Is Open Communication Scholarship a Promise or Peril? Preliminary Interviews with Qualitative Communication Scholars

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Formally initiated by the International Communication Association (ICA) in 2020, an open communication scholarship (OCS) movement has sparked much conversation within quantitative communication sciences. But why is OCS not more widely adopted in qualitative research? Do scholars think it brings more harm than good? This exploratory research focuses on how communication scholars perceive these questions. Using semistructured interviews with 40 scholars from the United States, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and China, we found that, in theory, most scholars support it; however, OCS practices and research environments are highly nuanced. Given the iterative nature of qualitative data analysis and the importance of context, subjectivity, and reflexivity, scholars prefer to share "condensed data" rather than "raw data." They worry about the difficulties in data sharing, verifying, and reusing; the potential risks of identification;

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intellectual property rights; and informed consent. The implications of OCS in qualitative research are mixed, exemplified by debates among scholars on data quality, cost, flexibility, trust, and collaboration.

Keywords: open science, open methodology, communication studies, qualitative research, interviews

The International Communication Association (ICA) recently hosted discussions and debates in the communication studies field on the adoption of open science/open scholarship (OS) practices in the field during its 70th Annual ICA Conference 2020, based on the theme of "Open Communication," as well as through its flagship *Journal of Communication* special issue in 2021 entitled "Opening a Conversation on Open Communication Research" (Shaw, Scharkow, & Wang, 2021).

OS is an umbrella term concerning the sharing of scientific knowledge (Fecher & Friesike, 2014). However, the communication discipline is very broad, encompassing not only scientific but also social scientific and humanities research traditions. The term "Open Communication Scholarship" (OCS) offers a more inclusive description of the adoption of OS in communication research (Arthur & Hearn, 2021). As such, in this article, OCS is referred to as Open Communication Scholarship—that is, the adoption of OS in communication research, whether quantitative or qualitative.

The OCS movement aims to enhance the reproducibility, replicability, and generalizability of communication research (Dienlin et al., 2021; McEwan, Carpenter, & Westerman, 2018). However, it has also developed partially in response to recent events, wherein canonical social scientific discoveries have been proclaimed irreplicable, invalid, and unreliable (Dienlin et al., 2021) because of questionable (and nontransparent) research practices (QRPs). The range of QRPs includes, but is not limited to, misleading results through p-hacking (Rinke & Schneider, 2016; Vermeulen et al., 2015) and reporting only the most attractive (i.e., publishable) results when confronted with multiple sets of results in the proverbial "garden of forking paths." These problems abound in experimental research designs (Matthes et al., 2015) and media content analysis (Scharkow & Bachl, 2017). QRPs, along with low statistical power and a high rate of human error (Dienlin et al., 2021; Konijn, van de Schoot, Winter, & Ferguson, 2015), threaten replication in communication research (McEwan et al., 2018). Although these QRPs are primarily associated with misconduct in scientific or quantitative research, the more inspiring and inclusive bedrock of open science or open scholarship features the principles of open access, open data, and open (transparent) methodology (Abele-Brehm, Gollwitzer, Steinberg, & Schonbrodt, 2019).

However, OCS commitments differ according to whether quantitative or qualitative research is being undertaken. Particularly in its current form, OCS overly privileges quantitative research standards defined by replicability and reproducibility, whereas replication not only is unrealistic but also fundamentally compromises qualitative discovery methods (Freiling, Krause, Scheufele, & Chen, 2021). In addition, quantitative conceptions of OS privilege acceleration, efficiency, and reproducibility; neglect global diversity; and possibly undermine the importance of local contexts in qualitative research (de Oliveira et al., 2021). Superficially, these arguments may suggest a fundamental discord between OS and qualitative research, although the OS open access and

open methodology principles can be found in qualitative commitments of validity, transparency ethics, reflexivity, and collaboration, as well as in the loftier aims of producing trustworthy, high-quality research (Humphreys, Lewis, Sender, & Won, 2021). Both quantitative and qualitative methods serve as legitimate resources for conducting communication research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). However, OCS's traditional focus on quantitative research has overlooked its feasibility, unique challenges, and risks. Alongside a comparatively more established quantitative OCS, it is pertinent to explore the benefits and challenges of OCS in qualitative research from the perspective of qualitative communication scholars.

Fundamentally, we ask: Does OCS bring promises or perils to qualitative communication research?

Literature Review

OS Initiatives: Promising While Controversial

Two streams of discussion on OS consequences are evident in the literature. One stream emphasizes the positive consequences of OS. Preregistration of research, as a critical step of OS, can combat dissemination bias and incentivize researchers to constantly report their progress with the research (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). Data sharing requires a more parsimonious data collection and greater accountability, and thus better spending of research money. Reusing data leads to better quality analyses, better use of resources, and more outputs and scientific progress (Cheah et al., 2015). These benefits further increase the transparency of findings, help establish trust, and increase collaboration (Grand, Wilkinson, Bultitude, & Winfield, 2012).

The other stream focuses on negative consequences. Even OS supporters voice concerns about and acknowledge the limitations of OS, arguing that sharing itself is risky and that the act of openness might invite unwilling outcomes. OS is often associated with methodological, ethical, and practical issues (Childs, McLeod, Lomas, & Cook, 2014), especially concerning data on marginalized groups and data with potentially identifying information, both quantitative and qualitative. From one perspective, data sharing in social sciences requires additional consent and disclosures, which can be harmful to research participants and their communities (Cheah et al., 2015). From another perspective, OS must contend with the more complex problems of personally identifying data because this entails the potential for the incidental divulgence of protected data and the misuse of data by special interest groups (Carusi & Jirotka, 2009; Pearce & Smith, 2011). In addition, scholars worry that OS might damage society and knowledge production. It adds additional time and costs to data management, contravenes the highly competitive nature of funding systems, and introduces concerns about the issues of copyright, intellectual property, and nondisclosure (Bowman & Keene, 2018). Moreover, the obligatory sharing of research data may breed and encourage the emergence of "data cemeteries" or "data trash." Instead of solving the fraud problem, data sharing may cultivate a culture of distrust among science communities (Abele-Brehm et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the above findings were based on surveys in psychology (Abele-Brehm et al., 2019; Houtkoop et al., 2018) and medical science (Chauvette, Schick-Makaroff, & Molzahn, 2019). Only more recently has OS entered communication studies. Bowman, Rinke, Lee, Nabi, and de Vreese (2022) surveyed 330 ICA members on their knowledge of, engagement with, attitudes toward, and perspectives on OS. They found that respondents reported broad familiarity with and support for OS but had lower levels of

engagement, suggesting that communication researchers do not uniformly endorse open science, even among the sample of ICA survey respondents who generally supported the practice. We acknowledge the substantial value of the open-ended questions deployed in their survey, which provided a "field-level" view of the communication field. Similarly, their qualitative interview-based study also aims to reveal nuances in the ways communication scholars engage with OS.

Qualitative Data in Open Science: Types and Characteristics

Qualitative data are subjectively created (Irwin, 2013), and they can be generated throughout the whole process of qualitative research. Qualitative data sources include (a) raw data collected at the beginning of the research through in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations, documents, visual methods, life histories, and biographies (Tsai et al., 2016), in forms such as original videos or tapes, interview guides, field notes, and transcripts; (b) methodological data generated during the process of data analysis by qualitative content analyses, case studies, grounded theory, narratives, ethnography, phenomenology (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017), and more, such as data used to establish intercoder reliability, codebooks, and documents describing the process of open coding, selection of codes and category construction, enabling external investigators to understand how researchers arrived at their conclusions; and (c) data represented in the final article to display findings and facilitate visualization, which are open by default.

Qualitative data possess unique features that appear contradictory to quantitative notions of OS. The two most frequently mentioned features are as follows:

A. *Reflexivity and subjectivity*. Unlike quantitative research aimed at seeking consensual outcomes, qualitative research places more emphasis on awareness and consideration of reflexivity (Branney et al., 2019). Such reflexivity is reflected in the inherently intersubjective nature of data collection, the iterative nature of data analysis, and the interpretative goal (Tsai et al., 2016). Verifying and reusing qualitative data are difficult because it is usually mixed with personal feelings and experiences.
B. *Situational context*. Research contexts informed by historical, cultural, social, and political influences (Coltart, Henwood, & Shirani, 2013) are important in qualitative research. It is difficult to adequately contextualize such data, and once they are decontextualized, they are no longer useful (Chauvette et al., 2019).

Consequently, such uniqueness of qualitative data presents challenges to open qualitative research. Obstacles to sharing and reusing qualitative data in social research include (a) the problem of data fit when taking context into consideration, (b) the problem of researchers not being present for the full interpretation, and (c) the problem of "verification" for establishing trustworthiness (Heaton, 2008).

For an ethical and efficient use of qualitative data, the uniqueness and context of qualitative research must be taken into consideration (Chauvette et al., 2019). Nevertheless, to date, there are few studies on qualitative data sharing and reusing in the communication field, and several questions remain. First, communication studies are distinguished by their profound heterogeneity and multimedia characteristics (Pooley, 2016), particularly because the way data are collected or generated might be different from other social disciplines. It is worthwhile to discuss what kinds of qualitative data in OCS are suitable for sharing, in addition

to when and how they should be shared. Second, considering the iterative nature, subjectivity, and reflexivity of qualitative research, its verification and replication require justification, and potential challenges need to be further discussed.

Methodology

Authors' Interpretive Lenses

Given that this article focuses on OCS within qualitative communication research, it is useful to discuss the research backgrounds and interpretive lenses of the five authors.

The first and fifth authors are confident in their engagement with OS, thanks to their conference exposure and authorship of several articles related to OS. The third author has extensive experience of OS in China, including several publications. The second author acknowledges his limited knowledge of OS before working on this article. During their 20-year academic careers, the fourth author can claim some exposure to, and knowledge of, OS. All the authors have engaged in qualitative research, and the first, second, and fifth authors are also actively engaged in quantitative research.

Notwithstanding their varied expertise and experience with OS and qualitative communication scholarship, all five authors share an intersubjective appreciation of the potential and contribution of OCS. The study's design, data collection, and analysis are largely attributed to the first three and fifth authors. The fifth author closely supervised and directed the project, whereas the fourth was initially a research participant and, during the in-depth interview, thoroughly reflected on the core questions related to OS in qualitative communication research. All the authors support the OCS principles of open access, open methodology, and open data while recognizing the ethical and practical considerations and challenges that accompany a research community's adoption of OS.

Study Design

This study used semistructured, in-depth interviews with communication scholars with qualitative research experience. Each interviewee answered a core set of predetermined, structured questions and follow-up questions. We adopted the six-step thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). All the transcripts were coded in NVivo by the first and second authors together. Open coding was used in the first round to derive themes relevant to the study objectives. Subsequent rounds further analyzed the fit and redundancy of these themes until clear definitions had been generated. The reduction strategy was based on the research question referring to the data types, difficulties, and consequences of adopting OS in qualitative research. Some flexibility in the unitization of coding was retained.

Our research follows the principles of theoretical sampling (Bryman, 2003; Silverman, 2019). Interviews were conducted among 40 participants from the United States, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and China to ensure a balanced reflection of Euro/American and Asian countries. Given that previous studies have suggested that sociodemographic variables shape attitudes toward OS (Abele-Brehm et al., 2019), we "sampled for range" (Weiss, 1995, p. 23) by contacting a cross-section of communication scholars with

varying academic backgrounds who have a doctoral degree in communication and have published at least one qualitative or mixed methods article in this field. The final sample consisted of 40 participants, 17 males and 23 females. Detailed information such as nationality, gender, title, publication, and attitude is available through OSF (https://osf.io/rhwcd/).

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted online. Of 40 participants, seven were interviewed by phone, 25 by social media, and eight by email. Note that different modalities might influence the interview and its findings. For example, synchronous communications (phone and social media) allowed interviewers the opportunity to probe and clarify participants' responses, whereas nonsynchronous ones (email) allowed interviewees more time to reflect. Thirty-one interviews were conducted in English, and nine were conducted in Chinese. Verbal interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). All quotes from interviews are the first author's translations from Chinese. The average length of interviews is 40 minutes for recording and 1,023 words for email. We explained the concept and development of OCS to interviewees before asking them the following questions:

- Q1: What kinds of qualitative data are suitable for open sharing and reusing in OCS?
- Q2: What are the difficulties faced by open qualitative research in the communication field? That is, why does open qualitative research lag behind its quantitative counterpart?
- Q3: What are the consequences if OCS were to be adopted in the qualitative research?

Open Qualitative Data in the Communication Field

Q1 asked scholars about the kind of qualitative data suitable for open sharing and reusing. Interview responses revealed that open qualitative data in OCS can be categorized into two types.

Raw Data

Communication scholars have different views on the extent to which qualitative data may be considered as "raw data" suitable for reuse if openly shared. Scholars tend to hold a broader definition of raw data, as featured by multimedia characteristics with no uniform format. For example, as Scholar 24 opines,

> Raw data is the first-hand information that you receive, you go and collect it yourself . . . it could be anything . . . as long as it is justified . . . for communication studies, qualitative data is kind of like textual material, things like movies or novels, or websites, or blogs, or anything that's kind of like in the public domain.

When asked about the granularity of raw data, most scholars agreed that although researcher-generated data such as transcripts and observation notes may not be as ideal as the direct records of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and documents, they can be roughly considered the same as "raw data." Scholar 21 replied that "transcripts from interviews or speech can be considered as raw data." Scholar 17 responded, "Both tapes and transcripts can be categorized into raw data, but with different reliability, the more original, the more reliable they are." Others shared similar views, and they considered raw data as data that are not yet analyzed and in pristine form.

Other scholars look to data quality and research aims. Only "objectively recorded" data that are "not interpreted or cleaned" merit consideration as raw data, such as original videos and transcripts. As Scholar 27 suggested, "the interview session . . . must be neatly and completely transcribed before it can be used as raw data." Furthermore, although tapes and transcripts can be considered the same, raw data also depend on the research question and method. Scholar 15 explained that if the researcher focuses on narrative analysis or semantics, then even "a pause and a sigh" may all have explanatory meaning; thus, they cannot be treated as the same.

Condensed Data

Most scholars acknowledged that it is not easy to draw boundaries around raw data; the data corpus can potentially include substantial raw materials from photographs, interview recordings, transcripts, field notes, and more. Instead of sharing raw data, they argued that "condensed data," data that have been already processed at a certain level, are more appropriate to share. Scholar 6 explained that sharing raw data creates additional problems posing risks to both researchers and participants. For example, recorded voices can be recognized easily by people who know the speakers well, thus contradicting standard practices of anonymity. It can be particularly burdensome for researchers engaging in sensitive topics. "I would be very hesitant to interview people who have dissenting views from the authorities in some countries in that regard," he said.

It is argued that raw data should be "processed" before sharing. The interview outlines and questions are suitable for open sharing because they do not involve the disclosure of participants. In regard to the field notes, the author's impromptu observations and thoughts may be more suitable for open sharing after being properly processed. Scholar 22, for example, said,

> These data, such as the interview, should be analyzed first, and it must be validated and acknowledged by the primary sources, i.e., the interviewees, in order that the meaning and intention are on point from their own perspectives and not from the writer's perspective only.

Scholars pointed out that methodological data, as a certain kind of "generated data," are more suitable to share than the original data. It can be in various forms, such as the codes, themes, coding books, and documents, which describe the process of open coding selection and code category construction. Scholar 1, for instance, opined, "For researchers to carry credibility, and come up with sound conclusions, they need to disclose how 'data,' e.g., interviews, focus groups, ethnographical research, are collected and analyzed."

Challenges and Risks of Open Qualitative Research in the Communication Field

Q2 asked scholars asked about the challenges of open qualitative research. Two themes emerging from the data were risks (data sharing, reusing, and verifying) and challenges (identification, intellectual property rights, and informed consent).

The Issue of Sharing Qualitative Data

Compared with quantitative research, qualitative research goes deep into a phenomenon and is often involved with sensitive, controversial, or disputed topics. Most interviewees, regardless of research interests and publication experience, unequivocally expressed concerns over the content of shared data; they argued the research aim and content need to be considered when sharing.

Data related to general human behaviors, such as hospice care and the relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law, can be openly shared. As described by Scholar 30, "As long as it's not something that could be potentially litigious, and people might sue you for using it. Or it's not something that might bring danger or shame to others. Then that's okay to share." Such "public-facing" documents are suitable for open sharing, and it doesn't have to be the "published" work in the traditional sense. Scholar 35 gave an example: "A documentary made based on the research project that has been shared on the project website and consequently on social media platforms such as YouTube is suitable for open sharing."

Data with personal information, specific controversies, and political issues are not appropriate to share. Scholar 29, for instance, said, "We can't share open transcripts of, say, conversations like interviews or a diary study of a political activist who might be in danger of persecution." Scholars pointed out that sharing such qualitative data can lead to serious ethical and even legal issues for researchers. Such sharing may even threaten certain research efforts investigating controversial issues. As mentioned by Scholar 38, "Obviously, if it's a transcript of, say, an interview with a rape victim . . . that should not be shared in an open scientific platform. Because even if it's scientific, it's scholarly, it's still a public platform."

Scholars also pointed out temporal and spatial considerations surrounding sensitive topics when sharing qualitative data. Certain qualitative data, such as interviews with homosexuals, should be embargoed for many years to protect interviewees. Furthermore, qualitative data face geopolitical constraints. Scholar 33 pointed out that communication research is closely linked with ideology and culture, and thus sensitive topics may vary from country to country.

> Suppose 60% of qualitative data are suitable to openly share in the U.S.; then that figure would be almost equivalent to the percentage of what can't be shared in China . . . Different countries have different sensitive topics, for example, the racial problems in the U.S. and the territory problems in China.

The Issue of Verifying Qualitative Data

First, scholars doubt the meaning of verifying qualitative research. They argued if the purpose of data opening is to replicate, to separate the researcher from the data, then the epistemology rooted in the qualitative concept is ruined. It does not make much sense to verify the findings of qualitative research because one distinct difference between quantitative and qualitative research is that for quantitative research, meanings come from standard numbers, whereas for qualitative research, meanings come from the interpretation of researchers. As Scholar 4 said,

The transparency and credibility of research should not be the main purpose of the open qualitative data. Unlike quantitative research that shares data at a massive level to invite verification, qualitative research only needs to follow the standard publishing process; authors can upload the data to journals to prove that their research is reliable.

Scholars also highlighted the lack of feasible ways to verify qualitative research. To pursue verification, raw data is necessary, not only transcripts but recordings, because errors in transcription may influence interpretation. Even if we have sufficient raw data, the lack of feasible inspection standards, for example, verifying ethnography and historical narration might lead to the misinterpretation of qualitative data.

Last, scholars believe it is highly demanding for both the research and researchers themselves. In fact, only a small portion of qualitative studies can be verified. As Scholar 13 emphasized, "Transparency is key in using secondary qualitative data: it has to be made very clear where the data come from, and how they are used." If the methodologies are not properly described or pose ambiguity, it may lead to improper application and eventually create different outcomes. Scholar 13 added, "the original research may be discredited for it seems nonreplicable." Furthermore, the work for verification can be burdensome and time-consuming. Scholar 19 elaborated that it is unrealistic to verify the qualities of data: "I can't think of anyone except authors who would bother to go through hundreds and thousands of words in transcripts; it is tedious and burdensome." In addition, verifying qualitative research requires a good mastery of OS skills. Scholars indicated that the researchers' lack of understanding of the data, the lack of knowledge and skills in using certain frameworks of analyses, and the lack of robustness in collecting triangulated data are challenges that hamper the verification of qualitative research.

The Issue of Reusing Qualitative Data

Scholars pointed out that the benefits of reusing qualitative data are often undervalued because its findings could be generic, unoriginal, and repetitive. There are mainly two obstacles.

First is the importance of context in qualitative research. As suggested by Scholar 5, "It's possible that the interpretation of data by other researchers may be wrong as they won't know the context of the data . . . wrong interpretations without considering the context." Scholar 17 agreed, "Especially for participatory qualitative research, it is difficult for external researchers to restore every detailed feeling at that time, and important details may be missing . . . they may also misinterpret the data because they were not personally involved." Scholars stressed that it is hard to "recontextualize" because the researcher may not have a full understanding of the background of the original data, just reading the interview transcripts may not give the researcher a complete picture of the study, and without sufficient contextual information, other researchers may not be able to use the data in the correct way.

Second is the subjectivity of interpretation. Qualitative data are collected and analyzed in ways that cannot be separated from the researcher's personal experience and understanding; therefore, it is difficult for others to reuse the data. Scholars pointed out that the interpretation of qualitative research data is influenced by the researcher's personal qualities, academic orientation, and values. For instance, Scholar 25 said,

Unlike quantitative data analysis, qualitative data relies more on human researchers as the analysis "algorithm" . . . if qualitative data become open on a post hoc basis, the researcher as a part of that "algorithm" should be put under the process of reexamination.

Even with the same raw data, different researchers interpret and induce the data in different ways. In the communication field, it is difficult to achieve the hard sciences' standards of repeatability and falsifiability through reusing data. Furthermore, such subjectivity may even lead to misinterpretation. Scholar 21 said,

These data may open to a wide range of interpretations depending on the perspective. Qualitative data are subjective in nature; hence, to assign a limitation and focus on a specific scope would be wise and ethical. Issues arise when the data are free to be interpreted in any way without a set of rules, opening up to misinterpretation.

Participant Identity and Safety Concerns

Identification is the top issue of the frequently mentioned obstacles for open qualitative research. Scholars worried that reduced anonymity and increased risk of identifying data would put participants at risk. Scholar 32, for instance, argued,

The identities of the respondents are very often, in many types of qualitative research, confidential or kept anonymous. So, sharing this kind of data in an open community might cause a researcher to inadvertently violate research ethics and also violate the trust between the research participants and the researcher.

Compared with quantitative data, the deidentification of qualitative data is more difficult, both in "raw data" and also in "condensed data." As Scholar 29 suggested, sharing the codes of transcripts requires special consideration; the themes derived from the interview transcripts may be shared, but perhaps not the specific quotations that illustrate those themes or the quotations where those themes were taken from. He expounded,

Because it's extremely subjective to define whether or not an excerpt from an interview, a sentence, and utterance, maybe a snippet of a conversation would help identify the interview . . . Whoever might want to harm them may actually find them if you share those kinds of little excerpts or quotations.

To make matters worse, inadvertently identifying individuals might lead to exposure of an entire marginal group. Snowball sampling is frequently applied in qualitative research wherein informants are not dispersed individuals but are interlocked in a "chain." Once someone is identified, the identities of other snowball participants are also at risk. As mentioned by Scholar 19, "It's quite clear that qualitative research involves a more homogeneous community. Whatever characteristics that you use for research, it needs to be bonded by ethical consideration; for example, some information that you have received from your gay community."

The identification might threaten the privacy and safety of both researchers and participants. Scholars expressed concerns about the unethical and unscrupulous use of qualitative data. Scholar 19 argued once we have numerous data available in an open scientific platform, "virtually anybody can go into an open platform and use that data . . . Perhaps people might be using data to commit crimes or to aid them to commit crimes . . . for espionage or military or political reasons." Scholar 26 further emphasized such safety concerns are especially pertinent for sensitive research topics. He illustrated the case with victims of a loan shark, one illegal method of money loan activities in Malaysia: "This had been troubled for quite a long time . . . and those researchers interested in doing this kind of research, they are not just jeopardizing their safety but are also involving others as well."

Intellectual Property Rights and Publishing Superiority

The second frequently mentioned issue is intellectual property rights. The cost of gathering qualitative data is sometimes immeasurable. Therefore, establishing how to protect researchers' efforts is important. Scholars discussed distinguishing between published and unpublished qualitative data.

Sharing of qualitative data necessary to reproduce findings of published research is welcomed. Scholars are convinced that data are an essential part of research efforts, and for published research, making data available may serve to broaden perspectives and understanding of the results. However, scholars are less supportive of sharing research data that have not yet been analyzed or reported. Those against sharing unreported data frequently cite intellectual property rights and publication competition. Scholars found sharing data in unpublished articles to be unfair; they argued that although researchers may have the same intellectual property rights over normal and exclusive data, the acts of sharing these two types of data have different consequences. For example, sharing data from exclusive interviews poses threats to the exclusivity of the data and the potential opportunities it may afford the researcher, whereas sharing interviews with ordinary people does not. As mentioned by Scholar 31, "Suppose I got a precious chance to interview the CEO of a nuclear power company, I would not be willing to share this exclusive data with others." Therefore, some scholars consider it is their right to keep the data for their own research.

Many scholars are reluctant to share qualitative data for fear of infringement of their intellectual property. Scholar 3, for example, argued that ethics regarding the ownership of data is a big issue: "Some people would actually replicate without acknowledging the original researcher . . . One might even claim others' research as their research for open sharing data collections." He pointed out, "Issues that involve open sharing in qualitative data is all about plagiarism. Maybe I would like to add some more heterogeneity and multimedia characteristic." Scholar 30 expressed similar concerns: "Since they have so many data to be shared, they can simply ignore where the data come from and how important to actually acknowledge or to get consent." Fear of losing the superiority associated with being the first to publish an article is another concern of scholars. They stated that quantitative data are usually subject to confidentiality; individuals or funding agencies who collect the data have intellectual property rights, which should be protected, and if they were asked to share those unpublished data, they might be "scooped" and lose their advantage to have their articles published first.

Informed Consent and Noncooperation

Informed consent is the third most frequently mentioned issue. Scholars indicated that qualitative data, particularly those collected from ethnographic observations, in-depth interviews, and diary studies, originate from participants and are usually bound by research ethics and informed consent of research participants.

Scholars admit that gaining consent from participants is the first step toward openly sharing before gaining consent from researchers, sponsoring institutions, and more. Otherwise, the very nature of qualitative research involving human research subjects would easily lead to a violation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). However, gaining consent from participants is arduous, and most scholars worried that open data could potentially make it more difficult to recruit research participants: some respondents are unwilling to cooperate in the first place, and those who agree to participate prefer to not share everything because of many reasons, such as privacy, embarrassment, or sensitivity. As mentioned by Scholar 29, "I think the respondents and interviewees probably will not even agree to do the research or to allow you to interview them if they think that you will share whatever they're telling you to an open forum." In this scholar's view, qualitative data disclose identities more often than quantitative data do and thus require more strict confidentiality and informed consent, including properly informing participants of their rights within the research, such as rights to quit halfway and retract, what researchers will do with their data, and asking for their permission to use their data. "So, all of that comes into play, and obviously, if in one step an interviewee or the research respondent does not want you to use the data, then you ethically cannot."

Gaining consent from researchers is another major obstacle mentioned by scholars. They argued that because OCS is not compulsory and simultaneously lacks sufficient incentives, researchers are not obliged to adopt a strong and established methodology for the research as well as to give consent to disclose their data. Scholar 9 expressed his pity over the current situation of OCS: "Qualitative researchers are often reluctant to give consent to share their data . . .They are just not doing enough, for the reason that a full picture can't be had without a full participant role." Scholars argued that communication researchers need a commonly "shared consent," and they emphasized the importance of cooperation. As Scholar 16 mentioned,

> We need a much higher level of institution, like an international association of universities and research centers, having mechanisms in place to ensure that those rules are mutually agreed to and abided by the major associations, research centers, journals, councils of professors, researchers, and university associations.

Negative Implications of Open Qualitative Research

Q3 asked scholars about the potential consequences of OCS in qualitative research. The data revealed one theme suggesting that qualitative OCS is inherently equivocal in terms of data quality, cost, values, flexibility, trust, and collaboration.

Better or Worse Data Quality?

Some scholars argued that as qualitative data become open and readily available for reanalysis, communication researchers could become more alert when they are making propositions or discussions. Scholar 10 was one of the optimists: "It will definitely improve the quality of data. Researchers will be more cautious in collecting, cleaning, and interpreting the data." Scholar 23 agreed that "the following research will be based on strongly factual and black-and-white data rather than presumptions, or worse, generalization." As a result, OCS might elevate the validity and quality of qualitative research. Moreover, it may motivate researchers to analyze and report the data promptly.

However, some scholars worried that the obligatory sharing would invite "data redundancy," and even worse, "data trash" or "data cemeteries," thus reducing overall data quality. Some qualitative data appear approximate in themes but differ in contexts and cannot support the research aim. Therefore, there would be redundancy, and even when researchers are willing to share data, such data would be of less value. Scholars argued that the reliability and credibility of open data is a substantial concern and given that a certain threshold for data sharing is lacking if unreliable data are reused to carry out other research, then erroneous results will be reached. Scholar 32 further expounded on the problem of low reliability and validity.

> The academician tends to focus on only fulfilling their key performance indicator for the sake of their interest by publishing low-quality data that are not able to solve problems that they were aiming to . . . In fact, the writers also tend to use the simplest and easiest ones.

Scholar 27 agreed that the obligatory sharing may let researchers deviate from the original aim of open science, in that "it encourages the scholar to game the system in order to publish their low-quality papers in any high impact journal for their benefits."

Cutting or Adding Cost?

Some scholars argued that with the sharing and reusing of qualitative data (e.g., the reuse of interview outlines, codes, and more), there would be more parsimonious data collection, and data value would be maximized; thus, research money would be better spent. Such benefits are especially prominent for researchers with limited funds for data collection, especially PhD students.

OCS saves costs for those who use open data as they don't need to go into the field or recruit interviewees. For those who collect and share the data, however, things become complicated. Scholars worried that OCS might be a burden for data management. First is the cost of data gathering, storing, and sharing. Scholars frequently mentioned the issue of storage capacity, particularly for qualitative data in video, graphic, or audio form. They worried it would cost more than quantitative data and would appear less appealing to funding agencies. Second, the cost of data regulation is a consideration. Scholars indicated that to prevent qualitative data from being lost and unethically altered, a new set of rules for data repository regulation that considers the uniqueness of qualitative data is necessary. The formulation and application of such rules will undoubtedly incur costs.

Furthermore, scholars feared qualitative research with a high budget for OCS might be at a disadvantage in the fierce competition for research funding. Scholar 18, for instance, expressed his concerns: "While it is argued that with a more parsimonious data collection, open science can help with better spending of research money, this could be used against researchers. Why would research councils bother to fund future research any longer?" Scholar 14 expressed his wish: "Hope they still see the value of investing in open qualitative research. I genuinely worry that the funding councils are less motivated to fund further projects."

More Insights or Constraints?

Most scholars are optimistic about the influence of open qualitative research. They believed that open qualitative research provides detailed insights into phenomena because they will be able to access almost unlimited data and sufficient methodological details to understand the overall research process. It can assist them in easily determining the academic gap for a clearer focus in their research because it is based on what is available in the open repertoire.

Scholars also value the pedagogical benefits brought by open qualitative research. They admitted that it provides good opportunities for junior scholars to learn about how to carry out research, gain insights from others, and expand their horizons. Scholar 3 said, "OS provides unlimited views and permits broader understanding regarding the focus study. New researchers will have a better grasp of conceptualization of other similar research instead of theirs."

Furthermore, scholars believe that OCS can facilitate knowledge building and upskilling in qualitative research. They argued communication researchers tend to develop a better methodology after learning and understanding the first approach. Eventually, this leads to the development of more techniques and methodologies.

Nevertheless, there are scholars who worry that open qualitative research may reduce researchers' motivation to collect new data and become less critical. They argued that being an academician demands a certain level of intellect and using open-sharing qualitative data too often will diminish their ability to be critical, make progress, and become as accomplished as they should be the first and foremost. Scholar 2, for example, said,

> The writers tend to paraphrase from the original data to escape plagiarism, give some
> comments that could be generic, and the worst part is that it could make them not be critical
> in thinking, which eventually leads to the inability for the readers to feel an epiphany.

Moreover, some scholars worried that open qualitative research would constrain research freedom, limiting their imagination and exploration. For example, Scholar 34, whose research involves working with vulnerable communities such as the aging population and the sensory impaired community, expressed that she is particularly concerned regarding how the ethical dimension of open science will affect her studies.

More Trust or Distrust?

Most scholars believed that rigorous qualitative research needed to be open and cumulative. Even though qualitative research is not traditionally subject to the same rigors of quantitative research regarding data and data sharing in that it is interpretive and subjective, it does not mean that qualitative researchers can be heedless with their data. However, they debated over whether OS will add trust to qualitative research.

One stream believed OS could increase trust for qualitative research. First was trust in the research. They argued there would be more rigorous data collection and analysis, and the shared data are critical to allow replication as a way to prove the research reliance. Consequently, qualitative research can attain more visibility and citations. Second was trust among researchers. Scholars believe it will inspire external researchers to reuse the data from different perspectives and make it easier for scholars to find new projects and collaborators, which can increase trust within the academic communities. Third was trust between the masses and researchers. As mentioned by Scholar 12, "I felt that my research impact has benefited from OS, my research has reached beyond the academic community."

The other stream did not count much on OS to solve the problem of fraud. They pointed out that OS alone cannot guarantee trust, and in contrast, it reflects increased distrust within qualitative research. They argued if the review process does not work well, then regardless of how authors make their data available to the public, bad research will continue to be published. For instance, Scholar 4 argued, "OS may create the false sense of trust because individuals can still manipulate the process . . . if one is intent on falsifying data, there are still ways of misrepresenting the data." They pointed out that the root lies in the lack of a concrete accountability system for open qualitative research. As suggested by Scholar 35,

> OS cannot guarantee trust; the most important thing is building a standard procedure in rectifying dishonest research practices and following it very vigorously . . . there has to be a system in which violators are punished duly, and this will be an essential deterring factor.

More Collaboration or Imputation?

Some scholars believed that adopting OCS in qualitative research promotes sharing of information and leads to more collaboration across individuals, groups, and disciplines. They argued open qualitative research could save them time and effort in collecting data and help them collaborate with other scholars with similar research interests. Scholar 24, who studies health communication, cited himself as an example: "Mass communication can collaborate with a faculty of medicine . . . any diseases like COVID-19 cannot actually stand on its own . . . the cooperation helps bridge the gap between medicine and communication." They pointed out that such cooperation can also be reflected in the process of knowledge accumulation, such as more comprehensive and scientific literature reviews. As Scholar 24 said, "For qualitative studies,

OCS can give a historical background of other research that leads to a similar context . . . we are much reliant on others' research because it gives us some scenarios that could be understood by us."

Nevertheless, some scholars worried open qualitative research might not bring ideal cooperation. It is indicated that although sharing of published data may function as a check for holding research accountable, it may invite unethical intentions and "spoiler" behaviors. Qualitative data are subject to various interpretations, and others may intentionally abuse the data for selfish purposes, for example in discrediting others and in lodging unfair accusations against others. Scholar 9, for instance, expressed his concerns: "I am afraid the data I collected may not be used appropriately by other scholars. There might be biases in terms of handling and interpreting the data." Scholar 8 further expressed the worries of "missing the identity" in OCS.

> I am a pure communications scholar. So, I couldn't see myself being in other areas, in other expertise. If I collaborate with someone in other areas, should or shouldn't I call that research being produced as my expertise? That is the risk.

Conclusion

Given the ongoing OCS conversation, this study offered an empirical perspective on the need for— and impact of—open research practices involving qualitative and humanistic research and data. Across the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and Malaysia, scholars cautiously support qualitative OCS. Data sharing is guided by research goals and content, while scholars prefer sharing "condensed" rather than "raw" data. Interestingly, our scholars criticized the traditional OS aims of providing evidence to support research findings and reusing data to generate new outputs (Childs et al., 2014). They noted the methodological and practical obstacles to verifying and reusing qualitative data, particularly the subjectivity accompanying interpretation, without a full understanding of the contexts surrounding the original data collection. The current findings echo the caution expressed in prior studies that the OS standards of reproducibility and replicability may not correspond to certain types of qualitative scholarship (Bowman et al., 2022). Our study also highlights the potential risks surrounding confidentiality, intellectual property rights, and informed consent. These are three major areas of concern for not only communication scholars but also those in other disciplines (Abele-Brehm et al., 2019; Cheah et al., 2015). Anonymizing qualitative data is far more difficult than doing so with quantitative data, whereas obtaining informed consent from qualitative research participants to share the data they provide is extremely challenging, particularly for research projects exploring sensitive, controversial, or private topics.

OCS is a double-edged sword, and proponents argue it can improve the quality of qualitative data, save money through more parsimonious data collection and reuse existing data, add value to the original data, give researchers more insights and inspiration, increase trust and transparency in qualitative research, and facilitate collaboration among different scholars and disciplines. In contrast, critiques argue it brings more harm than good: obligatory sharing of qualitative data may create "data cemeteries"; the uniqueness of qualitative data may incur additional data collection and management costs. Others opine that OCS's value is limited to historical studies, openness introduces more constraints to research, the call for transparency breeds distrust within qualitative research, and OCS characteristics might invite more imputation and unethical behavior.

Our analysis could be expanded in several ways. Attitudes not examined—for example, quantitative communication scientists' perceptions of open qualitative research and whether they will judge it using quantitative criteria—may deepen our understanding of our research community's overall attitudes toward OCS. Various indicators, such as nationality, title, and research interest, could also be further analyzed to more fully grasp what such characteristics afford. Our sampling focus on four countries likely minimized other important attributes: Analyses of larger spaces require careful attention to issues of academic systems and the overall progress of OS in different countries. Furthermore, our emphasis on the challenges and risks of open qualitative research could also be linked with potential measures and solutions for researchers and institutions, for example, interview protocols and partial transcripts rather than full transcripts, and access to an open scholarship platform with confidentiality agreement. Finally, different methodological techniques could capture other dimensions of communication scholars' attitudes toward open qualitative research not examined here: fieldwork observations could explore potential gaps between perceptions and practices, and survey data could test the degree to which the attitudes toward OCS observed in our sample exist elsewhere.

The implications of OCS in qualitative research are mixed, which is exemplified. Any decision to embark on OCS should begin by considering the possible unintended consequences of using open materials and open data (Bowman & Spence, 2020), given that quantitative methodologies and theoretical approaches do not map readily to qualitative and humanistic research (Grand et al., 2012; Lewis, 2020; Shaw et al., 2021). At this juncture, we momentarily conclude that OCS offers some promise for qualitative research, but it is important to remain cautious about its possible perils.

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