

Framing Slant of Nepali Print Media about the US during MCC Saga

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This paper examines the United States' image during Millennium challenge Corporation (MCC) in Nepal reflected in three print media outlets in Nepal. News framing of the USA plays the public opinion-making role to the people during mostly debated US's politics and strategy project conceal with economic and development aspects. Explanatory sequential content analysis methods have been applied to scrutinize the contents published from Dec 16, 2021 to March 29, 2022. This study found that the accessibility of US and her initiative in media contents was slightly more negative (35.6%) with a lower percentage of positive tone (34.8%) reflected in news, editorials, opinions, interviews, and remarks related to it. The aspects like sovereignty and politics, economic, and infrastructure & development aspect frames dominated the positive tone where strategic and cultural aspects frames found with negative tone. Based on Entman's media framing theory, the result highlights the four broad image of United States as confronting global power, geopolitical agendas with faithful economic development, supersede national interests of small country, standing as an instrument in divisive and disruptive politic, grappling with cultural identity .

Keywords: Framing, the USA, print media, MCC, content analysis

The five-year agreement with the United States Millennium Challenge Corporation (hereafter MCC) was approved by Nepal's House of Representatives on February 27, 2022. However, it took a fierce battle to pass the accord, the dispute did not end there. The provisions in the agreement (which will supersede Nepal's domestic law and give the United States final audit authority without Nepal's involvement) (MCA-Nepal, 2022) and the overwhelming presence of great power players (Khan & Dawar, 2025) in the Indo-Pacific region have led to growing concerns that Nepali society will be drawn into the military and security entanglements of the US Indo-Pacific strategy. This concern is not unfounded, as the MCC's continued international assistance policies attest and the way it has been discussed during the ratification process, as well as the recent steps taken by the recent Trump administration regarding the MCC, have underscored that it is a more strategic issue than development assistance.

The MCC was first announced in Mexico by President George W. Bush on March 14, 2002, to assist developing countries and to destroy the environment that supports terrorism after the September 11, 2001 Twin Towers attack (Rieffel & Fox, 2008). However, the ultimate objective is to hide the contradictory interests and national colors of US international help while distancing oneself from the problems of traditional aid policies (Nowels, 2004). It was launched as a new channeling system for U.S. foreign assistance to developing countries under Bush's administration's strategy, also called the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) (Parks & Rice, 2013a). According to Tarnoff (2014) and Runde, Milner and Santoro (2017), MCC prioritizes the creation of larger grants, a five-year aid "compact," transformation impact, and development independence. The compact is the main program of MCC, which is an agreement between MCC and a partner country. The United States of America shows the aptitude to identify deficient areas of donation-getting countries and then makes the plan to engage in that area, which explores more chances to flourish the strategic interest with the name of support.

At the time of MCC ratification, the US image was perceived in two ways in Nepal: those supporting and opposing the MCC. These groups including leaders of various political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public. One aspect was that if Nepal joined the MCC without changing any provisions indicate in compact paper, it would contradict Nepal's non-alignment foreign policy as some documents have proven that the MCC is the part of the IPS (Chand, 2021; Roka, 2022). This was reinforced by the IPS 2019 report stating that all investments, whether financial or otherwise, would strengthen national security and military ties (Department of Defence, 2019). The controversy deepened when the US Assistance Secretary of State for South Asia David J. Ranz called the MCC an effort under the Indo-Pacific Strategy (Adhikary, 2022). However, Parks and Rice, (2013b) depicted in their survey report that MCC is the policy and institution reform instrument of the USA in developing countries in regard to corruption

control and fiscal policy than others sector. Whereas domestic stakeholders and actors different narratives make it for national security challenge in Nepal (Adhikary, 2022).

In the context of the world and Nepal, loans and aid have long been provided and received under various projects and characteristics, but have not been very helpful in the national GDP and livelihood of the countries as it depends on the time frame and sustainability of the funded projects (Bhattarai, 2005). However, such aid is framed in different perspectives due to the competition of great powers in the recipient countries. For example, during the Cold War, US aid to Nepal was mainly focused on preventing communist influence from China and the Soviet Union (Khadka, 2000). In addition, Thakuri (2021) had conducted research based on the opinions expressed in English national dailies of Nepal in January 2020 and concluded that a caution approach to superpower involvement in Nepal should be taken. Since, the USA has been presented in different ways at different times, an attempt has been made to fill the gap in the study of what and how the Nepali press has presented this particular subject, and why it has been presented in that way. Because the media has an important role in shaping public opinion and determining the public's perception of any country (Aryal, 2024).

Therefore, there is a study on how the press presented or conducted the debate during the ratification of MCC by the parliament, which was highly debated for and against because of media role in exposing this issue to the public. This research provides insightful findings about how news depictions influence public opinion on sensitive issues like the MCC project and the US image in Nepal. Nepali print media heavily influenced public perception of issues by applying Entman's (1993) functions, locations, and interactions between framing and media bias of framing theory. This study limits closely at three important Nepali newspapers: *Kantipur National Daily* (hereafter KND), *Naya Patrika National Daily* (hereafter NPND), and *Annapurna Post National Daily* (hereafter APND) during the MCC situation, using a method called explanatory sequential content analysis. Additionally, both frequency-based and descriptive methods have been used to examine the content in five areas (sovereignty and politics, economy, infrastructure and development, strategic and culture) to identify the main themes and attitudes in the articles during the MCC ratification period.

Theoretical approach

The concept of framing was introduced by sociologist (Goffman, 1974), which has allowed many scholars in other disciplines to analyze different perspectives, indicating its importance in social science research (Entman, 1993; Gitlin, 1980; Gorp, 2007; Reese, 2007). Framing theory has been useful in examining how the media portrays protests, influencing public perception and conversation (Gitlin, 1980). Several researchers have used framing theory to provide theoretical and empirical ground for studies on various topics, including military interventions (Edy & Meirick, 2007), poverty (Kim et al., 2010), political scandals (Kepplinger et al., 2012), image framing of country (He et al., 2012), political communication (Busby et al., 2018), BRI framing (Sikandar, 2025) among many others.

Scholars in the field of communication, researchers have utilized various approaches to frame research including topic modeling and network analysis (Walter & Ophir, 2019); experiments (Igartua & Cheng, 2009); surveys (Hameleers & Vliegenthart, 2018); interviews (Lecheler et al., 2015); content analyses (He et al., 2012; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2015). Unsurprisingly, framing theory has become the standard way for assessing news stories and is often regarded as the most influential conceptual framework in news media research (Chung et al., 2013; D'Angelo, 2018).

Framing theory was integrated into all stages of the research to provide a full understanding of how framing works to produce media narratives. This allows for a more sophisticated comparison of newspapers' framing efforts, demonstrating the pervasive influence of the media in shaping public opinion. To better understand how these Nepali-language legacy newspapers select and accentuate specific events, this study thoroughly examines NPND, KND, and APND's news coverage of the United States in Nepal while MMC was ratifying a contentious issue in the House of Representatives. Furthermore, in this study, the theoretical foundations of framing theory serve as a platform for investigating how the United States' MCC is covered in Nepali print media.

This research has applied Entman's (1993) four functions of frames theory—problem categorization, causal interpretation, moral judgment, and treatment recommendation—for content analysis. On the basis of this theoretical approach, this study examines coverage of the USA during the MCC discussion in these three newspapers, to detect differences in framing and tone with the primary sources of content. Based on framing theory, the research is organized around the following specific research questions.

- How did a prominent Nepali print daily frame the USA during the MCC ratification process?
- What are the dominant frames in three newspapers' published media content?

- How did article tone compare among the three outlets covering the MCC?
- How did prevalent sourcing compare across newspapers related to the USA and MCC?

Method

This study was applied an explanatory sequential design incorporating content analysis techniques that utilized mixed research approaches to analyze how the news media in Nepal portrayed and framed the United States during the ratification of the MCC (Gaspers & Lang, 2016). Initially, the researchers conducted a quantitative analysis of content published in three Nepali language newspapers: KND, NPND, and APND, from December 16, 2021 to March 29, 2022 (the time of ratification). The MCC was initially signed in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on September 17, 2017, and was later ratified on February 27, 2022. In the second step, researchers conducted an interpretive analysis of content, including five aspects of the frame.

Because of their substantial readership, reputable news reporting and diverse political perspectives, these three outlets were selected. Moreover, the market presence of these three newspapers is paramount due to their accessibility and linguistic style (Kaustubha et al., 2021). A total of 264 items were published in these three newspapers during the research period, including news, editorials, opinions, interviews, and remarks (Golan & Lukito, 2015) on the issue of the US and the MCC. Researchers downloaded data from achieves of these newspapers. Throughout the study period, articles containing the keywords "US," "America," "Millennium Challenge Corporation of the United States," or "MCC with IPS" in the headline, lead, or main text were scanned from the database.

Researchers conducted a census of items for the three papers ($n = 85$ for the NPND; $n = 107$ for the KND; $n = 72$ for the APND) within the framework of MCC ratification time. The contents were coded according to the study protocol using a codebook for content analysis by the researchers. The codebook was pre-tested with a second qualified coder using material from outside the research period (after March 29, 2022) to ensure clarity and comprehensiveness. Researchers categorized the articles according to the study protocol, using a codebook for content analysis. A pre-test was conducted with a second qualified coder using content outside the research period (post-March 29, 2022) to ensure the codebook's clarity and comprehensiveness. Each item was classified according to variables organized into four sections: content categories, framing aspects, sources, and tones. Researchers performed a content analysis on the selected news articles, editorials, opinions, interviews, and remarks after compiling the content from the newspaper archive corpus. This study was guided by Entman's framing theory, which examines how specific attributes dominate the framing of particular issues, rendering them prominent.

This study customized five frames based on the literature. The frameworks for sovereignty and politics, economic initiatives, infrastructure and development, strategy, and culture aspects are all included. Researchers additionally categorized predominant sources: domestic officials (DMO), US officials (USO), international officials (IO), unofficial sources (UO), and document sources (DO). The primary source was the one most frequently referenced in the newspaper articles. If many sources are cited an equal number of times, the first one referenced in the text is designated as the dominant source. The researchers finally categorized the tone of the stories as positive, neutral, and negative, with an image toward the US and MCC.

After coding, researchers tested an intercoder reliability test using a random sample of twenty percent of contents from each media outlet ($n = 17$ NPND, $n = 21$ KND, and $n = 14$ APND). To ensure coding reliability by the researchers, each variable was calculated using Holsti's (1969) formula for simple agreement. The researcher found the reliability scores for the framing subjects, sources, and framing orientation tone to be 0.90, 0.86, and 0.84 respectively, which gives an average score of 0.86.

Results

During the ratification of the Nepal parliament in 2022, 264 articles, about the US and MCC, were collected from the corpus of three famous and prestigious Nepali language newspapers. 'News' content has been published in the highest frequency in these newspapers ($n=264$; News=147, 55.7%), whereas editorials, opinions, interviews, and remarks ($n=7$, 2.7%; $n=56$, 21.2%; $n=6$, 2.3%; and $n=48$, 18.6%) were published respectively (refers figure 1). The overall tone of the three privately owned domestic print media outlets is slightly negative, with a score of -0.01 (refer to Table 1). The result indicated that unofficial sources (UO) and domestic official sources (DMO) had been dominant sources for three newspapers (refer to Table 3).

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Content categories with respect to newspaper and published date (n=264)

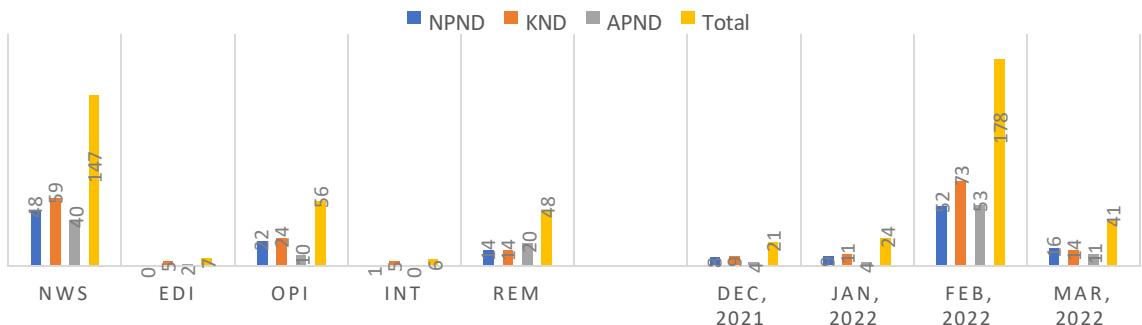


Figure 1 source: Computed from the contents of the print media, 2025. NWS=News; EDI=Editorial; OPI=Opinion; INT=Interview; REM=Remark

a. Tone analysis

Based on the contents presented in newspaper headlines, the negative tone accounted for 35.6 percent, the highest percentage among 264, with a difference of approximately one percent between the negative and positive tone (34.8%)(refer Table 1). Bleich et al. (2018) conducted a headline tone analysis, using the net tone = (positive tone - negative tone)/total headlines, resulting in a net tone range of -1, 0 to +1 (negative, neutral, positive). The sets of headlines exhibit positive, neutral, and negative tones when the results of the net tone analysis fall within the ranges of 0 and +1, 0, and -1, respectively. The contents framed in NPND and KND are negative in net tone (-0.15 and -0.02), while APND has a positive net tone (0.18), respectively. The net tone for the three privately owned domestic print media outlets is slightly negative at -0.01 (refer to Table 1).

Table 1
Net Tone analysis of newspaper contents (n=264)

Tone	NPND (%)	KND (%)	APND (%)	Total %
Positive	28 (10.6%)	37 (14.0%)	30 (10.2%)	92 (34.8%)
Neutral	14 (6.1%)	31 (11.7%)	29 (11.7%)	78 (39.5%)
Negative	43 (15.5%)	39 (14.8%)	13 (5.3%)	94 (35.6%)
Total	85 (32.2%)	107 (40.5%)	72 (27.3%)	264 (100%)
Net Tone	-0.15	-0.02	0.18	-0.01

Source: Computed from the contents of the print media, 2025.

Researchers looked at different themes to evaluate the space and tone of Sovereignty and politics framed content, which made up over half (n=264; SaP=161) at 61 percent, followed by content framed around strategic aspects at 23.1 percent, economic aspects at 10.6 percent, and cultural topics at less than 2 percent (refer to Table 2). The three print media outlets mostly showed a negative view of strategic (-0.39) and cultural (-1) aspects, while the other areas had a positive overall tone. The three print media outlets notably negatively depicted strategic (-0.39) and cultural (-1) dimensions, whereas the remaining components received a favorable net tone rating. Moreover, the chi-square test ($\chi^2=32.18$, $df=8$ $P<0.05$ [0.00008]) indicates a strong correlation between the topic areas and the tones of the three print media outlets. The general subject areas and tones are negative (-0.01), as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

Net tone evaluation in different aspects of contents (n=264)

	SaP (%)	Eco (%)	Inf & Dev (%)	Stg (%)	Cult (%)	Total (%)
Positive	59 (22.3%)	16 (6.1%)	5 (1.9%)	12 (4.5%)	0	92 (34.8%)
Neutral	53 (20.1%)	9 (3.4%)	3 (1.1%)	13 (4.9%)	0	78 (29.5%)
Negative	49 (18.6%)	3 (1.1%)	2 (0.8%)	35 (13.6%)	4 (1.5%)	94 (35.6%)
Total	161 (61.0%)	28 (10.6%)	10 (3.8%)	61 (23.1%)	4 (1.5%)	264 (100%)
Net Tone	0.06	0.46	0.3	-0.39	-1	-0.01

Source: Computed from the contents of the print media, 2025. SaP- Sovereignty and politics; Eco: Economic; Inf & Dev: Infrastructure and development; Stg: Strategic; Cult: Cultural

Sourcing between three mainstream news outlets in Nepal

Another research objective is to compare the leading source of MCC-related mainstream media content in Nepal. The findings show significant discrepancies in the dominating sources throughout the country's news organizations. Unofficial sources (UO) were the most frequently referenced in the three Nepali newspapers (n = 36, 13.6% NPND; n = 57, 21.6% KND; n = 2, 12.1% APND). Notably, KND got the largest percentage of citations from unapproved sources (21.6%). As a result, domestic authorities' sources were used as the second dominating source (n=26, 9.8% NPND; n=30, 11.4% KND; n=28, 10.6% APND). Furthermore, international officials were the third source of content overall (n=25, 9.5%), but KND chose the US official as the third source (n=10, 3.8%). These three newspapers had the scant document sources (n=5, 1.9% NPND; n=1, 0.4% KND; n=3, 1.1% APND) (refer to Table 3).

The utilization of legitimate document sources differed between the three privately held media outlets. The *Naya Patrika National Daily* received the greatest score for document sources (n=5, 1.9% NPND; n=1, 0.4% KND; n=3, 1.1% APND) compared to the *Kantipur National Daily* and the *Annapurna Post National Daily*. Furthermore, KND selected three sources (domestic officials, US officials, and unofficial) with the highest scores, whereas NPND preferred two (international officials and documents), citing information that APND did not name as main pattern sources. Domestic official sources (n=37, positive; n=26, negative; n=21, neutral), US official sources (n=6, positive; n=4, negative; n=1, neutral), and document sources (n=4, positive; n=2, negative; n=3, neutral) cited a positive tone angle, while unofficial sources (n=33, positive; n=47, negative; n=45, neutral) and international officials (n=2, positive; n=15, negative; n=8, neutral) mentioned a negative tone (refer to Table 3).

Table 3
Dominant source of contents (n=264)

		NPND (%)	KND (%)	APND (%)	Total (%)
Source	DMO	26 (9.8%)	30 (11.4%)	28 (10.6%)	84 (31.8%)
	USO	5 (1.9%)	10 (3.8%)	6 (2.3%)	21 (8.0%)
	IO	13 (4.9%)	9 (3.4%)	3 (1.1%)	25 (9.5%)
	UO	36 (13.6%)	57 (21.6%)	32 (12.1%)	125 (47.3%)
	DO	5 (1.9%)	1 (0.4%)	3 (1.1%)	9 (3.4%)
Total		85 (32.2%)	107 (40.5%)	72 (27.3%)	264 (100.0%)

Source: Computed from the contents of the print media, 2025. (Domestic official-DMO; the US official-USO; International Official-IO; Unofficial-UO; Document Source-DO)

Framing the US and MCC: Comparative analysis

The research question analyses about the portrayal of the United States by a major Nepali print media outlet during the MCC ratification period. The three Nepali newspapers often talked about the USA in relation to "sovereignty and politics" (n = 50, 18.9% NPND; n = 67, 25.4% KND; n = 44, 16.7% APND), focusing on topics like "internal party conflicts," the "role of parliament and the speaker," "disputes among coalitions and alliances," sovereignty issues tied to "clauses in the Nepal constitution," "political fragmentation," and the use of both soft and hard power. The second primary framework was the "strategic" (n=22, 8.3% NPND; n=24, 9.1% KND; n=15, 5.7% APND), which emphasized "constraining China," US defense policy, promotion of MCC in parliament, the "new cold war," "China's accession to MCC," and considerable "US pressure." The annulment of the MCC agreement may negatively impact the bilateral relations between the two nations, in addition to the geopolitical consequences of the competitive US-China dynamic, which is essential to the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Moreover, the "economic" frame was used in third place (n=7, 2.7% NPND; n=10, 3.8% KND; n=11, 4.2% APND), while the "infrastructure & development" frame was in fourth place (n=4, 1.5% NPND; n=4, 1.5% KND; n=2, 0.8% APND) in all three media outlets, and the cultural frame was the least used (refer to Table 4). KND allocated the biggest percentages to sovereignty and politics, with 25.4% and 9.1%, respectively, whereas in the economic frame, KND was surpassed by APND by 3.8%. Furthermore, the framing pattern exhibited similarities; yet, the tone of framing varied among those media outlets (refer to figure 2).

Table 4
Comparing Frame of Nepali newspaper (n=264)

	Frame	SaP (%)	Eco (%)	Inf & Dev (%)	Stg (%)	Cult (%)	Total (%)
Total		161 (61%)	28 (10.6%)	10 (3.8%)	61 (23.1%)	4 (1.4%)	264 (100%)
Newspe	NPND	50 (18.9%)	7 (2.7%)	4 (1.5%)	22 (8.3%)	2 (0.8%)	85 (32.2%)
pers	KND	67 (25.4%)	10 (3.8%)	4 (1.5%)	24 (9.1%)	2 (0.8%)	107 (40.5%)
	APND	44 (16.7%)	11 (4.2%)	2 (0.8%)	15 (5.7%)	0 (0%)	72 (27.3%)
Tone	Positive	59 (22.3%)	16 (6.1%)	5 (1.9%)	12 (4.5%)	0	92 (34.8%)
	Neutral	53 (20.1%)	9 (3.4%)	3 (1.1%)	13 (4.9%)	0	78 (29.5%)
	Negative	49 (18.6%)	3 (1.1%)	2 (0.8%)	35 (13.6%)	4 (1.5%)	94 (35.6%)
		$X^2=7.96, df=2, p<0.05 (0.0187)$	$X^2=9.11, df=2, p<0.05 (0.0105)$	$X^2=1.20, df=2, p>0.05 (0.548)$	$X^2=13.76, df=2, p<0.05 (0.0103)$	$X^2=7.23, df=2, p<0.05 (0.0269)$	

Source: Computed from the contents of the print media, 2025. SaP: Sovereignty and politics; Eco: Economic; Inf & Dev: Infrastructure and development; Stg: Strategic; Cult: Cultural

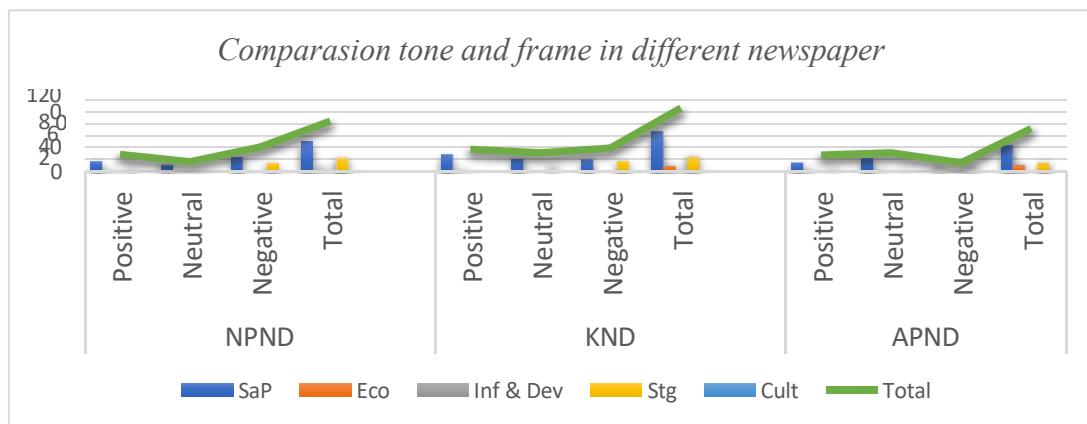


Figure 2: Source: Computed from the contents of the print media, 2025

The numerical data, presented in tables and charts, provides some micro-level insights into the Nepalese major print media's coverage about the USA and MCC during ratification time in 2022, which are seen as fragmented matters of countries' images. Based on the quantitative findings, researchers did an interpretive analysis of all the stories, identifying common themes and giving examples to show how these frameworks work.

Sovereignty and politics aspect

The portrayal of sovereign and politically framed contents were more favorable than that of neutral and negative frames. This framework illustrates the involvement of the USA in the discourse around Nepali politics and sovereignty. The newspaper examined several aspects of political and sovereignty frameworks. Tikaram Bhattarai articulates his viewpoint on the sovereignty challenge entitled "*MCC possessed with partisan interests*" (Feb 7, 2022 KND), which indicates Nepal's sovereignty is at risk from the geopolitical interests of big powers. Similarly, Naya Patrika characterized the situation as an "*unnatural rush to Deuba in MCC*" (Dec 19, 2021 NPND), indicating that the USA and MCC are afforded top priority among coalition partners, devoid of sanctions. It also published an article titled "*Political Trauma Induced by MCC*" (February 13, 2022 KND) by Krishna Khanal on the potential shock to domestic politics, which argues that it compromises Nepal's sovereignty.

The MCC is characterized as an intrusive interference in Nepal's internal policy and a diminishment of its sovereignty. While supporters emphasize economic benefits and strategic alignment with the United States, critics have warned of foreign manipulation, hidden geopolitical objectives, and erosion of national sovereignty. The endeavor to enact the MCC faced persistent delays, intense parliamentary discourse, and ultimately conditional approval accompanied by interpretive declaration. The US claimed that the MCC was a transparent, voluntary grant.

Consequently, Annapurna supported this claim by publishing a party decision under the headline “*MCC is being implemented with everyone's support*” (March 1, 2022 APND) that the Nepali Congress Party's project needed the support of all domestic political stakeholders to benefit. In sum, the political discourse surrounding it amplified suspicions of concealed geopolitical intentions. Newspapers have emphasized the political parties' apprehension regarding the rejection of the MCC and the implications of confronting global powers.

Economic aspect

The United States' involvement in Nepal as an economic initiative has exceeded 75 years. The USA, as Nepal's primary international donor, employs economic assistance with strategic intent. During the MCC ratification period, the project was presented by the Nepali media with a distinct economic perspective. Positive sentiment conveyed a significant proportion of economic content, accounting for 6.1% of the total 10.6% (refer Table 4). This framework has focused the concept of “*tool of corruption*” highlighting both positive and negative dimensions, the impact on private sector, the context of foreign aid, the role in economic assistance, and the anomalies associated with aid. In the economic aspect, these media have highlighted the entanglement of aid in power politics, which challenges then nation's capacity as well as political leaders and the business sector have emphasized that the acceptance of the MCC accord provides substantial opportunities for economic development in Nepal. For examples: *MCC approval motivates private sector* (March 2022 NPND); *That's why MCC is necessary* (Dec 2021 APND); MCC case: illusion and reality (KND, Dec, 2021); *"MCC is not treason"* (Feb 23, 2022 APND MCC caters to the Nepali people, not the leaders (*Fatima Sumar*, Feb 10, 2022 APND). Moreover, it has emphasized to national sovereignty and long-term development objectives, incorporating safeguards like unilateral cancellation in the event of violations of Nepal's laws (Feb 28, 2022 KND).

The MCC accord has faced growing criticism for illustrating the tendency of foreign aid prioritizing elite interests rather than national development. Example: Somat Ghimire noted in “*Foreign aid: a tool of corruption*” (Feb 10, 2022 NPND) that there are growing concerns about the potential misuse of such agreements, which may act as instruments of corruption. The expenditure of four and a half billion on preparations without MCC approval highlights substantial pre-implementation costs that lack legislative authorization, thereby compromising transparency and accountability. In the content “*foreign aid interests*” (Feb 13, 2022 KND), Devendra Raj Pandey argued that the MCC reflects over Nepal's priorities, which raises doubts about whether these projects primarily serve geopolitical agendas instead of faithful economic development.

Infrastructure and Development aspect

A scant number of contents (n=264, Inf & Dev=10) were published regarding the infrastructure and development framework of MCC materials, while exhibiting a positive sentiment of 1.9 per cent out of 3.9 per cent. This framework emphasizes transparency, development, and nationalism, documenting both the overt and covert motivations behind development, connectivity, transmission lines, and road upgrades, highlighting their positive and negative aspects. Media outlets have emphasized it in their content including significance in enhancing Nepal's infrastructure and development, specifically in relation to cross-border transmission lines and domestic road connectivity. For example, in the content title “*MCC must now be implemented*” (March 2, 2022, NPND), it framed the UML as also in favor of immediate implementation. Furthermore, in content like “*Chinese companies may also secure MCC contracts if deemed exemplary*” (March 3, 2022, NPND); *The usefulness of the MCC agreement* (Dec 2021, KND); *What about MCC?* (Feb 2022, APND), etc. highlighted the developmental value of the MCC agreement as its advantages become apparent.

Nonetheless, there has been also opponent views in contents, like “*MCC conditions are still pending; it will take one and a half years to complete*” (March 1, 2022, KND); *Debate on MCC, development, and nationalism* (March 2022, NPND) illustrate the significant gap between implementation and actual progress. MCC remains entrenched in ambiguity, despite its acceptance. Critics contend that rapid actions that are disguised as development could undermine Nepal's sovereignty and long-term interests. The delay prompts questions regarding the balance between anticipated infrastructural benefits and the associated political costs, thereby intensifying nationalist apprehensions that external conditions may supersede national interests under the guise of aid.

Strategic aspect

Given the position of Nepal between rising global powers and different political systems, US engagement in the country is not limited solely to development and economic aspects. Moreover, with the rivalry between the US and China, the US has been trying to expand its presence strategically in Nepal since the 1950s. In light of this, the MCC compact has been reflected in these newspapers as more than simply infrastructure financing; it is part of a larger US policy to promote regional stability and partnership. As “*US says: Nepal's sovereign decision in MCC*” makes clear, ratification was Nepal's independent decision. Despite worries about “*politicization and internationalization*,” the MCC

provides strategic cooperation in crisis response and development, as evidenced by the "MCC response letter" and courteous diplomatic exchanges, which include letters from Deuba and Prachanda.

However, the MCC is increasingly perceived as a geopolitical instrument in the US-China rivalry rather than solely a development grant. For example, the opinion of Lan Jinachu, "MCC: US strategy to contain China" (Feb 17, 2022, NPND cited from *Global Times*), helps to portray the deal as a geopolitical maneuver that risks undermining Nepal's long-standing non-aligned status. Similarly, contents entitle "decisive US pressure to pass MCC" (Feb 11, 2022 NPND); *Nepal and the impact of the new 'Cold War'* (Feb, 2022, NPND); *MCC's whirlwind* (Feb, 2022, KND); *MCC's hook and loop* (Feb, 2022, KND); *MCC power struggle* (Feb, 2022, APND, "US warns of reconsidering Nepal policy if MCC is not approved" (Feb 11, 2022, KND), "MCC in the clutches of partisan intrigue" (Feb 24, 2022 APND) etc. have raised concerns about conditional diplomacy, expense of national autonomy an instrument in divisive, disruptive politics.

Cultural aspect

Culturally, the face of the US in Nepal has not been portrayed positively because of his hegemonic tendency to undervalue developing countries' cultural values. These three newspapers have also given scant contents during the intensive debate about it as cultural aspect. These gave the least (n=264, Cult=4) priority to publishing media content. American society reveals long-term cultural and ideological disputes that transcend national boundaries. Opinion by Binayak Chaturvedi opines that American academic freedom under the influence of the Hindu right wing raises inquiries on the worldwide factors influencing discourse within American universities (Jan 2, 2022, NPND). Furthermore, the headlines "*Racial discrimination: A topic of debate at American universities*" (Feb 27, 2022, KND) emphasizes the ongoing tussle for academic equity, identity, and inclusion. Some unconnected news on the American project emphasizes a country grappling with its changing political and cultural identity.

Discussion and Conclusion

The coverage of this debate by the Nepali print media, particularly concerning the parliamentary ratification of the project in Nepal in 2022, was notably intriguing. After World War II, American involvement in South Asia exposed two aspects: one to curb the ideological spread of nations hostile to the United States and the other to be the in the name of principal democratic development project leader worldwide. Within these two main motives and strategies, the United States has engaged with countries in diverse ways. On September 14, 2017, four months after joining the BRI, Nepal signed an MoU on the United States' MCC project to build a high-voltage transmission line and upgrade roads. There was no discussion about this project during the MoU period. Nonetheless, once some American officials and the Department of Defense admitted that the MCC is a part of the IPS, a controversy over the MCC and the US's image began in 2019 with the motive of the USA's hidden interests.

As of 2025, the media frames focusing on "sovereignty and politics" and "strategic" implications remain relevant, influenced by U.S. policy shifts and local perceptions. As Trump's second term commenced in the United States, a vigorous discourse emerged regarding the suspension of numerous aid programs, including the MCC which is reinforcing previous narratives of U.S. strategic dominance merits (TKP, 2025a, 2025b). A reduction in the MCC's budget for FY 2026 intensified skepticism regarding the stability of U.S. commitments. Despite the resumption of payments in July 2025, Nepali discourse continued to view U.S. actions through the lens of sovereignty and politics, strategic rather than solely on developmental. Opinion pieces in different media framed the resumption not as a stabilization of aid, but as another indication of U.S. strategic maneuvering (Onlinekhabar, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Setopati, 2025). This enduring media framing reflects a deeper structural issue of the U.S. as both a development ally and a geopolitical actor, illustrating how established narratives shape national discourse on sovereignty and corporation. The 2022 ratification discourse in Nepal continues to affect opinions in 2025, demonstrating that established media frameworks have a lasting impact on national narratives regarding sovereignty, reliance, and collaboration. The United States' image as both a development partner and a strategic actor remains central in Nepali media narratives.

Through the Entman's (1993) media frameworks to recognize framing and media bias, this study examined how the United States of America and its contentious aid policy, known as MCC, are represented in Nepal's media, providing a framing analysis of the sentiments expressed by national newspapers regarding MCC. The data show that the Kantipur national newspaper has wider coverage (40.5%) than the Naya Patrika (32.2%) and Annapurna Post (27.3%) newspapers. Furthermore, the study has shown that the "sovereignty and politics" (SaP; n=161, 61%) and "strategic" (Stg; n=61, 23.1%) aspects related contents are main dominant frames of these three newspapers. The study also revealed that cited US-related information as unofficial sources (47.3%) due to the potential for content tampering to cause prejudice. Furthermore, the general net tone was considered slightly negative (-0.01). However, Zhu et al. (2023) notes that research on how news images are presented to influence local views of other countries has mostly been narrow, mainly looking at how positive or negative frames are created and evaluated or examining the image frames used in stories.

The image of the United States has been portrayed in various forms under different circumstances, such as "angel and devil," "coercive democracy proponent," and "unwilling to acknowledge heterogeneity." This framing was particularly evident during Nepal's ratification of US-backed aid programs, as media narratives highlighted Nepal's geopolitical significance while underscoring the precariousness of the current international system. The aid was characterized not merely as economic support but also as a possible instrument for "political meddling" and "fostering domestic instability" instead of promoting democratic principles. As a result, politically neutral intellectuals and civil society have concerned the strategic objectives of the United States. Furthermore, media coverage exhibited political parallelism, generating storylines that favored corporate or ideological interests due to political ties and advertising incentives for their companies. While certain storylines sought to depict American involvement as advantageous for both parties, the dominant media sentiment remained predominantly negative. In the context of the MCC ratification saga, media framing has shaped the perception of the United States in public discourse and policy discussions on aid.

Nevertheless, this study's concentration on domestic outlets and its restricted sample size may limit the global pertinency of its conclusions. Future research could expand upon this technique to examine how media framing strategies influence public perception concerning major powers, especially in politically sensitive contexts. Moreover, research could incorporate additional online media sources, including onlinekhabar.com, ratopati.com, and setopati.com, as well as television discussions, utilizing a larger sample size to furnish a deeper depiction of the United States' engagement as it relates to its positioning between the two major neighbors, China and India.

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