

Press release of 20 April 2021

Coronavirus pandemic reduces digital pressure to perform

Results of the 2021 “Data society and solidarity” survey

The COVID-19 pandemic has further boosted the digitalisation of society, especially in terms of online shopping, video telephony and streaming services. As well as delivering surprising results with regard to reduced pressure to perform through digital tracking, the “Data society and solidarity” survey also confirms a number of long-term trends. For example, digital and lifetracking services are being used more, despite fears regarding data security and negative consequences in terms of values such as solidarity. There is also ambivalence among survey participants with regard to the topic of personalised health.

For the fourth year in a row – and about one year after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic – the Sanitas health insurance foundation commissioned a survey among the Swiss population on acceptance of digital transformation and the possible consequences for social solidarity. The results were surprising.

Incredible: coronavirus crisis reduces digital pressure to perform

At the start of last year, young people in particular were anxious and stressed by the pressures of digital transformation. Now, in the midst of the pandemic, there seems to have been a turn-around in popular opinion. In January 2021, participants reported far less subjective pressure to perform from daily life-tracking at work, in the health sector, in relation to social media such as Instagram and Facebook, and even in the area of sport. With more people working from home and social distancing measures in place, the pressure resulting from monitoring and comparison via digital applications has reduced considerably. Particularly striking is the fall in perceived pressure to perform at work – from 45% to 18% across all age groups.

Surprising: no “coronavirus boost” for social media

Although people have had to stay at home more during the two lockdowns, the importance of the virtual social marketplace has also declined. Among young people in particular, the use of social media channels has reduced significantly compared to the year before (from 92% to 80%). And only half as many young people between the age of 18 and 35 feel pressure to perform as a result of social media such as Instagram and Facebook (20% compared to 39% the previous year). In other words, the enforced slow-down seems to counteract the fear of missing out (FOMO).

Crisis-driven: boom in video telephony

Digital devices, channels and services are still proving very popular. In times of social distancing and partial lockdown, the use of video telephony, for example Zoom, has doubled within a year from 33% to 59%, with only minor differences across age groups. Streaming services such as Netflix also seem to be steadily gaining in popularity among the over 35s and over 55s, with use increasing to 61% and 30% respectively.

Contradictory: pandemic-related mobile phone monitoring meets with high level of approval despite data protection concerns

Although the general uncertainty about digital transformation has continued to decline, scepticism about collecting and sharing personal data remains high. Despite people’s experiences in last year’s pandemic, this also applies to sharing data to track chains of infection, such as in the SwissCovid app or online registration in restaurants. Personal benefits, for example gaining access to restaurants via online registration during the pandemic, play a key role in whether or not people are willing to share data. Personal benefits thus supersede fundamental concerns about the misuse of data. It is also extremely surprising that 45% of those questioned would welcome the use of Asian-style mobile phone surveillance (with reduced data protection) to help prevent the spread of disease in another pandemic, with the aim of keeping everyday restrictions to a minimum. Interestingly, support for such mobile phone surveillance is similarly high across the political spectrum.

Ongoing: solidarity under pressure from digital transformation

The topic of solidarity has gained another dimension during the coronavirus crisis. Society has seen increased levels of interpersonal support, such as neighbourhood assistance in the form of shopping for people at high risk of becoming ill. The survey shows that digital platforms have played only a negligible role in this area so far. For the fourth year in a row, half of respondents believe that digital transformation will have a negative impact overall on social solidarity. Reasons for this include increasing self-referentiality and a growing gap between the strong and the weak. And even given people's experiences with coronavirus, 51% of respondents still believe that those who keep themselves fit and eat healthily should pay lower health insurance premiums than those who don't. Nevertheless, only one in five people would be willing to make their health data available to insurance companies.

Special focus: data and its potential for personalised health

Digital devices such as fitness trackers and smartphones are generating increasing amounts of self-recorded health data. In combination with clinical studies, laboratory and genome data (supported by artificial intelligence if necessary), this data can help drive forward personalised preventive healthcare measures and treatment. Despite major implications for the future of healthcare and lively debate among experts, the term "personalised health" is not yet well-established among the general population. Only 14% say they have a clear idea what it is. It is interesting to see that half of respondents would be willing to undergo genome analysis, one of the most radical applications of digital technology to human beings. If the question about genome analysis is supplemented with the information that effective personalised treatment may be available for identified risks, the share of those in favour increases to two-thirds. Here, too, we see that the personal benefits of bespoke treatments tend to overcome any initial unwillingness to share data.

If there is a good chance of successful treatment, four out of five people are in favour of expensive special therapies for cancer also being paid for under basic insurance, even though this could lead to higher health insurance premiums. In this regard, respondents express their support for solidarity-based financing of achievements in the field of personalised medicine. However, two-thirds believe that certain conditions must be met if cover is to be provided by social insurance, first and foremost a significant increase in quality of life. The results show that, if the development of personalised health continues, greater political involvement will be required to redefine the framework and financing of the healthcare system.

About the study

In January 2021, the sotomo research institute questioned 2,344 people online about their behaviour and attitude to solidarity in the context of digital transformation. Targeted respondent selection and weighting ensure a representative sample that is close to the composition of the Swiss population aged 18 and over. This was the fourth online survey conducted on behalf of the Sanitas health insurance foundation.

Download the study

The complete report on the 2021 "Data society and solidarity" survey is available here:

www.sanitas.com/foundation-survey

Social commitment of the Sanitas health insurance foundation

The [Sanitas health insurance foundation](http://www.sanitas.com/foundation-survey) was established in 1958. It is the sole shareholder of the [Sanitas Group](http://www.sanitas.com). It also supports projects and focuses on the social aspects of digitalisation, health and insurance. The foundation also publishes [articles on the data society and solidarity](#) in cooperation with experts.

For information about the foundation's social engagement and the survey

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