

CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR AND TECHNICIANS OF OPINION IN PAKISTANI TWITTERSPHERE: A THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS *

Çin-Pakistan Ekonomi Koridoru ve Pakistan Twitter Uzamında Kanaat Teknisyenleri: Tematik İçerik Analizi

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Abstract

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the most crucial trade route in contemporary South Asia which connects Pakistan's Gwadar port located in Balochistan province and China's Kashgar, shortening the Middle Eastern oil route for China. It happens to be a core project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which embodies Chinese alternative globalization and encompasses commercial and cultural routes and infrastructure in the participating countries. Although the BRI mainly involves the state institutions of the participating nations, the historic nature of cultural, political and economic relationships of these countries with China affect the political engagement and shape the public discussion about the BRI and its regional projects including the CPEC. Just like each participating country, Pakistan also attaches discrete significance to BRI and puts extraordinary emphasis to secure its respective regional and economic interests, while China has also boosted its public and cultural diplomacy to make ground for its successful execution. This study has undertaken a thematic analysis of the contents produced by 'opinion technicians' on Twitter from Pakistan during and immediately after China's Second Belt Road Forum (2019) as Pierre Bourdieu asserts that officials, opinion leaders, and leading institutions qualify to become the opinion technicians and shape dominant public opinion by the application of framing and priming in the light of local politics and agendas. The study found that the technicians of opinion are effectively adopting the multi-thematic discourse, and portray the CPEC as landmark project which has already started economic and industrial transformation in Pakistan and also holds potential benefits such as poverty alleviation, foreign investments and extended access to Chinese markets to exemplify the win-win cooperation in near future.

Keywords: BRI, CPEC, Belt and Road Forum, Alternative Globalization, Win-Win Cooperation, Pakistan, Twitter

Öz

Çin-Pakistan Ekonomik Koridoru (ÇPEK), Pakistan'ın Belucistan eyaletindeki Gwadar limanı ve Çin'in Kaşgar bölgesini birbirine bağlayarak, Çin'in Ortadoğu'daki petrol ticareti güzergahını kısaltan, günümüzdeki Güney Asya'da yer alan bir ticaret yoludur. ÇPEK, Çin'in Kuşak ve Yol Girişimi'nin (KYG) temel projesi olarak Çin'in alternatif küreselleşme vizyonunun yanı sıra katılımcı ülkelerin ticari ve kültürel ilişkileri ile altyapı yatırımlarını kapsamaktadır. Her ne kadar KYG en temelinde katılımcı ülkelerin devlet kurumlarını içeren bir proje olsa da bu ülkelerin Çin'le olan kültürel, siyasi ve ekonomik ilişkilerinin tarihsel niteliği, bu ülkelerin KYG'ye siyasi angajmanlarını etkilemekte, ÇPEK gibi bölgesel projelere yönelik kamusal tartışmaları şekillendirmektedir. Bir taraftan Çin, bu projenin başarılı bir şekilde uygulanması için kamu ve kültürel diplomasi faaliyetlerini yoğunlaştırırken, tıpkı her katılımcı ülke gibi Pakistan da bölgesel ve ekonomik çıkarlarını güvence

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altına almak adına KYG'ye özel bir önem atfetmektedir. Bu çalışma, Çin'de 2019'da gerçekleşen İkinci Kuşak ve Yol Forumu'nun hemen öncesinde ve sonrasında Pakistan'da Twitter'da içerik üreten 'kanaat teknisyenlerinin' içeriklerine tematik analiz uygulamıştır. Pierre Bourdieu; resmi yetkililerin, kanaat önderlerinin ve çeşitli kamusal kurum yetkililerinin, kamuoyundaki hakim söylemi yerel siyasi gündem ışığında çerçeveleme ve öne çıkarma gibi yöntemleri uygulamalarıyla kanaat teknisyeni niteliği kazandıklarını öne sürmektedir. Bu çalışmanın temel bulgusu, kanaat teknisyenlerinin çoklu temaya sahip bir söylem üreterek ÇPEK'i, Pakistan'daki ekonomik ve endüstriyel dönüşümü başlatan bir dönüm noktası olarak tasvir ederek; yoksullukla mücadele, dış yatırımlar ve yakın gelecekte kazan-kazan iş birliğinin bir örneği olacak Çin pazarlarına erişim gibi potansiyel çıkarlar çerçevesinde kabul ettiğidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Alternatif Küreselleşme ÇPEK, Kuşak ve Yol Forumu, Kuşak ve Yol Girişimi, Kazan-kazan iş birliği, Pakistan, Twitter

1. Introduction

Belt and Road Initiative (hereafter BRI) is a landmark and symbolic project that China gives the highest significance in the global politics. BRI has two main constituents, the first is named as “Silk Road Economic Belt” (丝绸之路经济带 – Sīchóu zhī lù jīngjì dài) and the second is “the Maritime

Silk Road for the 21st century” (二十一世纪海上丝绸之路- Èrshíyī shìjì hǎishàng sīchóu zhī lù). It is asserted that BRI is alternative globalization project that each participant would be able to contribute the project as independent country. In this respect, Chinese official discourse launched BRI as respective to independence to each participant country. According to the Chinese official discourse, BRI is also an alternative globalization project with Chinese characteristics, as a discursive reference that signifies socialism with Chinese characteristics which was the major turn in Chinese contemporary politics occurred in the early 1980s. This is also “incrementally [...] a long-term outlook, and it is a concept that demonstrates the convergence between different foreign policy initiatives and China's domestic development” and literally signifies Chinese proposal in global politics (Vangeli, 2019, p. 61).

As the current Chinese leader Xi Jinping has come into power in 2013, China initiated a kind of proactive foreign policy firstly towards the neighboring countries, which generated a spillover in foreign policy to the Asian countries, which later called ‘Asian dream’ (Miller, 2017). According to Xing Li (2015), Xi produced a number of discursive vocabularies such as common community, community of responsibilities that incorporates China dream into Asia dream. Accordingly, BRI is a kind of combination that puts together both China's internal political and economic achievements marked in the 13th 5-Year National Plan and proactive foreign policy which is an extension of Chinese capital accumulation in overseas (Li, 2019). This strategic combination has been considered as “*logical nexus between the accumulation and consolidation of China's internal achievement (hegemony) and its inevitable outward expansion*” (Li, 2019b, p. 31-32).

On the other hand, China's concerns on security of trading routes are of the main motivations of BRI. According to Li (2019), BRI has also two securitization hubs inherent in the Maritime Silk Road. The first is Gwadar Port, the endpoint of CPEC, located in the Indian Ocean shore in Belucistan province of Pakistan, the second is Djibouti located in the Horn of Africa. Geostrategically expected, Gwadar Port would generate a bypass of Malacca Strait. Accordingly, “*the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will include the construction of highways, railways, and natural gas and oil pipelines at the geopolitical level*” (Duarte, 2019, p.156), which will in turn allow China to extend influence in Indian Ocean.

Even though, BRI has two main constituents mostly located in the Asian territories, China emphasizes BRI as open for the globe. Respectively, Beijing hosted two international biennial summits, also called the Belt and Road Forum (hereafter the Forum) in 2017 and 2019. In the first forum, Xi declared BRI as landmark project and portray it “*as a new champion for free trade and globalizat on at a time when the world economy has been constrained by economic/financial crises as well by the isolationist policies and inward orientations of the new US administration*” (Li, 2019, p. 9). In the second forum, China played a responder role against vast criticism from the Western liberal countries, and portrayed BRI as more responsible to economic and political sustainability.

BRI has a number of constituent local projects, one of which is called China and Pakistan Economic Corridor (hereafter CPEC). This study mainly focuses on the approach within Pakistan's political engagement towards China's BRI. Thus, the next section is employed as a brief evaluation of Pakistan's

political pendulum navigating within strategic challenges and opportunities approach in participating BRI. In this study, this approach is employed as the Pakistan's hegemonic public approach in defining BRI. As a major participant country of BRI, the public discourse in Pakistan can be considered as highly significant in focusing on participant approach rather than founder official discourse. It is believed that this approach might ignite and broaden theoretical discussion by framing participant approach, which also might diverge the third parties' voice rather than two-camp-rigid criticisms addressed by China and the Western countries.

2. Pakistan-China Relationship and BRI: Challenges and Opportunities

Globally known as "*Iron Brothers*" or "*All-weather Friends*" (Schwemlein, 2019), China and Pakistan have a history of dynamic and strong bilateral relationship since establishment of their diplomatic ties in 1951. From the very early years of establishment of its relationship with China, Pakistan maintained a policy of friendship and non-confrontation with the neighboring state. Islamabad avoided involvement in the Korean War, didn't criticize Chinese decision to annex Tibet and ceded around 5,180 square kilometres of disputed Kashmir region under its control to China under a border treaty in 1963 (Chaudhuri, 2017). As a result, during the 1965 India-Pakistan war, China extended diplomatic and military support to Pakistan (Paul, 2003). During the 1970s, Sino-Pak relationship witnessed a major surge when it facilitated the direct negotiations between the United States and China (Chaudhuri 2017). Afterwards, during the 1980s Pakistan became a center of training for the Islamist fighters for the Soviet-Afghanistan war and it also influenced the separatist factions of China-based East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement (Steele and Kuo, 2007), however, through Pakistan's influence on Islamists fighting in Afghanistan China ensured that the Uighur separatists remain out of its Xinjiang region (Bernstein, 1981; Hassan, 2016). During the same year, Pakistan's military cooperation with China also started expanding and in 1990s when the Pak-US relationship relatively deteriorated, Beijing emerged as a leading arm supplier and strategic partner of Islamabad (Paul, 2003b; Curtis, 2009; Dwivedi, 2013; Roy, 2016). Due to this strengthening relationship, Pakistan started seeing China as a reliable regional partner and the latter underscored this bilateral relationship as an effective way to counter Indian influence in the South Asian region (Garver, 2004), and with the beginning of 21st century Sin-Pak relationship took a major shift as trade partnership. This trade relationship was furthered by the Pakistani governments under President Pervez Musharraf and Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani (Starr, 2007), and it touched new heights when the agreement of eight mega projects worth 18 billion US dollars were signed in May 2013. Eventually in 2014 and 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor – also known as CPEC – as a part of Chinese flagship project One Belt and One Road Initiative (BRI) which would provide financial support and investment in Pakistan through a 15-year package (Schwemlein, 2019). The CPEC agreement carried projects worth 46 billion US dollars originally, however, over the last years the pledged investment has risen to 62 billion US dollars (Rafiq, 2018). The CPEC has been seen as the most important project under the BRI as well as the largest ever foreign investment made in Pakistan which reflects new opportunities of progress in the Sino-Pak relationship along with several challenges.

As a part of the BRI, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) includes a range of projects such as infrastructure development, construction of roads, energy production plants and establishment of free economic zones in addition to the primary fact that it will connect China to Arabian Sea through Pakistan's Gwadar port (Shah, 2015). Already, China and Pakistan are connected via the Karakorum Highway (KKH) which runs through Pakistan's mountainous region and provides easy transportation of goods from China's Kashghar to the Pakistani capital city Islamabad. Once, fully implemented, the CPEC would establish a similar network of roads and railways to facilitate trade-related transportation throughout Pakistan (Ali, 2015). The scholars suggest that the CPEC will not only help Pakistan and China to strengthen their trade and military relationship but also provide them better chances of extended regional cooperation and become part of an alternative energy route to the Central Asian countries such as Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (Barber, 2014; Small, 2015; Irshad, 2015).

According to the official documents and available literature, the CPEC will be fully implemented by 2030 in four phases. The first phase was mainly focused on energy production and construction of road links among the provinces of Pakistan, and has been completed till 2017 (Hali, 2016). The second which is due by the end 2020 to be completed is related to Pak-China cross border optical fiber,

implementation of some more energy production projects and construction of training institutes and export-processing zones to facilitate trade through the CPEC (Hali, 2016). The third phase of the CPEC will be implemented by 2025 through upgradation of railway network of Pakistan, and the fourth phase aims to connect Pakistan's Havelian city to Kashgar city of China with a cost of 12 billion US dollar till 2030 to ensure that Chinese and East Asian trade goods can smoothly reach the Pakistani seaports in Gwadar and Karachi (Hali, 2016). Under the CPEC, Pakistan and China have prioritized the energy production sector and an amount of 33 billion US dollars has been allocated to solar, thermal, wind and hydro power plants to produce over 16,000 megawatt electricity to combat the energy deficiency of Pakistan in general as well as provide the required sources of power for success of the CPEC (Mannan, 2014). Most of these plants have been completed and are fulfilling the electricity demand of Pakistan (Irfan et al., 2019). Similarly, more than 8 billion US dollars has been allocated to the construction and upgradation of transport infrastructure i.e. roads and railways, while the development and expansion of Gwadar port to transform Gwadar into an international business city (Menhas et al., 2019). Finally, the establishment of special economic zones along routes of the CPEC will facilitate Chinese as well as Pakistani trade with the European and African countries through establishment and relocation of Chinese industries which will be able to benefit from simple regulations for companies, special financial concessions and a growth aligned to economic policies (Khan and Khan, 2019). At the 80th meeting of Joint Coordination Committee of the CPEC, both Pakistan and China agreed to establish nine SEZs across Pakistan i.e. Rashakai Economic Zone, Dhabeji Economic Zone, Bostan Industrial Zone, Allama Iqbal Industrial City, Islamabad Model Zone, Pakistan Steel Mills Industrial Park, Mirpur Special Economic Zone, Mohmand Marble City and Maqpoondaas Special Economic Zone (Khan, 2017; Khan and Khan, 2019).

As the implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is progressing, the debate on the potential opportunities and the possible challenges are also being shaped by the state institutions, media organizations, political parties and thinktanks in Pakistan. This debate covers a huge spectrum of discussion; however, a large proportion is limited to some just specific topics in the form of both the challenges and the opportunities.

In terms of opportunities-centered debate, the importance of this huge Chinese investment overshadows almost all other themes. When the CPEC agreement was signed by China and Pakistan, the latter was already facing history's worst electricity shortfall crisis and as a result a huge portion of the Chinese investment was directly allocated to the power production sector. Along with establishment of power production, the CPEC route also happens to be an alternative energy import-export route as it also includes construction of pipelines for transportation of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) at a cost of 2.5 billion US dollars. The proposed installation of gas and oil pipeline between Iran and Pakistan is expected to further complement this development and the CPEC provides China, Iran and Pakistan to transform themselves into major energy producers and exporters as a result (Malik, 2015; Shah, 2015). These energy-related component of the CPEC will serve as major boost for the GDP growth of Pakistan by fulfilling the local industrial demands and also create chances of potential export energy to other countries (Walsh, 2013; Barber, 2014; Kugelman, 2015). Likewise, the construction and upgradation of transportation infrastructure under the CPEC will not serve for smooth export of Chinese goods but also serve for the growth of local industries along with opportunities to attract more industrial installations especially after establishment of Special Economic Zones along the CPEC routes (Sial, 2014; Alam, 2015). The planned industrialization of Pakistan and China's Xinjiang region through establishment of nine Special Economic Zones in the first phase which will be extended to 27 later on is aimed to utilize the full potential of the CPEC by expanding trade of Chinese and Pakistani goods and also create new job opportunities for the locals. These economic zones will be declared as tax free by the Pakistani government for first ten years and according to the Pakistani Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms a turnover worth over 1 trillion rupees is expected in addition to the creation of 2 million new jobs (Haris, 2015; Rakisits, 2015; Aqeel, 2016; Shafique, 2017). China has already successfully established some 750 Special Economic Zones (SEZs) which are making impressive contribution to China's national GDP growth through 22% imports, 60% exports and 46% FDI (Farole, 2010). The scholarly literature suggests that the implementation of the CPEC projects under the BRI dream will also contribute to the socio-economic growth of Pakistan and attract new investments through infrastructure development, energy generation, establishment of SEZs and creation of new job

opportunities for the Pakistani youth which makes over 60 percent of the total population (Khan and Khan, 2019; Mazher et al., 2015; Ali et al., 2017).

At a secondary level, the influx of potential investments and new chances of growth will also boost the local businesses in the presence of infrastructure connecting the rural areas to the major cities and the Special Economic Zones (SEZs), leading to poverty alleviation and social prosperity in the under-developed regions of Pakistan. The establishment training institutes and skills development centers are purely aimed to achieve such goals (Menhas et al., 2019). The government of Pakistan has also introduced several institutional reforms to uplift industrial sector and improve domestic economic growth during the last few years. And in such a conducive environment, the umbrella of the BRI and the CPEC is expected to serve as a catalyst for the Pakistani society through provision of multidimensional solutions leading to sustainable social development, improvement of living standards and reduction of development gaps among different parts of the country (Menhas et al., 2019; Ishaque et al., 2018).

Another important dimension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is its potential to display the highest level of military and strategic partnership between China and Pakistan. Beijing has taken control of Pakistan's Gwadar port on lease for forty years and now that a lot of other infrastructure has also been developed under the CPEC, China aims to protect its interests through "Active Defense" as outlined in recent military strategic policy papers (Shah, 2015b). The CPEC has opened new ways of military and strategic partnership between Pakistan and China as the two countries look forward to expand their abilities to secure these projects and their interests through efficient open sea combats. The presence of a strong navy to protect Pakistani ports and seas will also be crucial for China and Pakistan as the CPEC ports and routes as an alternative trade through Indian Ocean and Gulf of Basra. China manages its 80 percent of imports and exports through maritime trade routes and completion of the CPEC projects will serve China as a replacement to the traditional use of Malacca Strait to reach Indian Ocean. Through Gwadar port, the travel distance will be shortened by around 6,000 miles as compared to the route of Malacca Strait (Ramachandran, 2016). This important strategic dimension is also demonstrated by the fact that China and Pakistan have installed their own optical-fiber for internet connectivity and other communications to avoid use of other maritime cable communications which have involvement of Indian companies; a regional challenger to the both countries (Shahid, 2017; Nasim, 2019). All these discussions seem to be more meaningful and objective-oriented when China's maritime expansion is seen in the context of Africa and Europe.

Despite the wide acknowledgement of the opportunities and potential benefits offered by the CPEC, the mega project is also surrounded by several challenges and political controversies. The top most challenge for the CPEC and the BRI to be successful is the security situation of the Pakistani regions where most of these projects are located. The existing threat of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and eminent threat of Baloch separatists is alarming for the security of the CPEC projects and the people working on these initiatives. For this, the Government of Pakistan has raised a dedicated Special Security Division (SSD) in Pakistan Army consisting of 12,000 troops to ensure the security of this flagship project (Hali, 2016). In addition to the security concerns, India's strongest opposition to the CPEC also serves a challenge and a potential threat. New Delhi has formally objected to the CPEC as it passes through the disputed Kashmir region of Pakistan, and also India is posing a competition to the Gwadar port through development of Iran's Chabahar port in the Gulf of Oman which is just a few miles away from Gwadar (Hali, 2016; Menhas et al., 2019). The third major challenge faced by the CPEC and the BRI is the western narrative of "Chinese Debt Trap" which refers to China's move to offer investments and loans to the developing nations for the construction of necessary infrastructure and upon their inability to return the loans Beijing would take over their national assets as a compensation (Ameyaw-Brobbe, 2018). Despite a huge discussion in media on this subject, the Chinese officials outrightly deny presence of any such policy (Cao, 2018).

Domestically also, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) faces several challenges posed by the small and nationalist political parties which allege that smaller provinces of Pakistan i.e. Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa did not receive their due share under the CPEC projects. The CPEC has been dubbed as a Punjab-dominated project (Malik, 2015). The major criticism is related to choice of routes under the CPEC i.e. Eastern, Central and Western routes, particularly the Western route.

It is alleged by some political parties that the Western route would not be as developed as the other routes and that there have been some hidden changes to the Western route which could result in unfair distribution of opportunities among the provinces (Malik, 2015; Menhas et al., 2019). The Government of Pakistan has tried to resolve this controversy through special briefings and All Parties Conference (APC) on the CPEC. The government announced that the Western route which passes through Hazara region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Quetta of Balochistan will be completed during the first phase to put an end to this controversy (Malik, 2015; Menhas et al., 2019). However, the controversy is still at times highlighted by some local political parties despite apparent redressal by the government.

Summarily, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) happens to be an important part of the One Belt and One Road Initiative (BRI) of China. It is based on the historically strong strategic and trade relationship of Pakistan and China, and it offers a range of opportunities in the form of economic growth, direct foreign investment, infrastructure development, improvement of living standards, poverty alleviation, new job opportunities and enhancement of bilateral military and strategic partnership. Meanwhile, the project also faces several challenges at local as well as regional and global level and during the next decade the world might be able to witness the ambitious role of the CPEC as regional game changer.

3. Methodology and Data Collecting Procedure

This study directly relies on the opinions shared by the technicians of opinion on the micro-blogging website Twitter as it has been recognized to have transformative effect on the spread of information and news to form public discourse acceptance (McCay-Peet and Quan-Hasse, 2017). As Pierre Bourdieu (as cited in Droit and Ferenczi, 2008) noted that public figures such as TV commentators, academicians, business-people and political figures have become fast thinkers that consider themselves wise to address solving contemporary political problems in a society. They qualify to become opinion technicians who generate certain ideas among the public by reflecting a dominant opinion and ensuring its public acceptance as well. The technicians of opinion construct a field of opinion by benefitting from the techniques of priming and framing to express a dominant point of view in a society. Thus, this study relies on the assumption that these technicians of opinion are the representatives of dominant public discourse about the BRI. For this research, the Twitter users which qualify to be the technicians of opinion as per outlined by Pierre Bourdieu above have been selected and filtered on basis of the Twitter contents under the hashtags and keywords related to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) i.e. #BRI2019, #CPEC, China Pakistan Economic Corridor, #BRI, Belt & Road Initiative and #BRIForum during and immediately after the Second Belt and Road Forum held in Beijing from April 25, 2019 to April 27, 2019. The selected accounts have been placed in categories such as journalists, media outlets, think tanks, business or international relations experts, state institutions, diplomats, politicians, political parties and trade outlets for further analysis in the light of thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis has been applied by adapting content analysis as theorized by Krippendorff (1989) who defined it as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context” (1989, p. 403). Even though, the content analysis is a methodology that aims to describe communication content within positivist paradigm, this study considers content analysis as a methodological approach applicable to identify frequently repetitive themes of a given set of content data. This study identified twenty-three sub-themes branched within six main themes.

In order to collect the data from the previously identified Twitter accounts of the opinion technicians, the Python programming language has been used first to extract the tweets through, Tweepy API (Twitter Application Program Interface). This API extracts data using the parameters such as consumer_key, consumer_secret, access_token and access_token_secret and provides contents such as Usernames, account names, tweet IDs, number of retweets and likes, URLs and multimedia contents shared in the tweet and location. For further analysis, only contents available in specified language criteria are taken into consideration i.e. Urdu and English. The time intervals of the content to be included in the analysis have also been limited between the dates of April 24, 2019 and April 28, 2019 i.e. starting from one day before the forum to the day after the Second Belt and Road Forum. The qualitative analysis has been carried through qualitative analysis software Nvivo after additional cleansing undertaken in Microsoft Excel.

4. Analysis and Interpretation

Following the analysis of the discursive text collected from the selected Twitter accounts, six main themes were found to be describing the nature of discourse developed by the opinion technicians in Pakistan. These themes have been categorized as Chinese Dream of Mutual Cooperation, Socio-Economic Development, Opportunities of Investment and Growth, CPEC as more than a mere economic corridor, Nature of projects and Facilitating Initiatives for a detailed discussion here. Furthermore, all of the themes carried several more sub-themes which explicitly revealed the presence of discourse and rhetoric practices adopted by the opinion technicians. However, prior to this discussion, here is a list of the Twitter accounts which have been identified as leading opinion technicians on the subject of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) based on their Twitter activities during the Second Belt and Road Forum held in April 2019. Each of the opinion technician has been placed in a specific category based on their public profile to assess the nature of their interest in the BRI and the CPEC, as well as understand the significance of their discourse practices. Of all these 45 opinion technicians, 415 discursive contents shared during the 2019 Belt and Road Forum in English and Urdu languages have been subjected to the analysis and thematic discussion. The texts shared in Urdu language originally were translated to English prior to the analysis.

Table 1: Opinion Technicians Selected for Analysis

No.	Opinion Technician	Username	Description	Category
1	Shah Mahmood Qureshi	@SMQureshiPTI	A politician from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party. Currently serving as foreign minister of Pakistan.	Politician
2	Liaquat Shahwani	@LiaquatShahwani	The spokesperson of the provincial government of Balochistan. Gwadar Port is located in Balochistan.	Politician
3	Jam Kamal Khan	@jam_kamal	The personal account of the Chief Minister of Balochistan province.	Politician
4	Sher Ali Arbab	@saarbab	Personal account of the chairman of parliamentary committee on CPEC/BRI.	Politician
5	Mushahid Hussain	@Mushahid	Member of the Senate of Pakistan. Leading politician engaged in CPEC-related debate.	Politician
6	Bushra Gohar	@BushraGohar	Leading left-wing politician, strong critic of some projects under CPEC.	Politician
7	Ahsan Iqbal	@betterpakistan	Member of the parliament. Former minister of planning and development.	Politician

8	Mian Iftikhar Husain	@MianIftikharHus	Left-wing politician from Awami National Party which is considered to be a nationalist party.	Politician
9	Sana Ullah BALOCH, MPA	@Senator_Baloch	Former senator and current member of the provincial assembly of Balochistan.	Politician
10	Imran Khan	@ImranKhanPTI	The personal account of current Prime Minister of Pakistan.	Politician
11	SenatorSherryRehman	@sherryrehman	Leading politician of Pakistan People's Party, an opposition party.	Politician
12	Ch Fawad Hussain	@fawadchaudhry	Current minister of Information and Technology, former minister of information and broadcasting.	Politician
13	Afrasiab Khattak	@a_siab	Leading left-wing nationalist politician from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.	Politician
14	Saleem Mandviwalla	@SaleemMandvi	Deputy chairman of the Senate of Pakistan. Also known as a leading businessman of Pakistan in the private sector.	Politician
15	Senator Kahuda Babar Baloch	@KahudaBabar	A leading politician from Balochistan province.	Politician
16	Zahoor Buledi	@Zahoor__Buledi	Former spokesperson of Balochistan government. Leading Baloch politician.	Politician
17	Shehbaz Sharif	@CMShehbaz	Current leader of the opposition in the National Assembly of Pakistan. Former chief minister Punjab province. President of Pakistan Muslim League party.	Politician
18	Asad Umar	@Asad_Umar	Current minister of planning and development, former minister of finance.	Politician
19	PTI	@PTIofficial	The official account of Pakistan People's Party, a leading opposition party.	Political Party: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

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20	PPP	@MediaCellPPP	The official account of Pakistan People's Party, a leading opposition party.	Political Party: Secretariat of Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party
21	Chinese Emb Pakistan	@CathayPak	The official account of Chinese Embassy in Pakistan.	Diplomat
22	Lijian Zhao 赵立坚	@zlj517	The personal account of Chinese diplomat who has served in Pakistan from 2016-19.	Diplomat
23	Amb Naghmana Hashmi	@AmbNaghmanaHash	Pakistani ambassador to China.	Diplomat
24	Parliamentary Committee on CPEC	@CpecParliament	The official account of Pakistan's parliamentary committee on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.	State Institution
25	CPEC_gov_pk	@CPEC_gov_pk	The official account managed by the government of Pakistan for addressing issues regarding CPEC/BRI.	State Institution
26	M/o Planning Development & Reform	@PlanComPakistan	The official account of Pakistan's Ministry for Planning and Development. It also addresses issues related to CPEC projects.	State Institution
27	BRI, CPEC & China Bulletin	@ipd_newsletter	The official newsletter by the Thinktank named Institute of Peace and Diplomatic Studies, addressing BRI, CPEC and Pakistan-China ties.	State Institution
28	Board of Investment, Pakistan	@investinpak	The official account of Pakistan's Board of Investment which addresses issues regarding foreign and local investments.	State Institution
29	Information Ministry	@MoIB_Official	The official account of Pakistan's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.	State Institution
30	Dr Mohammad Faisal	@ForeignOfficePk	The official account of the foreign office of Pakistan.	State Institution
31	Prime Minister's Office, Pakistan	@PakPMO	The official account of the Prime Minister's office.	State Institution

32	MoCommerce Pakistan	@MoCommercePk	The official account of the Ministry of Commerce.	State Institution
33	DG ISPR	@OfficialDGISPR	The official account of the Inter-Services Public Relations, a department which represents armed forces of Pakistan.	State Institution
34	Govt of Pakistan	@pid_gov	The official account the government of Pakistan.	State Institution
35	Adnan Aamir	@iAdnanAamir	Pakistani journalist and researcher mainly dealing with CPEC and other development projects of Pakistan and China.	Journalist
36	Zoon Ahmed Khan 明竺	@Zoon_AhmedKhan	Pakistani journalist based in China.	Journalist
37	Sabena Siddiqi	@sabena_siddiqi	Pakistani journalist based in Middle East, covering China related issues.	Journalist
38	Eva Zheng 郑怡斌 عائشة	@evazhengll	Chinese journalist addressing Pakistan related issues in media.	Journalist
39	cyril almeida	@cyalm	Leading Pakistani journalist known for criticizing CPEC and secrecy related to these projects.	Journalist
40	Husain Haqqani	@husainhaqqani	Pakistan former ambassador to the United States and currently America-based researcher and academic.	IR or Business Expert
41	Abdul Basit	@abasitpak1	Former Pakistani diplomat, currently working as a researcher and TV personality.	IR or Business Expert
42	DingZhaoJie 丁肇洁	@CPEC_CSCEC	Chinese construction expert engaged in CPEC related projects in Pakistan.	IR or Business Expert
43	Asif Ghafoor	@peaceforchange	The personal account of spokesperson of the armed forces of Pakistan.	IR or Business Expert

44	Jan Achakzai	@Jan_Achakzai	Former politician turned researcher and TV anchor.	IR or Business Expert
45	Pak-China Institute	@pcipakchina	The official account of Pakistan-China Institute thinktank based in Islamabad.	Thinktank
Total number of tweets subjected to thematic analysis				415

The summary of the frequency analysis of the discursive texts subjected to analysis also reveals nature and extent of the dominant rhetoric practices and techniques adopted by the opinion technicians. The most frequently used hashtags included #cpec, #beltandroadforum, #bri, #brf2019 and #beltandroad while @imrankhanpti, @investinpak, @zlj517, @cathaypak and @cpec_gov_pk were found to be the most mentioned usernames, and top keywords used by the opinion technicians were Investment, Cooperation, Development, Poverty-alleviation and Industrial-uplift. For the development of thematic discussion, each of the six total themes have also been identified as positive or negative in terms of being supportive or critical of the BRI or the CPEC based on the sentiment analysis of rhetorical characteristics of keywords used by the opinion technicians. Table 2 presents the summary of the sentiment analysis and top rhetorical keywords used for each theme.

No.	Theme	Sentiment	Rhetorical Keywords
1	Chinese Dream of Mutual Cooperation	Positive	industrial cooperation, agricultural cooperation, intergovernmental cooperation, practical cooperation, win-win cooperation, anti-corruption cooperation.
2	Socio-Economic Development	Positive	poverty alleviation, socio-economic uplift, industrial development, incredible poverty reduction, poverty alleviation fund, infrastructure development, social sector development, high-quality development
3	Opportunities of Investment and Growth	Positive	market opportunities, large-scale investment, liberal investment regime, equal opportunity, duty-free access demand, Chinese market, private sector investment, 90 percent market access, long-term investment interest, two-way investment
4	CPEC as more than a mere economic corridor	Positive	eastern corridor, bri tourism corridor, economic corridor, central corridor, corridor entrepreneurs forum, tourism corridor
5	Nature of Projects	Positive	motorway project, short term projects, flagship project, eco-friendly projects, pilot project, transport infrastructure projects, mega projects, national project

6	Facilitating Initiatives	Positive	thematic forums, diplomatic initiative, pak-china business forum, language connectivity initiative, corridor entrepreneurs forum
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Table 2: Summary of Sentiment Analysis and Top Rhetorical Keywords

Following the qualitative analysis of the selected discursive texts based on rhetorical keywords and contextual interpretation, it was found that the discourse practices adopted by the opinion technicians can be placed in following six themes:

4.1. Chinese Dream of Mutual Cooperation

Apparently inspired by the rhetorical notion of the “American Dream” which comprised of global peace and cooperation, the Chinese Dream embodies similar features of global cooperation and growth in a way to replace the preceding global icon (Li, 2015). However, the “Chinese Dream” also brings along certain features of Chinese socialism along with it (Li, 2015) in the form of political, economic, philosophical, historical and social qualities associated with the Belt and Road Initiative (Wang, 2014). The literature also portrays the “Chinese Dream” as an idea of alternative globalization based on win-win cooperation (Ishaque, et al., 2018) and this conception has too earned a state-level recognition by China. Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi categorically stated that “China believes it is essential to advance peace, development and win-win cooperation, foster a new form of international relations and build a community with a shared future for mankind” (Wang, 2017) while speaking at the 2017 “Symposium on International Developments and China Diplomacy”.

The analyzed discursive text also confirmed presence of win-win cooperation keyword as well as the literal manifestation by the opinion technicians: “Chinese President Xi Jinping announced a package of proposals to advance high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) at a key forum widely considered a milestone in promoting win-win cooperation #BeltandRoad” and “#BRI is based on the principles of equality and mutual benefit, focuses on connectivity and practical cooperation” respectively. The technicians of opinion found to have embarked on rationalization of the “Chinese Dream” at a well-focused contextual level through the analyzed discursive contents.

1. The contents also included the extended explanation of the win-win cooperation in the context of Pak-China relations and added the key essentials: “#XiJinping: China looks forward to working with all parties to improve the concept of cooperation, and focus on building #BRI with high quality on basis of extensive consultation and rule of law, joint efforts, shared benefits, equal opportunities for all #BeltandRoad #BRF2019”, “Minister Khusro Bakhtyar highlighted that through Belt and Road forum participating states should promote intergovernmental cooperation, build intergovernmental mechanisms based on shared interests, trust and consensus. #CPEC #BRI #Pakistan #China” and “#CPEC is a fusion of multiple developments in the global, regional, bilateral and domestic context.”

2. The opinion technicians also highlighted the sectors i.e. agriculture, industry and trade which happen to be the main focus of this mutual cooperation between Pakistan and China under the Belt and Road Initiative: “Beijing, 25 April 2109: Federal Minister for PD&R Mukhdum Khusro Bakhtyar has said that China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is now entering into the second phase with the focus on industrial Cooperation, trade, agriculture, and socio-economic development. #BeltandRoadForum #CPEC”.

3. The contents also pitched a narrative that win-win cooperation based on the “Chinese Dream” is not solely being determined by China but Pakistan also has an equal say in this: “PM @ImranKhanPTI's 5 suggestions 1) mitigating the adverse effects of climate change; 2) Establishing a BRI tourism corridor; 3) Establishing an office for anti-corruption cooperation; 4) Creating a poverty alleviation fund; 5) Trade liberalization & private sector investment #BRI”. It also shows that Pakistan is not only satisfied with the existing level of mutual cooperation under the BRI but also seeks an expansion in the extent of the Chinese alternative globalization.

It appears that the technicians of opinion which mainly come from media outlets, state institutions, diplomats, and business and investment sectors completely identify themselves in alignment to the “Chinese Dream of Mutual Cooperation” and attach great importance to the need of fulfillment of Chinese ambitions in terms of Pak-China ties, asserting that the BRI and the CPEC are projects aimed at two-way collaboration between Pakistan and China which guarantees equal benefit of the both countries.

4.2. Socio-Economic Development

The scholars have assessed that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor which initially put extraordinary emphasis on construction of power plants to eradicate electricity shortfall of Pakistan has now entered into the second phase where establishment of infrastructures looks for boosting local business, establishing the Special Economic Zones, creating new jobs for locals, alleviating poverty and introducing social prosperity in the remote areas of the country (Khan, 2017; Khan and Khan, 2019, Menhas, et al., 2019; Ali, et al., 2017; Mazher, et al., 2015). The presence of top rhetorical keywords which include mentions of socio-economic development, poverty alleviation, socio-economic uplift, incredible poverty reduction, poverty alleviation fund, infrastructure development and social sector development points to the notion the opinion technicians attach great importance to this aspect of the BRI. “In his keynote address at the second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, Prime Minister @ImranKhanPTI said the next phase of #CPEC would focus on socioeconomic uplift, poverty alleviation, agricultural cooperation and industrial development” and “RT @investinpak: “Pakistan is lucky to have China as a partner. China has changed society by promoting continuous development, PM”” mirror the similar nature of discourse. The analysis of the selected discursive texts further showed the following assertions to be shaping the discourse under this key theme:

- Development in under-developed and remote areas: “Minister PD&R said that there has been steady progress in infrastructure development adding that the groundbreaking of Gwadar airport heralds a new beginning in the development of the coastal city” – refers to the notion that the CPEC is bringing extensive development to Pakistan’s remote regions and the most under-developed Balochistan province. Gwadar port and Gwadar city both have been showcased by Pakistan and China as the heart of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.
- Short-term socio-economic projects: “Minister PD&R appreciated the role of CIDCA and National Development & Reform Commission of China in approval of various projects under Joint Working Group on socio-economic development and expressed optimism that short term projects can be completed in a year. #CPEC” and “Through the #BeltAndRoadForum, the second phase of #CPEC will begin which includes private sector involvement in Special Economic Zones, and social sector development for which China has given a grant of \$1 billion.” Senator Mushahid Hussain @zlj517 @Mushahid” – refers to declaration that second phase of the CPEC is full of short-term projects focused on socio-economic uplift of Pakistani society and that these projects will be implemented within one year. The second also carries a mention about the grant provided by China for this specific sector.
- Poverty alleviation: “China’s incredible poverty reduction: 800 million people lifted out of extreme poverty. Poverty rate reduced from 97% in 1978 to 2% in 2018 (Xi Jinping wants to make it 0% by 2020) That’s improving human rights #BRI #BRF2019 @pid_gov @Pakistan_MOFA @PlanComPakistan @zlj517” – refers to China’s exemplary potential of poverty alleviation within itself and outside countries. Such rhetoric asserts that China has already done the same job for itself and it has potential to do the same for Pakistan as well. Another tweet which says “Pakistan is lucky to have China as a partner. China has changed society by promoting continuous development, PM” puts this self-evident reference in a complete context.

4.3. Opportunities of Investment and Growth

The implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is expected to open the new doors of economic growth and opportunities to attract additional investments to the local markets. Especially, the establishment of dozens of the Special Economic Zones along the CPEC routes which would be declared tax free for the first ten years (Sial, 2014; Rakisits, 2015; Aqeel, 2016). In addition to creating

around two million new jobs, a revenue of worth 1 trillion rupees is also expected through implementation of the CPEC projects (Haris, 2015; Shafique, 2017). The Twitter contents shared by the opinion technicians also endorsed the same discourse that the CPEC will be serving as landmark opportunity for Pakistan to attract additional Chinese private investments as well as other global endeavors through these tax free economic zones of the country. Furthermore, the new opportunities for Pakistan to export its goods to China and the possibilities to get open access to Chinese markets were also underscored in the analyzed discursive texts. The frequent use of rhetorical keywords such as “90 percent market investment”, “liberal investment regime”, “duty free access demand” and “private sector investment” was observed under this theme. The technicians of opinion took note of the following to construct a very optimistic discourse around the CPEC projects:

- Two-way investment – it refers to the overall stature of the BRI that is allowing the participating countries to receive Chinese investment as well as an opportunity to explore the possibilities of making investments in the Chinese markets which are already flourishing and hardly welcomed any foreign investors in the past: “Massive investment spurs BRI countries’ growth! Two-way investment between China and economies related to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) exceeded \$130 billion between 2013 and 2018, injecting new growth momentum. #BRI #CPEC”. “Along the length of #CPEC, SEZs are set to come up, offering opportunities of investment for Pakistanis, Chinese” also points to a similar potential of the CPEC as being a significant part of the BRI.

- Access to Chinese market – it refers to the new Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Pakistan and China which was signed during the Second Belt and Road Forum, and Pakistani products were promised to be given access to 90 percent of Chinese markets and this development has been dubbed as a success of the CPEC which is already providing new opportunities of growth to the Pakistani businesses: “GOOD NEWS FOR PAKISTAN! Pakistan to access 90pc of Chinese market Beijing has agreed to provide 90 percent market access to Pakistani commodities under the revised Free Trade Agreement (FTA). #DontDelayInvestToday #TimeToInvestInPakistan”.

- Private Chinese investment – it refers to the Chinese government’s facilitation for Pakistan to approach China’s private investment groups and convince them to make investments in Pakistani markets particularly the Special Economic Zones established under the CPEC which provide major tax benefits for the next many years: “313 items: China accepts duty-free access demand Chairman BOI @SharifHaroon said 22 Chinese companies have either incorporated or are incorporating in Pakistan & relocation of Chinese industry to SEZs also on the cards #TimeToInvestInPakistan” and “PM Imran Khan also invited the international investors to make use of Pakistan's liberal investment regime & participate in the country's economy especially in the sectors of infrastructure, railways, dams, Information Technology and Manufacturing. #BRF2019”. The contents also underlined the significance of Pakistan leadership’s meetings with leading Chinese investment groups: “Chinese private investment is rapidly scaling up in Pakistan which will lead to technology transfer & increased export competitiveness, said Chairman BOI @SharifHaroon while assisting PM @ImranKhanPTI during key meetings with investors in China. #CPECtransformingPakistan”, “Prime Minister @ImranKhanPTI met Founder & Chief Executive of world leading Chinese Company @Huawei Mr. Ren Zhengfei. Chairman BoI @SharifHaroon was also present on the occasion. Mr. Zhengfei assured him on expansion plans and heavy investment in Pakistan #TimeToInvestInPakistan” and “Prime Minister @ImranKhanPTI met leadership of @Huawei, Rainbow Agritech Group, Challenge Apparel, Li & Fin Corporation and Foton cars in #Beijing, China. The leading Chinese firms pledge large-scale investment in Pakistan. #BeltandRoadInitiative @OBORCHINA @CPEC_Official”.

- Increase in Pakistani exports to China – it refers to the testimonial contents produced to portray a more trustworthy picture of improving Pakistani economy as a result of the CPEC projects which claim to have also resulted in increased Pakistani exports to China: “New FTA with China to increase exports by \$500m, says Dawood. BOI Chairman @SharifHaroon said it is not difficult to generate long-term investment interest in Pakistan. under FTA, market access is available while companies are also interested.”

4.4. CPEC as More Than a Mere Economic Corridor

As the scholarly discussion on the potential opportunities connected to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor also noted the prospective of this mega project's transformation into something even more significant in near future, the opinion technicians also produced similar discursive contents which underscore the CPEC as something more than a mere economic corridor between Pakistan and China. However, the absence of CPEC's projection as an energy corridor as suggested by the literature, and instead the technicians of opinion touched other areas for a potential expansion of the mega project. The top rhetorical keywords found under this theme in the analyzed contents showed that the CPEC has been pitched as a possible tourism corridor. The overall debate in that respect included:

- Expansion of CPEC to new areas – it refers to the Pakistani efforts and potential of the CPEC projects for expansion in Pakistan's steel, agriculture, textile and tourism sectors. These sectors are apparently of economic nature, however in a different aspect which is not directly connected with the original agenda of the CPEC, as they are the previously flourishing sectors of Pakistan which faced sudden downfall during the last two decades. The technicians of opinion suggested that the CPEC's expansion could revive these areas in Pakistan: "Minister PD&R reiterated the need to create a chain reaction of economic expansion along the economic corridor. He said that the Chinese government may encourage the private enterprises to explore opportunities in Pakistan in steel, agriculture, textile, IT and tourism sectors."

- Significance of eastern route of CPEC – it refers to the huge importance of the eastern route of the CPEC road-links which passes through Punjab region which is more economically stable and secure as compared to other parts of the country, and Pakistan can use the presence of this route to allure the Chinese companies to undertake a number of projects in this environment: "Minister for Planning thanked CEO China Roads and Bridges Corporation, Mr. Du Fei for his valuable support and also recommended that the certain projects in the eastern corridor may be taken up on BOT financing mode. #CPEC #China #Pakistan".

- BRI as tourism corridor – it refers to another dimension of BRI's potential to flourish tourism in the northern areas of Pakistan as well as in the adjacent Chinese areas which are home to natural beauty and high mountains: "PM @ImranKhanPTI suggested that members of the BRI should: "Establish a BRI tourism corridor for cultural and tourism exchanges..."

- BRI as digital corridor – this is the most significant reference to the upcoming potential of the BRI projects that can truly introduce digital transformation and skills development in countries like Pakistan due to their existing huge outreach: "PM @ImranKhanPTI suggested that members of the BRI should: "...Develop programmes for improving the skills of labor and create multi-lingual digital platforms #TimeToInvestInPak".

- Eco-friendly BRI projects – this reference presents the efforts of the opinion technicians that the BRI projects also ensure environment protection and this assertion needs a little between acknowledgment on the global scenario: "'A #BRI green prize should be introduced, and awarded each year to the Eco-friendly projects of the BRI.'" -Senator @Mushahid Hussain, Chairman #PCI. #BeltAndRoadForum #Beijing @zlj517 @CathayPak @GameChangerYR".

4.5. Nature of projects

Despite the fact that the CPEC was already 5 years into implementation when the Second Belt and Road Forum was taking place in China, the selected pool of the technicians of opinion were seem to be investing a considerable effort on explanation of the nature of the CPEC project and how it was crucial for the BRI flagship project. It showed a versatile lens of exposure of the CPEC such as:

- CPEC is the pilot project of the BRI – it refers to the assertion that the CPEC would become first success story of the BRI project which would establish alternative globalization of China in the whole world and that Pakistan's engagement in this flagship project puts the country at the very center of a major global development: "We in Pakistan are proud of the fact that #CPEC is the flagship and the

pilot project of the #BRI.”- Senator Mushahid Hussain, Chairman #PCI @zlj517 @GameChangerYR @CathayPak @Mushahid”.

- A project which transcends religions and regions – it refers to the efforts of the opinion technicians to portray the BRI and the CPEC a true global imagery: “President Xi said that the Ancient #SilkRoad also constituted the flow of knowledge and connected the lands of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.”-Senator Mushahid Hussain @zlj517”.

- A national project which is above politics – this exhibits the discourse practice to negate that Pakistan’s nationalist political parties are opposing the CPEC projects and it rather shows that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor focuses on overall national welfare of Pakistan with special importance to development in under-development areas: “Senator @Mushahid speaking before the second annual #BeltAndRoadForum in #Beijing. 1. “#CPEC is a national project which is above any party’s interest. The 1st phase has completed, with the revival of projects like Thar and Gwadar. 70,000 Pakistan people have now been employed.”

- A landmark road-link project – it points to the very initial discourse practice used for popularity of the CPEC projects by portraying it as an important trade route which could connect different regions of the country and revive the local infrastructure along with economic boost: “Amazing Daily Drone Video for #CPEC motorway project(M5 392km from Sukkur to Multan) Section-1 Interchange Work #CSCECnews. @zlj517 @CPEC15 @AbdulMaan @CPECJobs @evazhengll @CathayPak @beltandroad1 @CPEC_Official @ElaudierLaudier @CPEC_UPDATE @ChinaDaily @PDChina @bajisitanren”.

4.6. Facilitating Initiatives

The final theme developed on the basis of the analyzed discursive texts refers to the discourse practice to provide a better and significant picture of the CPEC and the BRI projects by showing how these projects are facilitating so many other initiatives which have potential to transform the world and pave way for cooperation and progress. In the context of the Second Belt and Road Forum, the opinion technicians relied on the following sub-themes:

- A forum connecting people of different languages – “A video showing #ConfuciusInstitute's language connectivity initiative along the #BeltAndRoad, being featured at the thematic forums of the second annual #BeltAndRoadForum in #Beijing. @zlj517 @CathayPak @Mushahid @GameChangerYR”.

- A project showcasing the Chinese public diplomacy through humanitarian projects in war-struck Afghanistan – “Stories from the #BeltAndRoad, being featured at the Thematic Forums of the second annual #BeltAndRoadForum. In this video, children suffering from congenital heart disease in #Afghanistan are being treated by the Chinese #RedCross. @zlj517 @CathayPak @CRCFChn”

- A forum bringing together world leaders at one table for world’s largest diplomatic initiative – “Biggest global gathering, over 5000 representatives from 100+ countries, including 37 Presidents & PMs, for 2nd Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) Forum, with BRI emerging today as the biggest developmental & diplomatic initiative in the 21st Century, with CPEC as its flagship project”.

- A forum bringing together the entrepreneurs of Pakistan, China and the world at one platform of global development – “RT @AbdulMaan: China Pakistan Economic Corridor Entrepreneurs forum held in Beijing”.

Discussion and Conclusion

The literature strongly suggests that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has effectively been recognized as the core project of the Belt and Road Initiative by Pakistan as well as China, and the successful implementation of the CPEC would have significant impact on the BRI projects in other regions as well. That is why the CPEC appears to have gained a political and strategic significance for the technicians of opinion in Pakistan. The categorization of the opinion technicians showed that all

types of political parties, state institutions, diplomats, business groups and journalists are actively participating in the process of opinion making related to the CPEC. However, contrary to the reviewed literature from the recent years, the analyzed tweets showed that while the opinion technicians almost covered all of the positive aspects of the CPEC and the BRI including the future prospects, they have outrightly ignored the challenges posed by the local and global elements. The complete absence of any sort of negative discourse practices suggests that the debate on previously acknowledged nationalist or regionalist challenges for the CPEC have successfully been neutralized by the stakeholders and discourse practices in terms of Pakistan-China relationship and the CPEC have now entered into a new period where the fruit of first implementation phase and more potential benefits in the form of economic growth and opportunities has now become subject of the central discussion. This situation also confirms that technicians of opinion from Pakistan are in complete alignment with the dominant discourse on the CPEC set by the Pakistani and Chinese state actors.

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