

Pakistani Print Media's View of China and Belt and Road Initiative

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Abstract

The article aims to give an objectively true account of Pakistani newspaper's perspective about China and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It uses mixed method analysis in its reading of editorials from online editions of Pakistan's main English newspapers: The News, The Express Tribune, The Nation and Dawn. Editorials are the unit of analysis of this study as they usually voice the opinion of the editors, the newspapers' lead writers and set the newspapers' agenda. This article makes use of framing theory, in coverage of China and its humongous investment and infrastructure project, the BRI project. It looks at how the editorials present China and the BRI, major themes, and reasons for these editorial choices. It attempts to identify attitudes underlying these editorials. After a reflexive thematic analysis, the article gauges the different newspapers' adherence to universal norms of journalism. The paper examines and assesses the editorials in terms of their slants, coverage, and framing of China and its BRI. The majority of editorials employ frames that are negative or concerned. They reflect national interests. They express an independent opinion from that of the Chinese and Pakistani governments. There is a notable dominance of negative frames in the editorials' coverage of the BRI when it comes to certain themes of economics, management & administration.

Keywords: PRC, Belt and Road Initiative, Pakistani Newspapers, Editorials

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1. Introduction

This paper presents the Pakistani news media's perspective on China and Belt and Road Initiative. It will help understand Pakistani news media, especially newspapers, through the extensive coverage of China and Belt and Road Initiative. The selection of the variables of China and BRI is due to the sheer importance of the two for Pakistan not only in past and present but in the future as well. The study has selected the four most popular English newspapers in Pakistan i.e., Dawn, The News, The Nation and The Express Tribune.

Pakistan print news media is the oldest form of media in Pakistan. Before 2002, it was considered to be the most reliable and recognizable news source of Pakistani media. Print media and its journalists struggled for freedom of expression and free media in Pakistan. The multi linguistic domestic print media served the whole nation's different ethnic and religious minorities. On the other hand, the English newspapers have considerable leverage among opinion makers and foreign readers, with urban centric and progressive attitudes (Tsui & Tollefson, 2017). In this way the English newspapers not only target the national audiences but also international readers.

Thanks to the advancement in technology and the arrival of the internet, today print media is gradually shifting from hard copies to online editions all over the world, and Pakistan is not an exception. Almost all newspapers in Pakistan have websites and rely on an online delivery mechanism, where they post not only their online editions of their newspapers but also provide breaking news, which was not possible with the traditional print form. This study selected editorials as the unit of analysis, in order to get a sense of the newspapers' views on China and its Belt and Road Initiative in the online edition of these newspapers.

An editorial is a brief article usually but not always written by its editor that expresses a newspaper's or publishing house's views, agenda and policies on a topical issue. Therefore, it can also be called the policy statement of that particular newspaper. The topics of these editorials gives us an adequate idea of their news agenda. Analyzing deeply on the patterns of themes can tell us how the information has been framed. Editorials offer an authoritative and reliable means of ascertaining the views of journalists on controversial issues. Unlike news reporters, editorial writers are given free reign to express their opinions without having to appeal to

journalistic standards of objectivity and balance. Editorials are opinion pieces used by newspapers and magazines to give a full and frank summary of the guiding outlook of the newspaper's team on a dominant topic that receives much coverage in the surrounding pages. They are relatively uncluttered by facts and figures, and quotes from the opposite side and thus give information of opinions from a wider range of a society (Richardson & Lancendorfer, 2004).

Through the lenses of framing theory this paper has analyzed these editorials. Moreover, the paper also attempts to discover to what extent the newspapers follow universal journalistic values and norms, by investing and evaluating the news editorials based on the slant, treatment, tone and framing of the themes about China and China's Belt and Road Initiative.

2. Background

Media is the main conduit of discourse between government, institutions, leaders and the general public. Media informs the public of newsworthy events and can frame its reporting in a way which influences public opinion and public policy. Media reporting is always driven by the ideology, agenda, rules and norms set by each particular outlet. The journalist's personal activities play a big part in determining the way they craft news stories. Journalists make editorial decisions for themselves in deciding which stories to investigate and report. They apply their own preferences in interpreting events for their viewers, listeners and readers. Like everyone else, the views and endeavors of journalists are largely determined by their ideology, including values mores and customs of the societies they grow up in. Differences between societies can often be usefully appealed to for explaining the way journalists from different countries report the news. This socially determined reporting reinforces the peculiar biases of different societies.

China's rise to the status of the world's second largest economy has attracted lots of media attention. As China's rise accompanies globalization, the globalization of media has made it harder and harder even for the most parochial journalism to ignore China. The majority of the countries in the world have bilateral relations with China, therefore China-news reporting around the world has increased exponentially especially from international news outlets. It has particularly increased more after the initiation of China's Belt and Road Initiative. The Chinese media endorses the Chinese government's claims BRI as is a means of prosperity for all mankind by reducing the rich-poor gap through building infrastructure (Gao, 2020).

Despite BRI central importance for China, and China's central importance for global media reporting the BRI has been under-discussed, overlooked and ignored by many international news outlets, especially by western media. This is partly explained by the complexity and open-endedness of most of the BRI project outlined by China so far. Although Pakistani media gives extensive coverage to China and BRI, but the doubts, rumors and mystery surrounding BRI funding has led to uncertainty that has also exerted pressure on journalists to speculate.

China and Pakistan have enjoyed deep rooted diplomatic relations for the last seven decades, and there is an immense mutual respect of the two nations for each other. Pakistani media reports on China and its Flagship project BRI are not uncritical. Pakistani media is considered as bluntly vocal and critical over national news such as politics and governance etc. Interestingly enough, it is found during this study that it criticizes China the same way as it criticizes Pakistani government over governmental issues. Most of the criticism on China is related to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is the flagship project of the Belt and Road Project.

There could be several important reasons behind this phenomenon, first is the long weak economic situation of Pakistan, which has been one of the centers of attention of Pakistani media for several decades. Almost all the government policies to improve Pakistan's economic situation have failed. In such devastating economic conditions of Pakistan, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, at the time of initiation, was welcomed by all members of society including the media. But as the time is passing with little concrete results a considerable number of media outlets is displaying suspicion over the CPEC project. This paper has tried to evaluate the reasons behind this phenomenon in the news editorials in order to get a true sense of print media. Secondly, Pakistani media have evolved from several decades long strict governmental censorships to the free, vocal, blunt and ruthless reporting of the present time, which never spares governments for their actions through tough criticism and reporting. This to some extent is replicated in the case of reporting China and BRI in the sample editorials of this study. Thirdly, there is a heavy influence of the western media on Pakistani media, especially on the English print media. They highly regard and follow the western media style in their reporting. Therefore, they do not hesitate to criticize China and BRI, directly or indirectly similar to their western counterparts.

3. Variables of the Study: China and BRI

This study has selected China and BRI as the two main variables because China and Pakistan are getting closer and more interdependent with each passing day. To promote, participate and safeguard each other's interests is part of that. BRI is a huge project of China and CPEC is its flagship project which is huge for Pakistan, where China pledged to invest 46 billion dollars in the early 2015 (Ye, 2020). It brings the two countries far closer than before.

China-Pakistan relations have been peaceful, cooperative and friendly. Friendship, is something that Pakistan can offer China more convincingly than any other country, and that matters far more to China than it used to (Small, 2015). Previously the cooperation between the two countries was based on defence and was military in nature. But with the passage of time, as China's vision broadens to cooperation and trade with other countries through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the cooperation between Pakistan and China enhanced from the mere military dimension to trade and multi-billion-dollar economic projects under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

For decades, Pakistan has played a key role in China's foreign policy as a cornerstone of the latter's strategy in Central Asia and South Asia. To date, China has sought a strategic partnership with Pakistan as a useful way to counter U.S. and Indian aggression towards it. Pakistan has become an increasingly closest ally of China (Casas & Serano Oswald, 2020) in addressing the challenge posed by the U.S. and India, China's strategic rivals. This was especially so when the Obama administration decided on a pivot toward East Asia and transformed the region into a new front in the strategic rivalry between Washington and Beijing, as well as China's strategic rivalry with India.

The Belt and Road Initiative offers great promise for China to make it less dependent on the U.S. for its trade, and make it more independent and powerful. In fact, BRI is a "significant projection of power" in China's ongoing "Third Revolution" (Economy, 2018). BRI has also been seen as an opportunity for many countries, like Pakistan, to reduce U.S. influence on them. Pakistan has long depended on the U.S. for security reasons. It has been facing security threats and aggression from India since its establishment in 1947. For that reason, Pakistan has always sought out security and weapons technology support from the U.S. whereas India enjoyed the military support of the Soviet Union. The U.S. has therefore been the center of Pakistan's foreign policy for a long time (Bray, 1992).

This study included China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) because it is one of the prestigious and flagship projects of Belt and Road Initiative. CPEC is discussed more extensively than the Belt and Road Initiative in Pakistani media and other circles. As Pakistani news media is one of the components of this study, CPEC is supposed to be discussed in the news editorials as a synonymous with the Belt and Road Initiative.

This is the reason that CPEC is not only discussed in local politics but has also become an integral part of the Foreign policy of Pakistan. Because it is one of greatest investment projects in Pakistan's history, which has the potential to change Pakistan's poor economic fate. In the words of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, "CPEC is a game changer for Pakistan." There is no doubt about it even in the establishment circles of Pakistan. That is why Pakistan's army, which is considered as the main stake holder of foreign policy, has given assurances to the government and Chinese authorities that it will do everything in its power to strive to improve the law and order situation in Pakistan, in order to provide a conducive environment to carry out the CPEC project in the country. Because everyone knows that only a strong economy of Pakistan can make it stable and reduce the poverty in the country, and hence bring peace and prosperity to the nation.

In addition, Pakistan's geo-strategic location provides Beijing alternate routes for oil and gas supplies from the Middle East and especially access to the energy-rich Persian Gulf region. Despite years of effort to diversify its energy supplies from places like Africa, Latin America, Central Asia, and Russia, China remains heavily dependent on Middle Eastern oil and gas, and this dependence has only grown in recent years. In 2014, Beijing imported an average of 6.1 million barrels of oil a day, with more than 52 per cent coming from the Persian Gulf region (Johnson, 2015). In practical terms, that makes China vulnerable to fallout from any energy-supply disruptions in the Middle East without being able to do much about it. Hence, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, an important project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), provides an alternative route for China to access the African and middle-eastern markets and access these countries for its energy needs.

In such a cooperative and friendly environment, this paper has attempted how Pakistani media, which claims to be independent and most outspoken, portrays China and its Belt and Road Initiative project which are near and dear to Pakistan.

4. Methodology

The overall research process is divided into three stages, the first stage included data collection, in the second stage major categories of editorial content on China and Belt and Road Initiative are made, and in the third stage there is contextual and thematic analyses of the themes in the editorial content of the newspapers to investigate the significant underlying message and covert meaning embedded in the text of the editorial content on China and BRI.

4.1 Sampling

Dawn, The News, The Nation and The Express Tribune are the largest English language newspapers in Pakistan, which are popular among the elites, opinion makers and policy makers. The editorials were collected from the archives of each newspaper's website extensively by searching key terms i.e., China, Chinese, One Belt, One Road, OBOR, Belt and Road Initiative, BRI, China Pakistan Economic Corridor, CPEC, Silk Road, and modern silk road. The data collection process was very strict in its selection parameters of the editorials. It was done by reading each and every editorial of every newspaper for the study period, then selecting the editorial for the study as sample by following Stratified sampling technique. Six hundred and sixty-seven (667) editorials from the four newspapers were collected and investigated for the study, from the 1st January 2017 to 31st December 2018.

4.2 Variables

BRI is a part of China news but to investigate the themes in detail, the researcher has divided the themes under the two main variables, i.e. China and BRI. This helps to understand the editorials' treatment of BRI. The primary difference between the two is that all the themes related to Belt and Road Initiative are categorized under BRI variable, whereas as all the themes related to China other than Belt and Road Initiative are categorized under China variable.

4.3 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The data was identified and coded for themes at 1297 nodes through NVivo software, and further categorized into main themes and sub themes by following (Braun & Clarke, 2006) Reflexive Thematic Analysis. It has helped in delineating lines between relationships of concepts, comparing them with patterns of frequency in the editorial data. It has linked different concepts and viewpoints of the data which then was analyzed for different combinations in order to get refined and extended meaning drawn out of the data.

There are three main approaches to Thematic Analysis, which are, reflexive approach, coding reliability approach and codebook approach. Braun & Clark's approach to coding is reflexive approach which is flexible, in which the coding evolves throughout the coding process, while reading and re-reading the data. This approach is to some extent similar to initial coding in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Coding should be an active and reflexive process that inevitably and inescapably bears the mark of the researchers. There is no 'accurate' way to code data, therefore the logic behind inter-rater reliability (and multi-independent coders) disappears.

In coding reliability and codebook approaches different coders may be trained to code the data in the same way, in order to get similar results with minimum or no difference, but this does not mean that their coding is 'accurate'. In addition, in order to facilitate multiple coders of the same data, the codebook technique often ends up with superficial codes. Consequently, this technique often limits the theoretical flexibility of these types of Thematic Analysis. Hence, the reflexive thematic analysis best suits this study where the themes emerge freely from the data.

4.4 Framing Theory

Framing theory is a very important resource and topic of contemporary research. This importance has arisen through the massive increase in the power and presence of mass media in the 21st century. It is central to important aspects of this paper. Media relations, their management and control are of critical importance for all public institutions and leaders. Media involves the framing of its perspectives in all of its many diverse forms.

Yet, relative to the perspective of the media outlet, the goals and views of its disseminators, diverse framing is employed for reporting on any one news event. Media outlets invariably frame their reporting in such a way as to be most beneficial to the interest groups that direct their work, hence the ubiquity of media bias. The peculiarities of framing techniques have become a vital topic of concern for all journalism scholars, trying to uncover the influence and motivations of media outlets.

Despite the revolution of journalism that has accompanied social media's empowerment of individuals to broadcast their own news, public discourse on news events is still dominated by the framing of the sum of the

dominant mass media outlets, who have the power to broadcast their news most widely. The major media outlets still greatly sway public perception of news in the way they define and prioritize the news events worthy of public attention. In this sense they generate the frames of public perspectives (Goffman, 1974).

Hence framing is a powerful mechanism of media to portray anything in a particular way they choose. On the basis of the positive, negative or neutral aspect of the language, tone and manner of the editorials and the themes evolved from them, the researcher has divided them into five categories and called it 4Cs Framing technique, which are explained as follows:

4.5 4Cs Framing Technique

This technique was created to scrutinize each and every frame used for China and BRI in the data. On the basis of the nature of the frames, they are divided into five categories, i.e., Cooperation, Competition, Concern, Conflict and neutral.

1. “Cooperation” frames are positive in nature, indicating the positive aspects of China or BRI.
2. “Competition” frames are somewhat positive in nature, indicating its inclination more towards positive than negative.
3. “Concern” frames are somewhat negative in nature, indicating its inclination more towards negative than positive.
4. “Conflict frames are negative in nature, indicating the negative aspects.
5. “Neutral” frames are neither positive nor negative.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Frames

On the basis of the 4Cs Framing technique, all the themes collected and categorized through the reflexive thematic analysis, the following data was observed. Altogether, 1075 nodes were coded in NVivo software for analyzing the frames of each theme.

Table 1. Frequency of themes according to 4Cs Framing Technique

<i>4Cs Framing</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1 Cooperation	414	39%
2 Competition	154	14%
3 Neutral	11	1%
4 Concern	427	40%
5 Conflict	69	6%
<i>Total</i>	1075	100%

Each theme was coded for its framing, as the table above shows that the “Cooperation” Frames 39%, and “Competition” Frames 14%, indicating the positive and somewhat positive frames cover about 53% of the all the themes emerged from the editorials. Whereas, “Conflict” Frames 6%, and “Concern” Frames 40%, indicating negative and somewhat negative frames covers about 46% of the themes. And only 1% present are neutral frames.

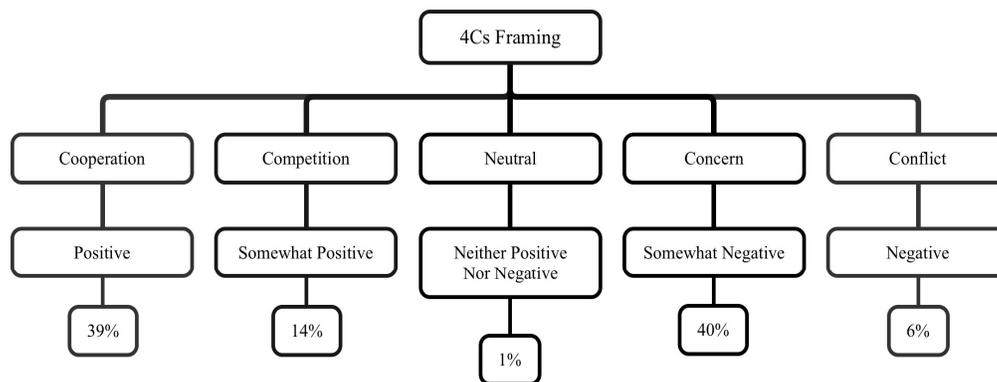


Figure 1. 4Cs Framing Technique

This suggests that the editorials have used almost the same number of positive and somewhat positive frames as compared to the negative and somewhat negative ones, as shown in the figure above.

The following table gives a full picture of the 4Cs framing on China and BRI related themes in total. It is to be noted that multiple nodes of themes were coded for several same 4Cs Framing nodes, that results in 1075 nodes for 4Cs Framing and 1287 nodes for themes.

Table 2. 4Cs framing of China and BRI

4Cs Framing	China	Percentage	BRI	Percentage	Total	Percentage
1 Cooperation	233	<u>47%</u>	182	31%	415	<u>39%</u>
2 Competition	66	13%	88	15%	154	14%
3 Neutral	10	2%	0	0%	10	1%
4 Concern	145	29%	282	<u>49%</u>	427	<u>40%</u>
5 Conflict	41	8%	28	5%	69	6%
Grand Total	495	100%	580	100%	1075	100%

It is clear that the overall most frequent frames are the “Concern” frames making 40% of the grand total. They are mostly BRI related i.e. 49%, because the editorials have highlighted them in the themes related to issues and problems of BRI such as those negative ones under the “Economy” and “Management & Administration”. Whereas the second most frequent frames are the “Cooperation” frames making 39% of the grand total. They are mostly related to China i.e. 47%, because China and Pakistan are undoubtedly the closest economic and strategic partners in the region.

5.2 Themes and Subthemes

Here follows an explanation of the themes and sub themes that emerged from the data. The main ones are Geopolitics, BRI in Chinese Geopolitics, Economy, Management & Administration, Defense & Security and Others.

5.2.1 Geopolitics

China can promote its economic ties, people to people contacts and political influence on the BRI countries through effective geopolitical strategies (Szunomar, 2018). All the sub themes under Geopolitics are discussed in detail as under.

Table 2. Geopolitics themes and sub themes

<i>Geopolitics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Regional Cooperation & Connectivity</i>	146	45%
<i>Strong Ally</i>	70	21%
<i>Diplomacy & International Relations</i>	66	20%
<i>National Interest First</i>	13	4%
<i>Containment of China</i>	13	4%
<i>Assertive China</i>	10	3%
<i>Total</i>	318	100%

China has proven its presence in the world through various geopolitical moves. The data suggests that the themes related to the “Regional Cooperation & Connectivity” 45% of the geopolitical themes makes China at the center of all the important issues in the region. The sub themes such as “Afghan Peace Process”, “Conflict Resolution”, “Cooperation & Agreements” and “Trade and Economic Partnership” shows China’s determination and domination to bring the peace and stability in the region and provide an good environment for the countries in the region to thrive and progress through mutual cooperation and benefits. Although China is presented as a country with bigger stakes and involvement in the region BRI has the potential to change the geopolitical scenario in the favor of most of the countries in the region. However, some of the themes hinted that BRI will radically shift the balance of power in the region in China’s favor, which might not necessarily be a bad thing for Pakistan.

In fact, China and Pakistan have been strong allies in the region for the last seven decades, but the nature of the alliance has gradually changed over time. The cause of this change is directly related to changes in international power dynamics. Previously the nature of China Pakistan Relations was mostly on the diplomatic and economic levels, but now it is elevated to the strategic level. This is clear from the statements in the Pakistani Editorials which have presented China as a “Strong Ally” in 21% of the Geopolitics Theme.

“Diplomacy & International Relations” 20% presented China as a dynamic and responsible country fulfilling its international commitments through its diplomatic engagements with other countries and proving itself to be a “major world player”. China’s efforts for “peace initiatives” and major “foreign policy shift” in the form of BRI implies China’s inevitable rise in the global stage which offers both ‘peace’ and ‘force’ wherever necessary.

Interestingly enough, “National Interest First” 4% suggest that no matter how close China and Pakistan might be, they should guard their own national interests. This especially applies to Pakistan which is the weaker of the two. Another 4% of themes of Containment of China show the Rivalry of China and the U.S. where the U.S. is shown to take measures against the rising power of China through the policy of containment. Whereas, in 3% of the themes China is shown under the “Assertive China” theme, indicating China’s aggression against its opponents, mostly the U.S. and its allies like India, Japan and other neighbors on the South China Sea. The 2017 border tensions between China and India have created an opportunity for the U.S. to use China-India tension for its own ends of containment of China through supporting Indian claims and providing assistance to India. This situation naturally brings China and Pakistan even closer. In other themes under the theme of Geopolitics, China is shown as a U.S. opponent, the object of U.S. accusations and criticism.

5.2.2 BRI in Chinese Geopolitics

Undoubtedly, Belt and Road Initiative is China’s massive and ambitious geopolitical drive, which is to coordinate the international and domestic general situations of China, make use of the international and domestic markets and resources to realize the sustainable development of China’s economy and smooth development of foreign relations (Feng *et al.*, 2019). Pakistani media has extensively covered it in the Pakistani editorials. Surprisingly, there were two major themes observed in the data. “Pro BRI” and “Anti BRI”, as shown in the following tables 4 and 5:

Table 4. Anti BRI themes and sub themes

<i>Anti BRI</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Western and Other Countries' Concern</i>	40	53%
<i>Uncertainty</i>	23	31%
<i>Risk OR Challenges</i>	12	16%
<i>Total</i>	75	100%

The BRI has been welcomed with mixed reactions. On one side are sections of the Western world, who view the initiative as a tool of Sino-hegemony. The other side comprises of the tens of countries, and hundreds of business concerns, who see the BRI as a boon to the global economy (Ndegwa, 2019).

The 53% of “Anti BRI” themes related to the “concerns of the western and other countries”. The concerns of the US and India in this regard is the route of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which runs through the so-called disputed territory of Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Region. Another concern of the US is that it may lose its leverage over the countries like Pakistan which had been used by the US for its geopolitical motives in the region, in Afghanistan in particular.

“Uncertainty” 31% raise questions and doubts on the success of the BRI. It is due to the complication, hurdles, “Risk & Challenges” 16%, that makes the success of BRI ambiguous. These challenges include the “Baloch insurgencies”, “territorial disputes”, and “political instabilities” in Pakistan.

Table 5. Pro BRI themes and sub themes

<i>Pro BRI</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Game Changer</i>	26	38%
<i>Win-win for China and Others</i>	12	18%
<i>Economic AND Strategic Importance</i>	20	30%
<i>Inclusion of other countries</i>	7	10%
<i>Chinese Confidence AND Deamination in it</i>	3	4%
<i>Total</i>	68	100%

On the other hand, 38% of the “Pro BRI” themes presented it as a “Game Changer” not only for Pakistan and China but also many other countries involved in the project. It has the potential to connect the majority of the countries in at least three continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa. It is an opportunity of “win-win for China and others” 18%, of those participating in it and a great opportunity cost for those abstaining from it.

Experts say China’s replication of the Silk and Road will be highly productive, and have great positive impact on the global economy. What makes BRI attractive is also the promise by China to maintain its policy of non-interference in the internal governance of partners. This will enable economic and infrastructural mutuality in the cooperation (Ndegwa, 2019).

The “Economic and Strategic Importance” 30%, shows BRI is not only the means of economic integration through shortening the communication lines between the participant countries but also bringing them closer into some kind of strategic alliance with China. It is a huge project which is going to have a geopolitical impact on generations to come. Economically and strategically, it will place China in the center of the world and give it geopolitical power that will exceed the U.S. in the region.

Whether its opponents like it or not, China’s Belt and Road initiative is getting global traction. It has attracted over 70 countries for boosting their economies and the “Inclusion of other countries” 10%, would only increase with the passage of time. The “Chinese Confidence and Determination” 4%, in the BRI success is evident from the Chinese officials’ statements and resolve in it.

5.2.3 Economy

Several factors involve in Economic development of a country, such as new inventions, better goods and services,

new means of communications, transportations and fresh markets. BRI can provide conducive environment for such progress in different parts of world in order to fulfill Chinese Dream (Joshua, 2019). However, there are still doubts and uncertainties among BRI countries, which are evident from the themes and sub themes emerged from the Pakistani editorials. They are discussed in detail below.

Table 6. Economy themes and sub themes

<i>Economy</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Investment & Infrastructure</i>	58	19%
<i>Debts & Loans</i>	57	19%
<i>Market Competition</i>	50	16%
<i>Trade Cooperation</i>	45	15%
<i>Growth & Development</i>	34	11%
<i>Uncertainty & Risks</i>	32	10%
<i>Aid & Support</i>	17	6%
<i>Trade War</i>	15	5%
<i>Total</i>	308	100%

Under the Economy Theme, the Investment & infrastructure sub theme is the most common with about 19% under this subtheme in the Pakistani Editorials. This is because of China’s Belt and Road Investment in Pakistan. CPEC is the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative. China has spent billions of dollars to make it the Belt and Road project attractive to other countries. Therefore, its heavy investment and infrastructure projects are the focus of extensive media coverage in Pakistan.

But the media is very vocal in showing their concern about the burden of Chinese Debts & Loans on the Pakistani economy. 19% of the sub themes express grave concern over the potential scale and effects of additional CPEC debts on the Pakistani economy’s trade deficit and current account deficit, as the country is already under huge pressure from the IMF. CPEC debts and loans would only make the debt situation worse until the investments are realized and there are worries about the soundness of the forecasts of growth accrued from them.

China is Pakistan’s biggest trading partner so it is unsurprising that the “Trade Cooperation” 15% of themes discuss this. Whereas 16% of them show concerns over the growing “Market Competition” including the trade deficit with China. The government explains this negative trend is caused by high imports for the CPEC project, which will get better once they become fully operational. Still the concerns and uncertainty are out there. Another concern is the growing presence and dominance of Chinese companies in the Pakistani market. They are outcompeting many of Pakistan’s domestic companies. The Editorials often perceive this as a failure of government policy and advocate government negotiations with Chinese companies to give Pakistani companies a fair share of their home market. At the same time, they argue Pakistan should increase favorable trade with China and find a place for its goods in Chinese markets because it is an economic hub not only in the region but also in the whole world.

11% sub themes were under the “Growth & Development” theme, whereas 10% were of the “Risks & Uncertainty” theme. This indicates the articles presented both positive and negative ideas about Chinese projects in Pakistan. Although these projects are important for the growth and development of the country, the sheer size and ambition of the Belt and Road Initiative creates many doubts and uncertainties about its success.

China is known as Pakistan’s “iron brother” and has supported Pakistan on many occasions when Pakistan’s economy was very weak and unstable. To take a recent example, China provided financial assistance to help Pakistan stave off bankruptcy in 2018. 6% of the “Aid & Support” theme shows China’s care for Pakistan.

About 5% of themes discuss the trade tensions between America and China. Donald Trump’s protectionist policies have made trouble for all its big trading partners. The high tariffs imposed from both sides has led to trade war between the U.S. and China. In these Editorials both countries are urged to negotiate a way out of this trade war, otherwise it is feared the tension could lead to military confrontation.

5.2.4 Management & Administration

The following presents the management and administration related themes and sub themes.

Table 7. Management & Administration themes and sub themes

<i>Management & Administration</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Transparency Issues</i>	106	39%
<i>Planning & Development</i>	81	30%
<i>Local's Concerns</i>	31	12%
<i>Check & Balance</i>	23	9%
<i>Dispute Resolution Mechanism OR Fraud</i>	17	6%
<i>Bad Governance</i>	11	4%
<i>Total</i>	269	100%

Under the “Management & Administration” theme, the sub theme of “Transparency Issues” is 39%. This problem is a big one, because Pakistani media has been very vocal on government affairs for the last two decades at least and has come to expect full public disclosure from officials. Since the initiation of CPEC in Pakistan, the government has not been forthcoming in revealing details of the agreements between China and Pakistan. Angered with the feeling it has been left out of the loop, sometimes the media exaggerates the extent and implications of this issue, which causes doubts and uncertainty among the common people. Government officials defend their stance with the argument that the Chinese government wants to keep details secret because CPEC’s enemies will generate controversy out of anything they can find. Generating acrimony in this way discredits the CPEC project, even when the details that its opponents seize upon are completely irrelevant or misinterpreted. Editorials generally argue that the government should realize that China and Pakistan are two different countries with different governance systems. While China can keep the details confidential, they argue Pakistan cannot, because of its democratic norms. Keeping the details hidden creates suspicions and mistrust, which also discredits CPEC, therefore through mutual consensus, they argue both countries should develop some kind of mechanism to address this transparency issue.

The second most used theme in this series is “Planning & Development”, making 30% of the total. This is because of the many projects under CPEC related to planning and development. One thing to note is that not all the “Planning & Development” themes are used in positive frames. Pakistani media is often very critical of CPEC projects and complains about perceived flaws openly. Similar trends are observed in these Editorials as well. For instance, a very common complaint about CPEC projects is the accusation that planners and administrators are withholding important information or are vague on the details relevant to the projects.

Next is the “Locals’ Concerns” 12%. There is a resentment among residents of some areas about CPEC projects. Baluchistan and Gilgit Baltistan are two areas rich in minerals in Pakistan strategically pivotal for CPEC, but with impoverished and hitherto neglected local populations. Right now, there are many development and infrastructure projects going on in these areas but the locals have not yet seen any share of the benefits to come from this. Their concern is that the governments and commercial stakeholders involved in this development will exploit the region at the expense of the inhabitants and that they will not be given their fair share of the wealth their land will generate, and in this way they will continue to live in poverty with a government that continues to ignore their grievances. “Bad Governance” with 4% indicates that the editorials reflect the general perception that the government has failed to be accountable and provide for the locals in areas of CPEC and also the Chinese workers in those areas. For instance, the coastal port city of Gwadar which is the central hub of the CPEC, still lacks running drinking water. Power outages are still common in these areas. These are some basic necessities locals and the Chinese workers have had to do without.

“Check & Balance” 9%, discuss that Pakistan should be vigilant while dealing with its much stronger and more experienced Chinese counterparts. When it comes to dealing and negotiating the CPEC projects, China has always got an upper hand and its companies and officials bargain for the better deals and concessions as compared to their Pakistani counterparts. Pakistan should learn to deal with China on equal terms, because the success of CPEC must benefit both, therefore Pakistan should not be afraid of arguing for a fair deal from China. Pakistan should revisit some of the already signed expensive or unfair deals which are far greater in favor of China than Pakistan. Another thing to be noted by the Pakistani officials and companies is that the Chinese are

very strict with their work ethics and professionalism, Pakistanis should learn this from the Chinese and try to keep pace with them, otherwise Pakistan would suffer losses.

“Dispute Resolution Mechanism” 6% indicates that when many companies of two different countries work together on a mass level, there can be conflicts between them, which if not resolved in time can escalate to higher levels. Such conflicts have been pointed out in these Editorials; they argue the government should make some kind of dispute resolution mechanism for resolving this issue.

5.2.5 Defense & Security

The following is a discussion of the Defense and Security related themes and sub themes.

Table 8. Defense & Security themes and sub themes

<i>Defense & Security</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Strategic Alliance</i>	30	26%
<i>Law & Order Situation</i>	23	20%
<i>Cross Border Conflicts</i>	18	16%
<i>Security Concerns</i>	16	14%
<i>Terrorism</i>	15	13%
<i>Regional Disputes</i>	8	7%
<i>Security Cost</i>	5	4%
<i>Total</i>	117	100%

The U.S. advocates American interests first, and balks when other countries claim they also have the right to do what is best for themselves in conflict with U.S. interests. The U.S.’s long list of criticisms, accusations, threats and demands on Pakistan have been humiliating for Pakistan’s global standing in the world. This hostile rhetoric, compounded by sanctions and growing support of Pakistan’s main regional enemy India, has made Pakistanis come to feel that the U.S. is not a trustworthy ally anymore. The U.S. has never respected and acknowledged Pakistani efforts in the War on Terror and has generally been unsympathetic, critical and unilateral in its actions in Pakistan. Its recent support of India against Pakistan has led to it losing a strong ally in Pakistan.

“Strategic Alliance” is the most used sub theme under “Defense & Security” i.e. 26%. From its earliest days, Pakistan has been dependent on U.S. support against India as its proxy in the Cold War. But since the early 2000s Pakistan has started shifting its dependence from the U.S. towards the Chinese through making a strategic alliance with China. Since then they have worked together on joint ventures and completed many projects. JF-17 Thunder, Pakistan’s state of the art aircraft, is the most prominent example of Pakistani and Chinese cooperation. Both countries have been working together on different projects which will make them both strong enough to mutually tackle any external threat. This is evident from the coverage of the Editorials’ “Strategic Alliance” theme.

“Cross Border Conflicts” 16% and “Regional Disputes” 7% indicate the regional tensions between the countries bordering China and Pakistan, such as Afghanistan, Iran, India, North Korea and the countries in the South China Sea Region. The rivalry of the US and India against China has brought massive changes in the foreign policy of both countries. The US-India alliance in containment of China has brought both the countries together. This alliance has given the Indian regime a free hand to step-up its suppression of Jammu and Kashmir through violence and brutalities against the Kashmiri people. Kashmir is the pivot of all major disputes in the region where three nuclear powers are at conflict. Cross-border tensions in the region are a constant threat and this unrest makes it an unsuitable environment for any kind of business and trade. China is the biggest beneficiary of peace and stability in the region because only with these can the Belt and Road Initiative go through this region. The editorials have shown China in the Cooperation frames when it comes to the Cross-Border Conflicts.

“Law & Order Situation” 20% and “Terrorism” 13% concern China’s relevance to this issue because peace and stability, in Pakistan in particular and in the region in general, is very important for the success of CPEC. Both countries are determined to overcome tensions in the region. To a large extent the situation has got better as compared to the past but there is still room for improvement. There are still hotspots and flare ups, but mutual cooperation and strong determination can overcome all kinds of hurdles and make the CPEC a success.

“Security Concerns” 14%, discuss several security issues that have been discussed in the editorials, especially those related to the CPEC project which is under different kinds of security threats, and China shows its concern over any security lapse related to the CPEC because China is also the biggest stake holder in it alongside Pakistan. Other security concerns are related to the tension between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir issue which could be a trigger point for a disaster not only for the two countries but also for CPEC and China. Such vulnerability can be exploited by the rival forces, mostly the western countries, against CPEC which can be detrimental for China and Pakistan. To avoid this and other cyber security related issue China and Pakistan initiated a secure line which would cater the two countries needs in cyber space, and make them independent of western countries’ internet connections.

“Security Cost” 4% involves the concern that the security cost is very high but is recognized to be an essential element of the CPEC. To defeat CPEC’s resourceful and industrious opponents, editorials often argue Pakistan should not shy away from spending on and bearing the security cost because national security should be a priority for any government regardless of the requirements and projected outcomes of investment projects like CPEC.

5.2.6 Other Themes

From here onwards, some other major themes and their sub themes are analyzed and discussed in detail.

Table 3. Miscellaneous themes and sub themes

<i>Other Themes & Their Sub Themes</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Politics & Internal Affairs</i>	41	31%
<i>FATF & IMF</i>	36	27%
<i>Environment & Health</i>	28	21%
<i>Human Rights</i>	23	17%
<i>Arts & Culture</i>	6	4%
<i>Total</i>	134	100%

“Politics & Internal Affairs” 31%, presents the themes related to the internal politics of the two countries. There is a trend in Pakistani media not to discuss the politics or internal matters of China much. The same trend is observed in these editorials. Generally, in the subthemes of “Politics & Internal Affairs” they discuss the politics and internal affairs of Pakistan which are directly and indirectly affecting China and CPEC.

Sub themes such as “Political Scoring” describes how CPEC has been used for the political maneuvering by different political parties for their own political agendas. This can cause damage to public confidence and trust in China which sees CPEC as the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative. Editorials are so involved in Pakistan’s party politics that they rarely acknowledge that in future CPEC will become the backbone of Pakistan’s economy, and therefore should not be used for petty political gains.

In Pakistan the multi-party-political system always keeps its politics in turmoil because of huge disparities in society and the way the different parties use them to whip up unrest. Harsh allegations of election rigging, corruption, and bad governance issues have resulted in mass protests lasting many days, the longest of which lasted approximately four months. The topic of “Political Instability” shows China’s concerns over the political instability in Pakistan. China is a major stakeholder in Pakistan’s stability and always supports a peaceful environment in Pakistan where both countries can move forward with mutual cooperation and work for CPEC success. Hitherto China has been very unlike the U.S. in seeking to avoid interfering in Pakistan’s domestic political affairs and it has not been accused of this much by the Pakistani media.

“FATF & IMF” 27%, discuss the themes related to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the International Monetary Funds (IMF). These two organization play a vital role in manipulating Pakistan’s sovereignty through lending loans to support Pakistan’s poor economy and the tough conditions of FATF. Pakistan’s growing ties with China has brought the U.S. to the realization that its leverage on Pakistan is declining day by day. But FATF and IMF are the tools through which the U.S. can still control Pakistan to some extent. America knows that it benefits from having Pakistan as an ally in the region but it is losing it because of tough and unfriendly policies towards Pakistan.

The sub themes like “Doubts on Chinese Loans” and the IMF’s “Demands on CPEC details”, discuss the effects of the U.S.’s use of the IMF to leverage and pressurize Pakistan to disclose the details of agreements between China and Pakistan. The IMF is under U.S. control because it is the biggest funder of the IMF. Some editorials speculate that China sees the IMF demands on the CPEC details as an American tool to sabotage CPEC.

FATF is another tool that threatens Pakistan over terrorism and money laundering issues. Pakistan’s stance on this is that Pakistan itself is the victim of terrorism and there are foreign elements involved in terrorist activities against Pakistan. But India also claims false flag terrorist operations in India were carried out by Pakistan, for which India could not provide solid evidence. Yet Pakistan is under constant threat of FATF sanctions. FATF demands include the ban on a few Pakistani based organizations and control on money laundering has been met by the Pakistani authorities. The sub theme “China’s Pressure on Pakistan” indicates that China encourages Pakistan to meet the FATF demands so that it could get clearance from the FATF. China does not want Pakistan to be in a weak position on these issues on the international level. A free and strong Pakistan suits China. Therefore, China provides financial assistance to Pakistan so that it might not need to go to the IMF again for more bailout packages. The sub theme “China’s Bailout in IMF” discuss all the topics involved in this.

“Environment & Health” 21%, mostly consist of the environment and health related themes and sub themes. Although Pakistan is not a developed country and does not contribute much to global pollution and climate change, it is among the countries suffering most from the effects of global warming. Large countries like the U.S., China and India are among the top countries responsible for global warming. While the U.S. does not adhere to the stipulations of the Paris accord, China has agreed to uphold it: to reduce its carbon emission and help improve climate change conditions through using alternative energy sources.

Sub themes such as “Carbon Emission”, “Pollution” and “Climate Change” discuss these issues. Some articles are concerned about the coal power projects of CPEC because they argue that China displays double standards in working on coal power projects in Pakistan when it knows they are harmful to the environment and China itself has been converting to alternative environmentally friendly energy plants. Another sub theme “Disease” discusses the health-related issues caused by different factors, pollution being one of them. Pakistan is a victim of a great many toxic diseases and pandemics, some of which cross borders to and from China.

“Human Rights” 17%, consists of human right issues. But unlike western media which covers all kinds of issues on perceived violations of Human Rights in China with high frequency, Pakistani media gives little coverage with indirect criticism to these issues. The same pattern is observed in the Pakistani editorials. The sub themes such as “Capital Punishment”, “Freedom of Speech & Censorship” and “Authoritarian Regime” concern China’s internal affairs. “Human Persecution” themes concern the Human Rights issues outside China, where China is alleged to support such acts. For instance, the Human Rights violations in Myanmar are condemned by the whole world but China notably supports the stance of the Myanmar government. Myanmar’s human rights violations against the Muslim minority is seen very negatively in all Muslim majority countries including Pakistan. China’s support of Myanmar’s government in such acts is perceived negatively in Pakistan. The editorials have consistently condemned China over this issue. “Minorities Issue” and “Ethnic Disputes” in China with its government are also among the very few sub themes discussed in the editorials.

“Arts & Culture” 4%, present the arts and culture related themes, but they are the least discussed themes in the Editorials. Pakistan and China are so culturally different that there are relatively few newsworthy high-profile cross-cultural exchanges between them. “People to People Connectivity” and “Sports” area are the few sub themes of Arts & Culture. Sport coverage generally does not touch upon China much as China and Pakistan have vastly different sporting cultures.

6. Conclusion

Through the extensive analysis of the editorials the researcher has come to the conclusion that Pakistani media is vocal, blunt and straightforward in reporting national and international issues. This is also manifested in the reportage of the editorials of this study, which criticized the government on China and BRI related issues. This opposition to the government line might be due to the ownership and affiliation of Pakistan’s English press being closely tied to American and other Western financial interests and media conglomerates. The interests of these foreign owners’ conflict with those of the Pakistani government and its BRI-friendly stance. They might be exercising their influence on Pakistani media through ownership as well as the cultural hegemony of American soft-power to set the agenda of Pakistan’s domestic political discourse.

The editorials openly criticized the BRI transparency issues. The Pakistani government has always enjoyed close

relations with China, but the criticism of BRI related issues in the editorials is a phenomenon of national interest. Pakistani editorials, in contrast to the diplomatic amity between Pakistan and China, have highlighted the issues of transparency, risks, uncertainty, bad management, debt burden, unequal opportunities and many other issues. The element of national interest is frequently found in the editorials. Yet it would be an oversimplification to infer from the generally critical reception of BRI in Pakistani editorials that they thereby oppose the government, are advocating Pakistan's withdrawal from BRI negotiations and are trying to undermine the project. To express doubts and concerns, raise critical questions and expose omissions from government announcements plays an important role in Pakistan's public-policy formulation.

In their highly complex negotiations with their Chinese counterparts, Pakistani politicians and diplomats can make use of the data, calculations and forecasts of the journalists in the editorials and can contribute editorials themselves. Pakistani politicians make use of Pakistani media as a bell-weather for public opinion. It may also be the case that Pakistani government officials have already strategically leaked information or voiced opinions to journalists as a means of influencing the negotiations. Sharing information with the media can offer a tempting option for Pakistani officials if they feel their concerns are not being listened to by their Chinese counterparts because the fear of a scandal and provoking a backlash from the public can put pressure on the Chinese politicians to temper plans that might not be well-received by Pakistan's notoriously volatile general-public. Whether or not any Pakistani diplomats have succumbed to this temptation, the awareness that Pakistan's unfriendly media has proven to be quite adept at whipping up public unrest in the past, must be a constant concern of the Chinese policy-makers that they must factor into their plans. It was certainly one of the main reasons for the Chinese to insist upon secrecy of negotiations in the first place. This fear of angering the people through provoking Pakistani politicians to use the media on the part of the Chinese planners does not have the sole effect of hindering BRI negotiations. It can also have beneficial effects for the BRI in its most politically sensitive localities of ethnic tension and political strife. In these localities public discontent is relatively easy for the media to transform into destabilizing protests and violence and it is in precisely these localities that BRI promises the most in terms of poverty alleviation. These are the localities where the Chinese financiers must be the most careful to make sure that their investments benefit the local people and these are the places where the local people need it most.

Another important finding is that the democratic system of Pakistan gives the right to freedom of speech to everyone in the society, including the media. This can be seen from the 40 % of "Concern" frames meaning somewhat negative frames about BRI, despite the importance of the BRI for Pakistan and friendly relations of the two countries. Pakistan's government does not censor hostile opinions expressed in the press.

The editorials are critical in the "Economy" and "Management & Administration" related themes over the CPEC project. They seem to complain over transparency issues, management issues and debt and trade deficit related issues among many others. The reason behind this is that the already weak economic condition of Pakistan cannot bear more mismanagement and the debt burden of the CPEC project. Pakistani journalists are right to be worried about anything which might add to Pakistan's debt level. However, in the present case, a good argument has been made that participation in BRI could be Pakistan's only means of escaping its debt burden hitherto. In their focus on the risks of further leveraging the economy the critical editorials exploit their privileged status as observers and neither remind their readers that the current situation is unsustainable for Pakistan, nor point out any alternative means of getting on top of the country's debts. It is not as if any other options for economic growth present themselves to Pakistan now. By refusing BRI Pakistan would be closing the door to all future economic cooperation with its closest diplomatic and economic ally China, the engine of growth of the world's economy. It is an opportunity too good to refuse. It is perhaps because the only alternative, an attempted rapprochement with the USA, is so ludicrous that the editorials seem so willing to express their doubts about BRI. As the editors must know that nothing they say about it could deter the government from its present course of BRI cooperation they know they can afford to be more liberal and savage with their language. Through highlighting these issues, they may fulfil their journalistic duties towards the nation. Thus, journalistic norms also seemed to be followed by the editors in this case. It is also the case that there are a range of opinions expressed in the editorials such that an article which contains a focus on overwhelmingly negative themes might just express a certain negative bias due to its specific focus. That is, for example, an editor might regard BRI in a generally favorable light but merely lament the secrecy of the negotiations. This editor might write an article which lauds BRI in general but 90% of its contents are focused on this one unsatisfactory issue with transparency. This focus would skew the data this article has collected for a reading implying opposition to BRI even though this opposition to BRI was solely focused upon one feature of it. While this kind of bias might influence the margins of the majority negative frames for BRI, nevertheless I think it cannot statistically account for the fact of

the majority itself and in that sense, I stand by my data. The minority of positive frames for BRI in the sample is also not to be discounted, it amounts to quite a lot of the writing in the study sample.

Hence, this paper has found that despite the close relation of China and Pakistan, and the importance of the Belt and Road Initiative for the two countries, Pakistani media highlights and supports the BRI project, through extensive reporting. But at the same time, they do not hesitate to highlight the problems and issues related to China and BRI project.

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