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CORONAVIRUS SHAPES OUR DIGITAL FUTURE

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Everyone may already be aware of such a phenomenon as coronavirus or COVID-19, an outbreak of which began in one of the Chinese cities, Wuhan, last year. However, in addition to all the problems that it has brought, such as many deaths, worldwide panic and the destruction of the international economy, there is a bright side to all this. It can be attributed to a very rapid jump in the development of information technologies, which includes five different directions:

1. Virtualization of major events. Virtualization of major events is going to accelerate the adoption of remote working technologies. It may also force consideration on the balance sheet when it comes to costs saved on staff travel. For those working internationally, the investment needed to ensure staff in countries with less reliable connections are able to regularly participate in virtual meetings may be far less than the cost of regular flights.

2. Tackling disinformation. Also encouraging is the cooperation shown by social media companies when it comes to tackling disinformation. If it's possible to work with the authorities like this during a crisis then maybe, just maybe, more cooperation is possible when it comes to other initiatives to create better digital societies.

3. Data transparency. As well as the actions of big tech there are already examples of how government transparency with data can have a beneficial impact for society. In Singapore open government data has enabled detailed and informative mapping of the outbreak which may have helped contain transmission and is in sharp contrast with the situation in Iran.

4. Driving innovation. We could also see innovation amongst the growing GovTech ecosystem which looks to provide technological solutions to public policy problems and efficiency gains for public services. In Korea smartphone users are already informed by apps like «Corona 100m» when they are in an area where Covid-19 cases have been identified.

5. Artificial intelligence in science and healthcare. Finally there is limited information about the ways in which artificial intelligence can be used to provide accurate diagnosis and prognosis for Covid-19 patients. The unprecedented speed and scale of the scientific response in recent weeks will support future healthcare in the 21st century. In the years ahead, the world needs to strike new social contracts between governments, citizens and technology companies that earn the informed consent of citizens and maximize the public good that comes with modern digital capabilities. If a coronavirus pandemic provides the impetus to those conversations then the planet may have something to look back and be thankful for.

