

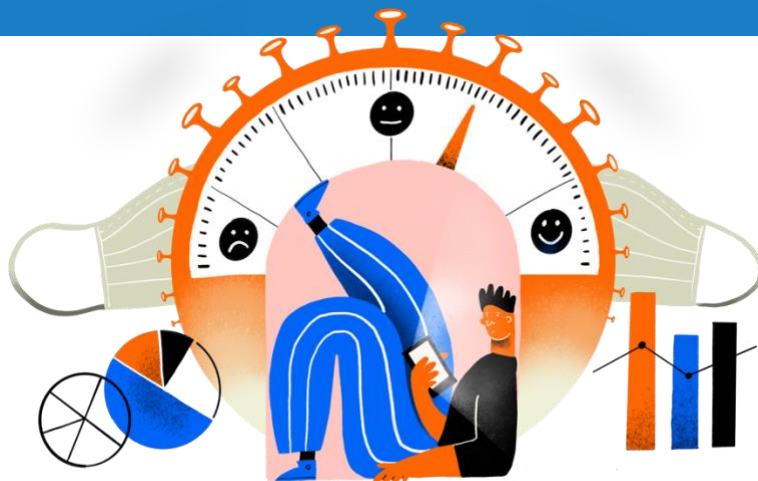
REPORT 14

What do citizens think of corona badges and the corona barometer? A closer look at some motivational tools.

The Motivation Barometer

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Infection rates rose rapidly in recent weeks. There is a growing realization among part of the population that readjustment is necessary. At the same time, other citizens are questioning the need for it. In some cases, resistance is growing. The question is how to learn to live with the measures to manage the risk of an escalating development. CELEVAL proposed a corona barometer, a color-coded system that reflects the risk level of the epidemic. This system, which was already launched at the end of May by the expert group 'psychology & corona' as a motivation-supporting framework, received the necessary support from the politicians but they considered refinements necessary. But what does the population think of this color-coded barometer? And what do people think of corona badges that citizens would pin to their sweaters or coats with the inscription, for example, "1.5m all day keeps the virus away!?" In this report, we discuss the psychological benefits of these tools. In the latest survey of the Motivation Barometer of Ghent University, in which 4877 people participated (average age 53.02 years, 62.8% women), participants gave their opinion on these corona badges and barometer. This yielded many interesting results that CELEVAL can work with. Therefore, we also formulate a number of recommendations for the implementation of these tools.

Take home message

- There are several psychological benefits to widespread adoption of corona badges and to the installation of a corona barometer.
- Corona badges signal self-motivation, can play a social connecting role and elicit corona proof behavior from bystanders.
- 52% of the respondents indicated that a corona badge would encourage them to act corona proof and just over 1/3rd would wear one themselves.
- The corona barometer ensures that measures are proportionate and clear, increases commitment and sense of responsibility, and provides perspective because of its goal-oriented nature.
- 83% of the respondents would (very) definitely look at the corona barometer; 71% indicated that the corona barometer would provide (a lot of) clarity; and 58% said that the corona barometer would prompt them to adopt corona proof behavior.

CORONA BADGES

Psychological Benefits

A corona badge contains a corona-specific message that citizens can pin to their jacket or sweater. The basic philosophy of the corona badge is that citizens keep each other alert. In this way, a collective vigilance is created whereby we encourage or even empower each other to follow the corona measures. From a motivational and social psychological perspective, this corona badge has several advantages.






- First, pinning on the corona badge oneself demonstrates affiliation with a shared social project. The more the wearing of a corona badge becomes established and thus the norm, the more it encourages corona proof behavior. Corona badges can thus play a social connecting role.
- Secondly, this corona badge acts as a trigger: it elicits the desired behavior from bystanders. This is a good example of nudging, the psychological principle by which the environment is arranged in such a way that the desired behavior is encouraged.
- Third, a corona badge acts as a communication signal. Wearers communicate to those around them that they are committed to following the measures. This also eliminates the need for a wearer to verbally remind others that he or she is breaking the physical distance. While many are hesitant to point out the measures to others, in this way it is less necessary or can be done in a more playful rather than a patronizing manner.

Appreciation rates

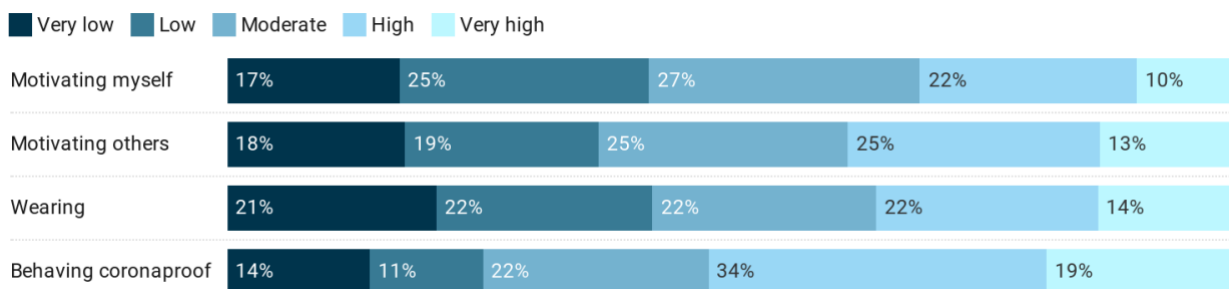
In the latest wave of the Motivation Barometer of the University of Ghent, participants were presented with several corona badges. Participants could indicate whether they found several slogans attractive, as shown in Figure 1. The attractiveness of the slogans varied with the age and gender of the participants, with older participants and women appreciating the badges more than younger participants and men. These results are consistent with identified motivational differences. In addition, participants were asked to what extent ...

- ... they would wear a badge themselves
- ... they would find wearing a badge to be motivating, for themselves and for others
- ... the badge would encourage them to act corona proof

Figure 1. *Attractiveness given slogans*

Slogan					
Average	3.31	2.82	2.97	2.86	3.18

The percentages are shown in Figure 2. Interestingly, participants find wearing such a badge more motivating for others than for themselves. Just over half (i.c., 53%) indicated that the badge would (very) definitely encourage them to act corona proof. Just over a third (i.c., 36%) indicated that they would want to wear such a badge themselves. These results are encouraging. The question whether wearing a badge will really have a motivating effect depends on a number of preconditions that have to be met when implementing it. We discuss these in the next section.

Figure 2. *Appreciation corona badge*

Points of attention during implementation

- Badges and their associated slogan can be informative but also directive. For example, wearing this badge can be interpreted as a sign of moral superiority, forcing the other to follow the measures. The idea is to limit the directing character and maximize the informing character. The psychological significance assigned depends, among other things, on the nature of the slogan and the authenticity of its wearer.
- Introducing these corona badges can provide a playful note around a loaded and serious theme. Badges can be distributed in all kinds of shapes and colors and the slogans can be quite funny. In this way we encourage each other to follow the measures.

- Not all types of badges and slogans will appeal to all target groups to the same extent. By choosing target group-specific slogans, customization can be offered and the lifestyles of specific target groups can be connected. It is recommended to involve these target groups and different language communities in choosing relevant slogans (e.g. through a radio program). As a wearer you can also choose between different badges so you can express your own preference. Customization and choice strengthen the commitment to wear these badges.
- Do not impose these corona badges, but do make them available to the wider public. It should be a free choice for every citizen to wear them or not. These badges can be purchased and distributed by organizations (e.g., universities, businesses), with social role models within an organization also indicating why they wear them. For example, medical students can show their commitment to their fellow students.

CORONA BAROMETER

Psychological Benefits

The corona barometer includes a color-coded system where each color reflects a different risk level. The system includes a clear switching formula from one color to another according to the risk level and it describes corresponding measures. This has a number of important psychological benefits:

- First, the corona barometer ensures that the efforts that need to be made are aligned with or proportional to the risk level of the pandemic. Disproportionate measures elicit 'must'-ivation: adhering to the measures will be a hard job and we won't last. Citizens, on the other hand, are quite willing to comply with stricter measures if they perceive them as necessary in the given situation. By relaxing the measures at lower levels of risk, the population can moderate its efforts and use the energy needed to cope with the crisis more sparingly. After all, it may be a while before a vaccine will be available.
- Second, a barometer provides clarity and aims to reduce the unpredictability of the situation. Stricter measures were introduced in the middle of this summer. One reason these bothered us was their unexpected nature. In addition, the barometer

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provides a shared understanding of the situation: we are all on the same page in estimating the current level of risk.

- Third, the barometer aims to increase citizens' sense of responsibility. Because citizens themselves can monitor the situation in their region, they can participate in thinking and individually or collectively take the initiative to adjust their behavior according to a shifting risk level. As a result, their voluntary motivation is thus more encouraged. Moreover, if corona proof behavior becomes the norm in their own region then this has a 'contagious' effect so that the desired behavior spreads among citizens.
- Fourth, the barometer provides a clear goal for citizens to pursue. Introducing critical thresholds for switching provides a perspective. When citizens work together toward this collective goal, they can also experience a sense of collective efficacy and control. Achieving such a collective goal stimulates trust and different social groups in society can be mobilized around this collective goal. It becomes a unifying social project.

Appreciation rates

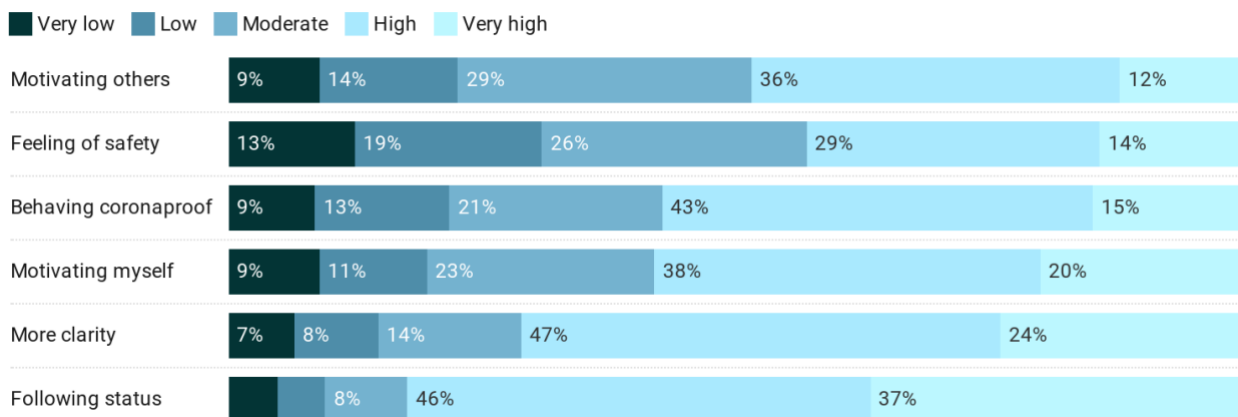
Similar to the corona badges, participants were asked a series of questions about the barometer. Specifically, they were polled on the extent to which ...

- ... they would follow up with the barometer
- ... they would find the barometer motivating, for themselves and others
- ... the barometer would provide clarity and a sense of security
- ... the barometer would encourage them to act corona proof

The results of the latest wave show that 83% of the participants would (very) definitely follow the status of the corona barometer (see Figure 3). Thus, it is indicated that it would provide (much) more clarity (71%) and a (much) greater sense of security (43%).

Participants indicated that the barometer would be both (very) motivating for themselves (58%) and for others (48%) and would (very) encourage them to adopt corona proof behaviors (58%).

Figure 3. Appreciation barometer



Points of attention during implementation

In further refining this barometer, the following psychological concerns can be taken into account:

- Try to introduce the barometer at a regional level. If it is introduced on a national or even a provincial level, citizens may feel that certain measures are insufficiently attuned to the level of risk in their immediate surroundings (e.g. district). Think of the lockdown in the province of Antwerp: while inhabitants of the city of Antwerp experienced it as useful and necessary, this was (much) less true for citizens from regions where infection rates were not rising so quickly. A too local level (e.g. municipal) then potentially causes confusion because color codes differ too much between municipalities.
- It is important not only to indicate how "the 6 golden rules" apply to different degrees at different levels of risk, but also to develop a consistent sector-specific version of them (e.g., catering industry, sports, education). In this way, the barometer can act as a guide for our functioning in various life domains.
- Communicate about this barometer in a clear way. Think of a corona bulletin, similar to a weather report, where different colors light up on the map of Belgium (cfr. results of political elections).

- Our behavior today is our main weapon against the spread of the virus. If we want to prevent a further rise in numbers, it is important that the critical thresholds are sufficiently low. If the blinkers go off faster, adhering to the measures will keep the situation from getting out of hand. Such low thresholds can be justified by showing graphs which show how the situation would evolve if we did not follow the phase-specific measures. Note that this preventive approach is precisely the core of a barometer: it predicts how the situation will evolve in the future, rather than being a representation of the current or past state.
- Choose psychologically relevant parameters. The parameters to switch can be diverse. The psychological advantage of hospitalization rates is that they presumably have a stronger impact on the risk perception of the population, which in turn increases motivation. Their disadvantage is that they are at the back of the 'corona chain' and thus the thresholds need to be very low to preventively elicit the desired behavior. Therefore, it is good to supplement the number of hospitalizations also with earlier risk parameters (e.g., R-value or the positivity ratio).
- Avoid a yo-yo effect. It causes confusion and unpredictability among citizens if two risk levels or colors are switched too quickly, for example, if in a few days the situation shifts from yellow to orange and back again. Think of the ambiguity caused by rapidly changing color codes. Especially when switching to a lower risk level, it is crucial to build in enough certainty that the risk level is under control. Certainty could mean that the set parameters should be reached for at least a few days before switching.

Reflection: are psychologists manipulators of the population?

How are psychologists seen who try to steer our corona behavior in the right direction? Do they have to provide the necessary stimulation so that the entire population will get back in line and adhere to the ambitions as laid out by biomedics? This would be a fallacy. After all, we know from empirical research that people have a psychological need for autonomy, just as we have physiological needs (e.g. eating, drinking). When this autonomy need is satisfied, it means that we feel we can be ourselves: our opinions are taken seriously, and

we fully support our actions. With this basic principle in mind, we make three considerations.

1. When motivational tools are used to decrease dissident voices, they undermine rather than satisfy our autonomy needs. Thus, coercive motivational tools go against the basic psychological principle that psychologists themselves advocate. Hence, in the development and implementation of these tools, attention is needed to participation (e.g., type of slogan), choice (e.g., to wear a corona badge or not), proportionality (e.g., disproportionate measures feel like a straitjacket), and rationale (e.g., what is the added value of these tools?).
2. Participation means actually listening to protesting citizens and creating space for protesting citizens and their concerns which are often legitimate. It is important to engage in dialogue and to take these concerns into account. But the purpose of this protest can be very diverse: discouragement, lack of belief in the strategy being pursued, or conflict of goals. Following the measures is frequently in conflict with our other goals, such as maintaining close social ties. It is therefore crucial that citizens are able to make informed and thus well-considered choices. To this end, they must have the information necessary to assess the consequences of not adhering to the safe behavior principles, such as when they overextend their close contacts.
3. It is crucial to keep in mind the larger collective goal of keeping infection rates under control. The more and the longer we realize this goal, the more we maximize our autonomy under the circumstances. Indeed, a lockdown would curtail our autonomy even more. Because different paths (read: measures) lead to this collective goal, it is crucial to keep the discussion about this alive. After all, an authentic commitment will only be elicited if citizens fully support the outlined paths.

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