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# Self-recorded conversations in tourism memory research

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Research note

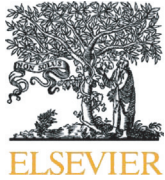# Self-recorded conversations in tourism memory research

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This research note discusses the application of a novel qualitative data generation method, self-recorded paired conversations. The context of this discussion is a study where we used this method to understand the negotiation of tourism memory narratives drawn from shared overnight music festival experiences. The method offers a fresh approach to interviews, moving from traditional, researcher-led individual and focus group interviews towards participant-led conversations preceded by individual narratives on the same topic. Self-recording is a suitable technique in times of limited travel, but it also provides further benefits described below.

Dyadic, joint, paired or couple interviews have been used, for instance, in health (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018; Morgan et al., 2013), social (Wilson et al., 2016) and tourism studies (Anantamongkolkul et al., 2019). Conducting a paired interview, particularly with the people who know each other, has the benefit that "individual partners sometimes ask each other questions regarding certain experiences that the researcher might not have thought of" (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018, p. 7), they help each other to remember (Morgan et al., 2013), and might reveal cultural and power dynamics (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018). However, previously these interviews have entailed face-to-face meetings with the presence of the researcher.

Data generation without the presence of an interviewer (e.g. audio diaries or self-interviews), have typically been used in psychological studies (e.g. Hislop et al., 2005; Keightley et al., 2012) to give more voice to research participants. However, these studies include only monologues, not conversations.

Our initial participants were recruited via an open invite to anyone who had attended an overnight festival using email lists of festival goers, snowballing and social media. The data collection phase then started with these participants recruiting someone else with whom they had attended any overnight festival. After both giving their consent for the research, they were asked to

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self-record their individual memories and then get together (virtually) to talk together about the same festival. Thus, there were three recordings for each pair, two individual and one dialogic. The method of recording first individual memories followed by shared ones facilitated the process of evoking memories since "sometimes certain memories do not come back to mind all at once" (Keightley et al., 2012, p. 509). It is also essential that the pair knew each other well, thus creating a safe and confidential environment for the shared conversation. This is important since what is remembered depends on the "audience" (being alone, with a friend/imagined researcher) and the "conversational dynamics" (who is in charge, who dominates, what is revealed and what not) (Hirst & Echterhoff, 2012, p. 57).

Participants were free to choose the place, time and communication method (face-to-face, by phone or online meeting), making themselves comfortable in the situation. They were encouraged to use music, videos, photos and messaging from the time as memory cues for the festival experience (see also Keightley et al., 2012; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018).

## Quality of data

The paired memory sharing is self-perpetuating and in most cases, storytelling was fluent and flow-like. The pairs continued each other's sentences and occasionally demonstrated emotions that would normally only be revealed to the partner or a trusted friend. New memories emerged in the conversation–sometimes at the same instance for both of the participants as the following quote illustrates.

F1 & F2 (shared)

> F1: I wouldn't remember without that video. There is this amazing video from that gig. I don't remember which song it was, right in the beginning of the gig. And somebody yelling…
> Both: "I'VE FOUND MY FAITH NOW!" (both laughing)
> F2: Yea, I have that clip too!

Talking with a trusted partner or friend revealed intimate moments. In the following, the individual recordings of a couple were rather factual whereas the shared conversation created an atmosphere where the female told how she had said for the first time that she loved her partner. Before this opportunity to reminisce she was not sure if her partner had even heard her say it.

M1 (individual)

> We thought that we'll grab Pori-burgers from a traditional grill. But I have to say that it was a bit too modern a version to be a real Pori-burger.

F3 (individual)

> And we found a little grill, some local grill, and we ate Pori-burgers there. They had space for something like ten customers, but there were maybe a hundred people there. And the feeling continued, kind of funny, that after a world-class concert you enter a tiny local grill.

M1 & F3 (shared)

> M1: Remember those burgers, they were the world's best Pori-burgers (laughs).
> F3: Yea (chuckles), it was the authentic local grill. And the sausage slices were so thick, filled you up in a second. But it was so funny, first we were at this world-class festival and then, just like that, at this tiny grill, there was a magic of its own and I loved it. And I wonder if you remember–or maybe you didn't even hear–but that's where I told you the first time, when we were sitting there among those sausage-eaters that were quite drunk, I said, all of a sudden, that I love you.
> M1: (whispers) I sure remember.

## "Presence" of researcher

Research participants never met with or talked directly to the researchers. Emailed instructions explained the process and participants had the opportunity to ask clarification questions of the researchers via email. The discussion guidance was deliberately unstructured in order not to direct the reminiscence and to facilitate the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

(Moss et al., 2020). The guidelines suggested that they "…reflect on the most memorable moments. Talk a bit about these and how you like to remember them".

The method is non-intrusive and the absence of the researcher gave participants more "discursive freedom" (Keightley et al., 2012, p. 516) even though the imagined interviewer was virtually present in the form of the instructions. Some participants addressed the imagined researcher during their recordings.

F4 & M2 (shared)


F4: Maybe we should've been remembering some other thing. Something where we've only been once. […] Sorry, researchers! (chuckle)


## Analysis of rich data

Collecting rich data by having both individual and shared memories of the same experience offered a good opportunity to study divergences and convergences of the narratives. Combining both perspectives produced a broader picture as suggested by Taylor and de Vocht (2011).

Analysis required a complex and sympathetic approach in order to maintain the voice and emotional context of both the individual and paired conversations. To compare these in a meaningful way we took an idiographic approach keeping the "stories" as whole as possible and making use of both the transcripts and the voice recordings (Parameswaran et al., 2020). Using guidance from Moss et al. (2020) the analysis utilised the most current version of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

## Benefits and challenges

The biggest benefit of using the method of self-recorded paired conversations was that the absence of a researcher made it possible to gain less inhibited, highly intimate and emotionally charged memories which would not have been revealed to a stranger. Our participants appeared to quickly forget about the imagined "listener" and spoke freely and openly to each other. They also seemed to enjoy the opportunity to reminisce and relive happy and sad memories together.

The main challenge was that in order to recruit sufficient participants we needed to send invitations to relatively large databases of suitable people (those who had attended festivals in the past). Interest in the project varied by country (selected to explore cultural differences in the narratives) with 796 emails recruiting 14 research participants in Finland. In the UK 12 (out of 250 contacted) agreed to take part but only four pairs completed the tasks in full. In China, 100 emails gained only two pairs with seven others recruited through social media and snowballing. As we take an idiographic Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach we used the concept of "information power" to determine sufficiency in the sample (Malterud et al., 2016). Each pair provided "powerful" information in the depth of discussion, reflection and in instances of memory negotiation so that overall we had far more participants than needed for an in-depth qualitative study.

Other challenges were minor. The conversation-like progress of the paired reminiscence led to situations where participants were talking out of turn, making the transcription difficult or even impossible. However, questions could be addressed afterwards. The individual recordings were found more challenging by some of the participants as they felt uncomfortable talking to themselves.

## Future research directions

The method has much to offer for qualitative tourism research both in the quality and depth of the data gathered and in overcoming the practical challenges of restricted travel and/or contact.

The technique is particularly applicable in understanding the memories of collective experiences whether these be day trips, holidays or events with families, friends, colleagues. Most tourism experiences tend to be shared and therefore the methods employed in studying these need to reflect this (Wood, 2020). A social method that suits the study of social phenomena. There is much this approach could add to the study of memorable experiences in tourism (Sterchele, 2020) and the role of others in memory narrative formation (Wood & Kenyon, 2018). The method is also a useful addition to the growing toolkit of approaches in the study of emotions in tourism (Stadler et al., 2018; Volo, 2021; Wood & Kinnunen, 2020).


## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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