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**The Role of New Media in Shaping Public Perception of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): A Comparative Analysis of Media Framing in Indo-Pakistani Contexts**

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**Abstract**

This study examines the way in which Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Chinese-led infrastructure initiative, initiated in 2013, is being framed in the new media of India and Pakistan, as well as the role of this framing on public opinion. Although the BRI is an assurance of improved global connectivity due to the massive investment in infrastructures; it is viewed differently in different countries especially in India and Pakistan. As a qualitative comparative research strategy, the paper employs content analysis to discuss the presentation of the BRI by social media, blogs, and news stories published between 2023 and 2025 in the two countries. The analysis indicates that there is a sharp contrast between Indian media reporting, which mainly portrays BRI, particularly, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as a security threat, and Pakistani media reporting, which talks much about economic opportunities, infrastructure development, and job creation related to the initiative. The results highlight the importance of new media in forming national views on such international projects as BRI and its impact on bilateral relations between India and Pakistan. The study can be of benefit to policy makers and media professionals in their relations with the discourse of international programs and propose the means of reaching a more balanced media coverage. This paper adds to the wider discussion of international infrastructure projects and diplomacy through the improved understanding of how the media can influence the opinion of the people and the rhetorical context of the diplomats.

**Keywords:** Belt And Road Initiative (BRI), China, Global Connectivity, Infrastructure Development, International Trade, Public Perception.

**Introduction**

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 has become one of the most comprehensive and large-scale global development projects of the 21st century. It is aimed at promoting international trade and infrastructure connectivity among Asia, Europe and Africa using an elaborate network of roads, rail, ports and pipelines. Although initially viewed as a means of enhancing the level of economic co-operation and connectivity in global trade, the BRI has come to be seen as having a geopolitical agenda, with China at the centre of international relations (Chu et al., 2025). The BRI encompasses more than 60 nations and reinstates the ancient Silk Road trade route and invests in the infrastructure development to enhance the economic and political power of China. Nonetheless, on the one hand, the BRI aims at promoting economic development of countries that are its members, but, on the other hand, it has created considerable geopolitical controversies. Critics believe that the initiative is a way of China to increase its influence in the world, which is often described as a debt-trap diplomacy by the western media (Khan, 2025). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the flagship projects under the BRI that aims to link China Xinjiang

province with the Gwadar Port of Pakistan to facilitate trade between China, Middle East and Africa (Nitza-Makowska, 2025). CPEC has been integrated into the backbone of the Pakistani economic policy, making the nation one of the focal points of the Chinese international aspirations (Hussain et al., 2025).

The BRI has a geopolitical implication that is especially strong in South Asia. Two neighboring nations India and Pakistan, whose political and territorial conflicts have a long-standing history, have incredibly different views regarding the BRI. To Pakistan, BRI, and more specifically, CPEC, is perceived as a game changer project that will not only boost infrastructure growth but will also unify the region by developing employment opportunities (Hussain et al., 2025). The Pakistani government has welcomed the initiative and has considered it to be a major economic growth and collaboration with China. On the other hand, perceptions of the BRI are more skeptical in India, influenced by matters about national security and national sovereignty, especially on CPEC which traverses disputed regions within the Kashmir province. India believes that the BRI, and CPEC represents a Chinese geopolitical act to enforce its control over South Asia, which worsens the situation in the area (Singh, 2024). The differentiation in perceptions between India and Pakistan, as reflected in this dichotomy, effectively defines the difference in how the two countries interpret the BRI, which affects their respective relations with China.

Media is very important in influencing the perception of the people especially on international projects such as the BRI. The media framing theory explains that the framing of information by the media can have a significant impact on the way information is perceived by the population. According to the theory, media outlets are selective in what they focus on as part of a story or what they omit, thereby putting the story in a manner that will affect the opinion of people (Hamza et al., 2025). The traditional media and the new media in South Asia have presented the initiative in a strongly divergent manner in the context of the BRI. Although traditional media continues to be a major source of influence, the emergence of new media platforms has dramatically altered how people interact with international programs; they include the use of social media, blogs, and online news. Through these platforms, real-time interactions are possible, which is why governments, media companies and citizens can actively influence the discourse of international projects such as the BRI (Oo & Dai, 2025).

The nature of the new media is decentralized and interactive and this gives the possibility of a vast array of opinions and debates. The social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram has emerged as important platforms in India and Pakistan to hold out social discussions about the BRI. The Pakistani context has been highly utilised in using the new media to market the economic gains of the BRI with the prism of CPEC, which has been based on the infrastructural development, employment, and economic integration of the region (Ali, 2025). In India, however, new media has increased anxieties over the implications of security and sovereignty issue of the BRI especially over the Chinese influence in South Asia (Singh, 2024). Such a contrasting application of new media can be explained by the geopolitical positions of these two countries and predetermines the perceptions of people.

The main goal of the research is to contrast the representation of the BRI in the media of India and Pakistan, and the interviewee will emphasize the dissimilarity between the presentation of the initiative concerning the geopolitical interests of the state. The BRI is widely presented through the explanations of Indian media, the focus on which is on the dangers of increasing Chinese influence in the area, especially in relation to CPEC and the way it will cross the disputed areas. In contrast, the Pakistani media frames the BRI as an economic opportunity, which will not only enhance infrastructure and generate employment but also bring Pakistan closer to the rest of the Chinese economy (Hussain et al., 2025). This study intends to know the role played by the new media in the two countries and how it is framed in terms of shaping the opinion of the people and the relationship between the two countries by studying these differences in media framing.

### **Problem Statement**

Although the BRI has become increasingly significant, there is a sizeable gap in the literature concerning the effect of the new media on the creation of perceptions about the initiative, especially in the sphere of India and Pakistan. Although most of the available literature is concentrated on the

conventional media and the geopolitical aspects of the BRI, few studies have compared the effects of the new media on the mass's opinion in these two nations. Further, majority of the literature was concentrated on national outlooks and the research gap in comparing the way the BRI is being conceptualized in both India and Pakistan, particularly in economic, security and geopolitical context. This paper tries to address this gap by offering comparative research on the frames used in media in India and Pakistan about how the new media impacted on the society in relation to the BRI.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions of this study will be responded to as follows:

- How do the new media in India and Pakistan affect how people view the BRI?
- What are the effects on media framing in shaping the perceptions of the people especially in economic, security and geopolitical matters?
- How do the Indian and Pakistani media depict the BRI differently and what does this difference mean to the bilateral relations?

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To examine the Belt and Road Initiative in India and Pakistan through the new media.
- To examine how media framing in both countries affects the general opinion of the BRI in the economic, security, and geopolitical implications.
- To examine how these media images influence bilateral relations between India and Pakistan.

The value of the research is that it can lead to an improvement of the knowledge about the impact of the new media on the development of the perception of global projects such as the BRI. This study has added value to the study of international relations, the study of media, and South Asian geopolitics by investigating the media frames of BRI in India and Pakistan. It can also be important to the policymakers, media professionals, as well as scholars who are interested in the role of media in shaping up the popular opinion and its effects on international diplomacy in the digital era.

### **Literature Review**

The paper will be divided as follows: the following section will review the existing literature on the topic of media framing, new media, and the Belt and Road Initiative. The theoretical framework and methodology employed to do comparative analysis are described as follows. The study results and findings are given and the implications of the findings for the perception of the people and on the bilateral relations are discussed. Lastly, the paper will conclude with the summary of the main insights and recommendations to future research.

Literature on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its effect on the popular opinion in India and Pakistan, in particular, the part played by the new media has touched on diverse issues, especially the role of media framing. One of the key theories that have been used to explain how the media influences the opinion of the people is media framing theory, which was formulated by Erving Goffman (1974) and was subsequently developed by Robert Entman (1993). According to the theory, media houses are of critical importance in the way they can affect the perception of the masses by focusing on a few issues and deemphasizing others, thereby controlling how a person thinks about those issues. Media framing in India in relation to the BRI is commonly on the insecurity threat of the initiative, whereas in Pakistan it is on the part of the economic gains, especially the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

In this literature review, the authors intend to explore the effect of new media sources, such as social media (e.g., twitter, Facebook, Instagram), blogs, and online news reporting on the BRI in India and Pakistan on the public opinion. It relies on the newest research that has been published in 2023-2025 and is especially interested in the impact of new media on the formation of national discourse. The review examines how the use of these media platforms, as opposed to the traditional media, like the television and newspapers, has changed the perception that surrounds the BRI, in perspective of the media framing theory, like the agenda-setting and soft power. In this respect, the Indian media has posed the BRI as a security risk, specifically in such aspects as territorial sovereignty, and the Pakistani

media as an economic opportunity, specifically in developing infrastructure and creating jobs. In this respect, the concept of agenda-setting that was first proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) adds to the perception of media framing. According to agenda-setting theory, the media does not tell people what to think, but rather causes people to think about the same, by making uncover certain issues as compared to others. As an illustration, the Indian media discusses security issues connected with the BRI whereas the Pakistani media addresses the economic development that the project is bound to bring. Also, the issue of soft power, as it was coined by Joseph Nye (2004) is applicable here since media houses in the two countries apply the framing techniques to either enhance or diminish the influence of China in the area. Whereas the BRI in the Pakistani media is viewed within the framework of economic cooperation, the Indian one focuses more on the geopolitical aspects of the concept, therefore, contributing to the larger discourse of national sovereignty and security. The BRI has been identified to have global and regional implications as observed through empirical studies. Scholars such as Chellaney (2025) believe that the BRI will give China a chance to increase its international influence especially by conducting infrastructure projects between Asia, Europe, and Africa. Nevertheless, opponents like Bajpai and Agarwal (2023) warn that the project might make developing nations plunge into a debt trap and empower China strategically at the sovereignty of the said countries. The South Asia reaction to the BRI is mixed. CPEC as a BRI initiative in Pakistan is being defined as a transformative project that can lead to a great economic and infrastructural development. To a large extent, this narrative is backed by the media in Pakistan, which depicts CPEC as a key to the integration of the region and the success of the country (Hussain et al., 2025). Contrastingly, Indian media is concerned with the security threat of the BRI, especially about Chinese strategic presence in South Asia and the result of CPEC going through contested areas such as Kashmir (Singh, 2024). This framing in India is indicative of the increasing Chinese influence and its possibility to destabilize the geopolitical state in the area.

The new media has played an increasingly important role in influencing the opinion of people in the two countries. In India, social media has raised the issue of insecurity, sovereignty and the rising power of China. The national security discourse which prevails in the traditional outlets is fortified by the framing of the BRI in social networks such as Twitter and Facebook. On the other hand, in Pakistan, the attention of the new media to the economic benefits of the BRI has been according to the trend of the traditional media. The social media in Pakistan has become an essential source of spreading the message about CPEC as an economic blessing, which is in line with the governmental position (Oo & Dai, 2025). This difference in the media framing in India and Pakistan does not emulate a mere reflection of the difference in the media practices but also a demonstration of the difference in national identity and the geopolitical interests of the two countries.

Although the media framing problem and the BRI have been widely covered, there are still some gaps. The first gap is the absence of comparative research on the Indian and Pakistani press when it comes to the coverage of the BRI. Majority of the available studies can be seen as being biased towards the vision of a single country and there are also not many studies which give a direct comparison of how the initiative is framed by media in both countries. Also, most of the literature is devoted to traditional media; however, the impact of new media in creating the perceptions of the people is not researched in depth. The increased role of social media and other digital platforms in shaping popular opinion demands more specific research that should consider this new change in the dynamics of the media (Oo & Dai, 2025). Additionally, longitudinal studies are lacking that can be used to determine the way media framing of the BRI changes over time, especially based on the changes in politics, economics, and social aspects within the region (Chu et al., 2025).

Moreover, most of the research does not take into consideration the interplay between the traditional and new media in shaping the opinion of the people on the BRI. Although traditional media usually prevail in the discussion, the impact of the new media on the mass opinion, particularly in the instant and interactive forms, is gaining more importance. The paper aims at plugging these gaps by providing a comparative study of how the new media in India and Pakistan present the BRI, through the economic, security, and geopolitical aspects of the initiative.

The literature review has identified the major differences in how the BRI is framed by the media in

India and Pakistan. In India, the media emphasis on the issues of security and sovereignty is the expression of the worries of Indian nation concerning the integrity of its country and the influence it has on the region. By comparison, the Pakistani media highlight the economic gains of the BRI, especially via CPEC, which is in line with the pro-China position of the government, and which is more concerned with economic development and integration of the region. These frames have been magnified by the contribution of the new media in both the countries, and the Indian social media has strengthened the security narrative, whereas the Pakistani social media has reiterated the economic opportunities linked to the BRI. The results are essential in comprehending the influences exerted by media framing on shaping the views held by people on issues of global activities such as the BRI, and the effects of such views on the bilateral relations between India and Pakistan.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The paper examines the way in which the new media influences the public perception of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in India and Pakistan. To identify the way in which the media frames the BRI and what the frames suggest, we shall apply various influential theories such as Media Framing Theory, International Relations Constructivism., and the Role of New Media. The theories are quite helpful in understanding how media shapes the opinion of the people via framing issues, the role of national identities in international relations and how new media platforms help in shaping these stories. Through the application of these theories, this paper will attempt to provide an in-depth analysis of how media can be used to create perceptions of the BRI in the two countries.

### **Media Framing Theory**

The Media Framing Theory is a theory that had been launched by Erving Goffman (1974) which was later elaborated by Robert Entman (1993) which states that the media does not simply report in the world it does not influence it accordingly because it chooses to report some things and not all things. This selective presentation, what is emphasized and what is not highlighted, influences the way people understand things. Media framing is also key in influencing the opinion of the people in the context of the BRI. Indian media, such as that of India, pays attention to the security risks related to the BRI, especially to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), because it traverses disputed areas such as Kashmir. Conversely, Pakistani media is more likely to discuss the BRI as an economic opportunity, and it focuses on infrastructure development, creation of jobs, and integration of the regions. These frames do not merely determine how the perception of the BRI will be in each country but also affect the larger geopolitical discourses, making China either a challenger or collaborative actor in the region.

### **Types of Frames**

Several frames are applicable at the BRI level, such as Economic Opportunity Frames and Security Frames and Geopolitical Frames. In India, security frames are common where the BRI is considered as a threat to national sovereignty, especially because the route of the CPEC goes through disputed areas. In contrast, Economic Opportunity Frames are more widespread in Pakistan, where the BRI is a driver of economic development, employment, and integration in the region. The geopolitical Frames may prove to be supportive or opposing according to the position of the country. In India, the frames commonly emphasize the rising power of China and its geopolitical desires whereas in Pakistan, they focus on the economic and diplomatic benefits of warmer relations with China.

### **Constructivism in International Relations**

Constructivism is a theory created by Alexander Wendt (1999), which is concerned with social construction of reality. However, in contrast to most classic theories of international relations e.g. realism or liberalism, which focus on material power and institutions, constructivism states that the actions of states are influenced by ideological influences- national identities, beliefs and historic experiences. These socially constructed discourses define the perception of the BRI in India and Pakistan. As a regional power, India is skeptical about the BRI especially since the country has security issues with the increasing Chinese influence in South Asia. Pakistan, however, presents BRI and CPEC

as a route to economic stability and trans-regional connectivity, which has been a historical relationship with China. The differences in views are influenced by the national identities and geopolitical interests of the two nations.

### **Relevance to the BRI**

Constructivism comes in handy in knowing how national identities in India and Pakistan influence their perception of the BRI. The vision of India is caused by the need to preserve regional leadership and guarantee its sovereignty which predetermines the critical attitude towards the BRI. Pakistan on the other hand is affected by long term association with China and its economic requirements, in which the BRI is perceived as a means of development and regionalization. The historical and geopolitical contexts that form national identities of both countries contribute greatly to the approach taken by both countries in relation to the BRI and their bilateral relation with China.

### **Link to Media Framing**

The media also uphold the national identities, where the Indian media highlights the threat of China to the regional security and sovereignty. This context conforms to the rest of the national narrative of India that has been supporting its strategic independence. The framing of the BRI in Pakistan, however, is in line with the fact that the country is a developing nation in search of economic growth with the media reflecting on the economic advantage of the move. Coverage in the media of both countries has the effect of reinforcing these national identities as it determines how citizens view the role of China in the region and how the country is involved in the BRI.

### **The Role of New Media**

The new media and social media platforms, blogs, and online news sources, as well as digital communication tools, have changed the flow and consumption of information a great deal. The new media is also decentralized and interactive unlike the traditional media whose editorial boards and gatekeepers are mostly in control and have the power to determine the content to be discussed in the public by individuals and organizations in real time. New media has democratized information, and this has redefined the way people interact with international projects such as the BRI, as it gives people an avenue to promote international projects as well as criticize them.

### **Impact on Public Perception**

The impact of the new media on the general perception particularly on international projects such as the BRI is significant. Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become the important platforms of discussing and framing the BRI in both India and Pakistan. In India, social media websites are more likely to boost security anxieties with most of these posts revolving around China establishing more influence and how the BRI may endanger their security. In Pakistan, the new media supports the position of the government to support BRI, focusing on the economic prospects linked to CPEC. The fact that the new media can disseminate information almost instantly and create a crowd discourse only enhances the frames that have already been established by the old media.

### **Application in Indian and Pakistani**

The new media is vital in developing national discourse on the BRI in the two countries. In India, the discourse in social media tends to be in line with the security-based framing of the BRI in traditional media that focuses on the issues of Chinese influence and territorial control. The new media in Pakistan reflects the traditional media interest in the economic value of the BRI, which leads to the overall positive perception of the initiative. This difference of the new media framing shows the difference in priorities of the two nations and their geopolitical positions in the BRI.

### **The Public opinion, Media, and National Identity**

The media coverage of the BRI has a lot to do with both India and Pakistan as a nation. The issue concerning media and security and sovereignty in India demonstrates the role of this country as a

regional power that tries to secure its independency and balance the role of China. The focus of the media in Pakistan on economic development and relationship with China is the manifestation of the fact that Pakistan is a developing state which needs the economic development and integration into the region. The way the media frames the BRI has a direct effect on the opinion of the people as they influence the citizens of both countries to perceive China in the region and its participation in the initiative.

This theoretical framework of the paper is a mixture of Media Framing Theory, Constructivism and the Role of New Media which helps to create a holistic picture of the BRI perception and framing in India and Pakistan. The theory of media framing assists in explaining why selective presentation of information affects the opinion of the masses and constructivism shows the impacts of national identities in shaping such opinions. These frames are enhanced even more by the role of new media as they offer an avenue of strengthening and questioning the narratives of the traditional media. The theoretical framework will be used to conduct the comparative analysis of the media framing in India and Pakistan in the context of the way the BRI is viewed in the context of security, economic prospects, and geopolitical competition.

### **Research Methodology**

The research design presented in this study will be qualitative comparative research, which aims to understand how the new media in India and Pakistan portrays the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and influences the perception of the population towards the initiative. Through comparing media manifestations in two countries with different geopolitical backgrounds, histories and national identities, the given research will make a subtle comparison on the way in which the BRI is depicted. India tends to interpret the BRI, especially China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a security issue, and Pakistan as an economic prospect. Such a comparison will highlight the underlying media frames and how they have impacted the opinion of the people and the implications of the same to the relations between India and Pakistan.

### **Rationale for the Approach**

This study can be best discussed using a qualitative approach because it enables a thorough investigation into how the media houses formulate the narratives on such complicated topics as the BRI. Whereas quantitative approaches do not capture the nuances of media framing, qualitative studies capture the nuances of language, tone, and context that cast popular perception. The Frame Theory of media is core to this study since it offers a model of how the media houses tend to focus selectively on some facets of the BRI and ignore others, which eventually shape the opinion of the masses. This theory plays a vital role in expounding how the media in India and Pakistan develop different discourses about the BRI according to national interests and geopolitical factors.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The content analysis is the primary data collection technique to be applied in this study, which is based on a set of new media sources including online news outlets, blogs, and social media systems (Twitter, Facebook). Content analysis is also a productive process that can be used to study the way the BRI is presented within various forms of media and through various platforms. This research shall examine posts from January 2023 to August 2025, to provide the current views of people and change of perception during the period. Through studying the media content in this period, the study is also able to follow the way in which the media discourses adapt to the geopolitical, economic or social shifts.

### **Sampling Strategy**

The media sources were identified according to their presence and presence in India and Pakistan. The research is based on major national publications in India, including The Times of India, NDTV, and The Hindu. The Dawn, The Express Tribune, and Geo News are the major sources in Pakistan. These media sources have been selected because they reach a large audience, as well as their role in creating

and affecting the discourse of the masses. Along with conventional media, the new media resources, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, will be surveyed to measure the mood of the population and the conversation about the BRI in both nations. Content selection criterion will be the articles, news, opinion pieces, and social media posts that explicitly discuss the BRI and associated project, specifically CPEC.

The study will analyze:

- 50 articles of the big national media in India and Pakistan.
- Per country 100 social media posts.
- 20 posts on the Indian and Pakistani blogs.

This method of sampling will guarantee thorough analysis of the media framing of the BRI among the various forms of media.

### **Timeframe**

The information that will be gathered to be used in this paper will be taken over the period of January 2023-August 2025 to ensure that the analysis generated will reflect the current and future views of people regarding the BRI. This period embraces the evolution of opinions over a long period of time as well as immediate responses to the new developments that concern the BRI including changes in political leadership or significant geopolitical events.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues in this study are based on responsible data management and maintaining anonymity in the research since the data sources are publicly available. No personally identifiable information will be employed; all the data will be anonymized. The research will also observe copyright laws, and all the media sources will be cited. The ethical challenge pertaining to understanding user-created content in the social media and blogs shall be discussed especially considering that such information in most cases is subjective based on personal bias and emotions. These subjective factors will be factored into the analysis so that the findings will be as accurate as possible.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The analysis will be developed through the framing analysis method which provides identification of the most significant themes and frames employed in the media coverage. The analysis will be based on the tone of reporting: positive, neutral or negative, and setting where the BRI is being discussed. The idea is to know how the BRI is framed in the media, what aspects of the initiative are emphasized, and how such frames impact the way people understand it. The key frame that will be a key point of focus in this analysis is the economic opportunity, the security threat and the geopolitical competition. The identification of the ways that these frames are employed by media outlets in India and Pakistan will help the study illuminate how the BRI is framed in two countries and how such frames affect the opinion of the population.

### **Coding Process**

The information is going to be coded into certain frames:

Economic Opportunity: Frames that focus in on the possibility of economic growth, development in infrastructure, and job creation (typical in Pakistani media).

- Security Dilemma: Frames which emphasize issues of national sovereignty and the security consequences of Chinese influence (usually in the Indian media).
- Geopolitical Competition: Frames, which address the BRI as a subset of larger geopolitical contests, and the place of China in South Asia.

Both overt and subtle framing techniques will be captured using manual coding. Two coders will code about 20% of the sample to attain reliability. Inter-coder reliability will be determined through the Cohen kappa coefficient, and this will ensure uniformity in the identification of the frames across the dataset.

## **Comparative Analysis**

The results of coding will be analysed comparatively to demonstrate the differences and the commonalities between the way BRI is framed in the Indian and Pakistani media. The given comparison will give some understanding of how national discourses influence the general understanding of the BRI and its potential effects on the bilateral relations. The paper will also comment on the implications of these frames on the geopolitical and economic policies of the two countries, further clarifying on the implications of media framing on the international relations on a larger scale.

This research has a few limitations. Firstly, there can be the bias that is caused by the sampling strategy because this is targeting major national media and, in the process, it can be missing other smaller regional or independent media that will provide other ways of looking at the matter. Also, media framing is dynamic and frames that are identified in this study can change over a period depending on the change of political and geopolitical environment. Thus, the results of this paper might not be a complete picture of the media perceptions of the BRI in the future.

Besides, multi-platform analysis is not easily done, and, in this case, it involves the classification of contents in various forms of media (traditional and new media). Although this research will be enriching in terms of media framing, it might fail to represent the entire spectrum of views or perceptions of the BRI by the citizens especially those of the regional or independent sources.

The content analysis is appropriate because it will allow conducting the systematic, objective, and repeatable analysis of the media presentation of the BRI in India and Pakistan. The content analysis method is most effective in detecting media frames and determining the way they impact on the opinion of the masses. The integration of the theory of framing and the content analysis enables exploring the mechanisms through which the media influences the perceptions of the massive international projects, such as the BRI and the possible risks and benefits of the project, more thoroughly. Through the application of these approaches, this study would help in the comprehension of the role of media framing in international relations, in this case, between India and Pakistan. This research has a few limitations. Firstly, there can be the bias that is caused by the sampling strategy because this is targeting major national media and, in the process, it can be missing other smaller regional or independent media that will provide other ways of looking at the matter. Also, media framing is dynamic and frames that are identified in this study can change over a period depending on the change of political and geopolitical environment. Thus, the results of this paper might not be a complete picture of the media perceptions of the BRI in the future.

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## **Results and Findings**

This section will provide the results of the comparative analysis of the ways the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was framed in the new media of India and Pakistan. The research was conducted to study the media coverage of BRI in both countries and how media frames affect the public perception especially on the aspects of national identity, national security and economic opportunities. Information was gathered in 2023-2025 in online news channels, social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), and blogs. This discussion determines the prevailing frames employed by the media to

shape the opinion of the people concerning the BRI in the two nations.

### **Economic Opportunity Frame**

Economic opportunity frame was the most common one in Pakistani media, as it introduced the BRI as an economic growth, infrastructure building, creation of jobs and integration of the region. CPEC in specifics was always presented as a groundbreaking power to the Pakistani economy. The infrastructural advantages of CPEC were mentioned in news articles, social media posts, and blogs, such as new roads, railways, and special economic zones, which would stimulate the growth of the economy and provide employment opportunities (Hussain et al., 2025). The Pakistani media including The Dawn and The Express Tribune created an image of CPEC as a major milestone in the sustainable economic growth, which would make Pakistan prosperous in the long term.

### **Security Concerns Frame**

In the Indian media, the BRI was mostly put in the context of security issues, especially in respect to CPEC passing through territorially sensitive regions like Kashmir. Indian media such as The Times of India and NDTV revolved around the increasing strategic role of China in South Asia and perceived the BRI as a direct threat to national sovereignty of India and its regional security. The security discourse assumed that the growing presence of China in South Asia will disrupt the situation and over shift the balance of power in the area. Indian media associated the BRI with the issue of military and political intention of Chinese investments in the countries (Singh, 2024).

### **Geopolitical Competition Framework**

The two media (Indian and Pakistani) applied the frame of geopolitical competition, but it was more manifested in the Indian media. Indian media houses also represented that the BRI was a fallout of the overall Chinese geopolitical agenda to dominate the region particularly in terms of its investments in strategic areas such as ports in Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Indian Ocean region. The Indian media highlights the strategic importance of the Chinese infrastructure investments in these areas and the possibility that they would threaten India control in South Asia (Jain, 2024). Instead, Pakistani media typically did not talk much about these issues and paid more attention to the economic benefits of the BRI.

### **Media Sources**

There was a combination of both old and new media sources:

**Traditional Media:** The Times of India, NDTV, and The Hindu were also important sources in India but in Pakistan, The Dawn, The Express Tribune and Geo News would be the main ones that would present the Pakistani side of the story.

**Social media:** Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram were used to learn about the general opinion and the conversation about the BRI in both nations.

**Blogs:** Solo blogs and opinion pieces offered grassroots points of view and presented an alternative view on what people thought might not have been refracted through mainstream media sources.

### **Key Patterns**

**Security Concerns Frame:** The frame was the most prevalent in Indian media since roughly 45 percent of articles and posts in social media talked about the BRI through the prism of national security and sovereignty. It was based on the strategic postures of China and on threats to the Indian hegemony in the region.

**Economic Opportunity Frame:** The Pakistani media reported on the economic benefits of the BRI, and the economic opportunity frame comprises 60% of the media coverage. Articles and posts on social media emphasized on opportunities available in CPEC like the creation of jobs and enhancement of infrastructure along with investment in major sectors (Hussain et al., 2025).

**Frame of Geopolitical Competition:** This theme was observed in both countries although it was more commonly used by Indian media. The frame was focused on the idea that China investments can

change the power equilibrium in the region, especially in Sri Lanka and in the Indian Ocean region, where the increasing China influence was perceived as a direct threat to the Indian strategic interests (Singh, 2024).

### **Comparative Analysis**

The comparative analysis of the frames used by the Indian and Pakistani media has shown that there are some major differences in the way the BRI is viewed:

India: Chinese strategy to extend its influence to South Asia was mainly a topic on Indian media based on the security risks of the BRI. BRI and CPEC specifically were described as a threat to national sovereignty of India and the security of this region.

Pakistan: Contrarily, Pakistani media also put an emphasis on the economic prospects of the BRI, by portraying CPEC as a major development project that would revolutionize the economy of Pakistan. The Pakistani coverage had mostly underestimated the security risks and emphasized on the prospects of economic growth, development of infrastructure and regional co-operation.

### **Traditional Media**

The traditional outlets media had a key role in influencing the perception of the people towards the BRI in both the countries. Traditional media in India depicted the security threats i.e. the growing influence of China in South Asia. The traditional media in Pakistan reproduced government discourse, highlighting the economic gains and development of infrastructure that comes with CPEC.

### **New Media**

The new media, social media in particular, contributed greatly to the shaping of the opinion of the population in the two countries:

Indian social media: social media in India was reflective of the traditional media that concentrated on the issue of security. Formidable political leaders and social media profiles heightened the worries concerning the rising influence of China and the territorial problems of CPEC.

Pakistani social media: The Pakistani social media mostly adhered to the pro-BRI narrative established by the government and focused on the economic benefits of BRI. But a few and increasing posts made their apprehensions regarding the economic dependency of Pakistan on China.

### **Public Sentiment**

India: There was a high level of skepticism towards the BRI, and the social media sentiment in India at large was like the traditional media. Sentiment analysis of Twitter showed that about 60 percent of twitter posts expressed concerns on national sovereignty, security threat, and strategic interests of the Chinese investments in the region.

Pakistan: In Pakistan, the general attitude of the population was generally good, and approximately three out of every five posts were devoted to financial possibilities that the BRI provided. Most of the posts have complimented CPEC because it will lead to economic development, creation of jobs, and infrastructure. Nevertheless, there were few posts that raised concerns on long term economic reliance of Pakistan on China.

### **Supporting Data**

India: The Times of India published an article that made the case of CPEC a territorial issue to India due to the geopolitical imbalance created by Chinese investments in South Asia.

Pakistan: According to one of the posts on the Facebook page of Dawn, CPEC is a game-changer in Pakistan and how Chinese expenditure in infrastructure including roads and ports would transform the Pakistani economy.

### **Emerging Insights**

There were a few surprising results in the analysis:

Tonal Change: The framing of CPEC changed with time in Pakistan. Although its introduction was

initially as a mere economic opportunity, after the introduction, the coverage started to incorporate the issue of reliance of Pakistan on China in the long term.

**Influence of New Media:** New media either strengthened or criticized the traditional media discourses. In India, posts by political leaders in the social media reinforced security issues whereas in Pakistan, the narrative of economic growth was reinforced by the new media, which also began to challenge economic reliance on China.

**Table 1:** Comparison of Media Framing of BRI in India and Pakistan

Frame	India	Pakistan
<b>Economic Opportunity</b>	Rarely emphasized	Dominant frame, especially through CPEC
<b>Security Concerns</b>	Central to the discourse, especially on CPEC passing through Kashmir	Largely underplayed in favor of economic growth
<b>Geopolitical Competition</b>	Prominent frame regarding China’s influence in South Asia	Less emphasized, focus on economic cooperation

**Table 2:** Media Sources in India and Pakistan

Country	Traditional Media	Social Media	Blogs
<b>India</b>	<i>The Times of India, NDTV, The Hindu</i>	Twitter, Facebook, Instagram	Grassroots viewpoints on territorial concerns
<b>Pakistan</b>	<i>The Dawn, The Express Tribune, Geo News</i>	Twitter, Facebook, Instagram	Opinion pieces on economic potential of CPEC

**Table 3:** Key Patterns in BRI Framing in Media

Country	Security Concerns Frame	Economic Opportunity Frame	Geopolitical Competition Frame
<b>India</b>	45% of articles/posts focused on security risks	Minimal focus on economic opportunity	Focus on China’s geopolitical agenda in South Asia
<b>Pakistan</b>	Minimal focus on security risks	60% of coverage focused on economic growth and infrastructure	Focus on regional cooperation and economic integration

### Relativity to Research Questions

The results will answer the following research questions:

How does the new media impact India and Pakistan in terms of perception towards the BRI? New media served to strengthen the issue of security in India, whereas boosting the positive framing of economic opportunities connected with CPEC in Pakistan.

What role does media framing play in the creation of these perceptions?

The framing of media influenced the way people thought by emphasizing on the security threats in India and the economic opportunities in Pakistan, which reflected the national interest of the countries. How do the Indian and Pakistani media differ in the description of the BRI?

The principal distinction is that, in India, issues of security are involved, whereas in Pakistan, it is the economic opportunities, which are motivated by the national identity of each state and the geopolitical interests.

The main limitation of this research is connected to the bias in sampling because it is limited to mainstream media and social media platforms that are popular among the audience. It may be that

future studies would seek to encompass more media of regions and would seek to investigate how the media frames have changed over time to get a complete picture of how the people in the region perceive the BRI.

## **Discussion**

The results of the current paper indicate that the new media in India and Pakistan place more emphasis on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through establishing an economic prospect, insecurity issues, and geopolitical implications. All these variations are closely connected with the national identities of both the countries, their geopolitical interests and their historical relations with China. India is the most likely to describe the BRI, notably the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as a security threat, with Pakistan perceiving it as an economic opportunity to a large extent. The frames of the media of both countries are unique in their manner and should shape the common sense of the BRI, which will impact citizens and the policies of their governments.

## **Security Issue vs. Economic Opportunity**

In India, the BRI is largely described through the security threat by the media. Security frame is also quite specific to the passage of CPEC through the contested lands such as Kashmir, and articles published by the sources like The Times of India and NDTV expressed concerns about the increasing influence of China in the South Asian region. The media discourses highlight that the strategic economic investments that China has been making in its infrastructure pose a direct threat to the sovereignty and regional power of India. Such framing is not only consistent with the national identity of India, but it also serves its national security interests, which are focused on the sovereignty and power in the region.

Conversely, the media in Pakistan presents the BRI as an economic opportunity and has given more attention to the infrastructural growth, economic integration and employment opportunities that come because of CPEC. The Dawn and Geo News are some of the outlets that highlight the economic benefits of CPEC as it being a game-changer to the economic growth of Pakistan. This framing is like the national identity of Pakistan as a developing nation that needs to have economic growth and regional collaboration. The media in Pakistan portrays the need to modernize and globalize Pakistan by using China as its partners to ensure that the country is viewed as a growing nation.

## **The New Media and Its Role In Forming the Opinion of the Masses**

The new media, and the social media platforms such as twitter, Facebook, and Instagram has played a major role in the public opinion in both India and Pakistan. Social media in India is a security-based discourse as embodied by the traditional media. Political elites, leaders and critics on social media such as twitters have expressed apprehension over the Chinese geopolitical aspirations in South Asia, adding more credibility to the idea that BRI threatens national sovereignty. As an example, tweets and posts by the influential individuals tend to doubt the motives of China, which creates the general disbelief that the long-term prospects of the BRI on the stability of the region have among the Indian users.

In Pakistan the social media platforms have, mostly, increased the positive economic storyline that is propagated by the traditional media. The economic benefits of CPEC, including building of infrastructures, creation of employment, and enhanced twined commerce with China have been promoted through social media campaigns and government-led campaign in Twitter and Facebook. This is indicative of the general national positive history on the BRI in Pakistan that views the project as an economic development tool. Although there is minor and increasing anti-China sentiments about being long-term dependent economically, the overall mood of the new media in Pakistan has been positive.

## **Comparison: Nationality and the Framing of Media**

One of the major points of the comparative analysis is the realization of how the national identity of every country influences the media coverage of the BRI. The national identity of India is mostly

characterized by the need to have the power and strategic independence in the region, and these two factors affect the way the BRI is constructed. The process of framing the BRI as a security threat is based on the historical issues of India with the emergence of China as a regional power and its territorial issues with China. The promotion of BRI by the media as a strategic action by China to extend its influence is in line with the national interests of India that emphasize on sovereignty and the security of the region. Conversely, the national identity of Pakistan is determined by the fact that it is an economic growing state and regionally integrated. The decision to frame the BRI as an economic opportunity in Pakistan is an indication of how Pakistan has experienced strategic alliance with China over the years and its willingness to leverage the BRI to solve its economic problems. The positive portrayal of the BRI by the media as a job creation policy, infrastructure development policy and an investment policy also appeal to the interests of economic modernization and regionalism of the goals of Pakistan.

### **Effects of Media Framing on the National Identities**

The framing on the BRI by the media is closely related to the national identities of India and Pakistan. The perception of the BRI as a threat to India is a boost to the identity of the country as a regional power that is determined to safeguard their sovereignty and strategic interests. This framing brings about the perception of China as a strategic opponent, which shapes the public opinion and affects the attitude of the foreign policy of India toward China. The drive of the media towards national security is also an important issue in the mobilization of the masses which is why BRI has become a very contested topic in India.

The description of the BRI by the media in Pakistan is in line with the fact that the nation is a developing country, and it is trying to grow in terms of its economy. The Pakistani media contributes to the national discourse of development and integration in the region by positioning CPEC as one of the primary growth stimuli. The BRI is economically framed in a way that justifies the diplomatic ties between Pakistan and China and makes the BRI be used as an instrument of national development and not a cause of geopolitical instability.

### **The Influence of New Media In Creating The Opinion of The People**

These new media platforms have significantly impacted on the general opinion in both India and Pakistan. In India, social media largely has fortified the security issues that traditional media have raised. The posts on twitter and Facebook about the geopolitical threat posed by the BRI have helped build the perception in the minds of people about the BRI as a strategic threat to the sovereignty of India. The security-focused discussion of social media is indicative of the rest of the nation which feels threatened by the increasing power of China in South Asia as a challenge to the leadership role of India in the region. The new media has been very vital in boosting the BRI economic narrative in Pakistan. Campaigns via social media and blogging posts have brought to the spotlight the economic benefits of CPEC making it seem like a source of economic growth and regional integration. Although there are some opposing voices, the overall vibe on the Pakistani social media is heavily positive, which supports the pro-BRI position of the government.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although the paper provides insightful information on how the BRI has been framed in both India and Pakistan, there are several limitations that one should keep in mind. The issue of sampling bias is also quite important, because the analysis is mostly directed at the mainstream media and the large social media platforms, which might not reflect the opinions of the regional or independent sources. Also, the time constraint (2023-2025) does not allow capturing the dynamic aspects of media framing in their entirety since the geopolitical landscape or the shift in the leadership of the political administration may change the media presentation of the BRI across time.

In addition, the fact that the study is based on publicly available media sources is also a restriction with regards to coverage since not every media content will be gathered and examined. Such limitations could be overcome in future research by adding more sources of media such as independent

sources and regional media and by conducting longitudinal studies which would focus on how the BRI is being framed.

### **Future Research Directions**

The development of future research may be based on the present study that places emphasis on the longitudinal change in media framing of the BRI as more changes in the political landscape and geopolitical events influence the perception of the people. Also, a comparative analysis of the media framing in other South Asian states, including Bangladesh or Nepal, would also shed more light on the local processes of the BRI. The analysis of the influence of the alternative media and independent sources in building the perceptions of the BRI may provide a more accurate picture of the way the initiative is framed in various media platforms.

### **Policy Implications**

This study has great policy implications to India, Pakistan and China. In India, the policy makers can use the media platforms to introduce a more balanced account of the BRI not only in terms of security but also in terms of economic prospects. This would go a long way in alleviating doubt and making people have a positive discussion regarding the role of the BRI in the region.

The BRI has been presented in a positive light by the media in Pakistan, but there is a necessity to consider the possible dangers of economic reliance on China. A less biased media coverage, which covers both the side opportunities and challenges, would stimulate a more thoughtful popular discussion concerning the consequences of the long-term CPEC. The new media avenues can be utilized by both countries to communicate positively about the BRI, and this will enable free discussions that concentrate on both the economic and security fronts. This would facilitate understanding and probing between India and Pakistan and this would help the greater South Asian region.

### **Conclusion**

The paper has examined the ways in which new media influences the perceptions of the people in India and Pakistan towards the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and found that there are huge discrepancies between the approaches to framing the BRI in both countries. The BRI is mostly conceived in an Indian context, where the said security is defined as a concern about increasing Chinese influence, as well as the possible geopolitical risks of such a project as CPEC, mainly concerning the contentious areas like Kashmir. This framing complies with national identity of India as a regional power that is sovereign and security oriented. Meanwhile, the Pakistani media pays little attention to the economic opportunities of the BRI, paying attention to infrastructural development and creating employment due to CPEC. This standpoint is the representative of the Pakistani national identity of a developing country that aims at the economic development and regional integration. These contrasting frames are enhanced by new media, and the discussion on social media in India is more centred on supporting security concerns, whilst in Pakistan, it remains largely the same as the traditional media focused on economic opportunities. Not only do these framing differences influence the popular opinion, but they also have a say on bilateral relations and foreign policy between the two countries. It does however have limitations in its conduct especially in depending on mainstream national and social media, which may not fully reflect regional views. Future studies would consider expanding the field by looking at the other countries that are entangled in the BRI and especially in South Asia and Africa to better understand the subject matter. In conclusion, policymakers in India and Pakistan need to learn the concept of media framing to promote positive interaction and promote collaboration across the borders.

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