

Framing of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Elite Press of Afghanistan and Iran(2015-2017)

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Abstract

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project is considered as the game changer for not only Pakistan but for whole region as well. It is a project of connectivity and infrastructure building to enhance the indigenous, regional as well as global connectivity. Iran and Afghanistan are the nearest neighboring countries of Pakistan to the CPEC. They also have vested interests in CPEC due to its geo-strategic importance. This study discusses the framing of CPEC in cross-national comparative fashion in press of Iran and Afghanistan. Iran and Afghanistan being territorial neighbors shares certain interests, reservations and apprehensions related to CPEC. Two English newspapers of Afghanistan and Iran were selected and all the news and editorials related to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor were collected for analysis for the period of 2015-2017. Finding reveals that there are significant differences in the framing of CPEC. Afghan press heavily focused on development as well as inequality frames. Coverage of CPEC in Iranian press is minimal and neutral. Moreover, there slant and use of sources of information also varies. Afghanistan covered it favorable as well as unfavorable manners while the coverage in Iranian press was found neutral. Moreover, framing of CPEC varies over the time in the press of Iran and Afghanistan. Findings imply that Pakistan should made efforts to develop better relations with Iran by considering Chabhar as sister port to Gwadar rather than rival. Study also suggests that policy making is needed to reduce the negative stance and communication differences of Afghan press towards CPEC.

Keywords: Framing, Sino-Pak relations, Cross-national framing, Content analysis, News sources

Introduction

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a framework to enhance regional integration. CPEC is a positive move towards the development of the whole region including Afghanistan, India, Iran and Central Asian Republics. This mega project will enhance geographical connectivity with improved transportation system that will bring more collaboration at individual, academic and government level (Alam, Li, & Baig, 2019). This will result in rise of economic activities hence will enhance trade and businesses, producing and sharing resources that will make this region more developed and prosperous and will usher the new era of harmony and development (Government of Pakistan, 2014). The geopolitical location of Pakistan is very unique and important (Sahir & Qureshi, 2007). Pakistan is the gateway of trade activities to Central Asia, South Asia, East Asia and West Asia. There are giant economies of China and India as the neighboring countries of Pakistan. However, Pakistan did not ever take any benefit of its geo-strategic location to gain economic advantages.

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.It is the geo-strategic location of Pakistan which has always been a central necessity and of great importance for international powers as well as the target of international conspiracies (Hassain, 2014). CPEC could be extended to the countries of Central Asia, Afghanistan, West Asia and India. The landlocked central Asian countries having great potential of natural resources can access regional as well as other countries of the world through CPEC which will provide an opportunity to boost their economies.

In this age of globalization no country can remain intact with the development and progress of other countries especially in case of neighboring countries. The pace of development can be enhanced by mutual cooperation and sharing of resources. This development can be made more rapid if the neighboring countries join hands for mutual sharing of resources and providing access to each other as it is somewhat cast effective and more useful. CPEC is not limited to just China and Pakistan rather it is a part of bigger plan to link the world in a network hence it definitely have potential impact on neighboring countries of Pakistan. Due to geo-strategic position of Pakistan and disagreement over several issues with the neighboring countries it is a matter of utmost importance to weigh their opinion and thoughts towards CPEC. Pakistan shares its territorial borders with china, India, Iran and Afghanistan. This paper seeks to evaluate the treatment given by elite press of Afghanistan and Iran to the CPEC during the time period ranging from April 2015 to December 2017.

CPEC is package for regional connectivity and development which is going to unleash endless possibilities for development of Pakistan and the region, hence there are certain concerns and interests of regional countries are attached to this project which should be given importance to make this project a success. Mass media has the power to influence the people's perception toward other countries (McNelly & Izcaray, 1986). There are certain sources of image formation of foreign nations which includes foreign visits, contacts and literature and films and arts etc., but the most significant role is played by the news media due to their regularity, ubiquity and perseverance (Kiouisis & Wu, 2008; McCracken, 1987).

Rationale of the Study

CPEC is one the most ambitious project of development which is going to revolutionize the economic and social sector of Pakistan. The main route of CPEC project is passing through the Pakistani provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. KPK has longest border line with Afghanistan. Historically, and culturally the region has much importance for the stability and socio-economic development of Afghanistan. On the other side, Baluchistan province is linked with border line of Iran. This province has historically and culturally importance for the both countries. Therefore, geo-economic importance of CPEC may have significant effects on these two neighboring countries of Pakistan. Present study is Cross-National Comparative Framing study which will address the framing of this development project and portrayed communication differences in the print media of Iran and Afghanistan. This will lead to understand and properly respond towards hesitations and misunderstandings of neighboring countries related to CPEC. Specific issues and events are often been the subjects of Framing studies while framing of issues across different media and news outlets are also discussed. But comparatively less attention has been paid to cross national comparative framing studies due

to its complexity and challenges (Gharawi, Pardo, & Guerrero, 2009; Vreese, Peter, Semetko, & Claes, 2001). This paper is an attempt to understand the perception and concerns of neighboring countries of Pakistan. This paper is also aimed at highlighting the communication differences and interest of neighboring countries.

Statement of the Problem

The present study is a cross-national comparative study that has been designed to investigate how the elite press of Iran and Afghanistan frames the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. The study will also examine the extent of coverage given to this project in context with the Pakistan-China relations as well as in the wider perspective of the One Belt One Road initiative by the elite press of these countries who have different kind of perception and perspective towards this project due to different kind of interest and motives in the region. This study explores how the news media of neighboring countries used news sources differently to support specific frames of the CPEC coverage, implicating strategic media framing by which news media strategically construct connotation of the events by selecting different types of news sources.

Objectives of the Study

Keeping in view the problem statement discussed above and to measure extent of coverage, perception and perspective towards CPEC and to know the patterns of the frames used as well as selection of sources by the print media of the neighboring countries, the study mainly aims to measure and highlight framing of CPEC in the coverage of newspapers of Iran and Afghanistan. It also aims to compare the framing of CPEC and use of sources of information in Afghan and Iranian press to cover CPEC. Study will also highlight the effects of sources on the framing of CPEC in the newspapers of Iran and Afghanistan.

Research Questions

RQ 1. To what extent CPEC is being covered by the newspapers of Iran and Afghanistan?

RQ 2. Which frames are being used to cover CPEC by the newspapers of Iran and Afghanistan?

RQ 3. Is there any difference in the framing of CPEC among the newspapers of Iran and Afghanistan?

RQ 4. Is there any difference of sources of information among the newspapers of Iran and Afghanistan, which are being used to cover CPEC?

RQ 5. Is there any effect of sources of information on the framing of CPEC by the newspapers of Iran and Afghanistan to cover CPEC?

Literature Review

The mass media of Iran and Afghanistan portray Pakistan differently as Pakistan has speckled bilateral relations history with these countries due to social, cultural, geographical and strategic concerns. Foreign relation and foreign policy considered as an important key player in covering the news about international events and issues (Park, 2003). In the context of international communication framework the news media have increasingly mediated the social reality through the flow of news hence constitution of social reality largely depends upon mass

media (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Lippmann, 1922). Although social media is bridging the geographical boundaries yet people to people interaction among different countries are not that strong hence mass media are considered as the major source of information which can make people aware about their country and foreign relations as well as national images (McNelly & Izcaray, 1986, p. 546). People seek information from news media and this information caused to make beliefs towards others as displayed in the news. Navasky as quoted in Saleem (2007) noted that journalistic approach towards specific region, culture or country determines the development pattern of our national mind.

International issues and events must be reported in such context which represents diverse and objective perspective of that particular issue or event but often it is witness in the arena of international communication that reporting of issues which involves interest of different organizations, groups, communities or countries, the national interest outweighs other factors in process of news framing (Yang, 2003). Those countries got more coverage in the arena of international news flow, who are considered as politically more significant in international affairs (Livingston & Eachus, 1995). Similarly the news coverage tend to upheld the national interest while covering international news rather than the interest and assistance of the country being covered (Wittebols, 1996).

How news media of neighboring countries give coverage to the events and issues of Pakistan depends upon various factors depending upon mutual foreign relation, geo-economic relations, socio-political environment and cultural as well as ideological instances as discussed earlier. As an example in the perspective we can appraise the coverage of Kashmir issue which is one of the most important and vital conflicting point among Pakistan and India. Different countries cover Kashmir movement from different perspectives depending upon their ideological and sociopolitical philosophy. Commenting on this Siraj (2006) argued that while covering news about Pakistan and Kashmir, the tonality of Chinese newspaper often seems in favorable diplomatic terms. He further elaborated the fact by quoting news story from Xinhua which states, "Anti-India sentiment runs deep for majority of Kashmiris", which endorse Pakistan's viewpoint on Kashmir as a territorial dispute as well as enforced occupation by Indian forces over Kashmir while the portrayal of Pakistan by U.S. news media is less favorable (Siraj, 2008).

Pakistan shares geographical border with Iran through its westerns province i.e Baluchistan. Although Pakistan and Iran enjoys friendly relations as both the countries are connected socially, religiously and culturally yet often unusual events caused strains on mutual affairs. Such kind of event like the recent arrest of Kulbhushan Jadhav by the Pakistani forces proved unfavorable and disappointing factor which caused misunderstanding, reservations and strains in the friendly mutual relations as the Kulbhushan Jadhav was using Iranian territory as launching pad for terrorist activities against Pakistan (Khan, 2012). The press system of Iran

is not independent and controlled by the Government hence the coverage of Pakistan in Iranian press seems careful.

Pakistan shares its border with Iran through Baluchistan province which is one of the key components of CPEC. The development of Baluchistan is directly associated with CPEC as the province is not only the socio-cultural gateway of Pak-Iran relations but also often caused distrust due to issues like unlawful trespassing and smuggling, drugs handling, sectarian killing and assassinations. The development of Chabahar Iranian port also portraying growing competition between the Gwader and Chabahar port which aimed to bypass Pakistan for access to landlocked central Asian states.

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an essential component of China's One Belt one Road vision hence special emphasis has been given by the Chinese press to this project. Pakistan and China enjoys cordial bilateral relations and time tested friendship with mutual economic, strategic, and military relations. The media of China is supporting CPEC by disseminating information and eliminating misconceptions about the project.

Theoretical Framework

This study considers framing theory for its theoretical framework. Framing theory has been widely used approach to journalistic research because it does not assume news as a piece of information that is objectively identifiable (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 58) like traditional approaches to content analysis rather it posits that the text of the news correlate with the news consumers' latent understanding and knowledge to create an exclusive message received by the audience (p. 42). Last six decades of mass communication research seems agreed upon the defining news as socially created product rather than a reflection of an objective reality (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 21). Being constructed as a social product, news got influenced by number of social, political, economic, and ideological factors, that leads to a an interesting course of cognitive simplification that is called framing (Akhavan-Majid & Ramaprasad, 1998).

The origin of the Framing theory can be attributed to Walter Lippman and his thesis; "The world outside and the pictures in our heads" (Lippmann, 1922). He was the first scholar to introduce the concept of how the media can construct a simple frame through which the audience can more easily interpret events. The development of Framing as an analytical technique was introduced by Goffman (1974) a renowned social psychologists, Entman (1991) and Gitlin (1980) with the aim to elucidate the mass media's role in defining public issues. With the development of the mass communication as an independent field of study, "framing" is now considered as an established concept in the field of mass communication studies. According to Entman (1993),

"To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal

interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52).

McCombs defines framing in terms of “selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed” (M. McCombs, 1997). The concept of framing draws attention to certain details and perspectives while omitting other variables that are considerably important to societal issues (M. McCombs, 1997). This strengthens the notion that media not only tell the public what to think about, but also how they think about those topics, whether it be through the idea of media framing or agenda setting (M. E. McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 2013). In mass communication framing theory refers to how media present the news stories that shape the mass opinion. Framing is the process of pruning the news stories to mold it to meet with the requirements of the sender (Scheufele, 1999).

Cross National News Framing

China Pakistan Economic Corridor invited great interest from the neighboring countries of Pakistan due to its geo-strategic significance hence their media put great emphasis on news related to this project. There are number of studies conducted on framing of other countries which reveals that multiple factors are responsible for framing the image of other countries in the press (Saleem, 2008). Foreign relations, territorial conflicts, trade and ideological differences play an important role while framing news about specific country.

Dependency on mass media for information about international affairs resulted in its high importance determining mass perceptions of other countries (Brewer, Graf, & Willnat, 2003). CPEC is an interesting event to study the international news coverage, as using an event of mutual interest for investigating framing in the news provides effective measures for cross-national comparative framing which would be impossible with routine affairs of domestic nature (Vreese et al., 2001).

While covering the international issues, the media often support their governments and protect the interests of their countries hence frame issues in such way that did not harm the policies and national interest. Media’s selection and presentation of news makes certain aspects relevant while others irrelevant to those countries that receive the news (Chang, Jian, & Chih-Hsien, 1994). Clausen (2003) opined that while reporting international news, journalists tried to ‘localize’ the news story by to make it more relevant and interesting for national audience. He studied the coverage of 9/11 attacks in world media, focusing on the news communication strategies, he pointed out that journalists from different countries reported this event differently to related this event with the local cultural framework as news and video footage about were similar yet media houses from different countries put their national spin to localize and signify the news story. National interest frames often being employed to explain an incident or issue and to make that international event or issue relevant to local audiences (Brewer, 2006).

Framing of news is manner of creating meaning of news by using a set of organizing principles as it is evident from definitions of framing by various scholars (Chyi & McCombs, 2004;

Entman & Herbst, 2001; Reese, Gandy Jr, & Grant, 2001). These organizing principles often got influenced by social structure, ideology and national interest as Yang (2003) stated that these principles cannot be separated from values and ideologies that are socially dominant. These are not only address specific issues but also in harmony with societal values on a macro level. How these macro level values are depicted in framing of news can be effectively discovered by cross-national comparative analysis (Kwon & Moon, 2009). According to H. De Vreese (2001) the major chunk of research in the field of framing remain within the national context hence effect of macro-level principles beyond national boundaries remain neglected area. However, recent years witness rise in studies related to cross-national comparison of news content e.g. (Luther & Zhou, 2005; Tian & Stewart, 2005; Werder & Golan, 2002).

CPEC has socio-economic and geo-strategic significance for the regional countries hence is an ultimate chance to explore framing beyond national settings. The scholars who studies Cross-National news coverage outlined various influencing factors of international media coverage related to an event. Yao (2008) comparatively analyzed US and Chinese national television coverage in the Post- Cold War era, and found that the relative importance of the event regulate the news coverage and not the attributes of the event. The contextual factors are recognized as influential in modeling the world news. These contextual aspects can be political ideology (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Wang, 1992), national interest (Yang, 2003), diplomatic sensitivity (Wang, 1992), history and organizational resources (Chang-ho, Pan, Chan, & So, 2001).

Guo and colleagues proposed a transnational framing analysis model to compare frames across different nations and to provide theoretical guidance for transnational framing study. In this model, they summarized that cultures, ideologies, political positions, and media systems are four factors that drive distinct frames in different nations when cover the same issue (Guo, Holton, & Jeong, 2012). Since the United States and China are the primary economic entities that have major differences in the four factors, cultures, the comparison between the two nations is meaningful to reveal the global application of media frames.

News Sources and Framing in International News Coverage

In the arena of international communication, the selection of sources is a key contributing factor of news framing. The selection of specific news sources plays significant role in framing of an event (Carpenter, 2007). Analyzing the use of news sources in the light of framing is an excellent method to understand meaning making of an international event (Kim & Jahng, 2016). The importance of news sources cannot be undermined in context of international communication as the news sources that shape journalists' understanding of the issue (Seib, 2002). There is comparatively less research available on the association between source use and media framing (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012).

Entman (2007) argued that the thinking of people got modified by political actors who influence how people think about certain issues through the use of framing. In this scenario it is a question of much importance to investigate that 'whose' voices and viewpoints are conveyed in the presentation of such frames in order to comprehend the process of frame construction (Kim & Jahng, 2016). Selections of news sources by the journalists and media houses are associated with the framing of the news. News sources are considered an important

factor of strategic framing to promote favored policies (Entman, 2007) as scholars of communication argued that neglecting the role of source in framing means to ignore the basic power questions (Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Reese, Gandy Jr, Gandy Jr, & Grant, 2001; Vliegthart & Van Zoonen, 2011). Selection of news sources is made to support strategic media framing to strategically develop interpretation of the events by using specific news sources (Kim & Jahng, 2016).

While reporting international issues those sources are being considered which support a specific stance. Official sources are deemed to be credible hence considered as an important factor in news making (Donsbach, 2004; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Iyengar and Simon (1993) analyzed news reports on Gulf War and discovered that more than 50% of news reports originated from official sources. Reliance on official sources although seems credible yet it might result in ignoring the other side of the picture as Kothari (2010) concluded that dependency on officials sources for news and information might resulted in endorsement of their stance and hence ignoring other viewpoints.

Those sources are selected which supports a specific stance as Chang-ho (2004) provided empirical evidence by comparatively analyzing the New York Times, the Arab News, and the Middle East Times related to U.S war with Iraq that those sources were quoted by the US newspapers that exhibit congruence to their perspective Iraq war. According to Gans (1979) as quoted in Strömbäck et al. (2013) “while sources attempt to ‘manage’ the news, putting the best light on themselves, journalists concurrently ‘manage’ the sources in order to extract the information they want.” Sources and Journalists have mandatory relationship as each part needs the other; at the same time, they oftentimes have opposing interests and thus try to develop strategies that will enable them to exercise as much control as possible over, while avoiding being controlled by, the other (Strömbäck et al., 2013).

To study the selection and use of sources in news is of great importance to know how news sources contribute in the selection of frames when reporting on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor by the elite press of Iran and Afghanistan. Hence this study aimed at to explore the differences between these newspapers regarding coverage, frames used and selection of news sources in the coverage of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Methodology

In the arena of communications research, the theory of framing has given birth to framing analysis, a content analysis method in which researchers analyzes the frames embedded in the news texts. In this study, we rest upon the mix method approach as quantitative and qualitative approach is used. Quantitative content analysis is used while to assess the overall frames in the news and editorials the qualitative assessment is made. Mix method approach is suitable for framing analysis as Van Gorp (2007, pp. 72-73) advocates mixed-method approach to frame analysis and emphasize the use of mix method to examine trends in large data sets by application of quantitative techniques, and qualitative techniques to examine subtle framing

effects in smaller data sets. Examining the text through content analysis whether qualitative or quantitative way, helps researchers to gain “new insights” and improves understanding about the issues under study (Krippendorff, 2013). The qualitative assessment of framing can be made through reading of all the news stories to identify the ‘key words, metaphors, concepts and symbols. According to McQuail, “analyzing content through a qualitative strategy is meant to elucidate the quantitative data and to interpret various frames. The application of quantitative and qualitative methods provide an opportunity towards better understanding of the research questions (McQuail, 1987, p. 187).

Content Analysis

Content analysis is often used by the communication scholars to determine the meaning of text and to identify and describe frames. The frame manifests itself in communication content through many ways, such as specific choice of words, exemplars, metaphors, descriptions, arguments, visual effects, the accompanying headlines, and tone of presentation, placement, and the usage of certain words (Gamson, 1988; Myers, Klak, & Koehl, 1996; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). In the field of mass communication, Content Analysis is considered as the general name for the methodology that can be used as a technique to analyze the content of messages (Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 2004). According to Macnamara (2005), content analysis is not only meant to measure aspect of message content rather is a tool that can be used for making inferences about the message context. A message can be interpreted differently by the receiver or the sender of a message; hence it is imperative to understand that a message should have a meaning in the “context of its use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 33). The Content Analysis is aimed at to infer the relevant meaning in the particular context from the symbols from the message.

This study has made a cross-national comparison of the framing of news related to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in the elite press Iran and Afghanistan. The objective of the research is not just to count the number of news, amount of coverage and word frequencies, but also analyze the inherent meanings and the implications of coverage given by the neighboring countries of Pakistan. As this study is cross national in nature and evidence from previous literature supports the argument that content analysis is an effective methodology for making cross-national comparisons and for identification of the differences in coverage and emerging themes and patterns in countries (Browne, 1998; H. De Vreese, 2001; Singh, Zhao, & Hu, 2005).

Fico, Lacy, and Riffe (2008) emphasized the relationship between content analysis and content production: “News content is the product or consequence of those routines, practices, and values, is constructed by news workers, and reflects both the professional cultural of journalism and the larger society” (p.9). By examining news content, researchers could understand antecedent choices journalists and editors made in mass communication and what was happening at the time of their production. From a cultural perspective, examining symbols used in media messages during a given period of time would reflect the dominant culture and ideology of that period, using specific images, messages or themes to clearly reveal antecedent

cultural values (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Hence, we find content analysis relevant and suitable to explore the framing of CPEC in cross national perspectives.

Universe of the Study

To answer the above described research questions and preserve the congruity of the comparative analysis, English-language newspapers from Iran and Afghanistan were selected for the period ranging from April 2015 to December 2017. So, the **Universe** of study is the elite English press of Afghanistan and Iran.

Sample.

The sample is the editorials and news of the selected newspapers. Two English-language newspapers of Iran and Afghanistan were selected for this study.

Sample newspapers.

These newspapers includes; Tehran Times and Iran Daily from Iran, and Afghanistan Times and Daily Outlook Afghanistan from Afghanistan. News and editorials of these newspapers were analyzed from April 2015 to December 2017.

Unit of analysis.

To measure the tone and the use of sources by for the news story, the paragraph is the unit of analysis for every editorial and news related to CPEC during the selected time frame.

Instrument.

While comparing the quantitative and qualitative methods of content analysis and analyzing the definition of various communication scholars it comes to the surface that along with certain differences the major is the predefined codes for quantitative analysis, while the codes emerged in an interactive process of reading and re-reading the communication text in qualitative analysis. Here in this study we used both quantitative as well as qualitative content analysis therefore we developed a coding sheet according to the previous literature on framing studies and with the help of pilot study.

Tone.

The tone of the articles and news stories about CPEC is defined as positive where it the story express complementary and welcoming opinions towards the project. The news story that discusses CPEC with seriousness and highlights the importance of the project is regarded as positive. The paragraphs having specific keywords like development, progress, connectivity or prosperity usually associated with positive tone in relation with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The paragraphs that criticize the project by highlighting unjustified and irrational arguments by keeping in view a specific stance about the project are considered as negative in tone. The negative tone is usually associated with certain keywords like terrorism, regional conflict or regional security. A news story or paragraph which is not judgmental about the CPEC rather based on evidence based facts and justified arguments having covering all aspects of the project is considered as neutral or balanced in tone. The news story or paragraph which does not express favorability towards any side specifically is coded as neutral. News from different sources reflect diverse perspective hence every paragraph is coded and the total numbers of paragraphs with positive, negative and neutral tone were recorded.

Procedures

This study first took deductive approaches to extract main frames by closely examining the sample and reviewing the existing media frames. Then, this study followed an inductive approach to build a codebook based on identified frames, and applied the codebook. This study consider each paragraph of every news story as coding unit because coding every article was commonly used in content analysis (Xu, Yu, Tesso, Dowell, & Wang, 2013) and was enough to define the overall tones and themes (Hogg, Lomicky, & Hossain, 2008).

An inductive approach is used for this study as this approach is quite useful to organize the available data in categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). The categories are not defined a priori for this study, rather developed in a check-and-revise style during the coding process. It is very likely that sets of statements which had originally not been anticipated are found during the coding process (Leifeld, 2012, p. 52).

Inter-coder Reliability

Two graduates from the field of journalism were trained for the coding. Details of coding instructions were shared and discussed. These coders were given 20% of the stories for coding. A pilot study was conducted on a sub-set of sample 12 editorials and 120 news stories to ensure the inter-coder reliability. It was obtained 0.83 by employing Cohen Kappa measurement.

Analysis and Discussion

In this age of globalization, no country can survive alone depending upon its indigenous resources. Hence, mutual agreements regarding trade, development and infrastructure are being designed by sharing resources for shared benefits. These kind of ventures often raised concerns for other countries especially geographically connected countries which can be assessed and addressed by analyzing the communication contents of that country about that specific project or agreement. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an important project for regional countries as the analysis reveals that considerable coverage has been given by the press of Iran and Afghanistan. Table 1 reveals that Afghanistan Times published 249 news stories and 07 editorials related to China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) while Afghanistan Outlook gave comparatively less coverage by publishing 138 news stories and 01 editorial. Tehran Times from Iran published 57 news stories and Iran daily extend its coverage to China Pakistan Economic Corridor by printing 36 news stories and 05 editorial during the selected time frame i.e. 2015-2017.

Table 1: No. of News Stories by Newspapers

	Newspaper	Country	News Stories			Editorials		
			2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
Name of newspaper	Afghanistan Times	Afghanistan	81	84	84	02	02	03
	Afghanistan Outlook	Afghanistan	23	35	80	-	-	01
	Tehran Times	Iran	06	23	28	-	-	-
	Iran Daily	Iran	09	18	09	01	03	01

Table 2: No. of Paragraphs by Newspapers

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Afghanistan Times	457	50.4
	Afghanistan Outlook	317	35.1
	Tehran Times	71	7.8
	Iran Daily	61	6.7
	Total	906	100.0

Table 3 reveals that different frames have been utilized by the press of Iran and Afghanistan like Trade & Economy, Strategic, Peace & Conflict yet the Development frame is more visible. This Table shows that the Newspapers of Iran covered strategic frames and developmental frames more than other type of frames. The press of Iran, on the other hand heavily relied on development, peace & conflict, foreign relations as well as strategic frames.

Table 3: Master Frames

		Country of Newspaper		Total
		Afghanista	Iran	
		n		
Master Frames	Trade & Economy	107	20	127
	Cultural	2	0	2
	Strategic	147	45	192
	Foreign Relations	143	18	161
	Peace & Conflict	139	17	156
	Development	236	32	268
Total		774	132	906

Note: $df=5$, $X^2=17.278$ $p=.01$

Table 3 depicts how newspapers of Iran and Afghanistan utilized sub-frames regarding CPEC. Afghanistan Times and Afghan Outlook mostly focused on regional development and regional connectivity as well as terrorism and security issues. They also covered inequality sub-frame in their coverage. Iranian press covered CPEC with frames of energy projects, regional hegemony and foreign relations as well as geo-strategic and regional connectivity. In this way, further figure 1 clearly shows the cross national comparison of Afghan and Iranian Press about CPEC framing. Table 2, 3 and Figure 1 show that there are significant differences in the use of sub-frames to cover CPEC by Afghan and Iranian press.

Table 4: Sub Frames

		Country of Newspaper		Total
		Afghanistan	Iran	
Sub-frames	Investments	46	7	53
	Agreements	17	4	21
	Trade Exchanges	40	10	50
	Visits/MoU	4	0	4
	Customs & Traditions	1	0	1
	Language	1	0	1
	Geo-strategic	29	15	44
	Regional Connectivity	69	13	82
	Game Changer	15	1	16
	Regional Hegemony	34	16	50
	Sino-Pak Relations	63	0	63
	Pak Foreign Relations	59	16	75
	China Foreign Relations	21	2	23
	Territorial Conflicts	17	2	19
	Terrorism & Security Issues	58	9	67
	Power Imbalances	20	1	21
	Inequality	44	5	49
	Infrastructure	53	5	58
	Energy Projects	67	17	84
	Human Development	41	1	42
	Regional development	75	8	83
Total		774	132	906

Note: $df=20$, $X^2= 56.482$, $p=.01$

The table 5 shows the result of Chi-square test, which indicates that slant of the CPEC, varies according to the framing by the Afghan press. In the Afghan press, developmental as well as strategic frames are being covered positively. On the other side, peace and conflict frames are being covered unfavorably. In this way, it shows that there are significant differences in the framing as well as slant of the CPEC by the Afghan press.

Table 5: Slant of Frames in Afghan Press

		Slant of the Content			Total
		Unfavorable	Neutral	Favorable	
Master Frames	Trade & Economy	14	9	84	107
	Cultural	0	0	2	2
	Strategic	41	6	100	147
	Foreign Relations	50	14	79	143
	Peace & Conflict	83	11	45	139
	Development	17	6	213	236
Total		205	46	523	774

$df= 10$, $X^2=162.859$, $p=.01$

Table 6 depicts that press of Iran covers trade & economy and development aspect of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in favorable manner. However, while commenting on strategic aspects of the project, the tone of the Iranian press got unfavorable towards China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Table 6: Slant of Frames in Iranian Press

		Slant of the Content			Total
		Unfavorable	Neutral	Favorable	
Master Frames	Trade & Economy	2	3	15	20
	Strategic	21	8	16	45
	Foreign Relations	0	1	17	18
	Peace & Conflict	9	5	3	17
	Development	0	3	29	32
Total		32	20	80	132

df= 8, $X^2=51.868$, $p=01$

Selection of news source by journalists is considered as an important factor of framing (Entman, 2007) and are used to interpret the event by selecting specific news sources (Kim & Jahng, 2016). Journalists tend to manage the news about certain happening by managing the sources in order to extract the information they required (Gans, 1979). While framing news related to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by the press of neighboring countries of Pakistan, there are number of sources selected by the newspapers including Sino-Pak governments, indigenous government, politicians, reporters, experts and civil society etc. (Table & Fig 6.1.6). Data analysis further reveals that press of neighboring countries used Sino-Pak governments and Sino-Pak press as highly cited source of information in news stories relate to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and more than 60 percent of the news stories are originated from this source.

This table shows the differences in the selection of the news sources of information by Afghan and Iranian press. The major information sources of Afghanistan's press are Sino-Pak governments as well as Sino-Pak politicians; however, Iranian press used indigenous governments and indigenous press as major source of information.

Table 7: Differences of Sources of Information to Cover CPEC by Afghan & Iranian Press

		Country of Newspaper		Total
		Afghanistan	Iran	
Sources of News	Sino-Pak Governments	398	46	444
	Indigenous Government	16	36	52
	Other Governments	62	2	64
	Sino-Pak Politicians	64	0	64
	Indigenous Politicians	2	0	2
	Other Politicians	0	1	1
	Sino-Pak Press	36	3	39
	Indigenous Press	122	33	155
	Other Press	16	5	21
	Sino-Pak Civil Society	16	0	16
	Experts	42	6	48
Total		774	132	906

Note: df= 10, $X^2= 166.441$, $p=.01$

Table 8 indicates that the framing of CPEC varies according to the sources of information which are being used to cover CPEC by the Afghan press. Sino-Pak governments heavily focused on developmental and strategic frames. However, Sino-Pak politicians are making peace and conflict frames more prominent. Similarly, indigenous press of Afghanistan is also making developmental as well as conflict frames more prominent.

Table 8: Effect of Sources of Information on Framing of CPEC in Afghan Press

		Master Frames						Total
		Trade & Economy	Cultural	Strategic	Foreign Relations	Peace & Conflict	Development	
Sources of News	Sino-Pak Governments	62	2	72	54	53	155	398
	Indigenous Government	1	0	4	5	4	2	16
	Other Governments	3	0	19	18	13	9	62
	Sino-Pak Politicians	3	0	7	13	39	2	64
	Indigenous Politicians	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
	Sino-Pak Press	9	0	2	8	1	16	36
	Indigenous Press	11	0	23	32	23	33	122
	Other Press	2	0	7	3	2	2	16
	Sino-Pak Civil Society	4	0	4	4	1	3	16
	Experts	12	0	9	4	3	14	42
Total		107	2	147	143	139	236	774

Note: df= 28 $X^2= 42.016$, $p=.05$

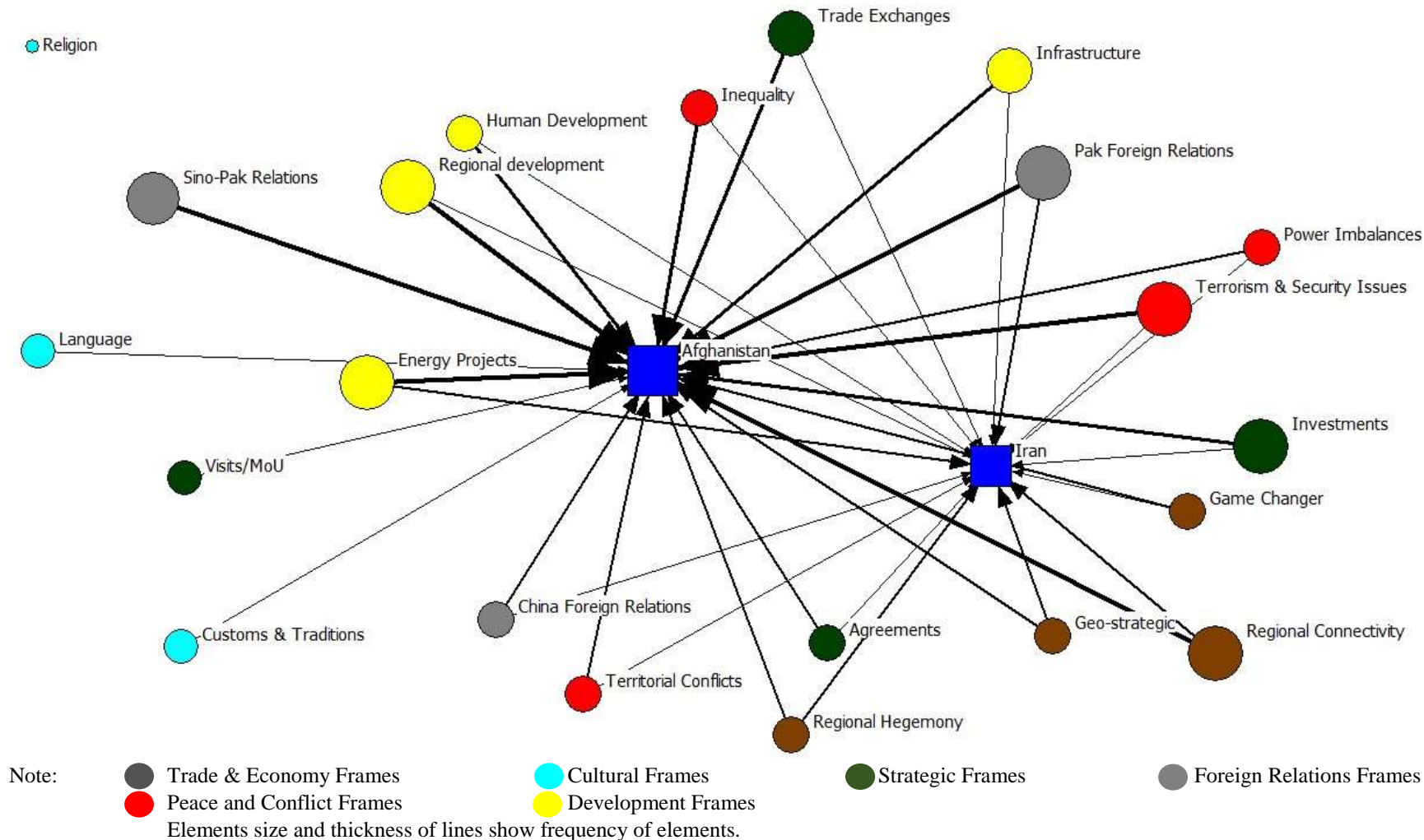
The Table no. 9 shows that the framing of CPEC varies according to the sources of information which are being used to cover CPEC by the Iranian press. Iranian press mostly used its own governmental and media sources to cover CPEC. Iranian government and press heavily focused on strategic frames. They also highlight the developmental aspects of CPEC. However, Sino-Pak governments are also being used as sources to highlight the economic frames about CPEC in Iranian press.

Table 9: Effect of Sources of Information on Framing of CPEC in Iranian Press (RQ5)

		Master Frames					Total
		Trade & Economy	Strategic	Foreign Relations	Peace & Conflict	Development	
Sources of News	Sino-Pak Governments	10	11	5	9	11	46
	Indigenous Government	5	12	10	0	9	36
	Other Governments	0	2	0	0	0	2
	Other Politicians	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Sino-Pak Press	0	0	0	2	1	3
	Indigenous Press	2	17	2	4	8	33
	Other Press	1	1	0	2	1	5
	Experts	2	1	1	0	2	6
Total		20	45	18	17	32	132

Note: df= 28, $X^2= 42.016$, $p=.05$

Figure 1: Cross-National Comparison of CPEC Framing in Afghan & Iranian Press



Conclusion

In present study we studied the cross-national framing of CPEC in elite press of Iran and Afghanistan. We found that the press of all these countries of Pakistan is covering CPEC significantly. However, Iranian media is less focused towards it as compared to Afghanistan. Iran is a key state of the region. Its geo-political position in international relations remains very important due to dynamic relations with global super powers especially US and China. It is very alarming for Pakistan, that Iran is not taking much interest in CPEC the project of regional development. Therefore, our foreign office and media houses should promote awareness among the Iranian officials for creating goodwill of CPEC in Iran.

Further we found that CPEC is being covered with the frames of Regional development, trade & economy and strategic frames. In this way, our findings show a positive indicator for examining the image of CPEC. The press of Iran and Afghanistan considers CPEC as a project of regional connectivity and regional change.

We further found that Sino-Pak governments are major source of information for coverage of CPEC in press of Iran and Afghanistan. This source is promoting soft and positive image of CPEC. However, on the other side, framing of CPEC varies according to the sources of information. Iranian government is attributed with conflict and strategic perspectives of CPEC.

Recommendations

1. Based on empirical findings, the study suggest following recommendations.
2. We found that Iranian and Afghani press are highlighting the negative statements of Sino-Pak politicians. For example, ANP leaders are often quoted by the press of Iran and Afghanistan for their criticism on development of CPEC. The situation is very alarming for Pakistani state institutions. This narrative should be balanced by formulating a collective narrative of CPEC.
3. The province of Baluchistan is central hub of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which cannot be ignored to make the project a success. The security related issues are still prevailing in the province which needs to be addressed for better implementation of the development projects.
4. The stability and peaceful environment of the Baluchistan can only guarantee the accomplishment of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The people of the Baluchistan should be made part of the benefits associated with the project.
5. The media should also contribute towards disseminating information related to the progress and development of Baluchistan as well as addressing and conveying the concerns of the people of Baluchistan.
6. There are certain concerns being raised about impact of CPEC on environment and natural settings especially about the areas of Gilgit-Baltistan. Due to rapid development of roads and heavy transportation there is a real threat to the environment, hence there is need to address the environment related issues and to minimize the hazards as well as

media should have to play role regarding preservation for natural setting of the area by highlighting issues related to environmental degradation.

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Annexure 1: Coding Sheet

Master Frame	Sub frames	Key words
1. Trade and Economy	1) Investments 2) Agreements 3) Trade Exchanges 4) Visits/MoU	Investment, FDI, Industry, Economic Relations, Opportunities, Trade Agreements, Trade Exchanges, Industrial & Economic Zones, Economic Challenges and Reforms, Public-Private Partnerships
2. Cultural	5) Religion 6) Customs and Traditions 7) Language	Pashtun, Baloch, Festivals, Persian, Urdu, Sectarianism, Religious bond, Shared values and culture, Same Religion and Culture, Ethnic & Linguistic Divide
3. Strategic	8) Geo-strategic 9) Regional connectivity 10) Game Changer 11) Regional Hegemony	Hegemony on oil, Easy access to regional areas, Transportation, Enhanced connectivity, Ambitious Economic Plans, Encircle India, Strategic Partnership, Destiny Changer, Fate Changer, Strategic Assets, Policy Alignment, Rival Chabahar Port, Chabahar and Gwadar as sister ports, Geo-politics, Strategic importance of Gwadar, Win-Win for all, East India Company
4. Foreign Relation	12) Sino-Pak 13) Pak and others 14) China and others	Iron Brother, Rivals, Wars, Gas Pipeline projects, Friendly Relations, National interest, Harmonious relations, Strategic Relations, Diplomatic Support, all weather” ally
5. Peace & Conflict	15) Territorial conflicts 16) Terrorism and Security issues 17) Power Imbalances 18) Inequality	Inequality, Terrorism, Power Imbalance, Provincialism, Human Rights, Pashtun Nationalist, Disputed territory, Armed Forces, Bilateral Issues, Sovereignty, Political Turmoil, Protest & Sit-ins, Political, Epicenter of terror. Instability, anti-India , Cross Border Violation
6. Development	19) Infrastructure 20) Energy Projects 21) Human Development 22) Regional Development	Fate Changer, Window of opportunities, Socio-Economic Development, Stable Development, Boost Economic Ties, Structural Reforms, Expanding Infrastructure, Prosperity,
7. Other	23)	Energy Crisis, spies and terrorist activities against CPEC, conspiracy against CPEC, Shia Sunni conflict, Environmental issues, corruption, violation of rules

Sources

Sr.	Source	Definition
1	1) Sino-Pak Governments 2) Indigenous Governments 3) Other Governments	Government Officials, Government Press Releases, Political Statements, Foreign Ambassadors, Foreign Government Officials,
2	4) Sino-Pak Politicians 5) Indigenous Politicians 6) Other Politicians	Foreign Politicians, Institutions, Press Releases, Politicians
3	7) Sino-Pak Press 8) Indigenous Press 9) Other Press	Foreign News Agencies, Source of Newspapers, Correspondents, Reporter, etc.
4	10) Sino-Pak Civil Society 11) Indigenous Civil Society 12) Other Civil Society	Protests, Seminars, Walks, Social Gatherings, Personal Tweets, Showbiz Personalities, Players, Press Releases etc.
5	13) Experts	Foreign Relations experts, Economists, IMF, UNO
6	14) Others	Hafiz Saeed, Baloch Separatist Leaders,

