



# Research through social media in the time of 'social' distancing

*Reflecting on the 'Life during lockdown' study*



science & innovation

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HSRC  
Human Sciences  
Research Council

# *About the Life during lockdown study*

- Conceptualised in a group discussion during the first 2 weeks of the lockdown
  - How will the COVID-19 pandemic influence our lives and how will we cope during lockdown?
- **Study conceptualisation team**
  - Candice Groenewald (Phd), Zaynab Essack (PhD), Natasha Van der Pol (MA), Prof Alastair van Heerden, Inbarani Naidoo (PhD)
- **Study implementation team**
  - Thobeka Ntini (Doctoral scholar and Project manager)
  - Mafanato Maluleka (Fieldwork manager)
  - Thabo Keetsi (data capturer / transcriber)
  - Lindelwa Bhembe (data capturer / transcriber)



# In-depth exploration



## *Research interests*

Explore describe investigate uncover  
document present experience

### **Study aims**

- To explore South African's perceptions and experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown over time
- Open and responsive approach
  - Regulations
  - Challenges and struggles + Coping responses
  - Fears and concerns + Happiness and future aspirations [wellbeing]
  - COVID-19 knowledge, risk and protective practices (KAPB)
  - Phenomenology of the lockdown (positive and negative outcomes/experiences/perspectives)

### **Study participants**

- Who will be impacted by the lockdown and pandemic:  
EVERYONE
  - Children (5-12 yo), adolescents (13-17 yo), adults (18-59 yo) and older adults (60+ yo)



In the midst of a pandemic,  
'social' distancing and a strict  
lockdown, how will we  
implement our research?

Popular and convenient  
communication platform: Social media

# *Research and social media*

- Social media platforms have become increasingly popular spaces for participant recruitment and data collection
  - especially useful when in-person contact with potential participants is not suitable.
- The dynamic nature of social media offers unique opportunities to directly communicate with participants and explore their experiences, interactions and perspectives
- Popular platforms include social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram as well as instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Messenger



'Social media' is a platform and has to be paired with appropriate methodologies

# *Qualitative dominant mixed-methods approach*

## **Traditional approaches**

- Traditional qualitative 1:1 telephone interviews
- Traditional quantitative surveys

## **Alternative approaches**

- Visual methodologies
  - Photovoice (Wang et al., 1990)
  - Expression sessions (Groenewald et al., 2018)
- Rapid WhatsApp engagements through voicenotes and texts



## Life during lockdown

### Tell us **YOUR STORY**

The HSRC is inviting you to participate in some exciting research about YOUR lockdown experiences

We are interested in learning about your life before, during and after lockdown!



You can participate by  
\*taking a quick survey  
\*telephone/WhatsApp interviews  
or  
\*taking pictures or short videos of your day

#### Who can participate?

- Children (5 - 11yrs)
- Teens (12-17yrs)
- Adult women
- Adult men
- Older persons (60+yrs)

We will communicate with u via WhatsApp

Participants under 18 yrs will need parental permission to join the study

If you are interested, please send a 'please call me' OR WhatsApp to **065 851 6942**

The study has been approved by the HSRC Research Ethics Committee (REC1/04/20)

# Recruitment Platforms



## Participant Engagement Platform

- Consent and assent
- Data collection
  - Traditional qualitative 1:1 telephone interviews
  - Traditional quantitative surveys
  - Visual methodologies (Photovoice and expression sessions)
  - Rapid WhatsApp engagements through voicenotes and texts
- Feedback and sharing findings



Social media as a research  
platform during the  
lockdown: Was it useful?





# *Facilitated recruitment*



CHILDREN (5-12 YO)  
[N=15]

ADOLESCENTS (13-17 YO)  
[N=14]

ADULTS (18-59 YO)  
[N=48]

OLDER ADULTS (60+ YO)  
[N=10]

TEACHERS  
[N=10]

WFH  
[N=57]

# Facilitated data collection

- Allowed us to implement various data collection strategies without 'interfering' in the participants' lives
  - Facilitated dissemination of research activities to participants
  - Allowed participants to easily share their responses (texts, voicenotes, photos or videos) through a familiar platform
- Participants could respond when they were ready and comfortable
- Participants had access to a researcher to clarify questions
- Researcher developed interactive relationships with participants which encourage participation

**LIFE DURING LOCKDOWN FOR KIDS**

**ACTIVITY 3** 

**PLEASE SEND US A WHATSAPP TEXT MESSAGE OR VOICENOTE TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS**

 Remember there are no wrong answers!

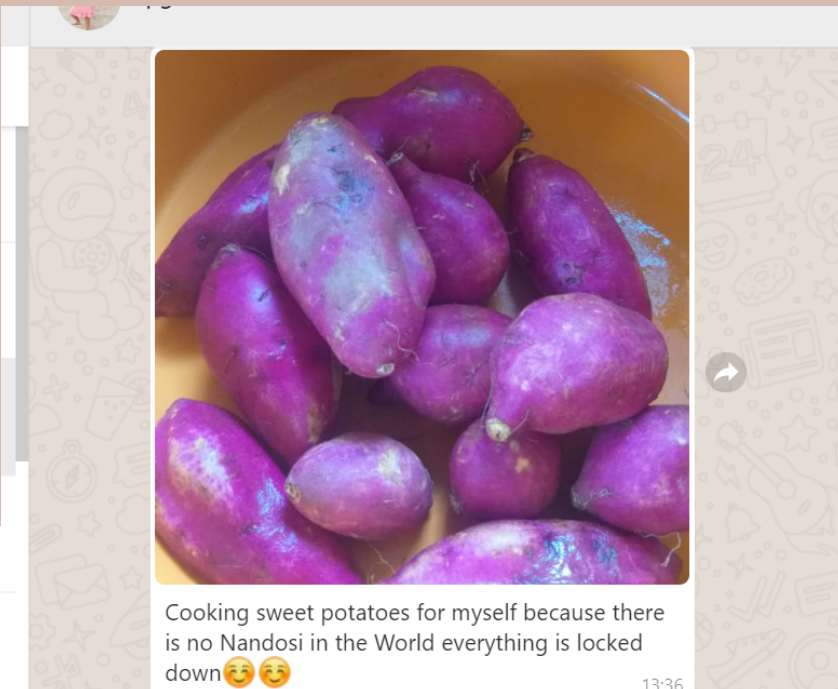
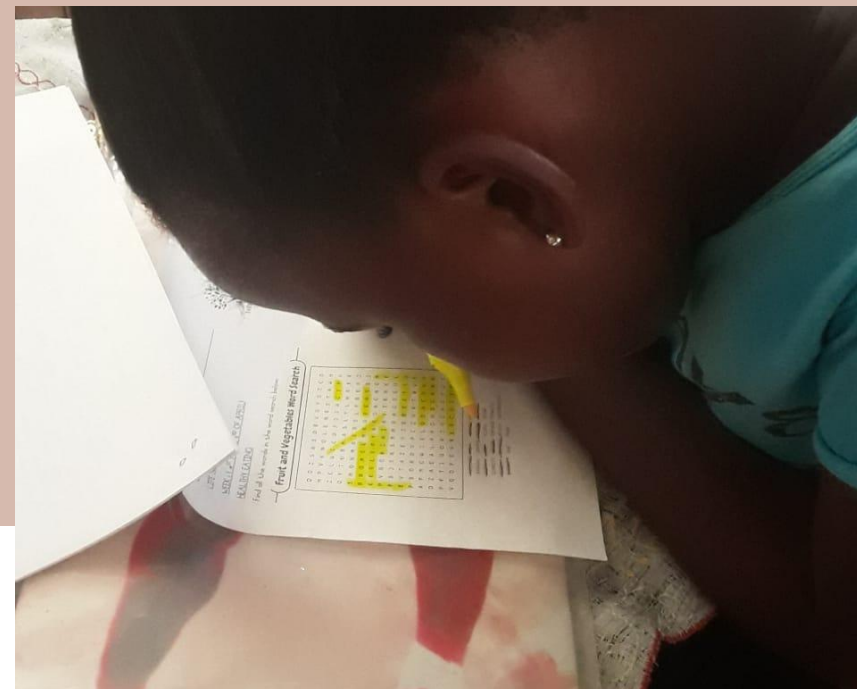
 Q1 Is there anything about the lockdown that makes you feel sad?  
If there is, please tell us about this.

 Q2 Is there anything about the lockdown that makes you feel happy?  
If there is, please tell us about this

 **PLEASE SEND US UP TO 3 PICTURES OR SHORT VIDEOS TO SHOW US WHAT YOU DO TO KEEP UP WITH YOUR SCHOOL WORK DURING LOCKDOWN**

*When you send your pictures, please send us a WhatsApp voicenote or text message to explain why you sent them*

*Provided insights into people's experiences during the lockdown*



*Provided  
insights  
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lockdown*



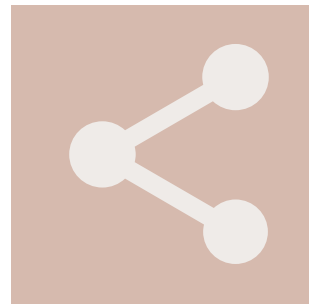
You must wear  
your mask  
when you are  
going to  
school, or else  
coronavirus  
will catch you  
and you will  
get sick!



Social media as a research  
platform: What have we  
learned so far?

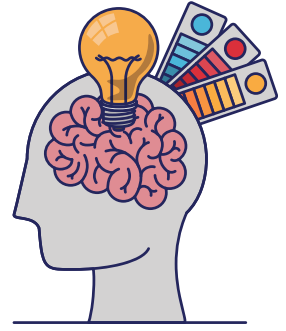


## EMBRACE THE 'PLEASE SHARE' CULTURE



- Stay active on social media and be prepared to respond to questions

## BE CREATIVE WITH CONTENT



- Briefs need to stimulate interest
- Keep research activities short and clear
- Use multiple activities- follow-up interviews are valuable
- Social media engagement is not for everyone

## DEVELOP AGE-APPROPRIATE CONTENT



- Language
- Colours
- Images

## ACTIVE AND INVESTED PARTICIPANT LIAISONS



- Active WhatsApp number
- Available 'after-hours'
- Interactive and responsive

Research  
via social  
media is  
valuable but  
time-  
consuming



*Thank you*

