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## **COVID-19 Pandemic: Balancing Privacy and Saving Lives in Technology Usage**

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# COVID-19 Pandemic: Balancing Privacy and Saving Lives in Technology Usage

TREO Talk Paper

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## Abstract

COVID-19 is sweeping across the globe. Some countries are collecting anonymized data to study the movement of people and others are providing more detailed information about individuals in addition to the movement data. Surveillance tools are widely used to stem the spread of the COVID-19. South Korea uses smartphone location data, surveillance camera footage, and credit card data to create a publicly available map that tracks the paths of COVID-19 patients. Austria's network operators share anonymized location data with the government, but the data may remain at risk from re-identification in the future. The Polish government releases an app for people in quarantine, requiring them to upload geo-located selfies periodically. In some countries, police and military personnel are also involved in enforcing quarantines, curfews, and social distancing, which may encroach on personal freedom and privacy. There is no doubt that the use of technologies, such as geolocation and facial recognition, can help to slow and manage the spread of COVID-19 and enforce social distancing, but people are concerned about the expanded and potentially questionable uses of technologies that may result in privacy issues (Siau & Wang, 2020). Many questions remain to be answered. How the data is being shared? How to deal with the data and the surveillance capabilities once the pandemic subsides? How to prevent unauthorized individuals or institutions from gaining access to the data?

Privacy is recognized as a fundamental human right, essential for freedom, democracy, and psychological well-being. As technology developed, especially the progress of mobile devices (Siau & Shen, 2002, 2006), concerns about privacy (location data in particular) increase (Shokri *et al.* 2011). Some organizations are dedicated to protecting individual privacy while sharing information, and encrypting the data collected to prevent a hacker from accessing identifiable information. However, as evidenced by data breaches, information is increasingly exposed to hacking, which results in information security and privacy issues (Siau & Wang, 2018; Wang & Siau, 2019). This qualitative study will examine how organizations and authorities are dealing with the tradeoff between protecting individual privacy and saving lives in the pandemic. In the first phase of the study, data security and privacy officers in various government and healthcare organizations will be interviewed. In the second phase, the findings from the first phase will be used to design questionnaires, which will be administered in government organizations. This will be a multi-country and multi-culture research.

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