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# Constructive Journalism Practices and Regional Development: Qualitative Content Analysis of News on CPEC

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## Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to analyse the role of the press while in reporting on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a program that is considered to be the game-changer for regional development across various regions in Asia and other contienes of the world like Africa and Europe. Numerous developmental projects have been launched under the umbrella of CPEC. To conduct this study, news stories on CPEC from *Dawn*, *Express Tribune*, *Washington Post* and *New York Times* published from July 2021 to December 2022 were examined. In terms of methodology, qualitative content analysis techniques were utilized to examine the constructive journalism approach, employing six elements classified by the Journalism School at Windeshein University of Applied Sciences in 2016. These elements includes Solution, Future Orientation, Depolarization, Constructive Interviewing, The Rosling and Co-Creation And Empowerment. This study incorporates and defines these elements to avoid the researcher's bias, while also exploring beyond their scope. The news stories were covered through three-stage of coding process: open coding, axile coding and selective coding. The coding techniques were borrowed from the grounded theory approach. the study findings revealed the emergence of eight major themes from the data, pertaining to the journalistic practices of Pakistani and American newspapers regarding CPEC. Eight major themes are Risk, Game Changer, Geo-Politics, Corruption, Chinese Strategy, Economic Activities, Infrastrural Development and Project Details. This study provides a comparative analysis of four newspapers, two from Pakistan and two from USA, focusing on their journalistic practicesin relation to constructive journalism.

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**Keywords:** Constructive Journalism, Regional Development, Qualitative Content Analysis, News Analysis and CPEC

## Introduction

Due to globalization, everything depends on news and journalism is the process of collecting, assessing, making and presenting news. The core idea of news is to shape, mould, and highlight the issues that can mould people's opinions or perceptions. In the present era, mainstream news often focuses on problems, disasters, pandemics, sensations, crises and negativity (Aitamurto & Varma, 2018; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'neill, 2001) that followed through different branches of journalism. Most scholars, journalists, researchers, practitioners and psychologists believed that an overflow of negative news can become cause of despair to audiences becoming disinterested in civic issues.

To encounter the negativity of news, constructive journalism approach adopted by many journalists as a solution-oriented approach also called solution-journalism (K. J. J. P. McIntyre, 2019), happy journalism (K. McIntyre, 2015), positive journalism and constructive journalism (Gyldensted, 2011; Haagerup, 2017; K. McIntyre, 2015; K. McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018; K. McIntyre, Sobel, & Society, 2017). Constructive journalism has been developed as a form of journalism that purpose to create positive collective impact by informing people regarding issues/problems and suggesting effective and efficient ways to resolve specific issues. In short, constructive journalism not only highlights the symptoms of issues but also identified the cause of the problem with possible solutions (Brandtzaeg, Følstad, & Chaparro Domínguez, 2018; Gyldensted, 2011; K. McIntyre, 2015).

Four components in this research has taken as prominent phases; First, constructive journalism practices in this phase try to cover how generalist makes news and how they portray positive and negative news. Second, this study include six elements of constructive journalism six elements classified by the Journalism School at Windeshein University of Applied Sciences in 2016. These elements includes

Solution, Future Orientation, Depolarization, Constructive Interviewing, The Rosling and Co-Creation And Empowerment. This study incorporates and defines these elements to avoid the researcher's bias, while also exploring beyond their scope Third, regional development under the umbrella of CPEC. fourth, qualitative content analysis of news on CPEC will cover news stories of two Pakistani newspapers -Dawn and Express Tribune-, and two American newspapers -Washington Post and New York Times-.

Media can play an essential role in the formation of regional development as we can see in the form of CPEC programs and projects. CPEC is a small but essential part of OBOR that has a great capacity to mobilize trade among regions and also develop economic prosperity in the regions especially in Asia, Africa and Europe. After the cold war, America rules over the world and has been imposing capital ideology around the globe through different means. American foreign policy is based on aggressive supremacy, imposing sanctions on different countries and directly influencing their domestic policies. These American strategies never allow regional integration among the powers of the world or developing countries Such as African and South Asian countries. On the other side, China's foreign policy believed in economic prosperity and regional integration among the regions without interfering in their domestic policies. China development projects are consider as a game-changer in the present scenario of the world. China's infrastructural development projects change regional, economic and geo-political relations in all six regions of Asia but also in Africa and Europe.

CPEC is the tiny part of OBOR, which can change the power dimensions in South Asia and reduce the hegemony of India and America in this region. CPEC projects include infrastructural projects, roads, fiber, dams, air ports, hospitals and energy projects etc. CPEC is a development framework of collaboration in the all regions of Asia. The enhancement of geographical linkages through CPEC will benefit Sino-Pak relations and also boost regional trade and political stability in the region (Ahmad, Mi, & Journal, 2017). The implementation of different projects of CPEC not only brings economic prosperity in Pakistan but also increases the geo-political importance of Pakistan in the eyes of the economic world. The success of CPEC always

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faces multiple propaganda techniques from different counties through media and especially print media. Hameed and Shahzad (2020) have claimed that news framing of CPEC in Chinese and Pakistani newspaper are supportive and American and Indian newspapers are not supportive. The American media portray a negative image of Pakistan and consider it a failed state (Small, 2015). American media frame its narratives and policies around the world and shape the opinion of people nationally and internationally.

Constructive journalism elements help to understand the importance of CPEC in the eyes of two opposite extremes (America and Pakistan) and also this journalistic approach would find out some solutions. Waisbord (2013) stated that constructive journalism emphasizes that journalists can perform an active and positive role in the construction and mediated reality.

**Research Questions**

- RQ 1: What are the major themes focused by the selected newspapers while covering CPEC?
- RQ 2: Do Pakistani newspapers used more favourable frames than American newspapers while covering CPEC?

**Research Objective**

- To identify the primary themes focused by the selected newspapers in their coverage of the CPEC projects.
- To Pakistani newspapers used more favourable frames than American newspapers while covering CPEC?

**Scope of the Study**

To conduct this study, news stories on CPEC from *Dawn, Express Tribune, Washington Post* and *New York Times* published from July 2021 to December 2022 were examined.

## Literature Review

News journalism often focuses on negative news and seldomly focuses on positive news which may reduce the interest of the readers. (De Smaele, Demeyere, & Van Elsen, 2019) pointed out that journalism has a reflective effect on the development of culture, societies and regions, also has the capacity to mould and shape the public opinion that affects people's perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. According to Gyldensted (2015) journalism derived from behavioural sciences as positive psychology to reduce biasness in the way, news journalist portrays the world.

Constructive journalism is an emerging field in journalism research, academic research and more prominently journalism practice (Adoni & Mane, 1984; L. Hermans & C. J. J. Gyldensted, 2019; Waisbord, 2013). The purpose of constructive journalism is to do journalism positively. The core objective of constructive journalism is to provide more positive information and it tries to give suitable solutions to the problems as well as predict the future with tacit information. Most scholars argue that it tries to develop the cognitive ability of the readers and allow readers less engaged with the public debates (Gyldensted, 2011; Haagerup, 2017) and allow readers to adopt a problem-solving-oriented approach (Hermans & Drok, 2018; K. McIntyre & Sobel, 2018; Meier, 2018; Powers & Curry, 2019). Constructive journalism also engages public-oriented perspectives and chases to embrace current affairs news and perspectives (L. Hermans & C. J. J. Gyldensted, 2019; Waisbord, 2013).

Constructive journalism is still in an emerging phase, as a concept as well as a practice of new tools which cover umbrella concepts of alternative practices of journalism. Six elements of constructive were classified by the JSWN of applied science; 1) Solutions, 2) Future Orientation, 3) Depolarization, 4) Constructive Interviewing, 5) The Rosling, 6) Co-creation and empowerment (L. Hermans & C. J. J. Gyldensted, 2019). (L. Hermans & C. Gyldensted, 2019) identify four branches of constructive journalism: solutions journalism (SJ), Prospective Journalism (PJ), Peace Journalism (PJ) and Normative Journalism (NJ).

On the other side, some scholars used a constructive approach in multi-disciplinary research and used it to solve social problems, an ideal of social progress,

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reporting practices oriented around hope and some calls it a “change agent” (Krüger, 2017). A constructive role includes an extensive scope of journalism, such as advocacy journalism, peace journalism, development journalism, future-oriented journalism and impact journalism (Carpentier, 2005; Hanitzsch, 2007; Krüger, 2017). Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, and White (2010) stated that journalism often fits clearly into a single normative category, but distinguished categories (Social responsibility theory, soviet- communist theory, the authoritarian theory and libertarian theory) are useful to understand different types of journalism. In the present era, constructive role is used as the fifth normative role of the press, which is different in the sense that the press offers a vision of how society can move forward (K. McIntyre & Sobel, 2018).

**Regional Development**

The growth of regional economic cooperation has emerged as a major development in the global political economy since the end of World War II. Regional integration has played a crucial role in successfully bringing together countries that were historically enemies.(Koch & Stivachtis, 2019; Stivachtis, 2018). Both economic and political factors contribute to bringing neighbouring countries closer together. However, throughout the history of nation-states, economic considerations have consistently taken precedence over political ones. A striking example of this can be observed in the European Union (EU) and Southeast Asia (SEA), where the economic dimension has successfully united long-standing adversaries on a shared platform.(Church, 2017; Koch & Stivachtis, 2019; Lichev, 2020; Stivachtis, 2018).

The concept of "One Belt One Road" holds significant strategic importance on an international level. The OBOR initiative extends across countries, regions and continents encompassing a total population of 4.4 billion and a combined economic volume of $21 trillion. This economic size for 63% and 29% respectively of the world's total population and economic output (Liping, 2015). The corridor plan aims to boost economic growth and trade, enhance transportation, develop mining and energy

sectors, and promote political flexibility. It envisions bringing Asia, Europe, Africa, Oceania, and the Middle East closer together through new infrastructure and the establishment of free trade zones. This vision has the potential to bring significant changes to the world (Silin, Kapustina, Trevisan, & Drevalev, 2017). The One Belt One Road (OBOR) is a regional collaboration program which include three main development routes: the Southern, Central and Northern. The Southern corridor routes begins from Guangzhou that is the third largest city in South-central China and its extended to Western part of China and attach to Kashgar, Kunjerab pass, Pakistan. The Chines government also has completed lot of development projects in pakistan that establish a connenction to Gawadar Port (Arabian Sea). The CPEC route is the most direct, feasible, safe and shortest route for China that connect to Arabian Sea. The second route is the Central corridor, which starts from the Shanghai and ended to Tashkant and Tehran. This route further extends towards Bandar Imam Khomeini Port on the Persian Gulf. Although this rout consider a longest route and disclose lot of alternative options for China

The Northern route starts from China's northern regions and moves westward. It passes through countries such as Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus, before reaching Europe. This route aims to facilitate trade and connectivity between China and the European continent. It provides an alternative land-based route for China's trade with Europe, supplementing the traditional sea-based shipping routes.(Hussain et al., 2020). These three routes of the "One Belt One Road" project aim to enhance trade, economic cooperation, and infrastructure development across various regions, promoting connectivity and fostering closer ties between China and countries along the routes.

**National and International News on CPEC**

Media makes the news that influences public opinion which were discussed by Walter Lipmann in his book public opinion in 1921 (Wright, 2015). Bernard Cohen (1956) extended the work of Walter Lipmann, he argued that “media are not successful in telling what to think but it is stunningly successful in telling people what to think about”. Most of the policymakers and legislators gain intelligence from the media and based on the content they articulated public opinion; on the other side, the major source of information for the public is the media to investigate “what policymakers are doing”

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(Wlezien & Soroka, 2016).

In 2013, the Pakistani newspaper "Dawn" and China newspaper "Daily" both published one article regarding CPEC. In the same year, New York Times did not show any concern about CPEC. In 2014, DAWN published nine articles and China Daily printed ten editorials regarding CPEC. On the other side, the Times of India published nineteen articles while The New York Times published two editorials. On the whole 40 editorials were published related to CPEC in 2014. In 2015 (49 editorials), in 2016 (45 editorials), and in 2017 (35 editorials) were published in all undertaking newspapers (Hameed & Shahzad, 2020).

## Methodology

This study used Qualitative Content Analysis of news items regarding to regional development according to the six elements of constructive journalism classified by the Journalism School at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences. News articles (n=189) of *Express Tribune, Dawn, Washington Post and New York Times* Published from July 2021 to December 2022 on CPEC were collected. News items were coded by using a three-stage coding technique borrowed from Grounded Theory Methodology.

In the first stage, open coding was done of all the news articles followed by axial coding (second stage) and selective coding (third stage). Axial coding was done to generate themes by analyzing the open codes.

Although this study used a qualitative approach, however, it also presents the frequency of new articles on CPEC (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Frequency of news articles**

| Newspaper | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Express Tribune | 61 | 32.2% |
| New York Times | 38 | 20.2% |
| Dawn | 53 | 28.0% |
| Washington Post | 37 | 19.6% |
| N | 189 | 100% |

**Source: Author**

**Conceptual Framework**

This study deployed six elements of constructive journalism as a conceptual framework classified by the Journalism School at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in 2016 as a conceptual framework.

1) ***Solutions****:* When covering problems, also add a solution-oriented framing of news

2) ***Future Orientation****:* Adding a "What Now?" question to the traditional journalistic questions (who, what, when, where, why, how). Supplying a future orientation allows for a possible productive perspective about the future, and about society's ability to get there.

3) ***Depolarization****:* Work against polarizing dynamics created by news media in order to strengthen inclusion and diversity.

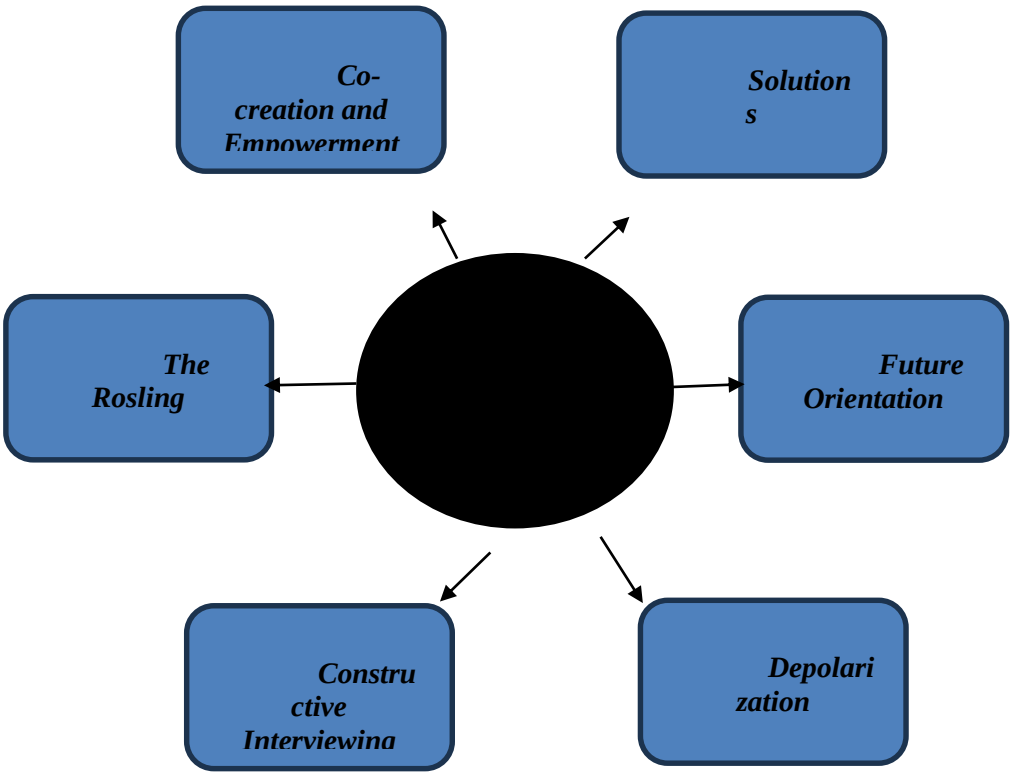
4) ***Constructive Interviewing****:* "Kill Your Victim." Include a variety of questions to empower socalled victims and experts. These questions should elucidate

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possible resources, collaborations, common ground and solutions.

5) ***The Rosling****:* Using data to establish whether progress or setback is happening on an issue covered journalistically.

6) ***Co-creation and Empowerment****:* Engage and empower the public. Co-create journalistic content with citizens, strengthening civil debate.




**Six Elements of Constructive Journalism**

Constructive journalism, also known as solution-oriented journalism, has gained significant attention and traction in the field of journalism, leading to it being recognized as a prominent topic of discussion. Haagerup (2014) predicted that constructive journalism would be the "next megatrend." Scholars such as Gyldensted (2011), Haagerup (2014), and Hickman (2009) have extensively written about this innovative approach. By examining its origins, constructive journalism can be seen as

rooted in the normative tradition and aligned with the principles of social responsibility theory. According to McQuail (1987), social responsibility theory places a responsibility on media professionals to explore novel ways of delivering news that reflects the perspectives and serves the needs of their communities.

**Themes Identification**

Journalistic practices are examined in this study by using a qualitative approach. The results show that there are not only some similarities between both newspapers but also several differences that have existed while reporting CPEC. Major themes that emerged after the coding process are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Themes were used by newspapers while covering CPEC**

| Themes | Properties |
|---|---|
| Risk | Security issues, disturbing regional relations, and high-interest rates on loans, Mostly focused by New York Times and less focused by Express Tribune |
| Game Changer | Huge investment by China, increasing regional importance of Pakistan, strategic alliance. mostly focused by Express Tribune and less focused by New York Times |
| Geo-Politics | India, Iran & UAE are not in favour of CPEC, India-Iran joint project to counter CPEC, and anti-CPEC alliance, mostly covered by both newspapers |

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| | |
|---|---|
| Corruption | Hidden deals between Pakistan and China, less transparency, and Financial corruption, mostly focused by New York Times and less focused by Express Tribune |
| Chinese Strategy | Money as a weapon, diplomacy, trade with loans, mostly focused by New York Times and less focused by Express Tribune |
| Economic Activities | Establishing industrial zones, jobs creation, revenue generation, mostly focused by Express Tribune and less focused by New York Times |
| Development | New railway tracks, new roads, and new housing societies were mostly focused by Express Tribune and less focused by New York Times. |
| Projects Details | A complete list and current state of all the projects under CPEC, allocated a budget of each project, mostly focused by Express Tribune and less focused by New York Times |

**Results and Discussion**

While covering CPEC from July 2021 to December 2022, New York Times and Washington Post have more focused on security-related issues like terrorism in the region, and attacks on officials, especially in Baluchistan. It tried to focus on risks more than other positive aspects of CPEC. Content and coding analysis suggested that New

York Times and Washington Post tried to frame CPEC as a risk for regional security by highlighting above mentioned topics as salient features of their news articles. On the other hand, Express Tribune and Dawn have also focused on security-related issues, however, results show that there was no such strong framing as risk used by it. New York Times and Washington Post also tried in several news articles that CPEC is affecting the relationships of Pakistan with Iran and UAE. New York also framed economic loans by China to Pakistan as very high-interest loans that will burden on the economy of Pakistan. It raised a question that how Pakistan is going to repay its debts to China, however, Pakistani officials have rejected the claims of Western media regarding the loans by them "incorrect information, distorted facts and one-sided opinions." Several news items compared the CPEC project with the Chinese projects in Malaysia and Sri Lanka, which have very high-interest rate loans involved so Pakistani officials responded to those claims as "China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship and most active project of Belt and Road Initiative where 22 projects of worth $28 billion have been actualized over the past 04 years. The project could not be compared with Chinese overseas investment in Sri Lanka or Malaysia as frameworks and financial modes of CPEC are altogether different in nature.

Express Tribune and Dawn seemed to be more focused to frame CPEC as a game-changer in the region in terms of huge investment by China that would result in infrastructure development, and Gwadar port would enhance the importance of Pakistan in the region. It will also open worldwide new markets for Pakistan. Pakistan now can easily reach Central Asian countries and Russia. However, New York Times and Washington Post were less focused on the topics that highlight CPEC in a positive way and a game-changer.

New York Times and Washington Post also showed a focus on geo-political tensions among the countries of this region such as relationship between Pakistan and Iran, the relationship between Pakistan and UAE. That resulted in a Chahbahar port deal between India and Iran to counter Gawadar port. Negatively highlighting regional politics leads to being assumed that New York Times and Washington Post trying to frame CPEC negatively, on the other hand, Express Tribune and Dawn seemed to be less focused on such angles. Although Tribune had published news articles on geo-

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politics those articles can be considered neutral in nature, neither positive nor negative. Several news items in both newspapers focused on corruption-related issues in CPEC projects, but New York Times and Washington Post looked more focused on highlighting corruption than Express Tribune and Dawn. New York Times and Washington Post aired out that there were hidden deals between China and Pakistan. People from both sides, especially people of Pakistan have no clear and detailed information regarding the agreements signed by both countries. China has been framed by Western media as a country that uses money as weapon. News items published in New York Times and Washington Post suggested that China use its money to get its goals. China has a development approach through trade, business and investment that attract the host country. Same in the case of CPEC, the American newspaper framed China has enough money to kick off a multibillion-dollar investment plan such as CPEC that attracts Pakistan.

Several industrial zones are to be developed under the umbrella of CPEC. This infrastructural development approach creates more job opportunities, that will be utilized by the local people and also by a few foreigners. Express Tribune and Dawn focused more on such a positive way while reporting CPEC as compared to New York Times and Washington Post. CPEC allows not only industrial zones but also new roads to be built, and new railway tracks to be laid down to maximize low-cost transportation of goods. The last theme that emerged from the data is Projects Details, Express Tribune and Dawn published more details of the projects that started or going to be started. Such practices need to be done regularly that provides maximum detailed information to the media consumers.

## Conclusion

This study provides a comparative analysis of two newspapers, one from Pakistan and one from the USA, on journalistic practices about constructive journalism. Constructive journalism as a theoretical framework suggests six elements that should be included in a news story. This study not only examines the existence of

those six elements in news stories but also looks for the themes that were focused by the selected newspapers about CPEC. Results of the study showed that most of the news stories lacked in providing a solution as they portrayed CPEC as a problem especially by the New York Times and Washington Post. Other elements such as constructive interviews, public input, and depolarization were also missing. When it comes to major themes focused by both newspapers are Risks related to CPEC, CPEC is a Game Changer, its effects on Geo-Politics, CPEC opened the doors for Corruption, Chinese Strategies to gain more power globally, CPEC turned on Economic Activities in the region, Development has been started in Pakistan after CPEC started, Express Tribune and Dawn also focused on the Projects Details related to CPEC. When it comes to journalism practices, results suggested that New York Times and Washington Post were more anti-CPEC while Express Tribune and Dawn remained pro-CPEC in their coverage of several projects of CPEC.

**Recommendations**

Recommendations for future research in the area of constructive journalism and development should include:

- To conduct in-depth interviews from those journalists who are covering development projects. Also, conduct interviews of officials of development projects.
- In future, mix methord approach can be utilize through in-depth interview and survey methods.

**Quantitative research should be done:**

- For the development of new elements of constructive journalism, the researchers need to analyze study themes on Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and developed new factors.
- After the factor identification through EFA and test factor through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and develop new elements of constructive journalism

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