Researcher perceptions and choices of interview media: The case of accounting research

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Abstract

This study offers foundational insights into the ways in which perceptions of different interview media – principally, face-to-face, telephone and videoconferencing channels of communication – may influence researcher choices and practices. Informed by the reflections of 23 senior accounting researchers, our evidence identifies a duality of practices in the usage of different interviewing media, influenced primarily through the role played by experience, which informs perceptions upon which practices are based. We discuss this duality of practices in terms of Information Richness Theory and Channel Expansion Theory, and offer further insights into the factors that influence and shape researchers' perceptions of the contextual suitability of particular media available to interview-based accounting research.

Paper classification: Research paper.

Keywords: interviews; qualitative accounting research; qualitative research; research methods.

1. Introduction

Research method texts as well as journal articles provide considerable advice for qualitative researchers in various facets of the interview method. Such advice includes guidance in developing research questions (Qu and Dumay, 2011), how questions might be posed, written, and delivered (Kvale, 2007), the extent to which interviews should be structured (Ahrens and Chapman, 2006), establishing rapport with interviewees (Fontana and Frey, 1998), learning to deal with the unexpected (Parker, 2012), and, what generally constitutes a 'good' interview (Patton, 2002). For the most part, such discussions surrounding the design and execution of interview-based studies inherently assume face-to-face channels of communication as the default means of interviewing (Parker, 2014).

However, advances in communications technology have to an extent, mitigated the 'tyranny of distance' by enhancing the accessibility of researchers to interviewees as data sources previously prohibited for reasons relating to both time and expense. In an increasingly global research community, researchers now have the option of using telephone as well as videoconferencing mediums in addition to traditional face-to-face means through which to collect data. Yet, discussions concerning the choice and comparability of face-to-face, telephone and videoconferencing media in qualitative interviews are to date, limited (Novick, 2008), and have not generated the critical discussion that is merited (Sweet, 2002).[1] The equivalence of these forms of data collection has rarely been questioned in the literature, and our understanding of what implications this may have for research practice, is largely unknown.

The availability of telephone and videoconferencing communication media [2] as an alternative to face-to-face interviewing, gives rise to a conundrum that has yet to be extensively addressed in the qualitative methodology literature. On the one hand, it might be argued that data collected via these

[1] While there is a substantial body of literature examining the traditional face-to-face interview (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), as well as telephone interviews (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013), and interviews by means of videoconferencing technologies (Hanna, 2012), there is a dearth of research comparing and contrasting the conduct of interviews via multiple communication medias within a single research project (Opdenakker, 2006).

[2] For the purposes of this paper, we use the terms, 'media' and 'channel' interchangeably.

three channels may be regarded as largely equivalent or substitutable. On the other hand, it may be that face-to-face, telephone and videoconferencing modalities are appreciably different in the nature of the evidence they are able to collect, and the resulting interpretations that may ensue.

In the instance in which different interview modalities are used, particularly within the same study, the implications arising from the choice of media by which interview data are harvested may very well be salient. Resolution of this conundrum is important as it relates directly to critiques of the 'credibility', 'confirmability', 'trustworthiness', 'consistency', 'authenticity', 'plausibility', 'convincingness' and 'dependability' of qualitative research (Parker, 2012, 2014). Indeed, if 'the type of data collected is central to the construction of credible qualitative research' (Parker, 2012, p. 59), directing attention to the potential variability in evidence collected via alternative communication media is a priority.

In our review of the published literature in this area, it is evident that qualitative researchers do use various interview media, but virtually without comment on selection or comparison. This silence suggests that qualitative researchers may not consider that differences between interview media are significant or important. However, theory suggests otherwise. Indeed, at least two theoretical vantage points, Information Richness Theory (IRT) and Channel Expansion Theory (CET), speak to the potential implications of different communication media in the acquisition of qualitative evidence garnered via interviews.

IRT (Daft and Lengel, 1986) has served as a predictive theory on how individuals make communication media choices. This theoretical stance posits that individuals would prefer 'rich' media for those tasks higher in equivocality or ambiguity. According to IRT, face-to-face communication would be characterized as 'rich' media while modern information technology such as videoconferencing could be classified as 'lean' media. In contrast, CET suggests that richness perceptions are associated with and conditioned by specific levels of prior experience with usage of the particular media (Carlson and Zmud, 1999). Hence, the perception of media richness may be strengthened as individuals gain exposure to and experience in using a particular medium. From the

standpoint of CET, individual's media choices follow not from the properties of the communication medium alone, but also from their prior experiences with that media.

Thus, whilst IRT emphasizes the significance of richness in the communication channel by which interviews may be conducted, CET posits that experience is likely to be the dominant influence in determining the choice of media. These contradictory theoretical positions give rise to a tension with which this study seeks to engage. Addressing this tension underlies our study's central aim of exploring how face-to-face, telephone and videoconferencing media characteristics and qualitative researchers' experiences combine to shape their perceptions and choices of interview media.

Specifically, we direct our attention primarily to those types of interviews most commonly used in qualitative accounting research – semi-structured, and unstructured ethnographic interview processes (Qu and Dumay, 2011). To this end, our study is aimed at penetrating the experiences, meanings and reflections of a purposively selected sample of established researchers who have published studies discussing the role, nature and application of qualitative methods and methodology in accounting. The attitudes and expectations of such individuals are arguably influential in the construction of qualitative accounting research methodology. Capturing their assessments therefore provides a first level perspective on this issue.

2. Informing theoretical perspectives and relevant prior literature

2.1 Information Richness Theory

The argument, that 'interviews through all media are not necessarily alike' is theoretically justified by reference to information richness theory (IRT) (Daft and Lengel, 1986, 1990). IRT is predicated on the premise that although information is obtained through particular communication channels, these channels differ in their ability to carry 'rich' information. The richness of a medium is a function of four factors: 'capacity for immediate feedback, the diversity of cues, personalization, and language variety' (Daft and Lengel, 1986, p.560). Specifically, communication channels are considered to

possess a higher degree of richness if they provide the opportunity to receive instant feedback; convey multiple cues, such as body language, facial expressions, or tone of voice; offer the ability for the use of natural language to convey subtleties and nuances; and enable a personal focus in communications by their ability to convey personal feeling and emotions (Dennis and Kinney, 1998).

Thus, richness is 'perceived multidimensionally in terms of the information carrying capacity of media' (D'Ambra, Rice and O'Connor, 1998, p. 164). According to the theory, messages should be communicated on channels with sufficient and appropriate media richness capacities. Information conveyed on inappropriate channels may be misinterpreted by recipients or may be otherwise ineffective with regard to their intended purpose (Trevino et al., 1990).

Although interviews are generally employed because of the richness they can capture in settings of high equivocality or complexity,[3] interview methods need not be, and are not restricted to such contexts. The extent of 'richness' or 'depth' desired will, in broad terms, be dependent upon the complexity of the phenomenon under study and the type of questions being asked. Notably, Lillis and Mundy (2005, p.132) argue such complexity may be viewed on a continuum, and that in addition to 'highly complex real-world events and interactions', 'qualitative insights of relatively limited depth on issues of relatively limited complexity' can and are, also commonly captured using interview methods. Thus, IRT would suggest different communication channels by which interviews may be conducted possess a greater or lesser propensity to address research questions of varying complexity, depending on the richness or 'information-carrying capacity' of the channel of communication that is used.

Research investigating the relative effectiveness of various communication media in interviewing demonstrate the central importance of richness as contended by IRT. For example, face-to-face channels are regarded as the richest medium because in addition to the words conveyed in the course

[3] Daft and Lengel (1986) do not clearly differentiate between equivocality and complexity but use the two concepts interchangeably. As Sheer and Chen (2004, p. 79) observe, 'The relationship between media richness and complexity is comparable to that between media richness and equivocality: rich media is used for complex topics and lean media for simple topics. Although complexity seems to be more subjective or perception-dependent than is equivocality'. For the purposes of this paper, we follow this understanding of equivocality and complexity.

of the interview, they allow the receiver to access 'additional' data in the form of eye movement, voice patterns, body language and mood (Markus, 1994). In contrast, the medium of the telephone as a means by which to conduct interviews has been cited as problematic. Most commonly because the lack of face-to-face contact may restrict the development of rapport and a 'natural' encounter (Gillham, 2005), limitations on the depth of meaning that can be conveyed because of the absence of visual cues (Fielding and Thomas, 2008), and because of the loss in spontaneity as compared with face-to-face conversations (Sellen, 1995).

Similarly, the more commonly cited downsides of interviewing via videoconferencing typically relate to technological or signal problems which make the building of rapport difficult, and disrupt the flow of the interview. Such problems include 'drop outs', where the conversation has to stop because the video freezes or where the other person is unable to hear, and the need to turn off video in order to enhance sound quality, poor image quality and transmission lag (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013). In addition, it has been noted that seeing oneself on screen can often be a source of unease and anxiety, so that some interviewers as well as interviewees may not feel as comfortable working through the online medium, affecting their participation and engagement in the study (Hesse-Biber and Griffin, 2013). These examples, although not exhaustive, point to the inherent richness characteristics of communication channels as pivotal considerations in researchers' rationales for their choices of interview media.

2.2 Channel Expansion Theory

IRT has received considerable empirical support in a range of disciplinary literatures including, management (D'Urso and Rains, 2008), communication (van den Hoof, Groot and de Jorge, 2005), information systems and technology (D'Ambra, et al., 1998; Leonardi and Barley, 2008), and accounting (Marginson, 2006). Nevertheless, empirical findings grounded on this theoretical vantage

point have been inconsistent **(**see, Markus, 1994), and show only partial support for some of the central underlying assumptions IRT.

Examples include the findings that particular media characteristics are fixed and substantially differ only across different media (Fulk, Schmitz and Steinfield, 1990), that richness perceptions for a specific communication channel can be dynamic within individuals, changing as their relevant knowledge bases and perceived social influences change (Rice, et al., 1994), and that individuals may simultaneously possess different richness perceptions for the same channel, depending on the situational contexts they confront (Markus 1994). These inconsistencies have encouraged a reconsideration of the descriptive and explanatory capacity of IRT.

Channel Expansion Theory (CET) (Carlson and Zmud, 1999), has represented an attempt to refine and extend IRT by broadening individuals' conception of media richness, to include experiential factors as an explanation for how a given medium's richness is perceived. Developed in response to the sometimes-contradictory empirical findings of studies employing IRT, particularly in relation to electronic communication media (Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997), CET posits that in addition to the inherent characteristics of particular communication channels, media richness perceptions are also strongly influenced by prior experience.

Specifically, four forms of experience in particular are instrumental in *shaping the perceptions* of media richness: experience with the channel, experience with the topic under discussion, experience with the communication context, and experience with other communication participants (D'Urso and Rains, 2008). Experience with a given communication *channel* strongly influences the way characteristics of that channel are defined and potentially exploited by interviewers. Opportunities offered by the channel therefore depend strongly on the interviewer's experience and expertise with it (channel experience). Interviewers with experience in a given *topic* have developed a knowledge base for that topic. This topic knowledge base enables the encoding of messages with richer meanings for other communication partners (topic experience). Experience in the same *industry*, or in organisations

using similar business processes would better enable interviewers to formulate appropriate questions and evaluate responses, than interviewers who have little or no prior contextual experience (context experience). *Co-communicator* experience enables the development of a form of 'shorthand' that facilitates the conveyance of more informational cues than would be otherwise possible (participant experience).

Through these experiences, CET argues that individuals develop associated knowledge bases that may be used to more effectively encode and decode rich messages conveyed within any given channel (van den Hoof, et al., 2005). In this way, experiential factors may explain differences in richness perceptions beyond those offered by IRT. Therefore, a particular medium may be perceived as lean in one instance and as rich in another, depending on the inherent characteristics of the medium, as well as on the researcher's prior experience with the media. Moreover, perceptions of media characteristics are not invariant; they may vary between individuals and even over time for any one individual (Carlson and Zmud, 1999).

Thus, in highlighting the importance of experience in shaping how an individual develops richness perceptions for a given channel, CET regards communication richness as following not only from the intrinsic properties of the communication medium alone (as posited by IRT), but also through the social, experience-based constructions of communication channels and their use. As shown in Figure 1, conceptually CET represents a type of cybernetic feedback loop which considers feedback as a 'signal, mechanism and process, which controls the system within itself' (Pitkänen, and Lukka, 2011).

**** Insert Figure 1 here ****

Central to this theoretical position, is its emphasis on 'the ability of individuals to question and reflect upon information from the environment' (Cornelissen and Durand, 2014, p. 1010). As depicted in Figure 1, in this cyclical feedback loop, perceptions (of the researcher) are informed by experiences (of the channel, the message topic, the organizational context, and, the communication partner), and

consequently, lead to particular practices (or usage of a particular media channel) (Fernandez et al., 2013).

Thus, CET is predicated on the idea that perceptions of media richness are progressively enhanced by reflection on the feedback obtained through experiences gained, which consequently leads to changed practices. CET can therefore be described as a learning mechanism of acting and reflecting, and augments IRT by emphasizing the central importance of experience in determining perceptions of media richness, and as such, points to the significance of 'subjective' interpretations of richness that will supplement (and may not necessarily conform to) the 'objective' characterizations of media richness posited by IRT.

2.3 Neglected Comparability

Implicit in the above discussion is that qualitative researchers utilizing interviews have a variety of data collection options available to them. Although traditional face-to-face interviews remain prominent and the use of telephone interviews has increased appreciably over the past two decades (see Chenhall and Smith, 2011), videoconferencing also has the potential to facilitate a further connection between researcher and interview participant.

Largely absent from discussions of qualitative interview-based research designs is the extent to which the relative advantages and disadvantages of the three interactive media available to qualitative accounting researchers are in reality, salient. This question warrants consideration not least because of the contrasting theoretical predictions and explanations offered by IRT and CET. On the one hand, IRT focuses on media richness as the basis for researchers' choice of media for interviewing, with media ranking higher in richness perceived to be preferable to less rich media. On the other hand, the tenets of CET suggest that experiential factors are likely to influence perceptions of 'appropriate' media through which interviews should be conducted. In short, this theoretical tension can be reduced

to a question of how IRT and CET may separately and/or jointly combine to inform researcher's preferences for, and usage of, particular media in interviewing.

More than merely introspective reflections, a deeper understanding of these preferences and the basis upon which they are constructed has implications for doctoral students, early career researchers as well as more experienced qualitative researchers. They offer the potential to contribute to our stock of knowledge regarding interview-based research design, as well as the process of undertaking qualitative research.

3. Research design

Evidence for this study was based upon the views and opinions of individuals who have demonstrated expertise in interview-based qualitative research in accounting. These participants have, over the fifteen year period between 1988 and 2013, not only published qualitative research studies, but have also specifically published methodological discussions concerning the nature and application of qualitative research methods, in one or more of the following nine journals: *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *Contemporary Accounting Research*, *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, *Management Accounting Research*, *Journal of Management Accounting Research*, *The British Accounting Review*, *Critical Perspective on Accounting*, *Behavioral Research in Accounting*, and *Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management*. This collection of journals provides a significant yet manageable selection of publications of qualitative research in accounting (Chenhall and Smith, 2011), and contain many of the arguably referenced and influential papers relating to qualitative research methods, and in particular, the use of interviews.

Of 40 individuals identified as meeting these criteria, 23 agreed to participate in this study. With their agreement, the participating researchers and their institutional affiliation as at the date of our consultation with them are listed in Appendix A. The choice of these particular informants in providing the evidence base upon which this study is founded employs purposive sampling in which

we targeted interviewees based on their qualitative research publication records and demonstrated contributions to methodological discourse in the accounting literature.

As further justification for our selecting this group of researchers and eliciting their views experiences and attitudes, we assessed evidence of their positioning to influence upon the global community of qualitative researchers. That influence has arguably extended beyond their citable publications to include their journal editorships and reviewing work, doctoral thesis supervisions and examining, conference presentations, doctoral and emerging scholar colloquia presentations, and more. These multiple criteria in combination were employed to govern purposive selection of interviewees for this study.

Questions used to steer discussions with these researchers are presented in Appendix B. The interview guide was supplemented by follow-up probe questioning to deepen secured detail, examples and interviewer understanding of interviewee responses (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). The duration of interviews ranged from 31 to 98 minutes, with the average interview lasting 52 minutes. The interviews were conducted between January and March 2014. In order to encourage frank and open dialogue, interviews were not digitally recorded.[4] Detailed notes, however, were taken during, and directly after each interview. Particular effort was made to make a note of pertinent verbatim quotations.[5] Interview notes ranged from three to five pages of hand-written summaries. Of the 23 interviews conducted, two were undertaken in person, nine via telephone, and 12 via videoconferencing (Skype). For the 21 telephone/Skype interviews, interviewees were given the option of participating by telephone or by Skype.

In common with other forms of data analysis, the process we employed involved data reduction or summarization, classification and interpretation. The interview data was analysed with a view to

[4] The subject matter could not be considered sensitive per se. However, given that we requested permission from interviewees to disclose their identities, and in view of the relatively limited number of interviews we conducted, we felt this introduced a degree of sensitivity that we wished to mitigate. Thus, our intent in electing to take field-notes in the interview discussions was that interviewees would feel less constrained knowing their comments were not being recorded.

[5] We were particularly attentive in recording (by hand) of pertinent verbatim quotations using a form of shorthand abbreviations and symbols as interviews progressed.

identifying patterns in the explanations provided by interviewees, and to draw out both common, as well as unique themes. The conduct of the interviews and analysis of the interview notes were undertaken by the same member of the research team to ensure consistency and uniformity in interpretation. Both members of the research team collaborated on the analysis of the empirical data and related findings.

To preserve anonymity of attributing particular quotes to particular interviewees, although quotes cited in the paper are provided with an accompanying unique identifier, these identifiers do not necessarily correspond to the order of the interviewees listed in Appendix A. Thus, for example, the quote labelled "Interviewer A" should not be attributed to the first interviewee listed in Appendix A.

4. Findings

In this section, we present the predominant issues and themes emerging from our interview discussions. In aiming to gain insights into how face-to-face, telephone and videoconferencing media characteristics and accounting researchers' experiences combine to shape perceptions and choices of interview media, the evidence presented in this section is primarily directed to unpacking the following principal questions. First, to what extent is such an investigation worthy of examination? Second, how do informants to this study perceive alternative media characteristics? Third, how has the experience of informants with these media forms influenced these perceptions?

4.1 A non-trivial question?

Given the dearth of relevant research on this topic, our opening question was to ascertain the extent to which participants felt the broad purpose of this study was worthy of scholarly investigation. This question recognizes that the limited empirical and theoretical attention directed to the influence of interview media effects on the quality of interview data may signify a legitimate gap in our understanding, but may alternatively represent a trivial question.

In virtually all interviews, researchers indicated an investigation of interview media effects in interviewing, and the implications for qualitative accounting research was a question warranting consideration:

> 'I'm not sure that it is trivial – in fact I think it's enormously important. There's lots of factors that affect the quality and confidence that you can place on interview data, and this is one that has received insufficient attention' (Interviewee K).

In addition to the need to address what was perceived to be a gap in interview-based research writings in accounting, issues of rigor were repeatedly cited by interviewees as a vindication of this study. The comment of one researches illustrates the perceived importance of this issue, and appears to reflect the ongoing qualitative researchers' agenda of justifying and defending qualitative research methods in the face of a still dominant quantitative positivist accounting research paradigm internationally:

> 'US journals increasingly require more rigorous procedures and protocols for qualitative papers - one that mirrors the need for verification, credibility and validity – just like quantitative studies. So for this reason if no other, this is an important study' (Interviewee B).

Despite this observation, however, it is necessary to critically reflect on the credibility of this apparent affirmation of the significance of this study. In particular, any potential concerns about social desirability and self-selection bias warrant a response[6]. The effect of social desirability bias - where respondents either deliberately or unconsciously provide a biased representation of the facts (Silva and Ferreira; 2010) - is a potential consideration. Given that those academics participating in this study were known to the authors, their favourable evaluation of the importance of the study may be attributable to their familiarity with us as researchers. Similarly, self-selection bias where interviewees determine whether or not they wish to participate in a study (James, 2006), might exist because interviewees who agreed to be interviewed might be more likely to think positively of the significance of the study. The importance of this issue is highlighted by Parker (2012) who draws attention to the pivotal need in qualitative research in accounting to demonstrate credibility, arguing the fundamental

[6] We are grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting further discussion of this point.

tests to be met are whether the accounts rendered are convincing in the sense of being authentic, plausible, and convincingly drawn. Moreover, as Qu and Dumay (2011) contend, the interview transcript is not a mirror of reality but rather a text that needs to be subjectively evaluated, and claims that can be made from interpreting interview data must be tempered with a disclaimer about the objective truth of the empirical findings. Mindful of the above issues, we employed purposive sampling to select interviewees most likely to be able to provide information relevant to this study's objectives.

A prima facie assumption in qualitative research generally is that "the interviewee is assumed to have provided the researcher with reliable data about a phenomenon as long as there are no apparent reasons to believe otherwise" (Alvesson, 2003, p. 28). In response, we assessed all interviews for any evidence of disingenuous opinions, contradictory statements, self-serving propaganda, or interviewer effect. As far as we were able, we could not identify any evidence of any of our interviewees intentionally distorting or misrepresenting their perceptions. Furthermore, we would expect that not all researchers would hold the view that this study's aim is significant; however, it is the views of those that *do* recognise the importance of this research that our investigation sought to capture. Thus, the issue of social desirability or self-selection bias is perhaps less pertinent in this investigation in which the sampling frame was constructed purposively, deliberately, and for specific reasons.

4.2 Perceptions of alternative media characteristics

In most instances, when asked to evaluate the three interview media in terms of their perceived media characteristics, researchers generally ranked face-to-face most highly, followed by videoconferencing followed by telephone, in that order. Reasons underlying the strong preference for face-to-face encounters were typified by the following comment:

> '…you can't beat actually being there, can you?' (Interviewee L).

‘Richness’ was a central criterion by which participants assess media characteristics and reflected their preparedness to outline a continuum of richness along which different interview media could be located. Capturing such richness was seen to be readily achievable via face-to-face interviewing, but less so via telephone and videoconferencing interview channels:

> ‘It’s really hard to define, but you kind of feel as though you are missing something by not being there. I’d say what you miss out on is what everyone calls ‘richness’, and that’s one of the advantages of using face-to-face interview methods’ (Interviewee V).

The capacity to observe and interpret non-verbal cues, and more easily establish trust and rapport with interviewees was instrumental to this construction of richness. It was also seen as the major advantage of face-to-face interviews over that of telephone interviews, and to a lesser extent, videoconferencing. Furthermore, the need to optimize such richness by virtue of the particular communication channel was considered as central to facilitate discussions of sensitive issues with interviewees:

> ‘Asking people to share their opinions and judgements requires establishing a relationship – it’s crucial for when you get into controversial or contentious topics. That’s why I prefer to make personal contact’ (Interviewee U).

These opinions highlighted the understandings of richness as encompassing the capacity to convey and appreciate personal feelings and emotions, supporting immediate bi-directional feedback, and the opportunity to interpret multiple tone, gesture, body and language cues. The richness afforded by face-to-face interviews was also perceived to include symbolically projecting to interviewees, the researcher’s serious interest in their views and observations. Furthermore, our informants saw the physical visit as an opportunity to prepare for conducting an interview, sensitize their receptivity to what interviewees may have to say, and precipitating a questioning of underlying meanings and alternative explanations conveyed in the interview. This extended to physically observing the interviewees’ organizational and cultural context, and opening up the possibility of further guided conversations or informal discussions before and after a formal interview event, just by virtue of their physical presence:

> ‘Some of the best interviews I’ve done have been after the ‘official’ end of the discussion once the recorder has been turned off – this is what being there in person does for you – the interviewee is more relaxed and very often gives you an enormous amount of information. You don’t get the opportunity to do this with phone or Skype – once the formalities are over, so is the chance to capture the good stuff’ (Interviewee E).

Although the predilection for face-to-face interviews was clear in our discussions, interviewees did not dismiss telephone and videoconferencing interviews but saw them as possessing distinct advantages in particular contexts and settings. The metaphorical reflection of one academic summarized this view in a particularly eloquent way:

> ‘It depends on the question you’re asking. You don’t always need a Rolls Royce to get to work’ (Interviewee H).

Telephone and videoconferencing media were considered appropriate for situations in which topics of conversation are of lesser sensitivity or primarily descriptive. Cited examples included collecting factual or detailed information, contextualizing background data, and providing an initial scoping of issues that might be potentially relevant. This was contrasted with the perceived greater suitability of face-to-face interviews for sensitive issues, or when seeking deeper level interpretations:

> ‘For benign topics where the sensitivity of the topic is low, I don’t think it matters too much what medium is used. Where the sensitivity of the subject is high, face-to-face interviews are necessary, as you need to build up trust with the interviewee. I’d say that’s probably far more difficult across a telephone line or a video link’ (Interviewee J).

Hence, our informants expressed a clear inclination to interact via the face-to-face means when situations or issues were deemed highly equivocal, or where there might be a danger of misinterpretation by either party to an interview. In contrast, if issues were considered benign or of low sensitivity, then communication channels perceived as less rich, such as telephone or videoconferencing, might be employed.

In addition to handling issues of low sensitivity, another scenario in which face-to-face encounters were not considered critical included situations in which interviewees were known to the interviewer. Familiarity with an interviewee did not prevent spontaneity or richness of data obtained through telephone and videoconferencing interview media. In such instances, personal focus, immediacy of

feedback and conveying multiple cues were seen to be equally possible between face-to-face and alternative communication channels. That is, the richness of media communications could be maintained between the parties as their mutual familiarity might compensate for the inherent limitations in the richness capacity of a particular channel of communication.

Thus, the perceptions of our informants about communication channel characteristics, and the amenability of different channels by which interviews may be undertaken are largely consistent with the tenets of IRT. Reconciling these perceptions with the *practices* of our informants, however, is by no means unproblematic. Taken together with the opinions articulated and reported above, Table 1 provides a summary of how our informants use face-to-face, telephone and videoconferencing means by which to undertake interview-based research. What is clear is the significant predilection of our informants for interviewing via face-to-face rather than telephone or videoconferencing means.

Face-to-face interviewing has been employed by all our informants, telephone interviewing by just over 20% of informants, and interviewing using videoconferencing by less than 10% of informants. Table 1 provides stark insights into the dominant rationale that appears to explain the limited actual usage of media other than that of face-to-face. This is despite researchers' undertaking studies in which opportunities for using 'less rich' media would, according to IRT, be sufficient to achieve the aims of the research, or answer the research question under consideration.

**** Insert Table 1 here ****

As we have seen, one of the fundamental tenets of IRT is that richness is a multidimensional construct, based on four factors: 'the opportunity for timely feedback, the ability to convey multiple cues, the tailoring of messages to personal circumstances, and the ability to encompass language variety' (Huber and Daft, 1987, p. 152). As shown in Table 2, these four factors were repeatedly raised in our interviews as significant in evaluating the perceived richness of the three interview media.

**** Insert Table 2 here ****

We were acutely aware of O'Dwyer's caution that, 'there can be a temptation to "cherry pick" from elements of interview transcriptions to either support or refute the core constructs in the analytical theme, and to try and make descriptions "fit" into the lens being used' (O'Dwyer, 2004, p.403). However, the sample of responses presented in Table 2 is representative of interviewees' descriptions of 'richness'. Far from a selective reporting of findings that concur with the theoretical positions of IRT, the comments represented in Table 2 demonstrate the significance of the four constituent elements of richness in influencing overall perceptions of our informants.

In summary, what is clear from the accounts provided by our informants is the perception that face-to-face generally, but by no means exclusively, is seen to provide the richest information in interview-based research. Nevertheless, telephone and videoconferencing as a means by which interviews may be undertaken are also perceived to be appropriate under particular circumstances. However, perception is not necessarily reality in terms of interview media choices. To gain further understandings of the relationship between perception and practice, we turn to a closer look at researcher experiences with various media forms.

4.3 Researcher direct experiences with media forms

Researchers' personal experiences appeared to condition their perceptions of different media characteristics, and their attitudes towards them. However, although closely related as part of a circular feedback loop (as depicted in Figure 1), perceptions and experience are different things. In Table 3, we present an overview of prior experiences of our informants in terms of different interview media, and their perceptions of the richness of these media related to the four experiential factors derived from the theoretical perspective of CET.

Based on the reported usage of these different media (as shown in Table 1), our sample can be divided into two distinct groups. One group comprises those researchers who have experience in only face-to-face interviewing. We label these researchers, the 'majority group' as they include the majority of

individuals (18) comprising our total sample. The other group includes five individuals who have had experience in interviewing in telephone and videoconferencing, in addition to face-to-face communication channels. We label these researchers, the 'minority group'.

**** Insert Table 3 here ****

Table 3 provides insights into how the differing experiences of the majority and minority groups may influence their perceptions of media richness. The voices of both majority and minority groups reveal both the perceived advantages as well as the disadvantages associated with the richness of different communication media.

Researcher familiarity and comfort with the communication channel, expectations about richness, situational factors relating to the context of the interview setting and the research question under investigation, and assumptions about interviewee preferences represent the predominant perceptions voiced by the majority group. For the minority group, the benefits of alternatives to face-to-face interviewing emerged as important, particularly in terms of physical presence (of interviewer and of interviewee preferences), and the need to overcome the inherent challenges associated with telephone and videoconferencing media in unpacking discussions relating to the topic and the study context. Physical presence was acknowledged by most minority group informants as important. However, interviewer presence through verbal (telephone) or audio/visual means (videoconferencing) was generally seen to potentially offset the absence of a face-to-face discussion:

> 'I've found that being detached through phone or Skype can actually foster rapport – you can get to the point of the interview quicker as phone and Skype seem to have an immediacy about them. You also have to *consciously* and *deliberately* probe for elements of context to compensate for not being physically present' (Interviewee A).

Finally, at a broader level, practical considerations were also seen by the minority group to influence the decision to interview via the telephone, or by videoconferencing as an alternative to face-to-face interactions:

> ‘Our research is becoming more global – it makes practical sense to contact people by phone or by Skype – I look at it not as a compromise, but more of an opportunity for researchers’ (Interviewee O).

Importantly, however, the perceptions formed by the minority group were based on their direct experience with all three interview media. In contrast, the perceptions of the majority group were based largely on assumptions and general impressions about how interviews ‘should best’ be conducted. These observations underscore the point that the matter of which channel of communication is preferable is bounded not only by the nature of any particular medium, but also by interviewer experience with it.

5. Discussion

On the basis of our findings described above, the message clearly emerging from our study is one of a tension between the perceptions of our informants on the one hand, and what they practice, on the other. Consistent with IRT, our informants readily acknowledge differences in the richness of communication media. However, despite this widespread acknowledgement, face-to-face interviewing is by far the ‘medium of choice’ as expressed by interviewees representing the majority group. For these individuals, our evidence suggests that statements of belief about the importance of information richness are largely overruled by their actual practice, namely making media choices based on their prior experience. For the majority group, this experience has been confined to face-to-face interviewing, thereby conditioning and effectively limiting their perceptions of appropriate interview media and consequent interview practices.

In contrast, the minority group of researchers have used telephone and videoconferencing in addition to face-to-face communication channels in their interviewing. For this group, perceptions of information richness *are* informed by practice and experience. In this section, we draw on the theoretical positions of IRT and CET to provide insights into this apparent paradox, in particular, the ‘fit’ between our empirical observations and the tenets of IRT and CET.

5.1 Boundary conditions of IRT as applied to interviewing

The evidence collected in the current study is consistent with the premise underlying IRT insofar as the recognition that different communication media are perceived to differ in the amount of information they are able to convey. In terms of such information carrying capacity or richness, face-to-face interviews are perceived to be the 'gold standard', and thus, the 'medium of choice' when it comes to researcher's preferences in data collection. This perception reflects the contention that personal interaction usually yields the richest data (Hine, 2004). Relative to face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews are regarded by participants in this study as lean (less rich). With an information-carrying capacity generally perceived to higher than that of telephone, but lower than that of face-to-face encounters, our informants generally perceive videoconferencing to fall somewhere in-between these two extremes.

However, our study also demonstrates that, to the extent that IRT accurately describes the choice of medium by which interviews *can be* conducted, this theoretical vantage point has limited application for the majority group. In practice, what individuals in the majority group *actually do* in terms of media selection appears, on the face of it, to be decoupled from *their perceptions* of media richness. One potential explanation for such apparent decoupling is that, contrary to one fundamental assumption underlying IRT, media richness is *not* an invariant property of media channels, and what constitutes 'richness' is very much in the eye of the beholder. Thus, a deeper understanding of the basis upon which choices of interview media are, in reality made, requires more than the vantage point of IRT is able to provide. This limitation of IRT leads us to consider the role of researchers' experiences in making such choices.

5.2 The pivotal role of experience

The preceding discussion draws attention to the fallacy of conceptualizing and stereotyping media richness in apparently neat, clear-cut categories. To do so, at least in the context of the current study is likely to lead to an underestimation of the complexity of researcher choices. As indicated by our

findings, IRT provides a potential explanation for researchers' *perceptions* of interview media, but not their *choices*. Moreover, it remains largely silent as to the arguably more fundamental question of *why* there exists an observed disconnect between perceptions and practices. As a theory that engages directly with the central role that experience plays in influencing media usage, the use of CET can augment our understanding of why such a disconnect may prevail.

According to CET, media characteristics vary perceptually from individual to individual and also in an individual over time. Hence, a given medium may be perceived as lean in one instance and rich in another, depending on the level of the user's prior experience. The four primary experiential factors influential in shaping how individuals perceive a medium's richness (experience with the channel, experience with the communication topic, experience of the context within which the communication occurs, and experience with one's communication partner), were all cited by participants in this study as significant. Based on our interview evidence, the influence that these experiential factors exert in shaping perceptions of a channel's richness, and hence the usage of these channels, is far from negligible. Indeed our study suggests they are appreciable.

As shown in Table 3, our analysis reveals a duality of views in our sample. We have labelled these researchers according to their predominant views: a 'majority group' and a 'minority group'. The 'majority group' comprised 18 researchers who had only used interviews using face-to-face means. The 'minority group' included five researchers (just over 20% of our sample) who had used telephone and videoconferencing media in interviews, in addition to face-to-face communication in prior research. Although all researchers participating in this study acknowledged the differences in richness offered by face-to-face, telephone and videoconferencing channels, the influence of experience in shaping their perceptions (and therefore interview-media practices) was markedly dissimilar.

From the frame of reference of the majority group, the media by which interviews are conducted appeared to be, 'dominated by habits rather than rational considerations' (van den Boer, et al. 2015, p.5). For this stream of researchers, it seems as though 'past practices influence the future through

their influence on present actions that reflect custom, tradition, convention and habit' (Parker, 2004, p. 18). Consistent with the observation of Jasperson et al. (2005), these past practices are likely to directly affect future practices.

For the majority group, the potential channels available to undertake interviews are not selected according to the tenets of IRT, but instead are driven by the prior experiences of interviewers, as proposed by CET. The use of face-to-face interviews has become institutionalized in the sense that practices are based on 'accepted' conventions, habits or tradition (Oliver, 1992), and has assumed an unquestioned, 'taken-for-granted' character as defining the way interviews are to be conducted. Consequently, face-to-face interviewing has seemingly acquired an almost a rule-like status, and become self-reinforcing over time as the only natural or 'obvious' way to undertake interview-based qualitative research.

To be sure, the perceptions of different richness characteristics are acknowledged by this group of researchers – but not reflected in their interview practices. In restricting their practices only to face-to-face interviewing and overlooking the use of videoconferencing and telephone channels of communication in conducting interviews, however, the prior experiences of the majority group *have* influenced their perceptions, and that has ensured they continue with their exclusive reliance on face to face interviewing – consistent with the prediction of CET.

For the minority group of researchers, interview practices are also informed by prior experience. However, that prior experience exhibits a greater range of interview media, so that these are reflected in this group's perceptions of appropriate interview media, and then reflected in their interview practices. As with the majority group, these choices and practices are consistent with CET. That is to say, as CET recognizes, if prior experiences are limited, then perceptions of options will be limited, and a restricted range of practices becomes yet again reinforced. On the other hand, if prior experiences have exposed researchers to a great range of interview media, then their perceptions are expanded and their practices become more diverse and varied.

5.3 In defence of a predilection for face-to-face interviewing

On the face of it, our findings may be seen as a somewhat disparaging reflection upon the majority group of researchers participating in this study. Maintaining face-to-face channels as the sole means by which interviews are undertaken represents mere repetition of past behavior where the only learning that occurs is consistent with what is already known, and the only change that takes place is within the norms of established practice. In short, the majority group, *prima facie*, appear satisfied to remain within their 'comfort zones' and avoid unconventional interview practices with which they are unfamiliar.

In contrast, it appears as though reflecting on their experiences with telephone and videoconferencing media, researchers comprising the minority group question underlying assumptions and whether the particular communication channels they chose to use in interviewing remains appropriate given current evidence, observations and experience. Reflection and challenging of the status quo permits a more flexible and reflexive approach to interviewing, by reaching otherwise difficult to access interviewees, and necessary data via different interview media to address their research questions.

However, the preference for interviewing exclusively via face-to-face means as exhibited by the majority group of researchers is in itself not necessarily problematic. Such experienced individuals can be expected to have reasons for their practices. There are numerous possible explanations for their separation of perceptions and practice. For example, 'perceived social influences may form a filter through which an individual views future use' (Carlson and Zmud, 1999, p.166). Despite their avowed recognition that different interview media can be appropriate, the social influences as to what may or may not constitute 'acceptable', 'accepted' or 'legitimate' interview practice in terms of media selection and usage may contribute to their reliance on face-to-face interviewing as the medium of choice. The concern may very well be that using telephone or videoconferencing channels as distinct from face-to-face interviewing may be seen as in some way 'sub-standard' – or at least, not the 'gold standard'.

Related to this possible explanation is that time is required by members of a given community of practice for the assimilation of innovative - or at least different – practices. Consistent with critical mass theory (Markus, 1987), collective behavior, particularly if that behavior is novel or atypical, is difficult to initiate. Once started, and as acceptance and usage escalate, that behavior gradually becomes sufficiently prevalent to the point at which 'critical mass' is eventually achieved. At this point of critical mass, rates of adoption rise speedily (van den Hooff et al., 2005) and adoption becomes self-sustaining (Rogers, 1995). Thus, it may be that choices to interview using face-to-face means are explainable because the pervasiveness of using telephone and/or videoconferencing media has yet to reach levels signalling general acceptance across the research community.

Almost certainly, other factors may explain observed differences between perceptions of the majority group and their use of 'alternative' interview media. To explore them further would be little more than speculation on our part, and such an exercise is far beyond the remit of this study. Suffice it to say, however, although the majority of our informants appeared to confine their interviewing exclusively to face-to-face means, a minority of researchers did not. The precedent for interviewing in non-traditional media has been established, and as seen by the views expressed on acceptability to editors and reviewers, as well as the reflexive accounts of our informants on their prior research, alternatives to face-to-face interviews are options that qualitative accounting researchers would be well advised to consider.

6. Concluding reflections

Our aim in this study was to address the central question of how face-to-face, telephone and videoconferencing media characteristics and accounting researchers' experiences combine to shape their perceptions and choices of interview media. Our study identifies a clear hierarchy in the ways in which interviews are conducted in practice, with telephone and videoconferencing interaction presented as secondary choices or alternatives when face-to-face interviewing is not possible.

While our findings indicate differences in *perceptions* between face-to-face, telephone and videoconferencing characteristics, rarely are *choices* of the communication channel by which interview-based accounting research based on these perceived characteristics. Although IRT provides a robust explanation for the perceptions of different communication channels, it is CET that explains the disconnect observed between perceived media characteristics and the actual driver of media choice and use in practice. What informs the choices of researchers is better understood through the lens offered by CET, in that interview medium selection is an interviewer's social construction-driven selection conditioned by their prior experiences of and with channel, topic, context, and participants. Whilst the limited experience of a majority group of researchers participating in this study restrictively conditions their perceptions and thus preserves their limited practices, the interview perceptions and practices of a minority of researchers are also clearly informed by their more diverse interview media experiences.

When interviews by telephone and videoconferencing media are assessed on how much they deviate from what has been traditionally regarded as the ideal (face-to-face), these media are generally regarded as deficient. Yet our informants have acknowledged the ability of one medium to substitute for another in many – although admittedly not all – scenarios or settings. So, rather than offering normative recommendations to researchers about 'what course of action to choose', the findings of this study imply a challenge to qualitative researchers to explore beyond their method 'comfort zones' and to develop new skills, and even more importantly, experience – in interview-based data collection. This is particularly so in terms of using (comparatively) new media such as videoconferencing as a viable means by which interviews may be conducted.

We acknowledge a number of limitations of this study that lead to opportunities for further research. First, our enquiry has been confined to semi-structured and unstructured ethnographic interview processes, and excludes variants of other types and procedures of interviews used in qualitative accounting research. Such variants include not only traditional interview approaches such as the structured interview, focus group interviews, and in-depth interviews, but also more recent

developments and innovative approaches such as cognitive interviews (Condie, 2012), photo-related interviews (Warren and Parker, 2009), and analytical interviews (Kreiner and Mouritsen, 2005). The media effects of these other types of interviews may differ from the findings of the current study. Exploring the extent to which the choice of different communication media may be significant in these other forms of interviews would therefore expand the scope of the current investigation and provide additional evidence on the reasons for such choices by researchers.

Second, as we emphasize at the outset of this paper, as we have confined our investigation to accounting research, we advise caution in extrapolating the findings of this study to interview-based research in other academic disciplines. Such a view is consistent with what Flyvbjerg (2001) terms, 'the power of example', in which knowledge is neither generalized nor presented as 'facts', but rather is context-dependent. Nonetheless, consistent with Flyvbjerg, in offering our conclusions as applicable across the accounting interview-based research community, we draw on Parker and Northcott's (2016) concepts of theoretical and naturalistic qualitative generalisation. These concepts offer both contextualized theory about a phenomenon and naturalistic transferability of study findings to other settings experienced by readers.

Third, as a qualitative, interview-based study, our findings are subject to the usual inherent limitations associated with such research methods. Although such risks were minimized as far as possible by the adoption of protocols for data collection and analysis, it is nonetheless possible that participants may have misinterpreted some of our questions, or we misinterpreted some of their answers.

This study points to differences between researchers' perceptions of media richness and the actual interview media choices they often make. Such choices emerge in this study as a product of researchers' historical experience and embedded conditioning on 'how interview-based research should proceed'. It therefore appears that, despite the increasing availability of technological options, choice of interview media is rarely questioned. Instead, it reflects researchers' filtering of innovations through their entrenched experience-based attitudes. The findings of our study thus represent a call for

qualitative accounting researchers to challenge conventional wisdom by reconsidering the hitherto underutilized tools at our disposal. In view of the popularity and prevalence of interview-based research, reflections on choice of interview media and its suitability to purpose, carry the prospect of enhancing the qualitative tradition in accounting.

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Appendix A: Researchers interviewed

Name	Institution	Date of interview	Communication channel used	Duration of interview (mins)
1. Professor Sue Llewellyn	Manchester Business School	3rd January, 2014	Telephone	47 mins
2. Professor Yves Gendron	Université Laval	6th January, 2014	Skype	42 mins
3. Professor Helen Irvine	Queensland University of Technology	7th January, 2014	Face-to-face	46 mins
4. Professor Bob Scapens	Manchester Business School	23rd January, 2014	Skype	58 mins
5. Professor Kari Lukka	Turku School of Economics	28th January, 2014	Skype	43 mins
6. Professor Teemu Malmi	Helsinki School of Economics	29th January, 2014	Skype	41 mins
7. Professor Deryl Northcott	Auckland University of Technology	29th January, 2014	Telephone	58 mins
8. Professor Richard Laughlin	Kings College, University of London	29th January, 2014	Skype	42 mins
9. Professor Jane Broadbent	Royal Holloway University of London	29th January, 2014	Skype	44 mins
10. Associate Professor John Dumay	University of Sydney	30th January, 2014	Telephone	38 mins
11. Professor James Guthrie	Macquarie University	30th January, 2014	Face-to-face	62 mins
12. Professor Sven Modell	Manchester Business School	31st January, 2014	Telephone	68 mins
13. Professor Clinton Free	University of New South Wales	5th February, 2014	Telephone	44 mins
14. Professor Ken Merchant	University of Southern California	7th February, 2014	Telephone	43 mins
15. Professor Christopher Chapman	Imperial College	10th February, 2014	Skype	42 mins
16. Professor David Marginson	Warwick Business School	13th February, 2014	Skype	53 mins

17. Associate Professor Marcia Annisette	Schulich School of Business York University	20th February, 2014	Skype	52 mins
18. Professor Trevor Hopper	University of Sussex	20th February, 2014	Skype	42 mins
19. Professor Jeffrey Unerman	Royal Holloway University of London	27th February, 2014	Telephone	48 mins
20. Professor Christine Cooper	University of Strathclyde	14th March, 2014	Skype	42 mins
21. Professor Chris Humphrey	Manchester Business School	14th March, 2014	Skype	98 mins
22. Professor Alan Lowe	Aston Business School	18th March, 2014	Skype	61 mins
23. Professor Paolo Quattrone	University of Edinburgh	18th March, 2014	Skype	31 mins

Appendix B: Interview questions – broad areas of inquiry

1. To what extent does the style of interaction (that is, face-to-face, telephone or video conferencing) in interviews matter in qualitative studies?

2. On the basis of your experience, in what ways does the communication channel used in interviewing (that is, face-to-face, telephone or video conferencing) influence the quality of evidence collected in a qualitative study?

3. On the basis of your experience, in what ways does the communication channel used in interviewing (that is, face-to-face, telephone or video conferencing) influence the analysis of the evidence collected in a qualitative study?

4. On the basis of your experience, in what ways does the communication channel used in interviewing influence the interpretation of the evidence collected in a qualitative study?

5. To what extent are face-to-face, telephone and video conferencing methods substitutable?

Table 1: Interviewee usage of interview media.

Communication channel used	Regularity of use by interviewees	Interviewee Voices
Face-to-Face	23 (100%)	"To be honest, I've never considered interviewing by any other means. Face-to-face interviewing has been the tradition in qualitative accounting research" (*Interviewee W*). "It (face-to-face interviewing) requires quite specific skills – we teach it in our research methods courses, not so, telephone of Skype interview methods. I spend a lot of time teaching my doctoral students about the art as well as the science of personal interviewing" (*Interviewee K*).
Telephone	5 (22%)	"When follow-up, clarification, or fact-finding has been necessary, telephone interviews are really helpful" (*Interviewee D*). "The telephone is a good way of touching base or setting the scene – I look at it as the appetiser rather than the main course" (*Interviewee J*).
Videoconferencing	2 (9%)	"There's no reason videoconferencing can't be effective way of interviewing – I've not used it, but I know of others that have. It seems worthy of consideration" (*Interviewee X*). "The jury is probably out on the benefits of Skype in interpretive studies – although I haven't used it for research interviews, it's something I may consider in the future" (*Interviewee P*).

Table 2: How 'media richness' is perceived

	DIMENSIONS OF RICHNESS			
	Immediacy of Feedback	**Diversity of Cues**	**Personalisation**	**Language Variety**
INTERVIEWEE COMMENTS	"Generally, there isn't a lot of difference in richness with face-to-face, phone or Skype interviewing – all give you immediate feedback" (*Interviewee J*). "If you're looking at richness of data collected in interviews, visual feedback like nods, smiles, frowns, and so on is also important. This is where personal interviews are superior to both phone and videoconferencing" (*Interviewee M*).	"A lot of texts on interviewing talk about the 'rich' data you get by observing non-verbals. I think this is overplayed and potentially dangerous. We're accounting researchers – interpretation and attributing meaning to non-verbal cues is best left to psychologists. It's too easy to attribute meanings we want to see through gestures and visual signs" (*Interviewee C*). "Telephone communication is thought to be less rich because of the inability to capture visual information. But we need to ask ourselves, 'do we really need to see the environment? Does it add a lot of value or is it a security blanket for the researcher?' Sometimes it is important, sometimes it isn't" (*Interviewee Y*).	"I've seen interviewees exhibit the whole range of emotions (anger, fear, happiness, sadness, excitement). This information is what many would call 'rich'. If you are looking to get on the same wavelength as the interviewee, you need this. A personal presence gives you this, skype gives you some, phone interviewing, much less" (*Interviewee S*). "You need to sum up where the interviewer is at fairly quickly at the commencement of an interview to establish rapport and get the interviewee to open up. To achieve this you need to tailor the message to the person being interviewed and where they're at – that's why you need to be there in person" (*Interviewee R*).	"Interpretive research is just that – research that interprets. The researcher needs to take into account not only what is said, but the way in which it is said – pauses, non-word utterances (like 'ahum', 'err', 'mmm', silences, are all part of the interpretation – conversations by phone are really effective in picking this up" (*Interviewee C*). "I try to pick up on formal as well as informal language interviewee's use. Things like laughter, exclamations and expletives are all valuable parts of the narrative" (*Interviewee A*).

Table 3: Interviewee experience with interview media.

Experiential factors	Experience with *only* face-to-face interviews (The 'majority group')	Experience with *all three* interview media (The 'minority group')
Channel	"I've never used telephones or Skype to undertake my research – these (telephone and videoconferencing) options are pretty foreign to me" (*Interviewee U*). "Skype can be very frustrating. The technology is not always easy to work with. You're going along really well, and then poor connections, drop outs, video quality disrupt the flow of conversation" (*Interviewee E*)	"Face to face is certainly the ideal – but I've found you can still collect the data you require using other means like telephone and videoconferencing" (*Interviewee F*). "Obviously the physical presence of the interviewer helps to build a relationship with the interviewee – but sometimes it might be better to maintain a degree of distance – not everyone feels comfortable with face-to-face encounters, and some individuals prefer the barrier that a phone or Skype connection gives" (*Interviewee D*).
Topic	"I surmise that being able to talk in depth about a subject would be problematic using telephone or videoconferences. I'm not sure that's entirely true, and I think things will change given the greater use of technology" (*Interviewee L*). "I want to be sure I can get beneath the presenting problems – I can do that in personal interviews. I'm not sure about telephone interviews and Skype" (*Interviewee Z*).	"What I've experienced is that using skype or phone does force you to get to the heart of discussions quicker than in personal discussions" (*Interviewee A*). "In the unlikely event in which the topic or the RQ is unfamiliar, you are compelled to ask more questions than in personal interviews – if anything, phones and skype methods make it easier in this regard" (*Interviewee D*).
Context	"Capturing and interpreting non-verbals is the attraction of personal interviews – maybe you could get a sense of that using videoconferencing. I have no personal experience of it though" (*Interviewee U*). "I worry that conveying a sense of richness and being there would be lost in telephone interviews and to a lesser degree, videoconferencing" (*Interviewee L*).	"When I've used telephone and videoconferencing, I can't really say there has been a cost because of losing contextual detail … because I'm aware of the potential to miss something I've always focused on in my discussions" (*Interviewee F*). "Context is easier to gauge if you're personally interviewing, but if you interview using phone or skype, you need to be a little more careful in the way you go about assessing it – this is probably a good thing" (*Interviewee B*).

Participants	"In the past, face-to-face interviews were what was expected – I think the world has moved on and videoconferencing especially, would now be a viable option" (*Interviewee V*). "I know there's research that finds that being physically removed from the interview setting (by using phone or videoconferencing) can actually be an advantage. I can see the point of remote interviewing" (*Interviewee C*).	"If you know the people you are interviewing – like you are in this study – there's unlikely to be a lot of difference between the three modes" (*Interviewee E*). "Not everyone is a social animal. Some folk are shy, and prefer a telephone interview to meeting face-to-face. We don't often think about that when we design our interview schedules" (*Interviewee G*).

Figure 1: Theoretically assumed role of experience in influencing richness perceptions