

Chapter 27

Using Video Diaries in Social Science Research: Reflections on Past, Current, and Future Ethical Trends

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this chapter is the use of video-diaries in social research. The aim is to examine and reflect upon the particular ethical terrain and situated ethics of using visual diary method in social science research with different participant groups who arguably present specific ethical concerns, including children and older people, people with disabilities (either physical, cognitive, or psychiatric), and older people. The authors present a discussion of the specific ethical considerations arising from the use of this method due to the particular type of data it generates, namely audio and moving visual data. As such, the process of creating a video diary and the procedures involved in collecting and analysing video diary data are fundamentally different from a paper-based (non-digital) diary. For these reasons, it is important to step back and reflect on the situated ethics, including the digital ethics encountered when using this method.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss how visual research, and in particular, video diary method has been, and is used in social science research, and to endeavour to forecast future trends for this method. Part of this will involve examining and reflecting upon the situated ethics of using digitalised visual diary methods in social science research in varying contexts and with different participant groups, including, for example, in remote environments and with children and older people. Video diaries generate a huge range

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of ethical and practical considerations due to the digitised nature of the audio and visual data they generate. For example, how to engage with these data effectively, analyse and communicate findings from them whilst mindfully adhering to appropriate ethical procedures of informed consent and anonymity. As such, the process of creating a video diary and the procedures involved in collecting and analysing video diary data are fundamentally different from a paper-based (non-digital) diary. For these reasons, it is important to step back and reflect on the situated ethics, including the digital ethics encountered when using this method.

Evolution of Diary Method

Asking participants to keep a record of their thoughts, actions, behaviours, or feelings about a topic (i.e. diary method) is a method of data collection that has been used by researchers for more than a century. One of the earliest diary studies was conducted in London by the Fabian Society. In this research, 43 women living on a low-income were asked to keep a record of their expenditure for one week (Reeves, 1913: 11). Although the term ‘diary method’ was not used by researchers, record/diary keeping was the basic design. Since then, the term ‘diary method’ has evolved and thousands of diary studies have been conducted in a wide range of disciplines, on various topics and in various ways with different research diary types; for example, structured diaries collecting numerical information (such as expenditure) as well as unstructured or semi-structured diaries more typically situated in qualitative research. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in any detail how diary method is used in social science research; besides, strong accounts are already provided in the literature (see, for example, Alaszewski, 2006; Bartlett & Milligan, 2015). The focus of this chapter is on the evolution and use of video diary methods in social science research.

Video Diary Method

Video diary method, asking participants to maintain a record of their thoughts, feelings and actions using an electronic filming device (such as a smartphone or flip cam) over a certain period of time, has been growing in popularity among social scientists in the last twenty years. As a research instrument, video diary method is an integral part of the qualitative researcher’s toolkit. The self-disclosing element and storified content means it has close connections to narrative methods. Video diary can be characterised in terms of a ‘participant-generated video account’ of a given topic or experience (Gibson, 2005: 35) – that is, participants are in control of data collection, rather than the researcher. For example, in one video diary study of open water swimming, participants (who were sea swimmers) were asked to wear a GoPro camera and make a video diary entry before they swam, during the swim, and after they got out (Bates and Moles, 2021). One participant made much longer diary entries than the others.

Whatever the topic or experience, video diaries are defined by the following methodological characteristics: *regularity* – participants are asked to organise their entries over a certain period (e.g. once a day for a month, or twice a day for a week); *private*: a video diary is typically generated by an individual on their own; *contemporaneous* – the recording is made at the same time or very close to the time that events occurred; *in situ* – the recording is made in the same place that the experience occurred (Bates and Moles, 2021); *multisensorial* – video diaries provide data that are visible and moving in both a changing and arousing sense. *Integrated*: video diaries are often combined with other methods, such as semi-structured interviews or focus groups, to ensure the fullest picture as possible is gained of the topic

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