

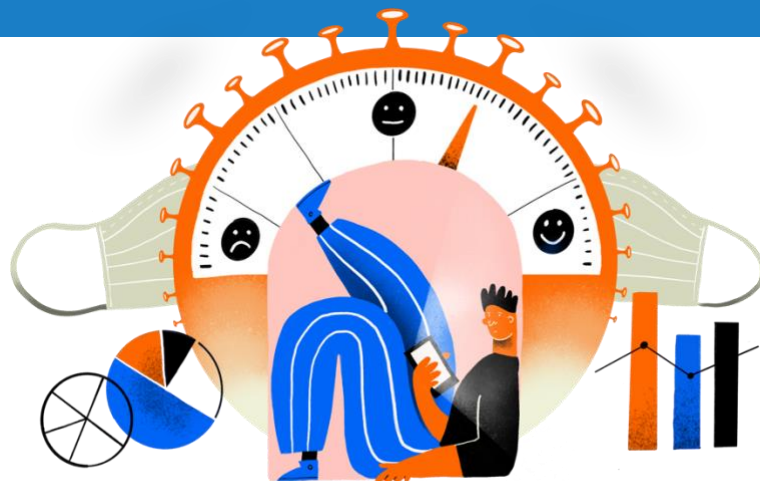
REPORT 1

How long will we hold on to these measures? Our motivation is strong at the moment!

The Motivation Barometer

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In order to achieve great performances, top athletes need to train daily and have to take good care of themselves. Therefore, their motivation is a key factor. Without a good amount of healthy motivation, they cannot keep up their demanding training regimen. In times of COVID-19, the motivation of the population to adhere to the prescribed measures is tested as well. This study conducted by the University of Ghent shows that, in general, although differences between individuals remain, our voluntary motivation today is high. This is good news because voluntary motivation acts as a good predictor of adherence to the measures and therefore has potential to constrain the spread of the virus. If the daily motivation measurement shows that our motivation is starting to decrease, the government can make adjustments through targeted, motivating communication.

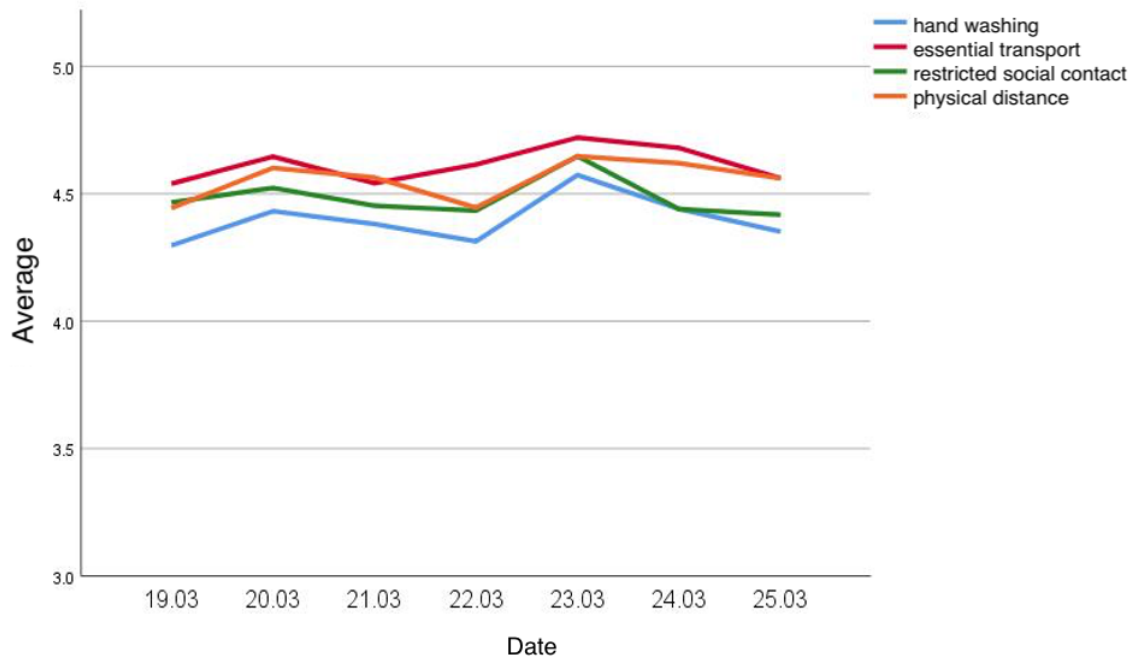
Adherence to the measures

Since the online launch of the study on Thursday, March 19, 2020, a total number of 2221 participants have completed the survey. The sample consists of mainly female participants (74.4%) and with a mean age of 39 years old. Participants report on how well they adhere to the six measures as imposed by the government: wash your hands as much as possible, maintain social distance, limit yourself to essential travel, telecommute, and avoid contact with the outside world. Almost 80% of the participants reported that they (almost) always adhere to all measures. Thus, only one-fifth of the participants do not strictly follow all measures. Even in this group, there are few who refuse to adhere to the measures at all. Older participants seem to be more conscientious and significantly more compliant. They are especially more likely to engage in 'social distancing'.

In general, participants indicated that limiting themselves to essential travel is the most feasible. Surprisingly, hand washing, possibly the most convenient and obvious measure, appears to be the least respected. Women do wash their hands slightly more than men. The restriction of transfers to work is also less strictly followed.

While some employees are still forced by their employers to make the transfer to work, washing our hands is an action which we control ourselves. How many times we wash our hands is entirely up to us. However, this exactly could be the point. What does it mean to wash your hands "as much as possible"? Is it three, five or ten times a day? Is it better to do it at fixed times or just after you have been outdoors? Should you do this even if you did not enter public spaces but went in your own garden? While a measure like 'avoiding contact' really breaks our daily routines, this may not be the case for hand washing. We did it before and thus the false perception may have been created that no extra effort is needed.

Figure 1. Adherence to the measures by day



Since last Thursday, the adherence to the measures has been monitored daily (see Figure 1). As the figure shows, all measures are well complied, with a peak in adherence seen on Monday, March 23, 2020. In the following days, these averages seem to drop slightly.

Imposed yet voluntarily motivated

How can we explain the adherence to these imposed measures? After all, these measures are a great intrusion into our daily routines and personal decision-making. The current study surveyed different types of motivation. Participants most frequently indicated that they complied with the measures voluntarily. Imposed measures yet voluntarily motivation? Although this might seem like a paradox, it is not. Participants voluntarily adhere to the measures because they recognize their necessity and usefulness. For example, they realize that otherwise they risk worsening the spread of the virus and putting at-risk groups in danger. Because health is at stake and because we can help others with these measures, people very easily recognize the relevance and personal importance of the measures. Thus, the government's drastic measures are legitimate in their opinion. Based on this understanding, the imposed measures do not feel like a restriction of our autonomy, but rather as a choice that aligns well with values that concern to almost all people: health and altruism.

Yet, these findings do not apply for everyone. Some experience external pressure to adhere to the measures. Their motivation for adhering to the measures is fear of criticism or avoiding a fine. In this case, following the measures feels like an obligation. Especially individuals who are single show more 'must-ivation'. Restricting social contact probably affects them more deeply than those who live with other family members.

The fact that the majority of the population is voluntarily motivated is an excellent thing. Voluntary motivation positively predicts adherence, while experiencing external pressure negatively predicts adherence. Dozens of studies in the motivation literature show that voluntarily motivated students, workers and athletes sustain their efforts longer. Even in hard times they are able to persevere. Therefore, we would benefit if the government would continue to foster this voluntary motivation. In doing so, younger generations can mirror older generations. After all, the higher level of voluntary motivation that characterizes the older generations explains why they are more compliant to the measures.

Motivational communication

Although the results seem to be encouraging at this time, virologists and scientists indicate that we will still have a long way to go. Therefore, the question is: how long will we be able to keep our voluntary motivation to adhere to the measures at these high levels? To motivate the population to make sustained efforts, we formulate three communicational recommendations.

Try to explain the expectations to the population in concrete terms. Maintaining a social distance is a good example of this. The government clearly communicated that the desirable distance is 1.5 meters. Many store owners therefore tape this distance on the ground to help citizens comply to this measure. More concrete guidelines could be given for hand washing (How many times? When?) or limiting oneself to essential transportations (Can I go to the grocery store daily to avoid hoarding or is it better to go only twice a week? Is it better for me to wear a face mask or should we save them for healthcare workers?). If we know concretely what is expected, we can more easily adapt our behavior to those expectations.

Explain to the population as best as possible why these measures are and will remain necessary in the coming weeks. This will contribute to a better understanding and a greater willingness to follow the measures. Specific information is desirable here. For example, why is it important to wash our hands? How can even minimal contact with neighbors be enough to spread the virus? What results could we expect if we did not adhere to these measures? Visualizing through images is often more comprehensible in this case. Reminding the population of the solidarity, helpfulness, and connection towards others is also a good motivational strategy. These values concern almost everyone, which provides a solid foundation for high-quality motivation. If our behavior helps the safety of at-risk groups, this will motivate us more strongly.

Try to communicate positively and appear trustworthy. Having confidence in positive results motivates the population to comply to the measures. Today, the optimism and determination among the government, scientists and caregivers is encouraging for the population and patients. Moreover, we as citizens can motivate each other as well. We could acknowledge each other when we adhere to the measures. Some still seem to have

hesitations, for example, to maintain social distance. A sign of gratitude to do so always works stimulating.

This crisis comes with numerous challenges. The tempo at which we will be able to overcome this crisis will largely depend on our self-discipline. Therefore, motivation is necessary. If the government, scientists but also citizens can interact with each other in a motivating manner, this will contribute to a sustainable commitment.

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