participants knew about him through Facebook. However, this identity helped him to access their recollections and narratives because they perceived university teachers as open-minded, progressive, and liberal, so they seemed very comfortable about talking with him. They shared some narratives for the first time with the researcher, including some that had never been disclosed with their peers. However, this strategy might not work in all situations, and some cases may raise ethical questions about power relations and consent between interviewer and interviewee. For example, when an adult researcher interviews a child, the interaction might be affected by the different social positioning of each party (Howlett, 2021; Khan, 2017a; Richardson et al., 2021).

Several researchers have argued that videoconference interviews may reduce rapport and are inappropriate for research problems related to special situations that are extremely socio-culturally sensitive, such as sexual abuse, sexuality, and drug abuse (Carr & Worth, 2001; Iacono et al., 2016; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Seitz, 2016), in terms of soliciting in-depth and emotional responses from participants. Sedgwick and Spiers (2009) note that the researcher's lack of physical presence may reduce sharing by participants who have sensitive information and have had difficult experiences. In contrast, for this Bangladeshi study, the Skype forum did not lead to a lack of trust by participants. Despite many sensitive

questions about participants' sexuality and private issues, the participants showed incredible enthusiasm. This may be because videoconference provides a para-social attachment instead of a physical attachment (Ahmed & Khan, 2012). Several other researchers also assert that participants did not feel shy or embarrassing when talking about sexually sensitive issues in videoconference (Ahmed & Khan, 2012; Howlett, 2021; Jenner & Myers, 2019). Upadhyay and Lipkovich (2020) confirmed in this context that participants "feel comfortable talking to researchers about sexual health and reproductive empowerment-related issues in their personal lives using a video meeting platform" (p.9). For example, it was difficult to wrap up the interviews within the designated timing, and most of the interviews exceeded this time by approximately 20–30 minutes. This experience is consistent with others who conducted Skype/online interviews, including Jowett et al. (2011), Sedgwick and Spiers (2009), and Iacono et al. (2016), who encountered a variety of challenges with keeping their interviews on track and on time.

Technological Disruptions and Emotion Management: Capturing the Essence of (Fully) Life Experiences

Technical disruptions related to the Skype forum did occur. Due to weak networks, the researcher encountered call drops during exchanges about emotional issues. For example, a call was dropped when a participant was talking about how he was abused at an early age by his close relatives. In this case, it was challenging to reconnect and return to the previous moment and remain at the same emotional level. As well, a lack of physical presence may create a colder environment. For instance, in the mentioned study, when a participant became emotional describing and recollecting his abuse by his close relatives if the researcher had been physically present, he could have supported the participant by using open body language, expressed caring and compassion, offering the participant tissues, rest periods, and the occasional physical touch as appropriate within the local cultural context (Sedgwick & Spiers, 2009). In the field setting of the said study, caring for someone during distresses was appreciated. Although compassion can be expressed through tone of voice and nonverbal facial expression via videoconferencing, none of the behaviors, as appropriate in a Bangladeshi context, that rely on tactile sensation could be expressed through this medium. In this respect, our study is consistent with the experiences of Sedgwick and Spiers (2009), who faced challenges with maintaining the tone of the interview during call drops.

Despite occasional technical challenges such as dropped calls, in most cases, the researcher resumed conversation successfully. While dropped calls have been seen to threaten rapport, they may also help to strengthen rapport, as the joint effort by participants and interviewers to repair the situation

may extend interactions and build intimacy (Roberts et al., 2021). In the case of our study, successfully resumed conversations may have occurred because of the good relations that had been formed with participants. According to Roulston (2010, p. 98), "For researchers using personal connections to informants as a means to recruit participants, relative intimacy and rapport with participants may enhance the generation of data in interview settings in ways not possible for 'outsider' [who is not well immersed in the interview setting] researchers." Interestingly, some of the participants expressed openly that they did not feel reluctant to share their private issues because, with a lack of FtF, an informal shield existed between researchers and participants. In addition, participants in a videoconference can choose to conduct the interview in their chosen environment (e.g., in their home or an outdoor area with privacy), which allows them to stay in a safe social space and keeps the interviewer from intervening in their personal physical environment (Hanna, 2012; Janghorban et al., 2014). Thus, in some circumstances, participants might feel freer to open themselves to a video screen instead of directly facing people. Ultimately, rapport building depends on social relations between the researcher and the participant, and this can occur either FtF or with videoconference interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Sedgwick & Spiers, 2009).

A failure to fully capture nonverbal cues, such as gesture, posture, body language, tone of voice, and eye contact, has been described as a weakness in videoconference interviews (Cohen et al., 2013; Hesse-Biber & Griffin, 2013; Novick, 2008), as nonverbal cues are important for rapport building (Iacono et al., 2016; Petralia, 2011; Seitz, 2016). Although the face is seen, important postural and expressive expressions of the whole body are missed in videoconference interviews. (Bayles, 2012; Curasi, 2001). However, these limitations can be muted if the researcher carefully listens to and observes participants' voices and facial expressions. As well, researchers should use their facial expressions deliberately to convey understanding and emotion (Iacono et al., 2016). Asking questions with many probes might help to overcome this drawback, but it is time-consuming (Curasi, 2001). In addition, Sedgwick and Spiers (2009, p. 6) are optimistic about videoconferencing interviews fulfilling the purpose of a FtF interview or considering the better alternative to FtF interviews.

The videoconference format might lead to increased "no shows" or "absenteeism" by participants (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Mann & Stewart, 2000; Weinmann et al., 2012). This is because it is easier for a participant to ignore a scheduled videoconference interview without feeling guilty than it would be to ignore a FtF interview because they are unlikely to encounter the researcher in person. For example, Deakin and Wakefield (2014) found that, while some participants did not attend their agreed-upon videoconference interview, there was no absentee in their FtF interviews. Our study provides a contract to the reflections of Deakin and

Wakefield (2014) in that the participants were enthusiastic about talking with the researcher, and the researcher did not face the issue of no-shows. Instead, our reflections in this context are consistent with those of Sedgwick and Spiers (2009), and Shuy (2001) 's, who described their videoconference interviews as taking more time than expected, indicating the rapport was strong, and the depth and detail of the generated data was not less rigorous than with FtF interviews.

Data Management and Analysis

A striking benefit of videoconference interviews is minimizing data management time because, without some minor corrections, the audio can be transcribed electronically using software (Curasi, 2001; Khan & MacEachen, 2019, 2021; Neville et al., 2016). But it is subject to ethical review, and the researcher needs prior permission from the participants. In the illustrative study, the researcher recorded the interviews using a separate voice recorder and transcribed the audio file after completing the interviews. The process was time-consuming; however, some researchers might feel more confident when analyzing data that is transcribed manually. In our experience, manual transcribing facilitated efficient coding and thematic analysis because of the in-depth familiarization and immersion of data. In terms of follow-up probes and member checks, videoconferences are useful for providing rapid and time-sensitive exchanges with respondents. For example, a researcher may wish to re-contact participants in a quest for theoretical and data clarification, and chatting via videoconference might be a great help in this context.

Of importance, a strategy might be helpful in analysis, in particular, that is using second researcher. Apart from this, it may help in report building, time management, fixing technical problems and beyond, in turn, facilitate to produce quality data. However, using a second researcher is subject to ethical approvals, feasibility, and budget. If everything allows, researchers may enjoy multiple benefits from this strategy beyond technical help. According to (Roberts et al., 2021), "[it] improved rapport with participants. Because the second researcher took detailed notes and attended to the technical issues of the interview, the interviewer could focus their attention on the participant, maintaining eye contact and employing facial expressing and nonverbal cues to indicate their attentiveness behaviors that are particularly crucial for building rapport in virtual interviews" (p.7). This scholar also assert that the second researcher work as a scribe, can take copious notes, capture visual cues, that are incredibly helpful in analysis data in terms of memo writing and reflexivity, leading to work as a backchannel to improve rigor and quality of data (Roberts et al., 2021).

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is a pillar of a whole research undertaking, from identifying the problem to the dissemination of the findings

(Iacono et al., 2016). Some scholar argue that ethical concerns for online interviews, including Skype interviews, are different than for FtF interviews (Paulus et al., 2017), and a researcher must realize this reality before embarking on Skype interviews (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). We disagree with these views, however, that the ethical concerns do not substantially vary between videoconferencing and FtF. Most of the standards of conventional FtF qualitative research, including informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, intellectual property, right to withdraw, unintended deception, and right to know about the potential benefit and risk of participation are applicable for Video conferencing. Of importance, some of the standards are more sensitive and fluid in videoconference interviews than in FtF interviews. For example, when we collect data online and preserve it using cloud storage, it blurs the public and private sphere leading to threatened privacy and confidentiality because data might be at risk of being hacked (Iacono et al., 2016). In this context, we did not use Skype's in-built voice recorder as it may induce risks in breaching participants' privacy. Instead, as earlier mentioned, we used a separate and portable voice recorder to minimize the risk and concerns. Scholars, who are experienced in using videoconference, underlined this cybersecurity, which requires thoughtful and careful attention to gain accurate and error-free data because the security system empowers participants and ensures privacy (Roberts et al., 2021). In addition, videoconferencing may save the lives of researchers, participants, or community people from the potential exposure to a deadly virus during pandemic, epidemic, or outbreak by reducing the risks of particular concerns, while social distancing is the utmost important way of living (Roberts et al., 2021).

As this research was conducted in a university in Canada, Skype interviewing was approved by the research ethics review board of the university. The researcher followed all standards and received permission to begin the interviews. Before the interview date, the interested participants were sent an informed consent letter/verbal script explaining the ins and outs of participation, making sure that they understood their rights, including their right to participate and right to withdraw during the interview without any penalty or any time after the interview. It is noteworthy that withdrawal is more convenient in Skype interviews than for FtF because it is just a matter of electronically disconnecting (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Janghorban et al., 2014; Neville et al., 2016).

As we mentioned above, Skype interviews pose unique ethical issues because a third party is involved in online conversation and storage (Jowett et al., 2011). In our view, researchers are somewhat vulnerable and unable to protect the data from hacking and exposure, though cybersecurity is getting stronger day by day (Jowett et al., 2011). The researcher had to face each subtle and nuanced issue of privacy and confidentiality dealing with the review board, including participants' feelings of cyber-insecurity. Possibly this is because this type of interview is somewhat recent. In the study,

the researcher encountered some critical questions from the ethics review board about how the data would be secured from the potential hackers, especially as the research questions involved sensitive and private issues. The researcher could not answer all of the ethics review board's questions directly but convinced them of the integrity of the method through a decent and sober discussion. As well, as the videoconference interview allows video recordings, alongside audio recording, some of the participants expressed legitimate concerns about how the video recordings happened and were stored. However, the researcher ensured them that he would not retain the video for research, but during the interview, he would take notes of nonverbal cues. In this context, Iacono et al. (2016) suggested, participants might be informed before the interview that online surveillance is beyond the researcher's control, and government agencies might be monitoring their conversation. In order to resolve this issue, the researcher opened a Skype account for each participant separately. Yet, it might be possible as the sample was small, it is not feasible when the large sample size exists. As interviews were recorded using a separate voice recorder, all interviews and information stored in Skype accounts were deleted and removed after the termination of interviews. This facilitated protection of online data for surveillance, though, we admit that it is insufficient.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this article, we contribute to discussions on videoconferencing as an alternative method of FtF interviewing in qualitative methodology literature by presenting critical reflections on the use of videoconference interviewing and discussing how these interviews can be useful in qualitative research for certain contexts. We find that, while virtual platforms for qualitative data collection raise some unique challenges, such as establishing rapport, research context and researcher preparation also play a role in creating successful interviews. We discuss how this technology provides unique opportunities, such as access to distant participants in a forum that allows for meaningful contact. In all, we content that teleconferencing approaches have expanded the methodological, epistemological, and ontological scope for social scientific research in general.

In our view, the potential for using videoconference interviews in qualitative research is expanding. With the COVID-19 pandemic, expenses of qualitative research, and environmental moves toward reduced travel, more researchers may opt to use this technology. As such, this qualitative data collection method requires further investigation and reflection. In particular, there remains a dearth of practical and ethical guiding principles in social science research on this tool. Specific guidelines on how videoconference interviews can be conducted to meet ethical standards in this context are needed. In addition, more reflection and reflexivity are needed about

the processes for conducting videoconference interviews and how technological advancements impact existing videoconference interview procedures and ethics.

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