

DIGITAL RESEARCH

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- The digital world is a moving object that impacts on how people are making and understanding their own lives in online and virtual environments. This has given rise to new digital research methods, and the digitisation of existing methods.
- The rise of digital research involves learning new skills for researchers and raises ethical and practical challenges, including the redefinition of public/private boundaries, consent and quality.
- Digital research offers advantages, including working across spatial and temporal boundaries, reducing costs, multiplying the voices and perspectives included and represented in research and enabling greater scrutiny of elites. Concerns relate to continued barriers to access and inequalities and digital privacy invasions, prompting demands for the democratization of the digital.
- Digital methods are changing social research practices and have the potential to challenge traditional ways of understanding.

Digital social research has become an increasingly mainstream category...to analyse new kinds of data in novel ways.

(May and Perry, 2022: 195)



DISCUSS

- What is the difference between digital and digitised methods?
- What different values and ethical dilemmas inform the conduct of digital research?
- Can digital research foster a more democratic form of knowledge production?
- Is the future of social research digital? Justify your opinion.

DO

You were in the middle of a participatory action research project in an area of multiple disadvantage in an inner city area. You are part of an international network and your colleagues overseas are undertaking similar work in their own countries. There is a pandemic and your government issues a stay-at-home order, whilst your international partners are still able to do fieldwork. You must work remotely for an indefinite period, but your funding will run out in 12 months' time.

- What do you do with your own research project? Are your partners able to continue? How have their circumstances changed?
- Are you able to adapt or innovate using digital technologies to carry out this work? Can you use different remote methods to achieve the same goals, or do you need different goals?
- What are the implications for your participation in the international network?
- What other issues might arise and can digital research help you address them?

This summary has been developed as an Open Access resource to support educators, students and researchers to develop and extend their understanding of the practice of social research. It draws on May, T. and Perry, B. (2022) *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*. London: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill. To buy the book, please visit [Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process](#), use code OPENUP20 for a discount.