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Is Space R&D Truly Fostering A Better World For Our Future? (2)

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PEOPLE ENJOY SPACE EXPLORATION - BUT DO THEY REALLY SUPPORT IT? RESULTS
FROM THE INTERNATIONAL STUDY ON SPACE EXPLORATION PERCEPTION.

Abstract

In this research, our primary objective was to delve into the perceptions of space exploration among the general public. Our investigation encompassed a robust and representative cohort of American (N=1120) and Polish (N=1058) citizens. We aimed to explore various facets of space exploration perception, including support for funding and different exploration types, while also examining the influencing factors such as age, gender, and education level. Additionally, we probed into whether individuals believe space exploration aligns with or conflicts with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Contrary to expectations, our findings revealed minimal disparities between the Polish and US samples, despite the more prominent space exploration traditions in the United States. Surprisingly, most results tended towards the middle of the scale, suggesting a lack of distinct opinions among people and an opportunity for heightened awareness. Notably, both samples exhibited a generally positive perception of space exploration, a sentiment not necessarily anticipated for cutting-edge technological advancements. Positive sentiments were particularly evident in functions like monitoring objects threatening Earth or monitoring Earth's ecosystem, while international rivalry and space tourism garnered the least appreciation.

Demographic factors such as age, religiosity, and political persuasion did not emerge as predictors of attitudes towards space exploration. However, a significant gender difference surfaced, with men displaying greater support for space exploration compared to women—a consistent trend with prior research. Men also perceived more facilitation and less conflict between space exploration and other global goals, potentially contributing to gender disparities in the space sector.

Despite the overall positive perception, we discovered that people's intention to engage in space familiarization activities, such as visiting exhibits or participating in citizen science projects, was relatively low. Most notably, our research unveiled a dual and potentially conflicting perspective on space exploration. People perceived it both as conflicting with other crucial global goals and supporting their attainment, underscoring the need for nuanced understanding. Intriguingly, the Sustainable Development Goals deemed most important, such as "No Poverty" or "No Hunger," were simultaneously perceived as least likely to be supported by space exploration achievements. This underscores the crucial role of science communication in emphasizing the positive consequences of space exploration for humanity.

Our presentation will further detail the next steps in this research project, providing a comprehensive outlook on the evolving landscape of public perceptions towards space exploration.