

waka kuaka



The Journal of the Polynesian Society

VOLUME 132 Nos 1 & 2,
MARCH & JUNE 2023 Double Issue

SPECIAL ISSUE:
RE-VISIONING PACIFIC
RESEARCH METHOD/OLOGIES

The Polynesian Society
The University of Auckland, New Zealand

RE-VISIONING ONLINE PACIFIC RESEARCH METHODS FOR KNOWLEDGE SHARING THAT MAINTAINS RESPECTFUL VĀ

RUTH (LUTE) FALEOLO
La Trobe University

ABSTRACT: The process of re-visioning online research methods for Pacific research requires us to understand what was, what currently is and what will be possible within future Pacific contexts. As a Pacific academic, I did not consider adopting online research methods for Pacific knowledge sharing until 2015. The significance of adopting these methods became more pronounced during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic social and travel restrictions. The purpose of this discussion is to first consider the online research methods used during my PhD study of multisited Pasifika/Pacific people residing in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, procedures which later became foundational for my postdoctoral work during the pandemic. Second, it offers a consideration of some cultural challenges in using online research methods that will lead us to reflect on how we can maintain respectful sociocultural spaces (vā) while carrying out Pacific research and knowledge-sharing processes online. The rapidly changing landscapes of internet technology and social online environments require us as Pacific researchers to revise/re-vision how we might better connect with our research informants and participants, while maintaining cultural protocols and value systems that ensure our communication is meaningful and that maintain vā.

Keywords: Pasifika, e-talanoa, online research, Pacific research methodologies, sociocultural spaces, talanoa vā

The inevitable implication of an increased use of the internet is a change in how people communicate and interact. According to Lee *et al.* (2017: 3), “[i]nformation and communication technologies have had socially transformative effects [on] how people make and maintain social relationships, the structure of their social networks ... [and how they] present themselves to the world and store their memories”. These rapidly changing landscapes of internet technology and online social environments require us as Pacific researchers to revise/re-vision how we might better connect with our research informants and participants, while maintaining cultural protocols and value systems that ensure our communication is meaningful and that maintain vā (respectful sociocultural spaces).

The process of re-visioning online research methods for Pacific research requires us to understand what was, what currently is and what possibilities there may be for our future practice as researchers in Pacific contexts (Fa'avae *et al.* 2022). How can we build and maintain respectful vā while carrying out Pacific research online? Is the process of online knowledge sharing an acceptable method of Pacific research? Why should I consider using online methods in my Pacific research design? These are just a few of the many questions that arise in the minds of Pacific researchers today who are embarking on Pacific research projects within an increasingly technologically advanced world and an ever-growing internet-savvy Pacific context.

This discussion will firstly cover online research methods I used during my PhD study of multisited Pasifika/Pacific people residing in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. These methods were foundational to the development of an online Pacific research approach, prompted by the start of the pandemic, that I used in my postdoctoral work. This methodological development highlights the significance of using online forums to create valuable sociocultural spaces for Pacific knowledge sharing—something Enari and Matapo (2020) refer to as the “digital vā”. Secondly, this discussion will consider the benefits as well as limitations of using online research methods for Pacific knowledge sharing while maintaining a respectful vā. The implementation of online Pacific research methods has revealed some cultural challenges in using digital spaces (Fa'avae *et al.* 2022), so we will need to reflect on how we can better build and maintain respectful vā while carrying out Pacific research and knowledge-sharing processes online.

BACKGROUND

Researcher Positionality

My personal position as a Pacific researcher relates to my interest in the topic of discussion and my connections to the Pasifika/Pacific communities and locales studied. Therefore, I take this opportunity to make my positioning in the research transparent for the reader.

I am of Tongan descent, from the villages of Mu'a and Houma in Tongatapu (with descent lines tracing to Ha'apai, Fiji, Sāmoa and 'Uvea), born and raised in Aotearoa. I am married to a beautiful Samoan man, from the villages of Saleaula, Falelima and Leulumoega, also born and raised in Aotearoa. Our family includes six Samoan and Tongan children, and together we identify as Kiwis/NZ-born Pasifika/Pacific Islanders of Samoan and Tongan descent. Although we are living, studying and working on Yugambeh Country in Beenleigh, Brisbane, we continue to “represent #274”¹ and remain connected with our South Auckland community of Ōtara.

My research interest in the links between mobility, well-being and the migration of Pasifika/Pacific peoples has grown over time. It started while living in Auckland, moving from personal observations to research inquiry. From 2003 to 2015, my role as a Pasifika educator at Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate in Ōtara allowed me to observe the significant links between the well-being of my Pasifika students, their family's mobility and the overall transient nature of the Pacific Island community in South Auckland. While working closely with families and students over these years, specifically in the pastoral care work at the school, I gained further insight into the familial networks that existed across the Tasman Sea for many of our Pacific families. I witnessed the departure of several Pasifika students and their families from South Auckland to the urban areas of Australia, either on a temporary basis or permanently. Most of these families found success in gaining employment and opportunities in Australia that had otherwise been difficult to achieve in Aotearoa. My own family's journey has bolstered this interest in understanding the trans-Tasman migration process and its links to our family's well-being. In December 2015, after much prayer and preparation, we made the life-changing decision to move. At the start of my PhD candidature in January 2015 we were based in Auckland and spent the following months travelling back and forth between Auckland and Brisbane as part of my research work. Through these trips we discovered the benefits of living in Brisbane. Our underlying belief in finally making Brisbane our base was that we were able to provide better opportunities for our children in Australia's environment and economy. Throughout the following years, particularly during 2016–2019, my family and I continued to travel between Aotearoa and Australia for work, study and personal reasons. These short trips allowed me to maintain valuable family and community connections across the Tasman.

The changes that occurred in 2020 as a result of the pandemic, with the travel restrictions and border closures between Aotearoa and Australia, changed how my family and I maintained these important connections both across the Tasman and within Australia. During these times, communication with our family members largely happened through private messaging apps and, increasingly, Zoom, and, when the migration regimes allowed it, we worked in quick trips around quarantines and vaccination rounds to check in on our elderly and physically isolated loved ones. This unprecedented period of physical isolation and social restrictions also affected the way I was connecting with my Pacific communities in Aotearoa and Australia. At the start we continued to “stay in touch” via private messaging, Facetime, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. As I write it is now 2023, and although we are travelling freely across borders (and have been since late 2022) with fewer

restrictions in both Aotearoa and Australia, the online spaces continue to be the “new normal” way of connecting or communicating within academia. These personal experiences provide further insight into how Pacific research spaces have changed from pre-pandemic to pandemic to post-pandemic settings. For these reasons, it is important that I make my positionality transparent at the outset of the following discussion.

METHODOLOGY

This paper presents understandings that are drawn from Pacific research methods employed during my PhD and postdoctoral work. Here, my focus will be on presenting and discussing the development of talanoa online, what I refer to as e-talanoa (Faleolo 2016; Fa’avae *et al.* 2022). Talanoa, a widely accepted Pacific narrative approach, is what Vaiotele (2006: 23) refers to as “a conversation, a talk, an exchange of ideas or thinking, whether formal or informal ... and interacting without a rigid framework”.

Talanoa and e-talanoa (both detailed in the next section) have been a crucial part of my research. Both my PhD (2015–2019) and postdoctoral work (2020–2022) entailed research with Pacific Islanders in multiple sites. The PhD work largely focused on Samoans and Tongans migrating between Auckland and Brisbane. This lens expanded in the postdoctoral work to include other Pacific Islanders, beyond just Samoans and Tongans, who were moving to and through Australia (all states and territories) and all regions of Aotearoa. In some instances, this included tracing narratives that had trans-Pacific links with Pacific Island homelands and other Pacific rim areas like the Americas. Therefore, the development and continued use of online methods as well as the maintenance of connections in these various spaces has grown over time.

I was not compelled to consider adopting an online Pacific research approach for knowledge sharing until 2015. It was during the initial communications with participants in my PhD study that I realised I had to create an online presence to connect with Pacific peoples. The significance of my having adopted online methods for the PhD work became even more pronounced and significant during the lockdowns and restrictions as a result of the pandemic, beginning in April 2020. The purpose of this discussion is to first consider some of the online research methods I had initially used during my PhD study of Pasifika in Aotearoa and Australia, which later became significant research tools during the pandemic. This discussion highlights the significance of using such online methods for maintaining valuable connections with people. Second, this discussion will include a consideration of some benefits as well as cultural challenges in using online research methods that will lead us to reflect on how we can maintain respectful vā while carrying out Pacific research and knowledge-sharing processes online.

PACIFIC RESEARCH METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

When I first began my journey as a Pacific researcher, in 1995, only 4.9% of Aotearoa's population were internet users while less than 1% of Tonga's population used the internet (World Bank n.d.). So, naturally my mode of communication with the 24 Tonga-based women (aged 18–77) participating in my first master's study ('Ilaiū 1997) at that time was through face-to-face talanoa focused on maintaining sociocultural spaces (tauhi vā). It is important to note that at the start of my research journey in the 1990s, the terms "talanoa" and "tauhi vā" were familiar to me in my familial spaces while growing up in Aotearoa, but I had not yet seen these terms in academic literature. However, as I recall and recount these aspects of my research developments, I will now refer to these practices of talanoa and tauhi vā as they really are, not as "semi-structured interviews and consultative communication" as is often the preferred wording of western academic institutions in Aotearoa or Australia.

The traditional narrative approach of talanoa (which could also be less formal, as in "talatalanoa") that I employed in the 1990s, although flexible and seemingly casual in comparison to the clinical western-style interviewing taught at university, would be my first experience of navigating Pacific research spaces as a semi-outsider. I was entering a world of Tongan sociocultural protocols that I had not yet engaged in as an academic and researcher but had only seen my parents operate in as family and church leaders, while I was growing up in Aotearoa. My first master's study (1995–1996) would prove to be a formative and foundational learning experience that would serve me well in years to come. In 1996, I had to travel to Tongatapu Island for fieldwork. Being a single woman in my twenties it was culturally correct to travel with my mother, Falakika Lose 'Ilaiū. I remember that my little brother Isaac (the youngest of eight children) also had to travel with us because he was a toddler. Looking back on it now, my mother and I were doing Pacific research with our Tongan women in the proper "Tongan way" (anga faka-Tonga), which was conducive to free-flow knowledge sharing. We were enacting tauhi vā: the building and maintenance of important, sociocultural, relational spaces. My mother had attended my very first face-to-face meetings with key informants, speaking while I sat quietly, as she was a pastor's wife (a respectable role in our community); this "connecting of persons" (of me to the research participants, through her) then distinguished me as a reliable person because she had prepared the relational space. She also introduced me as her "second daughter who is studying at the University of Auckland" to validate my research fieldwork, but more importantly she proceeded to explain our family's genealogical connections to the locations of Nuku'alofa and Kolomotu'a where I was collecting information. This vā that was built allowed me to begin my

research journey in Tonga. This learning experience taught me the value of cultural protocols in Pacific research and would pay dividends in my next Pacific research project.

In 2011, during my second master's study (Faleolo 2012) of the experiences of 15 Tongan women (aged 20s–50s) of higher education in Aotearoa, it was clear that their preferred mode of communication was face-to-face talanoa. Using my understanding of relational bridge-building and tauhi vā from my first master's study with Tongan women, I was able to communicate my positionality then as an educator and community leader in South Auckland to relate the significance of my research. Importantly, I was able to outline the key genealogical connections I had to Tongan members of our South Auckland community, paying homage to my Tongan village links via my parents and grandparents. However, it was also the first time that I had used an online mode of communication to recruit participants or to distribute information about the master's study. I felt that the introduction of individualised emails helped me to maximise the time available to conduct the study as well as assisted with on-the-go communications with this cohort of women who were already using computers in their professional spaces. We all had social media accounts during this time; however, most of the women preferred to use email communication for the distribution of information and reciprocal processes of script-checking. Only a few had asked that I send information via Facebook Messenger. Although in this second master's study I was using online means of communication for the distribution of information, the majority of the 15 Tongan women participating in the study were still keen to meet with me face-to-face for our talanoa sessions over a meal. I had learnt during my fieldwork in Tonga in 1996 that talanoa and knowledge-sharing was most enjoyable and free-flowing when combined with food—"breaking bread". So, it was evident during the early 2010s that Tongan forms of communication in Aotearoa resembled the preferred mode used in Tonga in the 1990s. Talanoa, so to speak, had not been fully embraced online at this time; however, it was not long after this, at the start of my PhD study, while connecting with Pasifika trans-Tasman migrants in Auckland and Brisbane, that I discovered the pendulum swing of Pacific people's desire, both Samoans and Tongans, to communicate more frequently online versus face-to-face. Taking this all in now as I am writing, I ponder the questions and play of meanings behind the terms "culture/cultural" and "convenience/convenient". Are our current cultural practices no longer convenient? Is it a cultural convenience to shift our practice online? Should we culturally adapt to do what is more convenient?

In 2015, 20 years after conducting my first Pacific research project in a very traditional face-to-face format ('Ilaiū 1997), I was now faced with an unexpected social change (Faleolo 2020). The shift was evident in both

trans-Tasman sites of the PhD study; in 2015, 88.2% of Aotearoa's population were internet users; similarly, Australia's population of internet users grew from 2.8% in 1995 to 84.6% in 2015 (World Bank n.d.). The implication of increased internet use within these two locales was the inevitable change in how people were choosing to interact and connect with others, over time and space. I noted that more than half of my Pasifika networks required me to text, email or chat via private messaging rather than receiving a phone call or meeting face-to-face. According to Lee *et al.* (2017) technology has transformed social structures and how people maintain relationships. Hence, the rapidly changing landscapes of internet technology and social online environments require us as Pacific researchers to revise/re-vision how we might better connect with our research informants and participants, while maintaining cultural protocols and value systems that are meaningful and at the heart of our research practice, always maintaining respectful *vā*.

A SIGNIFICANT LINK: TALANOA AND *VĀ*

Pasifika frameworks, like the Tongan way (*anga faka-Tonga*) and the Samoan way (*fa'a-Sāmoa*), are core to the Pacific research approaches I have embraced in life as a Tongan woman, wife and mother of Samoan-Tongan children. Such worldviews have also been central to my research approach. These frameworks help me to prioritise the relational spaces between me as the researcher and those who are being researched in the knowledge-sharing processes. The concept of *tauhi vā* (Tongan) or *tausi le vā* (Samoan) in Pacific research means to “nurture social relations ... on entering *talanoa* with Pasifika, the object should be to maintain social spaces and relationships” (Faleolo 2020: 52). Working as a researcher within Pacific contexts requires us to engage in a respectful and culturally appropriate way, both in verbal and non-verbal language and face-to-face and online.

Halapua (2002, 2003) draws a significant link between *vā* and *talanoa* that should not be ignored. Considering this paper's focus, this means that *talanoa* allows for meaningful communication and connections to occur, built on the shared obligation of the researcher and participants. *Talanoa* is a two-way process, reciprocating knowledge-sharing obligations to both give and receive. It is in this act of reciprocal information exchange, giving and taking, sharing and receiving knowledge that respectful *vā* in our Pacific research practices is created, nurtured and maintained. In the same way, using online forms of communication requires *tauhi vā* or *tausi le vā* even more so. Enari and Matapo (2020: 8) emphasise the importance of maintaining the digital *vā* when using online communication forums, by not stripping “the rich cultural significance of Pasifika ways of knowing”.

Talanoa and other narrative-style research methods come naturally to many Pacific researchers and participants as we often communicate in this

style within our private and public domains. However, we must not assume that just being Pacific and labelling what we do as “talanoa” means we are doing it the “right way” (Fa’avae, Jones and Manu’atu 2016; Fa’avae *et al.* 2022). Collecting Pacific knowledge by using the talanoa method should be undertaken with a deeper understanding of the social spaces in which talanoa occurs respectfully. For instance, when I am speaking with a family leader, a church leader or a community leader, I am mindful that there are “expected and respectful ways that a Pasifika researcher should be dressed” to address these persons of authority (Faleolo 2020: 51). And so, I conduct my talanoa sessions with these individuals in a manner that is befitting of their roles and titles, usually with a prayer and acknowledgement of their time before we break the ice with small talk. The significance of maintaining respectful vā in online research spaces as Pacific researchers is that we are accurately representing our cultural values and how we as researchers understand these (Faleolo 2021). Our “Pasifika-ness” is demonstrated in how we implement cultural protocols online; these aspects of our online communication set the tone for establishing and maintaining respectful vā in the current session and the next.

BENEFITS OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION

Online modes of contact were adopted in my PhD research (2015–2019) in order to cater for the communication needs of participants. This decision aligned closely with Pacific cultural values of respect (fa’aaloalo in Samoan; faka’apa’apa in Tongan) that were appropriate for the study, whereby research designs were responsive to the participants: a collaborative process of reciprocity where feedback from my participants prompted the use of mixed online/face-to-face methods of data collection. The shift in my research design acknowledges the central role that informants should play in academic research, redefining research spaces and repurposing modes of communication, contributing to culturally sensitive and appropriate Pacific knowledge-sharing processes.

While it was clear that online forums were key to collecting trans-Tasman narratives, I was also mindful that I was capturing Pasifika voices, so it was important to collect narratives in a culturally responsive manner—it only seemed natural that I spoke to other Pasifika the way I preferred to be spoken to: respectfully, meaningfully and thoughtfully. This is an art in our Pacific knowledge-sharing that entails purposeful entry, delivery and exit of dialogue that occurs between two or more people who are mindful of their spoken (vocabulary, tenor, tone) and non-spoken languages (facial expressions, body language, dress code, demeanour). I have unpacked the significance of this art of Pacific knowledge-sharing elsewhere (Faleolo 2021) but will summarise it here also.

As Pacific researchers, we should constantly be mindful that our business is not about selfish data-mining but rather about collectively maintaining our sociocultural spaces through the reciprocal knowledge-sharing process. The maintenance of sociocultural spaces should be an ongoing action within Pacific research contexts, including online spaces. The significance of *vā* to our practice as Pacific academics is in the act of maintaining and nurturing relationships and sociocultural spaces that connect us to our Pacific people. We need to be mindful that respectful *vā* starts with us and within ourselves. In any given Pacific research context in which we find ourselves standing, we must make the conscious decision to embrace respectful *vā* protocol. When uncertain, make time to speak with your family elders and community leaders and get a better understanding of what respectful *vā* looks like, sounds like and feels like within your research context. If this means that you need to put on a *puletasi* (two-piece church dress; not your pyjamas or bathrobe), change your Zoom background or move to a space in your home that is more culturally respectful (not sitting in your bathroom or lying in bed!), do so. Introduce yourself using family names—positionality, genealogy—making relevant connections to the participant/s. Second, be mindful and respectful of your participants and their personal knowledge. Know who you are speaking with, address them by name or titles, be understanding of their time constraints or personal interests in your current study. Pray with them or talk freely about their/your day before outlining your agenda for the meeting. Make time to really listen and to hear their heart as they speak and respond to you. Latu (2009) explains that Pacific peoples keep libraries of knowledge hidden deep within and it is with *talanoa* that these become known to those who listen. Knowing what drives them to talk with you in the first place is a good place to start (Faleolo 2021). From experience, I have found that most Pacific participants want to contribute to “the greater good” and that their knowledge shared is “a way of giving back” to their communities, descendants and ancestors. This understanding about Pasifika gives essence to what is being said.

Pasifika Trans-Tasman Migration: Facebook Community Page

In May 2015, key informants identified during the scoping stage of my PhD study helped to initiate the virtual snowball recruitment of participants. These key informants were crucial in establishing a relational context for me online to speak with members of their collectives. I was introduced online, via private messaging by key informants who would explain the significance of my research to our Pacific communities in Aotearoa and Australia and, importantly, my connection to them. These initial online connections further led me to create the Facebook community page Pasifika Trans-Tasman Migration where the newly formed Pacific connections online

led to wider, ongoing dialogue about the proposed research within their own collectives. The Facebook community forum made the research readily accessible for further potential participants to query, comment, “share” or “like” the project. As a researcher, I was able to spend less time recruiting and more time in dialogue with people, building those crucial sociocultural relationships and sharing important narratives of trans-Tasman migration. Five posts sharing photographic images (Fig. 1) as well as video links to the documentary series *Children of the Migration* (NZ On Screen 2004) and *Second Migration of Pacific People* (Kailahi 2015) were successful in generating robust discussion and general interest around the research, building on the vā that was established by the key informants. A month later, a sixth post called for interested Pasifika to participate in the study, outlining the objectives of the study as well as the criteria for their participation. Those who were interested but did not meet the criteria often shared this sixth post on their private Facebook pages, alerting others of their collectives to visit the Pasifika Trans-Tasman Migration page. The call out for participants went far and wide because of this online snowballing technique, saving a huge amount of time. Thus, the functionality of the already established Facebook community page became an important component of the multisited study across Aotearoa and Australia. Most importantly, the online snowballing



Figure 1. Post on the Facebook community page showing image of author's son, Nehemiah Thomas Faleolo, at the Pasifika Festival held in Manukau, Auckland, in 2015.

extended a process that was also occurring verbally in my community networks offline. This use of online snowballing via Facebook gives our Pacific communities and collectives significant levels of agency and control in their impact on research, widening the participation and intake of stakeholders in Pacific research.

During June and July 2015, the Facebook community page was used to post open-ended discussion questions relating to experiences of trans-Tasman migration and well-being in Aotearoa and Australia. It became evident that there was a lot more interest in the research than initially expected, with some posts reaching hundreds of people, and with the additional use of the Facebook “boosted posts” feature, thousands of Pasifika people were reached globally.

It was especially important, as the researcher, to remain transparent in order to ensure the voices and stories I recorded were accurate. One method employed using the online community page was to provide regular updates on stages of the study (data collections, analysis phases and outputs of research) as well as the opportunity for informants, participants and community members to comment on draft findings, articles, conference papers and the thesis progress. Overall, the Facebook community page allowed for a series of respectful and reciprocal interactions between the researcher and knowledge holders throughout the knowledge-sharing process of the PhD study.

Private Messaging: The Humble Beginnings of E-Talanoa

What became evident at the start of my PhD study in early 2015 is that most of the participants preferred online modes of communication, particularly those who were multisited or in transition between Aotearoa and Australia. The need for dialogue embedding Pacific values using online modes led to the creation of e-talanoa as an online Pacific narrative approach, a direct response to my participants’ needs. Often, private communications via Facebook Messenger was the preferred online mode of communication for participants, followed closely by emails. Thus in mid-2015, further considerations were made to ensure the research design and methods of the study embraced the participants’ communication needs, while ensuring safe and secure information and knowledge sharing.

Having conducted Pacific research in Tonga and Aotearoa prior to 2015, I had anticipated home visits and talanoa sessions that would need me to travel often and afar to meet face-to-face with informants. After months of these talanoa sessions, I would spend double the amount of time transcribing and ensuring the scripts are correct by revisiting homes and laboriously reading through scripts with everyone. However, to my surprise, I had the convenience of e-talanoa with instant verbatim scripts from the reciprocal dialogue I and the participant had typed. This ease of retrieving scripts of

our dialogue meant that my research practice was more efficient, providing participants more time to reflect on their responses soon after our e-talanoa.

Latu (2009) prompts us to provide our participants with an environment that is conducive to good talanoa, aided by a sense of comfort and familiarity. This methodological development provided the flexibility and ease for informants to participate. In particular, Facebook Messenger allowed several participants to have live conversations with me, free-flow in and around their “realities and daily lives” (Faleolo 2016: 67). Often these types of conversations went on for more than a day. Sometimes this was through text dialogue and other times participants would ask to do a Facetime video call if they were busy with household work, running errands, travelling or out with their children. In essence, as a Pacific researcher, I was giving my informants the reins of control, empowering them to respond to interview prompts according to their preference (Facetime video or text submission through private messaging or by email “volley” conversation) and when they had time (Fa’avae *et al.* 2022; Faleolo 2016, 2021).

ONLINE RESEARCH DURING THE PANDEMIC

At the time my postdoctoral research began in April 2020, I was not aware of the full extent of the pandemic and all the restrictions it would impose on my movements and my research. It was not until months later that it dawned on me how profoundly blessed I had been to have developed the e-talanoa narrative approach. It was as if I had been preparing for such a time as this. However, it was not all smooth sailing as I discovered that not everyone, including myself, was prepared for the long-haul social isolation periods.

Zoom: Later Developments of E-Talanoa

Postdoctoral research during 2020–2022 studying Pasifika mobilities to and through Australia allowed me to continue using e-talanoa with already established networks of informants living in Aotearoa and Australia. During this time the pandemic had spurred online communication and technological advancements to a new high; e-talanoa had largely transferred from the Facebook Messenger chats and Facetime video calls to the more corporate-style Zoom sessions. The culmination of technological advances like the applications Zoom and Microsoft Teams and the heightened need for social connection during the pandemic provided the perfect conditions for the ripening of e-talanoa as a research method for knowledge sharing. Enari and Matapo (2020) as well as Enari and Faleolo (2020) capture the significance of maintaining digital vā through the continual use of e-talanoa in response to the COVID-19 social and travel restrictions. Their analysis of Pasifika connections during 2020 highlighted the significance of familial and communal solidarity during the pandemic that was strengthened through online forums.

It would be remiss of me to not mention the challenges that arose, particularly in 2020, while using online forums to connect with some research participants and academics alike. In particular, the elderly cohorts were at first apprehensive when invited to join an e-talanoa. More often than not, elderly participants (aged 70 years or older) were not tech savvy and were unable to use online platforms to connect socially. For almost all other participants (aged 18 years or older) Zoom was an unfamiliar application at the start of the pandemic (early 2020) and only became a readily accessible online forum towards the end of 2020. During lockdowns, with school- or working-aged members of participants' families being home-bound, elderly and non-tech-savvy participants now gained assistance to set up and use Facebook or Zoom. It was evident by 2022 that our Pacific communities, elderly included, had embraced the usefulness of online forums for building their familial and communal connections. Figures 2 and 3 show examples of how the online forums were being used in the Pacific communities observed.

A Collaborative Pacific Research Space During the Pandemic

At the start of COVID lockdowns and travel restrictions in 2020, I was asked by Pacific academics in Aotearoa and Australia to share my understandings and praxis of e-talanoa. This was the beginning of an important and continuing dialogue whereby other Pacific researchers were able to reference e-talanoa as a way forward in their own research and practices online. The



Figure 2. Auckland-based Samoan community celebration of Samoan Language Week, online during COVID restrictions, 2020.

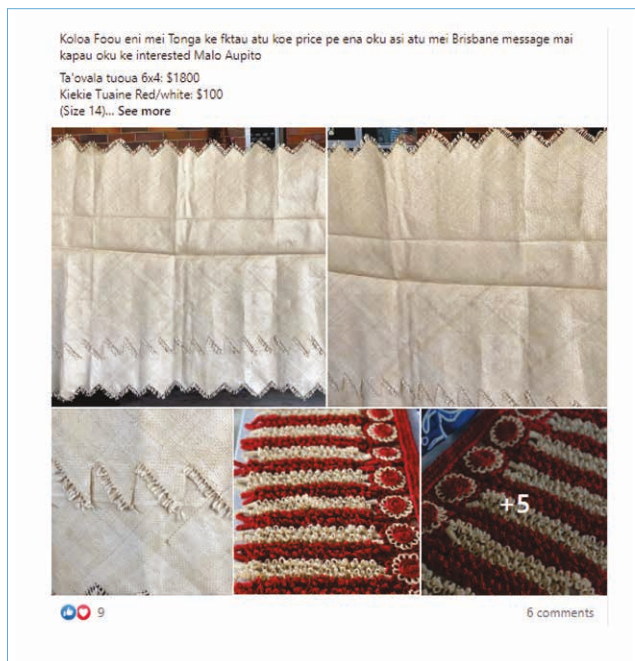


Figure 3. Brisbane-based Tongan community advertising Tongan-made crafts online, 2022.

outcome of these initial discussions gave rise to an important critical analysis of e-talanoa as an online tool, calling for further interrogation and unpacking of the method and underlying methodology. I welcomed this collaboration with my fellow Pacific researchers because I could see the need to unpack the complexities associated with e-talanoa, and to articulate why and how e-talanoa had emerged. Our co-authored work (Fa'avae *et al.* 2022) provides a valuable outline of the benefits and challenges of e-talanoa. There was a general agreement amongst the researchers involved in this project that e-talanoa was an opportunity to extend Pacific research into online spaces. However, very real concerns were expressed by researchers who were more adept in traditional face-to-face talanoa practices about the loss of māfana (warmth and emotion felt in the presence of others) when talking to a screen, particularly with someone who has turned off their camera, or not being able to read facial expressions or body language accurately. So, there is still room for improvement regarding Pacific knowledge sharing using e-talanoa.

RE-VISIONING PACIFIC KNOWLEDGE SHARING ONLINE:
MAINTAINING RESPECTFUL VĀ

The maintenance of sociocultural spaces should be an ongoing action within Pacific research, including online spaces. Ka'ili (2017) suggests that the significance of vā is in the act of maintaining and nurturing relationships and sociocultural spaces that connect Pacific peoples. Where does this respectful vā begin? With the researcher first and foremost. Understanding what respectful vā looks like, sounds like and feels like when enacted will empower us as Pacific researchers working within online spaces (Faleolo 2021).

The gradual changes that have occurred in our Pacific research contexts, as outlined in the discussion above (1990s to the present), has streamlined Pacific knowledge-sharing processes from the more traditional face-to-face talanoa to e-talanoa. However, the protocols that govern our traditional face-to-face talanoa, founded on cultural tauhi vā/tausi le vā, should still be replicated when using e-talanoa.

DEDICATION

In loving memory of our son, Nehemiah (2003–2020) and our daughter Angels (2000), both dearly missed, forever in our hearts, now resting in our Heavenly Father's arms. Psalm 91:1. Also dedicated to Thom and our growing Pacific academics: Israel, Sh'Kinah, Lydia and Naomi. Onward and upward. 2 Timothy 1:7.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

'Oku ou tōmu'a tuku a e fakafeta'i kihe 'Eiki; ke langilangi'ia pe ia! Fakamālo atu kihe 'eku 'ofa'anga: Thom, Israel, Sh'Kinah, Angels, Nehemiah, Lydia and Naomi. Fakamālo atu kihe'eku ongo mātu'a, Faifekau 'Ahoia mo Faifekau Lose 'Ilaiū. Fakamālo lahi atu kihe kāinga Tonga moe 'āiga Sāmoa kotoape na'e tokoni'i eku fekumi.

My 2015–2019 PhD research was funded by the University of Queensland research scholarships and supported by Prof. Paul Memmott and Dr. Kelly Greenop of the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre, as well as Prof. Mark Western and Dr. Denise Clague of the Institute for Social Science Research and Life Course Centre, Brisbane.

My 2020–2023 postdoctoral research is in association with Dr. Katherine Ellinghaus and Dr. Rachel Standfield as part of the research project Indigenous Mobilities to and through Australia: Agency and Sovereignities, funded by the Australian Research Council DP200103269.

NOTES

1. The area code 274 is used for phone numbers in the South Auckland suburb of Ōtara, where the author was raised in Aotearoa.

GLOSSARY

anga faka-Tonga	the Tongan way
fa'aaloalo	respect (Samoan)
fa'a-Sāmoa	the Samoan way
faka'apa'apa	respect (Tongan)
māfana	warmth and emotion felt in the presence of others (Tongan)
puletasi	two-piece church dress (Samoan)
talanoa	exchange of ideas or thinking through conversation and storytelling (Fijian, Samoan, Tongan)
talatalanoa	less formal approach to talanoa/conversations (Tongan)
tausi le vā	maintaining sociocultural spaces and relationships (Samoan)
tauhi vā	maintaining sociocultural spaces and relationships (Tongan)
vā	respectful sociocultural relational spaces (Samoan, Tongan)

REFERENCES

- Enari, Dion and Ruth Faleolo, 2020. Pasifika collective well-being during the COVID-19 crisis: Samoans and Tongans in Brisbane. *Journal of Indigenous Social Development* 9 (3): 110–26. <http://hdl.handle.net/10292/14533>
- Enari, Dion and Jacoba Matapo, 2020. The digital vā: Pasifika education innovation during the Covid-19 pandemic. *MAI Journal* 9 (4): 7–11. <https://doi.org/10.20507/MAIJournal.2020.9.4.2>
- Fa'avae, David, Alison Jones and Linitā Manu'atu, 2016. Talanoa'i 'a e talanoa—talking about talanoa: Some dilemmas of a novice researcher. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 12 (2): 138–50. <https://doi.org/10.20507/AlterNative.2016.12.2.3>
- Fa'avae, David Taufui Mikato, Ruth (Lute) Faleolo, 'Elisapesi Hepi Havea, Dion Enari, Tepora Wright and Alvin Chand, 2022. E-talanoa as an online research method: Extending vā-relations across spaces. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 18 (3): 391–401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801221118609>
- Faleolo, Ruth L., 2012. Higher Education in New Zealand: A Form of Fakalalakalaka for Educated Tongan Women? MEd thesis, Massey University, Palmerston North. <http://hdl.handle.net/10179/3549>
- 2016. *Pasifika* trans-Tasman migrant perspectives of well-being in Australia and New Zealand. *Pacific Asia Inquiry* 7 (1): 63–74. https://www.uog.edu/_resources/files/schools-and-colleges/college-of-liberal-arts-and-social-sciences/pai/pai-7-faleolo-pasifika-trans-tasman.pdf

- 2020. Pasifika Well-Being and Trans-Tasman Migration: A Mixed Methods Analysis of Samoan and Tongan Well-Being Perspectives and Experiences in Auckland and Brisbane. PhD thesis, University of Queensland, Brisbane.
<https://doi.org/10.14264/uql.2020.511>
- 2021. *Talanoa moe vā*: Pacific knowledge-sharing and changing sociocultural spaces during COVID-19. *Waikato Journal of Education* 26: 125–34.
<https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v26i1.763>
- Halapua, Sitiveni, 2002. Talanoa process: The case of Fiji. Honolulu: East–West Center.
<https://fdocuments.net/download/talanoa-process-the-case-of-fiji-united-process-the-case-of-fiji-sitiveni>
- 2003. Walking the Knife-Edged Pathways to Peace. Inaugural public lecture of the Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara Friendship Foundation, Suva, 7–8 July 2003.
- ‘Ilaiū, Ruth, 1997. Signs of Development as “Fakalakalaka” in Tonga? A Consideration of the Views and Changing Roles of Tongan Women. MA dissertation, University of Auckland, Auckland.
- Kailahi, Sandra, 2015. *Secondary Migration of Pacific People*. Three-part documentary series, January. Posted to YouTube by Tagata Pasifika, New Zealand, 27 Jan. 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGwbRuZpErU>
- Ka‘ili, Tēvita O., 2017. *Marking Indigeneity: The Tongan Art of Sociospatial Relations*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Latu, Makelesi, 2009. Talanoa: A Contribution to the Teaching and Learning of Tongan Primary School Children in New Zealand. MA thesis, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland. <http://hdl.handle.net/10292/919>
- Lee, Raymond M., Nigel G. Fielding and Grant Blank, 2017. Online research methods in the social sciences: An editorial introduction. In N.G. Fielding, R.M. Lee and G. Blank (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods*. SAGE, pp. 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957992.n1>
- NZ On Screen, 2004. *Children of the Migration*. Three-part television series (excerpts). <https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/children-of-the-migration-2004>
- Vaiotei, Timote M., 2006. Talanoa research methodology: A developing position on Pacific research. *Waikato Journal of Education* 12: 21–34.
<https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v12i1.296>
- World Bank, n.d. World Development Indicators.
<https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>

AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Ruth (Lute) Faleolo, Department of Archaeology and History, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University, Bundoora, VIC 3086, Australia.
ruth.faleolo@gmail.com | <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0074-0490>