Using the Internet to Conduct Research With Culturally Diverse Populations: Challenges and Opportunities

Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar, Fabrio E. Balcazar, and Tina Taylor-Ritzler
University of Illinois at Chicago

People from around the globe rely on the Internet for daily use in a variety of ways from downloading information and sharing content with friends and family to collecting data for research purposes. Although the means have seen rapid growth in access to the Internet among multicultural populations, some areas are still far behind. In particular, those with the least limited access include those with limited English proficiency and those living in rural areas. This paper discusses the use of the Internet as a research tool for culturally diverse populations with a focus on two specific populations: African Americans and those living in rural areas. The Internet as a tool to collect information about participants (e.g., survey research, qualitative and descriptive research, and needs assessment) and the Internet as a research tool and provide recommendations for using the Internet to collect information about the Internet itself. The paper also provides some general guidelines for using the Internet as a research tool and provide recommendations for using the Internet to collect information about the Internet itself. The paper also provides some general guidelines for using the Internet as a research tool and provide recommendations for using the Internet to collect information about the Internet itself.
Challenges in Using the Internet as a Tool to Collect Information About Participants

The first challenge is to adequately frame and represent the experiment in the context of everyday life. The second is to attract working-class communities who are less likely to have access to the Internet. Without internet access, individuals of color, people with disabilities, and those from lower-income backgrounds may be left out of essential conversations about health. The authors found that those who completed the survey may have been more interested in engaging with the topics presented. The third challenge is to determine the consent forms and understand the implications of each subgroup's consent process. The fourth challenge is to design a user-friendly and accessible website for those who may need it. The fifth challenge is to ensure that the website is easy to use and navigate. The sixth challenge is to ensure that the website is accessible to all individuals, regardless of their internet access. The seventh challenge is to ensure that the website is secure and protected against data breaches. The eighth challenge is to ensure that the website is compliant with data protection laws. The ninth challenge is to ensure that the website is efficient and effective in delivering the intended information. The tenth challenge is to ensure that the website is regularly updated and maintained.
The project paid for printers and the monthly cost of the Internet connection. This study was conducted in collaboration with a community health organization and a local hospital. An interdisciplinary research team researched and prioritized the community leader, provided ongoing trouble shooting, and evaluated the outcomes of the intervention. In collaboration with some of the community leaders who participated in the project, the research team developed a project website that included health information and links to the cultural center. The website included information about community events, jobs, local schools’ events, education, and information about a number of social service resources that community residents could access. The researchers used several resources to assess the impact of providing WebTVs, training, and asking participants to help themselves. They included discussions with the participants’ sense of empowerment and sense of community and included interviews and focus groups to collect data on the use of the Internet. The results of this study revealed that there were significant differences in the leaders’ sense of empowerment when compared to the median of women who were not participating in the intervention (Mxu et al., 2003). The results also indicated that participants felt more knowledgeable and educated about using the Internet to access information as well as proud of their new skills (Szares-Balcazar, 2005). Furthermore, from the participants’ stories, the researchers reported that the most frequently donated sites were related to entertainment and the project’s health Web site. The citizen leaders also used the Internet as a tool to communicate with one another, to obtain information about resources that facilitated their role as leaders, and to promote self-help actions to improve their community (Szares-Balcazar & Kimney, 2002).

One of the goals of the intervention was to extend access to the Internet to other community members by having community leaders available to assist them on their residential computers. This goal, however, was quickly turned down because they did not want to charge people for using their own house. Instead, it was recommended by the community leaders themselves, the research team placed WebTVs in various community settings, in health clubs, senior centers, afterschool programs, and community-based organizations. Although this placement was intended for adults resident of the community, the most common users were children and teenagers, who used it for entertainment, homework, and employment searches. The WebTVs placed in community leaders’ homes were shared by their extended families. The Department of Education’s “Friends” campaign in general, this study demonstrated that access to the Internet can build individual and community capacity to access information and help close the digital divide.

Challenges for Using the Internet as Part of Intervention

One of the challenges is the sustainability of the technology even the project is completed. For instance, in the study conducted by Szares-Balcazar, Kimney et al. (2005), the project was funded by a grant from the Department of Education. Once the project was completed and funding ceased, participants were responsible for covering the costs of their own WebTV operators. For low-income and elderly families this expense is not necessarily a priority. About 25% of the participants maintained the operation of their WebTVs and another 25% decided to upgrade and buy personal computers for their homes (less than 25% of the participants discontinued their use of WebTV). Yet, access to the Internet is critical for decreasing the digital divide. One way to address this issue is by having community leaders and other potential champions for technology. Lack of recreation centers, public libraries, health centers, and schools.

A second challenge is having the support and technical assistance needed to support empowerment and training (Balcazar, 2001). In one of our studies we observed that when some members experienced trouble with their equipment or the connection, they waited for the technical support team to fix the problem without first attempting to solve the problem themselves, even if this meant calls to the research team. The Internet must be used in paper-and-pencil surveys directed at at-risk and less-explored populations.

Visual information may facilitate access to potential responses to cultural and demographic differences and those with learning disabilities. However, with visual displays, the information on the screen may deter individuals with visual impairments. It is important to link the survey to an Internet survey. For example, the commonly available version of Survey Monitor, a survey platform commonly used for data collection over the Internet, does not respond to click on the appropriate box to select their response. Persons with visual impairments cannot see the buttons to mark their responses and have to rely on access reader programs like Jaws. However, Jaws cannot read these small type fonts. The Survey Monitor and many other survey platforms are not yet accessible to people with visual impairments. For accommodations for people with a variety of disabilities much more could be considered by software developers and many are, in fact, adapting their platforms to have this accessibility. Therefore, researchers should consider testing both versions.

Consider the culture and language of the population of interest. Despite the gap, there has been a growing interest in the use of the Internet by diverse cultural and language groups. Immigrants as well as children and teenagers, who used it for entertainment, homework, and employment searches. The WebTVs placed in community leaders’ homes were shared by their extended families. The Department of Education’s “Friends” campaign in general, this study demonstrated that access to the Internet can build individual and community capacity to access information and help close the digital divide

The Internet delivery services, like BIPL, have the potential of increasing access and perhaps reduce collection costs. A secretor significant aspect of access is education and technology. Potential research participants may need support to effectively use the technology. Lack of familiarity and knowledge can limit the use of the Internet.

Although the support response to each person support may initially be needed to help potential Internet users the Internet. Self-service strategies might not necessarily work well with individuals who have limited education.

2. Consider the benefits and limitations of using visual displays. Researchers should use visual aids and easy-to-read text. Research participants may need support to effectively use the technology. Lack of familiarity and knowledge can limit the use of the Internet.

3. When using visual displays of any kind, the information on the screen may deter individuals with visual impairments. It is important to link the survey to an Internet survey. For example, the commonly available version of Survey Monitor, a survey platform commonly used for data collection over the Internet, does not respond to click on the appropriate box to select their response. Persons with visual impairments cannot see the buttons to mark their responses and have to rely on access reader programs like Jaws. However, Jaws cannot read these small type fonts. The Survey Monitor and many other survey platforms are not yet accessible to people with visual impairments. For accommodations for people with a variety of disabilities much more could be considered by software developers and many are, in fact, adapting their platforms to have this accessibility. Therefore, researchers should consider testing both versions.

5. Provide technical assistance to potential respondents. Most people don’t have experience completing surveys on the Web. As a result, researchers may consider providing clear instructions and assistance to reduce respondents’ difficulties. Offering a toll-free phone number for in-person assistance or online resources can assist people who may encounter difficulties while participating in the research project.

6. Ensure that the survey can be completed in a relatively short amount of time. One of the biggest challenges of Internet survey data collection is to keep potential respondents actually complete the survey and submit it. This is of course a problem that all types of surveys face, but surveys on the Web can be busy and they do not want to spend too much time filling out surveys.

7. Consider payment or other forms of compensation. People are less likely to fill out an instrument if it is of personal relevance or if it is not paid. A significant amount of effort is put into marketing the Internet to the population of interest. For translation to be adequately achieved, you must pilot test the Internet protocols with the appropriate population(s) and to see if their active participation in the translation process.

4. Data access to an electronic mailing list. An effective Web-based approach for survey research requires access to the particular target that the target population sample. In the case of our study with the community leaders, we had access to the list maintained by the Colombian Consulate of Chicago. There were over 4,000 contacts in the list at the time of the study and the number continued to grow because of individuals obtaining any type of service from the office of the consulate. The individuals provide an e-mail contact if they had one. This means that the researchers have a list of potential candidates or organizational agencies responsible for keeping an active list of updated e-mail addresses of specific groups. Agencies do not want to overwhelm their constituents with too much information about participating in a research project. This is why in any typical survey approaches to research is helpful in building the collaboration, engaging the agencies, and participants in the process of determining the importance of the research and data-collection efforts, and, most importantly, the potential benefits that will be achieved from participating in a research project.

8. Email approval. The issues of confidentiality and anonymity are crucial in any survey research.
nations have to be carefully explained when submitting your request for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. University researchers are required to comply with federal guidelines for the protection of human subjects in research. These guidelines emphasize the importance of protecting the confidentiality of data and preventing any form of work-related stress. Researchers should ensure that their research studies respect the privacy and autonomy of participants who provide consent. Studies involving personal information must be approved by an IRB. IRBs may require researchers to seek informed consent from potential participants if they determine that the research addresses a topic that is sensitive to the respondent, or if the respondent is believed to be vulnerable in some way or another. The informed consent document must be provided in a language that is understandable to the respondent. The informed consent document must be signed by the respondent.

10. Internet and culture: the internet and multilayered institutional effects


& Behavior, 10, 1-4.


http://www.jisc.ac.uk/projects/researches/The%20Digital%20 Divide/Results%202.pdf
