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Americans' willingness to adopt a COVID-19 tracking app: The role of app distributor

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Abstract

The COVID-19 global pandemic led governments, health agencies, and technology companies to work on solutions to minimize the spread of the disease. One such solution concerns contact-tracing apps whose utility is tied to widespread adoption. Using survey data collected a few weeks into lockdown measures in the United States, we explore Americans' willingness to install a COVID-19 tracking app. Specifically, we evaluate how the distributor of such an app (*e.g.*, government, health-protection agency, technology company) affects people's willingness to adopt the tool. While we find that 67 percent of respondents are willing to install an app from at least one of the eight providers included, the factors that predict one's willingness to adopt differ. Using Nissenbaum's theory of privacy as contextual integrity, we explore differences in responses across distributors and discuss why some distributors may be viewed as less appropriate than others in the context of providing health-related apps during a global pandemic. We conclude the paper by providing policy recommendations for wide-scale data collection that minimizes the likelihood that such tools violate the norms of appropriate information flows.

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