Bridging Strategies for Non-contact Cognitive Dissonance Among College Students During University Lockdown in China: An Analytical Framework Based on the Quality Gap Model

WU Mei
Open University of China, Chengdu, China
DONG Yuting
Yunnan University, Kunming, China

Research has found that the “non-contact” cognitive dissonance is an increasingly common phenomenon among college students during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown of a university in China. For this, a qualitative approach based on psychological literature, and the “Quality Gap Model” in marketing are adopted, and a “non-contact” cognitive dissonance model of college students has been constructed. According to the model, cognitive dissonance is caused by the gap between college students’ individual behavior and the expectation for the “non-contact” policy, the gap between college students’ expectation with the university and the reality, and the gap between the expectation for the policy provider and the perceived reality. The research further explains the psychological mechanism of this behavior. It is proposed that the impact bias “catalyzes” the “escalation” of the “non-contact” cognitive dissonance behavior among college students. To solve this problem, the gap should be filled considering the following three aspects: counter attitudinal advocacy, establishment of cognitive overlap, and cognitive transformation. The unique contribution of the present study is presentation of a new perspective on “non-contact” cognitive dissonance based on public behavior management and to provide a case of controlling and prevention from the pandemic COVID-19 in China.

Keywords: Quality Gap Model, public crisis, online public opinion, policy pressure, impact bias, post-decision disorder

Problems Being Proposed

In early 2022, 36 students in a university of Jiangsu Province, China, were punished for climbing over the wall of a university, during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. In the middle of the same year, a banner on the campus of a university in Sichuan read: “XX University is a university for all teachers and students, not all bureaucrats”. The reason was that the officials of the university adopted different standards for students and teachers with respect to epidemic prevention and control measures. As a result, the students of one college in the
XX university posted various comments on social media platforms highlighting the “double standards of the management behind university closure during the COVID-19 pandemic”, which resulted in a public crisis as the students were allowed to go out of the university, and generated public opinion online, similarly as in the case of a university of Xi’an in China. It can be seen that, based on the special needs during the special period (the global epidemic of COVID-19), the “non-contact” at the beginning of COVID-19 referred to the safety social distance of one meter, and wearing of masks by everyone in China, and students could go out of the universities freely before implementation of lockdown in universities. But every student was not allowed to go out of universities because of lockdown for all students in universities after that. So “non-contact” from college students’ cognition is inconsistent with previous consistent self-cognition. Similar events were discussed in the case of the Tianmen Christians by Aronson: Tianmen Christians used a telescope not to see the actual spacecraft non-existed, so they thought there was something wrong with the telescope being remorselessly “returned”—if they did not think so, their own unbearable cognitive dissonance would be happened (Aronson, 2018, p. 139). Similarly, reflecting on the cases in the three universities of China, if the college students did not climb over the wall (students in a university of Jiangsu Province, China), did not pull banners (students in a university of Sichuan Province, China), did not sit on the railings “waving flags and shouting” (students in a university of Shanxi Province, China), intolerable cognitive dissonance due to non-contact would have occurred. This would have resulted in self-deception.

Therefore, the following research questions were formulated:

- How does “non-contact” cognitive dissonance arise among college students in China?
- What is the psychological mechanism behind the dissonant behavior?
- How should cognitive bias behavior be overcome?

**Literature Review**

**Re-discussing “Non-contact”**

The concept of “non-contact” is neither an exotic concept nor a “new thing”—the concept of “non-contact” has been discussed to a small extent in the field of humanistic social science, but is widely used in research pertaining to science and engineering. In addition, the concept of “non-contact” in the field of medical research is relatively common. Considering that the criteria for classifying major disciplines are very cumbersome, existing research results can be divided into humanistic social science and non-humanistic social science. In the humanistic social science, people define “non-contact” research as: Instead of directly touching the object of relationship, high-tech means such as network and telecommunication services are used for connecting with the object, such as non-contact crime (Zhao, 2019), non-contact fraud (Zhang, Liu, & Zhou, 2018, pp. 1218-1226), non-contact comprehensive law enforcement (Hu, 2021), non-contact mobile payment (Guo, 2006), etc. In the non-humanistic social science, some studies believe that the equipment measuring electronic pressure and the internal ballistic radar should be applied to measure the chamber pressure of firearms (C. Y. Jing, Z. Jing, & Du, 2022, pp. 141-146). Other studies have suggested that the data pertaining to the temperature of the measured object can be obtained with the help of infrared thermometer (Wang, 2022, pp. 78-80). Regardless of the field of humanistic social science or non-humanistic social science, the concept of “non-contact” refers to the relationship with the tested object in an indirect way through an intermediate medium. The concept of cognitive dissonance
resulting due to non-contact of college students aligns with the concept of “non-contact” mentioned in previous literature. The difference is that college students were “contactless” during COVID-19 epidemic and the special event mentioned in the second paragraph refers to the reality of the global epidemic. The concept of cognitive dissonance resulting due to non-contact of college students aligns with the concept of “non-contact” mentioned in previous literature. For example, in a document entitled “Research on the Cultivation of Campus ‘Non-contact’ Culture in the Stage of Normal Epidemic Prevention”, the author believes: During the special period, “non-contact” has gradually evolved into a daily learning and life style for college students after they return to school. Furthermore, it is pointed out that the “non-contact” culture on campus should be cultivated keeping two aspects in mind: the ideological guidance and the environmental shaping (Chi, 2020, pp. 49-53). Therefore, there are obvious differences between the “non-contact” social situations among college students during special period and other “non-contact” situations.

Considering the “non-contact” scenario during COVID-19 and on the bias of foreign literature records, some scholars have proposed that Automatic Non-contact Fever Detector plays an important role in preventing the spread of COVID-19 (Tian, 2020, pp. 180-184); M2Presswire, the world’s third largest electronic press, has also shown that non-contact surface temperature measurements can reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection. Some literatures also discuss the use of wireless sensing (contactless sensing) technologies such as Wi-Fi, radar, and software to monitor patients with COVID-19 (Saeed et al., 2022, pp. 193-204). In addition, the connotation of “non-contact healthcare”, “non-contact screening system”, and “non-contact community treatment centre”, etc., is the same as the concept of “non-contact” in China. It can be seen that the concept of “non-contact” discussed in this paper emerged due to the outbreak of the global epidemic COVID-19.

Re-understanding the Cognitive Dissonance Among College Students

Cognitive dissonance refers to discomfort caused by behavior, and is contrary to a person’s usual (generally positive) self-concept (Festinger, 1999, p. 11). It was found through in-depth observation and interview that cognitive dissonance among college students mainly pertains to two aspects: One is cognitive dissonance toward current affairs (events), such as cognitive dissonance among college students’ learning, which may lead to lack of interest and willingness to study; additionally, cognitive dislocation, environmental change, education itself, social problems, and other factors can lead to cognitive dissonance among college students (Yan & Li, 2015, pp. 132-134). The other aspect pertains to cognitive dissonance toward affairs (events) in the future related to an individual’s interests, such as cognitive dissonance during job search by college students (Jiang, Luo, & Zhang, 2017, pp. 105-111). In addition, researches related to cognitive dissonance among college students include: existence of cognitive dissonance in the cognitive system of college students, and their ideological and political education (Tao, 2012, pp. 79-83). The three dimensions of college students’ self-harmony (disharmony between self and experience, self-flexibility, and self-rigidity) have a predictive effect on cognitive dissonance (Li, 2010).

In western countries, not much literature on cognitive dissonance among college students is available. Mariam H. Al-Lihyani, who studied cognitive dissonance among female students at Umm Al Qura University, believes that the seven factors that cause cognitive dissonance in female college students are family, emotion, self-compatibility, control and dominance, social dimension, education, discipline and behavioral commitment (Al-Lihyani & Al-Otaibi, 2015, pp. 416-430). Edward Lichtenstein studied the relationship between college
students’ smoking attitude, willingness, and cognitive dissonance (Lichtenstein, 1967, pp. 425-430). Trent W. Maurer studied college students’ relatively low course evaluation due to cognitive dissonance (Maurer, 2006, pp. 176-179), and a series of other conclusions.

By combing and consulting the literature pertaining to cognitive dissonance among college students, we can infer that cognitive dissonance among college students is a common problem that may pertain to all aspects of the life of college students. Different factors lead to cognitive dissonance among college students. Among these factors, those related to students’ self-dimension or the self-related factors, play a dominant role, while social situational factors exist but only play a secondary role.

To sum up, there is still a lack of research exploring “non-contact cognitive dissonance” among college students in China during COVID-19, and this study will be helpful in bridging the gap. Furthermore, this study exploring “non-contact” cognitive dissonance among college students during the COVID-19 epidemic offers practical reference for all over the word: That means the influence of social situation factors on cognitive dissonance is secondary; social situation factors during COVID-19 are likely to perform the “inducing” function on cognitive subjects. Some people will “conform” to the “pressure” of the social situation in order to pursue the value orientation pertaining to life safety, and are likely to comply with the public values advocated by public policies. But at the same time, the pressure may also “coerce” the cognitive subject to “compromise”, which may lead to compulsive obedience. At this time, cognitive dissonance behavior that deviates from social situations may influence an individual or even group life, and may lead to public crisis events. Therefore, bridging the “non-contact” cognitive dissonance among college students is important for maintaining the normal order of learning, and life on campus during COVID-19.

Deconstruction of “Non-contact” Cognitive Dissonance Model Among College Students

“In 1955, Osgood and Tennenboum put forward the Consistency Theory, which proposes that people always seek a balanced, harmonious, and conflict-free mental state: when the relationship expressed according to the information received by people is inconsistent with their original attitude, and people are likely to feel uneasy or unhappy. The premise of Cognitive Dissonance Theory from Festinger has been that people have a tendency to maintain cognitive consistency (Festinger, 1999, p. 1). In 1958, Fritz Heider pointed out in his Theory of Balance that balanced cognition could lead to a pleasant state of satisfaction: One tends to achieve cognitive balance in case of cognitive imbalance. In essence, Fritz Heider’s Theory of Balance is similar to the Cognitive Dissonance Theory proposed by Festinger. Regardless of the Conformity Theory, the Balance Theory, or the Cognitive Dissonance Theory, their proponents have agreed that the cognitive elements are inconsistent with the reality of the people; there is likely to be certain pressure (Festinger, 1999, p. 4).

As time passed, in the 1980s and 1990s, American marketer A. Parasuraman et al. put forward the famous SERVQUAL (Service Quality Theory) in their own research—“SERVQUAL: Une échelle multi-items de mesure des perceptions de la qualité de service par les consommateurs” (one type of multivariable customer-perceived service quality measurement method). The core of the theory is the “Quality Gap Model”.

He has believed that the customer gap (i.e., the gap between the customer expectations and the customer perceived service) is determined by the gap in the other four aspects of the service process (i.e., gap pertaining
to service quality standard, service transaction, marketing communication, and service quality) (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1990, pp. 19-42). In the Gap Model, the gap between expectation and perception is regarded as being inconsistent. If this inconsistency affects people’s inner sense of self, dissonance is likely to occur (Aronson, 2018, p. 142).

Based on the above discussed traditional psychological literature, such as the Consistency Theory, the Balance Theory, and the Cognitive Dissonance Theory, in combination with the discourse system expressed by the Gap Model in the field of marketing, the model mechanism of the generation of “non-contact” cognitive dissonance among college students would be explored in this paper, in order to deconstruct the generation process of “non-contact” cognitive dissonance during the special period, and seek strategies to bridge cognitive dissonance.

As shown in Figure 1 below,

![Figure 1. “Non-contact” cognitive dissonance model among college students in China.](image)

The narrative activities in traditional psychology literature reveal that the major cause of “non-contact” cognitive dissonance among college students lies in the gap between students’ expectation and their perception of reality. This inconsistency mainly arises due to other gaps (as shown in Figure 1):

**Gap 1: Gap between the individual behavior of college students and the expectation for a “non-contact” policy.** The Ministry of Education in China has issued the Fourth Edition of the Technical Plan for the Prevention and Control of the COVID-19 pandemic in university institutions, which stipulates that teachers and students should abide by the school gate management regulations, and minimizes their attendance at school. At the same time, keeping a safe social distance of one meter at least from others was made mandatory in classrooms, study rooms, libraries, canteens, indoor sports venues, etc. It can be understood that “maintaining a social distance” and reducing mobility (described in the document as “minimizing school attendance”) are the behavioral expectation from the students considering the “non-contact” policy in various documents during the special period. However, students’ understanding of the “non-contact” policy is obviously inconsistent with the expectations from the policy itself. Otherwise, the “banner incident” in which the students climbed over the gate in a university of Jiangsu, China would not have happened.
Gap 2: Gap between the expectations of college students from university officials and reality. This gap can be reflected in three aspects, namely the “listening gap”, “communication gap”, and “role absence”. The listening gap shows that the school officials are not aware of the students’ expectations. The communication gap is manifested in the form of failure to provide the necessary services to the students as promised by the officials of the university; lack of students’ appeal channels, information asymmetry, excessive communication cost, misjudgment of information, and delayed psychological counseling are the reasons for the communication gap. The absence of teachers’ role is reflected in the absence of school teachers in the campus. During the process of interviewing students in a local university in Yunnan Province of China, students unanimously reflected that, in view of the prevention and control reality during the special period, public crises faced by students on campus could have been avoided if some teachers would have intervened in the cognitive counseling, psychological construction, and the fermentation process of student-related mass incidents. Existing studies reveal that college counselors are often too busy to help and guide students due to their own job assignment (Chai & Wang, 2022, pp. 115-120).

Gap 3: Gap between the expectations from the policy providers and the perceived reality. On the one hand, this gap is caused by the pressure of public policy. “Maintaining a safe social distance of one meter at least” is the interpretation of “non-contact”, which is the first life protection barrier set by the national government in the form of public policy for providing maximum life safety. However, policy providers tend to ignore the reality: “The policy pressure is inversely proportional to the binding force of law enforcement norms” (Zhang, 2022). Although implementation plans that are suitable for their own universities’ interests, based on national policies, will be organized, greater the pressure from public policies at the national level, the lesser will be the binding force exerted by the implementation plan formulated at the university level.

On the other hand, it is caused by the pressure created by the social situation. Self-perception theory suggests that when people’s attitudes and feeling are in a state of uncertainty or ambiguity, we make judgments by observing our own behavior and the social situation. During the outbreak of COVID-19, the university officials showed preference for lockdown or lifting up of the lockdown, and were unable to determine whether the decision was suitable for the social situation and would be able to fulfill students’ needs. In such a situation, officials make judgments depending on the social situation. So, the question which arises is: Does the decision of lockdown in the university truly reflect students’ own feeling or is it influenced by the social situation? While discussing the prisoner’s dilemma of “civil service”, Carina Saxlund Bischoff also showed that civil servants under political pressure are more likely to compromise than those who are not (Bischoff, 2022). Therefore, the potential political risks, policy pressure, and political pressure are more likely to “assist” the officials of universities to take the decision of imposing lockdown in the university.

It can be seen that the process of “non-contact” cognitive dissonance among college students during the special period is not only related to public policy, but is also directly related to the behaviors and decisions of school authorities. Although it is caused by the gap between students’ expectation and their reality perception in essence, it is closely related to the “induction” of the social situational factors. That is, social situational factors are the indirect factors that may lead to “non-contact” cognitive dissonance among college students, as shown in Figure 2 below:
“Impact Bias” Behavior Mechanism of “Non-contact” Cognitive Dissonance Among College Students

As mentioned above, the process and causes of “non-contact” cognitive dissonance have been clarified by constructing the “non-contact” cognitive dissonance model during the special period. A question that needs to be answered is: Why did college students climb over the wall and pull banners in the university? Additionally, this research will further explain the psychological mechanism of “non-contact” cognitive dissonance behavior among college students with respect to the above discussed events.

In the study of chemistry, chemical equations are used to explain the process by which a substance undergoes qualitative changes. Based on this method of depicting changes in the material properties, we believe that the “non-contact” cognitive dissonance among college students is a type of catalytic effect based on “impact bias”, which leads to cognitive dissonance behavior, as depicted in Figure 3:

Aronson’s research revealed that impact bias is displayed after the emergence of cognitive dissonance. People always overestimate the intensity and duration of their negative emotional responses, and unconsciously engage in the process of reducing cognitive dissonance (Aronson, 2018, p. 124). In other words, people are unable to realize that they can reduce the disorder, and they never expect that they will be able to reduce the disorder well. Kimberly A. Arditte Hall, who studied the “impact bias”, drew similar conclusions; he also pointed out that people underestimate the positive effects of others when they overestimate the negative effects of oneself and others (Arditte Hall, Joormann, Siemer, & Timpano, 2018, pp. 37-46).

Therefore, in Figure 3, the “non-contact” cognitive dissonance among college students “escalates” and evolves into a series of disorders under the “catalytic” effect of impact bias. One kind of dissonance is behavioral
rationalization (as shown in Figure 3), that is, constantly convincing oneself that they are right. As mentioned above, during the lockdown in the university of China due to the global epidemic of COVID-19, college students thought it was reasonable to “climb over the wall” and “pull up banners” on campus, but they did not know that it came at the expense of rational behavior. Eventually, the “wall” was climbed over, and the “banner” was pulled up and the college students chose to display this “bad behavior”. Another type of dissonance is “post-decision dissonance” (Figure 3) (i.e., the process of making a wrong decision resulting in discomfort) (Aronson, 2018, p. 126). For example, as mentioned in the beginning of the paper, the students expressed their dissatisfaction on the internet regarding the wall climbing incident which took place in a university of Shanxi Province, China. After deciding to sit on the railings, students displayed their “choice” by “waving flags and shouting” so as to reduce the discomfort of post-decision disorder, which is one type of cognitive dissonance after they have made a decision of sitting on railings on campus, which is unreasonable actually they know, but they pretend not to know. It could even be reduced by “calling on” more students to join the group that raised flags and shouted. It has been observed that post-decision dissonance is highly likely to subvert a person’s moral outlook. Once they make a wrong decision, they reinforce and rationalize their decision, while increasing the possibility of committing mistakes again. This is why cognitive dissonance among college students may lead to group public crises on campus.

To sum up, from the behavioral science perspective, the catalyst function influences the deviation that influences the individual behavior of students that is likely to deteriorate. Hence the question that arises is: How can this cognitive dissonance be reduced?

Bridging Strategies for Non-contact Cognitive Dissonance Among College Students

A. Parasuraman proposed in his Gap Model that the cognitive dissonance of service quality is caused by the gap between the expectations and perception (actual acquisition) of a service. Therefore, in order to bridge this gap, the remaining four gaps should be filled; the principle of bridging “non-contact” cognitive dissonance in college students is the same as the principle of bridging strategies in the gap mode. To bridge the gap between expectations and perception of reality, it is necessary to bridge the three gaps depicted in Figure 1. The process of bridging of the cognitive deviation is the process of reducing cognitive dissonance. Aronson believed that cognitive dissonance could be reduced by changing behavior, altering cognition, and adding new cognition (Aronson, 2018, p. 140).

Bridging the Gap 1: From forced compliance to counter attitudinal advocacy. According to the “non-contact” policy standard in China, some people put forward that: College students violate the school discipline and regulations from time to time (Yue, 2019). Therefore, certain rewards can be given to those who obey the policy, and threatening punishments can also be given to those who fail to obey. Under such normative conditions, college students are likely to display forced obedience (passive obedience). Superficially, such a kind of obedience has a certain effect on students’ obedience to the “non-contact” policy. However, according to the theory of cognitive dissonance, this situation can lead to the greatest degree of cognitive dissonance among college students. Therefore, it is not advisable to force the college students to comply with the “non-contact” policy standard imposed due to the COVID-19 epidemic.

In order to bridge the first gap, it is proposed that the college students’ attitude toward the “non-contact” policy should be altered to be in awe of public policy. Studies have shown that: Individuals with a high sense of awe can generate a higher level of self-transcendence for reducing the occurrence of impulsive behavior (Yang,
In this way, college students’ rational cognition toward “non-contact” policies can be improved, and the gap between individual cognition and policy expectations can be narrowed. The question is: Can it lead them to change their attitude toward the “non-contact” policy during the COVID-19 lockdown of the universities in China? The answer is yes. The counter attitudinal advocacy experiment has proven that the smaller the external incentive, the greater is the degree of attitude change (Aronson, 2018, p. 132). Festinger also demonstrated in the experiment on cognitive preference dissonance in jungle stories and superhero stories that in case of high degree of incentive, subjects refused large rewards and their attitude changed (Festinger, 1999, pp. 95-99). Recent research also shows that counter attitudinal advocacy can effectively promote attitude change in bias related fields (Eisenstadt, Leippe, Rivers, & Stambush, 2003, pp. 2123-2152). Therefore, the method of “counter attitudinal advocacy” can be used as a reference to change the attitude of college students, so as to reduce the degree of cognitive dissonance and the possibility of irrational behavior.

The process of counter attitudinal advocacy toward the cognition of “non-contact” policy means that they have no good external rationalization reasons for the “non-contact” policy, by “looking for” the positive side of the “non-contact” policy, and they change their own behavior or attitude through the internal rationalization process to reduce the cognitive dissonance. However, students may dismiss these positive factors due to the “impact bias” (as mentioned above). Hence a pertinent question that arises is: How to make students aware of the positive aspect of the “no contact” policy? For this, teachers need to “return” to fulfill their responsibilities; this is particularly important as it will facilitate bridging of the second gap.

**Bridging the Gap 2: Re-adoption of teachers’ role for establishing cognitive overlap.** As discussed above, due to the “impact bias” factors, college students are likely to ignore others, and the positive impact of “non-contact” policy. Therefore, it is particularly important to bring students’ cognition back on track. “Teaching and educating” function includes the role positioning of teachers including university teachers. “Teaching” and “educating” are disjointed in China. In other words, in China, there is a disconnection between teaching and education, and the problem is widespread. In this case, the teachers should re-adopt their role: They should not only teach but also help the students in solving problems, and establish new cognition. In China, ideological and political courses and psychological counseling centers in colleges help college students in eliminating bias factors, adjusting their cognition, identifying the positive aspects of things to get the counter attitudinal advocacy toward the cognition of “non-contact” policy with the help of teachers’ external forces.

Furthermore, the faculty can help students establish a cognitive overlap toward the pandemic COVID-19, which can serve as an important means for reducing cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance theory verifies that the more identical the cognitive elements of different alternatives in the corresponding decision are, the lesser will be the dissonance (Festinger, 1999, p. 39). In particular, college students’ cognition toward “non-contact” policy and the possibility of cognitive dissonance depends on their cognition of “masks”, “alcohol”, “bicycle tools”, “one-meter social distance”, “non-contact payment”, “online teaching”, “non-gathering”, “non-essential stay at the school gate”, etc. The more similar the characteristics of the elements in terms of conveying the value and significance of life safety, the easier would be the reduction of cognitive dissonance of “non-contact” policy. Teachers play an important role in helping college students create “cognitive connections” to achieve cognitive overlap.

It can be seen that getting faculty onboard in a university is conducive to building a bridge between the student and the school. The communication gap is often caused due to failure to open the communication channel. Therefore, the listening gap becomes more and more prominent. Re-adoption of their roles by teachers is to facilitate bridging of the gap.
Bridging the Gap 3: Cognitive transition from social situational stress to public crisis (risk). It has been discussed above that the action strategies adopted by universities during the special period are likely to induce cognitive dissonance among college students toward the “non-contact” policy. Therefore, in order to bridge the third gap, the relationship between universities and public policy subjects needs to be explored.

After introduction of public policies by the government, universities are likely to compromise under pressure of existing social situation (as discussed in Figure 1). In the Chinese context, this can be attributed to the government’s status which is supreme, as compared to that of public and private schools, when the universities exercise their power for educational management. In case of an administrative order issued by the state administrative organ based on the law enforced in China, it should be complied within the school (Hu & Ge, 2001, pp. 19-24). To a certain extent, the university does not have the same power as the government. So, pressure is created by social situations, and hence the university officials have no choice but to implement “lockdown”. With the passage of time and due to change of environment during COVID-19, the public policy also underwent great changes. Implementation of a public policy calls for people to face reality, work together to resist common suffering, and build common human values (Camus, 2000, p. 945).

With the change in the policy environment and policy goals, officials of universities are likely to pay more attention to potential political risks and political consequence in the process of administrative decision-making. Nowadays, with the increase in the frequency of mass incidents among college students, public crisis is inevitable because of the public expressing opinions online due to the polarization tendency of students. Therefore, during this special period, it is more challenging than ever for the universities’ officials to adopt measures, which are relatively reasonable, moderate and meet the demands of most teachers and students for preventing the spread of COVID-19 epidemic in China.

Discussion

It has been found cognitive dissonance toward the “non-contact” policy not only exists among college students, but also among other persons in social environments in China. Special events during special periods have had a significant impact on people’s material and spiritual life. Many extreme events have taken place during the “lockdown” period. It can be seen that the psychological damage caused by “non-contact” cognitive dissonance is far more than “climbing over the wall” and “pulling banners”.

Second, public policies affect citizens’ cognition and behavior to a large extent. People’s actions depend on their understanding of the “non-contact” policy. So the necessary intervention is far more important than the policy itself during the COVID-19 pandemic. With respect to traditional policy tools, such as tax incentives and other financial inducements, we found that nudge interventions were considered better than traditional interventions. We conclude that nudging is a valuable approach that should be used more often in conjunction with traditional policies (Benartzi et al., 2017, pp. 1041-1055). Public policy agents need to consider citizens’ knowledge when they plan to formulate rules for genuine participation in public health intervention (Samuel et al., 2022, pp. 31-43) to protect the interests of vulnerable groups and special groups as much as possible. Therefore, public policy agents should formulate policies by adopting a psychological as well as sociological perspective to achieve development goals through government and professional intervention (Shaffer, 2015, pp. 578-581).

Finally, while global policymakers are increasingly investing in digital health technologies to complement the efforts being made to control the spread of COVID-19, there is a difference in the value goals pertaining to
advocacy of preparedness in China and the West. Based on the understanding of individual freedom and related national narrative activities in the West, the western epidemic prevention policies advocate the values of “freedom” and “autonomy”, while the Chinese policies advocate “people’s safety” as the main purpose of the big security concept in China. Therefore, the essential difference between the Chinese and western epidemic prevention policies lies in the choice between national interests and personal interests.

References


