

Media Framing and Foreign Policy: A Case Study of the Coverage of Sino-Pak Relations in Global Media

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Abstract

Foreign policy is considered as one the important factors in media framing of various national and international issues and events. Building on the existing literature regarding the relationship between media framing and foreign policy, the present study investigates that how leading American, Indian, Chinese and Pakistani press frame Sino-Pak relations, especially the Chinese President, Xi Jinping's visit of April 2015 to Pakistan in the backdrop of CPEC. Content analyses of the selected newspapers for a period of two months i.e., March 20, 2015 to May 20, 2015 indicated that China Daily and daily Dawn gave more coverage to Sino-Pak relations than The Times of India and The New York Times. Furthermore, it was found that The Times of India and The New York Times focused more on the 'conflict' frame whereas Pakistani and Chinese press emphasized more the 'economic, responsibility and human interest' frames.

Key words: Foreign policy, media framing, Sino-Pak relations,

Introduction

News media are important social institutions that interpret the world for audiences and hence are influential in changing the perception of people. According to critical media scholars, news media are not silent disseminator of information rather they are important agents to promote and influence foreign policies of states.¹ Presenters of political economy theory (in mass communication) have long argued that news media are agents of status quo and since corporate media is usually controlled by economic elites. They also view that media, economic elites and

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governments usually have commonality of interests especially in international arena. In fact, governments in different parts of the world invest hugely in media sector to promote friendly relations with each other.²

Existing literature on the nexus between news media and foreign policy indicates that media could play a significant role in achieving the foreign policy goals of a country if media are properly utilized. Mass media could engender supportive as well as antagonistic sentiments among audiences that would have policy repercussions³. According to researchers, protests against the Iraq War were widely covered in the European media, which pressurized different governments to frame their foreign policies accordingly.⁴

Media are considered important institutions/ agents of public diplomacy that promote national interests at international arena. Scholars view a correlation between national media and foreign policy of a country, and usually media follow the foreign policy initiatives.⁵ Bohensky and Leitch, and Ramprasad and Mitroff have examined the nexus between the US news media and foreign policy initiatives and found that media discourse was indexed to the political elites.⁶ It is viewed that media play due role in formulation of foreign policy of a country and journalists follow the dictates of national foreign policy, especially during wartimes or when national interest of the country are threatened.⁷ The American mass media, which are considered more professional and liberal amongst the contemporary news mass media of the world, supported American government policy in Persian Gulf War without questioning Bush Administration's propaganda campaign against Saddam Hussain. They portrayed Saddam very negatively and did not investigate objectively the causes of the war and American invasion of Iraq. Generally it is believed that media are maneuvered by states for the achievement of foreign policy goals particularly during conflict and crisis times. This is the elitist approach.⁸

The elite-driven model views media as a tool in the hands of powerful political, especially government and business elites for serving their predefined interests.⁹ Media follow elite perspectives to shield the so-called national interest determined by the ruling elite. This model suggests that media help the government stimulate an artificial consent on policies and ensure support for the decisions made by the elite politicians. Likewise, according to the Bennett's indexing hypothesis journalists try to index news according to political agenda of the ruling elite. Journalists heavily

depend on the official sources that lead to little accountability of the government. According to this model, Journalists willingly index news and abandoned objectivity to get curry with the elites.¹⁰

No doubt previous studies have found out relationship between foreign policy of a country and framing in its media coverage of different issues/events nevertheless the present study investigate media framing of different countries of the same event but under different foreign policies' perspectives. The present study is designed to investigate that how the selected newspapers of Pakistan, China, India and America frame the bilateral relations between China and Pakistan, particularly when the relationship between the two countries (China and Pakistan) have further boosted with execution of the multi-billion dollar project, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The study was also aimed to examine the dominant themes/issues and frames in the overall coverage of the selected newspapers of the four different countries regarding the coverage of Pak-China relationship in the backdrop of CPEC. It was hypothesized that:

H1: Daily Dawn and China Daily will give more coverage to CPEC than The New York Times and Times of India.

H2: Framing of Chinese president's visit to Pakistan will significantly differ in American and Indian press from Pakistani and Chinese press.

The Sino-Pak relationship, which is strengthening more and more in the wake of CPEC, has attracted huge media attention in the regional and foreign news media. Chinese President, Xi Jinping visited Pakistan from 20-21 April, 2015 and signed accords worth US dollar \$ 46 billion as Chinese investment in Pakistan for building roads, rails, power plants under the CPEC. On this occasion, the two sides also inked agreements regarding defense cooperation, nuclear cooperation, security cooperation, space and maritime cooperation, and enhancing their bilateral trade.

The researchers designed the present study to investigate that how the leading newspapers of different countries framed Pak-China relationship, particularly in the backdrop of Chinese President's latest visit to Pakistan. For this purpose the researchers selected leading English newspapers of China, Pakistan, USA, and India. Rationale of selection of American and Indian newspapers among rest of the countries of the world was very obvious. America is the sole super power of the world whereas India is

neighboring both Pakistan and China, and is an important country of the region (South Asia).¹¹ Although the U.S formulates its China policy on an issue-by-issue basis but the US administration feels shaky of the Chinese continuously expanding business and trade tentacles around the globe.¹² The new National Security Strategy (NSS) of USA shows Donald Trump's government uneasiness with a rising China. The NSS indicates that America is not feeling good with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and with CPEC. To dilute China's influence in the region the new NSS urges for strengthening strategic relationship with India and supporting a leadership role of India in the Indian Ocean and the region.¹³ America recognizes China as a potential threat to change the international order.¹⁴

Indian relationships with both China and Pakistan have been strained for decades. It has even fought wars against both Pakistan and China. There are frequent cross-border firing between India and Pakistan, especially at the Line of Control (LoC). India and USA have a common interest in working against the CPEC. India is worried about the economic and military development, and its growing influence in the region. To incapacitate CPEC the USA, in collaboration with India, is planning to initiate work on projects. The Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC) and reviving the New Silk Road Plan is the glaring examples.¹⁵

On the other hand Pakistan and China are enjoying exemplary relationship. Rather the Sino-Pak relationship can be modeled for good bilateral relationships between other countries of the world.¹⁶

Methodology

Content analysis technique was employed by the researchers. All the news stories, editorial and columns that were printed in The New York Times (USA), The Times of India (India), China Daily (China) and daily Dawn (Pakistan) related to the bilateral relations between China and Pakistan from March 20, 2015 to May 20, 2015 were selected for analysis. The stories were obtained from the Lexis-Nexis by entering the key words "CPEC and Pakistan and China". All the items related to bilateral relations between China and Pakistan in the selected newspapers, particularly relating to CPEC, strategic cooperation, economy, Chinese influence over Pakistan and 'Pak-China relations as threat to India' were the topics/themes/issues of the present study.

While using Semetko and Valkenburg's model the researchers used conflict, human interest, economic consequences

and attribution of responsibility as frames of the study. Other variables of this study were 'newspapers', 'number of articles', themes/ issues. The themes/ issues of the study were CPEC, Strategic cooperation, Economy, China influence over Pakistan, and regional threat to India.¹⁷ The researchers determined the presence or absence of following frames:

Conflict

The absence or presence of this frame in the content was determined by some indicators. The presence of conflict frame in this study was marked if the story suggested: (i) Indian concern on Pak-China military alliance, (ii) that Chinese investment in CPEC will endanger Indian sovereignty, (iii) that China's investment in CPEC will be a threat to regional peace, (iv) that CPEC will lead to military race between Pakistan and India, (v) that India should initiate measures to neutralize the impact of CPEC, (vi) India-America alliance to neutralize the impact of CPEC, (vii) American apprehensions of Pak-China relationship for global peace, (viii) American apprehension of losing its supremacy and (ix) confusion of opposition parties of Pakistan over government stance on CPEC route.

Human interest

The presence/absence of this frame was decided on that whether story suggests : (i) promotion of interaction between China and Pakistan, (ii) CPEC will provide opportunity to make South Asia, a cooperative region, (iii) feelings of care, friendship cultural harmony and mutual understanding between the two countries.

Similarly, the researchers identified economic consequences frame in the selected content if the story mentions: expansion of trade routes for China, (ii) economic development for Western region of Xinjiang, (iii) economic development of Pakistan due to CPEC, (iv) CPEC will provide advanced infrastructure to Pakistan, (v) Chinese investment will overcome energy crisis of Pakistan, (vi) employment rate in Pakistan after execution of CPEC (vii) economic cost of the CPEC, (viii) CARs (Central Asian Republicans) will get access to the world economy through CPEC, (ix) Chinese President visit to Pakistan will prove helpful in economic development of Pakistan and China, (x) the visit will prove helpful in economic development of the region, (xi) that the visit will prove helpful in global economic development, (xii) that the boost in Pak-China economic relation will affect Indian economy, (xiii) that CPEC will negatively affect

American economy, (xiv) that the visit will boost both Chinese and Pakistani economy.

Responsibility frame

The researchers marked the presence/ absence of the responsibility frame in the content if the story suggested something regarding the protection of CPEC project, China shows tells regarding antiterrorism measures in Pakistan, either Pakistani or Chinese leadership narrate both countries are united in the fight against terrorism, Pakistan will provide protection to Chinese engineers and workers, China's appreciation for anti-terrorism efforts of Pakistan, Pakistan's intention for regional peace building, and China's intention for regional peace building.

Frequency distributions and cross tables were developed through SPSS. Chi Square test was used to study the importance of difference among the particular newspapers of the research. The P value for this analysis was taken as equal to 0.05. Each item was coded as "Yes =1" and "No =2".

Results and discussion

The researchers first examined the extent of coverage given to bilateral relations between China and Pakistan in the selected newspapers of Pakistan, China, India and America. Table-1 shows the degree of respective coverage of each selected newspaper given to Sino-Pak relations during the specified period.

Daily "Dawn" is leading in the coverage by publishing (n = 49 or 51.6%), followed by China Daily (n=30 or 31.6%), Times of India published (n=10 or 10.5%) and The New York Times (6= 0r 6.3%). It was hypothesized (H1) in the present study that Dawn and China Daily will give more coverage to bilateral relations between China and Pakistan than The New York Times and Times of India. Table-1 shows that as compared the New York Times and Times of India, daily Dawn and China Daily gave more coverage to Sino-Pak relations. Dawn and China Daily published 79 stories collectively in the two-month time while in comparison the New York Times and Times of India together run just 16 stories in the same period. The result is in the hypothesized direction (H1), and hence H1 is supported.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of number of stories in the selected newspapers

News papers	Frequency	percentage
The New York Times	06	06.3%
The Times of India	10	10.5%
Dawn	49	51.6%
China Daily	30	31.6%
Total	95	100

Regarding framing of the Pak-China relations in the coverage of the selected newspapers the researchers assumed that framing of the bilateral relations between China and Pakistan will significantly differ in American and Indian press from Pakistani and Chinese press.

Table-2 given below indicates that selected newspapers of the four countries used significantly different framing in their coverage of Sino-Pak relationships. As compared to Pakistani and Chinese newspapers, American and India press emphasized more on the conflict frame. This result is also in the hypothesized direction.

Table2: Newspaper-wise framing of Sino-Pak relations

Newspaper id	Frames				Total
	Conflict	Human interest	Economic	Responsibility	
New york times	9(27.02%)	-	15(6.17%)	9(12.6%)	33
Time of India	18(48.6%)	-	4(1.64%)	6(8.4%)	28
Dawn	8(21.6%)	30(35.71%)	135(55.5%)	32(45.07%)	205
China Daily	2(5.4%)	54(64.2%)	89(36.6%)	24(33.8%)	169
Total	37	84	243	71	435
Chi-square	43.271	17.507	122.525	35.816	
Sig.	P .025	P .001	P .000	P .057	

Discussion

The overall coverage of the bilateral relations between China and Pakistan was more in the selected Chinese and Pakistani press as the number of stories was significantly greater. Both countries covered Sino-Pak relations and Chinese President's visit to Pakistan in positive manner by using "Economic consequences" and "Human Interest" frames more. These findings corresponded with results of previous studies, which found that media of China and Pakistan make efforts to shape positive image of Sino- Pak relations. On the other hand, as compared Pakistani and Chinese selected newspapers, American and Indian newspapers (The New York Times and Times of India) gave lesser coverage to the Sino-

Pak relations and the “conflict” frame got comparatively more coverage in the New York Times and Times of India.¹⁸

American media also showed concern about Chinese influence over Pakistan. India portrayed Chinese president’s visit to Pakistan as negative and used conflict frame as dominant one in coverage of Sino-Pak relations. These results are also in line with foreign policies of both India and America towards China and Pakistan. Results of the present study confirm findings of previous studies about correlation between media framing and foreign policy of a country.

Such findings cast very serious doubts on news media’s objectivity. The results support the view that news is socially constructed and there are different factors which shape news content.¹⁹ However, this scenario seems more serious when it comes to international media, which are not only important sources of information for audience across the globe rather they are also the trend-setters for local media in all parts of the world.

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