

COVID-19 Shutdown: A Qualitative Study on Pearls and Pitfalls [†]

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Abstract: The extraordinary and tragic conditions that humanity has not experienced before in the modern period have become ordinary, namely, a “new normal” with the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has had frightening consequences for human health and has caused one million deaths as of September 2020. On the other hand, it has set a new standard of good habits, approaches, and benefits. Due to its global and long-term impact, this unique virus has laid the groundwork for unprecedented helping and sharing behaviors between people and countries. In this study, findings are compiled from the open-ended responses of 626 individuals, all of whom live in Turkey. Within the study’s scope, individuals were asked about the unique advantages and disadvantages of the restrictions imposed under COVID-19. While the categories of economy, social distance, and health came to the fore among the harms, the strengthening of family ties, adoption of technology, and the spread of solidarity culture were mentioned among the advantages.

Keywords: COVID; Turkey; impact of crisis; advantages; disadvantages

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1. Introduction

Shorter innovation cycles force companies to invest much money in research and development in order to be able to remain competitive in the long term in global and dynamic markets. The risk of unsuitable investments increases with the speed and pressure of always presenting new products to consumers. Since not all of these innovations can establish themselves on the market, a fundamental knowledge of the diffusion process and the adoption of technological innovations are essential to minimize possible misallocations.

Since Davis, one of the most well-known names in the technology acceptance literature, thousands of scientists have studied the adoption of technology, examining the adoption pattern of various technologies among different societies or age groups. Among the factors that affect technology adoption, the most well-known factors are perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and behavioral intention. An epidemic in late 2019 which swept the world by 2020 has left behind the triggering factors revealed by scientists and brand-new neuro techniques developed by marketing experts and caused millions of people to use and adopt the technology.

In March and April 2020, the world population was confronted with an exceptional historical situation. The measures taken to prevent the COVID-19 virus have not only massively affected people’s everyday lives, but they have also had a collective effect in psychological and emotional terms and have left their mark [1]. Identifying and dealing with the direct social, economic, ecological, and political consequences of the crisis and the measures taken to deal with it will, therefore, have priority for political decision-makers and scientists from various disciplines [2]. The generation of freely accessible data and knowledge (open access policy) has become enormously influential, not least due to the

current crisis. While many researchers focus on the disadvantages of the epidemic due to the negative consequences [3–7], this research is one of the primary studies to our knowledge which shows that this challenging period also provides many advantages. This research aims to contribute to these efforts and enlighten the consequences.

This study ascertains personal and social advantages and disadvantages of the Turkish people's perspective during the shutdown time. As part of a more extensive data collection, a selection of 626 respondents were asked one of the following questions between 25 March and 5 April 2020:

(1) What are the most significant personal disadvantages for you due to the current coronavirus crisis?

(2) In your opinion, what are the most significant personal advantages due to the current coronavirus crisis?

The data offer valuable insights into the pressures, worries, fears of citizens, as well as the gains and how the crisis turns into an opportunity for the population during this extremely critical phase (when the restrictions due to measures to control the coronavirus were implemented continuously).

This extraordinary period's pros and cons were discussed within this study's scope without any guidance and without any question patterns that would cause the participants to feel convergent. As a result of this objective perspective, many different themes have emerged, and one of them is the adoption of technologies.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Survey Design

The data was collected in the form of two open-ended questions: (1) What are the most significant personal disadvantages for you due to the current coronavirus crisis? (2) In your opinion, what are the most significant personal advantages due to the current coronavirus crisis?

The data collection took the form of an online survey from 25 March–5 April 2020, during the weeks of the most challenging government measures taken in response to the COVID-19 crisis. A random selection of 626 survey participants was asked the two open-ended questions. By randomizing the questions throughout the survey, systematic bias can be excluded.

2.2. Data Material

The two questions were asked to 626 survey participants, with 1244 data records being included in the study after excluding eight invalid answers. Figure 1 provides an overview of the distribution of respondents by gender and age.

The majority of the answers (78%) consist of up to 10 words (in detail: 15% = one word; 41% = two to five words; 22% = six to 10 words); four respondents did not answer (0.32% with 0 words). The arithmetic mean is 11 words; the median is six words. According to the results, there were no significant differences between the answers to the two questions regarding word count.

2.3. Data

As part of an exploratory qualitative content analysis of the corpus [8], 14 content categories were inductively generated from the answers, with which the entire corpus was then coded. The main categories represent thematic dimensions and are not mutually exclusive. Different dimensions were often addressed in the mostly keyword-like answers (more than one main category was assigned).

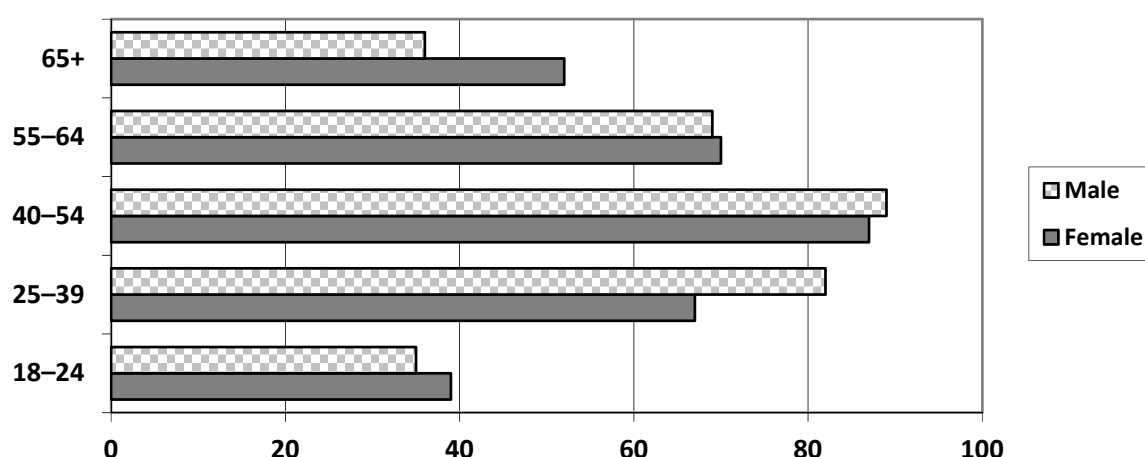


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by gender and by age group.

3. Findings

The two open-ended questions have different perspectives: The question of personal disadvantages activates one's concern and focuses on changes in the environment or corresponding fears. The second question strained the minds and ideas of a "good"—in the sense of desirable—environment or society are expressed, which is also reflected in the answers' specific characteristics and formulations (Figure 2).

A first overview of the inductively generated main categories for grouping the answers shows a high thematic homogeneity between the two groups of questions. The high level of agreement in the subject areas suggests that the pandemic's disadvantages and advantages and the associated measures are experienced or assessed similarly by the population.

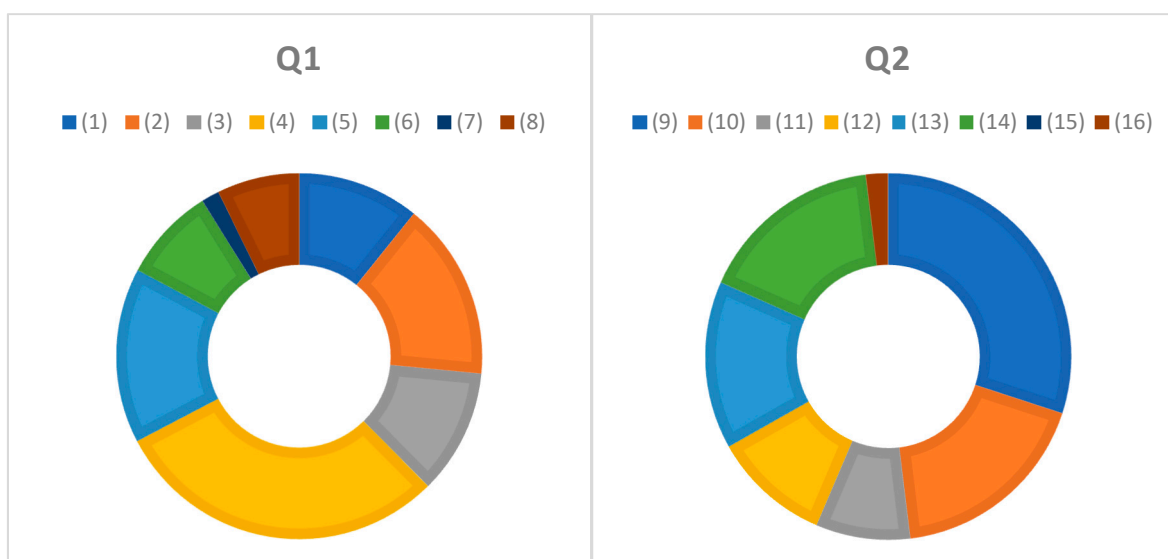


Figure 2- Main categories, statements per question, and percentage distribution of the statements.

The categories (2) and (10) are perspective-specific: Statements about everyday professional and private life are a focus in the answers to question 1, while in question 2, gains, improvements, and advancements are of particular importance, supplemented by highlighting the need for technological change and adoption. The widespread mention of the family, both in questions 1 and 2, is also striking. The differences between the two perspectives become incredibly apparent in the detailed analysis of the statements. In the

next section, the characteristics in the individual categories are, therefore, described in detail.

3.1. *Personal Disadvantages*

Q1: What are the most significant personal disadvantages for you due to the current coronavirus crisis?

In this question, the focus is on the most significant personal disadvantages due to the coronavirus crisis. Therefore, the answers mainly relate to personal concerns or changes in the respondents' immediate environment.

3.1.1. (Cat1) Economic–Financial Dimension of Personal Disadvantages

Disadvantages in economic and financial terms are discussed by 102 respondents (16.3%). Loss of income, loss of earnings, loss of wages, or wages are addressed. Due to developments in the capital market, income effects are mentioned once ("my funds have fallen sharply").

Loss or reduction in gainful employment is listed in 29 answers. The associated financial consequences are taken into account by taking them into account in this category (the associated effects on everyday life are also taken into account by taking them into account in Cat2).

Two of the statements deal with the economy in a very general way ("economy"; "that the economy is going downhill"). Since these are answers to the question about personal disadvantages, they were interpreted as an indication of the economic and financial personal situation and included in this category.

3.1.2. (Cat2) Everyday Life (Professional and Private) and Social Climate

Due to the COVID-19 measures and their effects, the respondents also perceived disadvantages in their professional, school, and university life and private living conditions. Cat2 subsumes these statements on private and professional everyday life as well as in interpersonal relationships (social climate) unless they explicitly refer to social distancing (Cat4) or restriction of (freedom of) movement (Cat5).

A total of 149 respondents (23.8%) referred to the negative changes they experienced in everyday life. The majority of the statements (46, 19.2%) relate to the work or study situation. Of these, 29 people are affected by unemployment or short-term work (see Cat1), and two respondents fear losing their jobs. The statements on the changed work situation relate to, i.e., working hours, overtime, general overtime, and additional stress and strain from the home office. In the case of students, an increased organizational effort and lack of classroom teaching ("that I can no longer attend the university lectures"; "No courses at the university"; "Restrictions at the University") or failed exams are cited.

Childcare is discussed in 18 responses, i.e., by 2.9% of those surveyed, with the effects of closed kindergartens being addressed twice. Only one statement refers explicitly to home learning, which is very extensive in comparison and with an insight into the emotional level: "Exhausted patience, support children with home learning. Postponement of the school admission exam dates, learn camping instead of summer vacation, vacation cancellations." Seven answers contain singular expressions such as, e.g., "Lack of time", "Have to cook yourself. However, I have more free time.", or "Storage is greater now".

Private interpersonal tensions are addressed twice: "Crisis in the relationship" and the already mentioned statement on homeschooling ("exhausted patience"). A small number of respondents (8) address the general climate in everyday life by expressing dissatisfaction with the behavior of fellow citizens: "That people exaggerate"; "That there are still many ignoramuses and egoists (...)" ; "None, I often do not understand the hysteria. The media often suggest something, and unstable people believe it. "

3.1.3. (Cat3) Limited Infrastructure

One hundred and five respondents (around 16.7%) named restricted access to infrastructure and cultural events as a personal disadvantage. The infrastructure in the leisure sector (sport, culture) is most frequently named with 16 comments “no sporting opportunities”; “tennis not yet allowed”; “Swimming pools are unfortunately closed”; “lack of cultural, sport and leisure activities”; “Sporting events”; “no cultural offer”; “no cultural events”; “Cannot attend events”, followed by statements on the closure of restaurants (13): “Cannot visit bars”; “would just like to be able to visit” my “coffee house and tavern again”; “Gastronomy closed”; “Restaurants are closed”.

Closed shops are addressed in 21 responses, with two respondents referring to the lack of products or panic buying. Inadequate access to health care is cited in eight responses: “Those important appointments with doctors and in outpatient clinics have been canceled”; “No routine medical examinations possible”; “no therapies”. In five cases, closed kindergartens are discussed. Individual statements refer to services such as hair-dressing (2) and pedicure (1), as well as the use of public transport (1).

3.1.4. (Cat4) Social Distancing

Two hundred and eighty-three respondents discussed the dimension of social coexistence. The majority of the answers (278, 44.4%) relate to social contacts or the lack of such contacts and are summarized under 4.1 Social Distancing. The lack of social contact with family (119) and friends (114) is mentioned most frequently, with 52 respondents mentioning both groups in their answers. Colleagues are only mentioned in eight answers. A further 85 respondents formulated the lack of or the restriction of social contacts in general, while in isolated cases, the children’s lack of social contacts (6) as well as “isolation” (3) and “keep your distance” (3) are discussed. In eight responses, in connection with social distancing, the limited opportunity to help others was regretted: “That I cannot support my children because I have to go to work”; “(...) that I rarely see my friends and family and that I cannot support my grandparents as usual.”; “Not being able to support 100% of people in difficult life situations”.

3.1.5. (Cat5) Restrictions on (Movement) Freedom

One hundred and forty-six respondents (23.4%) expressed their views on requirements and prohibitions and their consequences as part of the COVID-19 measures (statements on the social dimension of these restrictions, which have already been presented in Cat4 not included here). Almost 13% of those surveyed mention exit restrictions (41) and restrictions on freedom of movement (40), with individual statements using a language that is significantly more emotional than other categories: “house arrest”, “not allowed out”, “you have to stay at home (...)”. Twenty-nine people took up the topic with a focus on personal freedom: “No freedom”; “Restriction of my Freedom”; “the freedom to come and go wherever you want”; “Restrictions on personal freedom”, and once also “deprivation of liberty”. Civil rights and democracy are only explicitly addressed by one person. The subject of travel restrictions is addressed in 34 replies.

3.1.6. (Cat6) Health Dimension

Health aspects are discussed by 79 respondents (12.6%). Statements on the psychological–emotional level relate to loneliness/depression (21): “I am completely alone and a stigmatized Corona grandma”; “Insulation”; “No more personal contact. / Loneliness”; “You feel lonely, and you get depressed”. On the other hand, worries, fears, and uncertainties (31) are expressed, including fear of illness/hospital stay, reduction of pension, loss of a job; “Dangerous situation”; “Uncertain duration of the pandemic”; “Uncertainty how things will go on”; “no supportive therapies possible”. On the physical level, physical inactivity (10) and weight gain (3) are addressed.

Another four statements relate to problems with nose and mouth protection: (“Wearing a mask, I cannot breathe, I am naturally short of breath because of my COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)”); “Headache due to mask requirement. Insufficient oxygen.”) Previous illnesses (“My lung disease / and therefore the greater risk”) and (acute) “negative effects on mental health (...)”.

3.1.7. (Cat7) Other Disadvantages

Twenty-six isolated utterances were not assigned to any other main category. Five of them contain no meaningful statement.

Five of these articles address the media: “A lot of media reports are faked or incorrectly displayed, too few tests, therefore, the statistics are unrealistic”; “None, I often do not understand the hysteria. The media often suggest something, and unstable people then believe it.”

One person criticizes the government (“The way how the government copes with this crisis”), seven other respondents exercise general criticism of the system and paint a very negative picture of the situation, the government, the Federal President, the measures and their consequences, politicians, and Lobbyists, etc. Due to the detail and the sometimes vehemence of the formulations, they differ significantly from the other answers regarding content, language, and scope.

Four respondents express a general dissatisfaction with their fellow citizens: “That people exaggerate”; “That there are still many ignoramuses and egoists”.

3.1.8. (Cat8) No Disadvantages

Slightly more than 10% of the respondents (67) stated that they had no (44) or no noteworthy (23) disadvantages, whereby 13 of them still named some (e.g., “actually none, would just like to go back to” my “coffee house and be able to visit my pub.”; “I have no disadvantages. I just miss meeting my friends and family”; “Not really. Childcare, however, challenging”).

3.2. Personal Advantages

Q2: In your opinion, what are the most significant personal advantages due to the current coronavirus crisis?

This question focuses on the most significant personal advantages due to the coronavirus crisis. The answers relate to a lesser extent to the respondents’ immediate everyday world but increasingly focus on changes in the broader environment perceived as advantageous. They give an insight into the respondents’ relevance structures concerning the society in which they would like to live.

3.2.1. (Cat9) Family Relationships

Two hundred and thirty-eight people (38.1%) among the respondents stated that family closeness increased, and family ties were strengthened.

What was mentioned as advantages in 39 of the answers were about “communication”, “spending time”, “doing something together”. In 24 more dramatic responses, people talked about “getting to know each other” (13), “listening to each other” (6), and “eliminating misunderstandings” (5).

Thirty-one responses (5.1%) emphasizing the importance of being together with elders and minors formed a thematic structure. Sharing the past and sharing memories that were not worthy of telling or wondering because of not spending so much time together were among the issues that positively answered the questions, and some people (8) mentioned that their curiosity about family history increased.

The majority of respondents (14.4%) said that spending time together turned into an advantage, although it initially sounded negative. They said that the disputes were not

difficult to resolve (55) because they had to talk. After all, they had to stay in the same house and work things out.

Eighteen of the respondents stated that they did not realize common points until now emerged, and it is enjoyable to do something with family members.

Five people who said they liked being alone before said they started to think that they were lucky to have someone at home to chat with when the curfew was imposed. These people stated that they realized that not being alone during the epidemic period was an advantage rather than an obligation.

3.2.2. (Cat10) Technology Adoption

One hundred and forty-three respondents (22.9%) mentioned that restrictions on going to crowded places or going out on the streets pushed them to use technology. Fifty-two participants mentioned that they did not like to use e-commerce before, but they met many new platforms in this period. Among them, 36 people stated that they knew that e-shopping is cheaper than traditional shopping, but they never tried it, and that they broke their chains in the period of restrictions.

Eight of the respondents stated that they were pleased that their family started using mobile applications. "So my family does not need me anymore when it comes to technology; I have peace of mind!"

Under this theme, the most mentioned topics were "shopping among the abundant options", "recognizing e-commerce", "trusting e-commerce", "using virtual cards", "getting a new habit", and "safe shopping".

Seven participants mentioned that their parents, who have never done e-shopping before, downloaded the online market applications to their phones and enjoyed these applications. One person stated that his 73-year-old father issued a virtual card, which sounded terrific.

3.2.3. (Cat11) Personal Care and Cleaning

Among the respondents, 66 people (10.6%) mentioned personal care and cleaning.

The answers gathered under this theme include the words "washing hands", "bathing", "closing mouth while coughing-sneezing", "cleaning public areas," and "avoiding contact with hands".

Sixteen people stated that the environment they were in felt cleaner and fresh. Some participants (11) said that paying attention to cleaning during the epidemic period also changed their habits, and they now need to be cleaned more frequently (7). Two participants stated that cleaning behaviors had become a permanent habit due to the epidemic period's long duration.

Some (8) of those who touched on personal care and cleaning stated that seeing those around them pay attention to cleanliness motivated them. One user commented, "When I come from outside, I need to take a bath so that I do not put my family at risk. Taking a bath was an activity I used to get lazy. Now I got used to cleaning after the bath, and now I think that even after the epidemic period is over, I will continue to take a bath every day from work."

Four participants stated that while the issue of personal care and cleaning was not on their agenda before the epidemic, they no longer hesitate to pay for it.

3.2.4. (Cat12) Welfare

Eighty-three of the participants (13.2%) emphasized as an advantage that the enormous negative conditions created by the epidemic led people to help.

Most of the statements include the structures "donation of the rich" (28), "not receiving rent" (17), "sharing expenses" (15), "food aid" (13), "social aid" (9).

The answers grouped under the theme of solidarity explained that the epidemic has negatively affected many people for a long time and forced people to help. Three participants mentioned that wealthy people were directed towards the policy of solidarity with the municipality's initiative. (2) The middle-level people also found a place in this cooperation culture. "During the epidemic, people started to wonder whether their neighbors had food."

3.2.5. (Cat13) Insight and Personal Development

The responses of 31 participants were reported under the category of insight and personal development. The answers in this category include "going inside yourself" (8), "insight" (6), "awareness" (4), "meditation" (3), "personal development" (3), "ambition and egos". Also, most of the answers in this category (54%) mentioned religious elements.

People (18) reported that being alone during the epidemic period distracted them from routine occupations. Stating that their time to devote to themselves increased, and some participants (6) tended to monitor and criticize themselves in this process.

Three participants stated that they realized that experiencing significant changes is very simple and that life depends on a thread. Participants (2) stated that they could not use the items they purchased with various plans. A significant majority of the participants (8) emphasized that they understood that the items were not that important; they could be less content. "Maybe I bought many items that I could not use for a long time. I could have died from the epidemic, and these items would be meaningless forever." "I am really questioning if almost all of what I bought is necessary. I'm not sure; it is like we woke up from a night of sleep, we were wasting."

3.2.6. (Cat14) The Importance of Freedom

The importance of freedom was addressed by 49 participants (20.8%). Participants stated that they did not understand the value of being free in the pre-epidemic period, but they did when they lost this freedom.

Some participants (7) stated that they understood that they had very unimportant problems. Six participants questioned the value of the issues they worked hard for. A person who had trouble staying at home while he had planned jobs said that freedom was the most basic need he never realized.

Some of the comments listed under this theme are similar to Cat13. When people (4) stayed away from the rush of life, they asked what was more important in their own lives.

3.2.7. (Cat15) Other Advantages/Non-Assignable

Statements that do not fit into any of the categories listed above refer to public benefits and are grouped under the other category. Structures such as "it had useful features", "provided advantages" could not be reported under other categories because they do not refer to a specific subject.

Four participants answered, "I do not know," and two participants' answers were not understood.

3.2.8. (Cat16) No Advantage

Six participants (1%) stated that they did not see any advantage.

4. Limitations

This paper offers a detailed description of selected data from a more extensive study, a preparation of the same based on a content-analytical evaluation (including frequencies), and initial approaches to how these can be related for further analysis. An in-depth, theoretically-based evaluation of the entire study will take place in the near future with the aim of publishing as soon as possible.

This paper gives decision-makers in politics and business and colleagues in science and research the opportunity to generate knowledge about citizens' positive and negative perceptions and thus create benefits for society.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This research focuses solely on the personal advantages and disadvantages of the COVID-19 outbreak. People had to abandon their accustomed living conditions in the March–April period when the curfew was intense. This radical change has brought several benefits and disadvantages. While much research focuses on the disadvantages of the epidemic due to the negative consequences, this research is one of the primary studies that show that this challenging period also provides many advantages. This extraordinary period's pros and cons were discussed without any guidance and without any question pattern that would cause the participants to feel convergent.

Within the study's scope, it was preferred to evaluate open-ended answers instead of answers restricted by options. In this way, people were able to talk about all the conditions that came to their minds and the traces and new views created by the epidemic in their own world.

The disadvantages listed as a result of the study, as expected, are the psychological negativities of health deterioration, financial loss, and sociopathy and closure at home. When the advantages are examined, the strengthening of family ties showed that people get closer to their immediate/nuclear circles even if they break away from their wider environment. The epidemic conditions, which oblige the adoption of technology and enable a rapid digital transformation in this sense, have enabled people and economies to gain many advantages in the long term, e-shopping, e-payment habits. On the other hand, the widespread use of personal hygiene and hygiene behavior is a beneficial trend for the general public in preventing many future diseases.

Among the conditions that participants consider as an advantage, the second most mentioned theme is adopting technologies, which may please the informatics world for two reasons. The first reason is that people are aware of this change. Those who state that technology's penetration into daily life is an advantage give signals that this change may create permanent changes in their habits. Therefore, this usage behavior can be described as an acceptance period, not a temporary period of use. The second satisfactory reason is that people who are not inclined to use technology do not consider technology harmful, contrary to popular belief. It is essential that individuals become aware of technology's possibilities and do not think that using technology is a disadvantage of this extraordinary period.

In conclusion, it should not be ignored that the epidemic, which spreads rapidly and continues its intense effect despite the passing of months, has brought along some changes and transformations that can be considered a significant advantage in cultural and technological terms as well as major and maybe permanent damages.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of Sakarya University (protocol code E.11668 – 09.12.2020).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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