The Journalist's Perception of How Pakistani Media Cover the US-China Trade War

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Abstract

This research article attempts to analyse the economic war between the United States of America and China with a historical approach while drawing a comparison from the existing body of literature about the current-day trade war along similar economic conflicts in past. It also examines perception of Pakistani journalists regarding the current conflict between the US and China. The research has four major objectives; to investigate the knowledge of journalists regarding on-going China and America's war on trade, to investigate the perception of journalists towards conflicts of trade between USA and China, to examine the extent of coverage given to the China-USA trade war in Pakistan on different media platforms; and lastly to determine if the Pakistani media favours China or the US in this conflict. A questionnaire was used to collect data from working journalists associated with different media organizations in the country, including reporters, assignment editors, producers, anchors, freelance journalists etc. Data source for the study includes 100 Pakistani working journalists from local, national and international media as well as free-lance journalists. The study was theoretically informed by framing theory and political economy of communication theory. The findings indicate that according to the perception of journalists the electronic media gave more coverage than the print media to the US-China trade war. The researchers found journalists believed that the Pakistani media was pro-China. The study also revealed that the current dispute between two nations was perceived to have great political and economic consequences that may lead to a global economic crisis.

Keywords*: Framing, Journalists, Pakistani Media, Sino-Pak Relations, US-China Trade War.*

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the year 2018, when the administration of President Donald Trump levied tariffs on large size imported laundry machines and solar energy modules, the global economy has been affected by the consecutive series of disputes of trade between the USA and China. China, the world's biggest solar panel producer, showed strong dissatisfaction and warned the United States about the adverse effects of this decision on the global trade environment (BBC News, 2018). China is ranked as the second largest giant of global economy with considerable political as well as military power, and has now established itself as a technological force in the world. Since the opening-up policy of China in 1978, the nation's economic development, estimated by the gross domestic product (GDP), has soared and the GDP growth rate has averaged 9.6 per cent per annum between 1978 and 2017 (The World Bank, n.d.). Various scholars, including Mearsheimer (2014) see China's ascent as a challenge to the domination of the US and believe that conflict between these two incredible forces is unavoidable. After President Trump assumed office, US policy towards China has visibly changed, and it now aims to counter the emergence of China as a superpower and to maintain its own global hegemony. The trade war between Beijing and Washington is getting worse day by day. It will not only harm the two main players but it will also pose challenges to developing nations. Recently, the US set up a fund assistance initiative aiming strategically to counter China (Iqbal, 2018).

Strategic significance of Pakistan for America and China cannot be denied. As the geographical location of Pakistan associates it to four significant regions of Asia that are Peoples Republic of China, South Asia, Central Asian states and South West Asia. Pakistan has always remained at is in a beneficial place as it can easily affect various political, social, and ideological situations along business and trade of the neighboring regions, particularly in the benefit of the United States of America. As a hub of US led war, unstable situation of politics, economy and security has affected Pakistan from its neighbouring states. USA has also realization of this fact (Javaid & Mushtaq, 2014).

Pakistan and China have maintained a close and mutually beneficial relationship over the last few decades. Pakistan served as a link between Beijing and Washington in 1971 and also as a bridge to the Muslim world for China in the 1980s (Blood, 2002). The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the culmination of US-China rapprochement, in which Pakistan played a pivotal role in bringing the two countries closer. The US forged a relationship with China as an attempt to to gain a possible ally against the Soviet Union during the cold war. Pakistan has continued to be a channel for negotiation between the Americans and Chinese for high-level meetings (Xia, 2006).

The trade war between the two great economies will have serious repercussions for the world economy in terms of production, costs, employment, low trade volumes, low government revenues, low profits, and disturbances in component supply chains which collectively may lead to financial crises particularly

in developing countries. The trade war may bear some fruit, but by and large it is a lose-lose scenario for both countries. The economy of Pakistan is relatively less merged with the global chain of supply and it seems that it will not be directly affected by the trade tussle between China and USA, however, due to the growing economic dependency of Pakistan over China, Pakistan's economy will suffer the implications. To address its current economic challenges, Pakistan needs to develop economic partnerships with countries which have minimum trade related impediments, higher level of safety for customers and have capacity to integrate in regional and global supply chains. By improving its trade policies and using the "Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)" to further flourish bilateral cooperation for economic growth with the "GCC countries" as well as Turkey, Islamic republic of Iran along other states from Central Asia (CGSS, 2018).

This study examines the US- China trade war which started in March 2018 from a historical standpoint and compares it with other similar conflicts in the past. This study attempts to understand the knowledge and perception of Pakistani journalists regarding the conflict between America and China on the trade grounds and how Pakistani media deals with this issue. It is very important to understand how Pakistani journalists portray and perceive the present situation because on the one hand Pakistan is an ally of the US on different issues and on the other hand it has a close economic relationship with China. It is important to determine whether the media in its coverage has been biased towards either of the two countries or has remained neutral to the event as a whole. The findings of this research dissertation will help academicians, researchers, scholars and media practitioners to understand the perception of Pakistani journalists regarding the US-China war.

Literature Review

There are three significant strands of literature that examine the current trade war and other similar disputes in the past, analyzing the global impact of the US-China trade war and its implications for Pakistan.

Stewart regards the conflict between America and China on the trade grounds to the trade wars of history. He explains in his article the most prominent trade war of the 20th century that began with the "Smoot-Hawley tariff law 1930"; according to James B. Stewart, "historians and economists continue to debate the extent of the damage to the global economy, but there is little disagreement that Smoot-Hawley and the ensuing trade war exacerbated and prolonged the difficulties of the Great Depression". Certain eminent philosophers of history argued about the roots of economic and trade conflicts and censured the fascist political forces and Nazis for modern-day trade conflicts. The most important factor of the trade wars also emerged that there is no "winner" in these wars. Conybeare

pointed out, a common approach towards trade conflict most likely triumph will be for economically stronger country, former US president also believed that America would be winner due to its huge domestic market. Thought it could happen with USA's dispute with smaller nations yet it is out of question in the cases of USA's conflicts with EU or People's Republic of China.

Subsequently, both of the parties will lose with less differences in economic might (Steward, 2018).

An analyst James Griffiths compares the US-China trade war with the Japan-US trade war and argues that "Obviously 2019 is not 1985 and China is not Japan. Beijing is much stronger now than Tokyo used to be in the 1980s, both economically and politically. China is not dependent on the United States for national security and is not afraid of Washington's wrath. While Robert Lighthizer and Trump may learn positive lessons from the 1980s trade war, Beijing and China's leaders are also making sure not to repeat Japan's mistakes in the 1980's trade war" (Griffiths, 2019).

The main drivers for the China and USA trade war are the long-term changes in the relative positions of the US and China in the global economy. The shift in US policy is a result of the decline in US hegemony over the global economy (Mattoo & Staiger, 2020). The world is in a trade war with bigger economies imposing tariffs and duties that can have broad implications for world trade. The reciprocal measures taken by countries such as the United States, China, the EU and Canada can lead to further tariff upsurges (Kamani, 2018).

2.1. Global impact of Economic War between China and USA

The conflict of trade between China and America is likely to affect the global economy with a sudden increase in the prices of many products around the world because the mutual taxes of both countries are often linked to global supply chains. The United States is likely to face political and economic isolation given that the country uses tariff regulations as a bargaining tool not only against China, but also against the European Union, Russia and Turkey (BEŞER, 2018). This trade related conflict between China and America has been causing plunge in regional and global trade and leaving effects on regional trade diversion (affecting non ally countries of this trade war), along directly affecting an individual consumer due to rapid increase in prices of consumer goods. A trade war where everyone loses isn't just hurting only the key players, rather risks global economic situation and development of economies for future as well (UNCTD, 2019). The economic war between China and the United States is a complex issue that has received worldwide attention because of the immensity of the economies involved. The Bigger economies including European Union, ASEAN countries, and Japan may sustain the after-shocks of trade war between two global economic giants, however relatively smaller states with less economic might may suffer a lot. Certain research studies reflect that the key reasons behind the conflict of trade between China and USA are principally the differences of trade, upcoming polls in USA and the race for international supremacy (Chong, T., Li, 2019). Though it is universally accepted phenomenon that trade conflicts has no champion yet every trade related conflict must acknowledge three laggers: key actors of the war, plummeted trade globally, economic

and trade recession. (Carnegie, 2018). The tensions in the due to the strained trade relations between China and the USA loom the economy globally. Due to the trade cut between China and America, the plunge of 0.5 per cent is estimated in the economic growth globally for the year 2020 (Costa, 2018).

The escalation of this trade war is not limited to only two countries but it has wider effects on global trade supply chain and directly/indirectly other developing countries involved in global trade circle (Ghani, 2018).

2.2. US-China Trade War: Implications for Pakistan

An old African proverb states that, "When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers". Likewise, whenever there are clashes between large economies, it is always the developing states that suffer the consequences. Pakistan is also no exception in this matter due to this trade rift between China and America. The rates of construction material including Iron, aluminum and steel are expected to raise that would eventually affect the entire construction industry, which is one of important industries in Pakistan. The mega projects of infrastructure building and local housing industry are two important sectors which are consuming steel, iron, and aluminum. Moreover, such adverse effects may delay the infra-structure related projects and plans of hydropower industry including the most imperative development projects of CPEC. Consequently, this may threaten the future economic development in various sectors of Pakistan. Besides all this, it may badly affect the country on political fronts as current government pledged to provide five million houses for the working class of Pakistan in its tenure. Moreover, consumer prices of basic household items like laundry machines and solar panels will also increase. (Nisar, 2018). A negative trend has already been observed in international markets as stocks in global markets fell due to the resulting uncertainty. Given the setbacks in the major economies, the effects are also being felt in developing and emerging markets, specifically those countries who are dealing in exports with United states of America or China. As, the web of trade is actually incorporated horizontally as well as vertically that eventually leaves a far-reaching impact to the global trade ecosystem (Salik, 2020). This on-going tussle of trade may have relatively less effects of the economy of Pakistan as Pakistan is not a key partner in the international trade. This weakness may provide Pakistan an opportunity to raise its access to the global markets for trade while devising a better and up-dated policy of trade. It is possible through "Free Trade Agreements" with those nations that have least barriers in customs (SDPI, 2018).

Keeping in mind the variables, this study is theoretically informed by the Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) and Political Economic Theory of Communication (Mosco, 2009). The theoretical approach of political-economy is regarded as one of the main theoretical domains in the media and communication studies. The epistemological roots of political economy goes to the media and cultural studies as it examines the processes of production, dissemination, and use of media content with the core foci on two major factors: media ownership and the power relations.

This theoretical understanding and the previous literature guide us to develop the following hypotheses:

H.1. It is more likely that the Pakistani journalists have better knowledge of the US-China trade war

H1.1. It is more likely that the more experienced a media professional is, the more knowledge he/she possesses of the US-China trade war

H2. It is more likely that electronic media provided more information than print media about the US-China trade war

H3. It is more likely that journalists consider Pakistani media as pro-China

H4. It is more likely that the US-China trade war will lead to global economic crises.

Method

This study employed a quantitative method of survey research, the researchers selected a sample of respondents from a population and administered a standardized questionnaire. In order to have maximum representation and reliability, the investigators have adopted a stratified proportional random sampling method. A stratified proportional random sample of 100 professional journalists of different media organizations in Pakistan was used to select the subjects. This includes reporters, assignment editors, producers, anchors and freelance journalists etc. A standardized questionnaire was served through Google docs for data collection from respondents consisting of thirteen (13) close-ended questions of multiple choices.

With an aim to maximize reliability of the study, a pilot study was conducted to ensure that the questionnaire fulfilled the purpose of study and respondents could understand the questions. Pilot study respondents consisted of 10 journalists from different media organizations. Eventually, the tool of data collection was modified accordingly while keeping in view the responses of the participants and in line of the principal objectives of the study.

Moreover, SPSS was used to analyse the collected data, whereas the charts, tables and graphs were developed in Microsoft Office. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient test was also applied to investigate the relation between the two variables.

Findings

Table 1: *Personal Information (continued)*

Categories	Values	Responses	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Designation				
	Reporter	36	36	36
	Producer	13	13	49
	Anchor	10	10	59
	Assignment Editor	14	14	73
	Associate Producer	7	7	80

Free Lancer	1	1	81
Any other	19	19	100

Media				
	Local	7	7	7
	National Media	76	76	83
	International Media	13	13	96
	Free Lancer	4	4	100
Type of Media				
	Newspaper	27	27	27
	Television	51	51	78
	Radio	6	6	84
	Online Media	16	16	100
Experience				
	More than 6 years	26	26	26
	More than 4 years and less than 6 years More	11	11	37
	than 2 years and less than 4 years More	16	16	53
	than 1 year and less than 2 years	47	47	100

N= 100

Table one reveals that overall 36% respondents are reporters followed by 14% assignment editors, 13% producers, 10% anchors, 7% associate producers and 1% free lancers. Table one also reveals that overall 76% respondents are from national media organizations followed by 13% international media, 7% respondents working in local media and 4% are freelancers. Table one shows that 51% of respondents are from television followed by 27% from newspapers, 6% from radio and 16% from online media organizations. Table one also indicates that 47% respondents have the experience of more than one year and less than two years followed by 26% respondents have more than 6 years of experience of working as journalists in different media organizations while 16% respondents have the experience of more than two years and less than four years and 11% respondents have more than 4 years of experience and less than 6 years working experience in media organizations.

Table 2: *Coverage of International Issues by Journalists*

Values	Responses	%age	Cumulative %age
Not at all	22	22.0	22.0
To some extent	54	54.0	76.0
Much	20	20.0	96.0
Very Much	4	4.0	100.0

N=100

Table two indicates that the majority of the respondents i.e. 54% cover international issues to some extent followed by 22% who do not cover international

issues at all and 20% cover international issues often while only 4% respondents cover international issues very often.

Table 3: *Information regarding US-China trade war*

Values	Responses	%age	Cumulative %age
Not at all	3	3.0	3.0
To some extent	54	54.0	57.0
Much	38	38.0	95.0
Very Much	5	5.0	100.0

N=100

Table three indicates that most of the respondents i.e. 54% know about the US-China trade war to some extent followed by 38% respondents who have much information regarding the US-China trade war, only 5% respondents have very much information about the issue under study while 3% don't know about the issue at all.

Table 4: *Which Media Provide Information about US-China Trade War?*

Categories	Values	Responses	%age	Cumulative %age
Newspaper				
	Not at all	12	12	12
	To some extent	55	55	67
	Frequently	30	30	97
	Very frequently	3	3	100
Television				
	Not at all	17	17	17
	To some extent	60	60	77
	Frequently	20	20	97
	Very frequently	3	3	100
Radio				
	Not at all	43	43	43
	To some extent	50	50	93
	Frequently	6	6	99
	Very frequently	1	1	100
Online Media				
	Not at all	13	13	13.0
	To some extent	44	44	57.0
	Frequently	37	37	94.0
	Very frequently	6	6	100.0

N=100

Table four reveals that 55% respondents agree newspapers give coverage regarding US-China trade war to some extent followed by 30% who agree newspapers give coverage regarding US-China trade war frequently, 12% think that

newspapers do not give any coverage to the US-China trade war at all while 3% perceive that newspapers cover the issue very frequently. Table four also indicates that overall 60% respondents agree that television covers the US-China trade war to some extent followed by 20% who consider that television provides coverage regarding the US-China trade war frequently, 17% respondents think that television does not provide any coverage regarding the US-China trade war. Table four further reveals that overall 50% respondents think that radio gives coverage to the US-China trade war to some extent while 43% consider that radio does not cover the US-China trade war at all. Table four also indicates that overall 44% respondents believe online media does give information about the US-China trade war to some extent followed by 37% who consider that online media gives coverage to the US-China trade war frequently.

Table 5: *Trade War is a result of political change in US*

Values	Responses	%age	Cumulative %age
Strongly Disagree	2	2.0	2.0
Disagree	12	12.0	14.0
Neutral	28	28.0	42.0
Agree	46	46.0	88.0
Strongly Agree	12	12.0	100.0

N=100

Table five indicates that overall 46% respondents agreed that the US-China trade war is a result of political changes in the US followed by 28% respondents who chose to remain neutral and only 12% respondents disagreed with the statement.

Table 6: *Pakistani Media is Pro-China or Pro-US*

Category	Values	Responses	%age	Cumulative %age
Pro-China				
	Strongly Disagree			
	Disagree	16	16	16
	Neutral	22	22	38
	Agree	51	51	89
	Strongly Agree	11	11	100
Pro-US				
	Strongly Disagree	3	3	3
	Disagree	54	54	57
	Neutral	31	31	88
	Agree	11	11	99
	Strongly Agree	1	1	100

N=100

Table six reveals that the majority of the respondents 51% agree that Pakistani media is pro-China followed by 22% respondents that remained neutral, 16% respondents disagreed with this, while 11% respondents strongly agree that Pakistani media is pro-China. Table six also indicates that overall 54% respondents disagree that the Pakistani media is pro-US followed by 31% respondents who remain neutral and 11% respondents agree that the Pakistani media is pro-US.

Table 7: *US-China trade war has negative impacts on the economies of developing countries*

Values	Responses	%age	Cumulative %age
Strongly Disagree			
Disagree	10	10.0	10.0
Neutral	11	11.0	21.0
Agree	59	59.0	80.0
Strongly Agree	20	20.0	100.0

N=100

Table seven indicates that overall 59% respondents agree that the US-China trade war has a negative impact on the economies of developing countries followed by 20% who strongly agree with the statement, 11% remain neutral and only 10% respondents disagree with the statement.

Table 8: *US-China trade war has negative effects on Pakistani economy*

Values	Responses	%age	Cumulative %age
Strongly Disagree	2	2.0	2.0
Disagree	14	14.0	16.0
Neutral	22	22.0	38.0
Agree	53	53.0	91.0
Strongly Agree	9	9.0	100.0

N=100

Table eight reveals that overall 53% respondents agreed that the US-China trade war has negative effects on Pakistani economy followed by 22% respondents that remained neutral, 14% respondents disagree with the statement, while 9% respondent strongly agree that US-China trade war has negative effects on Pakistani economy.

Table 9: *US-China trade war has serious consequences on Global trade*

Values	Responses	%age	Cumulative %age
Strongly Disagree	1	1.0	1.0
Disagree	7	7.0	8.0
Neutral	11	11.0	19.0
Agree	53	53.0	72.0
Strongly Agree	28	28.0	100.0

N=100

Table nine indicates that the overall majority of the respondents i.e. 53% agree that the US-China trade war has serious consequences on global trade followed by 28% respondents who strongly agree with the statement while 11% respondents remained neutral and only 7% respondents disagree with the statement.

Table 10: *Current trade war between US-China lead to global economic crises*

Values	Responses	%age	Cumulative %age
Disagree	12	12.0	12.0
Neutral	14	14.0	26.0
Agree	53	53.0	79.0
Strongly Agree	21	21.0	100.0

N=100

Table ten reveals that overall 53% respondents agree that the current trade war between US-China lead to global economic crises followed by 21% respondents strongly agree with the statement while 14% respondents remain neutral and 12% respondents disagree that current trade war between US-China lead to global economic crises.

Table 11: *Correlations*

It is more likely that higher the experience of media higher the knowledge of US-China trade war

			For how long you have been covering stories related to trade war?	How much information do you have about US-China trade war?
Spearman's rho	For how long you have been covering stories related to trade war?	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.208
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.038
		N	100	100
	How much information do you have about US-China trade war?	Correlation Coefficient	-.208	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	.
		N	100	100

Sig=0.5

Spearman's rho correlation coefficient test was applied to investigate the relation between the two variables i.e. experience and information about the US-

China trade war. The significant level was set at 0.5. The test of the data reveals that both the variables have a relationship.

Table 12: *Correlations*

It is more likely that journalists consider Pakistani media as pro-China

			Do you agree that the representation of the US-China trade war in Pakistani media is pro-China?	Do you agree that the representation of the US-China trade war in Pakistani media is pro-US?
Spearman's rho	Do you agree that the representation of the US-China trade war in Pakistani media is pro-China?	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.213*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.033
		N	100	100
	Do you agree that the representation of the US-China trade war in Pakistani media is pro-US?	Correlation Coefficient	-.213*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.033	.
		N	100	100

Sig=0.5

Table 13: *Correlations*

It is more likely that US-China trade war lead to global economic crises

			Do you agree that US-China trade war has negative impacts on the economies of developing countries?	Do you agree that current trade war between US-China lead to global economic crises?
Spearman's rho	Do you agree that US-China trade war has negative impacts on the economies of developing countries?	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.363**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	100	100
	Do you agree that current trade war between US-China lead to global economic crises?	Correlation Coefficient	.363**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	100	100

Sig=0.01

Discussion and Conclusion

This on-going trade tussle between the two economic giants has indeed become a major concern for working journalists because the US on the one hand is a super power that controls the world through different means while China on the other hand is an emerging world super power. The conflict of trade between the two economic giants has grabbed the attention of the media around the globe.

Data tabulation and subsequent analysis reveals that the majority of the journalists are working with national and international media organizations and most of them are associated with the electronic media sector. The journalists working in different media organizations of Pakistan have some knowledge i.e. 54% know regarding economic and trade related conflicts between the two countries. The exclusive analysis of the data does not support our first hypothesis "It is more likely that journalists of Pakistan have better knowledge about the US-China trade war".

The US-China trade war has received attention from journalists around the globe and has led to close investigation of the issues. . It is worth noting that journalists who have greater experience have greater knowledge about the US-China trade war. The exclusive analysis of data supports our sub hypothesis i.e. "It is more likely that the more experienced a media professional is, the more knowledge he/she possesses of the US-China trade war".

Mass media as the fourth pillar of any state always plays a very important role not only in educating the masses but also informing the masses about the burning issues of the world. The exclusive analysis of the data reveals that electronic media in Pakistan is playing a very important role in covering the US-China trade war and supports our second hypothesis i.e. "It is more likely that electronic media provide more information than print media about US-China trade war"

Different countries around the globe support each other for their interests and needs. The bonds between the countries are necessary for growth and development. Similarly, China and Pakistan have long-term friendly relationships and many common interests. The data tabulation and the exclusive analysis of data reveal that journalists of Pakistan think Pakistani media is pro-China and supports our third hypothesis "It is more likely that journalists considered Pakistani media as pro-China".

The economic crises around the globe or between developed countries cause inflation and shortage of products, especially essential commodities. Due to trade tensions between China and the US, developing countries will suffer economic shocks. It is predicted by the United Nations in their Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs) those countries with the less developed and developing economies would be able to strengthen their economies by improving their export share in the international economy by the end of second decade of 21st century. Nevertheless, the current conflicts of trade may contribute in the limit the economic growth developing countries, subsequently widening the gaps between developed economies and developing economies.

Early implications of the trade rift between China and the USA would not remain just in these two economies rather it could be traced almost all the countries globally. Moreover, long lasting effects will prevail if the ice could not be melted on both sides. Subsequently, it may slow down the economic growth all over the world by stirring economic chaos in investments and financial sectors. The exclusive analysis of data reveals that the journalists of Pakistan consider that issues between the US and China will no doubt lead to global economic crises and the data support our fourth hypothesis i.e. "It is more likely that the US-China trade war will lead to a global economic crises".

Keeping the above discussion in mind it is concluded that this trade conflict between USA and China will undoubtedly have effects on the economic status of the world. It will not only affect the global economy but also affect the developing countries very badly. Both the countries should take initiatives to overcome the issue as soon as possible. If such crises continue for more time the economy of the world will suffer. Though it is projected that the economies of the United States of America and China are huge to sustain the strains of this war of trade, yet the exacerbated situation in future may leave both of countries' economies in turmoil due to the GDP decrease. China must plan a better substitute for up-coming potential repercussions if this trade conflict escalates and its relations with the USA get further strained . In this regard, policy makers in China will need to improve their economic strategy to mend any potential deficit with the help of more inclusive and broaden economic policies in long term to flourish economic development.

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