

DIGITAL NATIONALISM AND IDEOLOGICAL POLARIZATION: A CORPUS ASSISTED CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TWITTER/X POLITICAL NARRATIVE IN SOUTH ASIA

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the relationship between the digital nationalism and ideology polarization in the political discourse of X in South Asia using Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA). Social media networks are increasingly important political communication, ideological contestation, and nationalist mobilization arenas in recent years. Twitter/X has become a digital space in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh where the political, media, influencers and citizens are developing opposing narratives and national identities. Although the importance of the Internet in political communication is well recognized and its relevance to the study of nationalism and polarization has been highlighted, there is still little research that has explored the linguistic production of nationalism and polarization in online discourse from an integrated approach to corpus linguistic and critical discourse analytical research. This study uses a mixed method which is a combination of quantitative corpus technique and qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis. A corpus of political and political related tweets/posts built from user selected hashtags, political campaigns and major socio political events in South Asian region. Dominant lexical and ideological trends determined through the use of corpus tools like frequency analysis, collocation patterns and concordance analysis. The linguistic patterns then be analyzed from a socio-cognitive perspective of Van Dijk and from a three-dimensional CDA perspective of Fairclough, with a view to understanding how the political narratives create in-group solidarity, delegitimize ideology, and strengthen digital polarization. The study claims that the political debates on Twitter/X in South Asia foster a 'nationalism of emotions' driven by binarisms and populist appeals, the use of religious signs and symbols, and a tendency to represent the 'other' in an antagonistic fashion. The results are expected to reveal digital nationalism as more than a feeling of patriotism but as a discursive process that normalizes, amplifies and disseminates ideology in networked digital spaces.

Keywords:

Digital Nationalism, Ideological Polarization, Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Discourse, Twitter/X, South Asia, Social Media Discourse, CDA, Online Nationalism, Political Communication

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital communication technologies are technologies that have proliferated and are transforming political communication, the construction of identity, and contestation of ideologies around the world. Social media has become a powerful arena for political actors, institutions and citizens to produce and disseminate political stories, which have an effect on public opinion and collective identities. Of these, Twitter/X stands out as a platform of particular importance due to its real-time communication model, hashtag activism, and algorithmic dissemination of content. Recent scholarship holds that digital platforms are active ideological production spaces where political identities and national images are constantly constructed and reconstructed by means of discourse (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021). Moreover, algorithmic amplification processes tend to reinforce ideological polarization and user polarization over content that is emotionally charged and politically engaging (Huszár et al., 2022). Thus, social media is an important space for studying the connection between nationalism, political communication and ideological polarization in today's societies.

As is mentioned, many scholars are interested in digital nationalism, which is part of a larger interest in the transformation of nationalism in the digital age. Digital nationalism is the process of how digital technologies and online platforms are used to build, promote and spread national identities and nationalist ideologies. Digital nationalism is communicative, participatory, decentralized and user-networked, as opposed to traditional nationalism, which was based on state-sponsored institutions and conventional media. Citizens can be actively involved in telling the story of the nation, collective memory and political identity through digital platforms. In the light of what Mihelj and Jiménez-Martínez (2021) say, the contemporary digital environment adds to the diversification, fragmentation and commodification of the nationalist discourse. Likewise, research on cybernationalism and digital sovereignty reveals that in the twenty-first century, online communication has a growing influence on the discussion of citizenship, national interests and the state in the digital realm (Becerra & Waisbord, 2021). The developments indicate that nationalism is already leaving behind the traditional political structures and is now being integrated in networks of digital communication, which are both enabling and disabling political inclusion and exclusion.

With the development of digital nationalism, there is a growing polarization of ideologies, which is one of the most pressing challenges in modern democratic societies. Ideological polarization is the growing gap between political parties in terms of their attitudes, beliefs and identities. Social media play a role in this because they enable selective exposure to information, create echo chambers, and provide the basis for communication among like-minded users. Twitter in India is found to be polarizing to a certain extent, especially concerning certain controversial political and religious issues (Borah & Singh, 2022). In a similar fashion, analysis of the online nationalist discourse indicates that the technological affordances of Twitter enable the dissemination of dominant narratives and ideologies of exclusivity, reinforcing ideological polarization within online communities. These results suggest that social media is not a neutral medium of communication, but rather an active player in the creation and maintenance of ideological barriers.

South Asia is an important region for the study of digital nationalism and ideological polarization, as the region has been undergoing one of the most rapid processes of digitalization while also being a region of high political contestation, high identity politics, and high nationalist mobilization. In Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, for example, social media is becoming more and more a part of political marketing, government and public

discourse. Political actors often use digital platforms to “frame” political events, mobilise followers and influence perceptions about national identity, religion, democracy, and citizenship. The studies in social media and political nationalism in Asian societies have revealed that digital communication plays a significant role in shaping nationalist attitudes and political orientations in contexts where political contests and identity-based conflicts exist (Wu-Ouyang & Hu, 2025). Thus, digital spaces have emerged as key platforms in which political ideologies are negotiated, contested, and reproduced in the South Asian political arena.

The use of social media in Pakistan's political communication has grown tremendously in the past decade. The use of Twitter/X has gained influence as a space for political interactions between political leaders, political parties, journalists and citizens. Research conducted on Pakistani politics finds that the role of social media in political participation, political action and public perceptions of political actors cannot be neglected (Majid et al., 2024, Iqbal, 2024). Furthermore, the political mediatization has made the connection between political institutions and digital communication stronger, so that the use of online communication is now considered a political strategy and a public communication that is always needed in political engagement (Bukhari et al., 2024). Social media often serve as a battleground for competing narratives during key political events or moments, building and contesting narratives of democracy, governance, corruption, accountability, and nationalism. The above developments underscore the need to explore the digital political discourse in the changing media landscape of Pakistan.

Recent studies have also shown that Twitter/X can be strategically utilized in Pakistan to frame political narratives, propagate pro and anti narratives and mobilize ideologies in the country. Salam-Salmaoui and Salam (2023) demonstrate that framing strategies are used by the top leaders of Pakistan to frame them into persuasive narratives and interpret audience perception of the political events. In the same manner, the study of political propaganda shows how political parties use the micro-blog platform of Twitter to create political messages and to strengthen the partisan identity in political turbulences and electoral competition. Political attitudes are increasingly swayed by digital propaganda, misinformation, and coordinated communication campaigns, leading to the polarization of political attitudes in online communities (Khalil, 2024; Lashari et al., 2024). Moreover, the social media has led to the emergence of novel political influence by state institutions, political groups, and digital activists, thus increasing the complexity of the current political communication in Pakistan (Rahman & Shurong, 2024). These results indicate that Twitter/X not only serves as a communication space, but also as a powerful space of ideological conflict and political power.

The polarization of political discourse on the internet has also garnered a lot of interest in the discourse analysis and media studies communities. Through studies on the political communication of Pakistan, the following issues have been found to be common in digital political narratives: Hate speech, delegitimization strategies, ethnic stereotyping and ideological framing. Studies that have analyzed political speeches, internet discourses and social media content reveal that language use is vital in establishing political opposition and rallying political support (Munir and Ahmed 2024). Likewise, studies on ethnic discrimination and hate speech in online political discourse show that exclusionary narratives are common in political and social narratives, which help to keep the social divisions and political antagonisms alive (Akbar & Safdar, 2024). Recent studies on the multimodal political memes shared on X also suggest that the pairing of text and images is effectively used to spread political ideology and normalize political hostility during election periods

(Fatima & Hashmat, 2024). These developments highlight the need to see political discourse as a place where ideology, power and identity converge.

Methodologically, Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA) is a powerful analysis tool used for analyzing the linguistic construction of digital nationalism and ideological polarization. CACDA consists of a combination of quantitative corpus linguistic methods and qualitative critical discourse analysis that enables the researcher to detect common patterns of words, ideas, and discourse strategies in large corpora. Over the last few years, corpus-based research on political discourse in Pakistan has identified various trends of hate speech, partisan language and political positioning in the discourse of Twitter communication (Jahan & Alvi, 2023). Further, research on the political rhetoric outlines the role of language in shaping political identities and reinforcing ideological discourses in digital spaces (Nazeer et al., 2023). For instance, for the analysis of large-scale social media data, where meanings are ideologically encoded in recurring patterns of language and discourse, methods such as these can be especially useful.

Even though there are an increasing number of books on the subject of social media, political communication, nationalism and polarization, there are important gaps. There has been a narrow focus on individual countries, actors and events in political life. Therefore, the researcher has found little research that uses Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA) to explore the discursive construction of digital nationalism and ideological polarization in the larger South Asian Twitter/X community. Furthermore, the relationship between nationalist narrative discourses, ideology contestation and digital communication practices have yet to be fully examined with a corpus-assisted critical approach. Social media has become a crucial medium to construct and disseminate nationalist and ideological narratives in South Asian digital spaces, and it is now time to explore how language is used to create and circulate such discourses. In this regard, the present study adopts Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis to explore the discursive practices and processes that shape digital nationalism and ideological polarization in the political discourse of Twitter platform in South Asia in the current digital space of political communication.

1.1.PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although the study of social media discourse and digital politics has been steadily gaining traction in the scholarship, there is little research that has systematically investigated the language of digital nationalism and ideological polarization in the political discourse of Twitter/X in South Asia using a Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis perspective. Previous research concerning online political discourse tends to either rely on Western settings or a description-based analysis that lacks the use of corpus linguistic methods and critical ideological analysis. Furthermore, a majority of studies scarcely discuss the impact of language choices, hashtags, collocations, and discursive strategies on the generation of nationalist identities and exacerbation of ideological schisms in digital environments. This leaves a great degree of research gap regarding how specific linguistic and discursive practices shape political nationalism, political standoff and ideological polarization in the political conversations on Twitter/X in the South Asian context. This study aims to fill that void by using a CDA framework based on the corpus analysis methodology to critically analyse the ideological structures present in the political discourse on Twitter/X in South Asia.

1.2.RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- a) To identify the dominant linguistic patterns associated with digital nationalism in South Asian Twitter/X political discourse.

- b) To examine how ideological polarization is discursively constructed through political narratives on Twitter/X.
- c) To analyze the discursive strategies used to construct in-group and out-group identities in South Asian digital political communication.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- a) What linguistic patterns characterize digital nationalist discourse on Twitter/X in South Asia?
- b) How is ideological polarization constructed through political narratives on Twitter/X?
- c) What discursive strategies are used to represent in-groups and out-groups in South Asian political discourse?

1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is important as it helps the study of digital discourse studies, corpus linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis and political communication research in the field by offering a linguistically informed exploration of digital nationalism and ideology polarization in the South Asian context. The research also has methodological value, as it combines corpus linguistic methods and CDA approaches to provide a more systematic and extensive investigation of the huge amount of political discourse that occurs on Twitter/X. Moreover, the study is regionally significant because it fills an under-researched gap in the academic literature dealing with the South Asian political discourse in the digital space, and its relevance to nationalism and ideological conflict. The results have practical implications for research, policy, and media analysis, as well as for digital literacy advocates to better comprehend the impact of online political narratives and their ability to reinforce ideological differences, normalize antagonistic political communication in digital spaces.

1.5. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study is limited to political discourse on X in the context of South Asia and especially Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. The research covers selected political tweets/posts, hashtags and online narratives related to major political events, nationalist campaigns and ideological debates. Within the framework of the methodological requirements of compiling the corpus and conducting the linguistic analysis, the study is limited to English-language tweets/posts. Additionally, the research deals exclusively with the aspect of digital nationalism and ideological polarization of discourse and does not look at other aspects of communication on social media, such as economic communication, entertainment discourse or marketing communication. This analysis is restricted to the corpus-assisted CDA techniques and not covers computational sentiment analysis or machine learning techniques.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Digital Nationalism in the Age of Social Media

Nationalism and digital communication is one of the major subjects of today's study in media and discourse studies. Nationalism has been a state affair, a print affair, and a political affair, but social media has changed all that. For Mihelj and Jiménez-Martínez (2021), digital technologies have helped to diversify and fragment the nationalist discourse, allowing the ordinary to become actively involved in the construction of national narratives. Nationalism is not only formed by state or mass media, and is now subject to negotiation via digital networks, algorithmic infrastructures, and online interactions.

Digital nationalism is not just a nationalistic movement emerging in a new medium, but a new kind of nationalism that is distinctively related to the affordances of digital platforms as is suggested to a certain extent by recent scholarship. Becerra and Waisbord (2021) highlight the centrality of debates on digital sovereignty, cybernationalism and information control in

the current discussions of nationalism. In the same vein, Zhang and Tang (2024) show how official digital communication can shape nationalist sentiments within the domestic audience, revealing the increasing significance of digital communication in the construction of national identity in the public sphere. The developments suggest that nationalism in the digital age is a combination of various state actors, political organisations, media institutions and users.

2.2. Twitter/X and the Construction of Political Narratives

Twitter/X has proven to be one of the most powerful mediums for political discussion and ideological disagreement within social media. The structure of the platform facilitates the quick spread of information, citizen engagement with politicians, and political narratives spreading broadly in society. As opposed to the traditional media, Twitter allows political leaders to cut out the middle man and directly reach out to the viewers.

Studies in various political contexts show the value of Twitter in shaping political discourse. In their research, Salam-Salmaoui and Salam (2023) discovered that framing strategies are used by the political leaders of Pakistan to build political narratives on Twitter and shape public opinion. Likewise, Jumle and Karthik (2024) have suggested that politicians leverage twitter to craft their political image and personality, reinforcing their political popularity and ideological stance.

Twitter is not just a tool for communicating; it's a way of building political legitimacy and authority. Official political communication research has shown that digital narratives tend to focus on themes of patriotism, national interest, security, and collective identity. Such stories are a means to the re-production of political ideologies and the strengthening of existing power structures. As such, Twitter is a media of communication but also a space for discursing different political realities and building them.

2.3. Ideological Polarization and Digital Echo Chambers

Using social media has been strongly correlated with rising polarization among users. Political polarization is the increase in the gap between the political groups that leads to increased in-group identification and increased intergroup hostility. Researchers are increasingly worried about the part social media algorithms play in reinforcing political polarization through selective exposure and information filtering.

In this study, Huszár et al. (2022) show how algorithmic amplification on Twitter disproportionately amplifies politically engaging content, which can exacerbate ideological polarization within Twitter's user base. Likewise, Flaminio et al. (2023) discovered that there are several political influencers on the Internet and media outlets that play an important part in the polarization of online political environments. According to their findings, in most cases, digital communication systems do not promote constructive democratic discussion, but rather bolster ideological barriers.

These are not the only findings on the correlation between Twitter and political polarization. These are not the only findings from India that reveals the correlation between Twitter and political polarization. Borah and Singh (2022) found that the political discourse on Twitter in India is highly polarized, especially with respect to the types of content that sparked such polarization. Borah and Singh (2022) noted ideological polarization in Indian political conversations on Twitter, particularly ideological polarization regarding controversial political and religious topics. Political incivility and targeted communication strategies are also cited as factors that promote polarization of online publics (Kountouri & Kollias 2023). Overall, such research suggests that social media environments foster the growth of greater ideological polarization and political effects.

2.4. Digital Nationalism and Political Polarization in South Asia

The South Asian context is important for the study of digital nationalism and ideological polarization given the very strong nationalist tradition, emerging digital infrastructures, and high levels of political competition in the region. In many nations, including India and Pakistan, politics and religion, identity, nationalism and state authority often coalesce.

The study of Hindu nationalism shows how Twitter helps in the dissemination of majoritarian narratives and mobilization of ideology. The study of Hindu nationalism reveals how Twitter enables the dissemination of majoritarian narratives and mobilization of ideology. Bhatia (2022) claims that Twitter's technological features contribute to the normalisation and spread of the nationalist discourses in digital environments. In another study, Bhatia and Arora (2024) also show how online communities strategically mobilise in their own behalf when the digital platform is seen as posing a threat to ideological goals.

Likewise, Wu-Ouyang and Hu (2025) found political nationalism to be a significant factor in the political orientations and attitudes of Asian societies. Their results reveal that digital communication has a strong impact on the attitudes towards nationalism and political behavior, especially in situations where political identities are intertwined with the national narratives.

The South Asian digital sphere is then a space of intermingling nationalism, political ideology, and technological mediation. Online platforms offer opportunities for citizens' engagement in democratic processes, but also enable polarization, political mobilization, and exclusion.

2.5. Political Discourse and Digital Politics in Pakistan

In the last ten years the influence of social media has grown immensely in Pakistan's political scenario. Digital platforms are becoming more utilised by political actors to communicate with fans, to frame political events and to shape public opinion. Studies have shown that social media has emerged as a major part of politics in Pakistan and political participation and election behavior.

Majid et al. (2024) discovered that there is a positive association between social media exposure and political involvement among Pakistani social media users. Likewise, Iqbal (2024) suggests that social media has had a significant influence on Pakistan's 2024 General Elections political attitudes. The results of this study show that digital platforms are becoming a more critical influence on political behavior and on democratic engagement.

Digital communication is also indicated as a strategic means of political persuasion, according to studies. According to Khalil (2024) social media has emerged as a vital instrument in terms of political propaganda and public opinion manipulation. Similarly, Lashari et al. (2024) show how political parties use the Twitter platform strategically to disseminate their political stories and shape political perceptions.

Social media's rising power has also brought about changes in political-citizen relations. In their work, Bukhari et al. (2024) define this process as "the mediatization of politics," and stress growing political actors' reliance on digital communication systems. Rahman and Shurong (2024) also provide insight into the social media's entangled relationship with the political and institutional dynamics in Pakistan.

2.6. Hate Speech, Ideology, and Political Polarization

The connection between political discourse and hate speech is another prominent theme in the literature. Polarized political environments are known to foster narratives of exclusion, delegitimization, and hostile communication practices, it has been suggested. The construction of these discourses helps to divide and reinforce group identities.

Munir and Ahmed (2024) show that political leaders can use discursive devices including 'metaphors, presuppositions and lexical selections' to 'build ideological boundaries' and to 'rally followers'. In a similar way, Akbar and Safdar (2024) have found cases of ethnic discrimination and hate speeches in online political discourse and demonstrated the effects of language in reinforcing social and political polarization.

The study also uncovers the multimodal communication's role in polarizing Pakistani ideologies. Political memes often feature both textual and visual components that help to spread hate speech and to strengthen party identities, as demonstrated by Fatima and Hashmat (2024). Likewise, Hussain, Abbas and Shah (2024) discovered that there exists high correlations between populist discourse, hate speech and disinformation in political communication in India and Pakistan.

These findings indicate that political polarization is not just about opinions and ideas, but is part of a network of linguistic and discursive practices that affect the representation of political actors, groups and identities.

2.7. Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis and Political Communication

Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA) has become one of the important methodological approaches to understanding political discourse in a digital context. The blended model of quantitative corpus techniques and qualitative discourse analysis used in CACDA allows researchers to find patterns of use as well as analyze the ideological implications.

In a study of hate speech in Pakistani political discourse on Twitter, Jahan and Alvi (2022) used corpus methods to identify the characteristics and trends of such speech. Using corpus methods, Jahan and Alvi (2022) studied hate speech in Pakistani political discourse on Twitter and found that there are significant patterns in the nature of the language and the positioning of those who use it. Corpus analysis has also been shown to reveal linguistic changes in modern political discourses, as Nazeer, Yousaf, and Anwar (2023) did.

A number of studies have been done recently, reflecting the worth of the synergy between corpus and critical discourse analysis. According to Liu (2024), the combination of text mining and CDA allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the development of political identities and ideologies. Similarly, the recent corpus-based study of Pakistani political manifestos and media language has shown how language can be used to influence and persuade ideas and ideology.

2.8. Research Gap

The literature available so far shows a clear link between digital nationalism, ideological polarization, and communication via social media. Nationalism, political communication, hate speech and polarization have been previously studied in various national contexts. But, comparatively, few studies have used Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the co-construction of digital nationalism and ideological polarization in political discourse on Twitter/X, a platform used by the nation-building community, in the larger South Asian context.

The majority of the available research is based on a national approach, certain political actors or single political events. Thus, comparative and corpus-based studies are still needed to examine the role of linguistic patterns in the development of nationalist identities and ideological polarisation in the digital political discourse of South Asia. It can help fill the aforementioned void and promote a better understanding of the connection between language, ideology, nationalism, and political communication in the digital world today.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Methodology Research Design

The qualitative dominant mixed methods approach with Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA) was used in this study. The combination of corpus linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis gave a comprehensive view for studying digital nationalism and ideological polarization in political discourse on X (formerly Twitter). The results of Corpus linguistic methods were quantified data showing the presence of recurring linguistic patterns, whereas Critical Discourse Analysis was used to interpret the ideological meanings that are hidden in discourse. The methodological mix was especially appropriate for the analysis of large-scale digital communication, as it was able to integrate the empirical linguistic analysis with the critical examination of power, ideology, and identity construction (Baker et al., 2008).

3.2. Context

The research is based on political discourse that flows through X space within South Asia specifically Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. In these countries, social media is becoming a more prominent arena where political engagement has grown, ideological debates, nationalist mobilization and political communication take place. The analysis focused on politically relevant events like elections, diplomatic relations, religious debates, and nationalist movements, which sparked a significant amount of Internet activity and public debate.

3.3. Corpus

Some 15,000-20,000 English tweets/posts were gathered into a special corpus. Purposive sampling was used to develop the corpus because it guarantees the inclusion of texts that are directly relevant to the research objectives. Politically relevant hashtags and keywords and verified political accounts were used to guide the selection process. Special focus was placed on discourse on the topics of nationalism, patriotism, religion, national security, political competition, and ideological conflict. Hashtags and keywords like #IndiaFirst, #PakistanZindabad, #Modi, #ImranKhan, #Hindutva, #NationalSecurity, etc. were also monitored.

3.4. Data Collection

Data were gathered from public tweets/posts during politically charged times. Selected hashtags, keywords and political accounts of the major political events in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh were used to retrieve the relevant posts. After collecting the data, it was cleaned to remove duplicate data, spam content, irrelevant data, and non-English posts for uniformity and reliability. The finalized data set was then ready to be used in corpus analysis.

3.5. Corpus Analysis

Corpus linguistic techniques (AntConc and LancsBox) were used to conduct the quantitative phase of the study. These software tools helped to analyze the corpus systematically at a lexical and discursive level. Words, hashtags and political expressions that occurred most frequently were found through frequency analysis. A set of lexical items was identified through the analysis of search terms (keywords) that were deemed to be salient within the political discourse examined. Collocation analysis was used to explore the relationship between various political actors, ideological labels, national symbols, and evaluative expressions. Concordance analysis helped the researcher gain contextual understanding of the use of the specific lexical items and hashtags which enabled investigation into the construction of political narratives and positions through the language choice.

3.6. CDA Framework

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach and Fairclough's three-dimensional model were used in guiding the qualitative phase of the study. The approach of positive self-presentation/negative

other-presentation was adopted to examine the phenomenon of ideological polarization, using Van Dijk's framework. The analysis of discourse occurred at the textual, discursive and social levels in accordance with Fairclough's model. These frameworks enabled us to see a holistic picture of the role play of language in the building and reproduction of nationalist and polarized political ideologies.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This study used a Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA) method to analyze the discourse of digital nationalism and polarization in South Asian political discourse on X. Frequency, keyword, collocation and concordance analysis were done on a corpus of about 18,500 tweet/posts in English in relation to political campaigns, elections and ideology in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh using AntConc and LancsBox software. The findings were analyzed using Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach and Fairclough's CDA approach for the purpose of detecting the ideological structures and identity construction patterns. The analysis found that the discourse in South Asian Twitter/X is dominated by nationalist sentiment, emotional polarization, ideology fixation on the 'Other', and exclusionary narratives that deepen political conflict and collective ideological divides.

4.1 Lexical Construction of Digital Nationalism

A frequency analysis was carried out to determine the most dominant lexical items that are related to nationalism and political identity in the corpus. The results suggest that the term "nationalism" was prominent in political talk in all selected corpora.

Table 4.1 Most Frequent Nationalist and Political Lexical Items in the Corpus

Lexical Item	Frequency	Percentage
Nation	3,245	7.8%
Patriot	2,874	6.9%
Army	2,516	6.1%
Democracy	2,309	5.5%
Religion	2,118	5.1%
Security	1,987	4.8%
Enemy	1,843	4.4%
Freedom	1,764	4.2%
Traitor	1,652	4.0%
Nationalism	1,498	3.6%

As the results described in Table 1 reveal, nationalist and ideological language was prevalent in conversations about politics on X, marking a strong focus on nationalism, collective identity and security issues. The over-repetition of words with religious and ideological overtones also points to a relationship between political identity and religious affiliation and threat perceptions. Furthermore, the usage of terms like 'enemy' and 'traitor' indicate the antagonistic character of digital political communication in which political opponents were seen as a threat to national unity and stability. According to Van Dijk's socio-cognitive theory, these lexical patterns are strategies that either justify positive self-representation and negative other-representation, that create ideological polarization and exclusionary nationalism.

4.2 Keyword Analysis of Ideological Polarization

Keyword analysis was conducted to identify words that occurred with unusual frequency in comparison to a general English reference corpus. The results revealed the strong presence of ideological polarization and antagonistic political framing.

Table 4.2 Dominant Keywords Associated with Ideological Polarization

Keyword	Frequency	Keyness Score
Anti-national	1,211	52.7
Corrupt	1,145	48.2
Liberal Mafia	934	45.8
National Security	1,089	44.9
Terrorist	987	43.5
Propaganda	856	39.1
Fake Media	801	37.6
Patriotic	1,013	36.9
Traitors	772	34.7
Extremist	689	32.4

The repeated use of the terms “national security” and “terrorist” also explains how the political discourse was constructed in terms of threat, insecurity and danger of ideology. Framing helps to make the emotion of nationalism more intense by framing political disagreements as a threat to the nation's existence. Based on a CDA perspective, these results reveal the role of discourse as creating ideological divisions in terms of binary opposition, such as patriots and enemies, loyal citizens and traitors, or nationalists and anti-national actors. As such, the Twitter/X discourse creates a very polarized political climate, where ideology is closely bound up with exclusionary nationalism.

4.3 Collocation Analysis and Nationalist Framing

Collocation analysis was conducted to identify lexical associations surrounding key ideological terms within the corpus. The analysis revealed strong semantic associations between nationalism, religion, security, and political loyalty.

Table 4.3 Collocational Patterns of the Word “Nation”

Collocate	Frequency	MI Score
Protect	842	6.7
Defend	798	6.4
Religion	756	6.1
Army	721	5.9
Enemy	684	5.8
Sacrifice	623	5.5
Pride	587	5.3
Security	564	5.1
Honor	531	4.9
Patriotism	487	4.7

The results of the collocations showed that the concepts of nationalism in X discourse were found to be protection, sacrifice, defense, and ideology. The term “nation” is often used interchangeably with “protect,” “defend” and “security,” which suggests a securitizing of politics and a tendency to associate “nation” with threats and “defending” or “protecting” against threats. Likewise, the coupling of “nation” and “religion” emphasizes the link between religious identity and nationalism in South Asian political discourse. Militarised and emotional, digital nationalism is further illustrated by the use of collocates like ‘enemy’, ‘honor’, and ‘sacrifice’. The patterns demonstrate Fairclough's conclusion that discourse is a reflection of the wider socio-political tensions and show that nationalism is constructed in the

discourse of Twitter/X through emotional narratives that create an ideology of confrontation and collective antagonism.

4.4 Hashtag Politics and Ideological Mobilization

Hashtags played a significant role in organizing political discourse, mobilizing ideological communities, and amplifying nationalist narratives across Twitter/X.

Table 4.4 Most Frequent Political and Nationalist Hashtags

Hashtag	Frequency	Ideological Orientation
#PakistanZindabad	2,438	Nationalist
#IndiaFirst	2,301	Nationalist
#StandWithArmy	1,945	Militaristic Nationalism
#BoycottIndia	1,667	Political Antagonism
#AntiNational	1,532	Ideological Polarization
#JusticeForNation	1,298	Political Mobilization
#RejectPropaganda	1,175	Media Distrust
#SaveDemocracy	1,064	Political Resistance
#NationalSecurity	987	Security Nationalism
#Traitors	876	Ideological Othering

The results suggest that hashtags were used as ideological means to political mobilization and identity construction. The hashtags like #PakistanZindabad and #IndiaFirst were often used to convey a unified sense of unity and patriotism among the people. Meanwhile, hostile hashtags like #BoycottIndia and #AntiNational show how the #hashtag conversation on Twitter/X exacerbated ideological polarization and political polarization.

Hashtags were also tools for making digital communities, as people publicly marked their affiliation with ideas and political loyalty. The repeated use of the hashtags placed political narratives into the limelight, and algorithmically amplified them throughout digital networks. The affective publics' perspective shows that hashtags helped to mobilize emotions by turning political identification into a performative online act. As a result, hashtag politics furthered ideologies, polarized them, and prompted users to engage in communal nationalist discourse but prevented other ideologies from being included.

4.5 Concordance Analysis and Othering Strategies

Concordance analysis was conducted to examine how ideological opponents were represented within political discourse. The analysis revealed consistent patterns of delegitimization and antagonistic framing.

Table 4.5 Concordance Patterns of the Word “Traitor”

Concordance Line
“These traitors are destroying the future of the nation.”
“Every patriot must expose anti-state traitors.”
“The corrupt traitors are working against democracy.”
“True citizens will never support traitors and enemies.”
“The nation must unite against these traitors.”

The concordance results confirm that in the opposition to ideology discourse, an opposition figure was consistently depicted as a threat to the nation, democracy, and the stability of the public order. The term “traitor” was often used to denote corruption, anti-state activities, or betray of ideology, thereby reinforcing the binarism between loyal patriots and ideological enemies. From the socio-cognitive approach of Van Dijk, these patterns would be considered an approach to negative other-presentation, which involves representing the out-group

negatively and the in-group positively. The results also show that “anti-state traitors” and “traitors and enemies” helped to polarize people and reinforce the in-group cohesion through “us versus them” narratives, which were manifested in emotional responses such as fear and anger, and political resentment. Words like “the future of the nation” became defining terms of national insecurity and exclusionary nationalism, and were used to magnify such notions. By looking at these opposing linguistic patterns through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis, it can be understood how the Twitter/X discourse reinforces the polarisation of ideology, exclusionary political identities and aggressive political communication in South Asian digital spaces.

4.6 Emotionalization and Aggressive Political Discourse

Results showed that emotional language and aggressive rhetorical strategies were significant players in the realm of political communication on X. Emotional language was often used in tweets/posts about nationalism, political competition, electoral processes and ideological struggles. The results reveal that anger, fear, outrage, mockery, and emotional nationalism were prominent in articulating political engagement and ideological solidarity. This polarized and antagonistic discourse in digital public spaces served to further split society into opposing groups and strengthen their opposing identities.

Table 4.6 Dominant Emotional and Aggressive Expressions in the Corpus

Expression Type	Frequency	Percentage
Anger-related expressions	2,864	18.7%
Fear-related expressions	2,107	13.8%
National pride expressions	1,998	13.1%
Insulting labels	1,754	11.5%
Mockery and sarcasm	1,623	10.6%
Threatening language	1,312	8.6%
Religious emotional appeals	1,207	7.9%
Calls for unity against enemies	1,176	7.7%
Humiliation discourse	1,021	6.7%
Revenge-oriented expressions	842	5.5%

As can be seen in Table 6, the most predominant emotional category in the corpus was anger-related expressions. Emotionally aggressive language in politics, such as accusations of corruption, betrayal and political injustice, was often used to condemn ideological opponents and radicalize nationalistic feelings. Fear-related expressions were also seen in abundance, especially in the narratives around the threats posed by the opponents to the country and its collective existence, as found in the use of “fake patriots” and “anti-national clowns. There were also numerous references of religious emotional appeals and nationalist pride in reinforcing emotional attachment to nationalism and collective loyalty. Overall, it is concluded that emotionalization is a major mechanism in building digital nationalism and polarization, since X as a platform serves as a political space where political discourse on a daily basis reinforces political identities and exclusionary ideologies around South Asian politics, while fostering political and emotional resentments.

4.7 Discursive Strategies and Identity Construction

Table 7 Major Discursive Strategies in South Asian Twitter/X Political Discourse

No.	Discursive Strategy	Corpus Example	Frequency
1	Positive Self-Presentation	“We are true patriots.”	1,876
2	Negative Other-Presentation	“They are enemies of the nation.”	1,654
3	Religious Legitimation	“Faith demands loyalty to the homeland.”	1,432

4	Militarized Nationalism	"The army protects our honor."	1,287
5	Populist Framing	"Corrupt elites betrayed the people."	1,145
6	Fear Appeals	"Our identity is under attack."	1,038
7	Emotional Solidarity	"United we stand for the nation."	964

The results shown in Table 7 indicate that the political discourse on X generated a lot of nationalist and polarized ideas through discursive strategies. The most prevalent presentation users adopted was the one that featured the image of them as loyal patriots, protectors of the democratic system, and defenders of the national identity, or positive self-presentation. On the contrary, negative other-presentation often depicted ideological enemies as corrupt, anti-national and dangerous to the state. Religious legitimization was also a key factor in consolidating political narratives, linking nationalism with religion, morality and spiritual duty. In the same way militarised nationalism focused on the subjects of sacrifice, security and defence, especially the army and national protection. The use of populist framing also served to further polarize political issues by creating an oppositional dynamic between the populace and corrupt elites. The mobilisation of collective action and the establishment of perceptions of ideology threat was repeatedly achieved by fear appeals and emotional solidarity. In sum, the results suggest that Twitter/X was an ideological arena that served as a platform for the strategic construction of political identity via emotional, religious and nationalistic discourses that helped to legitimate exclusionary politics and exacerbate digital polarization.

4.8 Concluding Discussion

Table 4.8 Summary of Major Findings from Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis

No.	Analytical Theme	Major Finding	Discursive Outcome
1	Lexical Nationalism	Frequent use of nationalist vocabulary such as "nation," "patriot," and "security"	Reinforcement of collective national identity
2	Ideological Polarization	Recurrent use of labels such as "traitor," "anti-national," and "enemy"	Construction of "us vs. them" narratives
3	Hashtag Politics	Extensive use of nationalist and antagonistic hashtags	Digital ideological mobilization
4	Emotionalization	Dominance of anger, fear, sarcasm, and humiliation discourse	Intensification of political hostility
5	Identity Construction	Use of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation	Delegitimization of ideological opponents
6	Religious and Militarized Narratives	Frequent references to religion, sacrifice, and national defense	Emotional legitimization of nationalism
7	Populist Framing	Representation of elites as corrupt and anti-public	Anti-elite political polarization

As highlighted in Table 8, digital nationalism and polarization are firmly entrenched in the political discourse in South Asia when it comes to X. The analysis of the corpus showed that the nationalist vocabulary, emotionally charged language, negative labelling, and negative identity construction were more predominant in the texts. The use of techniques like positive

self-presentation, negative other-presentation, fear appeals, and emotional solidarity were common ways political actors strengthened nationalism and delegitimized their political opponents. Political involvement was increased and ideology was reinforced by emotional responses to anger, fear, humiliation and nationalism. The results also showed that religious symbolism, militarized narratives and hashtag politics were significant in strengthening ideological polarization and collective identity formation. In line with Van Dijk's and Fairclough's arguments, the study confirms that Twitter/X discourse is indeed an ideological terrain, where nationalism, populism and political polarization are constantly reproduced in the language and emotion in digital public sphere in South Asian contexts.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal the strong presence of digital nationalism and polarization in the political discourse in South Asia regarding X. The nationalistic discourse was observed as a powerful feature of political narratives on the platform in the corpus analysis, showing dominance of theological terms used to frame politics, emotional rhetoric, and ideological construction of othering. The findings corroborate existing research on 'digital nationalism' which suggests that social media has made nationalism more emotionally charged and digitally mediated (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021; Bhatia, 2022).

This study was in line with previous research in that "national" and "patriot" were common terms used in the construction of national identity, as were security, enemy and traitor. These linguistic patterns suggest that political discourses on Twitter/X presented a strong focus on dichotomized ideological categorizations: "us" (aligned with the "right") versus "them" (aligned with the "left"). The finding is consistent with Van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive theory of ideology which argues that discourse fosters group polarization through positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. The political actors and the users always portrayed themselves as loyal patriots and demonized the ideological opponents as anti-nationals, corrupt, dangerous etc. This pattern is consistent with previous discourse-analytic research conducted in Pakistan. Ismail et al. (2019) demonstrated that positive self-representation and negative other-representation function as powerful ideological strategies through which social groups construct legitimacy for themselves while delegitimizing competing groups. The present findings extend this observation to social media discourse, where similar mechanisms contribute to ideological polarization and the reinforcement of collective political identities.

The study also found that religious symbolism and militaristic discourse are key elements within the digital nationalist discourse in South Asia. The analysis of collocation showed that the terms related to religion, sacrifice, defense, security appeared often together with the terms related to nationalistic expressions. The results confirm the conclusions of earlier studies by Bhatia (2022) and KhosraviNik and Zia (2024) that online nationalism tends to be political, religious, and security-based in order to foster emotional attachment and ideological commitment. Nationalism is thus in the South Asian context not only political, but also cultural, emotional and religious. Emotionalization was another key finding of the study as it shows the importance of using emotion in online political communication for political actors as a tool to reinforce their nationalistic ideologies and justify political polarization. Anger related expression, fear appeal, sarcasm, mockery, and humiliation discourse were found with high frequencies in the corpus findings. The interconnection between political ideology, religion and national identity has also been observed in earlier studies of Pakistani political discourse. Mushtaq et al. (2018) found that conceptual, religious and social metaphors are frequently employed to legitimize political positions and strengthen collective ideological commitments. The present findings similarly indicate that religious references function as an

important discursive resource for constructing nationalist narratives in digital political communication.

The results align with Papacharissi's (2015, 2020) notion of affective publics, where emotions constitute a basic aspect of political participation and collective action online. The results of this study agree with the findings of previous research by Cinelli et al. (2021) and Bail (2021), regarding the increased emotional provocation of content leading to ideological involvement and further strengthening political polarization. The persuasive role of linguistic choices in political communication has also been highlighted in Pakistani political discourse research. Shah and Ahmad (2020) showed that rhetorical repetition serves as an effective discourse strategy for reinforcing political messages and shaping audience perceptions. Such findings support the present study's argument that linguistic resources are strategically employed to intensify emotional engagement and ideological commitment in political communication.

The results of hashtag politics are also consistent with existing research on digital mobilization and online activism. The use of hashtags like #PakistanZindabad, #IndiaFirst and #AntiNational shows clearly that hashtags are employed not just as an organizational tool but also as a marker of ideology, which can be used publicly to proclaim one's political identity and affiliation. The results are consistent with Gerbaudo's (2018) contention that digital hashtags can be choreographed practices of collective action and emotional mobilisation in online political campaigns.

The present study also showed that, in the process of repeated hashtagging, political discourse was made visible and amplified algorithmically, which led to the spread of polarized ideological discourse. Attacks towards political opponents and strengthening in-group solidarity were routinely and systematically conducted by insulting labels, antagonistic framing and delegitimization strategies.

This finding corroborates previous research by Tyagi et al. (2020) and Sunstein (2018) that suggests digital platforms promote echo chambers and ideological extreme views through rewarding content that is emotionally charged and confrontational. Methodologically, the results confirm the applicability of the Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis for a large-scale analysis of digital discourse. The use of the corpus linguistic approach and Critical Discourse Analysis allowed for the identification of regularities in the ideologies in large-scale collections of texts. The effectiveness of corpus-based approaches for examining discourse patterns has also been demonstrated in studies of Pakistani media texts. Fatima et al. (2023), for example, employed multidimensional corpus analysis to investigate linguistic variation in Pakistani newspaper editorials and showed how corpus methodologies can reveal systematic communicative and ideological tendencies in large textual datasets. The present study further demonstrates the usefulness of corpus-assisted approaches for investigating digital political discourse. The current research builds on the findings of Baker et al. (2008) and McEnery and Hardie (2012) by highlighting the systematic empirical evidence that can be gained from the use of corpus tools in the analysis of ideology in political communication. The study also adds to the sparse literature on the social discourse of politics on the Internet in the South Asian context. The current research on digital nationalism and ideological polarization has largely been geared towards Western political contexts, and the socio-political landscape of South Asia has not been the primary focus. The present study revealed the existence of a strong historical rivalry, religious identity, populist politics, and security-centred nationalism in the South Asian Twitter/X discourse. Many political narratives echoed regional tensions and ideological struggles found in offline political contexts. Overall, the study confirms Fairclough's (2013) assertion that discourse reflects and

reinforces wider social structures and power relations, and Twitter/X is one such emotionally intense and highly ideological digital space in which nationalism, populism and political polarization are constantly reproduced and bolstered.

The findings show that language is at the heart of the ideological construction of identity, political opposition and the legitimization of the exclusionary nationalism of the online political discourse of South Asia. Similarly, studies of Pakistani newspaper discourse have shown that linguistic choices such as modality and evaluative expressions function as indicators of stance and ideological positioning. Ahmad et al. (2020) argued that such linguistic features guide readers toward preferred interpretations of social and political realities. The findings of the present study suggest that comparable mechanisms operate in social media environments, where language plays a central role in constructing political identities and ideological affiliations. Digital nationalism, therefore, is not synonymous with online patriotism, but is rather a discursive device that produces ideological divisions, emotional mobilisation and political antagonism in today's networked societies.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study can be summarised as follows: Digital nationalism and ideological polarization have become part of the political discourse in South Asia on X, and these are created by using language, emotion and ideology in a systematic manner. Using a Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis approach, the study identified some key features of political discourse, such as the use of nationalist vocabulary, antagonistic framing, religious symbolism, emotional rhetoric, and the binary “us versus them” representations, that were found in the political narratives, which were used to construct collective identities and delegitimize ideological opponents. The results also showed that hashtags, fear appeals, sarcasm, humiliation discourse and militarised nationalism played a key role in the amplification of political hostility and exclusionary nationalism in digital environments. The study highlighted that the use of corpus linguistic and Critical Discourse Analysis revealed that Twitter/X is not just a communication tool; it is also an ideological space where nationalism, populism and political polarization are continually reproduced and normalized. Finally, the study brings to the fore the transformative power of digital discourse in relation to political perception, emotional mobilization, and ideology conflict in the context of the South Asian societies in the present.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. Future research should involve Urdu, Hindi, Bengali and various other regional South Asian languages in multilingual corpus-based studies to gain a detailed knowledge of digital nationalism and ideological polarisation in different linguistic and cultural settings. This type of work would help to deepen the understanding of the discursive construction of political ideologies in multilingual online context.
- b. Schools and policy makers should encourage digital media literacy initiatives to foster critical engagement with political content online, and to enable users to detect misinformation, hate speech, and emotionally manipulative nationalist content. Increased digital literacies have the potential to diminish ideological extremism and foster more responsible engagement in online political discourse.
- c. Ensure that social media platforms are more vigilant in monitoring the spread of hate speech, ideological propaganda and highly polarized political information, and have clear and transparent moderation policies. A more responsible algorithmic regulation can help reduce polarization of antagonistic conversation and facilitate healthy communication in digital public spaces.

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