

## Optimism and Global Uncertain Times

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**Received:** May 16, 2019; **Published:** June 25, 2019

### Abstract

The relevance of optimism in an era of humongous global uncertainties and challenges has never been felt so paramount earlier as it is today. Uncertainties of any kind - political, economic, business, socio-cultural, etc. - bring in both opportunities and challenges. And it is here that optimism plays a pivotal role in shaping mental attributes of individuals - be they leaders or common folks - to effectively deal with arising situations. This paper discusses the theoretical foundation of the concept of optimism. Thereafter, it analyses empirical cases to corroborate the theoretical implications in various uncertain global situations that profoundly impact the world both in regional and extra-regional architectures. The central argument of the strategic significance of optimism to address global uncertainties is well delineated in the theoretical and empirical analyses in order to draw the conclusion that reiterates the imperativeness of optimism in addressing pressing challenges worldwide.

**Keywords:** *Optimism; Global Uncertain Times*

### Introduction

In contemporary era of ever-changing dynamic global environment uncertainty abounds us in every aspect of our lives be it climate change, financial recession, health crisis and epidemics, natural disasters, diplomatic uncertainties and balance of power dynamics, business and economic fragile conditions, psychological attributes of people especially the young generation, etc. As global community faces new challenges in personal and professional lives on a daily basis, one of the major crisis areas that have taken the shape of epidemic worldwide is related to mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, psychiatric and complex psycho-dimensional issues. The situation has become so alarming over the years that considering the fact that the World Health Organization (WHO) conducted a one-year global campaign on fighting and curing depression starting April, 2017 [1]. The campaign was aimed at enabling people globally both in seeking and getting help in removing depression. According to WHO, "depression is a common illness worldwide, with more than 300 million people affected. Depression is different from usual mood fluctuations and short-lived emotional responses to challenges in everyday life. Especially when long-lasting and with moderate or severe intensity, depression may become a serious health condition" [2]. Having said that, the concept and relevance of optimism is growing exponentially in every walk of life across global community to effectively combat the uncertainties and challenges that confront us.

### Literature Review

The word optimism is derived from the Latin word, *optimus* which means "best". Martin Seligman interprets the concept of optimism as being proactive in reacting to the problems with positive attitude and confidence and effectively working towards the same [3]. Thus,

optimism is the innate belief system that drives an individual towards success. An optimist would always look for the best and is positive that good things will certainly happen. Optimism is also a major dimension of emotional intelligence which if developed and inculcated, may lead to enhanced quality of life of an individual. In fact, the degree of correlation between optimism and positive emotions is very high and this inter-linkage has a cascading positive effect on general wellbeing of an individual. Optimism, as an essential mental attribute, attempts to stress upon positive emotions, positive relationships, positive traits, and positive human functioning to overcome challenges and uncertainties [4].

Another significant dimension of optimism is its causal impact on enhancing happiness in individuals in all spheres of life. Empirical evidence suggests that happy people most of the time exuberate positive emotions i.e. optimism in other words, and that in turn generally leads to successful outcome. Positive valence of moods and emotions not only increases happiness but also make people think, feel, and act in such a manner that enables resource building and an acute sense of involvement with attainable goals [5]. In fact, success of happy people depends on experiencing frequent positive moods which in turn has a greater likelihood of working pro-actively and with endurance even in challenging situations. The positive psychological effects of optimism in happy people transcend the adversities and help in accomplishing new goals successfully.

Optimistic people believe that negative events/setbacks are in fact temporary, limited in scope and can be dealt with efficiently. Situations do not necessarily have to be seen as pervading every aspect of the individual's life. The health benefits of optimism are immense and this attitude goes a long way in developing a harmonious personality. In all stages of life optimists firmly believe that problems in the daily life can be dealt with more positively and are more resilient in facing stressful situations [6].

The concept of optimism, especially in challenging situations amidst uncertainties, provides people from all walks of life with a robust framework to ascertain the degree of "positive emotions, levels of engagement, developing a fulfilling relationship network, finding meaningfulness, and a sense of accomplishment in life" All these powerful positive attributes are essential building blocks of what we call psychological capital. It is conceptualized as a positive core construct to which various individual resources such as efficacy, hope, optimism, resiliency and endurance are integrated synergistically [7].

### Optimism - combating uncertainties

From the perspective of international relations - be it diplomacy, business and economy, trade issues, negotiations of international treaties, etc. optimism has a significant role to play in strategic decision process especially in the context of multilateral framework to addresses the complex challenges, especially in the context of climate change, energy security, cyber-security, terrorism, poverty alleviation, disproportionate distribution of income and wealth across global dimensions. If we take a look at the Cold War period when the NATO countries under the leadership of United States and the Eastern European Bloc under the leadership of erstwhile Soviet Union were at the peak of confrontation, leaders of USA and USSR took initiatives to diffuse the tension thereby providing relief to the global community. That relief was perceived as classic example of political optimism and something that was the highest need of the hour to save the world from imminent catastrophe. The way the Intermediate Range Nuclear Missile Treaty was negotiated by then US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev is well known and still considered as landmark diplomatic success. What was so astounding in the peak of the Cold War era was that then U.S. President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev got engaged in serious dialogue through three strategic summit meetings at Washington D.C., Moscow, and Reykjavik (Iceland) to diffuse diplomatic and economic tension and signing landmark defense treaty - Intermediate Range Nuclear Force Treaty - between the two superpowers. In another instance in order to diffuse tension at the peak of Cold War in the late 1980s when US President Ronald Reagan went to West Germany and made a clarion call to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall in order to restore long lasting peace and stability in international politics. That automatically enhanced politico-economic and socio-cultural well being of billions of people across the world. This was another milestone that later on actually happened and we see Germany is now united and a very prosperous nation, thereby making German people and entire European Union the most powerful trade

bloc and enhancing economic well being. However, the driving force for such transformative and path-breaking diplomatic successes was a deep sense of optimism, positive mental disposition and trust that exuberated in the top leadership between the two superpowers. There are ample of such instances in international relations, regional and extra-regional, that can be referred to see how well being has an intricate interface in the arena of international relations [6].

In contemporary international politics and global uncertainty cultural diplomacy in the EU demonstrates the importance of building cultural bridges for the benefits of EU economy, and well-being of EU citizens, while illustrating the cost-effective advantages of such programs compared to other policy alternatives [8]. Very recent dynamic changes in the ambit of international relations also displays that optimism has again proved to be the driving force in shaping the complex psycho-dimensional behavior of leaders including resilience, political engagement coupled with meaningful purpose in order to correctly interpret the empirical cases of political and business decision process. Such argument gets traction if we traverse through the terrain of world political history even as recent as U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un summit meeting in June 2018 in Singapore and in Hanoi (Vietnam) in February 2019. Other contemporary complex global issues have also been effectively dealt with by political and business leaders by constantly harnessing the spirit of optimism. For instance, (i) the historic visit of then U.S. President Barack Obama to Myanmar in November 2012, the first ever by a sitting U.S. President; (ii) the restoration of diplomatic and trade relations between the United States and Cuba, after 54 years of contentious politics, by the visit of President Obama to Cuba in 2016; (iii) expansion of European Union by including some of the eastern European countries; (iv) de-escalation of diplomatic tension between India and China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC); (v) formation of a powerful political-economic community in the form of BRICS comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa; (vi) Brexit in which Britain plans to exit the European Union driven by an optimistic future developmental strategy.

As the world is going through incredible changes in the realm of technology, we are becoming more engrossed to mechanical lifestyle. Internet and social media have been eating away a big slice of our daily routine. We remain glued to computers, laptops, mobile phones and other technology driven gadgets for a significant part of our everyday lives. We must admit that such transformational change in peoples' routine lifestyle require adequate emotional stability to handle the pressure arising out of technological boom. With technology come ancillary problems of remaining solitary and less socialized. Peoples' finer qualities and personality traits often get blurred. Many a time the inner peace of mind becomes a casualty after a tough day mostly driven by technological hustle and bustle. Under these circumstances a sense of optimism and positive mindset can act as a heavenly bliss in getting out of the doldrums of everyday monotonous and often sedentary or even secluded life pattern. Positive thought process spurs the much needed vivacity in life to move forward in a constructive manner and affect change. Success comes only if a person is able to show enough perseverance and an inner zeal with the right values and making the right effort. In between failures might and will surely come. But failures should give additional boost of mind to redouble the effort and make necessary adjustments to accomplish the predetermined objectives. And it is here that optimism provides individuals with the necessary prudence and meaningfulness of purpose for achieving the desired results successfully. This kind of a "never give up" attitude is particularly important for the youth all around the world. Young mind is vulnerable to all kinds of digressions and often submerge into depression coupled with acute hopelessness in extreme situations. Under these conditions they might lose direction of life and positivity. The relentlessness of efforts in a serious manner is no easy task. But the secret of success lies in the sincerity of effort that goes into fulfilling the task and accomplishing the goals. We all have to recognize that success is a continuous and often meandering journey to imbibe the right values and get immersed in the process wholeheartedly. When we take a look at the successful individuals and their journey to success, in all cases without exceptions we find that relentless perseverance, engagement, and confidence with a positive bent of mind to move forward with tremendous energy, no matter whatever might the magnitude of obstacles they might have faced. And in all cases, they were ultimately able to crush the monumental challenges primarily because of the resilience that they possessed right from the outset. In this context even small incidents matter as building blocks for successful outcome. When success comes, it brings tremendous amount of happiness in mind automatically. A sense of self-realization also comes in and refreshes the body, mind and spirit in such a manner that they get attuned to work in tandem with each other. It is like a huge rocket that is propelled successfully from the base, thereafter moving in a lightning speed and various boosters further re-enforcing the energy to reach its predetermined orbit. Similar is the power of optimism that comes from the mind and transforms its capability to work wonders.

In an interconnected world we all are mutually dependent on each other in a significant manner. We find ourselves struggling to accommodate in the midst of a very dynamic socio-politico-economic dimensions in an increasingly globalized environment. Every day

some new trends are happening in some form or other. Often on a regular basis we confront with a continuum of convergences and divergences in human engagement in our personal and professional lives. At the same time there are pressing challenges such as global warming, environmental safeguards, human rights, democratization, child welfare, women empowerment, hunger, poverty, malnutrition, health hazards, and many more, that need to be handled effectively by the international community. There seems to be an endless search of finding long term solutions at both micro and macro levels. Seeking peace and happiness on the face of the planet is the most critical concern for one and all. In this endeavor collective effort, where everybody has a role to play in some form or the other, matters.

In fact, the genesis of the New World Order can be fundamentally linked to the basic assumptions of optimism. The rise of institutionalism and multilateral set up in international relations is hugely attributed to this sense of optimism that collective effort will lead to dispute settlement thereby bringing irrevocable change towards betterment of the current state of situations [9]. The success of neoliberal institutionalism and constructivism [10] in the quest of searching a long lasting solution to critical global problems, that we all face on a daily basis, can be linked to the fundamental tenets of psychological maturity to make meaningful decisions. And here lies the enormous implications of optimism as a sophisticated construct that drives emotional intelligence and mental stability in the decision process. In this endeavor there is always a possibility of finding convergences of interests among diverse entities leading to the decipherment of a long lasting solution. Major successful interventions in the global arena have been primarily guided by a deep sense of optimism and positive thought process. Even the collapse of the Cold War can be linked to such proposition especially when the great wall dividing East and West Germany was torn down apart resulting in jubilation and happiness all over Europe. Happiness in turn is a powerful force that can drive human mental attributes in finding out peace. The construct of optimism is all encompassing in this synergy and indeed provides a strong base towards getting into successful outcome. The integral component of optimism is to remain committed with conviction that is directed towards unleashing the latent energy that is already within us.

### Optimism and public policy in uncertain times

Major public policy initiatives are also formulated and implemented from time to time to combat uncertainties in diplomatic and economic aspects. For instance, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India; Ayushman Bharat Health Insurance Policy in India; and Affordable Health-Care Act in USA are some of the major economic and health policy interventions that have been undertaken with a lot of optimism and hope that they will make peoples' lives better. With regard to domestic tax policy, a classic practical implication of this study can be found in the formulation and implementation process of Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India since July 2017. GST is regarded to be the most prolific structural economic intervention in India since the country's independence. GST has transformed the entire indirect tax regime in India in a manner that is unprecedented and extremely productive. The politico-economic run up to the debate and subsequent formulation of GST in a classic multi-party parliamentary democratic system is perhaps the most vivid example the world has ever witnessed, while making efforts in finding convergences across partisan and ideological divide in political and business establishments [11]. In similar sense the Ayushman Bharat Health Insurance is the biggest of any health schemes the world has ever seen. The policy is directed towards providing healthcare benefit up to Indian Rupees 5,00,000 per annum to the poorest of 10 crore population in India [12]. Similarly, the Affordable Health-Care Act in the United States was intended to provide health security to all those who were not either covered or unable to afford very expensive private healthcare facilities [13]. All these policies, notwithstanding massive in their nature and extent, are formulated by finding convergences amidst divergences in partisan and ideological debate. However, all of them are attributed by a deep underlying current of optimism and positive mental disposition of leaders and policymakers to address challenges arising out of uncertainties [14].

### Conclusion

The contemporary world community is constantly metamorphosed with new challenges, some of them are foreseen and some are totally unforeseen. However, in order to mitigate outstanding global problems, a beaming spirit of optimism and positive emotions among leaders and common people are absolutely imperative to overcome such challenges. In an era of global interdependences in which all

communities and geographies are interconnected, the spirit of optimism and mutual confidence building measures are the recipes of addressing the challenges in a united manner. The strong multilateral institutional set up can act as catalytic force in further accelerating the momentum of optimism to combat and successfully overcoming uncertainties.

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**Volume 8 Issue 7 July 2019**

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