

## **Approaches to data in the case of digital informal archives: A digital history study based on the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America**

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Several projects have started to use digital tools to collect and display records and memories of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide in 2020.<sup>1</sup> Previous studies have shown that this plethora of incipient archives, following Derrida's conception<sup>2</sup>, varies in several elements such as ownership, scale and scope, types of documents, strategies of collection, and platforms of access, among others.<sup>3</sup> This uncertainty is a challenge for scholars, particularly historians. Due to the inability to determine key elements such as context and provenance, the rich documentation collected by these projects can find pitfalls to be properly used as historical sources. Accordingly, this paper presents the ongoing results of a digital humanities venture that aims to monitor and make sense of digital archives regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America. In particular, this study reflects on the possible methodologies to shape and analyze data regarding the so-called "rapid response archives"<sup>4</sup>, treating the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America as a case study in the field of digital history. In short, one draws on the major initiative of monitoring and structuring data regarding such an issue in Latin America, the Coronarchive, which made its database available in 2023.<sup>5</sup> The paper articulates two different data perspectives to investigate the unfolding of this set of memory projects for historical research and the writing of history: First, a distant view<sup>6</sup> founded in the ideas of data analysis and very much connected with the creation of a taxonomy normalized in specific metadata categories of country, ownership, type of holder, strategies of collection, tools of collection, types of documents, and forms of access; Second, a more individualized ethnographic perspective, founded in the idea of "digital informal archives"<sup>7</sup> and very much attached to the use of oral history. As a result, this paper argues that the situation presented by the rapid response archives, specifically in the case of the ones that have been emerging in Latin America regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, implies treating data and (digital) historical research from a dialogical perspective, one that articulates distant reading and individualized approaches.

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Kisil Marino, "Notas preliminares sobre o arquivamento digital da Covid-19," *Ideias* 12 (July 14, 2021): e021011, <https://doi.org/10.20396/ideias.v12i00.8661843>.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Ian Kisil Marino and Thiago Lima Nicodemo, "COVID-19 and Digital Archives in Latin America," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*, by Ian Kisil Marino and Thiago Lima Nicodemo (Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.1071>.

<sup>4</sup> Tizian Zumthurn, "Crowdsourced COVID-19 Collections: A Brief Overview," *International Public History* 4, no. 1 (August 23, 2021): 77–83, <https://doi.org/10.1515/iph-2021-2021>.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Kisil Marino et al., "Coronarchive Database" (Repositório de Dados de Pesquisa da Unicamp, March 30, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.25824/redu/TKYHCZ>.

<sup>6</sup> Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Ian Kisil Marino, Pedro Telles da Silveira, and Thiago Lima Nicodemo, "Digital Resources: Digital Informal Archives in Contemporary Brazil," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*, by Ian Kisil Marino, Pedro Telles da Silveira, and Thiago Lima Nicodemo (Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.993>.

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