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Projection of CPEC in Print Media of Pakistan from 2014-2019

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Abstract

The study aims to examine the narrative of CPEC disseminated by the Pakistani national print English media. For comprehensive understanding, the CPEC was divided into three dimensions, economic, culture and environment. The study follows the secondary data for the analysis of the narrative on the print English media about the CPEC. The English media was specified in a way that all the leading newspapers like Dawn, The Tribune and The News were consulted covering the news and the opinion based articles. The study finds that the change in the trends about narrative of CPEC seems fluctuating between the favorable and unfavorable for Pakistan. Hence, the changing trends in narrative seem quite clear and visible. The study recommends that government and relevant officials representing CPEC should properly interaction with the media and journalists need to be capacitated in knowledge about the particular aspects of CPEC.

Key Words: CPEC, Print Media, Narrative, Favorable, Un-favorable

Introduction

One Belt One Road (OBOR) is an ambitious idea of Chinese President XI Jinping in which china intends to access the Central Asia, South Asia, Middle East, African and European countries for improving the trade and develop its economy (Tian, 2015). Belt and Road Initiative has changed the economic and political dynamics of the region and China is being considered as the future Super Power of the world. The CPEC is a flag ship project of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) which is a bilateral project between the Pakistan and China focusing on developing strong economic, political and strategic foundations between both countries based on the decades of bilateral relationship. CPEC aims to improve the infrastructure within Pakistan, establishing the power plants, enhancing the trade volume, generating the jobs and innovating the social sector. The project of CPEC was launched on April 20, 2015, which includes 51 agreements and memorandum were signed between Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Chinese president Xi Jinping in 2015 (Abid,& Ashfaq, 2015). Initially, the total cost of the project was $46vbillion; however, with the time, it extended to $62billion (Makhdoom, Shah & Sami, 2018). However, after the agreement of CPEC, a huge debate was started on the local and international media about the pros and cons of this project. Pakistan has remained quite enthusiastic about this project and worked sincerely and seriously about the designing and completion of the project.

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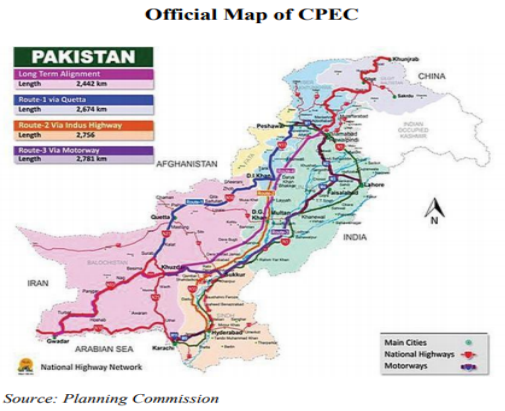


Figure 1: Official Map of CPEC

The role of media is of utmost importance in this regard because a lot of has been disseminated through media to the global and Pakistani audiences. The worldwide media has been reporting and analyzing the multiple aspects of CPEC and some declaring it as a Chinese style of colonialism and debt trap. CPEC is such a road project that has various dimensions and in order to understand it easily, the project has been divided into three themes such as economic, culture and environment. This paper however, endeavours to focus on the Pakistani media and specifically the print English media and analyzes the trend of the narrative about the economic, cultural and environmental aspects of CPEC.

Problem Statement

The Pakistani print media has been continuously analyzing the effects of CPEC and a narrative was constructed. The narrative around the CPEC was not constructed merely in a straight- forward way rather it seems that media is also confused about the various aspects of CPEC. The lack of understanding about CPEC has been further creating confusion and the masses are not in this position to clearly and scientifically understand the impact of the project. Therefore, this study prioritizes to comprehend the changing narrative of the print English media about the multiple aspects of CPEC. The existing paper would help in understanding the variation in the narrative of the print English media which further sensitize the policy makers to develop an extensive framework to appropriately address the media.

Literature Review

Kanwal, Chong and Pitafi (2019) stated that the government officials of China and Pakistan perceive CPEC as the fundamental project for the development of both nations, particularly Pakistan. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been initiated keeping in view the objectives of having benefits at a large level for local communities. They also argue that some projects like power plants, infrastructure, educational institutions etc have already started and contributing to the economic and social

development of the Pakistan. Tehsin, Khan and Sargana (2017) expressed that CPEC has brought a positive change in the multiple-sectors including infrastructure, education, energy, agriculture, trade, employment. Blanchard Blanchard and Dreyer (2017) were of the opinion that the government of both countries are advocating that CPEC would enhance the quality of life of the people through generating huge opportunities for the youth and experts. In addition, the connectivity of the roads and motorways would make the citizens capable to utilize their talent and skills and increase the living standards. Saad, Xinping and Ijaz (2019) argued that CPEC is such a giant project that would generate millions of jobs for the locals as well as for the Chinese. The point is that employment at such level would surely reduce the poverty and the economic condition of the country get elevated. Kousar, Rehman, Zafar, Ali, and Nasir (2018) expressed that certainly CPEC has started to create the jobs for the locals and about 30,000 Pakistani professionals specially with the medical, engineering and IT background were employed in the projects of Coal Power projects and Qasim port under the framework of CPEC. Smith (2001) was of the view that CPEC needs to be perceived in a positive way particular regarding the enhancement in the literacy of the people. Certainly, the improvement in the education helps directly and indirectly to reduce the poverty. Ali, Mi, Shah, Shah, Khan, Ullah, and Bibi (2018) perceived and analyzed that Pakistan is already suffering from the environmental issues and there are chances that CPEC would add the more mess to the environment. However, the latest technology may be utilized in the execution of multiple projects so that the environmental pollution and issues could be reduced. They were of the view that there is a serious need to develop proactive strategies to counter th environment related threats. Similarly, Asees, Awan and Ali (2019) concluded that various projects of CPEC specifically the industrial and infrastructural development would directly or indirectly influence the environment. Thomas, (2018) stated that the BRI project is a grand effort to encourage the smaller states like Pakistan and Sri Lanka to have debt and certainly these states would not be able to return the loan. Consequently, such states will be in a debt trap and their foreign policy would be affected due to debt trap.

The aforementioned literature has analyzed the various aspects of the CPEC and could not capture the complete picture. For instance, this particular paper aims to understand the CPEC and divides it into three major variables including economic, culture and environment. Moreover, the previous literature relies on the common perceptions and policy papers as well but this study examines the secondary data from 2014 to earlier 2019 which gives an extensive and comprehensive picture of the project with the lens of the print media.

Methodology

The quantitative approach has been employed in the study to get understanding about the changing trends in the print media. The secondary data was collected from the media, specifically print media. Print is comprises of two types, Urdu newspapers, English newspapers and newspapers in local languages of provinces. However, this study goes with the English selected newspapers such as Dawn News, The Tribune and The News. The rationale of selecting the specific English papers was that these papers are considered as the leading English print media of Pakistan. Moreover, the mentioned newspapers are continuously covering the multiple stories around the CPEC. The method of content analysis was adopted to apprehend the narrative and data

appropriately. Both of the sections of each newspaper including news stories and editorials or opinion based articles were consulted to understand and grab the data about the specific variables identified earlier and the changing narrative around the CPEC. The data was consulted from the specific newspapers of 2014 to earlier 2019. The data was analyzed through SPSS and presented in the form of graph for interpretation and discussions

Results and Discussion

The content analysis of the news and the articles of selected newspapers including Dawn, The Tribune and The News was carried out from year 2014 to earlier 2019. The study revolves around the three major variables, economy, culture and environment. The economy was divided into further sub-variables including infrastructure, electricity, economic zones, jobs etc. Similarly, the culture was also classified into multiple sub-variables including education, cultural integration, following new norms etc while the environment was also categorized into further multiple su-variables such as air pollution, industrial waste, deforestation etc. The trend of the media has been assessed on the Likert scale following, highly positive, positive, neutral, negative and highly negative.

Results

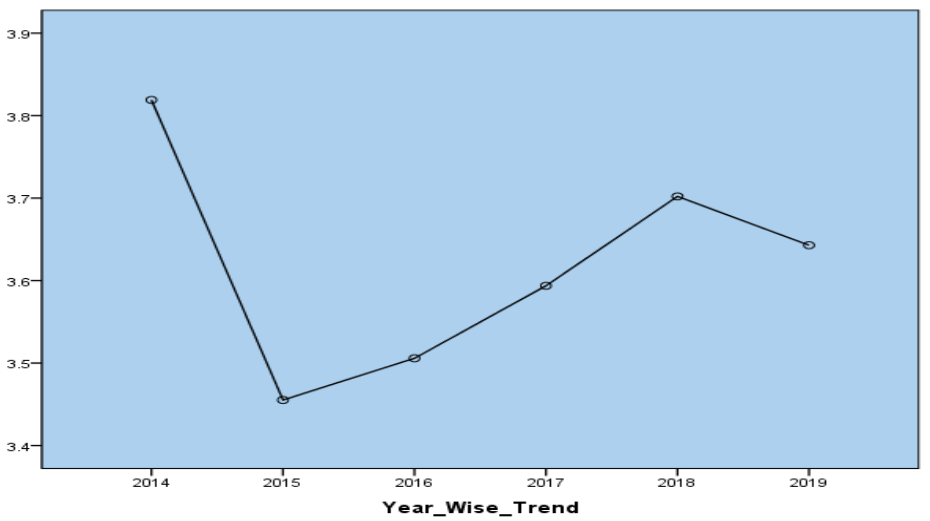


Figure 2: Projection of the Narrative about Economy under CPEC by Print English Media

The figure 2 indicates that English newspapers presented the narrative of CPEC with respect to the economy and that can be clearly observed that from 2014 to 2015, the economic aspects of CPEC were discussed in a pessimistic way, however, from 2015 to 2018, the positive and optimistic discussion about the economic aspects of CPEC was started whereas, in 2019 the narrative of CPEC in the context of the economy was turned into negative.

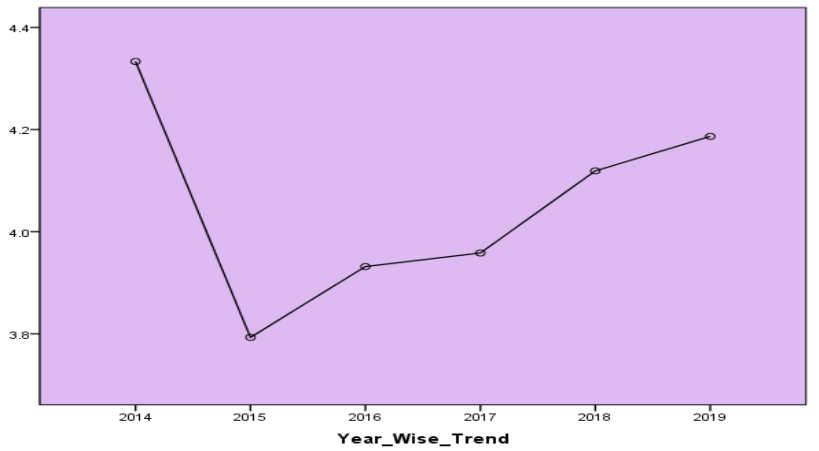


Figure 3: Projection of Narrative about Culture under CPEC by Print English Media

The figure 3 shows that the English newspapers constructed the positive narrative of CPEC in the beginning in 2014 but suddenly in later 2014 to 2015, the image of CPEC regarding culture changed. The trend does not decline more and started to move up from later 2015 to onward 2019.

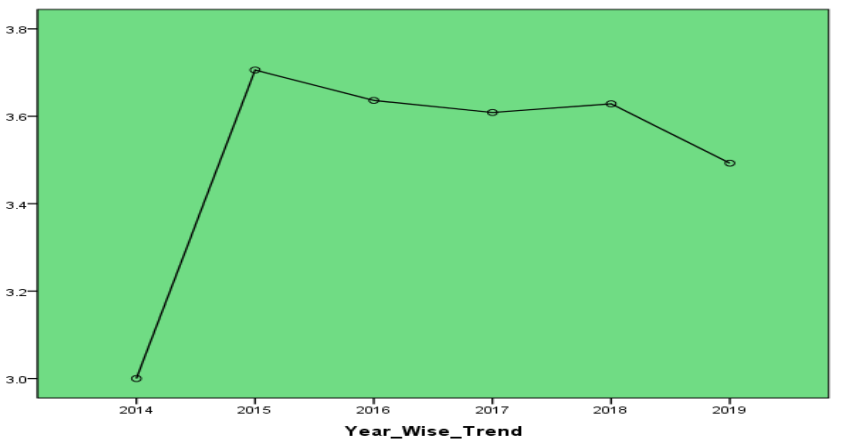


Figure 4: Projection of Narrative about Environment under CPEC by Print English Media

The figure 4 explains that the English newspapers from 2014 to mid of 2015 conceived the environmental aspect of CPEC in an optimistic way but in mid-2015 on ward to 2019, the narrative of English newspapers around the environmental aspect of CPEC changed.

Discussion

The discourse analysis in print media from editorials, opinion articles and news was observed to have a comprehensive understanding about the impact and the narrative

around CPEC. Since there is a lack of centre driven narrative and dissemination of systematic and authentic information and data about CPEC projects, as well as their impact and true nature, it seems difficult to separate facts from the discourse given by media. Little to no transparency and public sharing of information was shown by government and a certain silence is observed about monetary, strategic, political and logistical aspects of the project. Interestingly enough this silence is being interpreted readily by both media and public to manufacture and entertain either unrealistic expectations or speculate unnecessarily about the consequences of CPEC for Pakistan. The overall, print English media is supporting the narrative of CPEC but the important points which have not been addressed in a proper way are the prevailing misinformation which might be the outcome of the disinformation. The disinformation has been sponsored by the various regional players which are not in the favor of CPEC. So it is a great challenge to aptly deal and manage the perceptions of the people. The reservations need to be addressed as well. Above all, the changing trends of the perceptions of the print media in a way may be treated as positive because the diverse perspectives and multiple lens help in understanding and executing the project in much better way. about the Another push forward in managing perceptions and bridging gaps is addressing particularly those aspects of CPEC Narrative management around these issues could help highlighting the positive and neutralizing the negative through focused circulation and communication of information, data and awareness to relevant circles. Since the progressive influence of CPEC threatens the interests of the rival countries; the birth of anti- CPEC narratives by these states is a step to sabotage the project. Some actors started to build up pessimistic narratives and fabricated and false anti-CPEC narratives; colonial project, controversial routes, one state benefit, debt trap etc. started to rise in order to malign this project. This sort of narrative against the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has been launched through multiple means and channels, especially international and local media.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The CPEC has tremendous economic and strategic significance for China and Pakistan as well as for the region. IN a way, the future of Pakistan has been associated with the success of this project. However, anti-CPEC narrative is constantly being disseminated at the global and even at the local level through various means including media. The media has the capacity to develop the positive perceptions and narrative and even to deteriorate the good image of any project. IN Pakistan, media specifically print media is writing multiple articles on the effects of CPEC but the change in the opinions of the journalists is so quick that the readers and the audiences become confused. CPEC is such a huge project that it cannot afford a confused narrative in the national media of Pakistan. Such confused narrative may negatively influence the bilateral relations of Pakistan and China. Therefore, management of the narrative and the constant positive trend is highly required and for this, the government officials must play their role and engage the media. Moreover, an extensive media regulation is essential particularly regarding the CPEC related news and stories. Government may need to take media into confidence and brief them extensively around the positive implications of CPEC, and the many ways in which it may affect various aspects of Pakistan, through authentic facts and figures.

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