

Apps and social distancing: Why we accept coronavirus rules—or not

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The higher the severity of an infection is thought to be, the greater the motivation is to socially distance. That is one result of a study conducted by the psychologist Professor Kai Kaspar at the University of Cologne. Kaspar explored which factors constitute people's motivation to socially

distance and to use different corona apps. The results have been published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* under the title "Motivations for Social Distancing and App Use as Complementary Measures to Combat the COVID-19 Pandemic: Quantitative Survey Study."

Current government measures to contain the corona pandemic include [social distancing](#) and the recommendation to use corona apps. However, these measures are not supported by all citizens equally. Professor Kaspar wanted to find out why that is so. His study showed that the higher people gauged the severity of their own potential infection to be, the greater their [motivation](#) to socially distance was.

Perceived rewards for non-compliance with the rules of social distancing also play a role, such as the perceived pleasure of close personal encounters: If such rewards are perceived, this endangers appropriate distancing behavior. If people are convinced that they can maintain an appropriate distance to others and that this measure will actually help to prevent infections, people's motivation to follow social distancing rules is higher.

Social behavior is also important: "Participants in the study reported higher motivation to maintain [physical distance](#) when their trust in the motivation of their fellow human beings to maintain distance was high. Solidarity in the fight against the current pandemic therefore seems very important," Professor Kaspar explained.

The psychologist analyzed not only social distancing, but also people's motivation to voluntarily use two corona apps: one app for contact tracing—in the sense of the corona warning app—and the corona data donation app of the Robert Koch Institute, the leading government institution in the field of infectious diseases, which safeguards public health in Germany. With the corona warning app, users can track

contacts with possibly infected persons and inform others about their own infection status. With the corona data donation app, which analyzes data from smartwatches and fitness bracelets, people can provide the Robert Koch Institute with their health and activity data.

Regarding the use of corona apps, the study found that people's motivation to use a corona warning app was higher than their motivation to use the corona data donation app. "Although both apps do not actively protect against infection, an app with contact tracing at least allows you to check critical contacts you had with infected people. On the other hand, individual users do not benefit directly from the corona data donation app because this app aims to analyze the spread of the corona virus on a large scale," Kaspar said.

People's willingness to use corona apps is closely related to their motivation to socially distance. Motivation to use a corona warning app was higher, the more effective people regarded themselves in social distancing, the more they assessed social distancing as an effective measure, and the higher the perceived response costs associated with social distancing were. "These factors are not directly related to the use of apps, but rather to social distancing. However, this shows that the acceptance of different measures to combat the pandemic is partly related to identical personal appraisal processes," Kaspar said.

The study also made clear that users' trust in the confidential handling of their personal data is very important. "The greater the trust in official app providers and the lower the concern that the data provided could be misused, the higher was the reported motivation to use both a corona warning app and a corona data donation app. This relationship also applies to people's willingness to provide their infection status to a corona warning app," he emphasized.

More information: Kai Kaspar. Motivations for Social Distancing and

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