



## COVID-19 Lockdown: A Review of an Alternative to the Traditional Approach to Research



### Short Communication

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#### Abstract

This study aims to offer alternative ways of conducting research in the periods of lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic when the traditional research approaches are not feasible. This is crucial as some researchers hold the wrong perception that such difficult times are only fallow periods to focus on their personal and family problems. The study argues that there is the need for researchers to be busy carrying out investigations aimed at finding solutions to the multiplicity of problems faced by global communities as a result of the pandemic. Using desk research and document analysis of secondary data from published articles, the study discusses research approaches, particularly, alternative means of garnering primary and secondary data for investigating the COVID-19 pandemic from different academic disciplines. It posits that telephone and video conferencing interviews, text-based chats and e-surveys are alternative means for collecting primary data while secondary data from published articles and newspaper reports are viable means of generating reliable data for research. These alternative approaches to research would keep researchers busy in finding solutions to the difficult challenges faced during pandemics, the period their services are needed the most.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, pandemics, research writing, secondary data, telephone interviews, video interviews



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**Public Interest Statement**

Over the years, research activities have been popularly carried out using traditional research approaches. In pandemic outbreaks such as the current COVID-19, these traditional research approaches are not feasible due to the restrictions imposed on human movements to prevent the spread of infection. This study offers an alternate for undertaking research activities that generate reliable data which can be scholarly analyzed to produce new knowledge. It scholarly demonstrates how social media tools, secondary data and technological devices available can be harnessed effectively in producing quality research even in times of lockdowns as a result of pandemics.

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**1. Introduction**

Researchers are problem solvers who are relied on by global communities to offer sound and practical solutions to disturbing cankers in society at all times (Gaillet & Guglielmo, 2014) such as the recent COVID-19 global pandemic. The world is in great fear and panic due to the coronavirus pandemic and possibly the information and misinformation including conspiracy theories about its origin (Depoux, Martin, Karafillakis & Preet, 2020). People are disturbed psychologically and this period of crisis is causing stress throughout the population of the world with such symptoms as anxiety and depression as common psychological reactions; probably because individuals or their relatives and loved ones have tested positive for coronavirus or lost them to it (Bao, Sun, Meng, Shi & Lu, 2019; Rajkumar, 2020; WHO, 2020). Many researchers may have to face stigmatization from the COVID-19 (Centre for Disease Control, 2020). That notwithstanding, researchers are not cowards but fighters to stand up at all times to perform their duties to bring relief to the different facets of problems as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. Nothing should hold back researchers from discharging their duties which is primarily offering solutions all the time to the disturbing challenges in the society. Pandemic outbreaks are not fallow periods, neither are they holidays for researchers but rather times they must get busy with other alternative ways of carrying out their research activities (Clay, 2020). Periods of pandemic are supposed to be crucial times for researchers to sit at the table, investigating ways of combating the multiplicity of challenges brought about by the pandemic. This study aims to discuss some of the best approaches in conducting research even in periods of lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study argues that researchers have other means of carrying out their research activities when they have geographical constraints to collect data using traditional data collection procedures (Nehls, Smith & Schneider, 2015).

**2. Methods**

The study is a short communication driven in the qualitative approach, with desk research (Travis, 2016) and document analysis (Bowen, 2009) as the main research methods. Secondary data was obtained from published articles and news reports, from various online databases such as CiteSeerx, WorldCat, Google Advanced Search, CORE, and ResearchGate as well as various online news portals. A total of thirty-three (33)

articles were reviewed for the study. The high number of references is because the study relied on only secondary data. These sources were deemed as more convenient and cost-effective (Smith, 2008; Johnson, 2014) in the lockdown period within which the study was conducted. The secondary data were carefully analyzed thematically based on the broad research themes (Creswell, 2009). The discussions were scholarly corroborated with the existing theories in the literature (Peshkin, 1993). A final concise write-up was produced based on themes that emanated from the document analysis.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### ***3.1 Data Collection Procedures during Lockdowns***

Due to its allied management and preventive measures such as social distancing and lockdowns, the traditional procedures for data collection for research such as the distribution of questionnaires and conducting face-to-face interviews are not feasible (DeMers, 2020). Working remotely via computer-mediated communication technologies is appropriate in such conditions for generating qualitative and quantitative data (Clay, 2020). Telephone and video interviews, text-based chats, administration of electronic survey tools such as electronic questionnaires have considerable success in data generation (Harris, 2011) and could be used during pandemics when the physical movements of researchers are restricted.

##### ***3.1.1 Telephone Interviews***

Telephone interviews can be used in gathering the perceptions of respondents on the research phenomenon under investigation. However, it should be well organized and structured (Dolan, 2019) as if it was a face-to-face interview, with a tested and validated interview guide in hand. The room where the telephone call will be placed should be free from all forms of distraction. The researcher, now the interviewer should speak slowly and articulate clearly, framing auxiliary questions to clarify the main questions asked if it is not clear to the interviewee. The researcher should always be quick to listen to the actions and inactions of the respondents during the telephone interview. Moreover, the researcher must create a flexible and friendly environment via the tone of his voice, though he must ensure professionalism at all times. This would aid the interviewees to freely respond to the questions asked in all sincerity. Telephone interviews are more appropriate for conducting interviews with the rural population where the majority of the study participants may not have android devices that support video technology tools.

##### ***3.1.2 Online Video Conferencing Interviews***

Online video conferencing interview is now one of the fastest and reliable means of collecting qualitative data from respondents just like a face-to-face interview (Nehls, Smith & Schneider, 2015). It communicates in real-time via audio and video technologies such as Skype, Zoom, Google Meet, Google Duo, Adobe Connect, Apple's Face Time, Wimba and Google Chat. The videoconferencing duly follows the same

protocols during traditional face-to-face interviews. Video conferencing interviews allow the same system of flexibility just like telephone interviews where respondents stay in the comforts of their homes and workplaces. According to Kock's (2004) psychobiological model, a computer-mediated communication's degree of naturalness is dependent on the inclusion of elements of traditional face-to-face communication. Video interviews are conducted in real-time communication (synchronous), it is vouched as having a high degree of naturalness (Nehls, Smith & Schneider, 2015).

### **3.1.3 Text-Based/Instant Messaging Interviews**

Social media such as WhatsApp, WeChat, Facebook, Instagram Live and many others can be used for text-based or instant messaging interview (Fontes & O'Mahony, 2008). Mobile phone devices with android feature support apps for these social media tools. Many mobile phone devices that cannot be used for hosting the above mentioned social media tools can be used for SMS which can be used for text-based chats. The text-based or instant messaging engages respondents and can generate insightful data from them in an investigation of a phenomenon (Mann & Stewart, 2000). The ethics in encoding and decoding of texts must be followed. These include communicating text-based questions in much clarity and constructing text in simplicity, free from syntax weaknesses. Short-hands and jargon popular in informal text-based communications must be avoided.

Professionalism and formality must be upheld at all times in text-based interviews. This would reduce the impersonal and subjective nature of text-based communications (DeMers, 2020). Youths are much fascinated and like to communicate their views using text-based communication (Bryant, Sanders-Jackson, Smallwood & Ming, 2006), making it an essential data collection tool for studies that involve the youth. That notwithstanding, it can equally work well for other people of different age range because of its asynchronous nature, affording them to respond at their convenience.

### **3.1.4 Electronic Surveys**

The electronic survey is using electronic communication means in delivering online surveys to potential respondents and the collection of survey data from actual respondents (Jansen, Corley & Jansen, 2007). The two popular e-surveys are the e-mail surveys and the web-based surveys. Researchers are much interested in web-based e-survey which is only accessible via a web browser (Stanton, 1998). E-surveys in the form of the questionnaire is designed using SurveyMonkey, Typeform, Easypolls, etc. Electronic questionnaire holds the advantages of cost reduction (Lumsden, 2005) as well as speed in the collection and analysis of the data accrued (Van & Jankowski, 2006). E-questionnaire affords respondents great flexibility in offering their responses at their convenience in time and place. Moreover, the absence of the researcher's presence aids in reducing all forms of biases in responses, ensuring high objectivity (Minto, Vriza, Martinato & Gregori, 2017). Researchers have the freedom of sitting in the comforts of

their home designing, validating and disseminating the e-questionnaire via e-mails or other web-based platforms to the target respondents (Stanton, 1998).

### ***3.2 Exploring the Possibilities of Using Secondary Data for Research***

There is a high possibility of using secondary data generated through published materials in archived sources such as published academic research, newspaper reports, internal circulars and public reports of companies and government agencies, TV and Radio interviews and discussions for empirical studies (Harris, 2011). These secondary data are readily at the disposal of researchers at all times (Dalton & Metzger, 1992) with its collection flexible even in pandemic outbreaks such as the present COVID-19 global outbreak. Technology has made available, these vast amounts of secondary data (Johnson, 2014). Granted, there are costs in ensuring a steady internet supply and data bundles, yet, these costs may not be paralleled to the traditional ways of primary data solicitation. Gathering primary data via personal interviews and focus group discussions as well as the manual distribution of printed questionnaires comes at a high monetary cost and takes a great deal of time. Desk studies using existing empirical secondary data (Travis, 2016) can offer great enlightenment and solutions to existing problems under investigation, the same way primary data from traditional data collection instruments do. These secondary data are scholarly reviewed and analyzed via the more popular content analysis which is an unobstructed and well-developed technique for analyzing secondary data (Neuman, 1994) and/or the interpretive document analysis (Bowen, 2009) to offer new knowledge or lens to tackle the problems faced in global communities. Therefore, in pandemic outbreaks, even in the confines of their homes, researchers can work with secondary data to elucidate novel findings that would solve the problems in the society while broadening the horizon of knowledge in diverse fields of studies.

## **4. Conclusion**

Society relies on researchers to find proactive solutions to the challenges they constantly face. This is more needed in periods of pandemics such as the COVID-19. Therefore, researchers are expected to be productive at all times, especially when pandemics strike, to speedily offer insightful measures in overcoming its associated problems. The study concludes that researchers can collect essential data using text-based chats, telephone and video interviews, e-survey administration and the use of secondary data from print, audio, and video media to offer solutions to societal problems. However, to assist researchers to expedite their efforts in undertaking their research activities, funding must be provided by the government and other private funding agencies. In periods of pandemics, like the COVID-19, many countries have set up special funds in fighting the pandemic and many corporate bodies, industries, and well-meaning citizens are donating heavily to support the course. Governments could offer a percentage of the COVID-19 Fund to research institutions in their respective countries to equip them with the needed resources to carry out the urgent studies required to combat the spread of

the COVID-19. Some governments and private funding bodies are setting good examples in this respect and their efforts are worthy of emulation (University of Oxford, 2020; University of Ghana, 2020). Researchers must realize the urgency of these times, not seeing it as a fallow period for research activities. Selsacrifice and dedication on the part of all researchers globally are required the most in this period of crisis to collectively fight against the COVID-19 global pandemic.

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Mavis Osei is a Ghanaian Painter, Art Educator, Art Therapist and a Fulbright alumnus. She has a BA Art and a PhD Art Education from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana. She also has a Diploma in Mental Health Studies from Alison, Ireland and an MA Art (Clinical Art Therapy) from Long Island University, New York. She is an affable and dedicated Senior Lecturer in KNUST with ten years of university teaching experience demonstrating constant success as an Educator and Art Therapist in undergraduate and postgraduate education teaching courses like Educational Psychology, Psychology of Human Development and Learning, Art Therapy and Aesthetics and Criticism. She has also authored an Art Therapy postgraduate programme for the university, the first of its kind in the sub-region. Mavis has an array of publications to her credit. Currently, she is the Head of Department, Educational Innovations in Science and Technology, KNUST.

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