

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

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the current trade war between China and the US from a historical standpoint by comparing the literature available on the on-going trade war with similar trade conflicts in history. It also examines the 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 the US-China trade war, to investigate the perception of journalists about the US-China trade war, to examine the extent of coverage given to the US-China 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 January 2018, when the Trump administration imposed tariffs on large imported washing machines, as well as solar panels and modules, the global economy has been affected by a series of trade disputes between China and the US. 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 the world's second largest economy with considerable political and 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).

Pakistan is an important country for both China and the United States. The geographical location of Pakistan links it to four different regions i.e. South Asia, South West Asia, Central Asia and China. Pakistan is in an advantageous position to influence the security, trade & commerce, ideology and social state of all the four regions that surround it, for the advantage of the US. As the epicentre of the United States proxy war, political and economic instability and insecurity has trickled to it from its surrounding areas. This reality is also clear to the US (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 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. Pakistan's economy is the least integrated in the global supply chain and may not suffer as much from the US and China trade war in the short term, but by and large there are ramifications for Pakistan as the nation has increased its economic dependence on China. To address its current economic challenges, Pakistan needs to develop economic partnerships with countries that have low trade barriers, high consumer safety and have potential for supply chain integration. By improving its trade policies and using the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) to further promote bilateral and economic cooperation with the GCC countries as well as Iran, Turkey and the Central Asian Republics (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 trade war between China and the US and how the 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 relates the trade war between the United States and China 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 of 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. Many historians argue that it also contributed to the rise of the Nazis and other fascist parties. There is almost universal agreement that no one "won" that trade war. Professor Conybeare argues that an enduring lesson learnt from that trade conflict is that when there exists a great difference in economic power between two countries, the stronger one is likely to succeed. "Trump must be thinking that the large size of the United States domestic market gives it a lot of bargaining power in any commercial dispute", he said. While that may be true with much smaller and

weaker countries, it is not the case with equal or larger trading partners such as the European Union and China. "Without that great disparity in economic strength, both parties lose" (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 of the US-China 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 US-China Trade War

The trade war between the United States and China 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). The ongoing trade war between the United States and China has been a cause of sharp decline in bilateral trade, higher prices for consumers, and trade diversion effects (increased imports from countries not directly involved in the trade war). A trade war where everyone loses isn't just hurting the main competitors, but also jeopardizes the stability of the world economy and future growth (UNCTAD, 2019). The trade 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 are likely to absorb the negative spill over from the Sino-US trade war. On the other hand, smaller economies like Taiwan and Korea could be less resilient to these negative shocks. Chong and Li conclude that the main causes of the trade conflict between the US and China are primarily trade disparity, midterm elections in the US, and competition for global dominance (Chong, T., Li, 2019). The trade war has no winner, but every trade war recognizes three losers: both trading partners and the global decline in trade, leading to a slowdown in global economic growth (Carnegie, 2018). The tensions in the US-China trade relations threaten the entire world economy. Due to

the trade cut between the US and China, a decline in global growth of 0.5% is expected for 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". Similarly, whenever there are clashes between large economies, it is always the developing states that suffer the consequences. As for Pakistan, the prices of steel and aluminium are likely to be increased which will subsequently raise the cost of construction. In Pakistan, construction, infrastructure projects and the housing sector are the key drivers for consumption of steel. Any adverse developments on the CPEC front, delay in infrastructure projects (particularly hydropower projects) and significant increase in input prices may pose risks to future profitability growth of the sector. This does not bid well for the present government, which plans to provide 5 million housing units for the poor in the next five years. The prices of solar panels, washing machines and other appliances are also likely to go up (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, particularly those whose main export markets are the US and China. This is mainly due to the fact that in the current globalized world, trade networks are integrated both vertically and horizontally and therefore adverse conditions have an impact on a broad front (Salik, 2020). The current trade war is likely to have limited impacts on Pakistan since the country is not a major player in the global economy. This offers Pakistan the possibility of increasing its reach through improved integration into the global trade market, through a revised and improved economic policy. This can be achieved through Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with countries with low or no custom systems, which can give special preferences to popular Pakistani products (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). Political economy is one of the major perspectives in media studies while there are several significant fields and subjects, political economy in the realm of media and culture looks especially at the production, distribution, and consumption of media resources, with a primary focus on ownership and 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.

A pre-test was conducted prior to the actual data collection to make sure that the questions fit the purpose of the study and it is easy to follow by the respondents. The pilot study respondents consisted of 10 journalists from different media organizations. The questionnaire was shaped in accordance with the user's reactions and also with the objectives set for 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
<b>Designation</b>				
	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
<b>Media</b>				
	Local	7	7	7
	National Media	76	76	83
	International Media	13	13	96
	Free Lancer	4	4	100
<b>Type of Media</b>				
	Newspaper	27	27	27
	Television	51	51	78
	Radio	6	6	84
	Online Media	16	16	100
<b>Experience</b>				
	More than 6 years	26	26	26
	More than 4 years and less than 6 years	11	11	37
	More than 2 years and less than 4 years	16	16	53
	More 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
<b>Newspaper</b>				
	Not at all	12	12	12
	To some extent	55	55	67
	Frequently	30	30	97
	Very frequently	3	3	100
<b>Television</b>				
	Not at all	17	17	17
	To some extent	60	60	77
	Frequently	20	20	97
	Very frequently	3	3	100
<b>Radio</b>				
	Not at all	43	43	43
	To some extent	50	50	93
	Frequently	6	6	99
	Very frequently	1	1	100
<b>Online Media</b>				
	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
<b>Pro-China</b>				
Strongly Disagree				
Disagree	16	16	16	16
Neutral	22	22	38	38
Agree	51	51	89	89
Strongly Agree	11	11	100	100
<b>Pro-US</b>				
Strongly Disagree	3	3	3	3
Disagree	54	54	57	57
Neutral	31	31	88	88
Agree	11	11	99	99
Strongly Agree	1	1	100	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 Sig. (2-tailed) N	1.000 . . 100	-.213* .033 100
	Do you agree that the representation of the US-China trade war in Pakistani media is pro-US?	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.213* .033 100	1.000 . . 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 Sig. (2-tailed) N	1.000 . . 100	.363** .000 100
	Do you agree that current trade war between US-China lead to global economic crises?	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	.363** .000 100	1.000 . . 100

Sig=0.01

## Discussion and Conclusion

The current economic trade war between the United States and China has 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 trade war between the two countries 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 about the trade war between the US and China. 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".

The Media as the fourth pillar of the 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) that the developing economies will increase their share of exports in the global market by the year 2020. However, the prevailing events can seriously undermine the growth of developing economies and limit their potential gains from

world trade, leading to greater inequality both within and outside of developing countries. The initial ramifications of the US-China trade conflict will be felt around the world, rather than in the two countries involved. Long-term risks can also persist if the situation does not improve, eventually slowing global growth by creating turmoil in financial markets by reducing investment and consumption. 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 the US-China trade war will no doubt 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. Both China and the US are large enough to absorb the initial shocks of the trade war, but if the situation does not improve, the GDP of both countries will decline in the future. Beijing needs an alternative to deal with any possible aftermath. If relations with Washington deteriorate further and the trade war escalates, China's policy makers will have to step up their game, making up for any deficits in demand, with flexible monetary policy for as long as possible to stimulate growth.

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