



NEWS FRAMING OF CPEC DURING COVID-19: AN ANALYSIS OF THE LEADING PAKISTANI PRESS (2020-2021)

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Abstract

This research paper explores the news framing of CPEC - China Pakistan Economic Corridor after COVID-19 in the leading press of Pakistan. The following study employs 'Framing Analysis' by Goffman to investigate the representation of CPEC in the selected newspaper. This research analyses the news stories published on the front and back pages of the DAWN newspaper using different frames to study the coverage patterns about CPEC. The theory of framing was used which helped the researcher to study the stance of Pakistani leading press towards CPEC news framing during pandemic. Online news articles of the selected newspaper were analyzed from 1st January 2020 to 31th December 2021. Content analysis of the news articles revealed that DAWN has been framing CPEC in the positive light since January 2020. The results of the study showed that DAWN's stance is mostly favorable towards CPEC even after COVID-19 however some fears and concerns appeared regarding the completion of the project due to production delays and cost overrun. Findings also reveal that Pakistani leading press gives significance to CPEC and considers it as a promising project of future. Study recommends that policy making is required to minimize the unfavorable stance of press towards CPEC.

Keywords: Media framing, DAWN, Press, Coverage, CPEC, COVID-19

1. Introduction

Pakistan and China share close bilateral relations since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1951. Over the years, Sino-Pak relation has strengthened and there is a regular exchange of visits between the two countries (Pakistan Embassy Beijing, n.d.). Despite different political systems and culture, the relationship between China and Pakistan is marked by durability. Sino-Pakistan relationship developed not because of geopolitical shifts but mainly due to the mutual interests in economics, defense, trade, nuclear matters and broader diplomatic alliances (Ali, 2017).



China's Belt and Road Initiative is a multitrillion-dollar project that holds significant place according to China's 13th five-year plan released in October 2015. It is China's most ambitious foreign trade and investment project, spanning 65 countries and 60% of the world's population. There is enthusiasm and hopes but there is also skepticism throughout the regions across the world (Djankov & Miner, 2016). CPEC is a flagship project of Belt and Road initiative, which is now playing its role in improving infrastructure and enhancing people to people ties (Pakistan Embassy Beijing, n.d.). CPEC is a major economic cooperation between China and Pakistan. It is an important step to strengthen Sino-Pakistan all weather cooperation. It will not only ease energy crises in Pakistan but it will also improve infrastructure and economic growth (Chinese Embassy Pakistan, 2018).

COVID-19 is the disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that emerged in December 2019. The virus caused a pandemic of respiratory illness. Worldwide, COVID-19 has claimed millions of lives and left some survivors with long-lasting health issues. A person can contract the coronavirus from another individual. In order to curb the spread of virus, lockdowns were imposed when the virus initially hit the globe to ensure physical distancing (*What Is Coronavirus?*, 2022).

The media is essential in the modern world. Its consequences range from personal to social to national to global. The content of the mass media is a key factor in determining future choices for international relations and foreign policy. According to Lippmann (1922), "the press creates the images of the outside world in people's minds; they see the outside world through press." According to Ross (2006), media play a significant role in international politics and conflicts because people rely on them to provide timely, reliable information about far-off occurrences.

Framing appears in much of the news. From print to broadcast news, frames are found in all types of media and they convey meaning through the interaction between the reader and the text. Frames are embedded in culture, inside people's minds, and within the agendas of the media (Carter, 2013). Entman (2004) writes that the words and images that make up the frame can be identified by their ability to stimulate support or opposition to the sides of the issue. He defined framing as "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution" (Entman, 2004, p.5).

Therefore, in light of the aforementioned issue, it is crucial and worthwhile to look into how the Pakistani press has handled its coverage of the CPEC during the pandemic. Numerous studies have been done to examine the role of the media in the ongoing CPEC project, but it's critical to examine how Pakistan's print media presented it throughout the crucial years of 2020 and 2021. The study contributes to research concerning the framing of CPEC in the print media. With the advent of COVID-19, the overall sentiment towards China grew negative and international media started projecting China and its projects in a negative light. Judgements were made regarding China's politics, economic status, foreign affairs and cultural practices etc. Many also criticized China's Belt and Road Initiative and its flagship project CPEC (Chen et al., 2021). The researcher explores



the impact of COVID-19 on the news framing of CPEC. The study has significance since the CPEC is an ongoing project and both countries have gained extraordinary attention from the world's media in recent years. This study can help field experts and public relation practitioners to develop relevant policies and post COVID-19 media narrative regarding CPEC. The research has the following objectives:

1. To investigate the coverage (framing) given to CPEC by the selected newspaper during COVID-19.
2. To inspect the coverage given to CPEC project in Dawn in terms of direction, stance and tone of the news from January 2020 to December 2021.
3. To find out the DAWN's strategic placement of CPEC related stories.

2. Literature Review

The purpose of this part is to examine what other researchers have written on the subject under study by analyzing the literature that is directly or indirectly related to the research.

2.1. CPEC: An Overview

Pakistan was one of the first countries to recognize People's Republic of China. Pakistan considers China as its close friend and China considers Pakistan as its 'Iron Brother' (Pakistan Embassy Beijing, n.d.). The friendship between China and Pakistan has been characterized by the leaders of both nations as "higher than mountains, deeper than oceans, and recently, sweeter than honey,". It is an extraordinary case in the international system of states that we live in, after all, the cooperation is based on firm geopolitical and realistic measurements (Zeb, 2012).

In South Asia, the largest project between the two nations to improve their political and economic ties through trade is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. China, the Middle East, and Africa will benefit from this megaproject's completion in terms of trade. The distance between the Chinese ports and Middle Eastern oil will be shorter thanks to CPEC (Abid & Ashfaq, 2015). Along with the CPEC project, Pakistan and China signed 51 memorandums of understanding (MOUs) in April 2015. Additionally, Pakistan and China signed agreements in May 2014 for the construction of the Metro Bus and Orange Line tracks. Mutual trade in various sectors will boost both states' economic growth. Trade between Pakistan and China would expand to US \$16 billion by 2015 and US \$25 billion by 2017 (Nation, 2015).

CPEC will provide a significant number of jobs for the Pakistani population by 2030, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has the potential to generate over 2.3 million new employment. Eighty-eight projects totaling billions of dollars will be carried out under the CPEC umbrella. 18 of the eighty projects have been finished, 28 are in the process of being finished, and the other 41 CPEC projects are in the pipeline. 47000 Pakistanis were employed by various CPEC projects even during the Covid-19 pandemic ("CPEC Projects to Benefit Pakistan With 2.3m Jobs by 2030," 2020).



2.2. News Media, Framing and Policy Making

According to Entman (1993), framing makes clear that good communication has the power to create realities. The framing axis serves as the center of agenda setting theory. Leeper & Slothuus (2019) conducted a thorough investigation on the function of framing in implanting a particular kind of predetermined agenda in the brains of audience members. This study came to the conclusion that the press plays a crucial role in how certain government agendas and policies are framed. It also influences the masses to think, act, and behave in ways that are advantageous to or detrimental to particular ideologies and policies.

It is believed that the media play a significant role in a nation's formulation of its foreign policy, and that journalists adhere to national foreign policy directives, particularly during times of conflict or when the nation's national interests are threatened (Baum, 2003). In general, it is considered that states manipulate the media to further their foreign policy objectives, especially during times of conflict and crisis (Pavelka, 2014).

2.3. Framing of CPEC in Print Media

Rawan, Hussain & Khurshid (2018) used generic frames proposed by Semetko and Valkenburg to study the coverage of Sino-Pak relations in global media. The purpose of their study was to investigate how leading American, Indian, Chinese and Pakistani press frame Sino-Pak relations, in the backdrop of CPEC. Their analysis indicates that foreign policy of the country influence media framing. Furthermore, they found out the Times of India and the New York Times focused more on the 'conflict' frame whereas DAWN and China Daily emphasized more the 'economic, responsibility and human interest' frames.

Yousaf, Ahmed and Fiaz (2018) in their study '*Framing of China Pak Economic Corridor (CPEC) in the Leading Press of Pakistan and China*' investigate how press of both countries frame CPEC. It uses content analysis to analyze the framing in the press. The study shows that both countries frame CPEC with favorable stance. Umer, Sharma and Hussain (2018) studied the framing of CPEC in Pakistani, Indian and Chinese press. Their findings indicate that transnational press represents CPEC as an economic game changer.

Aslam, Ali, and Farooq explored the top Indian newspapers and studied how CPEC was framed from 2016 to 2018. By claiming that CPEC passes through the area where India and Pakistan have a border dispute and that China wants to use CPEC to advance its illegal interests in the area, India is stirring up controversy surrounding the project. Additionally, Indian print media (The Hindu and The Indian Express) frequently used the Chinese Army's deployment at Gwadar to frame propaganda against CPEC and attempt to link it to the planning of potential future incursions on India (Aslam et al., 2020).



2.4. Chinese and Global Media Perspective on the Impact of COVID-19 on CPEC

Despite significant economic and health obstacles brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects have made significant progress (“CPEC Achieves Major Progress Despite COVID-19: Pakistani Official,” 2020).

Worldwide commercial operations have been interrupted due to the coronavirus epidemic. Projects on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have been hampered because Chinese workers are subject to travel restrictions while local labour is required to stay at home. Despite the difficult conditions, China is advancing BRI by gradually resuming development activities and constructing the "Health Silk Road." Beijing is optimistic that once the crisis is handled, BRI will spearhead a global economic rebound (Saleem, 2020). Belts and Roads have been closed ever since the coronavirus pandemic started. The Payra coal power plant in Bangladesh, the CPEC, Cambodia's exclusive economic zone, and projects in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Myanmar have all seen a halt in construction (Shepard, 2020).

Christoph Nedopil Wang, Director of the Green Belt and Road Initiative Center, explains that China is battling to keep the economy flexible because these choices could have a significant financial impact on China and its international partners, particularly the BRI (Wang, 2020). The virus will not affect the CPEC (Zhou, 2020). Despite the pandemic, China and Pakistan saw ‘amazing progress’ on the CPEC projects (“China, Pakistan See ‘Remarkable Progress’ in CPEC Projects Despite Pandemic,” 2021).

H1: ‘Trade Development and Economy’ frame is most likely to appear in the DAWN.

H2: Coverage of CPEC is favorable in Dawn even after COVID-19.

H3: Placement of CPEC news is not more prominent in Dawn after COVID-19.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework directs the focus of the study. It shows relationship between pertinent theories and provides a map (Sinclair, 2007).

2.5.1. Framing Theory

The term ‘framing’ has a long history in mass media research. The sociologist Ervin Goffman first put the concept of framing forth. He claims that framing is a useful method for using an empirical framework to assess content for recurrent themes or key concepts. In essence, framing analysis gives its user the ability to find, perceive, name, and label an almost endless number of concrete events that are characterized in its terms. Through content analysis, frames can be found and interpreted using Goffman's framing analysis as a foundation (Goffman, 1974). Many communication scholars have applied Goffman’s theory in their work and explored and extended other dimensions of the theory. A frame is a primary theme or plot that gives significance to a



sequence of developing events and establishes a relationship between them. The framing makes an inference on the topic of contention or the core concern (de Vreese, 2005). Entman defines framing as “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” (Entman, 1993, p.52). Entman also identified the four locations of frames in the communication process i.e. the communicators who make conscious or unconscious framing judgments; the text (or news story) which may or may not contain a certain frame; the receiver who reads the newspaper and whose understanding after reading the news story may or may not reflect the story’s frames; and finally, the culture in which both the communicator and the receiver live and exchange meaning (Entman, 1993). This study focuses on the text (news articles) to identify frames used in the reporting. There is a pattern that unifies every news article, according to other scholars like Pan and Kosicki. This theme unites the various semantic elements of a story to form a unified whole (Pan and Kosicki, 1993). Pan and Kosicki referred to these themes as the frames due to their structuring function. According to Gitlin, the media are influenced by ideology and they always frame content in ways that can promote different definitions and understanding of issues (Gitlin, 1980/2003). Mass media scholars have long argued that it is indispensable to understand the ways in which framing of issues occurs because such framing influence public perceptions of issues and policy formation etc. A frame works by addressing certain values, considerations, or facts with more obvious relevance to the topic than they might have under another frame (Scheufle, 1999).

2.5.2. Justification of Theory

Over the past two decades, "framing" has emerged as one of the key theories in the study of news coverage. The framing of an issue in mass media refers to how it is portrayed. The first benefit of framing is that it enables the researcher to carefully examine the media material and characterize it in terms of the kinds and frequency of the frames utilized. Second, it gives the chance to examine how the material has changed over time and across mediums. Third, it is a valuable tool to complement other media effect theories, such as agenda setting and priming, in order to understand how media affects people's views and behavior (Vliegenhart, 2012). Keeping in mind these qualities, the researcher employed the theory of framing for the current study. Pakistani media has been depicting CPEC project from its beginnings by laying out various edges of its items, which allow people in general to think about this task as a basic drive. As a result, in order to examine how the newspaper framed the project from January 2020 to December 2021, researchers have implemented the concept of ‘Framing’ and divided news stories about the project published on the front and back pages of selected mainstream newspaper into various frames.

3. Methodology

The current study has been conducted using the quantitative research approach backed by qualitative description. The research method employed in this study is Content Analysis.



3.1. Content Analysis

Content analysis is a process which examines data, images, text, sound, symbols, characters and printed material i.e. speeches, textbooks and print advertising. It is used to explore what meaning images and other data hold for people and how people perceive them. It is a procedure, which enables the researcher to draw inferences from the data (Krippendorff, 2013). The purpose of content analysis is to identify and count the occurrence of specified characteristics or dimensions of texts, and through this, to be able to say something about the message. This method is popular with mass media researchers as it provides an efficient way to investigate the content of the media qualitatively and quantitatively.

3.2. Method used for Content Analysis

The current research uses secondary data for content analysis. The reason for choosing DAWN is its leading status in Pakistan. DAWN is the oldest English language newspaper of Pakistan. The leader of Pakistan Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah founded it in 1941. It is owned by DAWN Group of Newspapers and has one of the largest readership base (Rasheed, 2014). DAWN also has an online existence; archives of the website have made access to the articles a lot easier. The researcher has followed the steps adopted from Wimmer, (1994:167-168) as cited in Chaudhry, (2008) to study the portrayal of CPEC in the selected newspaper.

1. The mainstream newspaper of Pakistan DAWN was defined as the 'universe' of the study.
2. All news stories published on the front and back pages of the selected newspaper are the 'population' of the study.
3. All CPEC related news stories is the sample of the study from 1st January 2020 to 31st December 2021.
4. Each news story about CPEC published on the front and back pages of DAWN newspaper during specified time period is considered as 'unit of analysis'.
5. 'Categories' were designed and operationalized for each news type.
6. 'Directions of the contents' were defined as 'favorable', 'unfavorable' and 'Neutral'.
7. Pilot study and the 'Coding of the contents' were done on a purposefully designed coding sheet. Following are the major variables that were identified for Coding purposes:
 - a. The name of the newspaper being examined
 - b. News story placement: (A. front, B. back)
 - c. News categories: (A. Trade Development and Economy, B. Energy and Power Sector, C. Regional Peace and Security, D. Corridor to CARS, E. Response of National and International Stakeholders)
 - d. Direction/tone of news (A. favorable, B. unfavorable, C. neutral)
8. The collected data was presented (in logically arranged tables) and analyzed
9. In the last, the 'conclusion' was derived from the findings of the study



3.3. Categorization and Operationalization

Prior to doing a quantitative analysis, it was necessary to group the wide range of issues into categories that were exhaustive, mutually exclusive, and dependable. The researcher has created the following categories to assess the nature, degree, extent, and position of the news regarding the CPEC project:

A. Trade Development and Economy:

It includes all news pertaining to initiatives that may strengthen Pakistan's economy. Additionally, the advantages, costs, and accomplishment of the CPEC's trade, development and economic initiatives are also mentioned in this area.

B. Energy and Power Sector:

It includes all news pertaining to the energy and power industries. Additionally, the development, results, and benefits and drawbacks of these projects' power sector will be covered.

C. Regional Peace and Security:

It covers every piece of news pertaining to regional security and peace. It will cover all news stories that touch on how this flagship project will affect regional security and peace.

D. Corridors to CARs:

It includes all project-related news regarding the expansion to Central Asian Republics (CARs). Additionally, this category will cover the advantages following the connection of CPEC and CARs.

E. Response of National and International Stakeholders:

This covers all positive, negative and neutral responses of government, traders, opposition, military, and Chinese government towards CPEC project.

3.4. Direction of the Content

To determine the direction or stance, the researcher mostly relied on the 'overall tone' of the news. Different phrases, frames, ideologies, idioms, catchy words, themes, adjectives, slogans, and tones (favorable, unfavorable, neutral) were observed in the substance of news items in order to ascertain the 'whole impression'. This textual analysis is a method of interpretation that seeks to elucidate the significance of the explicit and implicit meanings included in a given text and originating from a particular culture and time (According to Chaudhry (2008), Elul, 2000: 54). Data was rated as 'Favorable', 'Unfavorable', or 'Neutral' on a three-point scale to determine the direction of the news content.



Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral
Any news appeared in DAWN during the study period, regarding CPEC project will be considered "Favorable" if its general stance directly supports government, by its content and is against the spoilers of CPEC project.	Any news about the CPEC project that appeared in DAWN during the study period will be deemed "Unfavorable" if it generally portrays the project negatively, criticizes the issue in its analysis and makes suggestions, is against the project through its content, and supports the agenda of proxies who are opposed to the project.	Any news about the CPEC project that appeared in DAWN throughout the study period will be categorized as "Neutral" if its overall stance is purely interpretive and lacks any favorable or unfavorable slant.

3.5. Coding and Reliability

The researcher examined news articles about CPEC in order to identify their categories, directions, and analyses. Decisions were made based on information that could be related to the themes and the coder's evaluations in order to establish classification that is mutually exclusive. Some news occasionally belongs in a different category that is either directly or indirectly related to its primary subject. For such news, decisions regarding the contents were made based on the headline, the frequency of ideas, words, and phrases on specific topics, as well as the (core theme) or central idea, or the overall impression of the coder based on the characteristics listed in the preceding paragraphs. The headline mostly assisted in deciding the categorization of the contents (Wimmer and Dominick, 1991:165 as cited in Chaudhry, 2008).

4. Study Analysis

The following section presents the analysis of the study and provides answers to the established research questions. Following the completion of the data collection, significant interpretations were derived.

4.1. Framing of CPEC in DAWN

The first question asks the kind of coverage (framing) given to CPEC in the news articles of DAWN and the second question dealt with the direction or stance of the selected newspaper in the news coverage of CPEC. The following table presents the findings of the researcher after the textual analysis. The researcher analyzed a total of 78 news articles published on the front and back pages of DAWN during the time frame of two years i.e. January 01, 2020 – December 31, 2021. After



carefully examining the articles, the researcher identified frames and stance used for the representation of CPEC after COVID-19. After analyzing the data, almost all frames were found in the articles. Some of the frames were more dominantly used and others were almost absent. The researcher read the news articles and their headlines multiple times to explore the framing.

Frames	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	N (%)
Trade Development and Economy	12	-	-	12 (30.8)
Energy and Power Sector	4	-	-	4 (10.2)
Regional Peace and Security	1	-	-	1 (2.6)
Corridor to CARS	3	-	-	3 (7.7)
Response	14	1	4	19 (48.7)
	34	1	4	39 (100)

Table 1 presents the framing of CPEC on the front pages of DAWN

A total of 39 CPEC related news stories were found on the front pages of DAWN. The analysis reveals that the frames of 'Trade Development and Economy' and 'Response' were most commonly found. Most news stories were regarding the response of national and international entities on CPEC. DAWN stance is mostly favorable towards CPEC in almost all categories. Only 1 news story with the 'Response' frame was unfavorable in approach, 4 news stories were neutral however 14 news stories under the same frame were favorable. Out of 39 news stories, 34 were favorable towards CPEC. According to statistical analysis, 87.1% news stories were favorable, 2.6% were unfavorable and 10.3% were neutral in their coverage of CPEC in DAWN.

Frames	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	N (%)
Trade Development and Economy	13	-	-	13 (33.3)
Energy and Power Sector	-	2	-	2 (5.1)
Regional Peace and Security	4	-	-	4 (10.3)
Corridor to CARS	1	-	-	1 (2.6)
Response	15	4	-	19 (48.7)
	33	6	-	39 (100)

Table 2 presents the framing of CPEC on the back pages of DAWN

A total of 39 CPEC related news stories were found on the back pages of DAWN. The analysis reveals that the frames of 'Trade Development and Economy' and 'Response' were most



commonly found. Most news stories were regarding the response of national and international entities on CPEC. DAWN stance is mostly favorable towards CPEC in almost all categories. 2 news stories with unfavorable stance were found with 'Energy and Power Sector' frame while 4 news stories were unfavorable with 'Response' frame. The researcher noticed that more unfavorable news articles were placed on the back pages of DAWN.

4.2. Strategic Placement of the news stories

The following table provides answer to the final research question. The pages of the selected newspaper and number of published stories are shown.

Frames	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	N (%)
Trade Development and Economy	12	-	-	12 (30.8)
Energy and Power Sector	4	-	-	4 (10.2)
Regional Peace and Security	1	-	-	1 (2.6)
Corridor to CARS	3	-	-	3 (7.7)
Response	14	1	4	19 (48.7)
	34	1	4	39 (100)

Table 3 presents the strategic placement of CPEC related stories in DAWN

Fewer CPEC related stories were published in DAWN during the year 2020 when COVID hit the globe. 10 news stories were published on front pages while 18 were published on the back pages. The researcher found that the fewer number of stories in 2020 is due to the pause imposed on the development activities of the project due to COVID-19. A total of 50 stories were published in DAWN in the year 2021, in this year more stories were published on the front pages while less stories were on the back pages. This was the time when lockdowns were lifted and normal activities resumed.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the research was to investigate the stance and framing of Pakistani leading press towards CPEC after COVID-19. After the analysis, the researcher found answers to the research questions. The analysis revealed the framing used by the DAWN and its stance towards China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The researcher found various topics or themes under each framing category. These topics showed the overall stance of the newspaper towards CPEC. The



words and phrases used, revealed the framing. DAWN mainly portrayed CPEC using the frames of 'Trade Development and Economy' and 'Response'. DAWN is the leading English newspaper of Pakistan; a country that shares friendly ties with China. Both countries make exchanges in political, economic and cultural arenas. Economy is the most prominent aspect of their friendship especially after the launch of China Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is the flagship project of Belt and Road Initiative.

As per the analysis, DAWN portrays CPEC in a positive light and has favorable stance towards the project even after COVID-19. A total of 9 news stories were published regarding the impact of COVID-19 on CPEC. 3 of which were published on the front pages i.e. *Imran highlights govt performance over three years, CPEC hasn't slowed down, assures Asad Umar, CPEC execution hit by coronavirus: PM of DAWN* while the rest appeared on the back pages i.e. *CPEC to be completed at all costs, says Imran, CPEC projects unaffected by Covid-19, say officials, Parties vow to ensure CPEC progress, guard it against threats, Work on CPEC project progressing: Chinese envoy, Delayed JCC meeting on Friday: CPEC authority chief, CPEC projects' implementation to be speeded up: Asad*

All these stories had a favorable stance however some fears and concerns appeared regarding the completion of the project due to production delays and cost overrun. Findings also reveal that Pakistani leading press gives significance to CPEC and considers it as a promising project of future. Study suggests that policy making is needed to reduce the negative stance of press towards CPEC. Pakistan should make efforts to develop a post COVID-19 narrative of CPEC since the project holds significance in the country's overall development. Before analyzing the content, three hypotheses were drawn by the researcher. The analysis of the content confirmed the hypotheses of the researcher as valid. It was hypothesized that 'Trade Development and Economy' frame was most likely to appear in DAWN's articles. The results of the study partially confirmed this hypothesis. It was second most occurring frame after 'Response' in the news framing of CPEC in DAWN. The second hypothesis was also found valid as the analysis showed that the coverage of CPEC is favorable in Dawn even after COVID-19. The third hypothesis was also partially valid. The placement of CPEC news was not prominent in DAWN during the year 2020 when the pandemic actually started however in the year 2021, the placement of CPEC was prominent and most news stories appeared on the front pages with favorable stance. According to the current research on how the CPEC was framed in Pakistan's leading newspaper, it may be deduced that the project received adequate publicity on the front and back pages of major newspaper, even during the pivotal days of Covid-19. Additionally, the way these news items have been framed has been very helpful to the project's strategy and execution. Therefore, it can be inferred that framing through newspaper content is not only beneficial but can also be implemented at periods when the globe is facing major challenges. Through this study, it is also possible to conclude that mass communication still uses newspapers and their online versions. It can be extremely effective at informing, educating, entertaining, and influencing the thoughts of the general public as well as policy-makers if it is consumed in a structured and organized manner.



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