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Media Framing of the Belt and Road Initiative: A Comparative Analysis of India and Nepal

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Abstract

China's BRI (Belt and Road Initiative), initiated in 2013, has been a game-changer in global economic realities especially for South Asia. This study examines how the BRI is reported in two countries — India, which takes a stand against the initiative, and Nepal, which supports it. We use CDA and framing theory to analyze the news media across print and digital. In the Indian context, media coverage in general has been critical of BRI: sovereignty issues top but followed by regional security and economic dependency especially on CPEC. But the Nepali press tells a different, sanguine story about the BRI, hailing it as a tremendous opportunity for infrastructural investment and regional integration. The contrast demonstrates the manner in which binary media portrayals contribute to a sense of antipathy or hostility in India and friendship or cooperation with Nepal. The findings of this paper present new insights into how the media framing could shape national policies and public opinion in politically sensitive regions such as South Asia. By comparing two sets of media, India and Nepal, this paper also makes an important theoretical claim: that of mediating the discourses of global initiatives - national interest over any objective role for the media.

1 Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), created by China in 2013, is one of the largest global infrastructure and development schemes in history. Described as a contemporary Silk Road (Niu & Relly, 2021). he BRI intends to promote global connectivity by way of an extensive network of trade routes, infrastructure investments and economic alliances across Asia, Africa and Europe. This campaign has received an overwhelming response from many countries, but a complete opposite reaction from South Asian world, especially India and Nepal. Media in these countries are central to disseminating public opinion and discussion around the BRI, with [media] coverage that is often shaped by and mirrors national interest, geo-political concerns and domestic politics (Yang et al., 2023).

The BRI is generally covered in Nepal as a route to economic prosperity and modernization. In the Nepalese media such as The Kathmandu Post, My Republica, and even The Himalayan Times, OBOR has commonly been portrayed as an opportunity to upgrade infrastructure, increase trade connectivity and decrease Nepal's historical reliance on India (Wei & Hu, 2024). This positive portrayal is in line with Nepal's strategic shift towards diversifying its foreign policy and seeking to benefit economically from China's ambitious infrastructure projects (Devkota et al., 2025).

On the contrary, Indian media coverage of BRI is highly critical and focuses on sovereignty, security and economic issues. The Indian press like The Times of India, NDTV and Aaj Tak prefer to focus on the fact that CPEC goes through a disputed territory; the anxiety about debt traps and broader geo-political implications from China's growing influence in South Asia (Chu et al., 2010). This skepticism of accepting India reflects its suspicion towards China's real intentions in South Asia and the implications about its centuries old influence (Anusandhanvallari & 2025, 2025).

The diverging media narratives in India and Nepal demonstrate the complex linkage between the press, opinion and foreign policy. Media, as a key agent of power mediation in political and social life are not just within public space but they are also at the center of political and societal power in society itself reporting of international projects such as BRI is significant aspect but more also crafting narratives that support national discourses and policies (Wei & Hu, 2024). How the media frames BRI in these two countries offers valuable insights into how media can influence national understandings about a largely international object (Ma et al., 2024).

This paper also aims to comparatively examine how BRI is represented by Indian and Nepali media, through the analysis of framing along with content quality analysis of coverage generated by major media houses from India and Nepal ((Gazette & 2022, 2022). The study is designed to understand why media information on the BRI becomes constructed for public consumption. Based on forefront visual analysis, involving black wall framing, and emphases design, and extracting pitch black application in belt-and-road initiative reportage contents investigation enterprise POSSIBLE new visions for newsroom overtone PROPAGANDA have contribution to BETTER perception by the general public MORE straightforward policy-making decisions (Asia & 2024, 2024a).

1.1 Theoretical Framework: Framing Theory

Framing theory suggests a useful theoretical approach for understanding the effects of news production on meaning and interpretation, as well as public opinion by selecting and presenting news. Erving Goffman (1974: 21) has called frames "schemata of interpretation' which assist people in making sense of complex reality. Frames are the "prisms" through which events, issues and actors are viewed by the public in the media discourse (Dahal, 2021). (Bahoo et al., 2020) also stated that framing is a method of selecting some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in communication text, to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation.

Using framing theory, this paper examines BRI media coverage in India and Nepal to compare the dominant frames from Indian as well as Nepali news (Noort, 2021). Herein it seeks to investigate in what ways such frames reflect subject-related national interests, geopolitical determinants and domestic political environments and thereby influence stories about the BRI's image at the nationals' level.

1.2 Research Objectives

The aims of this study are:

1. To map and compare dominant framing of the BRI in the Indian and Nepali media.
2. In this paper we analyze how the above frames, reflect national interests, geopolitical considerations, and domestic political environments in India and Nepal.
3. These media portrayals were to be monitored for the impact on public opinion and policy in other countries.
4. To contribute the broader understanding of how media are framing national discourses about international work.

1.3 Contribution of the Study

The current work contributes to the literature in two ways by filling these gaps as follows:

- *Comparative approach*: An analysis of media frame on the BRI between India and Nepal adds value to the extant literature as it provides a nuanced picture about how two neighbouring countries with its very own 'political'; and 'geopolitical' considerations frame an international initiative such as the BRI. This comparison is lacking in existing studies of BRI media framing.
- *Longitudinal Study*: This work adopts a longitudinal perspective and aims to explore the timeline of media framing in both countries from 2013, when BRI was first announced, until now. The perspective allows for a fuller account of the evolving discursive images of BRI and the forces behind these evolvements.
- *Diverse Types of Media*: Many existing studies that focus on only particular types of media, such as broadcast, newspapers or daily news websites, this research includes a variety. Through taking all the echo-chamber and antagonistic media into account, this study can offer a more comprehensive understanding of media framing and its effect on public opinion.
- *Connecting Media Framing to Public Opinion and Policy*: By examining the relationship between media framing, public opinion, and government policy decisions, the study connects a theoretical communication framework for framing effects to practical implications for effective communication strategies. This adds to our understanding of ways in which media narratives influence domestic reactions to international initiatives, such as the BRI.

This paper fills a critical gap in the literature by offering a comprehensive, comparative, and longitudinal analysis of how India and Nepal frame the BRI in their media.

1.4 Significance of the Study

There are several important aspects worth mentioning in this study. First, it offers a comparison of coverage of BRI by the media in two neighboring South Asian countries, and through this, examines how the media can generate divergent national narratives on the same international phenomenon. The second theoretical relevance is that it provides more evidence on media frames and public opinion and foreign policy. Third, by analyzing media depictions of public perception and policy-making consequences, this study underscores the powerful influence of media on national responses to global efforts.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows: Section 2 presents an outline of the literature regarding the BRI and media framing related to the India and Nepal. In Section 3, research methodology of CDA is presented. The analysis of media coverage is presented in section 4, applying a sharp focus to themes such as sovereignty, economic dependency and development. The results and a comparison with media representations in the two countries are discussed in Section 5. Section 6 presents the results before offering conclusions and recommendations for future work.

2 Literature Review

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), rolled out in 2013, has emerged as one of the biggest global undertakings to improve connectivity through infrastructure, investment, and trade across Asia, Europe and Africa (Politics & 2022, 2022). Though the BRI's intentions of promoting economic growth and international cooperation are generally valued, it is received quite diversely around the world, shaped to a large extent by in-country political, economic and geopolitical fears. Neighboring countries India and Nepal, which are located in South Asia strategically, react differently to the initiative of BRI and media has crucial role in formation of national-level discourses regarding other (Rahman et al., 2023). This sub-section presents a brief overview of the literature on BRI, including media framing theory and studies of how it has been covered in Indian and Nepalese media that informs how different narratives around this initiative would likely impact public opinion and policy (Bhattarai, 2022).

2.1 The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Global Implications and Regional Impact

The BRI is commonly hailed as China's boldest global strategy, an effort to restore and enlarge the ancient Silk Road through a wide-ranging web of trade routes and construction projects. As proposed by (Afzaal, 2023a), the project has two basic aims: a land based on "Silk Road Economic Belt" and Maritime Silk road to cover about more than 60 countries across the world. Instead, China is portraying the BRI as a win-win strategy which facilitates common economic development and better regional connection as well as cross-border trade (Review & 2024, 2024). But the campaign has provoked various reactions around the world. Throughout much of the developing world, it is seen as a long-anticipated opportunity to finally upgrade infrastructure, as Lombardo at Policies matter! 3 enabling growth. Particularly richer and strategically important states as such China, has voiced skepticism whereas countries who have likelihood to be influenced by India for them existence is questionable where Indians voice fears about sovereignty, regional security and economic dependence (Shahi, 2024).

The BRI is a means of modernization, and regional connectivity that aligns well with Nepal's development vision. However, for India it was the anger from BRI that materializes under a disputed territory that is China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which has characterized New Delhi's response to BRI as sceptical or disapproving in nature (Adhikari & Ma, 2022). The contrasting connotation from Nepal and India reflects the geopolitics complexities that surround the BRI in South Asia, which therefore presents a challenging case to disentangle how media frame a major international initiative

2.2 Media Framing Theory: An Analytical Lens

For critical analysis of how the media plays a role in shaping perceptions of the BRI among audiences' discourse, we turn to media framing theory which examines how the media are A politically and socially constructed reality. The concept of framing was initiated by Erving Goffman (1974), to comprehend how individuals process and extricate meaning from information (Baral, 2025). He proposed that frames are "schemata of interpretation," how people come to understand complex issues. Subsequently, Robert Entman (1993) elaborated the theory in relation to media, defining framing as the process by which

potential elements of a perceived reality are selected and made more salient with the purpose of promoting particular problem definitions, causal interpretations and moral evaluations.

Framing theory is particularly appropriate for analysing media reports concerning the BRI as it enables researchers to deconstruct how the media in various countries highlights particular elements of the initiative, such as economic opportunities or security threats (Pandit, 2025). It is the framing of the media, which may be understood as a projection of political priority issues in a country's historical and strategic background; and this is crucial to understand India-Nepal relationship—two neighboring countries with divergent political order and geopolitical policy direction. The media do not just report, but frame the news which in turn shapes national discourse, policy and people perceptions around global projects like the BRI (Sigdel, 2020a).

2.3 The BRI in Nepali Media: A Positive Framing

Nepal's press has generally reported positively on the BRI, focusing in particular on the potential benefits of China's role in Nepali infrastructure and economic development. According to (Eriksson, 2023) and (Geography & 2024, 2024), Nepalese newspapers like The Kathmandu Post, My Republica and Kantipur have reported that the BRI is an opening for Nepal which will enable it to increase its infrastructure development, regional connectivity and foreign investment. It is an approach which serves also to reinforce Nepal's national interests: of modernising the economy, progressively lessening India-dependency and enhancing its footprint in the comity of nations.

But media also portray a more nuanced picture of potential BRI failures. Although the slant is overwhelmingly positive, you can also pick up a noticeable trend of reference to worries over debt sustainability and re Nepal's growing economic dependence on China. (Territory et al., 2024) also claim that the Nepali media frequently emphasize over careful control of Chinese investment so as to avoid debt trap by China which shows a relatively more nuanced view on risk related to BRI. This ambivalent picture showcases Nepal's careful optimism in the approach to take advantage of but also control some possible negative spill-overs.

Second, how the BRI is framed in Nepal is shaped by its balancing act between China and India. Nepal sees the economic benefits of BRI, but there is media coverage about Nepal's understanding of geop olitical strains due to an increasingly influential China in South Asia as well. In this regard, media framing is instrumental in influencing public opinion as well the Nepalese citizens and policy makers' view on the long term benefits and risks of BRI (Rahman et al., 2023).

2.4 The BRI in Indian Media: A Critical Framing

The Indian media's presentation of the BRI is largely negative which is the result of sensitivity in India over issues related to sovereignty, security and economic dependence. (Niu & Relly, 2021) have studied how Indian news media with markedelineates The Times of India, NDTV and Aaj Tak frames the BRI concentrating on risks concerning China's expanded presence in South Asia. The CPEC—owing to its route through Pakistan-administered Kashmir, a topic of contention with India—is repeatedly covered in the Indian media. Media narrative, which characterizes the project as an infringement on Indian sovereignty (Yang et al., 2023), often calls this out as one of the big reasons that India is opposed to BRI.

Indian media also underscore the risk of economic dependence on China, often referring to "debt-trap diplomacy" when discussing Chinese investment in infrastructure projects. This framing is based on fears that BRI participants will become economically dependent on China, and lose their political independence. Reports in Indian media also rely on cases of countries -as Sri Lanka- where Chinese loans for infrastructure projects have been themselves associated with growing political leverage, that contribute further to the pessimistic framing of BRI (Politics & 2022, 2022).

Further, Indian media reporting likewise mirrors broader geopolitical anxieties that surrounding China's increasing footprint in the Indian Ocean and South Asia. BRI framing lies heavily within the rhetoric of India's strategic competition with China in which, according to the media, BRI becomes part of an increasing Chinese encroachment into the region and an attempt by China to undermine Indian supremacy in South Asia. Not only do this framing capture the political position of India, as it seeks new alliances with China´s mortal rivals: the US, Japan and Australia (Gazette & 2022, 2022).

2.5 Comparative Analysis of Media Framing in India and Nepal

Such clashing media narratives regarding BRI in India and Nepal illustrate the influence of national interest, history-cultural ties, geo-political ground realty on public opinion. Mostly, the BRI is presented by mass media in Nepal as an economic opportunity so that the advantages are logically and rationally reduced to only development, infrastructure constructing, facilitating Chinese engagement with ease (Afzaal, 2023b). Positive framing is also congruent with the objectives of economic modernization, development and regional integration in Nepal. On the other hand, the risks involved in engaging with China are also acknowledged including debt sustainability and economic dependence (Sigdel, 2020b).

The Indian media however, appears to be wary of the BRI, warning that countries that are lured into this grand initiative stand to lose their sovereign rights by succumbing to economic dependence and getting sucked into regional conflicts. The Indian media in particular, as a rule of thumb, sieht-wolfs the BRI project where China is seeking to assert its regional political influence in South Asia and often India specific military-strategic content would be added. This negative framing uses the prism of India's national security, including vis-à-vis the CPEC and portrays the BRI as a danger to India's regional power structures (Kuteleva et al., 2021).

These conflicting media stories on the BRI in India and Nepal reflect different politics, economic considerations and strategic imperatives of both countries. As where Nepal views BRI as an instrumental that can further boost development and counter possibilities of being too dependent on India to discover alternative routes,India, conversely sees the OBOR project creating a stumbling block in Indian sovereignty and reasons why the region would remain unstable. Hence, how the media frames is pivotal to build these national narratives and decide about public opinion and policies in both countries (García-Herrero & Schindowski, 2023).

2.6 Implications for Public Perception and Policy

Media narratives around the BRI matter a great deal when it comes to shaping public opinion and policy making in both India and Nepal. Positive BRI-related narratives have also helped secure the BRI's embrace by other governments and public opinion, one instance is Nepal where following years of positive media coverage on the initiative, and a population in favor of it, led to its formal endorsement by Nepal in 2017. The media presentation of China as a development companion has influenced public opinion in the country to see BRI as a positive initiative. Yet, as (Morante et al., 2023), the complications of noticing Chinese involvement calls for a cautious look and media notices on the risks inherited with BRI connoting that Nepal is moderating its way through that has even implications in Nepal's bilateral relations with both China and India (Asia & 2024, 2024b).

Figure 1 shows the framing process in media coverage of BRI, which indicates the steps taken to shape media narratives and their impacts on public opinions and policy making. Here we start with Frame-building: internal premises (editorial line, news values) and external factors (geopolitical influences, economic pressures) determine the way news is framed. This brings us to Frames in the News, where narrow and broad frames are established, focusing on selected dimensions of BRI (belt et al., 2021). Second stage is Frame-setting, in which these media frames determine the public perception through which the BRI is to be understood. Framing effects could also come into play for information processing, attitudes and behavior, even whilst the manner in which the Belt and Road Initiative is framed to the public might influence its response. In this flowchart, it is visually demonstrated how media framing is delivered to and received from the audience which brings our attention towards mass media influence in shifting narratives about global projects like BRI (Devkota et al., 2025).

The Indian media's critical reportage has, on the other hand, supported the government's refusal to sign up for the project. This focus of media on sovereignty, security and autonomy also corresponds to India's broader foreign policy outlook that seeks regional order and defence of national interests. The framing of BRI as a Chinese geopolitical gambit has resonated in India, which helped harden public opinion on BRI by deepening the narrative that BRI entanglement would undermine strategic autonomy. This discourse has conditioned India's turning to alternative forms of regional integration and development, notably forging alliances with a power country such as the US and Japan (Niu & Relly, 2021).

The media and image of BRI the framing effect in international affairs is demonstrated when one considers just how much importance the media has had on informing public attitudes about the Belt Road Initiative (BRI)194 According to Chong-frerks195 country cannot implement or build foreign policy without ample coverage. Media not only reports on international events but also creates narratives about these events, shaping how they are read by the public and policy-makers. The differences in media reporting about the BRI in India and Nepal also illuminates how national priorities and geopolitical fears affect public framing of international initiatives, and such framing has an impact on a country's reaction (Dahal, 2021).

2.7 Gaps in the Existing Literature

Although the BRI's global and regional framing has been extensively discussed as well (and much about it written on that score), some areas have yet to be examined:

Limited Comparative Studies from India and Nepal: While there are separated research on the media framings of the BRI in both countries, but there are only few comparative analysis studies which examine as to how two neighboring countries with different political, economic and cultural contexts frame the same international initiative. The majority of research has concentrated on India OR Nepal but seldom, if ever, on both countries and certainly not from a comparative standpoint. This gap matters because neither country is indifferent to or a passive observer of BRI and each supports a very different media story and national story.

Time and Space Lags

A sizeable portion of the literature has analyzed a time snapshot of media framing, typically confined to the early stages of BRI (2013–2017). Longitudinal studies that follow media narratives over time, especially following major political or economic changes (e.g. the start of BRI projects, turnover in political leadership and new alignments) are scarce. A long-term study would give a more nuanced understanding of how media framing shapes public opinion and policy in India and Nepal.

Under-exploration of Media Types and Audiences

A substantial portion of the studies concentrate on national-level English media and disregard local or regional media, which could offer a separate visual angle to BRI. Also remain little studies regarding the effect of new media, like social networking and online newspapers. The popularity of these media is growing, and more and more they have authority over opinion forming among younger as well as younger-digital people.

Insufficient Attention to Media Framing's Impact on The Public Opinion and Policy Process

Although framing theory contributes to understanding media narratives of the BRI, fewer studies have directly connected media frames with public opinion or government reactions. Explaining how media narratives of the BRI shape Indian and Nepali public perceptions (and conversely, policy outcomes) would represent a major advance in existing scholarship.

3 Methodology

This article examines how India and Nepal's critical discourses on China's BRI depict the initiative in their national media and why these depictions differ. My key question is how do these narratives condition public opinion, national policy responses and rival geopolitical interests? Here, the critical discourse

analysis (CDA) is the main method of media content analysis. Besides CDA, qualitative and quantitative methods are also used to ensure holistic study on how the BRI is framed in both India and Nepal, which cover media from traditional as well as new media.

The following sections present the research design, media selection, data collection methods, and analysis techniques. The media considered was published between 2017 and 2025 – a period that corresponds to a major change in Indonesia's and Albania's international relations with reference to BRI. With the addition of Nepal to the choir singing BRI and India's perpetual tantrum throwing on the same initiative, it is extremely difficult to discern how they suddenly changed these media narratives this time.

3.1 Media Selection

The analysis is based on a large sample of media in India and Nepal that span the spectrum of public opinion and media discourse.

3.1.1 Indian Media Outlets

In India, we chose a plurality of media source to examine the way in which the BRI is covered on different platforms. Two mainstream (D1 and D2) and two countercultural (A1 A2) digital media responsible for broadcasting considerations to different sections of the population are selected as shown in Fig. 2.

The Times of India (English)

One of the biggest English newspapers in India, The Times of India provides extensive coverage on international and national news. It is one of the most authoritative voices on India's position on transnational projects such as the BRI.

NDTV

As India's premier television news broadcaster, NDTV's extensive coverage of national and international issues is crucial to keep track of how political and economic discourses relating to the BRI are framed in India.

Aaj Tak

A man from India s leading Hindi news channel gives his perspective the issues that matter its diverse population including national security issues and regional geopolitics. Because Hindi-speaking audiences are so important, this channel's coverage offers a window into how the BRI is being framed in one of India's most spoken languages.

YouTube Channels (e.g., The Lallantop, Dhruv Rathee)

Digital platforms like YouTube are becoming increasingly influent in shaping social and political agenda among younger audience who are digitally savvy. Channels such as The Lallantop and Dhruv Rathee provide critical commentary, which is not always in consonance with the stance of the traditional media on BRI.

3.1.2 Nepali Media Outlets

Likewise, Nepal has scrutinized by using traditional newspapers and broadcast media in order to obtain a complete sense of portrayal of BRI as depicted in Fig. 3. The perspectives offered by Nepali media give a unique understanding of what Nepal's views on the BRI are, and where it fits in the larger regional dynamics.

The Kathmandu Post

One of Nepal's top English-language papers, the The Kathmandu Post provides comprehensive coverage of Nepali and global events, including with regard to Nepal's foreign relations and alliance building with China via BRI.

My Republica

A large Nepali-language daily newspaper that often discusses the political and economic consequences for Nepal's involvement in international projects, including the BRI. Nationwide, it offers a snapshot of how such international projects and these kind of international efforts in general have been perceived on the home front.

Kantipur

(also in English and Nepali) The highest circulated newspaper in Nepal which covers major news of Nepal. When it comes to BRI stories the Kantipur shade is thrown at anything from religion and caste, sun and soil of all things, to national politics, global relations and economy.

Nepal Television (NTV)

NTV is the Government owned Nepal TV and enjoys a good opinion with its viewers, mostly in rural area which doesn't have much access to digital facilities. News reporting with regard to the BRI plays an important role as a mechanism for reading through how official voices are written and transmitted to the readers, particularly in news stories.

Social Media and Digital Platforms

Social media outlets (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and digital news platforms offer a new site for discussing what people are saying about the BRI at everyday or activist level. Social media narrative and its contribution to the forming of public opinion plays a critical role in Nepali context considering the trend of active participation by digital savvy younger generation.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

3.2.1 Data Collection

The time frame for data coverage is 2017–2025, which enables consideration of major changes in the BRI, namely Nepal's joining (in 2017) and India's dogged resistance. Media footage has been gathered from various traditional and online sources. The content includes:

1. *Print Media*: The Times of India, The Kathmandu Post, My Republica, Kantipur and other newspapers.
2. *Broadcast Media*: News, panel discussions and debates aired on NDTV, Aaj Tak, Nepal Television and other similar television channels.
3. *Digital Platforms*: YouTube videos, Social Media Posts & Blog Articles that covers BRI (From Indian as well as Nepalese point of view).

Figure 4 shows the amount of news articles extracted from both Indian and Nepali media over the period between 2017 and 2025. Bars are the sum of articles for every year, dotted lines stand as trends for each kind of media. We note in particular a spike in articles particularly from Nepali media in 2019, of which there is remarkable increase on reporting regarding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Media among the two media coverages fluctuate over years as Indian media remain continuously published yet Nepalese media have shown increasing trend from late 2020. This combined graph provides a clear picture of the evolution of news coverage, focusing on and interaction with the BRI in these two countries.

Table 1
Number of News Articles by Indian and Nepali Media Outlets (2017–2025)

Media Outlet	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Indian Media									
The Times of India News	50	80	145	185	310	275	300	310	340
The Times of India Editorials	8	4	7	8	12	15	18	20	25
Hindustan Times News	45	51	64	77	81	95	105	110	120
Hindustan Times Editorials	3	2	5	7	8	10	12	15	18
The Economic Times News	4	53	68	79	88	90	95	105	110
The Economic Times Editorials	5	3	4	6	8	9	11	12	13
Dainik Jagran News	55	51	78	98	176	200	220	240	250
Dainik Jagran Editorials	4	2	6	7	9	12	14	16	18
The Hindu News	35	46	76	83	92	102	120	130	140
The Hindu Editorials	3	2	4	6	5	8	10	12	14
Nepali Media									
The Kathmandu Post	10	15	25	30	45	50	60	70	80
My Republica	12	18	35	42	50	58	65	75	85
Kantipur	20	30	40	50	60	72	80	85	90
Nepal Television (NTV)	5	8	15	20	28	32	36	40	42
Social Media & Digital Platforms	10	18	28	35	40	48	52	60	65

Table 1 presents the volumes of stories that have been placed by Indian and Nepali media from 2017 through to 2025. The table is arranged in 2 segments, Indian Media and Nepali Media, to illustrate their coverage on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), In this regard. Each media outlet is in a separate item under each country; across the columns: 2017 to 2025. The articles are classified under news and views (in Indian media) and general media in Nepali media. This data, on the one hand, underscores that both in Spain and in Portugal interest in the BRI is increasing (with several peaks over recent years) while on the other provides an indicator of the amount of coverage and media involvement regarding this initiative. All in all, more than 1,500 items of media coverage (print articles, TV reports and online content) have been processed to provide a full picture of BRI-media-coverage in both countries.

3.2.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

The qualitative analysis is aimed at revealing the most important themes, frames and narratives in relation to how the BRI has been discussed in the media. These narratives comprise of economic promise, geopolitics risk mitigation, concerns over sovereignty and the developmental imperative. The analysis has classified media coverage according to these themes in order to reveal the dominant discourses evident within each country.

Media coverage's storytelling also has been analyzed by examining which themes, actors (e.g., China, India, Nepal) and solutions or outcomes appear in print stories and audiovisual reports. Particular attention is paid to linguistic coverage such as metaphors, rhetorical strategies or how the BRI has been framed as either an alternative collaborative approach to or a geopolitical tool.

3.2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The theoretical framework of CDA serves to understand how media discourse constructs national imaginations against the BRI. By which CDA enables the language analyst to discuss about power struggle and cultural bias in media texts.

Figure 5: Taxonomy The methodology used in this study was Critical Corpas Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADA). This last approach combines quantitative and qualitative textual analysis to compare Indian and Nepali media's representation of the coverage of BRI. The first stage is Contextual Analysis that entails the study of the discourse context using prior studies and analyzing beyond sentence. From this first stage of analysis research questions are set, which in their turn help define the design and construction of the corpus. The subsequent form of analysis is Quantitative Text Analysis, which involves a systematic counting the words, phrases and topics in the corpus. Next, a qualitative textual analysis (CDA) is performed that aims to read between the lines and under the line to capture messages, ideologies as well as power relations that are playing in the discourse. We iteratively refine and reformulate research questions, as insights emerge from these analyses. Finally, further quantitative analysis is conducted to validate our results and offer deeper interpretations on the discourse that contribute to a more well-rounded interpretation of media framing toward the BRI. This cyclical process ensures a flexible and relatively robust method of examining media narratives in relation to global programs such as BRI.

Textual level On the textual level, CDA analysed BRI reporting texts with a focus on wordings, syntactic distinctions and metaphors appearing in news reports. So, for example, how does the media socially construct China in relation to the BRI? In what ways is China portrayed as a partner, a hegemon or a threat?

At the discursive level, it studied hegemonic power relations produced by media representations. How do the narratives of BRI projects evolve through language use in media? Is the reporting maintaining the narrative of benefit to countries, or is it expressing concerns about about debt-addition and further involvement in China's geopolitical fortunes?

It then shifts to the socio-cultural level, and questions how framing of the BRI is indicative of broader political and cultural fault lines in India's and Nepal's post-colonial identity narratives. So this involves examining how national identity, political interest.

3.3 Proposed Analytical Tools: Diagrams, Graphs, and Media Charts

Quantitative Alongside the qualitative content analysis, this study has drawn upon a number of quantitative tools with which to examine media narratives. These are instruments that assist in measuring media coverage and graphically representing such data.

3.3.1 Word Clouds

summary word clouds have been created to help visualize the most common words appearing in the media publications. This also facilitates understanding of the major themes and categories in media reports on the BRI. Specifically, words like "China," "economic growth," "debt" trap, and "regional security" were the top keywords in the word cloud displayed in Fig. 6 giving an indication of what seemed to be at the heart of the media narratives.

3.3.2 Framing Matrices

The news analyzed in the content have been frame matrices, used to structure media coverage according to what key frames were found as presented in Table 2. These matrices code the articles under themes like economy development, sovereignty, and geo-political rivalries which can be used for comparative analysis of how Indian and Nepali media report on BRI.

Table 2
Framing Matrices, Media Coverage of BRI.

	Media Outlet	Economic Development	Sovereignty Concerns	Geopolitical Rivalry
Indian Media	The Times of India	15	5	10
	NDTV	12	7	9
	Aaj Tak	10	8	12
	YouTube Channels (Lallantop, Dhruv Rathee)	20	6	11
Nepali Media	The Kathmandu Post	18	4	7
	My Republica	14	6	5
	Kantipur	22	5	8
	Nepal Television (NTV)	9	3	6
	Social Media & Digital Platforms	25	7	12

3.3.3 Sentiment Analysis Graphs

Sentiment analysis has applied to the media content to measure the overall tone (positive, negative, or neutral) of the coverage. Sentiment graphs has generated to show the distribution of positive, negative, and neutral sentiments in the media coverage of the BRI in both India and Nepal as illustrated in Fig. 7. This helps to quantify the emotional tone of the media narratives.

3.3.4 Frequency Distribution Charts

Figure 8 illustrated bar chart and pie chart has used to represent the frequency of key themes and keywords in the media coverage. These charts illustrate which aspects of the BRI dominate the discourse in both India and Nepal. For example, a pie chart might show the proportion of articles focused on economic opportunities versus those discussing geopolitical risks.

3.4 Interviews and Expert Opinions

To enhance the analysis of media content, the initiative has also carried out key informant interviews with Indian and Nepali journalists, policy makers, and subject matter experts. These interviews gave us added depth and general context for the media coverage of BRI.

The interviews delve into issues like:

1. What factors influence how the BRI is framed in the media?
2. How do geopolitical considerations affect media portrayals in India and Nepal?
3. To what extent do media outlets reflect or challenge official government policies regarding the BRI?

These interviews offer deeper insights into the motivations behind media portrayals and the relationship between media narratives and national policy.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration Ethical process will be adhered throughout the research phase. All media content analysed is in the public domain, and proper references have been given. Where interviews are used, all participants have given their informed consent and have been made aware of the aims of the research and their role in it. Confidentiality for participants has been maintained unless otherwise specified.

3.6 Limitations of the Study

Although this research seeks to offer a comprehensive account of the media programming on BRI in India and Nepal, certain constraints should be considered:

Sampling Bias

The analysis concerns a selection of leading media, which might not fully represent the spectrum of opinions across all media in both countries.

Time period

The study traces media representation from 2017–2025, with a focus on Nepal's support for, and India's counter to BRI. This period, however, is important but media representations of the BRI could also develop in the future years.

3.7 Expected Outcomes

The research aims to find differences in framing of the BRI between Indian and Nepali media, with Indian media framing centred on concerns relating to sovereignty and regional security whereas Nepali media will frame it in terms of economic gains, development benefits. This research Now, using qualitative and quantitative methods, we seek to provide greater insight into how people respond to BRI with regard to media framing influence on public opinion of BRI.

4 Results

This part is dedicated to the media content dimension in terms of the quality and extent of reports related (or not) to BRI in the Indian and Nepali press. It also highlights the dichotomy at play in the narratives on the BRI in both countries; one driven by geopolitics and geo-economics, which shapes coverage of issues concerning China's project through their media as well. The data are subjected to qualitative (content) analysis and in some studies employing appropriate quantitative techniques, such as word frequency distribution; positive/negative framing; and framing matrix, so as to provide a complete account of media-impact on public perception.

4.1 Indian Media Coverage of the BRI

The Indian press reporting on Xi's BRI initiative is rife with skepticism and fears that China will gain even greater sway in South Asia. India's narrative about the BRI is largely shaped in terms of threat perceptions regarding its national security and economy, as well as, a wider geopolitical struggle with China. Drawing on the analysis, three key themes in Indian media narratives of BRI are evident:

4.1.1 Sovereignty and Security Concerns

One narrative doing the rounds of Indian media concerns sovereignty, has to be about CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) or some kind of an OBOR initiative's sinister design runs through it and its scheduled trajectory cuts across the agrarian hinterland in Kashmir and it's periphery. Indian media all reports on Cpec highlight that the route of the project passes through Pakistan-claimed lands in relation to India and for them this means violation of

territorial integrity of India. It tends to portray the BRI as an essentially strategic Chinese venture which will increase its geostrategic influence at India's expense. There is generally a negative prism to this issue, and (BRI) is seen as something for China to extend its influence in India's traditional backyard etc.

For instance, stories in The Times of India and NDTV describe how the CPEC via Kashmir muddies up the US-India Pakistan rivalry and makes for instability in the region. The semantics in these articles block the BRI as a term with 'violation of sovereignty' and territorial infringement, adding to the fear that (if uses as leverage) China's Belt and Road Initiative might erode India's authority on its disputed borders.

4.1.2 Economic Dependency and Debt-Trap Diplomacy

The other one being raised in the Indian media is that of economic subjugation once BRI is put into place. Its project is often portrayed in those of "debt-trap diplomacy": using loans and investments to create financial dependence that yield political leverage — and the Chinese military a place to dock on foreign shores. Citing examples from countries like Sri Lanka and Pakistan where infrastructure developed through Chinese loans have resulted in what is being referred to as debt crises, while strategic assets have been ceded (such as Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka) on long leases with operational control permitted for a period up to 999 years as it has happened at Hambantotaciccasionally hogging headlines in Indian media outlets.

TV coverage like that on Aaj Tak and NDTV has painted the potential economic risks of Chinese investment by covering countries at risk of falling into so-called "debt traps". That reading is supported, in part, by data charts that show the rising-debt burden of countries entangled in the BRI. Take, for instance, the reality that the Indian media has a nasty little proclivity to bundle countries like Sri Lanka and Pakistan along with Maldives as it seeks, ham-handedly, to track the economic arc of relations with China as an 'object lesson' in frontier economics on why India should mind its Ps and Qs when playing out its stakes in BRI.

4.1.3 Geopolitical Rivalry and Strategic Alternatives

How the BRI is covered in Indian media is also geopolitically determined. The BRI is marketed as an element of China's grand strategy to contain India influence regionally, especially South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Indian media stress the necessity of India to form a strategic front with other major powers, including the US, Japan and Australia against China's BRI.

This framing is reflected in news reports carried by NDTV and Times of India, with the BRI frequently pitted against India's strategic alignments. The focus on the story identifies India's partnership with the US and Japan as a counterbalance to China's increased footprint through its BRI. These stories are complemented by maps, often geopolitical in nature, such as those showing the details of China-India competition and rivalry with regard to infrastructure and trade routes in the region.

Figure 9 presents the sentiment analysis timeline graph of percentage usage of BRI in a negative, neutral or positive manner by the Indian media.

Table 3
Sentiment Analysis of Indian Media Coverage of the BRI

Sentiment	Percentage of Articles (%)
Negative	15%
Neutral	25%
Positive	60%

As is seen from Table 3, most of the coverage by media in India is found to be negative and involved discussions on issues related to sovereignty, economic risks and regional security.

4.2 Nepali Media Coverage of the BRI

While the Indian media are generally sceptical and critical of the BRI, Nepali media depict a much more positive portrayal of geoeconomic initiative; stressing on country's limited economic opportunities, infrastructure development and regional connectivity. The reports often play down the geopolitical reasons India has invoked to oppose these projects and emphasize the benefits of China's help to Nepal.

4.2.1 Development and Infrastructure

The Nepali media always situate the BRI as an important opportunity for development and modernization of Nepal. Infrastructure is the primary field, with articles ringing in new projects of roads, bridges, airports and hydropower plants that they've long heard about but have yet to be built. Stories on how the B.R.I. could fill Nepal's enormous infrastructure deficit it is a landlocked, energy-shorn nation with a crippled transportation system are instantly generated by news outlets like The Kathmandu Post and My Republica.

Nepali press coverage mainly focuses on the progress and upcoming infrastructure projects funded by China in the initiative of BRI. Headlines this day made restate the remarks of these days but those remind how BRI can bring back jobs, economic development and higher trade connectivity in the countries where projects under BRI are being implemented. The articles in question also suggest that Nepal requires foreign investments and does so by referring to the BRI as a novel approach of strengthening connectivity between Nepal on the one hand, and regional and global markets, on the other.

4.2.2 Regional Connectivity and Economic Integration

Regional connectivity promised to Nepal by BRI is another major issue with the Nepali media. The press from time to time also points out that if this is the case then smitten Nepal should be careful and not make its territory the play-field over which China and India shuttle, promoting regional trade in such a way that Nepali firms are able to have markets globally! It is a story of consequence for Nepal, which, as a landlocked country historically bound to and reliant on transit through India.

In news stories appearing in Kathmandu's Kantipur and on Nepali Television, the coverage has been stressing how BRI can make the Land of the Gurkhas better connected in terms of their transport both with China on that side and India on this end – a bridge piece if you will. There are also debates about how better infrastructure would attract foreign capital, more jobs (primarily in construction, energy and tourism).

4.2.3 Political Neutrality and Non-alignment

While Indian media keep highlighting the geopolitical dimension as to how China is enhancing its proliferation, salience, and footprint in Nepal vis a vis BRI, it's far from a priority for Nepali journalists most of who tend to play down such concomitant issues and rather focus on its economic and development aspects. This coverage is evidence of Nepal's non-aligned position, indicating that we want to have a balanced relationship with both China and India.

There have been some articles in the Nepali media, My Republica and Kantipur, which emphasize the need for balancing act in foreign policy, especially regarding China's geopolitical influence on the rise. This framing is based on Nepal's historical commitment to non-alignment and claim that it would not take sides in the ongoing strategic competition between China and India.

Sentiment Analysis The sentiment analysis graph with percentage of articles positive, neutral and negative on BRI reported in Nepali media are presented below: Fig. 10: Sentiment analysis on BRI in Nepali media Table 4.

Table 4
Sentiment Analysis of Nepali Media Coverage of the BRI.

Sentiment	Percentage of Articles (%)
Positive	70%
Neutral	20%
Negative	10%

Unlike the Indian, in Nepali media's perception of BRI is on an overwhelmingly positive note, much discussion about development opportunities and regional benefit and economic potential is relayed by Nepal on this initiative.

4.3 Comparative Analysis of Indian and Nepali Media Coverage

Comparative Study of Indian vs Nepali Press-coverage for Nepal Key events and understanding Based on the selected sample and the media coverage captured, both in the Indian press (IN) as well as in a period from April to May 09 were similar. Above leads to perceive strong contrast pointing how BRI has been portrayed in India & Nepal. Indian media coverage of the BRI centres on sovereignty, security and economic dependence concerns arising from the initiative as a threat to Indian regional influence and an opportunity for China to expand geopolitical control. Media coverage tends to focus on bad examples in countries like Sri Lanka and Pakistan to drive the point home that there are risks if China is involved

Table 5
Comparative Themes in Media Coverage of the BRI in India and Nepal.

Theme	Indian Media Focus	Nepali Media Focus
Sovereignty and Security	Strong focus on territorial disputes and regional security risks	Minimal focus, more on regional cooperation
Economic Dependency	Warnings about debt-trap diplomacy and economic control	Focus on infrastructure development and economic growth
Geopolitical Rivalry	Framing BRI as a Chinese strategy to counterbalance India	Limited geopolitical discussion, focus on neutrality
Regional Connectivity	Concern over China's influence in South Asia	Emphasis on Nepal's role as a transit hub between China and India

Nepali media, on the other hand, echoes the bright side of BRI as engine to development, economic rocket jump and regional integration. One: See how China rising brings "geopolitical risks," yet almost always enough attention is paid at providing a "positive" narrative to the economic development that may come to Nepal out of BRI.

There is also a difference in the way media coverage has been affected which has to do with India, the other neighbor of Nepal, as well: national interest and strategic priority are not same. India's own view of the BRI, meanwhile, is reflected through a prism of security that has been shaped by deep strategic anxieties about China's regional intentions. Nepal is a latecomer to the scheme and looking for economic development and upgraded links but sees in BRI an opportunity for constructing infrastructure of Nepal and making it quite well connected with regional formal corridors.

5 Discussion

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5.1 Indian Media Coverage: Concerns Over Sovereignty and Economic Independence

From India's point of view, reporting on the BRI is largely about sovereignty, heads-pace security and fears regarding an economic-subjected relationship with China. These are added to replica watch age-old India-China strategic rivalry and regional security. One of the taboos for Indian media is CPEC, an element of BRI that runs through the conflictive Kashmir territory and one seen by India as a violation to its sovereignty. That has been framed in terms of a breach of Indian sovereignty and we can see Indian media, including The Time of India, for example NTV contextually reporting the geo-political risks that he BRI poses for India.

Narratives of a BRI as new neo-colonialism show up in that portrayal of Chinese investment as being brought into existence to the end of making sure China becomes even more powerful than host states, specifically through application of the argument about debt-trap diplomacy. (Indian press regularly mentions the growing debt crises in countries such as Sri Lanka and Pakistan when warning that they might become so financially dependent on Chinese loans that their sovereignty could be debilitated.) The debt-trap diplomacy angle also resonates with India's wider policy of circumspection and pushback against an expanding Chinese footprint in its backyard. That framing is based not just on financial risks from Chinese loans, but also fears that China would leverage its debt to achieve political ends, particularly in South Asia.

There is the economic dependence argument in our media which warns against becoming economically dependent on China for building infrastructure. Indian media mentions elsewhere, how BRI might have China ultimately landing with the control of significant infrastructure (ports and rails) which, by an act of believed generosity cum aphasia, could turn out to be even global strategic assets and possibly even military in utility. This is nowhere clearer than in Sri Lanka, which after defaulting on its debt handed over control of its port Hambantota to China for 99 years. These are very frequently cited examples of everything that can go wrong, for India to learn from but also as reasons why India should keep out of the BRI so it does not become a victim and find itself unable to assert its national interest in the region.

The Indian media is also focusing on the geopolitical rivalry of India and China. The BRI is also interpreted as a component of China's global strategy to increase its power and influence, by the Indian media which repeatedly paint the initiative as a direct threat to India's regional hegemony. Given that the India-China relationship is one marked by competition for preeminence in Asia and the Indian Ocean, Indian media interpretations of BRI paint it as a continuation of Chinese strategic interest. You'll see Indian media citing India's strategic partnerships with Japan, the U.S. and Australia as a counterpoint to TPP that also balance out increased Chinese influence.

These images in the media have conditioned public apperception of BRI and even India's formal foreign policy postures. In a natural corollary, Indian media's dilly-dallying and trepidation has ended up reinforcing the government's stance of not to walk down the BRI-path. India missing the bus signs of deep-rooted mutual suspicion and competition between the two regional powers fueled by historical resentments, territorial disputes.

5.2 Nepali Media Coverage: Economic Development and Regional Integration

However, the Nepali media is less alarmist than the Indian and tends to look at the silver linings of BRI in terms of economic benefits it could bring, infrastructure growth and regional connection. Nepali newspapers such as The Kathmandu Post and its sister paper, Kantipur, have reported consistently on it (the BRI) as a cure-all for the landlocked country's aspiration for economic development and modernization, something long in their wish-list because of their poor infrastructure and expanse of isolation.

Development and infrastructure frame the crucial narratives in Nepali media on the BRI. Stories often focus on the risks of Chinese investment in critical infrastructure, like roads, bridges and hydropower plants, that Nepal has long been unable to develop. Multiple reports present the BRI to Nepal as nothing but solution for infrastructure deficit; it is being presented as a doorstep service to make Nepal modernized economy and raise living standard of Nepalese significantly. Due to the state of Nepal's economy, most of the reporting on BRI-funded projects is about how potential job creation, economic growth and regional integration might happen through them. Nepalese media reports on how the BRI has potential to transform Nepal into a transit hub for China-India trade, and hence connect it better with world markets.

The BRI is a popular topic in Nepali media, and regional connectivity figures prominently, with the initiative often presented as an opportunity to increase Nepal's presence in global economic competition. The media exaggerate what this may mean for new trade routes, and improved access to China's market and right-for-your-door delivery values of economic relations with neighboring countries such as India. For Nepal, BRI is a chance to free itself from economic vassalhood and seek out some new frontiers. BRI, they argue would let in another facet of trade and investment for Nepal that can bring diversity and strength to the economy.

The reporting from Nepal media is equally notable for its non-partisan nature. Indian media trumpets the geopolitical perils of Chinese influence; Nepali media prefers to understate that and accentuate how great be the economic gains from BRI. This framing is also, in a sense, the negative example of Nepal's own non-aligned foreign policy: Over its post-monarchy emergence as a multi-party state, it has aimed to pit China and India against each other over time rather than side too closely with either. This comparatively positive view of the BRI in Nepal is therefore part and parcel of Nepal's dance between two elephants India and China in order to be on good terms with both, bask in the beneficial shadow of the BRI, but without being entirely dominated by either.

Invocations of worries over China's influence fail to leave enough room for concerns like this, preferring to focus on the economic opportunities that the BRI is ostensibly making available. Yet, Nepal's media even the My Republica which continue to voice the neutral-positive views on BRI as I have just stated it in the past casts this investment outgoingly as a win-win situation through mixing its development pellets with an argument that such investments could develop jobs and earnings for them, while at same time modernizing its infrastructure meaning there would be no question of confronting India over how funds from China are utilized.

5.3 Comparative Analysis of Media Coverage in India and Nepal

The two antithetical Indian and Nepali media discourses on BRI are the result of geopolitical considerations and national interest, economic interest and strategic imperatives playing a role in framing their coverage of the project. The Indian media portrays BRI as an issue of national security, sovereignty and independence; dubbing BRI to be a much-dreaded 'strategic Sino encirclement'! But the domestic representatives are more focusing toward BRI of China in hope of economic benefit besides development and regional connectivity's, and quality infrastructure like part of enhanced border facilities. Importantly, most media attention, (Nepal) seems to be subjected by "growing no surrounding" representative's domestic talking BRI advantage for income consumption, quality product from china's market.

The issue of Soverenity: A significant contrast can be seen in media reporting, between Indian and Nepali press when it comes to reporting on matters relating sovereignty i.e. the Indian side reports extensively about regular news stories associated with Nepal regarding this matter but hardly any such report is made by Nepali media. The CPEC, and its impact on the territorial issue of Kashmir, is the crux of Indian media's doubts. The Indian media are worried about the loss of strategic assets and national territories while the Nepali counterparts are less finicky on these counts – they lay a premium on economics.

What is more, the economic discourse in Indian media is dominated by worries about debt dependency, with Indian reporters and analysts pointing out the dangers of Chinese investment. This focus is lacking for the most part in Nepali media, which focuses on long-term economic gains from Chinese investments. The geopolitical lens through which news is covered in the Indian media, of China's regional hegemony and strategic long-term objective, however clashes with the portrayal of economic engagement and regional collaboration that infuses Nepali press coverage.

Figure 11 and Table 6 are based on comparing the most-occurring themes that media articles covered about BRI in India vis-à-vis Nepal.

Table 6
Comparison of Dominant Themes in Media Coverage of the BRI in India and Nepal

Theme	Indian Media (%)	Nepali Media (%)
Sovereignty and Security	40%	10%
Economic Dependency	35%	5%
Regional Connectivity	10%	30%
Development and Infrastructure	10%	40%
Geopolitical Rivalry	5%	5%

As can be seen from the Fig. 11, Indian media care more about sovereignty and economic dependence than Nepali media do, while Nepali media pay more attention to regional connectivity, development and infrastructure construction.

5.3.1 Simplification of Media Narratives

While the article argues convincingly that media framing in India and Nepal differs substantially — predominantly negative in India, mainly positive in Nepal — this dichotomy may be overstated. The claim that the media in India is overwhelmingly infatuated with sovereignty, security and economic subordination vis-à-vis Nepal and that Nepal's media conjures up a pink picture dominated by development and regional integration falls short of the complexities of the domestic mediascape of both nations. The two media ecosystems are much more varied and multifaceted. Take, for example, Indian media houses like The Hindu and NDTV that may express concerns about the strategic implications of BRI even as they critique India's tardy response to international infrastructure projects. Similarly, though the Nepalese media are hopeful about BRI's infrastructure dividends, they also frequently cover debt trap and geo-political tension with India in outlets such as Kantipur and My Republica.

Crucial Question: Explore diversity of media within India and Nepal more extensively. The two media ecosystems are indicative of wider political/social divisions. For instance, India's media is not always united in support or skepticism on the BRI: it includes both a pro-China and a pro-US faction. Also, some in Nepal have written carefully of the positives associated with BRI noting the need to balance our ties between China and India.

5.3.2 Framing the BRI in Terms of National Sovereignty

The article lists sovereignty as a key concern for India often citing CPEC in the list (CPEC runs through the disputed region of Kashmir). However, even if we accept that this is clearly a central issue in the Indian portrayal of the BRI, it does not fully explain how India's historical and strategic fears of China's expanding regional presence shape its mediation. India's depiction of the BRI as a geopolitical intrusion by China is frequently predicated on its wider national security agenda and Sino-Indian rivalry; reflected in concerns around issues such as territorial disputes, maritime security in the Indian Ocean and India's aspirations for regional hegemony.

Crucial Question

A better-drilled exploration might ask how the The Post's "Chinese encirclement" terror strategy is also evident in public discourse at large, with comparative historical (India's 1962 border war with China) and contemporary geopolitical (China's own geopolitical posture across Asia these last few years) backing. The article could also explain how Indian media coverage of the BRI often links with a perceived Chinese "footprint" in countries such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan and even the Maldives, stressing the wider consequences of China's economic muscle.

5.3.3 Lack of Alternative Perspectives in Nepalese Media

The article claims that the Nepali media is reporting about BRI in its favour more than even economic reforms of which it sees an increment in Nepal. Yet it could have gone a little deeper in probing the intricacies of Nepal's relation with China and India, say the contradictions of its media coverage on BRI. Nepal follows the policy of equidistance with India and China, and even though media organizations such as The Kathmandu Post or My Republica have a generally positive opinion of BRI, they are also concerned with Chinese long-terms strategic ambitions on one hand, and growing economic dependency on investments from China on the other.

Crucial Question

The article could include some Nepali media pieces that share such fears about China's burgeoning influence and economic dependence increasingly voiced over the past few years. There is also a developing discussion on what could be the possible implications for Nepal's geopolitical location, especially in terms of relations with India. For example, Nepal's cautious outlook on certain Chinese investments, despite BRI being framed in very positive terms overall, may complicate this narrative of a simplified "pro-China" voice amongst the Nepali media.

5.3.4 Impact of Global Narratives on National Media Framing

The piece briefly addresses how global narratives about the BRI resonate domestically, but it does not delve into the ways in which global media narratives especially from Western countries shape both Indian and Nepali media framing. For example, the framing of BRI in western media as "debt-trap diplomacy" and neo-imperialist project may resonate with existent skeptical framings in India. Conversely, the global narrative on BRI infrastructure dividends could help feed Nepal's fairly positive perception not least because, at a time when Nepal is seeking to enhance its connectivity and develop its own infrastructure across the world.

Crucial Question

The potential influence of Western media to form national consciousness of the BRI among Indians and Nepalis is not sufficiently studied. Getting a more nuanced view of the global media discourse on China's Belt and Road Initiative, in particular looking at how the project is being framed by media from around the world, including the US, Europe and Japan could help us to understand what kind of narratives make it through onto domestic screens; particularly interesting would be an examination of how these narratives influence coverage in 'in-between' countries that are caught up in great game politics such as India or Nepal.

5.3.5 Overemphasis on Media Influence on Policy

The paper highlights the role played by media framing in influencing popular opinion and national level policy making of the both countries – India and Nepal. But the impact of media on foreign policy is commonly exaggerated in this kind of analysis. Although the media certainly have an impact on public discourse and are capable of influencing political actors, decision-making power rests with the political elite and government. So too with India's decision to stay out of the BRI; this is not just the result of media framing, but rooted in deep strategy and diplomacy.

Crucial Question

A balanced review would also consider the interplay between media narratives and other determinants, such as political leadership, economic interests and diplomatic constraints. Media framing does not, however, tell the whole story of why India and Nepal's BRI policies diverge. For example, the reason that Nepal decided to join the BRI in 2017 was motivated by economic interests and a turning political tide - not just media exposes of China's master plan.

5.4 Implications for Public Opinion and Policy Decisions

Rival media narratives on the BRI have far-reaching ramifications in terms of public opinion and policy-making in India and Nepal. In India, the criticism and doubts voiced by the media have reinforced the government's stance of staying away from BRI. It has been the media's framing of this as a sovereignty issue, and as an economic control instrument, that has moulded public opinion represented in widespread support for India's cautious approach. Depicting BRI as a geopolitical instrument of China to undercut India's regional influence has essentially led to a strategic balance where India looks to offset the Chinese footprint with alternate alliances with US, Japan and Australia.

At the same time, as domestic Nepali media here project BRI in positive light we've a situation of pots calling to dot road leading Nepal's alignment with China-led move. Packaged as a business opportunity, and also as an instrument for national development, BRI has gotten the Nepali state to play high-powered politics of sorts with its neighbors' nation-state rivals; India and China. The coverage of the media on the economic benefits from the BRI has to some extent framed Nepal's involvement in terms that it would be a crucial move for modernizing its infrastructure and being better linked with regional and global markets.

In each case, media framing is critical in informing national discussion of projects such as the BRI. In constructing the BRI in certain ways, media organizations shape not only public opinion but also policy agendas, giving governments the domestic cover to adopt specific foreign policy postures. For instance, media skepticism in India has supported a policy of BRI exclusion, while media optimism in Nepal has helped justify the country's involvement.

6 Conclusion

This article offers a comparative analysis of BRI media reporting between India and Nepal, indicating that the framing of the initiative in the two countries differs greatly. Issues of sovereignty, security threats and economic dependence have characterized the Indian visualization of BRI as China's contingency plan to shape interests through its military might. This view also reflects India being careful, because both the CPEC and regional security are touchy subjects. On the other, it is being highlighted by Nepali media about its economic opportunities through infrastructure building that BRI has opened up – linkages involving job and infrastructure. The current BRI bashing paints a far brighter view of the life and times of BRI in Nepal's declining media market as an apt representation of how Nepal is localizing its most strategic balancing act between India and China. What makes this study unique is the comparable approach to mediating effect of media frames in public opinion formation and policy making in two countries. Drawing on a sample of print and online media, and employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the article demonstrates that media play an overarching role in defining how national public discourse about foreign-born initiatives develops. The implications are that India's skepticism and Nepal's optimism towards BRI, are main factors in shaping their foreign policies as well regional cross-roads. This study adds to discussions on the media framing literature in international relations and has policy implications for state actors and journalists interested in understanding how influential mass media can be in constructing narratives about geopolitics

The study also highlights the need for more balanced media coverage of such international initiatives as well as the BRI, covering economic opportunities and geo-political risks, so that public debate is more sophisticated and constructive. Future studies could investigate how such media representations of sexual violence influence public opinion and policy making on issues concerning sex crimes at the state level in South Asia and in other settings.

Declarations

Conflicts of Interest

Authors have no conflict of interest.

Ethics Statement

This study ensures that all ethical guidelines and principles have been followed. Where identifying data may be present, the anonymity and confidentiality of participants have been safeguarded. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and any personal information has been anonymized to protect privacy. The data has been handled and stored in compliance with ethical research standards and institutional guidelines. Any potentially identifiable information is only included when absolutely necessary and with appropriate consent from the participants. The research was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the National Social Science Foundation, China. The study was approved by the National Social Science Foundation, China under approval number: 22ZDA181 on 18 November 2024. All research involving human participants adhered to the ethical standards outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, or applicable ethical guidelines.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the study. The consent procedure was carried out physically. Written informed consent was provided by participants on 18 November 2024. Participants were fully informed of the nature, purpose, and any risks of the research before providing their consent.

Author Contribution

Bandana Singh contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, and preparation of the original draft of the manuscript, as well as review and editing. Yonghong Dai contributed to the study design, literature search, and provided critical comments during drafting and final manuscript review. Sabiha Ghafoor was responsible for data collection, interpretation, and analysis, and participated in revising the manuscript for important intellectual content. Attiq Ur Rehman provided technical support in research methodology and statistical data analysis, assisted in manuscript writing, and contributed meaningful revisions. Md Belal Bin Heyat led the study, supervised data analysis, and contributed to critical revision and final editing of the manuscript. Zeyar Oo contributed to data validation, visualization, and assisted in manuscript editing. Yasmine Edderssi contributed to literature review, formatting, proofreading, and language editing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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This research was supported by the major project “Study on the Impact of the Situation in the Bay of Bengal Region on the Safety of China’s East Data and West Computing Project” (Project No. 22ZDA181), funded by the National Social Science Foundation in 2022.This study ensures that all ethical guidelines and principles have been followed. Where identifying data may be present, the anonymity and confidentiality of participants have been safeguarded. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and any personal information has been anonymized to protect privacy. The data has been handled and stored in compliance with ethical research standards and institutional guidelines. Any potentially identifiable information is only included when absolutely necessary and with appropriate consent from the participants. The research was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the National Social Science Foundation, China. The study was approved by the National Social Science Foundation, China under approval number: 22ZDA181 on 18 November 2024. All research involving human participants adhered to the ethical standards outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, or applicable ethical guidelines.

Data Availability

Yes. The datasets used and generated during this study are available in the supplementary materials of the manuscript. The raw data, cleaned versions, variable definitions, coding schemes, and statistical scripts can be accessed through the supplementary materials. All data and materials are shared to ensure transparency and reproducibility of the research findings.

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Figures

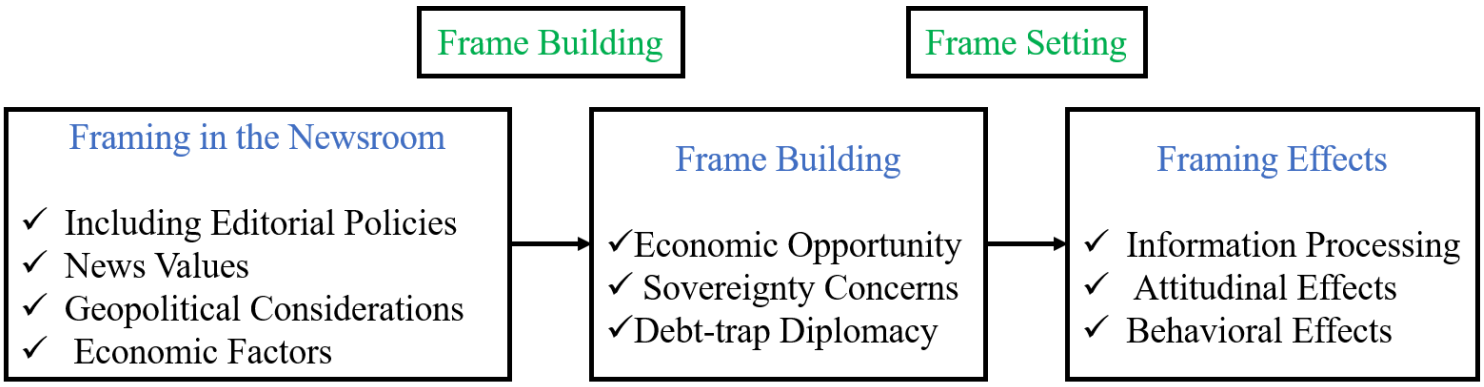


Figure 1

Framing process model and media coverage of the BRI.

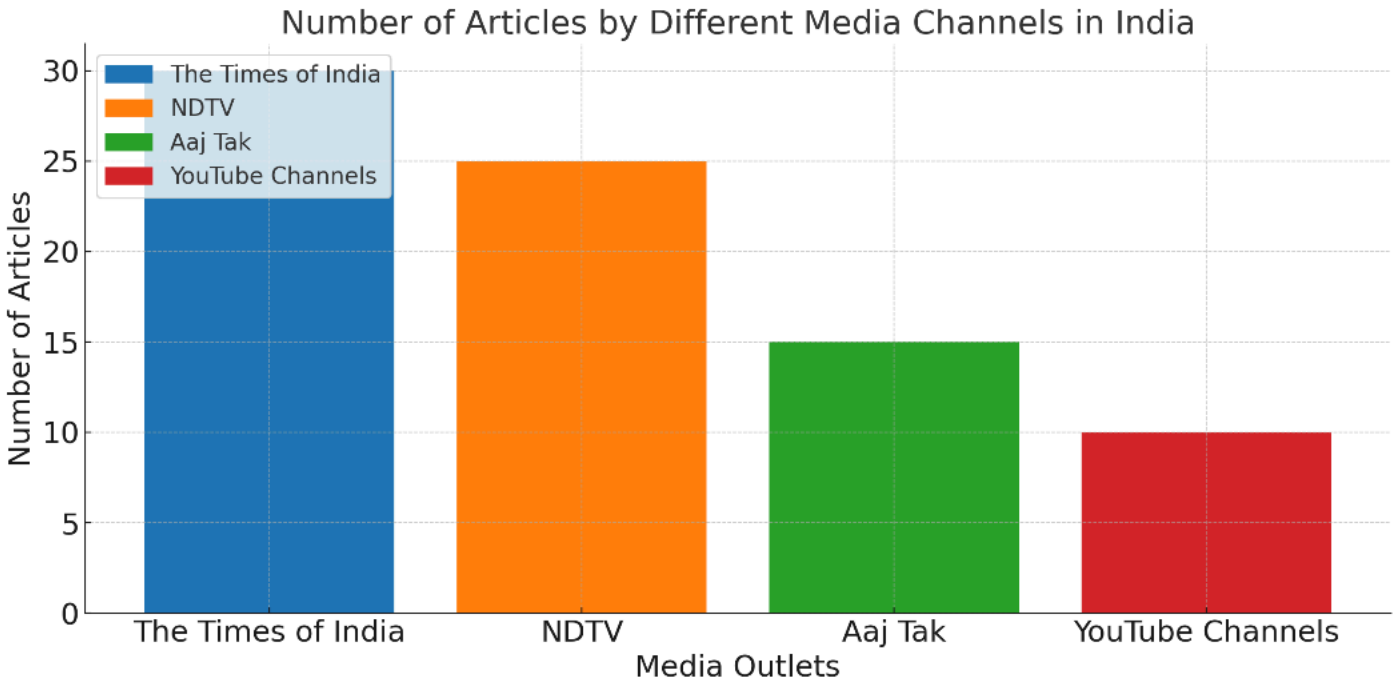


Figure 2

Number of Articles by Different Media Channels in India.

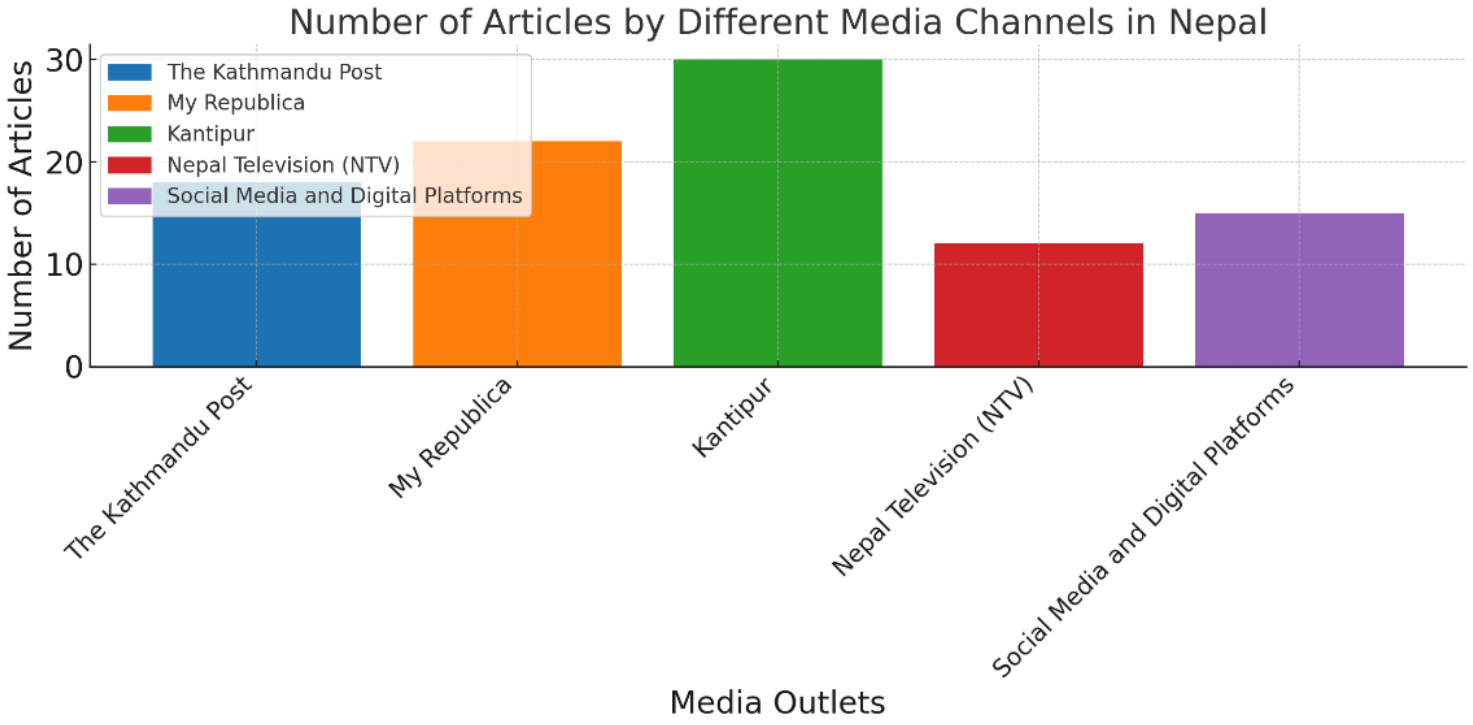


Figure 3

Number of Articles by Various Media in Nepal.

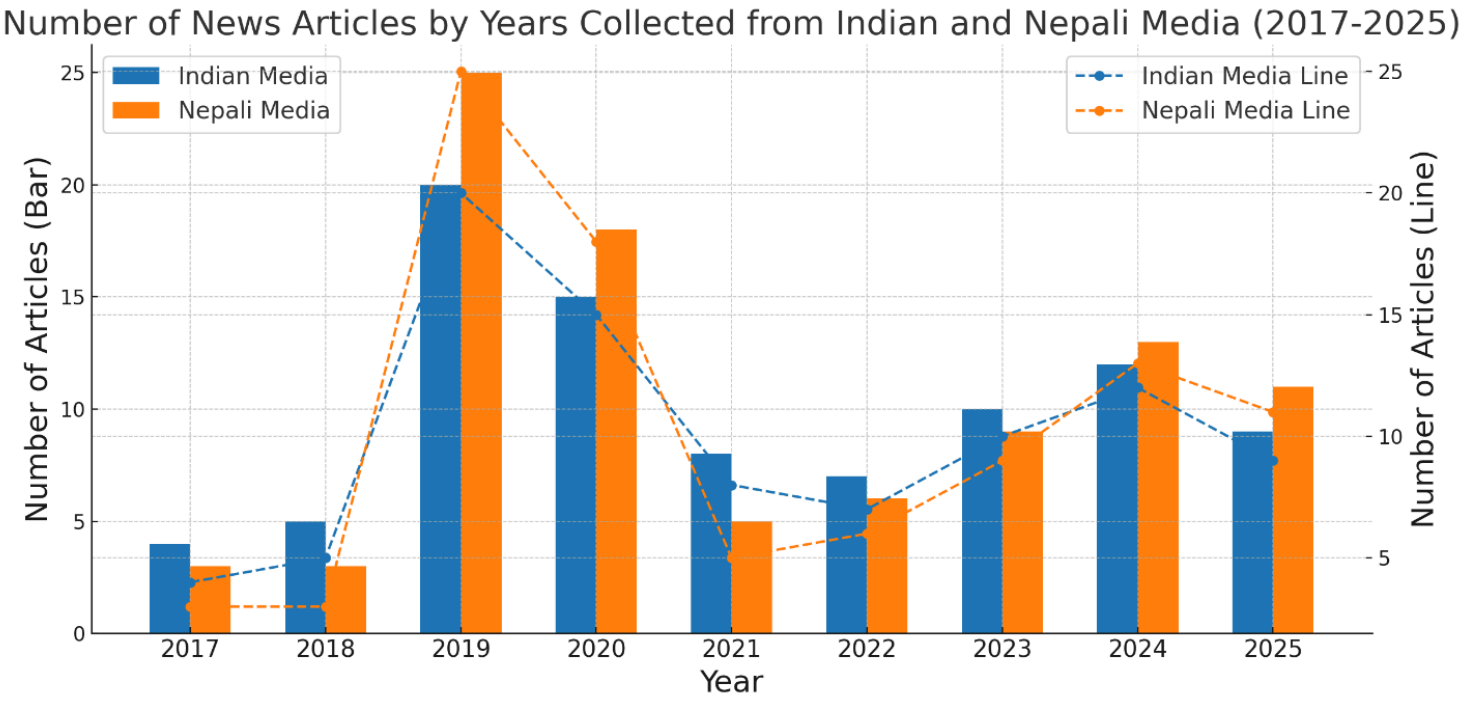


Figure 4

Count of Retrieved News Stories Each Year by Indian and Nepali Press (2017–2025).

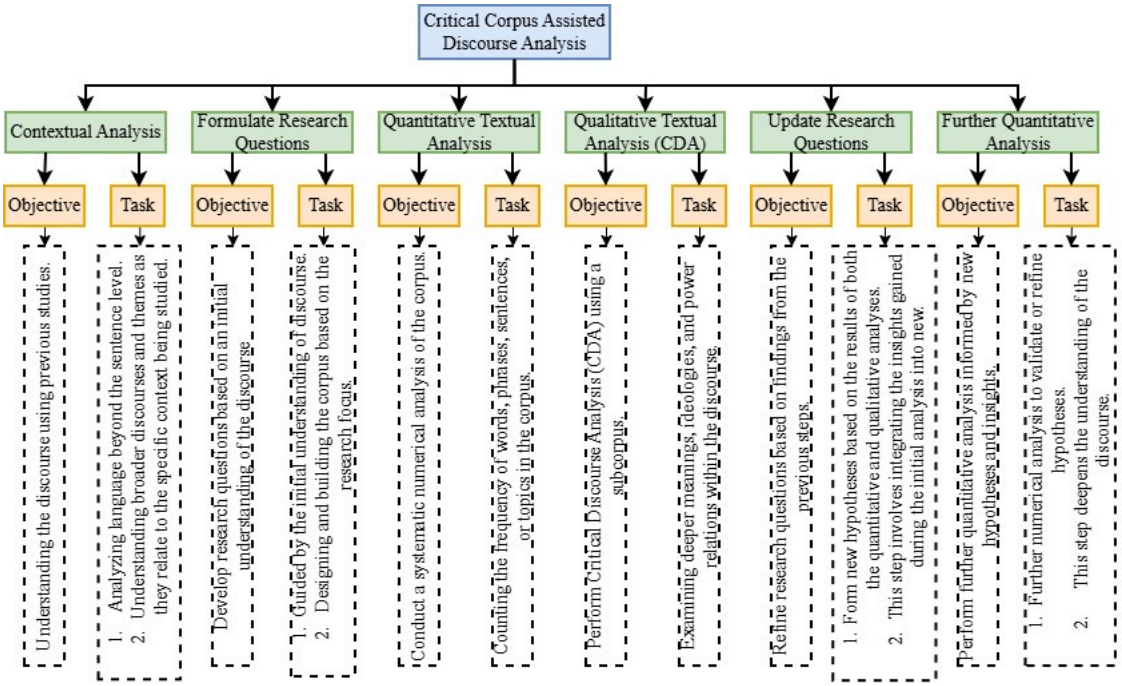


Figure 5

Critical Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADA) Methodology.

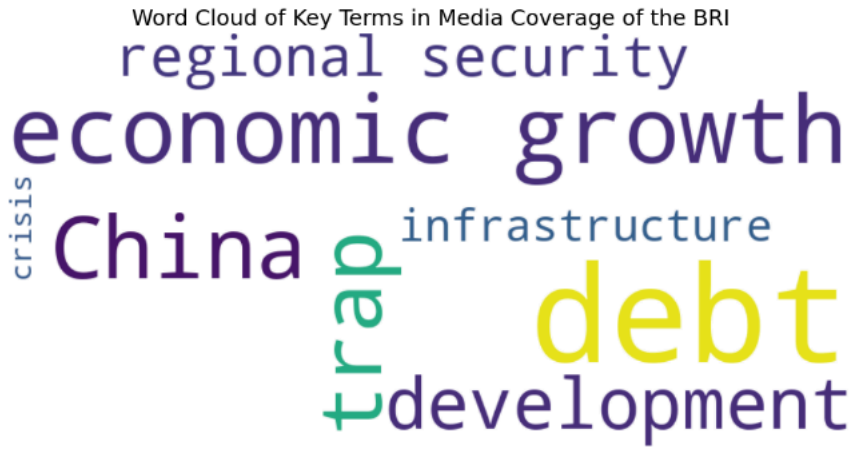


Figure 6

Word Cloud of Key Terms in Media Coverage of the BRI.

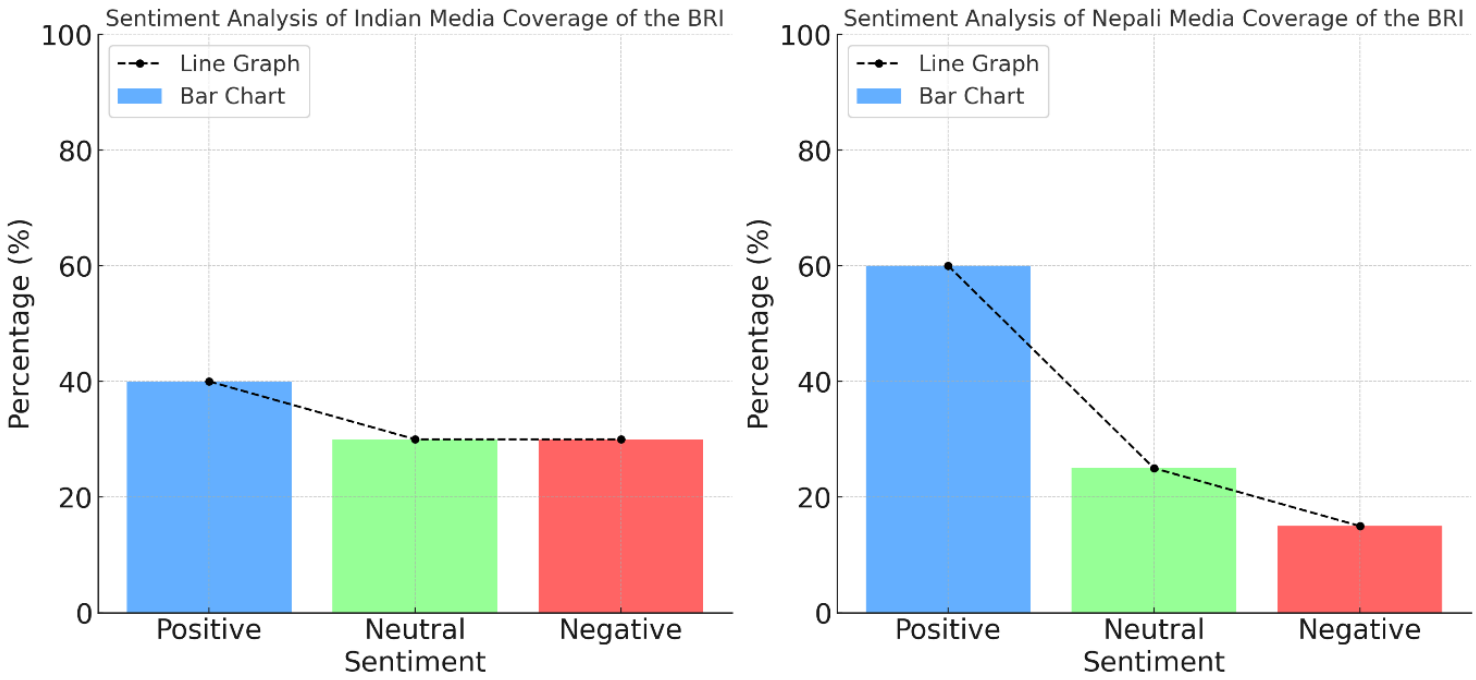


Figure 7

Word Cloud of Key Terms in Media Coverage of the BRI.

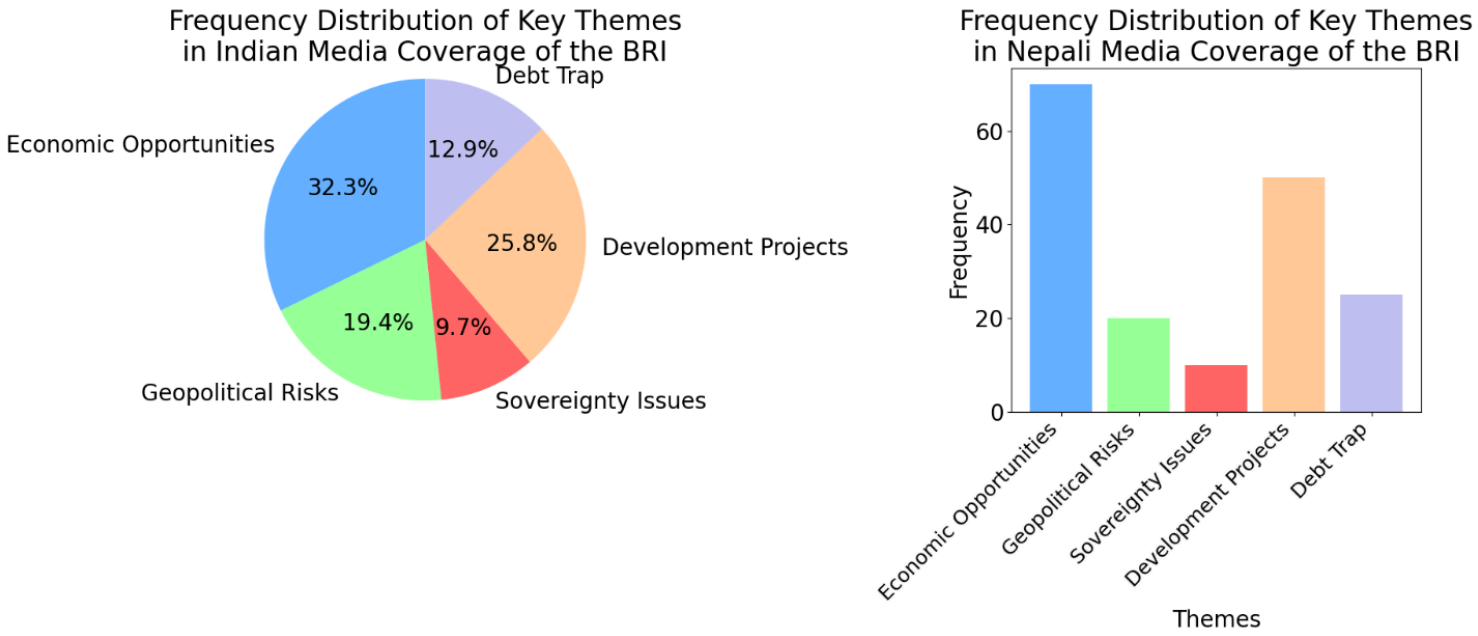


Figure 8

The left pie chart represents the frequency distribution of key themes in Indian media, the right bar chart represents the frequency distribution of key themes in Nepali media.

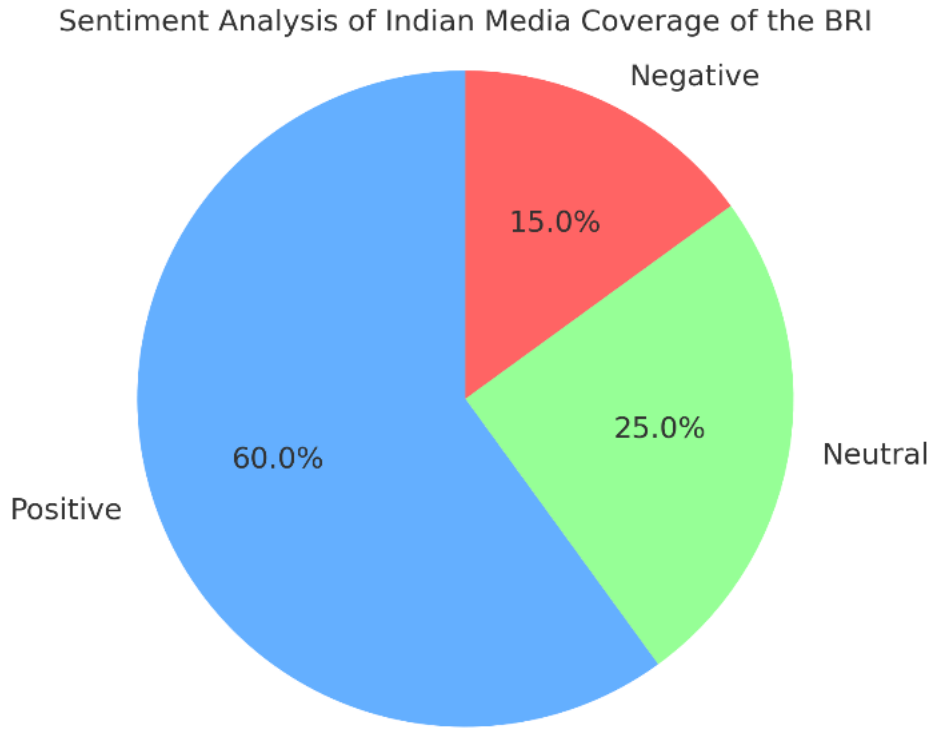


Figure 9

Sentiment Analysis of Indian Media on the BRI.

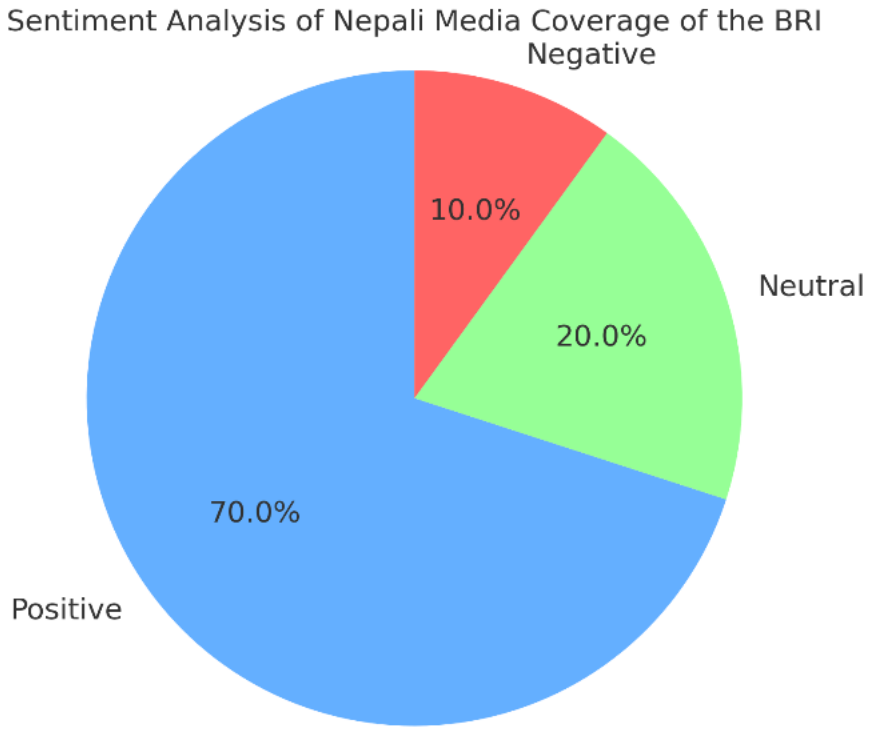


Figure 10

Sentiment Analysis of Nepali Media on the BRI.

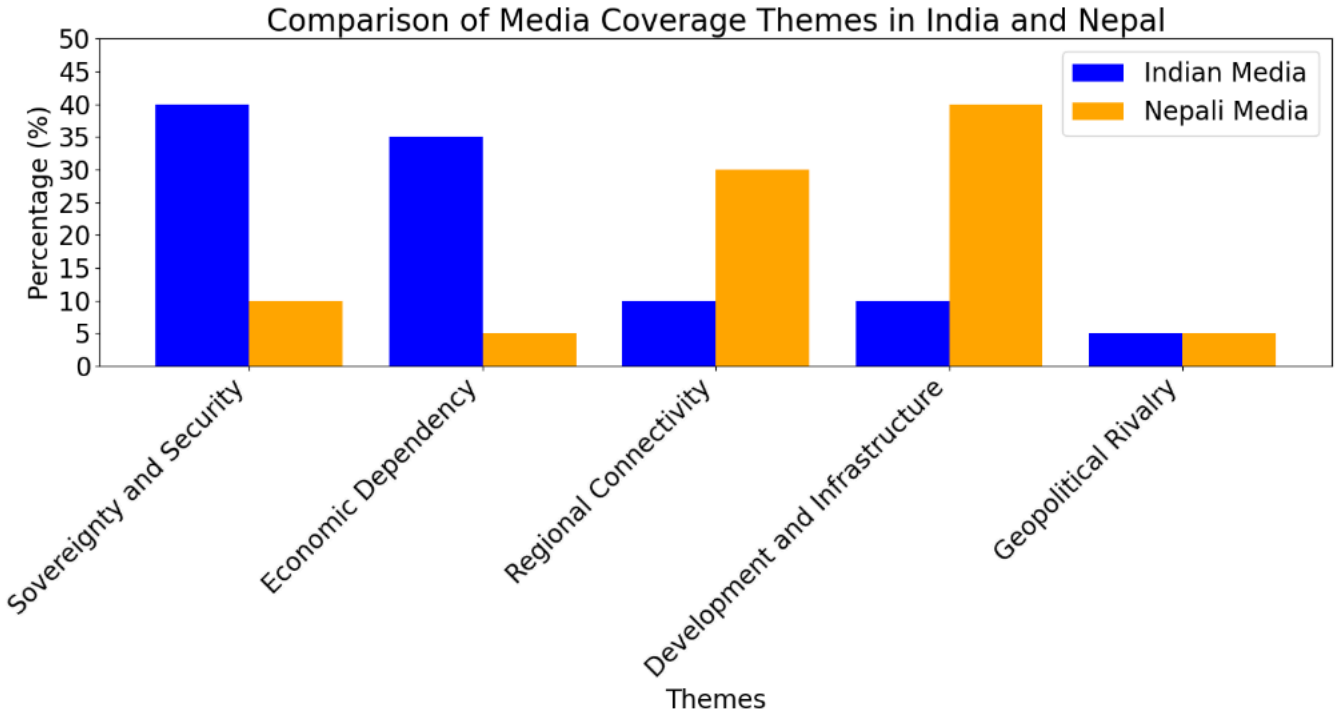


Figure 11

Comparison of Media Coverage Themes in India and Nepal

Supplementary Files

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- Formulasstatisticalcodeandscripts.docx
- VariableDefinitionsCodingSchemesandTransformations.xlsx