THE ROLE OF DEEPFAKE POLITICAL VIDEO IN SHAPING IDEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE ON INSTAGRAM

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Abstract
The potential transformation of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen-AI) has reshaped public perception on social media with the emergence of deepfake videos. Such videos have been circulating on social media, questioning the veracity of online content, especially in political media. The present study addresses the existing gap and uses a qualitative approach to critically analyse a highly shared deep fake political video, employing Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model alongside Van Dijk's Ideological Discourse Theory (IDT). By analysing the video's text, visuals, and audience comments, this study uncovers the use of ironic language, the role of pop culture references, gendered metaphors, political labels, and religious markers within a contested ideological context. The findings showed that deepfakes function as ideological texts that reinforce political polarisation and shared resentment, through humour, satire, and cultural beliefs. Moreover, a critical analysis of the fake video's comments section revealed discursive polarisation and identity-based attacks, demonstrating how digital discourse becomes a battleground for narrative construction and resistance. Moving beyond the technological detection of deepfakes, this research offers an interdisciplinary framework to analyse their rhetorical, cultural and ideological implications. It may provide a critical lens for understanding the role of deepfakes and user engagement in shaping sociopolitical discourse in the Pakistani digital context.
Key Words: *Deepfakes, Social Media, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideological Discourse Theory, Narrative Construction.*

1. Introduction

It has been a decade since Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies have been created and shared on digital media platforms, which has led to the widespread emergence and rapid evolution of deepfake content. It has not only affected the digital discourse but also the perception of the public. Deepfake videos, a form of AI that imitates real individuals through realistic simulation, influence and manipulate public opinions (Chesney & Citron, 2019). Consequently, deepfakes are increasingly being used as political propaganda tools, with the potential to affect public perception and manipulate political discourse on a global scale.

Deepfakes use Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) to make hyper-realistic synthetic media like videos, audio, and images for ideological manipulation. Due to a lack of media literacy and awareness of AI-generated content, deepfakes are used as a tool to influence the population of underdeveloped countries. Limited media education leads viewers to accept the manipulated videos as authentic, which makes them vulnerable to emotional manipulation and political misinformation (Caled & Silva, 2022). Although western scholars have multiple research studies based on forensic analysis and ethical ramifications of deepfakes, there has been less attention given to studying the discursive production of deepfake material and its role in shaping sociopolitical discourse in a culturally and politically charged environment such as Pakistan.

These fake videos work as multimodal texts that construct, contest and reinforce political ideologies. They have been rapidly deployed in Pakistan to manipulate political leaders and their

followers to influence their opinions. A significant example is Imran Khan's AI-generated speech, which demonstrates how deepfakes may blur the boundary between reality and fabrication, especially in an atmosphere already replete with political deception (Atif et al., 2024). Another example is the recent ceasefire that happened between two nuclear states, Pakistan and India, where many deepfakes have been circulated on various media platforms.

The current study analyses linguistic and symbolic elements found within deepfakes to provide a rich insight through discourse analysis. Since deepfake videos represent a complex multimodal issue that cannot be addressed by a single theory, therefore, the study combines two theoretical frameworks, Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Van Dijk's Ideological Theory (IDT), to fill this research gap. CDA investigates how language and visuals create meaning. It also focuses on how deepfakes work in social practices, i.e., in online comment sections. Similarly, IDT is employed to discover how the comments of users reflect their ideological positioning, in-group and out-group narratives, and power dynamics, which are part of their daily life communications.

This combined theoretical approach allows for a detailed understanding of how deepfakes function in the Pakistani digital context. It also acts as a powerful tool to shape or resist ideologies and identity performance. Through this discourse analysis, the study explored how deepfakes manipulate both political content and associated comments to create meanings and reveal socio-political concerns in an era of AI digital virality.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite the increasing prevalence of deepfake political videos in the digital landscape of Pakistan, which is highly polarised, there has been limited critical investigation into how these videos affect digital discourse and contribute to misleading information. Existing research lacks discourse-based frameworks, which hinders our knowledge of how deepfakes use language, visuals, and symbolic reactions to influence perspectives and reshape narratives. Deepfakes become potent multimedia tools for ideological manipulation, particularly in a country with low media literacy, where religious and gendered values are deeply embedded, and strong political polarisation.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To analyse the linguistic and multimodal strategies of the chosen deepfake political video to construct ideological meaning.
2. To examine how user-generated responses reflect and reproduce sociopolitical ideologies and discursive power structures in Pakistan's digital discourse.

1.3 Research Gap

Despite increased worldwide interest in deepfake technology and its societal ramifications, less is known about its discursive impact in developing countries like Pakistan, where political instability, digital illiteracy, and ideological divisions are common. Existing research focuses on Western settings and often emphasises technological features (e.g., detection algorithms) but hardly applies language or discourse analysis to deepfakes. There is also a notable lack of empirical study that explores how audiences in Pakistan interpret such media and construct ideological meanings in response. The language and shots in deepfake films are not assessed for their ability to construct, contest, or accept meaning. This study addresses this gap and provides a micro-level analysis of one representative deepfake video by integrating CDA with IDT, providing an interdisciplinary perspective on digital deceit in Pakistan.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study adds new insights by merging CDA with socio-cultural research, resulting in a localised, multidisciplinary viewpoint on digital disinformation. The findings of this study are expected to be valuable for several policymakers on the risks of unchecked AI in politics. For educators and campaigners, the research underscores the urgent need for media literacy. Finally, the study contributes to academic fields such as media studies, political science, sociolinguistics, and CDA.

2. Literature Review

In Pakistan, where political allegiance frequently overlaps with media illiteracy, deepfakes pose a particular threat. However, there are not many research investigations that examine how deepfakes are discursively created and emotionally understood by users. This study identifies the empirical and theoretical gap by utilising critical discourse analysis to comprehend how deepfakes influence user response, ideological framing, media representation and narrative construction.

2.1 Deepfake Technology and Global Political Narratives

Deepfake technology refers to artificial-intelligence-based tools that generate hyper-realistic video and audio simulations, often representing people saying or doing things they never actually did. In global politics, deepfakes have been used to create false narratives involving prominent figures such as Emmanuel Macron, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and Donald Trump (Alanazi & Asif, 2024). Based on this alarming situation, Noor, Malahat, and Noor investigated the social and political impacts of deepfakes in developing nations, highlighting how restricted technological frameworks and media understanding make them more susceptible to disinformation (Noor et al., 2024). Despite the investigation examining geopolitical deepfakes worldwide, these studies do not address discourse-based analysis, i.e., how deepfakes work within discursive structures or construct political meaning in linguistically diverse settings like Pakistan. This discussion provides the quintessential exploration of Pakistan's political landscape in the next section.

2.2 Deepfakes in the Pakistani Political Context

Appel and Prietzel's findings demonstrate that those who are critical thinkers and politically engaged are more likely to recognise deepfakes in political discourse (Appel & Prietzel, 2022). Their research contributes to understanding audience discernment, but it does not explain how deepfakes affect political identity through language or discursive cues. Focusing specifically on Pakistan's socio-political environment, Mumtaz et al. (2025) highlight how deepfakes increase political intolerance and manipulation in Pakistan by spreading emotionally charged misinformation, eroding trust, and reinforcing partisan biases (Mumtaz et al., 2025). Though the study focuses on the political impacts of deepfakes in Pakistan, it does not address how deepfake political videos actively shape ideological discourse through visual and textual interactions in digital spaces

These studies focus on the growing presence of deepfakes in political discourse, but they overlook the role of discourse in shaping ideological viewpoints. The next section, therefore, examines how gender and media representation contribute to the ideological construction.

2.3 Deepfakes, Media Representation and Gendered Disinformation

Media reporting is evident in Pakistan that demonstrates how deepfakes are frequently utilised for political disruption and the gendered discrediting of individuals. Tribune confirmed two high-profile deepfake incidents involving the ISPR chief's deepfake, which stated that the country lost two aircraft during the confrontation with India, demonstrating how fake news can promote

deception amid a crisis (Tribune, 2025). And another widely circulated video of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif as a deepfake depicted him conceding defeat to India (Checker, 2025). These videos are evidence of how deepfakes can lead to misperception and crisis manipulation.

On the domestic front, Dawn News reported a case about AI of Maryam Nawaz and other female politicians, demonstrating how fake news has become weaponised for political abuse and disruption. It stresses its usage in violent and insulting content. The source shows the state's legal response to deepfake threats, indicating their serious impact on Pakistani political discourse. It calls for digital literacy to combat gendered harm (Dawn, 2025a). The issue is not confined to Pakistan only. Dawn News also documented the global proliferation of AI-generated fake information erotica aimed at female politicians, citing examples from Pakistan, the United States, and Europe (Dawn, 2025b). This phenomenon poses a serious threat to women's political engagement and reveals legislative protection gaps across the globe. This documentation frames gendered deepfakes as a transnational challenge.

Despite these reports highlighting the scope of gendered abuse, they often overlook how deepfakes shape gender ideologies or serve discursive roles on digital platforms. The next section explores this ideological dimension through the lens of multimodal discourse studies.

2.4 Ideological Construction and Multimodal Discourse

From a discourse–analytical perspective, deepfakes function as complex multimodal texts that construct power relations and ideological narratives. Mongibello explores how the integration of language, visuals, and audio creates persuasive realities that align with or challenge prevailing political discourses (Mongibello, 2023). This study is relevant as it applies CDA but does not inculcate audience-based emotional analysis in the Pakistani context. Additionally, Glick (2023) studied the framing of deepfake satire, highlighting how digital narratives serve as a form of social critique and computational art (Glick, 2023). While these studies demonstrate narrative construction and visual symbolism, they lack user-level discourse analysis and regional specificity. Brieger (2024) conducted a discourse analysis of feminist discussions on deepfake pornography on online platforms. Her findings reveal how users construct perpetrators and victims, engaging in moral and ideological debates (Brieger, 2024). It suggests media literacy as a solution, but without analysing how discourse and ideology intersect.

2.5 Regional Disinformation and Media Literacy Challenges

Regional media narratives play a significant role in shaping societal perceptions of deepfakes. From a journalistic perspective, Giacomello (2025) discovered that the news exposure of deepfakes has evolved from sensational to moral challenges, misinformation, and discrimination based on gender, highlighting the need for more precise descriptions and collaborative approaches (Giacomello, 2025). It maps media framing but misses how such representations influence the user discourse or ideological polarisation in digital platforms. Moreover, Sunvy et al. (2023) discovered that Pakistani media focuses on fake information dangers, but Bangladeshi and Indian exposure is less threat-focused. This study emphasises how disinformation is disseminated and given legitimacy by the media (Sunvy et al., 2023). It provides regional framing logics, but does not dive into how these messages are interpreted or internalised by the public.

Lundberg and Mozelius (2024) findings revealed that deepfakes pose a serious threat to media credibility, democracy, and individual well-being. The researchers emphasise digital literacy education and source criticism to mitigate the spread of misinformation (Lundberg & Mozelius, 2024). Their study focuses on media literacy, overlooking how discourse and ideology are co-

produced through public interaction with deepfake content. Köbis et al. (2021) further highlighted the challenges of media misjudgment, showing that despite being warned, the participants overestimated their ability to detect deepfakes (Köbis et al., 2021). The study is insightful in revealing the overconfidence of users in fake video detection, but it lacks the examination of how such trust is discursively constructed or ideologically reinforced.

These studies highlight media literacy and institutional approaches, but they tend to overlook how users shape, contest, or reinforce public discourse about deepfakes. The next section addresses this gap by examining the ethical implications.

2.6 Deepfakes, Ethical Challenges and Public Perception

From an ethical viewpoint, Diakopoulos and Johnson's (2021) study revealed how these fake videos affect the political campaign, and the perception of voters questioned the whole electoral integrity. These harms were identified by eight hypothetical scenarios to map ethical risks in the election. The researchers highlighted strategies like media literacy, content moderation, and technological verifications to cope with deepfakes (Diakopoulos & Johnson, 2021). The study raises ethical considerations as it addresses them in the electoral context, but it lacks real-time user reactions of how such content is received and recirculated in digital discourse. Similarly, according to the WITNESS 2020 report, deepfakes are becoming more common and dangerous, particularly for women, endangering societal stability, voting, and media credibility (Witness, 2020). It offers media literacy, strong platform governance and policy recommendations but lacks a discourse-based or audience-centred analysis.

Building upon these concerns, Bashir et al. (2024) discovered that online social networking behaviour correlates with deepfake news spreading amongst Pakistani youth. However, they also discovered that individuals with a solid foundation in media literacy and ethical emotions, such as a sense of humiliation, diminish this risk (BASHIR et al.). It emphasises ethics and awareness, but not how ideology is performed or contested in public discourse.

Although the study highlights key ethical risks and proposes structural responses, it fails to examine how users' discourse actively constructs, negotiates, or challenges the ideological narratives embedded in deepfake content. The final section outlines the specific research gaps the study seeks to address.

2.7 Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature reveals a growing body of research addressing the ethical, technical, political, and representational dimensions of deepfakes. While scholars have explored detection methods, user awareness, media framing, and electoral threats, there remains limited investigation into how deep fakes discursively construct ideology, especially within the South Asian context. Existing studies often emphasise technological analysis or broad perception surveys, frequently overlooking the micro-level interplay between visual language, public discourse, and ideological alignment.

Moreover, despite the growing prevalence of deep fakes in Pakistan's digital media, particularly about gender, political satire, and identity construction, there remains a significant gap in research employing CDA or Van Dijk's IDT to analyse specific deepfake videos and the accompanying user-generated comment discourse.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

This research inculcates a combined theoretical approach based on both CDA and Ideological Discourse Theory. The three-dimensional CDA model developed by Fairclough aids in the study of how language and visual components affect social identities, power dynamics and ideologies.

It not only emphasises the language but also focuses on the social norms and contextual ideas that underlie it (Fairclough, 2013). This theoretical model is applied to examine the role of language in deepfake videos in Pakistan that create political narratives and shape public opinion in Pakistani discourse. The study explicitly reveals how power and socio-politics are communicated, contested or reinforced in digital discourse by analysing both textual elements and discursive practices. Complementing this approach, Van Dijk's Ideological Discourse Theory provides a valuable framework for analysing how discourse sustains and reproduces ideologies, particularly through representations of in-groups and out-groups, identity construction and symbolic power. His model combines cognitive, social, and discursive structures to uncover how our language functions as a vehicle for ideological reproduction (Van Dijk, 2012). The theory assisted the researcher in understanding how political identities such as "Patwari" and "Youthia" are generated, contested, or reinforced in viewers' perceptions, as well as how gendered or moral language reveals more profound socio-political divisions across digital platforms. By implementing both Van Dijk's and Fairclough's theories, the study shows the discursive construction of deepfakes and how they ideologically function and reinforce sociopolitical meanings within Pakistan's digital discourse.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive research approach, using IDT and CDA as theoretical frameworks. It examines a widely shared deepfake political video and the public responses and opinions on it. This helps the researcher closely study how verbal and visual discourse construction are used to spread, create and support political ideas in Pakistan's digital space. A purposeful sampling method is used for the selection of one highly circulated political deepfake video that features famous Pakistani political figures as characters of Marvel/DC. The comments analysed provide a rich insight into audience reception, ideological alignment, and performative identity construction that reflects the discourse event. Discursive themes, intertextual references, lexical choices, and multimodal features are identified through NVivo software. This qualitative coding helps us to understand how discourse functions as a place of ideological struggle and reframing of narratives.

Fairclough's CDA model reveals the linguistic and semiotic construction of political significance within the deepfake video, whereas Van Dijk's IDT adds to this by examining how users engage ideologically through in-group/out-group dynamics, discursive polarisation, and lexical techniques in online comments. When combined, these models provide a nuanced analysis of how deepfakes function as both textual entities and ideological grounds in public discussions.

3.1 NVivo Coding Scheme for Discourse Analysis

To support the analysis of this study, NVivo coding is used, where the parent nodes were based on CDA and Van Dijk's IDT. It allows for a grounded yet theory-driven thematic categorisation. This parent node comprises child nodes, including gendered discourse, meme framing, political alignment, pop culture and satire, and religious framing, which depict the discourse's dynamic of power and character elements.

Table 1: NVivo Coding Framework and Theoretical Alignment

Node Category	Subcategory	Theoretical Implementation
Political Alignment	Pro-Imran, Anti-Nawaz, Anti-Establishment	Van Dijk (IDT)
Gendered Discourse	Sexualised insults, feminisation	Van Dijk + CDA
Meme Framing	Joker, Hulk, and Wonder Woman symbols	CDA
Pop Culture & Satire	Marvel/DC parody, visual metaphors	CDA
Religious Framing	Islamic values, modesty references	CDA + Van Dijk
Group Labelling	Youthia, Patwari, Liberal, Bikao	Van Dijk

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Deepfake Video

The Instagram video, posted on May 1st by @oyezain.xd with the caption "When your nation is in trouble, so you have to carry out this act," is a highly political deepfake that combines national leadership personalities with globally recognisable superhero and villain tropes. The opening phrase refers to a national crisis rhetoric, emphasising urgency, ethical responsibility, and a demand for intervention. The use of high-stakes, emotive language specifically connects the audience with the eye of a national saviour, implying that exceptional (even fantasy) action is required in unusual circumstances.

The video's visuals are reminiscent of the Marvel/DC movie world, making it more appealing to digital youth literacy and Generation Z mock culture. General Asim Munir's transition into Batman places the military institution as the black knight or protector—a symbol of logical, clandestine, and morally just action. In contrast, Maryam Nawaz's portrayal of Wonder Woman depicts the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) as an honourable but exaggerated force. Altaf Hussain's transformation as Hulk evokes sheer anarchy and destructive strength, echoing the Muttahida Qaumi Movement's violent political history. Imran Khan, portrayed as the Joker, is positioned as the chaotic source of discord, reflecting split public opinion on his conservative, anti-authoritarian policies and provocative reports. Meanwhile, Bilawal Bhutto plays Harley Quinn, a sidekick and a source of uncertainty, emphasising the Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) ambiguous ideological boundaries.

The video exemplifies user-generated satire, which thrives in meme culture. Spread via popular hashtags like #marvel, #brainrot, #pakvsind, and #memes, it predominates over clear information in favour of visual spectacle. The information is not simply viewed passively; it is shared, altered, and commented on, demonstrating how collaborative digital culture breaks the distinction between fact, satire, and manipulation. Most of the 1750 responses exhibit a mix of political annoyance, satire, and belief, illustrating an emotionally charged discourse environment in which connection and emotion frequently take precedence over accurate facts.

This deepfake exists amid a larger discursive environment of political disenchantment, official repression, and rumour warfare in Pakistan's digital world. This humour is ideological, not frivolous. By incorporating a critique of politics in superhero humour, the video allows for hidden resistance in an environment where outright criticism is hazardous. The depiction of characters

like Imran Khan as the Joker and Altaf Hussain as the Hulk demonstrates how political identities are recast as pop-cultural emblems with moral undertones, rather than merely as leaders. In addition to reinforcing public antagonism, these portrayals offer the political arena as a performance battlefield, a sort of virtual stage where viral innovation is continuously recasting chaos, good, evil, and order.

Finally, this video serves a purpose other than amusement. This multi-modal discourse artefact is a combination of propaganda, satire, and ideological provocation that reflects and reproduces current ideological disputes in Pakistan. By using CDA, we may see how semiotic decisions (such as conversation, acoustics, and costumes) interact with political identities, power dynamics, and user interaction to create a disputed narrative environment in which algorithmic virality allows fiction and reality to coexist.

Here is a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the Instagram deepfake video's comments.

4.1.1 Discursive Themes in the Comment Section

4.1.1.1 Tone and Setup

The general tone of the discussion is quite casual, performative, and emotionally charged. It is loaded with emojis (😂 💀 🔥), profanity, slang terms, and Roman Urdu words like "*chootiyaaa*", "*bikao insan*", and "*youthiya*". This linguistic style depicts the informal and unmodified method of interaction common to vernacular digital culture. It reflects ideological labelling and public performance of political identity. The conversation is also emotionally intense, from laughter and praise to anger and mockery. For example, cheerful praise like "*Bro, your editing skills deserve a trophy*" coexists with aggressive criticisms like "*Laaanaatt ha apki creation per*," demonstrating the vast range of public emotions and polarised expressions.

4.1.1.2 Symbolic Representation and Political Satire

The video uses political irony by changing policymakers into fictional or comic book characters, like the Joker, Wonder Woman, and Hulk, and frequently exaggerating particular characteristics to mock or degrade them by creating symbolic hyperrealities. Imran Khan is portrayed as the Joker, with an image that varies between praise and mockery. Bilawal Bhutto is depicted as Harley Quinn, as the majority see it as an intimate or demeaning image that invokes sexual derision that is ingrained in queerphobic undertones. Whereas Maryam Nawaz was portrayed as Wonder Woman, a role that is inclined to oversexualisation of women and frequently leads to manipulation or disrespect.

The character action theme allows the audience to interact closely with the villain/superhero depictions in the deepfake video. Some of their responses, like "*Imran Khan is a Superhero, not Joker*", "*Altaf Hussain as Hulk* 😂," and "*Bilawal as Wonder Woman* 😭," vary from aggressive to hilarious. These comments demonstrate how visual analogies shape public perceptions of political roles. These remarks reflect popular reinterpretation and identity negotiation through cultural icons.

Public satire and crude humour are common subjects in the comment domain, where readers make fun of political personalities using exaggerated, offensive, and frequently foul language. Among these are offensive statements such as "*Maryam Nawaz ko India haraam mein bhejo*", "*Imran ki bundd to bachalo pehle*", and "*Gand maray Imran Khan* 😂😂." These words blend political criticism with shock value, insult and satire. A discursive strategy of resistance is shown through the use of vulgarity by mocking power through humour.

Ultimately, irony, memes, and sarcasm are popular forms of conversation in which individuals employ language of parody and criticism to communicate their thoughts. "*Bilawal be like: mujhe q tora* 😭," "*Last one was personal* 😂," "*Batman wants to be Asim Muneer right now* 🔥🔥", and "*Khan sahab py joker suite krta*" are a few examples that combine comedy with criticism in a technologically native political way.

4.1.1.3 Sexualized and Gendered Discourse

The sexual discourse and insult theme emphasises identity-based humiliation and insults. Maryam Nawaz has received inappropriate remarks such as "*Mariam ke boobs juicy hey* 🤣 and "*Maryam hits different* 😍," which are openly represents discursive acts of sexualisation, which is deployed as tool of ideological devaluation. Bilawal Bhutto, on the other hand, was mocked for his alleged feminine traits: "*Bilawal ke Sath to balatkaar hi krdiya Bhai Tum ne* 🤣", and "*Bilawal ko ladki kyu banaya* 😂," demonstrating how sexual orientation makes fun of people.

Moreover, the remarks like "*Maryam* 😍" and "*uff pata tha bahut bade hai uske* 💀 💀" also exemplify a systemic hierarchical framework and sexism. It highlights broader misogynistic norms and supports gendered objectification. Similarly, feminist insults such as "*Billo Rani*" and "*Bilawal Baji*" are used frequently in the comment section. These comments are meant to ridicule his manhood and queer personality to humiliate or stigmatize him.

4.1.1.4 Fan culture, Identity and Ideological Polarisation

Fan culture or hero worship is concerned with glorifying political figures, particularly Imran Khan. Dedicated followers deny the necessity for editing, claiming that "*Imran Khan does not require modifications to be a hero*" and that "*Imran Khan is the only hope of this country*." Idealised loyalty to politics and discursive glorification is evident in these statements, which leads to the mythologising of political leadership.

Victimhood framing emphasises sympathetic remarks about specific political leaders, particularly Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. "*Justice for Bilawal*", "*Billo ko kion tora?*" and "*Bilawal ke sath zyadti hui*" are examples of comments that imply viewers find certain characterisations to be unjust or exaggerated, which elicit empathetic reactions. These statements are counter-discourses that target political figures unfairly.

The feedback shows notable ideological divisiveness, specifically between PTI and PML-N followers, which usually boils down to the dichotomy of "*Patwari*" vs "*Youthiya*". The frequent usage of terminologies like "*Lanti patwari*", "*baghairat,*" and "*lanat*" shows a great deal of animosity and attempts to discredit other groups. It reflects the hyper-polarised nature of Pakistani politics in the digital world.

Pessimistic and doubtful statements about the editor or larger political institutions are part of the conspiratorial and anti-authoritarian theme. Viewers hypothesise about the video's aim, with responses such as "*Lagta hai kisi patwari ne editing ki hai,*" "*I think bilawal Pe Loki ziada acha lagta*", "*Dark Knight movie agar kisi ne dekhi ho to usko pata hoga k sari movie hi joker k gird ghoomti thi aur batman ki wahi hesiyyat thi jo munere mistri ki retirement k baad hogi,*" and "*Batman ko paleed nhi kro,*" indicating suspicion and discursive dissent against perceived state authorities.

4.1.1.5 Religious, Ethnic and Moral Language

Racist remarks indicate discriminatory overtones, showing that these online platforms provide space for discursive otherings. Demeaning statements such as "*Madarsa chaap Cartoon Network*"

and "*Muhajir = Plague*" demonstrate how racial and religious beliefs are turned into weapons in online social humour. Ethno-religious stereotyping is evident in these statements. By claiming that Maryam Nawaz is a Muslim woman who wears modest attire, certain critics support her by claiming moral and religious legitimacy. Statements such as "*Bro, Maryam Nawaz is a Muslim woman…*" and "*She dresses complete clothes…*" demonstrate that religious beliefs are employed to target the AI-generated democracy, illustrating the integration of Islamic ethical principles and contemporary affairs.

4.1.2   Discursive Polarisation and Identity Conflict

Shared allegiances, symbolic violence, and meme warfare have resulted from the video's strong emotional responses. Users typically support their partisan heroes or criticise other people, transforming the discussion area into a conflictual discursive platform. Humour trivialises the ethical weight of deepfakes, normalising online harassment and disinformation under the guise of entertainment. Political identities are weaponised through digital roleplay, with echo chambers reinforcing ideological bias rather than critical thought.

4.1.3   Pop Culture, Multimodality, and Ideological Framework

This deepfake multimodal text combines pop culture with politics by attributing Hollywood phantom personalities to regional politicians. This leads to a unique type of political advertising. For instance, Imran Khan is frequently depicted as an idealised, authoritarian hero using epic analogies such as "Iron Man", "King," or "Spartan,". However, Bilawal Bhutto, Maryam and Altaf Hussain are portrayed as demeaning caricatures, exposing a sarcastic societal disenchantment with their political or personal identities by creating a discursive hierarchy.

The comments demonstrate how deepfake political material serves as both a recreational and a forum for political discussion, frequently encouraging sexism, ethnocentrism, and moral enforcement. A Critical Discourse Analysis technique indicates that the language used in these technological environments is exploited to construct or dismantle ideological narratives, using satire as a double-edged discursive tool both for critique and propaganda.

4.1.4   Discourse Patterns through NVivo Coding: Lexical and Ideological Insights

4.1.4.1 Word Cloud

A word cloud was generated to visualise frequent lexical patterns. These patterns correspond to key discourses of satire, political identity, and populist metaphor. This part captures stop words, hashtags, usernames, and the most common terms that are about ideological identities. These words reflect hilarious sounds and judgmental overtones. The prominence of political characters in the conversation is demonstrated by the names that are often used: Nawaz, Imran, Asim, Altaf, Bilawal, Khan, and Munir. Some examples of highly personal terms like hilarious, genuine, degrading, disregard, worry, and offence emphasise the intense nature of the words. Words that generate debate, such as ISI, army, corruption, Joker, leader, vote, Pakistan, and Batman, imply a combination of popular culture iconography and sociopolitical scepticism.

The prevalence of terms like "funny," "truth," "joker," "corrupt," and "Pakistan" demonstrates the tumultuous interaction between comedy and criticism. Such speech indicates divided ideologies and the emergence of theatrical objection, in which parodies and pop allusions controversy government authority.

Figure 1: Top 50 Frequently Used Words in Deepfake Video Comments

4.1.4.2 NVivo Coding Summary

NVivo-based thematic codification displays an interconnected framework of interpretation throughout the data. The coded structure highlights that internet users actively participate in identification efficiency, political alignment, and rhetorical resistance, rather than being apathetic customers. An interdisciplinary discourse landscape driven by humour, suspicion, and ideological metaphor is created as the distinction between advertising and recreation becomes hazier. This structure enabled the researcher to trace patterns of ideological reproduction, group positioning (in-group/out-group), and narrative framing in the evolving deepfake discourse.

4.2 Ideological Discourse Analysis Using Van Dijk's (IDT) Model

Van Dijk's Ideological Discourse Theory (IDT) gives us the framework to examine how group-based ideology is reproduced through discourse. For this deep fake video and related Instagram user comments, IDT sheds light on the ways that users discursively locate themselves in Pakistan's contested political sphere, most typically through in-group solidarity and out-group demonisation. One such approach is negative other-presentation, as in word choices such as "*chor*," "*kutta*," and "*bikao*" used against political figures perceived to be corrupt or dishonest. These are not mere insults, but are employed for an ideological purpose to delegitimise one's opponents through animalization or criminalisation. This move amplifies in-group solidarity by projecting opponents as morally less righteous.

A second prominent aspect is the feminisation of political leaders along gendered framing. Bilawal Bhutto, for example, is repeatedly feminised by sobriquets such as "*Billo Rani*" and portrayed as a figure of disgrace or queer-coded impropriety. Likewise, word pairings such as "*Imran X Bilawal*" are used to elicit homoerotic mockery, operating as part of a broader heteronormative ideological frame in which gender nonconformity is the object of derision. All of these characteristics illustrate how language reproduces conventional gender hierarchies to assault or debase political opponents. Favourite leaders are shown as heroic figures to show Positive self-presentation. Ideal leaders are presented by users in mythological language, e.g., "*Imran Khan is a superhero, not a Joker.*" This not only favours the leader but, indirectly, also blames others as villains, since it reaffirms ideological dualism.

The viewers also interdiscursively frame political identities with pop culture stars—Imran is Joker, Maryam is Wonder Woman, and Altaf is Hulk. Political narratives are shaped through these cultural representations from global entertainment. This illustrates how Van Dijk's "semantic moves" work (1998, p. 312), as meaning-making comes through association, metaphor, and

presupposition (Van Dijk, 1998). Joker represents chaos, Wonder Woman is mythologised but also eroticized, and Hulk represents menacing unpredictability, all of which signify ideological judgments. In addition, controlling strategies in a specific context, like usage of emojis (😂 💀), tagging (@mentions), and meme formats, are used to invoke ideological alignment, build agreement within a group, or encourage mockery. All these practices are a form of digital in-group signalling, where affective signals (laughter or admiration) convey shared ideological opinion.

Moreover, polarisation is perhaps the most working discursive strategy. The two opposite groups, i.e., "Patwari" (PML-N followers) and "Youthia" (PTI followers), are an example of how viewers use language to discursively construct rigid identities. Terms such as "*Editor Patwari*" are rhetorical figures that are used in sarcasm or humour to discredit media content by attributing it to an oppositional ideological other.

Finally, Van Dijk's theory demonstrates that comment discourse is not just for jokes or being neutral. Instead, it is a platform on which ideological struggles are contested, identities are at stake, and group allegiances are claimed through language by using it strategically. Fairclough's model accounts for how multimodal discourse is constructed in terms of political meaning, whereas Van Dijk's IDT shows how users make sense of those meanings and reproduce them ideologically, especially along the hyperpolarised landscape of Pakistani digital politics.

4.2.1 Affective Discourse and Moral Positioning

The discourse within the comments is filled with affective language, where people use dark jokes to show dissent regarding political leaders and various public events. A meme's forms affect how these concepts are communicated. Emojis such as 😂 or 💀 accompanied by satirical responses portray discourse of ridicule. These expressions serve as ideological acts, positioning the speaker about the power structures being critiqued. Conversely, expressions of anger and outrage are frequently observed, provoked by apparent contempt shown for individuals like Maryam Nawaz or Imran Khan. Derogatory language and intensifiers used by the users to show discontentment, delegitimise political figures through discourse of moral condemnation. These expressions also reproduce a binary political field, framing political authority as either saviours or traitors.

Additionally, there is a moderation in sympathetic or empathetic behaviour, using emojis (😥), primarily directed towards Bilawal Bhutto or Imran Khan's jail punishment. It is evident when individuals briefly suspend sarcasm out of emotive compassion. These cases show the way discursive empathy works through a polite tone without abandoning ideological stakes. Another common attitude is vulgarity and disgust expressed through emoji (🤢), which includes slurs, psychological assaults, and humiliation of the physique, particularly towards feminine or feminised characters. Many comments reflect affective scepticism, a genre of humorous pessimism and institutional mistrust. A significant level of pessimism and mockery is commonly used to criticise the media, official authorities, and the army. Such affective modes act as resistant discourse, where humour simultaneously becomes a coping and critique mechanism.

4.2.2 Identity Politics and Gendered Representation

Male politicians like Bilawal Bhutto are discursively feminised by terms like "*Bhutto ladki hi hai* 😂" and "*Billo harley* 🔥🔥🔥", while others are assigned highly masculine heroic personas, demonstrating the trend of highly masculinised mockery leading to gendered identity construction. As a rhetorical device, sexual orientation can be used to degrade or elevate people according to their views on politics. Religious and moral sentiments are evident in statements that invoke

Islamic principles to criticise or denigrate female depictions. Statements like "*Astaghfirullah*", "*burqa nahi pehna*", and "*Allah ka azab aye*" indicate religious discourse and an ethical crisis regarding societal depictions of women. It also demonstrates the connection between religious conservatism, gender, and politics.

5. Discussion

The study has explored how the selected deepfake video and the related comment section collectively construct political ideologies and reproduce discursive power structures within the Pakistani digital media context. By implementing both CDA and IDT, the findings reveal that deepfakes serve as an interactive ideological artefact where convergence occurs in symbolic meaning, humour and resistance.

Political engagement observed in the comment section has emerged as a new digitised mode on Instagram. These comments expressing dissent are frequently conveyed through humour, parody, and profanity. This exemplifies Van Dijk's ideological enactment concept in daily life discourse. The presence of sarcasm as a political tactic represents a demographic transition, particularly among younger online audiences, who often mask serious criticism and dark humour. The findings reflect that discourse creates social realities through satire and performative language.

The way Bilawal Bhutto and Maryam Nawaz are portrayed shows a power imbalance related to gender. Both political figures have faced gendered and cultural scrutiny, where Maryam is subjected to criticism based on perceived modesty expectations and Bilawal through feminising language. This collectively reveals significant community unease with unconventional gender roles and their implication for authority. These discursive strategies, like othering presentation and in-group out-group representation through gendered ridicule and symbolic humiliation, align with Van Dijk's ideology.

Similarly, the way people either strongly ridicule the armed forces or exalt them through phrases like "*Pak Fauj zindabad"* or "*Lanat ho Asim Munir*" demonstrates the conflict between hilarious pessimism and ambivalent nationalism, exposing a deeply divided perception of national legitimacy and power. Institutional authority is not only challenged but also reinforced through semiotic acts, which align with Fairclough's social practice dimension of discourse.

Moreover, Instagram serves as a participatory stage drawing on Hutchby's 2001 concept of technological affordances, allowing for the rapid development, distribution, and consumption of ideological criticism. However, the discourse remains socially charged, polarised, and ideologically saturated, which supports Van Dijk's framing of discourse, e.g., "patwari" vs "youthia."

The ongoing Patwari versus Youthia conflict illustrates ingrained communal politics. "*Patwari*" (for pro-PMLN fans) and "*Youthia*" (for PTI members) are dualistic designations that contribute to digital polarisation. These ideological markers that the video's creator is a "*patwari*" bolster this ethnic and aggressive narrative, which reinforces Van Dijk's claim that language is an instrument of ideological reinforcement. Similarly, another discursive form of resistance is evident in the comment section, i.e., using profanity is not only a form of laughter but also a means of rebellion. For instance, *"bro what the fuck did u do don't ever match dc or marvel movies character with these bi*tc*🤮"*. As evident in this example, obscenity expresses disagreement with dominant individuals and corporate narratives by enabling emotional outbursts and a form of protest.

Finally, this discourse analysis confirms that deepfakes and their related comment sections function as ideologically performative spaces. They are considered interactive texts that

summarise social conflict, digital resistance, and identity politics. The discussion revealed that discourse is never neutral, even in its satirical form. In fact, it becomes a battleground where legitimacy, power, and opposition are negotiated in a digitally polarised sphere of Pakistan.

6. Limitations

This research focuses on a single publicly accessible deepfake video with political themes, which has gained significant attention on Instagram. It analyses the Urdu-English linguistic content, examining both the textual and visual aspects of the video, including the comments generated by users. The study does not incorporate any survey or interview data and relies solely on publicly available information from social media. To keep the research strictly political, entertainment and non-political deepfakes are omitted.

7. Conclusion and Implications

This study has critically analysed a highly circulated deepfake political video from Pakistan using two theories— Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis and Van Dijk's Ideological Discourse Theory. CDA focuses on how textual, visual, and intertextual cues of the deepfake video shape political meanings. Moreover, Van Dijk's method focused on how users implement the language in the comments to convey their ideological positioning and their socio-political messages. The findings revealed that the AI-generated video blends pop culture references, satire, and symbolic imagery to frame politicians as either saviours or antagonists. This interplay of modes doesn't just entertain or critique; it shows a deeper ideological narrative. This division is reflected in the comments section, where users were encouraging polarised identities, moral framings, promoting nationalism, or ridiculing opponents based on their gender. This eventually shows how online viewers perform and bolster ideological beliefs through common discourse.

The study has both theoretical and methodological implications, which contribute to the burgeoning yet underexplored field of deepfake discourse in the Global South. It highlights that social media platforms not only spread political content, but also provide a platform where ideas interact and identities are constructed. The combined research models led to multimodal analysis within political discourse that offers future studies to compare ideological reactions across various digital platforms and explore user framing shifts across political discourse. As for now, these findings underscore the need for critical media literacy and policy frameworks in societies at high digital risk, places like Pakistan, where humour, technology, and political polarisation converge to reshape public discourse.

8. Ethical Consideration

The study adheres to ethical standards for digital discourse analysis by relying entirely on publicly available data, eliminating any privacy infringement. It includes one political deepfake video and its related user comments. Confidentiality, anonymity, and data privacy are strictly maintained. The study was designed to avoid any harm and reflects reflexivity on the researcher's part regarding gathering and handling politically sensitive and polarised data.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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