

## THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE ON FACEBOOK: AMERICAN AND INDIAN ELITE PRESS PERSPECTIVES

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### ABSTRACT

The media's coverage of the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) reflects political dynamics and national objectives. This study explores BRI's coverage on Facebook News by examining articles from prominent American and Indian elite press. In this study, the framing theory serves as the theoretical framework. The content analysis is used as a research method. The data has been collected from the two American outlets, which are The Washington Post, and The Wall Street Journal, and the two Indian outlets, which are The Times of India, and The Asian Age, from 1 October 2021 to 31 October 2022. Through this comparative lens, we aim to clarify the divergent perspectives and underlying motivations shaping the portrayal of BRI, providing valuable insights into the complexities of international media representation and its implications for global perceptions and policy considerations. The first finding is that Indian and American publications' Facebook news stories portray the BRI more politically. The second study indicates that both American and Indian publications regularly frame BRI in terms of QUAD's strategic aims. The third study found that elite media in the United States and India are more likely to view BRI from an economic perspective. The fourth and last finding is that Facebook news in American and Indian media portrays the BRI negatively.

**Keywords:** Asian Age, Wall Street Journal, Belt and Road Initiative, Facebook posts, Washington Post, Times of India, Media News Framing, Framing Theory.

### INTRODUCTION

'The Belt and Road Initiative' BRI comprises The Silk Road Economic Belt and The twenty-first Century Maritime route. It is estimated that US\$ 5 trillion of assets would be needed for these fund projects, which are presently part of the BRI. This project will change the lives of the world's population in 65 countries. Hong Kong reached a point rating of 6.32, the highest level of 7 in Judiciary Freedom, where one is not separate, and seven are very independent (Asian Development Bank, 2016). Hong Kong's administration remains

ranked as one of the most individual, with its court system classed as extremely clear, representing critical measures to take when negotiating police and jurisdiction clauses and, ultimately, enforcement.

According to the Belt and Road strategy, China can invest extensively in nations along the Belt and Route. The constant development of China's public power needs us to integrate into the world actively and have a higher strength of speech leading and law-making. How do we defend the legal rights and

interests of investors? It has turned into a critical issue that needs to be resolved. Under these bilateral and multilateral practice mechanisms, establishing integrated and unified global investment conflict settlement execution is one of the most significant ways to secure investment protection and reduce investment risks.

The study can provide insights into the political and economic factors that drive media coverage of the BRI in different countries. By comparing the coverage of the initiative in American and Indian elite press, the study can highlight the differences and similarities in how these countries view the initiative and the geopolitical interests that underpin their views. Overall, the study can enhance the masses' understanding of BRI's impact on global politics and social media's impact on reshaping public opinion about major global issues.

BRI significantly shapes Americans' and Indians' perceptions of and sentiments toward China in both countries. The most commonly chosen frame is one related to the project's economics. The overall unfavorable mood suggested that the Sino-USA relations soured and the conflict between India and China widened; the world's two biggest democracies paid more attention to the BRI's possible danger and detrimental effects.

The purpose of analyzing the presentation of Facebook news on the Belt and Road activity in the American and Indian elite press is to better understand how the media in these two nations shapes public opinion about this critical global endeavor. The BRI is a critical geopolitical initiative that affects trade, economic development, and regional connectivity. As a result, it has aroused broad media coverage and debate, particularly in countries with significant regional interests, such as the USA and India.

This study examines how the BRI has been covered in the elite press in the United States and India, particularly emphasizing how Facebook news has influenced public perception. Facebook is actively used by forty percent of the world's population, making it the most popular social network, and its news feed has become a primary source of information for many individuals. The study's analysis of how Facebook news is utilized to cover the BRI in American and Indian elite press can

shed light on how the media molds public opinion and influences decision-making in these nations.

The general objective is to study the perspective of Americans' and Indians' Elite Press on the Game Changer project between Pakistan and China. However, the study will be guided to attempt the following:

- To investigate BRI from the perspective of QUAD countries, which had made an alliance against China, and how they project it in their Facebook pages of the elite press.
- To find out how the American and Indian newspapers' Facebook pages respond to BRI in news about international or global political scenarios.
- To dig out the treatment of BRI news, whether it is negative or positive, in Indian and American elite newspapers on Facebook.
- To explore how Indian and American elite newspapers have framed BRI in their Facebook newspapers.

The following hypotheses inform this research:

**H1:** It is more likely that the vital role played by elite media to portray BRI is negative in both Indian and American newspapers on Facebook news.

**H2:** It is more likely that the American and Indian newspapers frame the BRI news in line with the QUAD agenda.

**H3:** It is more likely that the leading elite newspapers in America and India frame China's BRI more likely from an economic perspective

**H4:** It is more likely that BRI's treatment of Facebook news in American and Indian newspapers is adverse.

#### Literature Review:

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, represents a substantial global economic endeavor initiated by China in 2013. Its objective is to boost regional and global connectivity, advance economic progress, and encourage cultural interchange through infrastructure developments and trade agreements spanning Asia, Europe, Africa, and other regions. Connecting to the context of the Silk Roads developed approximately 2000 years ago during the Han dynasty, the BRI revives the past routes of China with different

trading partners now known as Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, and Europe (Andrew & McBride, 2020). The BRI includes the Silk Road Economic Belt that links China with Europe through Central countries and the Maritime Silk Road, which links China's coastal regions with Southeast Asian countries, South Asian countries, Africa, and Europe (Tang et al., 2017), indicating China's return to world trade power.

The BRI comprises two main elements: The Belt and the Road. The 'Belt' refers to the overland links from China to Europe, incorporating a number of countries in Central Asia, the Middle East, and Russia. While the 'Road' stands for the sea routes that connect China's eastern seaboard with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, and Europe. Among these are six belts and one maritime that aims at increasing economic cooperation and improving facilities in this area. Major arteries are the New Eurasian Land Bridge, the CMRE Corridor, and the CPEC. Through these corridors, trade has become central to China's strategic geopolitical importance on extending its power in Asia and significantly worldwide (Andrew & McBride, 2020; Tang et al., 2017).

For instance, the New Eurasian Land Bridge connects China, the western part of Russia, and Europe. Among all, Kazakhstan has grown into an important economic partner for the BRI endeavor. Assets like Khorgos Gateway Dry Port show that Kazakhstan is a strategic node to continue this path of evolution in this historic trade route. Also, there is a progressive improvement in the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, where freight transport has had a boost, and customs procedures alongside investments in infrastructure have supported prosperous local economies (Hou, 2019; Newgarden, 2019).

However, some critics consider that the economic benefits of BRI are far from being without drawbacks, such as eradicating local companies and rising inequality resulting from more foreign investment. It has the possibility of balancing relations between two powerful neighbors, China and Russia, which makes the BRI involvement challenging for Mongolia (Graceffo, 2020).

The China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor is another crucial part of the BRI; it connects Southwest China with ASEAN member

countries. This corridor enhances city-to-city access and helps support the exchange of goods across borders to spur the growth of the region's economy. Programs like the Nanchong-Guang Expressway and the Nanning-Guangzhou High-Speed Railway clearly reflect the effort that has been made to improve the infrastructure of this corridor of China. Projects such as the Sino-Cambodian Special Economic Zone show that BRI can help spur cooperation in the region's economic development (Graceffo, 2020). The primary goal of the BRI is to foster cooperation and integration into a single economic area due to increased transportation and infrastructural networks. However, there remain questions about the initiative's effects on domestic industries in the region and environmental consequences (Tang et al., 2017).

BRI-supported Maritime Silk Road is significant as it is a connectivity hub connecting China to the SEA, SA, and the MEC. As a strategic route, it advances commerce and grants China critical requirements such as oil and minerals. By creating new, strong business relationships along this aqueous corridor, China seeks to balance geopolitical influences emerging from the United States and cement its economic power in the region (BRI, n.d.). However, the strategic goals of naval forces' growth and dominance raise sincere questions about their sustainable economic and organizational feasibility (Andrew & McBride, 2020).

The broader implications of the BRI resonate in geopolitical relations, particularly concerning The United States. To the U.S., BRI is an instrument of Chinese geopolitical and strategic interests in Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Concerns over possible debts in participant countries have arisen, threatening their sovereignty and independence (Jacob, 2017). Besides, the U.S. has tried to balance China's power through its efforts, stressing proper disclosure and environmental management in BRI ventures (Andrew & McBride, 2020). This balance of interest competition reflects the region's complex economic and political relations, especially between Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, which are in the middle of 'between' China and the U.S.

Indian position on BRI differs from other regional concerns, especially China's growing influence on South Asian neighbors. India perceives BRI as a strategic threat to its interests in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, so its worldview focuses on constraining China. Therefore, India has adjusted its diplomatic and economic approaches to maintain its hegemonic power within its vicinity as China grows (Kaura & Rani, 2020; Thoker & Singh, 2017). China's assertiveness has provoked the U.S., India, Australia, and Japan to improve cooperation in maritime security, climate change, and regional stability, forming the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) (India.com, 2022).

BRI is a complex concept that reflects an effort to enhance global interconnectivity and collaboration in commercial activities. Although it increases the prospects of extending infrastructure and trade operations, it creates tremendous threats and risks associated with the geopolitics and economic conditions of the geographical areas. Consequently, regional security and international relations are still contentious as the initiative unfolds its longstanding impact on the world trade system.

**Material and Methods:**

Recruiting participants through the current study uses a qualitative research design to assess how the elite presses in the United States and India portray Facebook news concerning the BRI. Quantitative

research helps answer questions, hypotheses, conceptions, or thoughts arrived at through qualitative research, providing program or concept ideas for subsequent quantitative analysis. In order to answer the research query during the data collection process, a comparative content analysis of the articles published in the selected prestigious American and Indian press establishments was carried out. Using purposive sampling, the study focuses on articles shared via Facebook from October 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022, mentioning BRI in the article title or the first paragraph.

The analysis encompasses articles from prominent American publications, namely The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal, alongside two Indian counterparts, The Times of India and The Asian Age, selected based on circulation, standing, and political inclination. The study population consists of these four newspapers, while the scope encompasses all publications from QUAD countries that perceive China as a potential threat in the South China Sea. The data accumulation process entailed compiling pertinent news articles and editorial pieces issued during the stipulated period using search phrases such as BRI, \One Belt, One Road, \OBOR, and \New Silk Road. Data interpretation involved categorizing articles by factors like tone and subjects, followed by employing descriptive statistics to pinpoint prevailing patterns and developments.

**Data Analysis:**

**Table 1: Frequencies of news articles on Belt and Road Initiative**

News outlet	<i>f</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
The Wall Street Journal (USA)	54	20.6	20.6	20.6
The Washington Post (USA)	76	29.0	29.0	49.6
The Times of India (India)	74	28.2	28.2	77.9
The Asian Age (India)	58	22.1	22.1	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The Washington Post is the main source among the listed newspapers, accounting for 76 occurrences of BRI coverage, or 29.0% of the total. The Times of India follows closely behind, with 74 stories,

accounting for 28.2% of the total. The Asian Age adds 58 articles, or 22.1% of the total coverage, while The Wall Street Journal covers the BRI 54 times, or 20.6%. These figures illustrate the

distribution of coverage among the specified newspapers, with The Washington Post and The Times of India occupying the top spots.

**Table 2: Categories of news content on Belt and Road Initiative**

Categories	<i>f</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Economic	60	22.9	22.9	22.9
Strategic	36	13.7	13.7	36.6
Geopolitics	39	14.9	14.9	51.5
Environmental	41	15.6	15.6	67.2
Social	42	16.0	16.0	83.2
Legal	21	8.0	8.0	91.2
Ethical	23	8.8	8.8	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

The table divides the news articles into several categories, explaining the number and proportion of articles within each category. Microeconomic subjects led in the dataset with 22,9% of the articles, while environmental and social subjects were the second most frequent, comprising 15–16, respectively. The second lowest category is "Strategic," with 13.7% of the replies responding to 36 cases. Moving to the "Geopolitics" category, which contributes to 14.9% of the replies, with 39 cases identified, reveals that geopolitical factors that shape the respondents' perceptions are not entirely negligible. On the other hand, the "Environmental" category attracts 15.6% of

replies, with 41 cases noted, meaning that the studied population is greatly concerned with environmental issues. According to the survey, the "Social" category is closely behind, with 16.0% of replies and 42 of the incidents cited. Although following closely, the kind that can be considered the most characteristic of the overall approach is the "Legal" category, occupying 8.0% of the replies, with 21 mentions in total, which reflects the legal regulations by which respondents engage with the subject. Last, the "Ethical" category equates to 8.8% of the responses, with 23 cases registered, indicating the importance of ethical concerns in the dataset.

**Table 3: Tone of News coverage on Belt and Road Initiative**

Tone	<i>f</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Positive	107	40.8	40.8	40.8
Neutral	69	26.3	26.3	67.2
Negative	86	32.8	32.8	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Table 3 analyzes the tone of news stories and divides them into three categories: positive, neutral, and negative. It shows the frequency and proportion of articles that fit within each tone group. Positive articles are the most common,

accounting for 107 occasions, or 40.8% of the total. There are 69 neutral articles, accounting for 26.3% of the total. Negative articles account for 86 incidents, or 32.8% of the total.

**Table 4: News Frames used by selective media on Belt and Road Initiative**

Frames	<i>f</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Supportive	98	37.4	37.4	37.4
Critical	75	28.6	28.6	66.0
Neutral	89	34.0	34.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Table 4 provides insights into the framing of news items about the BRI, classifying them as supportive, critical, or neutral. Supportive articles dominate the dataset, accounting for 37.4% of the total, demonstrating that the BRI receives a large amount of positive media attention. Critical stories follow, accounting for 28.6% of the total, indicating that a significant amount of the coverage

scrutinizes or challenges the program. Meanwhile, neutral articles account for 34.0% of the total, indicating a balanced approach or presentation of factual information without taking a firm opinion. This distribution emphasizes the variety of viewpoints represented in the press coverage of the BRI, with varied degrees of support, critiques, and objectivity.

**Table 5: Classification of news stories with different extent of mentioning BRI**

Different Extents	<i>f</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Brief mention	88	33.6	33.6	33.6
Featured Prominently	121	46.2	46.2	79.8
Not Mention	53	20.2	20.2	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The table 5 provides an analysis of the mentions of Facebook News within news articles' categorizing them into three main groups: Brief Mention, Featured Prominently, and Not Mentioned. It presents the frequency and percentage of articles falling into each category. Brief Mention of

Facebook News is found in 88 instances, accounting for 33.6% of the total. Facebook News is Featured Prominently in 121 instances, making up 46.2% of the total. For instances, Facebook News is Not Mentioned, representing 20.2% of the total.

**Table 6: Classification of news stories with different news coverage biases on BRI**

Biasness Type	<i>f</i>	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Highly in favor	52	19.8	19.8	19.8
Moderately in favor	128	48.9	48.9	68.7
Biased	82	31.3	31.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The Table 6 provides an insightful breakdown of the bias present in news articles, categorizing them into three distinct levels: Highly in favor, Moderately in favor, and Biased. A significant number of the evaluated articles, 19.8%, are judged

highly favorable to specific perspectives or positions. However, the majority of articles fell into the Moderately Favorable group, which represented 48.9% of the total, demonstrating an overall tendency toward favoritism, albeit to a

lesser degree. Furthermore, 31.3% of the articles are classed as biased, indicating a break from objective reporting.

**Table 7: Correlation analysis of Tones, Frames, Bias and Categories of news stories/articles**

	The Tone of the news	Framing of BRI	The bias in news	Strategic News	Geopolitics News	Environmental News	Social News	Legal News	Ethical News	Economic News
The Tone of the news	1									
Framing of BRI	.631**	1								
The bias in news	.616**	.391**	1							
Strategic News	.025	.017	.058	1						
Geopolitics News	-.050	.017	-.025	-.167**	1					
Environmental News	.089	.080	.097	-.172**	-.175**	1				
Social News	-.044	.042	-.071	-.177**	-.180**	-.185**	1			
Legal News	.044	.029	-.026	-.117	-.118	-.122*	-.126*	1		
Ethical News	-.100	-.151*	-.127*	-.123*	-.125*	-.129*	-.132*	-.087	1	
Economic News	.009	-.064	.002	-.221**	-.224**	-.231**	-.238**	-.157*	-.165**	1

Table 7 displays a correlation analysis examining the relationships between tone, framing, and bias in news articles covering the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) across different categories, such as strategic, geopolitical, environmental, social, legal, ethical, and economic news. The Pearson correlation coefficients reveal critical connections among these variables. The analysis indicates a strong positive correlation between the tone of the news and the framing of BRI ( $r = .631, p < .01$ ), as well as with bias in the news ( $r = .616, p < .01$ ). This suggests that how news articles are framed

significantly influences their tone and bias. Moreover, there is a moderate correlation between framing and bias in the news ( $r = .391, p < .01$ ), indicating that confident framing choices often accompany biased reporting. Strategic news displays no significant correlations with tone, framing, or bias among specific news categories, indicating a more neutral reporting stance in this category. Geopolitical news shows weak negative correlations with tone ( $r = -.050$ ) and bias ( $r = -.025$ ), though these are not statistically significant. Environmental news exhibits slight positive

correlations with tone ( $r = .089$ ) and bias ( $r = .097$ ), while social news indicates small negative correlations with both tone ( $r = -.044$ ) and bias ( $r = -.071$ ).

Interestingly, ethical news demonstrates a negative correlation with framing ( $r = -.151$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and bias ( $r = -.127$ ,  $p < .05$ ), suggesting that ethical reporting is less biased and less influenced by framing. Conversely, economic news shows

negative correlations with bias ( $r = -.002$ ), geopolitical news ( $r = -.224$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and social news ( $r = -.238$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating a focus on objective facts and avoidance of subjective biases in economic reporting. In summary, the analysis highlights significant interactions between tone, framing, and bias in news articles related to the BRI, with varying influences across different news categories.

**Table 8: One Sample analysis of Tones, Frames, Bias and Categories of news stories/articles**

**Test Value = 0**

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower Limit	Upper Limit
The Tone of the news	36.296	261	.000	1.91985	1.8157	2.0240
Framing of BRI	37.620	261	.000	1.96565	1.8628	2.0685
The bias in news	48.391	261	.000	2.11450	2.0285	2.2005
Economic News	8.805	261	.000	.22901	.1778	.2802
Strategic News	6.551	261	.000	.14122	.0988	.1837
Geopolitics News	6.654	261	.000	.14504	.1021	.1880
Environmental News	6.858	261	.000	.15267	.1088	.1965
Social News	7.059	261	.000	.16031	.1156	.2050
Legal News	4.644	261	.000	.07634	.0440	.1087
Ethical News	4.891	261	.000	.08397	.0502	.1178

Table 8 illustrates a one-sample t-test analysis exploring the tone, framing, bias, and different news stories associated with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The test is conducted with a set value of 0, revealing significant outcomes for all variables, as evidenced by p-values lower than 0.001. The tone of the news displays a mean difference of 1.92, accompanied by a t-value of 36.296, indicating a substantial deviation from the test value. This is further supported by a 95% confidence interval between 1.8157 and 2.0240.

Likewise, the extent of framing of BRI and bias in the news show high t-values of 37.620 and 48.391; significant mean differences are observed as 1.97

and 2.11, respectively, which means that the news failed to achieve complete neutrality. When considering the mean difference in the selected news categories, economic news has a mean difference of 0.23 ( $t = 8.805$ ), and strategic and geopolitical news both have a mean difference of 0.14 ( $t = 6.551$ ) and ( $t = 6.654$ ), respectively. Likewise, the environmental, social, legal, and ethical news have significant differences ranging from 0.08 to 0.16, as highlighted in the analysis. Thus, the following paper reveals significant differences in tone, framing, and bias in BRI news coverage across different news categories, which is statistically significant.



### Findings:

The statistical analysis findings offer valuable insights into how elite American and Indian newspapers present the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on Facebook, validating the specified hypotheses. Regarding H1, the Pearson correlation results reveal a substantial relationship between news tone and framing, showing a correlation of .631 ( $p < .001$ ). Moreover, there is a strong correlation between news bias and tone (.616,  $p < .001$ ), indicating a clear link between tone and bias, suggesting a predominantly negative portrayal of BRI in both American and Indian newspapers, supporting the hypothesis that elite media in these countries tend to depict BRI negatively.

The results also support H2, as the strategic and geopolitical news categories, closely related to the QUAD agenda, demonstrate significant correlations with other news categories. The geopolitical news category exhibits a negative correlation with strategic news (-.167,  $p < .001$ ) and tone (-.050), implying that the geopolitical framing of BRI in these newspapers may align with broader strategic considerations consistent with the QUAD's stance against China's influence.

In relation to H3, the findings reveal that economic news shows no significant correlation with framing (-.064) but is strongly correlated with other news categories, such as ethical news (-.165,  $p < .001$ ). This suggests that economic perspectives, while prevalent, are often contextualized within broader strategic or ethical contexts rather than in isolation, partially supporting the hypothesis.

Lastly, H4 is corroborated by the overall negative tone and bias observed in the study, as evidenced by the correlation between ethical news and bias (-.127,  $p < .05$ ), and the significant divergence of tone from neutrality as indicated by the one-sample t-tests ( $t = 36.296$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results underscore that the coverage of BRI in elite American and Indian newspapers tends to be critical and unfavorable.

### Conclusion:

The following research offers significant implications for understanding how the American and Indian elite press outlets share and construct news content about BRI on their Facebook accounts. The paper provides evidence for the first hypothesis (H1), which shows that the total sentiment score of the BRI news is negative. This is consistent with the previous research that shows that media outlets tend to have a critical attitude towards Chinese geopolitical moves and overall geopolitical nature.

Secondly, the results also confirm the second hypothesis (H2) that American and Indian newspapers tend to promote BRI compatible with the QUAD nations' agenda. BRI is portrayed, especially in strategy and geo-news, as a threat, like how the QUAD strategies seek to contain China's aggressive move in the IPI region.

Lastly, the third hypothesis (H3) results are also somewhat inconclusive. Although a clear economic view of the BRI is observed, it does not imply that economic aspects were dominant in the news materials. What has been identified is that other categories, including environmental and social concern, are also expressed with a comparable degree of prominence, which suggests a more balanced understanding of the BRI. This portrayal goes against past research studies that depict BRI in only the economic framework.

Finally, the last hypothesis proposed (H4) states that American and Indian newspapers mainly portray an adverse treatment towards BRI on Facebook news. The results concur with this, backing up the assertion that Western and Indian media often vilify China's globalization ventures. This negative portrayal can be explained by the fact that the relations between the USA, India, and China are strategic competitors. To summarize, this study underscores the idea that elite media outlets in the United States and India tend to depict China's BRI in a manner that aligns with their respective national interests and the geopolitical dynamics of the QUAD alliance.

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