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Perception of India's Foreign Policy with Special Focus on China and Russia, and its Impact on Daily Life: A Geopsychological Perspective

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Abstract

Due to increasing globalization and exposure to information via the internet, global events are having a greater impact on people's everyday lives. Events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war tend to further magnify such effects on ordinary people's lives. The purpose of this article was to understand the perception of youth about India's foreign policy, with special focus on China and Russia, as well as the impact of such events on the daily lives of ordinary citizens. The paper attempts to link Geopolitics with Psychology, which is now an emerging field known as Geopsychology, with an aim to highlight how global events have varied impacts on peoples'

mental states. It also explores the level of awareness about Geopolitical issues among youth. The findings indicated that youth tend to have a negative opinion about China attributed to COVID-19 and Indo-China border conflicts (**chi-square coefficient=13.99**). Participants had a mixed perception of Russia, with fewer of them being aware of Russia-related events compared to China. Another significant finding was that majority of the participants felt their mental health was impacted due to incidents like the war or pandemic lockdowns. Further, implications of the study have been discussed.

Keywords: Youth, Foreign Policy, Awareness, China, Russia, Daily Life

Introduction

Foreign Policy and Geopolitics are increasingly becoming a part of people's daily lives, and the implications of globalization are now more evident than they were a few decades ago. Something happening in one part of the world is quite likely to impact people living on a different continent. While this connectivity has brought with it many positive changes in the lives of people, it is important to examine it from a Psychological perspective. Such an analysis falls under the newly emergent field of Geopsychology. One major effect or repercussion of globalization which often goes unnoticed is the way it affects the mental health of people all over the world. With greater awareness of news from around the world, often with graphic images and videos that are circulated all over social media, people have started perceiving such events in more nuanced ways than before. Such perceptions can have varied impacts on the well-being of individuals consuming such content. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic, and border clashes, overlapping claims to territories and debt traps had a huge influence on the way we perceive China, not just in India, but all over the world. Therefore, in order to better examine the effects of events such as COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine war on people's lives, let us first look at how perception plays a role in shaping people's views.

Perception

Perception refers to the way in which people experience the world around them. It can be defined as the processes used to recognize, organize, and interpret the external world around us. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines perception as "the process or result of becoming aware of objects, relationships, and events by means of the senses, which includes such activities as recognizing, observing, and discriminating" through perception, we become capable of giving meaning to, and responding to our environment. Moskowitz and Gill (2013) ^[23] define person perception as "the study of the cognitive processes involved in categorizing people and their behaviour, forming inferences about their qualities and the causes for their action, arriving at attributions that explain behaviour, and making predictions about what people are like and likely to do". It includes the study of both voluntary and involuntary mental and cognitive processes (such as attention, cognitive reasoning) to understand impression formation in social situations. Such perception and impression formation helps us evaluate

and make quick judgements about people or events, which also determine how we view certain events and form opinions about broader issues.

Social Perception

Social Perception refers to people's perception of social situations or events. It can take place at both individual and group levels, meaning that an individual can have social perception of a social event, and a group of individuals can also perceive the same event at large. Heider (1958) has stated that people have a need to develop a coherent view of the world, and to have control over their external environments. He believed that this desire for consistency, stability, and the ability to predict outcomes of situations leads us to make attributions of causality for behaviours and events. Our 'basic need to attribute' can make the world a clear, definable, and predictable place, thereby reducing uncertainty. There can be two types of attributions of causality, depending on the 'Locus of Causality' assigned by the judge of an event or person. These are internal and external attributions. In case of the former, the cause is located in the behaviour or personality characteristics of the person, like their attitudes, mood, ability, or effort, whereas the latter assigns the cause to external events that are outside the control of the individual being judged. For example, the situation or circumstances, actions of others, luck, etc.

Applying these concepts to the real world, an example could be a citizen attributing the cause of the COVID-19 pandemic to either habits of the Chinese people eating exotic animals (internal attribution), or the Chinese Government carrying out dangerous experiments (external attribution). Such decisions and attitudes are also influenced by the personal characteristics of the person making such attributions, such as their personality, attitudes, level of awareness about world events, political ideologies, etc. Based on Vygotsky's (1929) [29] Socio-Cultural theory, it can also be stated that the nature of attributions made are also influenced by the social norms and culture of the society that the person lives in. For example, India's relationship with China has been strained for decades, and this factor would most likely have an impact on how Indians perceive and attribute causality to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Awareness of Foreign Policies

Foreign policy of a nation refers to the government's strategy of dealing with other countries and governments. The primary purpose of any foreign policy is to further the nation's interests and maintain security and sovereignty, while promoting cordial relations with other nations. For ensuring robust and effective national policies in the international sphere, it is imperative to have insight into the views of the citizens of the country regarding these issues. For this purpose, it is first important to know the level of awareness among citizens about such issues, and then to develop an understanding of their opinions. The role of younger generations is becoming more and more important in India's growth and advancement, and for policymaking to be effective, awareness of their opinions is crucial. The Observer Research Foundation (ORF) conducts an annual survey about public opinion of Foreign Policy in India, to fill the gap in understanding of how urban youth perceive India's responses to global events (Saran, 2022).

The role youth play in determining the growth trajectory of a nation is critical, especially for a country like India, where

about 67% of the population is in the working age group (15-64) years, as stated by the UN World Population Prospects 2022. Therefore, it is also necessary for policy makers to consider their opinions while determining responses to world issues and events. Being our upcoming labour force, who would decide the future course of development, makes youth a key stakeholder in such matters. Therefore, this study will aim to gain a better understanding of opinions of young people regarding Foreign Policy in India.

From a psychological perspective, an understanding of public opinion and attitudes about world affairs can have significant utility in promoting national interests in the global sphere, allowing the government and policy-makers to project true Indian opinions and perception accurately, which may further strengthen democracy. Further, insight into how people attribute actions of governments and determine causality of various international events concerning India can be leveraged to carry out impression management of India's interests and objectives, and align decision-making and actions taken to suit the people's opinion.

Geopsychological Perspective

The fast-emerging field and concept of Geopsychology in the context of International Relations (IR) is bringing about a paradigm shift by changing the prism through which geopolitical events are viewed. B.M. Jain (2019) [15] highlights how a Geopsychological perspective, by connecting the psyche with the social, cultural and geographical environment of the person/ group, provides a more comprehensive explanation of foreign policy behaviour. By adding a psychological interpretation to the already existing IR theoretical explanations, one can gain multiple valuable insights into any major global event or decision, for example, the Russia-Ukraine war. While a geopolitical analysis would throw light upon the historical aspects of the conflict right from the Cold War era to the contemporary implications of the war and Russia's conflict with NATO (which is using Ukraine as a proxy), a *geopsychological* analysis would also consider the angle of how people around the world (both leaders and common citizens) have reacted to the war. Geopsychology would explain why some nations (like USA) so vehemently condemn Russia's actions, while some others (eg – India, China) have taken more neutral positions to the conflict. While current geopolitical factors can explain such positions by emphasizing on national interests, a geopsychological perspective would also look at the historical and socio-cultural angles, for instance, India has not openly criticised Russia not just because of strong historical ties, but also because the mass psyche of the region takes a more nuanced approach to understanding the conflict in greater context than the Western media would like to bring to the fore. Therefore, it is evident that a geopsychological analysis of foreign policy and global events would be able to fill in the gaps in reasoning and judgement, and better explain why people, societies and governments react the way they do to any major event.

Review of Literature

Research in the area of public opinion and attitudes about Foreign Policy in the Indian context have been scattered over time. Studies from a psychological perspective are even

fewer in number. However, there are some researches that have focused on such issues, which will be discussed here to gain a better understanding of the nature of work done in this area.

Milliff *et al* (2019)^[22] conducted a study to gain insight into Indian public opinion on various foreign policy issues. The focus was to explore how Indians have viewed the country's foreign policy choices over the years, in the contemporary context where India is becoming more and more important in the international system. Their findings revealed that public opinion varies across foreign policy issues, as well as across regions within the country. It was also noted that income and education played a significant role in people's awareness and willingness to answer questions about world affairs. Milliff and Staniland (2021)^[21] also had similar results indicating that less educated and poorer respondents were found to be more likely to avoid expressing their opinions about foreign policy and world affairs. They also found that public opinion in India tends to follow the nature of political relations between the two countries. These studies also point out the implications of the above-mentioned findings, i. e., the proportion of Indians who consistently offer opinions on foreign policy is too small compared to the vast population of the country. This means that either such opinions are too insignificant to have an impact of policy-making decisions, or they may have a proportionately higher influence on such matters.

Coming to awareness of foreign policy issues among the public, Kertzer and Zeitzoff (2017)^[18] have summarized that the nature of public opinion on foreign policy can be of three major types. First, that the public is generally ill-informed about foreign policy (Almond, 1950; Lippmann, 1955)^[1, 20]. Second, that the public has a clear understanding of global issues (Mueller, 1971; Holsti, 1992; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Kertzer, 2013; Rathbun *et al.*, 2016)^[24, 12, 25, 19, 27]. Lastly, Zaller (1992)^[30], Berinsky (2009)^[7], Baum and Groeling (2009)^[6], and argue that foreign policy and security are considered central issues by the public, and that the general public and elites tend to have similar views and opinions on these themes. These approaches are discussed in further detail below.

The Almond-Lippmann consensus assumes that the general public is much too focused on daily life hassles, putting them out of sync with the nuances of governance and policy formation. This view concludes that public opinion lacks any coherent structure, and therefore, must not have an impact on foreign policy choices of nations (Iyer and Modi, 2020)^[13]. A second view, based primarily on the work of Holsti (1992)^[12] challenges the Almond-Lippman consensus. It is based on the premise that public opinions about foreign policy are not as incoherent as previously believed, and focused on the increasing evidence to challenge the previously established assumptions. This view moved to recognize that the layperson's opinion, in fact, is fairly aligned with a nation's foreign policy, which also acknowledged that people are not passive when it comes to awareness about international issues and global events. Finally, more recent trends in this area of research adopt that the public is not a passive receiver of foreign policy decisions by the government, and that foreign affairs and national security are important subjects of people's daily life. This is observed to be true especially in relation to conflict with other countries. This implies that the public is not only well aware of international happenings, but also has

dynamic and potentially guiding opinions about foreign affairs.

In the Indian context, Gupta (2021)^[9] has explored the relationship between Indian public relations and foreign policy formulation. She highlights that with increasing access to online media sources and awareness about issues of national importance among Indian citizens, they have considerable impact on the government's approach to managing foreign relations. This study also reveals how the Indian government follows a two-way approach in garnering public support for foreign policy choices, and at the same time, also taking cues from citizen opinions to formulate such policies.

According to Iyer (2020)^[13] Opinion of Indian public regarding China, in recent years, has been heavily influenced by mass media (news debates, social media), and issues such as recent border skirmishes with China, Indian government's ban on Chinese products and apps. Such opinions are also based on cultural and regional context of the people who hold these views. For example, people living in the North-Eastern states have sharper negative views about China than those living in the Northern states. Ash, Krastev and Leonard (2023)^[3] have shown how Indians generally tend to have a positive opinion about Russia, despite the ongoing war with Ukraine.

The existing literature reveals a paucity of work done in the area of the link between global events and psychological well-being of people, or the impact such events have on their mental health. This is one gap this study aims to fill, by looking into the psychological impact of wars and pandemics on people's everyday lives. While a number of studies have explored these themes in isolation, few have done it in the context of geopolitics, and the involvement of such issues in peoples' everyday routines. By focusing on these themes, this study aims to expand the scope of research in the domain of Geopsychology.

Rationale

Based on the above literature review, it is evident that even though a plethora of research has been carried out exploring the nature of Indian Foreign Policy, only a small percentage of them have delved into public opinion and awareness about these issues and how they impact the everyday life of the common citizen. This is what this study aims to investigate. The purpose and scope aim to develop an understanding of how youth perceive external affairs, particularly in the context of China and Russia, as these two countries have a major and direct impact on everyday life of citizens. The aim is to see how the young people look at the various issues that are of concern to the country's international objectives.

The topic of foreign policy was selected due to its relevance in present times. We live in a world that is increasingly becoming a global village, and what happens in one part of the world has a direct impact on people living in another part. For instance, events such as the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war have an impact on the everyday life of the Indian common man. Therefore, it was considered important to see how the youth perceive these issues, as they are the future of the country.

Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand the perception of

youth about India’s foreign policy, with special focus on China and Russia, as well as the impact of such events on the daily lives of ordinary citizens.

Objectives

This study was carried out with the following objectives:

- To explore the level of awareness of youth about foreign policy issues.
- To explore the perception of India’s relationship with China and Russia, and its impact on daily life.

Hypothesis

- Perception of youth about China and Russia will be negative.
- Youth will have awareness about foreign policy issues and their impact on daily life.

Research Design

Qualitative research design was used for this study, which involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences of participants.

Content Analysis

Content analysis was the research tool used, which involves quantifying qualitative data (i.e., text), in order to analyse and identify themes, meanings, and relationships formed within the data. One important feature of this method is that it allows for both, qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data, which was considered important for this study. The quantified data was analysed using the Chi-Square test, which is a statistical technique that allows the comparison of observed and expected frequency of responses. It helps identify relationships within data, by determining whether the difference between observed and expected data is due to chance, or if there is an actual relationship between the variables being studied.

Variables

1. **Awareness** about **foreign policy** issues among students of Political science and other subjects.
2. **Perception** regarding China and Russia.
3. **Identification of impact** of relationship with China and Russia on **daily life**.

Sample

Sampling technique used for this study was Purposive Sampling, which is a form of non-probability sampling, in which units are selected because they have characteristics that are relevant to the research question. This type of sampling was chosen due to the purpose of the study, which was to explore opinions and awareness levels of Indian youth.

Inclusion Criteria

- People in the age group of 21 to 25.
- People living in urban areas.
- People from a non-political science background (as the purpose was to explore the general level of awareness).
- People who have completed graduation.

Exclusion Criteria

- People below age 21, and above 25.

- People who have studied Political Science at higher education level.
- People who are pursuing Under Graduation.

Tools

The tool used for measurement of variables was interview. It explores the level of awareness of students about foreign policy matters, their perceptions about China and Russia, and impact of India’s relationship with these two nations on their day-to-day life. It consists of 5 questions, exploring the key variables of the study.

The interview questions were formed based on an in-depth review of literature. The questions were formulated keeping certain important details in mind. To ensure that items were effective to serve the purpose of the study, the procedure of item construction followed was based on the BRUSO method (Peterson, 2000) [26]. The acronym stands for: “brief,” “relevant,” “unambiguous,” “specific,” and “objective.” It was ensured that the language used in the questions was simple and easy to comprehend (limiting the use of jargon), and that the items were clear and concise. This was done to prevent differing interpretations of items by different people. It was also ensured that there were no leading questions, and that each item assesses only a single issue. The questions were kept mutually exhaustive, to prevent overlapping of responses.

Reliability and Validity

The interview was developed based on existing research done in this area, and questioned formed were kept close to the pre-determined objectives of the study. Construct validity of the interview schedule was estimated based on a pre-existing scale measuring similar attributes. This is the ORF Foreign Policy Survey (2022) [10], covering 5000 respondents from 19 Indian cities. The items were constructed based on key factors identified in the ORF survey, such as relevance of items to current research, accuracy, unambiguity, clarity, and precise construction of items, to ensure validity. In addition, the items were reviewed by a research expert before they were finalised.

Statistical Analysis

Content Analysis was used, and therefore, chi-square technique was used for statistical analysis, along with qualitative analysis of the interview responses obtained from the participants.

Results

Table 1: Showing participants’ opinion about Russia

Responses	Response Categories				Total
	Good	Bad	Neutral	Not Aware/ No Opinion	
Frequencies					28
Total	2	11	5	10	28

Table 2: Showing responses of opinion on China

Participants	Response Categories				Total
	Good	Bad	Neutral	Not Aware/ No Opinion	
Frequencies					28
Total	2	15	4	7	28

Table 3: Showing opinions about impact of global events on people’s lives

Participants	Response Categories				Total
	China Related	Russia Related	Mental Health	Not Aware/ No Impact	
Frequencies					50
Total	16	13	12	9	50

Table 4: Showing impact on participants’ daily lives

Participants	Response Categories				Total
	China Related	Russia Related	Mental Health	No Impact/Not Aware	
Frequencies					28
Total	11	7	5	5	28

Table 5: Showing opinion of youth on India’s Foreign Policy

Participants	Response Categories				Total
	Good	Bad	Neutral	Not Aware/ No Opinion	
Frequencies					28
Total	12	2	6	8	28

Table 6: Showing chi-square analysis of participants’ opinion about Russia

Categories	Fo	Fe	Fo - Fe	(Fo-Fe) ²	(Fo-Fe) ² /Fe
Good	2	7	-5	25	3.57
Bad	11	7	4	16	2.28
Neutral	5	7	-2	4	0.57
Not Aware/No Opinion	10	7	3	9	1.28
Total	28	28		54	7.7

$$df = (r-1) \times (c-1)$$

$$df = (4-1) \times (2-1) = 3$$

Critical Value of $\chi^2 = 7.815$ $\alpha = 0.05$
 Critical Value of $\chi^2 = 11.345$ $\alpha = 0.01$

Table 7: $df = (r-1) \times (c-1)$
 $df = (4-1) \times (2-1) = 3$

Critical Value of $\chi^2 = 7.815$ $\alpha = 0.05$
 Critical Value of $\chi^2 = 11.345$ $\alpha = 0.01$

Table 8: Showing chi-square analysis of opinion of youth on India’s Foreign Policy

Categories	Fo	Fe	Fo - Fe	(Fo-Fe) ²	(Fo-Fe) ² /Fe
Good	12	7	5	25	3.57
Bad	2	7	-5	25	3.57
Neutral	6	7	-1	1	0.14
Not Aware/No Impact	8	7	1	1	0.14
Total	28	28		52	7.42

$$df = (r-1) \times (c-1)$$

$$df = (4-1) \times (2-1) = 3$$

Critical Value of $\chi^2 = 7.815$ $\alpha = 0.05$
 Critical Value of $\chi^2 = 11.345$ $\alpha = 0.01$

Discussion and Interpretation

The aim of this study was to understand the perception of youth about India’s foreign policy, with special focus on China and Russia, as well as the impact of such events on the daily lives of ordinary citizens. For this purpose, an interview was conducted with 28 participants, to gauge the nature of their perception and opinion of world events, and their relationship with India, as well as the participants’ lives. The interview schedule was formed based on adequate

review of existing literature in this area. The data so obtained was analysed using content analysis. The method used was a mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis, to gain a deeper insight into people’s views and experiences. The hypotheses formed to study the objectives of the study were that the participants would have a negative perception about China and Russia, and that people would be able to identify the impact of global events on their daily lives. The findings suggest that people have a significantly negative perception of China, whereas opinions about Russia and India’s overall foreign policy were not very pronounced. A large number of participants also revealed their lack of awareness and adequate knowledge about these issues for them to be able to form any opinion on such matters. Other important themes that emerged from the interviews were that global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war have had a significant impact on the participants’ mental health. All these findings are discussed below in detail:

Opinions about Russia

Most of the participants either had a negative perception of Russia, or lacked awareness and knowledge to have an opinion. The **chi-square coefficient = 7.7** indicates that the findings are not significant, as the critical value lies at 7.815 (at $\alpha = 0.05$), but most participants shared that they either had a negative opinion or no opinion about Russia. It was noted that the war with Ukraine has largely shaped people’s opinions, which were formed on the basis of social media-based information. Those who do not follow current events, were less likely to be aware of war related news, and hence, lacked any substantive opinion. It was also noted that several participants’ knowledge and opinion about Russia was based on what they had learnt in School as part of their Political Science course, limited to the Cold War era, without any link to current events.

“I see it as a country I know very little about, with a culture I have no exposure to. Studying about Cold War in school, as well as the Putin memes you see on the internet are the only factors that have led my understanding of Russia.”

The above example represents how factors such as the internet, social media, and school level education have shaped people’s opinions about Russia, which indicates how a limited understanding/information base has led to a weak / no opinion. This highlights the importance of **exposure to, and sources of information** as important factors in attitude formation, which are bases of the cognitive component of any attitude (Bakanauskas *et al*, 2020)^[4].

Opinions about China

Table 7 reveals that our findings with respect to participants’ opinions about China are significant (at both, $\alpha = 0.05$, and $\alpha = 0.01$), with a **chi-square value = 13.99**. This shows that the majority of participants had a negative opinion of China, with the second highest number stating that they either did not have enough knowledge or had a neutral opinion. This is reflected in the following responses,

“China is bad, dangerous, selfish, and has no regard for anyone’s welfare. They only want more and more power.”

"I genuinely don't know much about what's going on with China so can't say much about them."

It was observed that participants were more aware about events related to China than Russia, and the reasons cited for this greater awareness were more exposure to information on social media, news, and efforts by the Indian government to control Chinese influence in our markets, through Chinese app bans and promotion of "Make in India" as an alternative to "Made in China" products.

People also seemed to be more aware and opinionated about China because of the following reasons:

- India's frequent border conflicts with China.
- COVID-19 had a huge impact on people's lives all over the country and the world.
- Lower quality of China-manufactured products.
- Overall negative views about China due to multiple issues.

This indicates that people's attitude towards China has all three ABC components, i.e., cognitive (due to border disputes), affective (due to COVID-19 pandemic), and behavioural (reflected in their motivation to avoid buying "Made in China" products).

Opinion about India's Foreign Policy

According to Table 8, which shows youth's opinion about India's overall foreign policy, the **chi-square coefficient is 7.42**, which is not significant, but is still close to the critical value of 7.815, at $\alpha = 0.05$. This indicates that participants' opinions about India's foreign policy are either good, or neutral, with a significant portion of them stating they have no opinion. Participants shared that their opinions were based on social media inputs such as reels and online documentaries, and traditional information sources such as newspapers.

Those who expressed a positive view of India's foreign policy were also more likely to have greater overall knowledge and awareness about global issues, and had a negative opinion of China. However, their opinions about Russia were more neutral. On the other hand, participants who stated they were neutral towards our policy, showed lower interest in other issues as well. Those who had a negative opinion shared that their opinion was influenced by India's internal issues, and not related to external events.

"I think overall, India's foreign policy is to be appreciated for its increasingly global approach."

"Can't say anything specific about the foreign policy because I'm not too aware about the government's exact policy."

According to Katz (1966)^[17], such public opinion seems to have been formed as a result of the salience and increased discussion around geopolitical issues these days. This is also facilitated by greater exposure to information through the internet, and people seem to be forming more personal associations with global events such as the pandemic or the war in Ukraine. Here, it can also be inferred that a greater level of awareness about geopolitics led people to approve the Indian Government's approach to managing different crises / issues, in a way that was most favourable to Indian interests. These finding align with Holtzi's (1992)^[12] work, who stated that contrary to the Almond-Lippman consensus, public opinion about a nation's foreign policy is not entirely

incoherent. This view sees people as being more aware and actively engaging with public life, which was also observed in the participants of this study, who formed their opinions based on information coming from traditional as well as social media sources. Even those who did not have an opinion, had knowledge about major global events.

Qualitative Analysis: Impact of Global Events on People's Daily Lives

Along with quantitative analysis of the content (chi square), qualitative analysis was also done. Content Analysis refers to a tool to identify the occurrence of concepts in an exposition. It is nothing but quantification of text or its meaning. An exposition can be an article, book, lecture, interview, conversation, or any other reading material. In this study, after applying chi-square, the participants' responses were also analysed in detail in a qualitative manner. Following are the findings:

Perception of China and Russia

Table 3 indicates the impact of global events on people's lives, as perceived by the participants. Almost all participants mentioned events linked to China having a direct impact on everyday life, for example, pandemic induced lockdowns, ban on Chinese apps, aversion to "Made in China products," and India's border conflicts with China.

"Yes, obviously any huge event like corona or the war on Ukraine is a huge hit to humanity. The suffering and pain just increased due to such events."

With respect to Russia, a number of participants mentioned their war with Ukraine, and the perceived impact was noted to be a negative effect on people's mental health, especially due to war related news about people's suffering. Many participants shared that reading war related news induced anxiety and stress, and had an overall negative impact on their mental health.

"Yes. I get a headache reading the newspaper. Plus, I'm not super excited about where humanity is headed as a whole. When I read war related news, I feel sad, very sad. It's not good for my mental health."

As compared to other questions, relatively fewer participants stated that such events had no impact on their lives, or that they were not aware about these events to realise the impact they could have. This indicates that most participants were able to easily relate to, and identify how global happenings affect them. This is an example of globalization, which has connected the whole world together, having both good and bad influences on people's lives. It can be inferred here that young people take world events seriously, and have a deep sense of humanity, which is the reason for declining psychological well-being upon encountering war or global health crisis related news across the planet.

The Gaza War: Another Cause for Concern

Based on Table 4, it can be inferred that most of the participants felt global events related to China had a direct bearing on their personal lives. With respect to Russia,

almost all participants shared that the war had a serious impact on their mental health.

Although this study was completed before the war between Israel and Hamas began in October 2023, the same parameters can be applied to this new crisis. This is another major geopolitical event that has a profound impact on lives and health (both, physical and psychological) of people not just in the conflict zone, but people all over the world. The damages and death tolls on both warring sides are alarming, and one can see how these may have an acute effect on mental health. As graphic images and videos are circulated on social media, there seems to be no end to the rising death tolls and destruction to life and property in the West Asian region. While governments are busy formulating their political and policy responses to maximise on national interests, the world seems to be hoping for a ceasefire, which seems nowhere in sight for now.

The menace of fake news / pictures / videos is another problem which seems to be getting aggravated post the wars and conflicts taking place these days. Deepfakes, using artificial intelligence technology, are being extensively circulated and used as propaganda to push for vested interest, with an aim to cause greater political instability in conflict torn regions. Jaiman (2020) ^[14] has discussed how deepfakes can have negatives impacts for individuals and societies at large, and can easily undermine and destabilize democracies the world over. While on one hand, a fake photo / video of a child killed or severely injured in war can cause significant mental trauma to people, on the other hand, dishonest people can easily dismiss inconvenient truths as deepfakes and use this narrative to their advantage.

Mental Health

The findings of this study indicate that awareness about events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war have a significant impact on common people's daily lives. A study by Barchielli *et al* (2022) ^[5] also explored the consequences of events such as COVID-19, wars, and climate change, on psychological well-being. The authors concluded that various stresses of the 21st century have an evident relationship with personal well-being (with a possible harmful impact on mental health of young adults). And therefore, such issues must be considered as potential global mental health concerns. Similar results have been obtained in this study where a majority of participants shared how stressors such as the war and pandemic have had a negative impact on their mental well-being.

The findings draw attention to a larger issue, that is, the possible negative consequences of prolonged stress, and other serious mental illnesses. Long periods of diminished psychological well-being of a large number of people can have adverse effects on national, regional and global economies. In addition to large-scale destruction or the halting of developmental activities due to such global disruptions, the mental states of people affected by these events can lead to reduced economic productivity, and in extreme cases, an increased expenditure demand on healthcare infrastructure at the national level. Therefore, it is important for governments to keep the well-being aspect in mind while formulating policy responses to various international issues.

Level of Awareness

One of the objectives of this study was to explore the level

of awareness of Indian youth about foreign policy issues, particularly those related to China and Russia. It was noted that while most participants had basic awareness about China-related issues and challenges, they were less aware about events related to Russia, or India's overall foreign policy. Many participants stated that they do not know enough and therefore, chose not to comment on the relevant questions. While there is a growing awareness and interest in such matters, it was noted that people still feel they may not have an adequate amount of knowledge related to these fields. However, on further probing, most participants were able to share an informed opinion. This indicates that although people may have knowledge, due to their unconventional sources (such as social media reels and short videos, as opposed to traditional newspapers and debates), they lack the ability to express such opinions with confidence.

Such perceived lack of knowledge can lead to the development of the misconception that people are not aware about international events that concern them, or are too occupied with more immediate issues to notice an impact of large-scale events on their own lives. This, however, is misleading, because one of the main outcomes of globalization and the digital age is hyper connectivity and the phenomenon of information overload. It means, that major incidents such as wars and pandemics are so widely discussed and shared on digital platforms via the internet, it is difficult for people to stay completely cut-off from such information, even if they personally do not find such current issues to be of interest to them. In reality, most young people are aware of what's going on in the world, and do have a coherent opinion, regardless of whether they feel competent enough to share those opinions or not.

Implications

- The present study throws light on a topic that has not been explored very extensively. While a number of existing studies have researched public opinion around foreign policies of nations and global events like COVID-19, very few examine their impact on psychological well-being, and people's daily lives.
- Even fewer such researches have been carried out in the Indian context. Therefore, this study highlights an important gap in existing research, which can be filled by further research in this area.
- The findings also reveal an interesting connection between world events and mental health of respondents, which is becoming evident in an increasingly digitized and globalized world.

Future Suggestions

- This study can be used as a base to further expand knowledge in the area of geopsychology, and linking International Relations to Psychology.
- Studies can be carried out with a larger sample size.
- More variables can be explored, such as nature of impact of opinions on mental health.
- Expanding the study to a global level can help provide a more comprehensive picture of the nature of impact of global issues on the global population.
- The study was concluded before the Gaza war began in October 2023, which is another phenomenon that can be explored from a Geopsychological angle.

- Youth's opinion about more varied global issues can be explored, such as climate change, terrorism, and the like.

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