

From Pitch to Politics: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Asia Cup 2025 Controversy of Othering on Twitter

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Abstract

The rise of social media has transformed political communication by enabling politicians to engage directly with audiences and construct ideological narratives in real time. This study investigates how political actors construct political positioning through digital discourse during the Asia Cup 2025 controversy. Grounded in Teun A. van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model (2006), with primary analytical focus on the Ideological Square, this study examines how political actors construct positive self-representation and negative other-representation through discourse strategies. Despite growing interest in digital statecraft, limited empirical attention has been paid to how transnational sporting crises are rapidly weaponized as event-driven ideological battlegrounds by political actors on social media.

To address this gap, this study utilizes a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to analyze a precise, targeted dataset of five purposively selected English-language tweets posted by verified political actors from Pakistan and India during the peak controversy period. The micro-level analysis systematically examines key textual parameters: lexicalization, pronoun usage, actor description, evaluative expressions, rhetorical emphasis, and in-group/out-group construction.

Within this limited dataset, the findings suggest that selected political actors contributed to transforming the Asia Cup 2025 controversy from a sporting issue into a site of ideological contestation. Across the selected tweets, these strategies framed politicians as legitimate, patriotic, and morally superior while portraying opponents as dishonest, disloyal, manipulative, or threatening. The study demonstrates that Twitter functions not merely as a platform for communication but as a discursive arena where political identities, nationalism, and ideological polarization are actively constructed. The research contributes to existing scholarship by providing a micro-level discourse analysis of political positioning within an event-driven digital context in South Asia.

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1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has significantly altered the nature of political communication. Unlike traditional media, digital platforms enable political actors to communicate directly with audiences, shape public opinion, and construct ideological narratives without institutional mediation. Among these platforms, Twitter (now X) has emerged as a prominent space where political discourse is produced, circulated, and contested. Political communication on Twitter is characterized by brevity, immediacy, and high audience engagement. These features encourage politicians to rely on strategic linguistic choices to convey ideological meanings and establish political identities. Consequently, political discourse on social media frequently reflects processes of polarization, identity construction, and ideological positioning. The Asia Cup 2025 controversy provides a unique context for

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examining these processes. Although cricket is generally viewed as a sporting activity, matches involving India and Pakistan often carry significant political and symbolic meaning due to the historical tensions between the two countries. The controversy surrounding the trophy presentation ceremony transformed a sporting event into a politically charged issue, generating widespread reactions from political actors across social media platforms. Specifically, the dynamic escalated rapidly when institutional friction between cricket boards was absorbed into state-level geopolitical rhetoric, serving as an immediate proxy for regional dominance and bilateral diplomatic standoff. This study investigates how politicians employed discourse strategies to construct political positioning during the Asia Cup 2025 incident. Although van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model comprises discourse, cognition, and society, the present study primarily employs the Ideological Square as its analytical framework to examine discourse-level ideological positioning in political tweets. By focusing on micro-level discourse features, the research contributes to understanding how ideological meanings are linguistically constructed in digital political communication. While prior literature profoundly covers routine election campaigning or long-term structural conflicts, there is an acute lack of empirical work capturing real-time language management during sudden, event-driven athletic crises in South Asia. This study contributes by addressing this gap to examining how selected political tweets linked a transient sporting event with broader state ideologies and nationalist narratives.

2. Research Objectives

- To examine how the Asia Cup 2025 sporting event is transformed into political discourse for ideological positioning.
- To identify the textual and rhetorical strategies employed by politicians to construct positive self-representation and negative other-representation in political tweets.

3. Research Questions

- In what ways is the Asia Cup 2025 sporting event transformed into political discourse for ideological positioning in political tweets?
- What textual and rhetorical strategies are employed to create positive self-representation and negative other-representation?

4. Literature Review

4.1 Political Discourse on Twitter (X)

The rapid growth of social media has transformed political communication by enabling political actors to communicate directly with citizens, bypass traditional media, and shape public opinion in real time. Among social media platforms, Twitter (now X) has become one of the most influential spaces for political discourse because of its immediacy, interactivity, and wide public reach. Studies have shown that politicians strategically employ tweets to construct political identities, frame public issues, and mobilize ideological support (Enli, 2017; Ott, 2017).

Researchers have also demonstrated that Twitter facilitates ideological polarization through selective language, hashtags, and evaluative expressions. For example, Huzaifa et al. (2025)

found that political hashtags on Twitter contribute to the construction of competing political narratives in Pakistan, while Maurer (2023) argued that social media enables politicians to transform ordinary public events into ideological debates. Similarly, Rehan et al. (2024) reported that increased political engagement on Twitter strengthens ideological polarization among users. Together, these studies indicate that Twitter functions not only as a communication platform but also as a space where political identities and ideological conflicts are actively negotiated. Although these studies establish Twitter/X as an important site of political polarization, they focus mainly on routine political communication, election campaigns, or general ideological narratives. Less attention has been given to how sudden sporting controversies are immediately absorbed into political discourse on Twitter/X.

4.2 Sports, Nationalism, and Political Communication

Previous research has shown that sporting events frequently extend beyond athletic competition and become symbols of nationalism, diplomacy, and political identity. Bandyopadhyay (2018) argues that sport in South Asia has long been connected with national identity and historical conflict, particularly in India–Pakistan relations. Ganguly (2001) similarly explains that sporting encounters between the two countries often reflect broader geopolitical tensions rather than purely athletic rivalry.

Studies focusing on digital communication further demonstrate how politicians use sports to advance political narratives. Mishra et al. (2021) found that athletes' and politicians' social media posts frequently link sporting success with patriotism and national pride. Likewise, Rafi et al. (2023) showed that cricket metaphors are commonly used in Pakistani political discourse to simplify political messages and strengthen ideological appeals. Although these studies establish a close relationship between sport and politics, they primarily examine nationalism or metaphorical language rather than the discourse strategies politicians employ to construct political positioning during a specific sporting controversy. These studies show that cricket can become a symbolic site of nationalism and political identity. However, they do not fully explain the micro-linguistic strategies through which politicians convert a sporting controversy into ideological discourse on social media. This makes Critical Discourse Analysis particularly suitable for the present study.

4.3 van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model and Critical Discourse Analysis

To examine how political meanings are constructed through specific linguistic choices, this study draws on Critical Discourse Analysis. CDA is suitable for the present research because it allows the analysis of how language, ideology, and power operate within political tweets about a sporting controversy. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides an effective framework for examining the relationship between language, ideology, and power. Among CDA approaches, Teun A. van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model (2006) is particularly influential because it explains how discourse reproduces ideological beliefs through cognitive structures and social interaction. Central to the model is the Ideological Square, which proposes that ideological groups emphasize their own positive qualities, emphasize the negative qualities of

opponents, de-emphasize their own weaknesses, and de-emphasize the strengths of opposing groups.

Numerous scholars have applied van Dijk's framework to political communication. Masroor et al. (2019) demonstrated how Pakistani political actors construct ideological polarization on Twitter through positive self-presentation and negative other-representation. Ashraf et al. (2022) similarly found that DG ISPR's Twitter discourse relied heavily on lexicalization, actor description, and evaluative language to reinforce national identity during the Indo–Pakistan conflict. Mehboob and Alvi (2021) extended van Dijk's framework to gender-based hate speech, showing that discourse strategies contribute to ideological discrimination on social media. Collectively, these studies confirm that van Dijk's model is highly effective for identifying ideological meanings embedded in political discourse. Since the present study focuses on linguistic construction rather than cognitive processing or broader social structures, it specifically applies van Dijk's Ideological Square as the principal analytical component of the Socio-Cognitive Model.

4.4 Synthesis and Research Gap

A synthesis of the reviewed literature reveals three major strands of research. First, numerous studies have examined Twitter (X) as a platform for political communication, demonstrating its role in shaping political narratives, ideological polarization, and public opinion (Enli, 2017; Huzaifa et al., 2025; Maurer, 2023; Rehan et al., 2024). These studies establish Twitter as a significant space for political interaction but primarily focus on framing, audience engagement, computational analysis, or political polarization rather than the micro-level linguistic construction of ideological positioning. Second, another body of literature has explored the relationship between sports and nationalism, showing that sporting events, particularly cricket in South Asia, function as powerful symbols of national identity and political expression (Bandyopadhyay, 2018; Mishra et al., 2021; Rafi et al., 2023; Ullah et al., 2021).

However, these studies generally examine sports as a cultural or symbolic phenomenon and pay limited attention to how politicians strategically transform a specific sporting event into political discourse. Third, studies grounded in van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model have successfully demonstrated how discourse constructs ideology through strategies such as positive self-representation and negative other-representation in contexts including military communication, political speeches, and institutional discourse (Masroor et al., 2019; Ashraf et al., 2022; Mehboob & Alvi, 2021). While these studies provide a robust theoretical foundation, they largely investigate relatively stable political contexts rather than sudden, event-driven controversies.

Despite these valuable contributions, few studies combine these three perspectives by examining Twitter-based political discourse, sport-related nationalism, and van Dijk's Ideological Square within the context of a sudden and highly visible sporting controversy such as the Asia Cup 2025 incident. Consequently, there remains limited understanding of how politicians employ discourse-level strategies to politicize a sporting event and construct ideological positioning in real time. Addressing this gap, the present study applies van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model, with particular emphasis on the discourse-level dimension and the

Ideological Square, to analyze how political actors use lexicalization, pronoun usage, actor description, evaluative expressions, rhetorical emphasis, and in-group/out-group construction to transform the Asia Cup 2025 incident into a site of ideological contestation. By integrating these three strands of scholarship, the study extends previous research through a micro-level Critical Discourse Analysis of political positioning in an event-driven digital context.

5. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design and employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its methodological approach. The analysis is guided by Teun A. van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model (2006); however, the study operationalizes only the Ideological Square as its principal analytical framework because the research examines discourse-level ideological positioning rather than cognitive representations or broader social structures.

5.1 Data Source and Collection

The data consist of five English-language tweets posted by political actors during the Asia Cup 2025 controversy. The tweets were collected from the official public X (formerly Twitter) accounts of political actors. To ensure transparency and reproducibility, the selected tweets were documented through publicly accessible links to the original posts on X (formerly Twitter). These links are provided in the Appendix.

5.2 Data Collection and Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was employed because the study aimed to examine tweets that directly addressed the Asia Cup 2025 trophy controversy and demonstrated clear evidence of political positioning. The data collection focused on tweets published between 28 September 2025 and 1 October 2025, the period during which the controversy generated the highest level of political discussion on Twitter (X).

The following strict inclusion selection criteria were applied:

- The tweet had to be directly related to the Asia Cup 2025 controversy.
- The tweet had to be posted by a politician or political office holder.
- The tweet had to contain explicit political commentary or ideological positioning.
- The tweet had to be written in English.
- The tweet had to be publicly available on Twitter (X).

Applying these parameters yielded five tweets that met all textual and structural conditions, forming the complete, focused dataset for this intensive qualitative micro-analysis.

5.3 Rationale for Selecting English-Language Tweets

Only English-language tweets were selected to ensure consistency in linguistic analysis and to avoid potential meaning shifts that may occur during translation. Since the study focuses on discourse features such as lexicalization, evaluative expressions, pronoun usage, and rhetorical

strategies, analyzing the original English texts ensured greater analytical accuracy and comparability across the dataset.

5.4 Coding and Data Analysis Procedure

The selected tweets were analyzed using van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model (2006), particularly the Ideological Square. The systematic analysis followed a rigorous two-stage sequence:

- **Stage 1 (Micro-Level Textual Coding):** Each tweet text was thoroughly interrogated to isolate micro-discourse features: *Lexicalization* (value-laden word choice), *Pronoun usage* (in-group vs. out-group alignment), *Actor description* (attributions assigned to characters), *Evaluative expressions* (qualitative judgements), *Rhetorical emphasis* (intensifiers and structural highlighting), and *In-group/Out-group construction* (demarcating boundaries).
- **Stage 2 (Macro-Level Ideological Interpretation):** These localized features were synthesized into overarching ideological macro-strategies—primarily *delegitimization*, *positive self-presentation*, *victimization*, and *nationalism*. These strategies were then mapped directly to the four quadrants of van Dijk's Ideological Square: emphasizing our good qualities, emphasizing their bad qualities, de-emphasizing our bad qualities, and de-emphasizing their good qualities.

The complete coding and interpretive analysis process was executed manually by a single researcher to maintain uniform stylistic application and framework consistency. To minimize subjective bias and ensure operational reliability, the codebook definitions were systematically re-applied across the entire sample over three independent iterative reviews, verifying that each linguistic label mapped accurately back to van Dijk's structural criteria.

5.4.1 Analytical Focus

Although van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model consists of three interrelated dimensions—discourse, cognition, and society—the present study operationalizes only the Ideological Square as its primary analytical framework. The analysis focuses on discourse-level textual features, including lexicalization, pronoun usage, actor description, evaluative expressions, rhetorical emphasis, and in-group/out-group construction, to examine how ideological positioning is linguistically constructed in political tweets. Cognitive processes and broader societal structures are acknowledged as part of the theoretical model but are not examined directly in this study.

5.5 Delimitation of the Study

This study is strictly delimited to the qualitative textual analysis of five purposively selected tweets posted by verified political actors during the peak phase of the controversy (28 September 2025 to 1 October 2025). It does not track downstream audience engagement data (such as retweets, replies, or metric shares), nor does it account for non-English external sociolinguistic variables across regional sub-continental platforms.

6. Findings

6.1 Overview of Sample Data

Table 6.1 presents a complete inventory of the five English-language tweets selected through purposive sampling for discourse analysis. In accordance with structural clarity for presentation and academic transparency, the dataset is organized below into a scannable, two-column comparative format pairing each political actor with their corresponding discursive content and primary strategies.

Political Actor & Context	Discursive Text & Primary Ideological Framework
Mohsin Naqvi • Pakistan (PCB Chairman / ACC President) • 1 October 2025	Discursive Text Excerpt: <i>India media thrives on lies, not facts. Let me make it absolutely clear: I have done nothing wrong and I have never apologized to the BCCI nor will I ever do so.</i> <i>This fabricated nonsense is nothing but cheap propaganda, aimed only at misleading their own people. Unfortunately, India continues to drag politics into cricket, damaging the very spirit of the game.</i> <i>As ACC President, I was ready to hand over the trophy that very day and I am still ready now. If they truly want it, they are welcome to come to the ACC office and collect it from me.</i> Primary Strategy: Delegitimization, positive self-presentation, and victimization. The tweet uses the lexical items "lies," "nothing wrong," "fabricated nonsense," "cheap propaganda," "misleading their own people," and "drag politics into cricket" to reject the Indian media's narrative, defend the speaker's own credibility, and portray Pakistan as the victim of politically motivated misinformation.
Amit Malviya • India (BJP) • 28 September 2025	Discursive Text Excerpt: <i>"It seems India's stunning win against Pakistan in the Asia Cup final has left Rahul Gandhi and the entire Congress in a comatose state. Just like after #OperationSindoor, when they couldn't bring themselves to congratulate the Indian Army for its stupendous strikes, they now appear to be waiting for permission from Mohsin Naqvi and their other handlers in Pakistan before joining the nation in celebrating the Indian cricket team's success.</i>

Political Actor & Context	Discursive Text & Primary Ideological Framework									
	<i>Put that aside — not even a single social media post from Congress congratulating our national team for thrashing Pakistan thrice in the tournament and bringing the Asia Cup home.</i> <i>Once again, Pakistan, Rahul Gandhi, and Congress find themselves on the same side of the divide.</i> Primary Strategy:Delegitimization, nationalism, and in-group vs. out-group boundary construction.The tweet uses the lexical items"stunning win," "comatose state," "waiting for permission," "handlers in Pakistan," "our national team,"and"same side of the divide" to portray the Congress Party as disloyal to the nation, reinforce nationalist sentiment, and construct a clear ideological boundary between the patriotic in-group and the opposition aligned with the out-group.									
Narendra Modi • India (BJP) • 28September 2025	<table><tr><th>Discursive</th><th>Text</th><th>Excerpt:</th></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td><i>"#OperationSindoor on the games field. Outcome is the same – India wins! Congrats to our cricketers."</i></td></tr><tr><td colspan="3"> Primary Strategy:Performative nationalism and in-group solidification.The tweet uses the lexical items "<i>#OperationSindoor</i>," "<i>India wins</i>," "<i>our cricketers</i>,"and "<i>Outcome is the same</i>" to associate India's cricket victory with military success, reinforce national pride, and strengthen the collective identity of the in-group by portraying sporting achievement as a symbol of national superiority and patriotic unity. </td></tr></table>	Discursive	Text	Excerpt:			<i>"#OperationSindoor on the games field. Outcome is the same – India wins! Congrats to our cricketers."</i>	Primary Strategy:Performative nationalism and in-group solidification.The tweet uses the lexical items "<i>#OperationSindoor</i>," "<i>India wins</i>," "<i>our cricketers</i>,"and "<i>Outcome is the same</i>" to associate India's cricket victory with military success, reinforce national pride, and strengthen the collective identity of the in-group by portraying sporting achievement as a symbol of national superiority and patriotic unity.		
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Mohsin Naqvi • Pakistan • 28 September 2025	Discursive Text Excerpt: <i>"If war was your measure of pride, history already records your humiliating defeats at Pakistan's hands. No cricket match can rewrite that truth. Dragging war into sport only exposes desperation and disgraces the very spirit of the game."</i> Primary Strategy:Counter-narrative construction and delegitimization.The tweet uses the lexical items "<i>humiliating defeats</i>," "<i>cannot rewrite that truth</i>," "<i>dragging war into sport</i>," "<i>desperation</i>,"and"<i>disgraces the very spirit of the game</i>"to challenge									

Political Actor & Context	Discursive Text & Primary Ideological Framework
	India's militarized nationalist narrative, portray the opposing discourse as politically motivated and desperate, and present Pakistan as defending the integrity and true spirit of sport.
Sanjay Raut • India (Shiv Sena UBT) • 29 September 2025	Discursive Text Excerpt: <i>"Just 15 days ago, at the start of the series, they were shaking hands and smiling for photos with Pakistan's minister Mohsin Naqvi. And now? Full-on nationalist drama for the cameras! If patriotism was truly in your blood, you wouldn't have even stepped on the field with Pakistan. Top to bottom — pure theatre, public being played"</i> Primary Strategy: Domestic political positioning and internal delegitimization. The tweet uses "theatre", "drama", "played", "smiling for photos" to criticize the political use of cricket and to challenge the ruling nationalist narrative.

6.2 Structural Analysis of Discourse Strategies

6.2.1 Delegitimization

Delegitimization emerged as the most dominant discourse strategy across the selected tweets. Political actors consistently employed negative lexicalization to undermine the credibility, morality, and legitimacy of opposing actors.

The phrase *"fabricated nonsense"* and accompanying lexical labels such as *"lies"* and *"cheap propaganda"* deployed by Mohsin Naqvi function as delegitimizing language because they do not merely reject the opposing claims; they systematically present the external out-group (Indian media) as fundamentally dishonest, deceptive, and politically compromised. This linguistic maneuver supports the principle of positive self-representation and negative other-representation proposed in van Dijk's Ideological Square, of emphasizing **their bad actions**. Simultaneously, by pairing this with the self-exculpatory phrase *"I have done nothing wrong,"* the speaker implicitly structures his own side as an embodiment of truth and moral rectitude, achieving **positive self-presentation**.

Similarly, Amit Malviya delegitimizes domestic political opponents by explicitly asserting that Congress is *"waiting for permission"* from *"handlers in Pakistan."* The choice of the noun *"handlers"* acts as an aggressive actor description that transforms a legitimate domestic opposition party into an asset of a foreign adversary state. By linguistically tethering domestic

rivals to an out-group antagonist, the tweet emphasizes **their bad qualities** (disloyalty, subversion) while reinforcing the ruling establishment as the exclusive guardian of the nation.

Sanjay Raut's tweet also demonstrates internal delegitimization, but from an oppositional political position. The phrase *"Full-on nationalist drama for the cameras!"* challenges the ruling party's attempt to attach cricket victory to political authority. The lexical choice *"pure theatre"* presents nationalist celebration not as genuine patriotism but as political performance. In terms of van Dijk's Ideological Square, the tweet attempts to emphasize the negative qualities of the ruling political group by portraying it as exploitative, opportunistic, or manipulative, while indirectly presenting the speaker's own position as more democratic, restrained, and ethically responsible.

6.2.2 Positive Self-Presentation

Positive self-presentation was consistently employed to construct the speaker and the in-group as patriotic, responsible, ethical, and morally superior.

Mohsin Naqvi's statement, *"I have done nothing wrong,"* functions as a rhetorical assertion of innocence. The repeated use of the first-person singular pronoun *"I"* reinforces personal credibility and presents the speaker as honest and responsible despite public criticism. This reflects van Dijk's principle of **de-emphasizing our bad qualities** through direct, absolute denial.

In another manifestation, Narendra Modi's tweet, *"India wins! Congrats to our cricketers,"* strategically leverages the first-person plural possessive pronoun *"our."* This pronoun functions to build an expansive, inclusive alignment that binds the political executive, the national athletes, and the civilian populace into a single, unified in-group entity. By celebrating this collective identity, the discourse actively **emphasizes our good qualities** (victory, excellence) and converts athletic achievements into shared political capital.

6.2.3 Victimization

Victimization was used to construct political actors or their respective nations as victims of misinformation, political manipulation, or external hostility.

Mohsin Naqvi's defensive declaration, *"I have done nothing wrong,"* works discursively to cast the speaker as an unfair target of coordinated institutional aggression. By evaluating incoming reports as *"fabricated nonsense,"* the language positions the speaker as an innocent victim of malicious out-group networks. This tactical posture seeks to cultivate regional empathy while automatically positioning the source of the critique as an unprovoked aggressor.

Indirectly, Amit Malviya structures a narrative of collective victimization, implying that the Indian public's authentic celebration of a *"stunning win"* is being subverted and undermined by the unpatriotic behavior of political dissenters. Here, the collective nation is framed as a victim of internal political betrayal, reinforcing the ideological necessity of out-group marginalization.

6.2.4 In-group and Out-group Construction

The analysis demonstrates extensive use of pronouns, actor descriptions, and evaluative language to construct rigid ideological boundaries between competing political groups.

Linguistic markers such as "*our*," "*I*," and "*the nation*" are deployed continuously to carve out a pristine, positive in-group zone. In stark opposition, nominal choices like "*Congress*," "*handlers*," and "*Indian media*" assemble a contaminated out-group zone. This produces a classic, highly polarized "**Us versus Them**" cognitive framework where the in-group retains a monopoly on patriotism and legitimacy, and the out-group is structurally saturated with connotations of hostility, deceit, or treachery. Malviya's deliberate grouping of "*Pakistan, Rahul Gandhi, and Congress*" collapses international borders and domestic political lines into a singular, externalized out-group threat matrix, flawlessly executing van Dijk's dual strategy of **emphasizing our good/their bad**.

6.2.5 Nationalism and Political Positioning

Nationalism functioned as a central ideological resource throughout the dataset, wherein sports were consistently subordinated to state power and sovereignty narratives.

Narendra Modi's deployment of the hashtag *#OperationSindoor* offers an explicit manifestation of this positioning. The hashtag acts as a powerful conceptual military metaphor, mapping the structural characteristics of state security interventions onto an athletic field. By framing a cricket tournament through a militaristic lens, the discourse strips the event of its playful or non-aligned character, transforming the win into an act of geopolitical dominance. This maximizes **emphasizing our good** by casting the in-group as structurally invincible.

Sanjay Raut's tweet introduces a domestic counter-discourse by questioning the political appropriation of cricket. The phrase "*Full-on nationalist drama for the cameras!*" suggests that sporting victory is being converted into a tool of political branding. Unlike Modi's militarized nationalist framing, Raut's discourse attempts to separate cricket from state propaganda and party politics. This creates an internal ideological boundary within Indian political discourse: the ruling side is positioned as exploiting nationalism, while the oppositional voice presents itself as more rational and less politically manipulative. In van Dijk's terms, the tweet reverses the dominant nationalist frame by emphasizing "their bad qualities" within the domestic political field.

Mohsin Naqvi's counter-tweet, "*If war was your measure of pride...*" introduces an explicit counter-narrative designed to expose this metaphorical mapping. Through the evaluative clause "*dragging war into sport only exposes desperation*," Naqvi attempts to flip the Ideological Square. He re-frames the out-group's military metaphor as a moral failure that "*disgraces the very spirit of the game*," trying to claim a position of sporting integrity for the in-group while archiving the out-group under **emphasizing their bad qualities** (politicization, desperation).

7. Discussion

The findings from this small qualitative dataset suggest that, during regional controversies, selected political actors may use digital spaces to move sporting discourse away from neutral athletic commentary and toward political alignment.

7.1 Cricket as a Political Symbol

The transformation of the Asia Cup 2025 trophy controversy into a national security issue highlights that in South Asia, cricket is fundamentally a symbolic extension of the state. Because cricket matches capture massive public attention and prompt intense national identification, political actors utilize these high-emotion intervals to perform statecraft. Rather than engaging with athletic performance, the discourse immediately re-centers on sovereignty, patriotism, and historical rivalry. This establishes that sports crises provide elite actors with a high-visibility platform to perform ideological work, using collective public sentiment to validate state positions or attack local opponents. However, the present study extends this argument by showing how this symbolic relationship is rapidly reproduced through short-form political tweets during an immediate controversy. Similarly, while Ganguly (2001) explains India-Pakistan tensions as part of a broader historical and geopolitical conflict, the present analysis shows how such tensions are condensed into brief digital expressions around cricket.

7.2 Twitter (X) as a Platform for Polarized Political Communication

The structural constraints of Twitter (X)—most notably its emphasis on brevity and immediate engagement—directly shape the stylistic profile of political discourse. The platform rewards compressed, emotionally volatile expressions over complex explanations.

Linguistic formulations analyzed in this study, such as "cheap propaganda" and military metaphors like #OperationSindoor, show how complex geopolitical realities are reduced to short, polarizing soundbites. These markers act as discursive shorthand that rapidly activates pre-existing cultural biases among followers. In this dataset, Twitter/X appears to function as an ideological amplifier by encouraging brief, emotionally charged, and polarizing forms of elite communication. This finding is consistent with Masroor et al. (2019), who found that Pakistani political actors use Twitter to construct ideological polarization through positive self-presentation and negative other-representation. The present study supports this pattern but applies it to an event-driven sporting controversy rather than routine political conflict. It also aligns with Huzaifa et al. (2025) and Rehan et al. (2024), who argue that Twitter/X strengthens competing political narratives and polarization; however, this study shows that such polarization can emerge not only from party politics but also from symbolic sporting incidents.

7.3 Political Positioning in the Context of South Asian Politics

The linguistic positioning observed in this dataset is deeply dependent on the historical, post-colonial anxieties of South Asia, specifically the enduring tensions between India and Pakistan. The ease with which an administrative cricket dispute was re-coded into accusations of military superiority and nationalist dominance shows how deeply embedded these geopolitical frameworks remain.

Crucially, the data reveal that this positioning operates symmetrically across two fronts: external state-level rivalry and internal domestic competition. As seen in the tweets of Malviya and Raut, internal domestic actors exploit external sporting friction to question the patriotism of local rivals. Thus, event-driven digital discourse functions as a dual-use weapon, reinforcing external state borders while simultaneously drawing polarizing lines inside domestic political spaces. This finding corresponds with Ashraf et al. (2022), who showed that Twitter discourse during Indo-Pak conflict relies on lexicalization, actor description, and evaluative language to reinforce national identity. The present study confirms the relevance of these discourse features but differs in context: instead of analyzing an explicitly military or conflict-based situation, it shows how similar ideological strategies appear in discourse surrounding a cricket controversy. This suggests that Indo-Pak political discourse can transfer conflict-based language into sporting contexts.

7.4 Contribution to Digital Discourse Studies

This study advances digital discourse studies by showing how transient, non-political events are rapidly incorporated into state-level ideological systems. While traditional CDA often focuses on static institutional environments like formal speeches or policy documents, this research demonstrates that political polarization is highly agile and event-driven.

By applying van Dijk's Ideological Square to a compressed social media controversy, this analysis provides a clear model of how micro-linguistic choices—such as pronoun shifts, value-laden word choices, and military metaphors—work together to maintain macro-level power relations. It confirms that the Ideological Square within van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model remains highly effective for analyzing the fast-moving, fragmented discourse environments that characterize contemporary digital political communication. This contribution also connects with KhosraviNik's (2017) view that social media requires CDA to pay attention to fragmented, interactive, and rapidly circulating forms of discourse. The present study supports this view by showing how ideological meanings are produced through short tweets, hashtags, and evaluative expressions. It also relates to Zappavigna's (2015) work on hashtags by showing that hashtags such as #OperationSindoor do not simply label an event; they frame the event ideologically and invite audiences to interpret cricket through a militarized national lens.

8. Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers detailed insights into event-driven political positioning, it contains clear boundaries that warrant acknowledgment. First, the qualitative dataset is explicitly delimited to five purposively selected tweets, which restricts the capacity to map the wider, multi-layered public conversation surrounding the Asia Cup 2025. Second, by restricting the scope to English-language data, the analysis omits significant vernacular political discourse occurring in Urdu, Hindi, and Pashto, which may contain different linguistic strategies and styles of political positioning. Third, this study focuses strictly on text production by political elites, leaving downstream audience reception, comments, quote tweets, and algorithmic circulation unexamined.

Future research should address these limitations by constructing large-scale, multilingual datasets that incorporate vernacular social media text. Additionally, combining qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis with quantitative computational methods, such as sentiment tracking and network analysis, would provide a more comprehensive view of how polarized discourse spreads and is negotiated by digital audiences across South Asia.

9. Conclusion

This study suggests that the selected political actors used Twitter/X discourse to frame the Asia Cup 2025 controversy as more than a sporting event, turning it into a politically charged discursive space. Through lexicalization, pronoun usage, evaluative expressions, actor description, and rhetorical emphasis, politicians constructed ideological polarization and political positioning on Twitter.

The findings reveal that delegitimization, victimization, and positive self-presentation operate as key discourse strategies for creating positive self-representation and negative other-representation. By employing these strategies, politicians positioned themselves as patriotic, responsible, and morally legitimate while portraying opponents as dishonest, disloyal, or threatening.

The study further illustrates the relevance of van Dijk's Ideological Square in understanding how ideological meanings are reproduced within digital communication. Ultimately, Twitter functions not only as a platform for information exchange but also as a site where political identities, nationalism, and ideological conflicts are actively negotiated through discourse.

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Appendix

Complete Dataset of Selected Tweets with Original X Links

Tweet No.	Political Actor	Date	Tweet
			:
1	Mohsin Naqvi	1 Oct 2025	<i>India media thrives on lies, not facts. Let me make it absolutely clear: I have done nothing wrong and I have never apologized to the BCCI nor will I ever do so.</i> <i>This fabricated nonsense is nothing but cheap propaganda, aimed only at misleading their own people. Unfortunately, India continues to drag politics into cricket, damaging the very spirit of the game.</i> <i>As ACC President , I was ready to hand over the trophy that very day and I am still ready now. If they truly want it, they are welcome to come to the ACC office and collect if from me.</i> https://x.com/MohsinnaqviC42/status/1973318934825935079?s=20 <i>"It seems India's stunning win against Pakistan in the Asia Cup final has left Rahul Gandhi and the entire Congress in a comatose state. Just like after #OperationSindoor, when they couldn't bring themselves to congratulate the Indian Army for its stupendous strikes, they now appear to be waiting for permission from Mohsin Naqvi and their other handlers in Pakistan before joining the nation in celebrating the Indian cricket team's success.</i>
2	Amit Malviya	28 Sept 2025	<i>Put that aside — not even a single social media post from Congress congratulating our national team for thrashing Pakistan thrice in the tournament and bringing the Asia Cup home.</i> <i>Once again, Pakistan, Rahul Gandhi, and Congress find themselves on the same side of the divide.</i> https://x.com/amitmalviya/status/1972512950851195158?s=20 <i>"#OperationSindoor on the games field.</i>
3	Narendra Modi	28 Sept 2025	<i>Outcome is the same - India wins!</i> <i>Congrats to our cricketers."</i> https://x.com/narendramodi/status/1972373287985401858?s=20
4	Mohsin Naqvi	28 Sept 2025	<i>"If war was your measure of pride, history already records your humiliating defeats at Pakistan's hands. No cricket match can rewrite</i>

Tweet No.	Political Actor	Date	Tweet
5	Sanjay Raut	29 Sept 2025	<i>that truth. Dragging war into sport only exposes desperation and disgraces the very spirit of the game."</i> https://x.com/MohsinnaqviC42/status/1972458690084229221?s=20 <i>"Just 15 days ago, at the start of the series, they were shaking hands and smiling for photos with Pakistan's minister Mohsin Naqvi. And now? Full-on nationalist drama for the cameras! If patriotism was truly in your blood, you wouldn't have even stepped on the field with Pakistan. Top to bottom — pure theatre, public being played"</i> https://x.com/rautsanjay61/status/1972531429817946488?s=20