Framing of China’s Belt and Road Initiative by the U.S. and Indian news media (2013-2018)

Thesis Defense | Shanshan Niu

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**Introduction:**

- **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):**
  - “The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road was first proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013” (official site).
  - It aims to promote international trade and economic links with countries across Asia, Africa, and Europe.” (official site).
  - Many Western media have published negative news coverage about the BRI, and have highlighted China’s growing *global economic expansion, increased geo-political influence, and soft power.*

Source: [https://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/xjpyydyl.htm](https://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/xjpyydyl.htm)
Map of BRI

News framing refers to selecting certain contents or aspects of a topic or reality and highlighting them in an attractive, meaningful, and memorable way (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

Most news framing helps the audiences find, identify, view, understand, and label the central concepts (Goffman, 1974, p. 21).

News media play a key role in influencing the way that people think and talk about public affairs (Gamson, 1988; Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Journalists often rely on familiar news frames and existing information from trusted sources (Norris, Kern & Just, 2003, pp. 4-5).

The capability of different frames of attracting people is various based on “frequency, accessibility and relevance” (Chong and Druckman, 2007, pp. 103-104).
Framing of China

China has been shaped as an image of product-country with low labor and resources costs (Han & Wang, 2012, p. 227).

The overall tone of news about China has increasingly become more negative than before “except the increasing emphasis on economic development” (Peng, 2006; Stone & Xiao, 2007).

The New York Times framed China as a global power, but the Wall Street Journals framed China as a direct threat to the U.S.

China has been framed as a ‘threatening, hungry giant’, ‘yellow threat’ (Becker, 2011, p. 496), “red China,” “communism,” or “potential enemy” (Chang, 2008, p.11).

Over 83 percent of Indians regarded China as a security threat, only one third of Indians believed that China’s rise benefit India (Wade, 2013, p.12).
The media coverage focused on the negative news, competition, lack of democracy and freedom, and tight censorship on media usage (Richter & Gebauer, 2011).

The predominant frame in covering China has been “anti-communism” or wrongdoings, failures and problems of Chinese government (Kobland et al., 1992, pp. 64, 66).

China often was framed as a dishonest or oppressive government (Lams, 2010, p. 316) or a human rights abuser (Huang & Leung, 2005; Lams, 2013, p. 61).

The framing of China still has highlighted guilty of lack of freedom of expression, because of the governmental censorship and control (Chen & Zhang, 2016, p. 5509).
Research Questions:

**RQ1**: How did the top English-language news outlets in the United States and India frame China’s Belt and Road Initiative?

**RQ2**: What are the similarities between the Indian articles and the U.S. articles related to the Belt and Road Initiative?

**RQ3**: What are the differences between the Indian articles and the U.S. articles related to the Belt and Road Initiative?
Method

- **Time period:** September 7, 2013 to September 30, 2018.

- **Newspapers:** The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times (the United States) and The Times of India and The Economic Times (India)

- **First,** India and the U.S. both are China’s *close partners and major competitors,* so they have conflicts and cooperation in many aspects, such as economy, politics, culture and military.

- **Second,** these four newspapers were chosen for their *circulation size, domestic influence and international readership.*
**Sampling**

- **Key Words:** “China’s BRI,” “New Silk Road,” “China’s Ambitious Project,” “OBOR,” “Belt and Road Initiative,” “Xi’s dream Plan,” and “China’s Marshall Plan,” during the period.

- One-sentence “briefs” or the articles referring the online “Silk Road” black market of drag trade are **not included**.

- The **census** of articles was 429 news reports from The Wall Street Journal, 290 news articles from The New York Times, 246 articles from the Times of India and 223 news reports from The Economic Times.

- I took a **random sample** of 100 articles from each newspaper to create the dataset of 400 total news articles.
Coding and measurement

Each article was coded for variables grouped into four sections: article data, frame, source and tone.

Data: The article data mainly included the headline, published date, length, and the main topic.

Frames: leadership frame, economic project frame, threat frame, global expansion frame, global cooperation frame, human rights frame and the others.

Source: domestic officials, Chinese officials, international officials, and unofficial sources.

Tone: positive, negative or neutral

To ensure reliability, a second coder was trained in the study protocol and coded 10% of the samples randomly selected.
## Findings

Table 2: Frames of the U.S. newspapers and the Indian newspapers ($N = 400$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>The Wall Street Journal</th>
<th>New York Times</th>
<th>Times of India</th>
<th>Economic Times</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1.5%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic project</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>13.3%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Threat/fear/conflict</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global development/cooperation/benefit</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global expansion/invasion/competition</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Human rights</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The top three popular frames in both countries are

- "economic project"
- "global expansion and competition"
- "threat"

Figure 2: Comparison of frames in U.S. and Indian newspapers
Major Frames of China’s BRI


2. Global expansion/invasion/competition frame: BRI is framed as Beijing’s tool to dominate geopolitics.

3. Threat/fear/conflict frame: India firmly rejected BRI because its worries on India’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. U.S. warned China’s plan aims to shake up the world economic order and challenge the leading position of the U.S.
Findings: Similarities

Figure 3: Comparison of topics in U.S. and Indian newspapers.

Figure 4: Comparison of tone in U.S. and Indian newspapers.
Findings: Differences

Figure 5: Comparison of length of the U.S. news articles and Indian news articles

Figure 6: Comparison of the sources of U.S. and Indian news articles
Figure 7: Comparison of unofficial sources in U.S. and Indian news articles
The media of India and the U.S. framed China’s BRI with many similarities and a few differences. The U.S. news media and Indian news media appeared to select primarily the most remarkable information in their framing. The BRI was framed in an overall negative way, but the framing of the BRI is more comprehensive. The media didn’t consider the human rights issues of the BRI with framing given historical coverage of China. The study found U.S. media and Indian media often rely on their familiar news frames and existing information from trusted sources. Indian media’s articles showed stronger negative attitude to China’s BRI than the U.S. media.
Conclusion

- The two countries’ news media have similarities on the reporting frames, topics, and tone, but some differences on the sources and depth of articles.

- Negative attitudes toward China’s BRI still are mainly reported in U.S. and Indian news media.

- The U.S. and Indian news media are able to frame BRI in a comprehensive way beyond the constraints of previous negative frameworks on China.

- The new frames show U.S. and Indian news media’s new concerns on China’s giant plan around the world.

First, the current study is limited in that only the largest circulation elite U.S. newspapers and the largest English-language India newspapers were analyzed.

Second, this study selected the articles from newspapers, but other types of publications are not included.

Last, this study doesn’t further compare the frames between different news agencies in the same country.
Reference

- OBOR official site https://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/.
Thank you so much, everyone!