

Transitivity Analysis of U.S. Media's Representations of the Muslim World in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor News Discourses: A Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract

The present study, rooted in Said's theory of Orientalism, employs a transitivity analysis to investigate the portrayal of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China's Uighur Muslim community in U.S. digital media discourses surrounding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Through a clause-based analysis of four feature articles from leading U.S. digital news outlets, this qualitative research explores recurring motifs and thematic patterns in media discourse. Findings reveal a pervasive Orientalist bias that frames the Muslims in terms of terrorism, extremism, corruption, greed, and incapacity, while simultaneously casting the U.S. as a civilizing force engaged in economic and military interventions within Pakistan and Afghanistan. The transitivity patterns highlight an ideological construction positioning the U.S./Occident as superior and the Muslims/Orient as subordinate, subtly shaping public opinion and influencing geopolitical perceptions. By illustrating how media discourse perpetuates power imbalances and constructs Muslims as the 'Other', this research underscores the enduring relevance of Said's theory in the context of contemporary digital media. It emphasizes the need for critical media literacy to challenge such biased representations, highlighting language's role in framing perceptions of marginalized communities.

Keywords: CPEC, Geopolitical Perceptions, Media Discourse, Muslims, Orientalism, Transitivity Analysis

Introduction

Background of the Study

In the present-day dynamic world, the power struggle between the strong and the weak continues through the medium of discourse. The investigation of power behind the discourse and the way it is manifested in the discourse is one of the main objectives of many of the radical movements - postcolonialism, feminism, Marxism and cultural studies - that aim to challenge and dismantle the racial/gender/socio-economic and cultural binaries in the wake of poststructuralism. Discourse, a site where power is won, lost or negotiated (Wearing, 1998), has equal potential for elimination as well as empowerment. Therefore, the exploration of the power relations and ideology are central to any critical study of discourse. Researchers (Scurry, 2010; Ghannam, 2011; El-Aswad, 2013; Ika, 2014; Eerdmans, 2016; Rameez, 2018) have been particularly interested in exploring media discourses as media, being one of the powerful institutions of any society, becomes a stake in the propagation of the dominant ideology prevalent in that society.

Statement of the Problem

Adopting the perspective of Said's (1978) orientalism, this research paper attempts to analyse how the Muslim world - Pakistan, Afghanistan and Uighur Muslim community of China - has been portrayed in U.S. digital media's discourses on CPEC. In his groundbreaking work, Said has brought to light the way the West has used its social and political discourses for centuries to present the East/the Orient as its inferior Other which is the direct result of its desire to impress upon the ideology of a superior West/the Occident. These discriminatory discourses, therefore, need to be critically analysed in order to expose and deconstruct the apparent as well as hidden structures of power. Of these, those built around the Muslim world, require special attention because of the surging racial biasness and animosity against the Muslims in the West (El-Aswad, 2013; Shahwar, 2014; Rameez, 2018). To achieve this purpose, Halliday's (1994) model of transitivity, known for its effectiveness in analysing language and ideology, has been employed to examine four feature articles from widely recognised U.S. digital news outlets (Rodsevich, 2024). This analysis aims to foreground and deconstruct the world-view of the U.S./Western journalists behind these discourses, thereby contributing to the understanding of contemporary media representations and their ideological underpinnings.

Research Questions

1. How is the Orient constructed through the transitivity choices?
2. How are the transitivity choices indicative of particular ideology?

Literature Review

Media Representation and Orientalism

Postcolonial discourse that aims to undermine the authority of colonial discourse by offering counter narratives that challenge the debased representations of the previously colonised states by the West formally started with Said's (1978) seminal work. Said's theory of orientalism foregrounds how the Orient/ the East as an inferior Other of the Occident/ the West is purely a Western construct - a mere representation rather than an objective reality. This theory has inspired many researchers (Scurry, 2010; El-Aswad, 2013; Eerdmans, 2016; Rameez, 2018; Bajuwaiber, 2024) who find it equally relevant today and forms the basis of many researches carried out on the Western discourses involving literary and political texts as well as popular culture. Scurry (2010) examined the portrayal of Muslims in Western media, revealing persistent stereotypes and biases. El-Aswad (2013) and Shahwar (2014) focused on how these representations contribute to the marginalization of Muslim communities. Studies by Eerdmans (2016) and Rameez (2018) highlighted the subtle ways media discourses perpetuate Orientalist ideologies, particularly in the context of geopolitical conflicts. More recent studies have expanded on these foundational ideas, adding depth to the understanding of how Orientalist ideologies persist and adapt in modern contexts. Wahid (2024) examined the transition from traditional Orientalism to neo-Orientalism, emphasising how contemporary representations in media, literature, and political discourses continue to reinforce stereotypes about Islam and Muslim societies. Similarly, Bajuwaiber (2024) analysed the portrayal of Arab-Muslim identities in pre- and post-9/11 Hollywood cinema, noting a significant shift toward heightened Islamophobia in recent films.

These studies collectively highlight how Western media consistently employs Orientalist frameworks to reinforce biases against Muslim communities. Building on these findings, this study specifically examines U.S. digital media's discourse surrounding CPEC and its portrayal of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Uighur Muslim community of China. By analysing linguistic

choices within this context, the study aims to reveal how Orientalist ideologies are perpetuated to reinforce an East-West binary, offering insights into how these narratives adapt and persist in modern media.

Transitivity Analysis in Critical Discourse Studies

Halliday (1978), emphasising the social nature of language, views every lexico- grammatical choice having a social function. He views discourse as a multidimensional process and text as its product reflecting the same polyphonic structuring with each clause serving a tripartite function - as message, exchange and representation - which he calls three metafunctions of language technically termed as ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction and textual metafunction. Besides, language “as the realization of semiotic orders above” (p.96), according to Halliday, may carry and reflect “all the inconsistencies, contradictions and conflicts that can exist within and between such high order semiotic systems” (p. 96). Therefore, any analysis of discourse should involve the investigation of the lexico-grammatical analysis of the language within the context - social, physical, cognitive, cultural, interpersonal etc.

Previous studies have successfully applied transitivity analysis to uncover ideological bias in media texts. Ghannam (2011) and Ika (2014) used transitivity analysis to analyse news discourses, showing how linguistic choices shape public perceptions of political figures and events. Cheikh’s (2017) study examines ideological construction in Algerian and U.S. newspapers when reporting the same Algerian events, such as the killing of a policeman in Constantine and the health of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Her findings reveal that, while covering identical events, newspapers employ specific language choices to influence readers, reflecting distinct ideological perspectives. Similarly, Abunahel (2023) analysed news reports from *The Hindu* and *The Washington Post* regarding the Israeli onslaught on Gaza. The study revealed how these media outlets shaped their narratives using verbal and material processes, often depicting Israel as an active agent. In contrast, actions attributed to Palestinians were frequently intensified through the use of adjectives and adverbs, suggesting a hidden ideological bias. These findings demonstrate the effectiveness of transitivity analysis in uncovering underlying ideological patterns, which informs the methodological approach of this study.

The foregoing literature review highlights that, while extant research has yielded substantial insights into Orientalist tendencies directed toward the Muslim world in Western media, a critical gap remains in understanding the specific linguistic constructions of these ideologies in U.S. digital media, particularly concerning CPEC. This study seeks to address this gap by analysing linguistic structures within media narratives that reflect Orientalist ideologies, thereby offering a unique approach that integrates Said's (1978) theoretical framework with detailed transitivity analysis. This perspective allows for a subtler examination of how language shapes perceptions, thus enriching the existing scholarship on media representation and ideological discourse.

Methodology

Methods and Materials

This study analyses four feature articles on CPEC from prominent U.S. digital news outlets: The New York Times (NYT), The Washington Post (WP), Foreign Policy (FP), and National Public Radio (NPR), spanning from April 2015 to April 2016. These articles have been selected for their comprehensive coverage during the initial phase of CPEC's launch, reflecting mainstream American perspectives. Employing a qualitative approach, the study focuses on identifying themes and ideological constructs related to the portrayal of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Uighur Muslim community in China, using thematic coding and Halliday's transitivity model. Data collection involved systematic review and coding of the selected articles based on emergent themes related to power dynamics and ideological biases. This methodological approach aims to critically examine how these discourses frame and potentially reinforce Western perceptions of the Muslim world, aligning with the theoretical framework of Orientalism.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in Said's (1978) theory of Orientalism and Halliday's (1994) systemic functional linguistics, particularly his model of transitivity. These theories provide the conceptual and analytical tools necessary to explore the ideological dimensions of media discourse.

Said's Orientalist Lens

Said's (1978) Orientalism serves as the foundational theory for understanding the ideological constructs within Western representations of the East. Said argues that the West has

historically constructed the East as its cultural, moral, and intellectual opposite, often portraying it as backward, irrational, and uncivilized. This portrayal is not accidental but a deliberate discourse that serves to justify and maintain Western dominance. By framing the East as exotic or barbaric, Orientalism creates a binary opposition that reinforces the notion of Western superiority. Central to Said's argument is the role of power in shaping these narratives. Western representations of the East are not neutral or objective; they are informed by the political, economic, and cultural hegemonies of the West. Orientalism functions as a tool to sustain these hegemonies, shaping public perception and legitimizing Western interventions in the East under the guise of modernization or salvation.

In more recent contexts, neo-Orientalism has emerged as an adaptation of traditional Orientalist narratives, shaped by global security concerns and economic competition. Unlike classical Orientalism, which primarily served colonial ambitions, neo-Orientalism focuses on framing Muslim-majority societies and the broader East as existential threats to Western stability and progress (Wahid, 2024). While Said's (1978) critique was primarily aimed at European colonial discourses, contemporary scholars extend his insights to modern media and geopolitical contexts. Bajuwaiber (2024) examines the persistence of Orientalist tropes in Western narratives about the Middle East and Wahid (2024) explores how neo-Orientalism adapts these stereotypes to align with post-9/11 narratives. These contributions enrich Said's original framework, offering a lens through which to analyse how U.S. digital media constructs narratives around CPEC.

Systemic Functional Linguistics and Transitivity Model

Systemic functional linguistics, developed by Halliday (1994), offers a comprehensive approach to analysing language as a social semiotic system. Central to this approach is the concept of transitivity, which concerns how actions, events, and states are represented in discourse. Halliday's transitivity model classifies processes into six types: material, mental, relational, behavioural, verbal, and existential. This classification allows for a detailed examination of how different types of actions and participants are depicted in media texts.

The transitivity model is particularly useful for uncovering ideological meanings embedded in language. By analysing the transitivity patterns in the selected media texts, this study aims to reveal how linguistic choices contribute to the construction of Orientalist ideologies. For instance, material processes can depict actions and events, often highlighting agency and responsibility. Mental processes can reveal perceptions and attitudes, while relational processes

can establish identities and relationships. By scrutinizing these patterns, the study seeks to uncover the underlying power relations and ideological biases in the media discourse.

Integration of Theories

The integration of Said's (1978) Orientalism with Halliday's (1994) transitivity model provides a robust framework for this study. While Orientalism offers a critical lens to understand the broader ideological implications of media representations, the transitivity model provides a detailed analytical method to examine how these ideologies are linguistically constructed. This dual framework enables a comprehensive analysis of both the content and the form of media discourse, ensuring that the study addresses both the macro-level ideological constructs and the micro-level linguistic choices.

Data Analysis

A clause-based analysis of the selected articles has been conducted, focusing on linguistic patterns that align with the themes identified through thematic coding. The themes—(1) terrorism and extremism, (2) corruption and acquisitiveness, and (3) incapability and weakness—emerged from a careful review of the data. The selection of these themes is informed by Said's (1978) Orientalist framework, which highlights the recurring depiction of the East as irrational, corrupt, and dependent on Western intervention. These patterns are corroborated by media discourse analysts such as El-Aswad (2013) and Bajuwaiber (2024), who observe similar portrayals in contemporary neo-Orientalist narratives.

The relationships between the U.S., China, Pakistan, and the neighbouring Muslim regions are shaped by a historical backdrop of geopolitical conflicts and interventions that inform contemporary narratives in U.S. media. The U.S. involvement in Afghanistan over two decades framed the region as a hub of terrorism and extremism, an image perpetuated through global media narratives. Pakistan, as a strategic ally in the War on Terror, occupies a dual role—portrayed as both a partner in counterterrorism efforts and a state fostering extremism (Khurshid, 2024). These conflicting narratives reflect Pakistan's geopolitical significance and its complex relationships with Western powers and neighboring China. Similarly, China's Belt and Road Initiative, particularly CPEC, is framed within the U.S.-China rivalry for global influence. The Uighur Muslim community in China serves as another focal point, with U.S. media critiquing China's policies under the guise of human rights advocacy, while also linking the community to security risks associated with Muslim extremism. Such framing reinforces broader geopolitical

aims by perpetuating narratives of Eastern nations as incapable of achieving stability and equity without Western intervention.

The context of these narratives is deeply rooted in Orientalist ideologies, as outlined by Said (1978, 2003), which depicts the East and particularly the Muslim world after 9/11 as "the Other"—irrational, corrupt, and needing Western guidance. This historical lens enables a deeper understanding of how these portrayals emerge in U.S. media discourse, particularly in the context of CPEC. By embedding these recurring themes within the broader geopolitical and historical context, the analysis reveals the intricate interplay between language and power in shaping global perceptions of the Muslims. Each theme is further explored in the sections that follow.

Terrorism and Extremism

The most prominent theme prevalent in the selected articles is the theme of terrorism and extremism linked to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Uighur Muslim community of China. This recurrent association reveals an underlying bias in the U.S. media's portrayal of these regions, reinforcing the stereotypical narrative of the Muslim world as inherently linked to terrorism. This portrayal aligns with Orientalist ideologies, as observed by scholars such as Said (1978), who critique how Western media historically constructs the East as a security threat to justify intervention and control. Within the context of CPEC, this framing serves to cast Pakistan as a breeding ground for extremism, Afghanistan as a region of instability, and the Uighur Muslims of China as a latent threat, thus drawing parallels with broader neo-Orientalist narratives. The process types, roles assigned to the participants, and the choices made in circumstances all contribute to highlighting this theme. The NYT journalist views the purpose of China's investment in Pakistan as to contain terrorism from spilling into its own country from the Pak-China border, as is evident from the clauses below.

“Just as the United States (Actor) sought to stabilize (Pr: Material) Pakistan (Goal) during the war in Afghanistan (Circ: Location), //so China (Actor) wants to prevent (Pr: Material) the spread of militant groups (Goal) in Pakistan (Cir: Location) into Xinjiang (Cir: Location), the far western region of China with a large Muslim population (Circ: Location).”

In the clauses above, U.S. and China have been positioned as Actors whose economic (and in the case of U.S., military) endeavours have the purpose of stabilizing Pakistan (Goal). The spread of militancy from Pakistan to China has been indicated by the circumstances of location. Besides linking Pakistan and the Chinese Muslim community with extremism, the ideology of the civilized U.S./the Occident acting as the dispeller of darkness has also been highlighted. This motif has been further elaborated in the following main clause which positions Pakistan as Actor but the real agency has been shifted to U.S. who as the Initiator tried to persuade Pakistani government to contain terrorist groups (Goal) from entering Afghanistan and attacking American troops (Goal).

“Washington (Initiator) tried to encourage (Pr :-) the Pakistani government (Actor) to try to stop (-: Material) terrorist groups (Goal) from [[crossing (Pr: Material) the border (Goal) into Afghanistan (Circ: Location) / and attacking (Pr: Material) American troops (Goal)]].”

By placing the American troops in the above-embedded clause at the Goal position, being attacked by the so-called terrorist groups from Pakistan, the journalist has tried to portray the American troops as the oppressed rather than the oppressors, being obstructed by the uncivilized brutes in their civilizing mission.

Turkestan Islamic Movement’s position in the following clauses as Actor does not add anything good to its credit because negative agency and power has been attached to it as the journalist claims, it operates with “terrorist groups in Pakistan” highlighted in the Circumstance of location and is argued to be the cause of great frustration for China.

“To the increasing frustration of China (Cir: Angle), a Muslim separatist group, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (Actor), operates (Pr: Material) alongside several Pakistani terrorist groups (Circ: Location) inside Pakistan’s ungoverned tribal areas (Circ: Location).”

Extremist element in the Muslim world is consolidated along with the U.S. sophisticated aim by positioning China as Senser in the following main clause who after becoming target of terrorism itself, as is claimed by the journalist, has now “learned” that the U.S’. plan to invade Afghanistan was for “deterring terrorism” (Goal) in that country.

“The Chinese (Senser) appear to have learned (Pr: Mental) from the American program (Circ: Location), including the notion [[that the American plan

(Actor) was designed to deliver (Pr: Material) a strategic result (Goal) / —
detering (Pr: Material) terrorism (Goal)].”

Islamophobic undertones can be sensed by the transitivity choices made in the WP article as well. According to the journalist, besides expanding its trades through the corridor, China positioned as Senser in the following main clause, also views Pakistan (Phenomenon) from the “lens of counter-terrorism” which is the iteration of the same thought expressed by the NYT journalist.

“China (Senser) views (Pr: Mental) Pakistan (Phenomenon) also through the lens of counter-terrorism (Circ: Manner).”

Following the similar line, possessive process has been employed in the following main clause to attach extremist element with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Uighur Muslim community of China.

“A number of extremist outfits allegedly [[linked (Pr: Material) to ethnic Uighur separatists within Xinjiang (Circ: Location)]] (Possessor) have (Pr: Possessive) training camps (Possessed) in Pakistan's rugged borderlands (Circ: Location) with Afghanistan (Circ: Accompaniment).”

The FP article is also replete with the tropes of extremism and terrorism attached with the Muslim world. Uighur Muslim community of Xinjiang is viewed as extremist in the following clauses. Relational process has been employed to assign the Xinjiang Muslim based region (Token) the value or identity of being “a security headache” for Beijing.

“The region, [[which (Token) is(Pr: Relational: Identifying) home to a sizable Muslim Uighur community(Value)]] (Token), has become (Pr: Relational: Identifying) a security headache for Beijing (Value) following a slew of brutal knife and bombing attacks [[carried out (Pr: Material) by extremists(Actor)]] (Circ: Location).”

As compared to the previous articles that have highlighted the extremist element in Pakistan through the militant groups, FP journalist launches a direct attack on it. Active roles have been provided to Pakistan but the power that has been assigned to it is the negative and destructive power as can be seen from the analyses of embedded clauses below.

“The biggest obstacle to an Afghan settlement (Value) has been (Pr: Relational: Identifying) Pakistan’s willingness [[to play (Pr: Material) with fire (Pr: Manner), /first by backing (Pr: Material) militant groups (Goal) inside Afghanistan (Circ: Manner)/ and later by offering (Pr: Material) safe havens (Goal) in Pakistani territory (Circ: Location) to violent groups (Beneficiary: Recipient)]] (Token).”

The propaganda of U.S. civilizing role in Afghanistan is the part of this article as well which is highlighted by bringing China / Beijing in the forefront as Senser in the first main clause below depicted as worrying the spread of “extremist threat” from Pakistan and Afghanistan (Circ: Location) after the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan.

“With U.S. forces [[scheduled to pack up (Pr: Material) in 2016(Circ: Location)]] (Circ: Manner), Beijing (Senser) worries (Pr: Mental)//that (Actor) could leave (Pr: Material) space (G-) for the extremist threat (Circ: Cause) from Afghanistan and Pakistan (Circ: Location) [[to metastasize (Pr: Material)]] (-oal).”

The transitivity choices along with the tactful use of framing provides the journalists pretext to solidify the discourse of “Islam and Terror” (Said, 2003) which is contrasted alongside the parallel discourse of U.S. civilizing Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Corruption and Acquisitiveness

Motifs of corruption, greed and acquisitiveness attached to Pakistan are strewn in the U.S. media’s discourses about CPEC which is typical of the way the so-called disciplined and sophisticated Occident looks at the wild and unprincipled Orient. NYT journalist positions China’s president Xi Jinping as Actor laden with “tens of billions of dollars” to visit Pakistan. He views this visit as a gesture (Sayer) announcing the decline of U.S. power over Pakistan.

“China’s president, Xi Jinping, (A-) travels (Pr: Material) to Pakistan (Circ: Location) on Monday (Circ: Location) laden with tens of billions of dollars in infrastructure and energy assistance (-ctor) // a gesture (Sayer) likely to confirm (Pr: Verbal) the decline of American influence (Verbiage) in that nation (Circ: Location).”

The analysis above indicates the biased and orientalist mental model of the journalist who views Pakistan as an opportunist nation changing loyalties and doing the biddings of those who offer more material benefits.

Similar choices have been made by the journalist of WP in talking about China's planned infrastructure investment in CPEC. President Xi Jinping positioned as Actor has been depicted to have brought "real gifts: an eye-popping \$46 billion worth of planned energy and infrastructure investment" (Goal). The Goal choice "an eye-popping" gift is meant to highlight the significance Pakistan attaches to money and material gains.

"Xi (Actor) arrived (Pr: Material) in Islamabad (Circ: Location) on Monday (Circ: Location)// bearing (Pr: Material) real gifts: an eye-popping \$46 billion worth of planned energy and infrastructure investment (Goal)."

According to the NPR journalist:

"Pakistan (Goal) is blighted (Pr: Material) by corruption and bad governance (Actor)."

The power in the above clause is provided to "corruption" and "bad governance" that take the role of Actor to rule Pakistan (Goal) depicted as powerless in the hands of these elements.

Incapability and Weakness

Skepticism over Pakistan's ability to provide security to the Chinese project is another reoccurring trope, which is a stereotyped way the capable and efficient Occident looks at the incapable and weak Orient. This thought is evident in the lines below where "security" as Goal seems unattainable by Pakistan.

"There is (Pr: Existential) skepticism (Existent) among diplomats and other observers (Circ: Location) about Pakistan's ability [[to deliver (Pr: Material) security (Goal) to China's project (Circ: Location)]] (Circ: Matter)."

Skepticism over the successful completion of the project has also been indicated in the WP article which has placed the Pakistan army at the Actor's position but its agency is undermined by the choice of process "grappling" which indicates its weakness in overpowering the insurgents.

“Sure, there remain (Pr: Existential) real reasons [[[for one] (Carrier) to be (Pr: Attributive Relational) sceptical (Attribute)]] (Existent). Much of the new construction (Goal) would be done (Pr: Material) in the vast, restive Pakistani province of Baluchistan, [[where (Circ: Location) the army is (Pr:-) still (Circ: Location) grappling (-: Material) with an entrenched separatist insurgency (Circ: Accompaniment)]] (Circ: Location).”

In the lines taken from the NPR article below “A long running separatist insurgency” in Baluchistan has been positioned as Actor in the main clause raising question about “the feasibility of the plan”. The same entity has been used as Goal in the embedded clause which the Army as Actor has been failed to control. As was the case with WP article, here as well, the Pakistan army has been positioned as Actor but its agency has been sabotaged for its failure to affect the Goal.

“The network of roads, railways and pipelines (Actor) will pass (Pr: Material) through Pakistan’s poor Baluchistan province (Circ: Location) // where (Circ: Location) a long-running separatist insurgency, [[which (Goal) the army (Actor) has failed to bring (Pr: Material) under control (Circ: Location)]] (Actor), will raise (Pr: Material) questions (Goal) about the feasibility of the plan (Circ: Matter).”

The ideological construction of a weak and corrupt Orient, provides the Occident an excuse to interfere in its internal affairs and justify its economic and political endeavours in the former’s land to set the things right.

Discussion and Findings

The above analysis reveals significant patterns in how U.S. digital media represents the Muslim world in the context of CPEC. The thematic focus on terrorism, corruption, and the portrayal of incapability illustrates how linguistic strategies reflect and reinforce Orientalist ideologies.

Terrorism and extremism emerge as the most prominent discourses throughout the selected articles. The linguistic choices regarding participants, process types, and circumstances reflect the portrayal of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Uighur Muslim community as breeding grounds for violence, reinforcing the stereotype of the Muslim world as inherently dangerous. In contrast,

specific linguistic strategies have been employed to justify U.S. intervention in these regions under the pretext of civilizing efforts. This aligns with Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, which suggests that Western representations often depict Eastern societies as exotic and in need of intervention. Moreover, framing the U.S. as a benevolent actor attempting to mitigate these threats obscures the complexities of the geopolitical dynamics in the region. Transitivity analysis highlights the power imbalance in the selected texts that position the West/U.S. as active agent exerting control, while Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Uighur Muslims are given either negative agency in active roles or portrayed as passive recipients lacking agency.

The analysis also highlights a recurring theme of corruption and greed, where Pakistan is depicted as a site of financial impropriety. This narrative diminishes the agency of the Pakistani government, portraying it as a passive recipient of Chinese investment due to its economic mismanagement. By framing the CPEC primarily as a conduit for corrupt practices, U.S. media discourses contribute to a broader narrative of Pakistan's incapacity to govern effectively. This portrayal undermines the potential benefits of the CPEC and perpetuates a negative image of Pakistan on the international stage. Additionally, the representation of Pakistan as incapable and weak emphasizes its dependence on external powers for stability and development. The findings align with existing literature (El-Aswad, 2013; Bajuwai, 2024; Wahid, 2024), which critiques how Western narratives often depict non-Western nations, particularly those in the Muslim world, as incompetent and reliant on Western intervention.

The findings of this study have significant implications for media studies, international relations, and public discourse. This research highlights the need for critical media literacy to help individuals recognize and challenge biased media representations and become aware of how ideologies are constructed through subtle linguistic choices. Promoting a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the Muslim world is crucial for fostering intercultural dialogue and promoting tolerance.

Conclusion

This study illustrates how U.S. digital media representations of Muslims, through the strategic use of linguistic choices, reflect and reinforce Orientalist ideologies. Transitivity analysis reveals that participants, processes, and circumstances are selectively framed to construct narratives centered on terrorism, corruption, and incapacity. Material processes often position Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Uighur Muslim community in China as either passive

agents or negatively active participants, associating them with instability and violence. Relational processes have been frequently used to assign negative attributes and identities to Muslims, portraying them as inherently flawed or deficient. Verbal processes solidify these negative perceptions by quoting established organizations and authoritative figures, predominantly Western, to lend credibility to these portrayals. These representations are further contextualized through specific choices in circumstances, reinforcing stereotypes and shaping public perception.

Such representations align with framing theories, which suggest that media narratives emphasize certain aspects while downplaying or omitting others, thereby shaping public perceptions and reinforcing global power imbalances. These framing strategies reveal the ideological biases in U.S. media discourse, which often depict nations in the Muslim world as reliant on external powers for governance and security. This narrative undermines their agency and obscures the developmental potential of initiatives like the CPEC, aligning with findings by Yaqin & Morey (2011) on the perpetuation of reductive and monolithic stereotypes of Muslims. Mamdani's (2004) concept of the "good Muslim, bad Muslim" is evident in the "bad Muslim" trope, which is constructed for those perceived as non-compliant with Western interests, thereby serving broader geopolitical objectives. The study highlights the critical need for a more comprehensive engagement with media narratives, advocating for representations that reflect the diverse realities and strengths of marginalized communities. By challenging the prevailing discourse, it is possible to foster a deeper understanding that promotes equity and respect for the complexities of the Muslim world, ultimately contributing to a more balanced and informed public perception.

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