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The use of applications in times of disasters: what can we learn from earlier experiences and the development of the Covid-19 applications.

Currently, the world is facing a pandemic. Governments are imposing restrictions on their citizens, such as quarantine, social distancing and obliging the wearing of face masks. Since there is a lot of debate about what would be the best approach to 'flatten the curve', all countries practice different strategies. The one thing that countries do seem to agree on is the employability of smartphone applications to assist the flattening.

This paper focusses on a historical aspect of the use of applications in times of disasters, and on the current situation of Covid-19 applications. In order to explicate the development of these applications, in the first part the belief system that underlies the applications and earlier cases are considered, re-evaluated, and put in perspective. Attention is paid to concepts such as surveillance culture, solutionism, and data-positivism. In the second part the focus shifts to the current situation. Covid-19 applications already employed in some countries raise several issues, not in the least concerning the privacy of its users. These issues have become even more prominent since large-scale public political manifestations were held during the lockdown, among which the ongoing public uprisings in Hongkong and the 'black lives matter' protests in the United States and Europe. Keeping in mind civil rights, sudden contextual shifts caused by a mix up of legal and ethical values make the implication of track-and-trace health applications with an obligatory impetus extremely tricky.

The research is conducted from an interdisciplinary perspective and follows a mixed methods approach.