



Political Communication of Politicians on Social Media: An Analysis of Party Leaders' Tweets in Pakistan

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Abstract: Political leaders utilise social media as a new means of communicating with their constituents and supporters. It provides political leaders with a platform to communicate with the general public on a large scale. It is imperative to study this usage of Twitter. For this purpose, three political leaders from leading political parties of Pakistan (PML-N, PPP and PTI) have been selected to investigate figurative language in their tweets using the Vandijk model of Critical Discourse Analysis. According to the study's findings, political leaders in Pakistan used Twitter for covid-related communication with varying frequency. They employed figurative language in their tweets, mostly using an active voice with a politically-motivated lexical choice. Religious connotations are also prominent in the discourse. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Maryam Nawaz are critical of the government's response to Covid-19, mostly aiming at the Pakistani public, whereas Imran Khan highlighted comparatively positive aspects while targeting the global audience.

Introduction

In addition to more conventional media like television, radio, and newspapers, world leaders utilise Twitter as an efficient public health tool to swiftly and directly disseminate information on COVID-19 to citizens (Broersma & Graham, 2012; Rufai & Bunce, 2020). Twitter is a social networking website that enables users to send up to 280-character messages, known as "tweets," to their following, known as "followers" (Hetler, 2022). Globally, Twitter has 206 million monetisable daily active users as of the second quarter of 2021. In January 2022, Twitter had a user base of 76.9 million in the United States, making it the most popular microblogging platform in the country. Japan and India were second and third, with 58 and 23.6 million users, respectively (Dixon, 2022). According to Twitter's

advertising resources, Pakistan had 3,4 million Twitter users at the beginning of 2022. Consequently, Twitter's advertising reach in Pakistan was around 1.5% of the population (Kemp, 2022). Many individuals can be influenced and inspired by the ideals of a leader. Crises present a chance to put these leaders to the test and evaluate their potential to give vital and prompt solutions. Leaders rely on online social media (OSM) platforms to effectively communicate with crisis-affected communities (Mayer et al., 2004).

Literature Review

Alshahrani (2020) said that Twitter may be exploited constructively or poorly and that it can have a favourable or negative impact on both the leader and the people who follow their tweets. Certain variables affect the nature and consequences of the post. Broersma and Graham

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(2012) analysed how media covered the 2010 British and Dutch elections using Twitter. Nearly one-fourth of British candidates and nearly fifty per cent of Dutch candidates utilised Twitter to share their thoughts, visions, and experiences. The qualitative research conducted by [Rufai and Bunce \(2020\)](#) includes content analysis. Inclusion was determined using the following criteria: G7 world leaders' viral tweets with at least 500 'likes'; keywords 'COVID-19' or 'coronavirus'. Twitter may be an effective way for international leaders to broadcast important public health information to citizens, according to the research. [Aharony \(2012\)](#) attempted to grasp how three political leaders interact via Twitter: Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel; David Cameron, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom; and Barack Obama, President of the United States of America. The research indicates that the US President tweets more frequently than the other leaders, with the British Prime Minister tweeting the least, and that all three leaders use Twitter for both transparency and outreach. [Kentish \(2021\)](#) permitted a close-reading study and a metadata analysis of the tweets of former US President Donald Trump, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Boris Johnson, and President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins. The author concluded, based on the tweets of these prominent government leaders, that communication was a major emphasis throughout the early years of COVID-19's development. Governmental systems and leaders utilised Twitter to promote their viewpoints on and experiences with COVID-19; platforms such as Twitter were used to position opinions, facts, policies, and procedures pertaining to COVID-19; and potential pandemic implications are explored.

[Goel & Sharma \(2021\)](#) analysed 29 million tweets from 6 million unique Twitter users obtained via Twitter's API using COVID-19 trending keywords ("coronavirus", "coronavirus outbreak", and "COVID-19"). From February 1, 2020, to May 2, 2020, they established a network of tweets from users and analysed the COVID-19 crisis leaders using social network analytic methods. According to their findings, leaders devote the majority of their time to five topics: (1) symptoms, (2) vaccinations, (3) cleanliness, (4) travel, and (5) pandemics. In addition, they utilised a number of text analysis techniques to determine the clusters' alignment with these concerns

throughout the COVID-19 outbreak. The scientific group was more concerned with the symptoms and progression of immunisation, while the news and political groups were more concerned with travel and sanitation.

Due to their vast appeal, social media have a significant impact. Politicians have employed their Twitter accounts to educate and inform the public about the lethality of the covid. [Haman \(2020\)](#) studied around 50,000 tweets from 143 state officials, as well as data regarding their followers. Compared to the preceding months, the number of followers surged considerably throughout the outbreak. Sixty-four per cent of UN member nations have a leader who tweeted about COVID-19. Using regression models using ordinary least squares, the analysis was undertaken. During the epidemic, [Urcan \(2021\)](#) examined the Twitter usage of three significant world leaders, including Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the President of Turkey, and Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan. A thorough analysis of their language, emotions, and word selection was undertaken. According to the study, while each country's leader utilised Twitter primarily for local politics and international concerns, during the epidemic, their major objective was to comfort their countrymen and raise awareness about the virus and its catastrophic effects. [Drylie-Carey, Sánchez-Castillo, and Galán-Cubillo \(2020\)](#) indicated that the coronavirus effect was enveloping the entire planet, which was the cause of its infectious character, which placed all nations, especially European nations, on high alert. The authors analysed the crisis communication for Covid-19 by European political figures such as Britain's Boris Johnson, France's Emmanuel Macron, Spain's Pedro Sánchez, and Italy's Giuseppe Conte, as well as WHO delegates Tedros Adhanom and European Union President Ursula Von der Leyen. After analysing the visual content of 634 tweets, they observed considerable discrepancies between the preventative actions advocated (social distance, mask-wearing, and handwashing, for instance) and the public image presented by the leaders' Twitter profiles. Numerous studies have been undertaken on the role of global political figures on Twitter in the aftermath of Covid; consequently, it was essential to examine Pakistani politicians' usage of Twitter in Covid discourse.

Research Questions

The current study tends to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1.** What is the frequency of tweets about Covid-19 by the three major political party leaders in Pakistan?
- RQ2.** How do the various Covid-19 tweets of the three major political leaders reflect ideologies and apply discourse techniques?
- RQ3.** How are overall discursive tactics employed in the tweets about Covid-19 by the three major political leaders of Pakistan?

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis

[Van Dijk \(1993\)](#) shows how knowledge attitudes and ideologies must be explored within the social context, as shown by language patterns, to understand power and discourse. [Machin and Mayr \(2012\)](#) characterise critical discourse analysis by quoting Fairclough and Wodak, saying it investigates how social power is exerted in dialogue. [Van Dijk \(1993\)](#) defines dominance as the misuse of social authority by authoritative figures, resulting in social inequity. Language shows how power is used.

Van Dijk's theory was not restricted to critical discourse analysis, according to [Sheyholislami \(2011\)](#). In the 1980s, he used ideological discourse analysis to study the portrayal of immigrants in national and international news broadcasts. Ideological discourse reveals social groupings' textual perspectives. It highlights topics that promote a certain social power ideology. Social power and economic considerations affect the news constantly.

[Van Dijk \(1985\)](#) says media discourse includes nonverbal cues like photos and videos. His ideology analysis is social, cognitive, and discursive. So, it's not limited to textual analysis; its sociological component considers both context and textual analysis, which is limited to syntax, semantics, and morphology. [Van Dijk's \(2004\)](#) socio-cognitive method of ideological analysis integrates social and personal cognition to link society, the self, and speech. Specific mental models depict events and ideas, which are part of

socially shared knowledge and attitudes. [Van Dijk \(2004\)](#) observed that the media use topicalisation, concretisation, and sympathy movements to convey disguised ideologies through text-generating institutions. Ideology is prejudiced common knowledge, according to [Van Dijk \(2009\)](#).

[Van Dijk's \(1995\)](#) research. Ideologies, he maintains, are common knowledge within a cultural civilisation articulated in discourses utilising reasoning and persuasion.

Methodology

A qualitative content analysis was carried out for the study. Critical discourse analysis was conducted over Twitter data of major political leaders in Pakistan.

According to the [Election Commission of Pakistan \(ECP\) \(n.d.\)](#), there are a total of 157 political parties in Pakistan registered with the ECP. Out of these, Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) are the three most prominent parties in the country's current governmental setup. As the study is based on the Twitter activity of the political leaders of Pakistan, therefore, the researcher selected the three major political leaders from these three parties who are the most active on Twitter. Maryam Nawaz is selected from PML-N, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is selected from PPP, and Imran Khan is selected from PTI.

An advanced Twitter search was applied for data collection. For this purpose, the tweets with the following keywords were extracted from the data set: "corona", "covid", "co-vid", and "كورونا" from these three Twitter accounts: @BbhattZardari@ImranKhanPTI@MaryamNSharif. To comprehensively cover the whole Covid period in Pakistan, tweets were extracted from the start of Covid-19, i.e. December 31, 2019, until the end of the 5th wave, i.e. March 31, 2022. The sophisticated Twitter search mined a total of 103 tweets for the selected keywords, during the Covid duration, from the three political leaders, with Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Imran Khan and Maryam Nawaz having 27, 69 and 7 tweets, respectively.

Table 1. Total Extracted Tweets During Covid-19

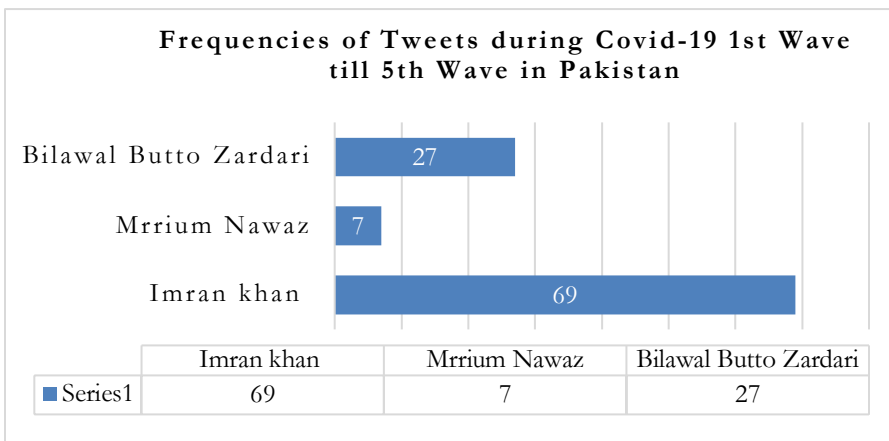
Political Leader	No. of Tweets During Covid-19
Bilawal Bhutto Zardari	27
Imran Khan	69
Maryam Nawaz	7
Total	103

A simple random sampling technique was employed to draw a sample out of the total tweet population. Randomised number generator was used to select the tweets, with at least 5 tweets from each of the leaders. Thus, a total of 19 tweets were selected for critical discourse analysis of the three leading political leaders in Pakistan.

Analysis and Result

Frequency of tweets of the three political leaders, i.e. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Imran Khan and Maryam Nawaz, during Covid-19

For answering RQ1, all tweets collected from the Twitter accounts of the three political leaders have been analysed numerically to analyse the frequency of tweets on Covid by each of the leaders.



Graph 1: Frequency of Tweets of the Political Leaders During Covid-19

The above graph reveals that throughout the Covid era, Imran Khan's tweets had the highest frequency of occurrence. He addressed the public to demonstrate his viewpoints regarding Covid-19 more than any other political leader in Pakistan. It is pertinent here that Imran Khan was the Prime Minister of Pakistan and hence a member of the government in power during the time.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's tweet frequency is considerably higher than Maryam Nawaz's. However, it is less than that of Imran Khan. He has seldom communicated the issue of Corona with the wider public.

In comparison, Maryam Nawaz's number of tweets is considerably lower than both of the other

party leaders. She did not communicate much with her Twitter followers about the topic of Covid.

The frequency results suggest that the leader involved in the current government were more focused on Covid. Even though Bilawal Bhutto Zardari & Maryam Nawaz were a part of the opposition, they did not effectively address Covid-19 in their Twitter communication.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Tweets of the Major Political Leaders

For answering RQ2, a thorough critical discourse analysis of individual tweets from all three major political party leaders in Pakistan has been done.

Tweets of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari

Tweet: May 12, 2020

"Press conference on #NursesDay2020 COVID, food security & locusts.

(Quote Tweet PPP @MediaCellPPP

ایک سال کا وقت ملنے کے باوجود وفاقی حکومت نے مڈی دل سے نمٹنے کیلئے کوئی اقدامات نہیں کیے

@BBhuttoZardari

https://youtu.be/-OOoX1_bZUI

Table 2.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Nurses Day, covid, food security and locusts	Passive Voice	Covid, food security and locusts. For a year, the federal government did not take any steps.

Discursive Tactics

Bilawal shared a tweet of his party's media cell where he has been tagged as well. The original tweet shared a video of Bilawal's press conference with the headline: 'Despite being given a year's time; the federal government did not take any steps to deal with locusts.' In the retweet, Bilawal has added the various topics he spoke on during the press conference, including Covid, food security and locusts.

together Covid with two other major issues, i.e. food insecurity and locust attack, being faced by Pakistan at the time of the tweet. When combined with the text of the original tweet, the discourse indirectly poses the incompetence of the government in handling all of those issues, that too for a time as long as a year.

Labelling

Bilawal's original quote talks about the incompetence of the government in handling locust attacks. However, in his retweet, he has added the labels of Covid and food security.

Tweet: June 2 6, 2020

"Press conference on #Covid_19 pandemic, doctors & frontline concerns, Locust & food security, steel mill workers jobs & NFC award. Pakistan is heading towards disaster if PTI incompetency isn't challenged. Parts 1-7.

(Quote Tweet PPP @MediaCellPPP

ایک و باکے بارے میں اگر معاشی ماہرین اور کاروباری حضرات سے مشاورت کی جائے گی تو اس کا کیا علاج ہوگا؟

حکومت کی ذمہ داری ہے کہ اپنی جان خطرے میں ڈالنے والے طبی ماہرین کی بات سنیں اور ان کے مطالبات پر فوری عملدرآمد کریں۔

Construction of Sentence

The sentence is composed in a passive voice.

@BbhuttoZardari #BBZexposingIncompetence)"

Lexical Choice

On the occasion of Nurses Day, Bilawal puts

Table 3.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Covid-19 pandemic, doctors & frontline concerns, Locust & food security, steel mill workers' jobs & NFC award	Passive voice	Heading towards disaster, PTI incompetency, the responsibility of Government, immediately, #BBZexposingIncompetence.

Discursive Tactics

Bilawal has retweeted a tweet by his party's official Twitter account. The original tweet states: "If economists and businessmen are consulted about

an epidemic, what will be the treatment for it? It is the responsibility of the government to listen to the medical professionals risking their lives and act on their demands immediately."

Labelling

Bilawal has mentioned the various topics he discussed in his press conference, including the Covid pandemic, the worries of frontline workers, locust attacks and resulting food insecurity, job issues of steel mill workers and the NFC award.

Construction of Sentence

The tweet uses the passive voice.

Lexical Choice

The tweet is a direct attack on the political party leading the government at the time i.e. PTI. After mentioning the multiple points of public concern, Bilawal uses a warning tone emphasising the need to challenge the ineptitude of PTI or else the country will be moving towards great damage, which he termed a 'disaster'. Bilawal's quoted text in the original tweet also questions the government

in a sarcastic tone for consulting economists and businessmen rather than medical professionals about the Covid-19 pandemic. The hashtag used is an overt tactic of painting Bilawal in a positive light where he is the one exposing incompetence.

Tweet: July 14, 2020

"Yet press-con PTI failures on Kashmir, economy, Covid & corruption. PTI cant answer any questions. Still haven't accepted any challenges 1) IK debate party heads in NA/TV 2)name 1 PTI gov hospitals that match NICVD 3) KP/Punjab match Sindh per capita testing. (youtube.com

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnHBCM8-PtU>

Chairman PPP exposes PTI's corruption & incompetence in Kashmir,...

Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party Bilawal Bhattu Zardari exposes PTI's corruption & incompetence on Kashmir issue, COVID19, Locust, Anti poor Budget, unfair di...)"

Table 4.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Kashmir, economy, covid and corruption	Both active and passive voice.	Can't answer any questions, match NICVD, KP/Punjab match Sindh, exposes corruption and incompetence.

Discursive Tactics

Bilawal has tweeted about his press conference, along with a reference link for the YouTube video of the said event. He has aggressively criticised PTI, i.e. the ruling political party at the time. Bilawal has mentioned 3 challenges given to PTI by him. Firstly, he challenged Imran Khan to have debates with political party heads either in the National Assembly or on television. Secondly, he challenges to point out any single hospital established by the PTI government which is at par with NICVD i.e. National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases established by the Government of Sindh. Thirdly, he challenges the provinces of KP and Punjab to gain the same level of per capita Covid testing being done in the province of Sindh.

and corruption as the topics discussed in the press conference calling them the failures of PTI.

Construction of Sentence

The tweet uses a mix of active and passive voice both.

Lexical Choice

In this tweet, Bilawal has slammed PTI for constant failures in numerous dimensions. He has also accused the opposition party of not being able to answer any questions. He has not just mentioned 3 challenges given by him to PTI but rather claimed that PTI did not accept them. Being the Chairman of PPP and the head of the party in charge in the province of Sindh, Bilawal has compared provinces under PTI's government with Sindh. Thus, showing the supremacy of PPP's government over that of PTI.

Labelling

The tweet mentions Kashmir, economy, Covid

Tweet: November 4, 24, 2020

"PPP is going to mark our 53rd foundation day by hosting South Punjab Jalsa for Pakistan Democratic Movement on

November 30 at Qila Kohna Qasim Bagh Stadium Multan. I would like to welcome everyone to join us. Please follow covid SOPs. Wear a mask 🤒."

Table 5.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
53rd foundation day, South Punjab Jalsa, Pakistan Democratic Movement	Active voice	Going to mark, welcome everyone, please follow covid SOPs, 🤒

Discursive Tactics

In this tweet, Bilawal has made an announcement of PPP's celebration of their 53rd foundation day, along with event details. He has invited people to join while requesting the observance of Covid SOPs.

Labelling

The tweet provides event details where PPP is celebrating their 53rd foundation day by holding an address for the people of South Punjab. By terming it a part of the Pakistan Democratic Movement, the event has been framed as a positive democratic move by the PPP.

Construction of Sentence

The dissemination of the message is in an active voice.

Lexical Choice

Bilawal has used a highly positive tone throughout the tweet. While inviting individuals from all walks to attend the event, he has also emphasised the importance of following Covid SOPs and wearing a mask. He has also used an emoticon of a mask-wearer at the end of the tweet. This shows the leaders' responsible attitude while conducting a mass gathering event during Covid times.

Tweet: May 5, 13, 2021

"This Eid, we pray for the people of Kashmir & Palestine. Who spend another eid resisting oppression & fighting for freedom. In Pakistan, we welcome eid with the COVID wave gaining momentum & backbreaking inflation robbing the joy of eid for so many. Appeal to all, observe eid with simplicity."

Table 6.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Eid, people of Kashmir & Palestine, welcome Eid with COVID	Active Voice	another Eid, resisting oppression and fighting for freedom, gaining momentum, backbreaking, robbing joy, simplicity

Discursive Tactics

This tweet was written on Eid, which is an occasion of religious festivity for Muslims. Bilawal has related the Muslim religious event with the hardships Muslims are facing internationally, i.e. in Kashmir & Palestine, as well as nationally in Pakistan.

Labelling

The tweet provides a special mention to the oppressed and subjugated people of the regions of

Kashmir and Palestine. By using the pronoun "we", Bilawal has used a subject of inclusion for the Pakistani nation.

Construction of Sentence

The sentence uses an active voice.

Lexical Choice

The tweet makes use of multiple adjectives to emphasise the strong impact of the problems facing the Muslim world. Even though Eid is a

celebration of happiness, however, Bilawal appeals to everyone to observe the occasion with simplicity in the wake of increasing Covid cases and terrible inflation hitting the country.

Tweets of Imran Khan

Tweet: October 2, 2020

"Wishing President Trump and First Lady Melania Trump a speedy recovery from COVID-19."

Table 7.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Wishing Trump and First Lady	Active Voice	Speedy Recovery

Discursive Tactics

It highlights the positive image building that the Pakistani nation has done by showing their concern for President Trump and First Lady Melania and wishing them a speedy recovery.

Labelling

These statements suggest that Imran Khan was concerned about the health and recovery of both Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump.

Construction of Sentence

Active voice

Lexical Choices

The tweet contributes to a more positive image of the nation by demonstrating that government representatives are concerned about President Trump and the First Lady's health as they recover from the terrible virus.

Tweet: October 12, 2020

"Despite Covid more good news for our economy. Alhamdulillah, remittances from our hardworking overseas Pakistanis rose to \$2.3 bn in Sept 2020, 31% higher than last Sept & 9% higher than August 2020. This marks the 4th consecutive month that remittances have remained above \$2 bn".

Table 8.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Alhamdulillah, good news, Rise	Active Voice	Remittances, hardworking, overseas, consecutive

Discursive Tactics

This labels as a positive tweet and appreciates the efforts of overseas Pakistanis to maintain the remittances.

Labelling

Imran Khan, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, expressed his gratitude to God by using the term 'Alhumdollah' for the steady flow of remittances and his appreciation for the hard work of Pakistanis living abroad in this tweet.

Construction of Sentence

Active voice

Lexical Choices

In the time of Corona, when all countries were experiencing economic downfall, the Pakistani people's perseverance in facing hardships outside is worthy of praise. The amount of money sent back home by migrants increased as compared to the prior year.

Tweet: November 13, 2020

"Despite the challenges of the Pandemic (Covid-19), Pakistan is progressing towards economic recovery faster than any country in the Subcontinent MashaAllah. In September, Large Scale Manufacturing (LSM) registered an impressive 7.7% job growth. Our energy co-package will be a source of capacity expansion and productivity growth."

Table 9.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Progressing, faster, recovery, job growth	Active Voice	Capacity, expansion, productivity, impressive

Discursive Tactics

The tweet is a positive indication and appreciation of the Pakistani nation in this pandemic.

Labelling

When compared to other countries on the Subcontinent, the LSM's rate of economic recovery is striking. The number of available jobs in the LSM rose by 7.7 per cent from August 2020 to September 2020.

Construction of Sentence

Active voice

Lexical Choices

In this tweet, Imran Khan explains that despite the

spread of Coronavirus, Pakistan is making better development than the other countries in the Subcontinent. According to LSM, the job growth rate is also something to be applauded, and our motivation to better the nation's state is the driving force behind all of these triumphs.

Tweet: 4 May 15, 2021

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاغِبُونَ

"Today, we lost a dedicated young PTI worker Zabid Mohmand to Covid 19. Zabid worked to organise our party at the grassroots level in Peshawar. My condolences & prayers go to his family. Everyone must follow Pandemic SOPs & wear masks."

Table 10.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Condolence, follow SOPs, to his family	Active Voice	Dedicated, young worker, grassroots, pandemic

Discursive Tactics

It emphasises following the SOPs of Coronavirus and shows his condolence to the departed Soul.

Labelling

It indicates that Imran Khan was disheartened to learn about the dedicated member of his party who collaborated with him to create the PTI in Peshawar. As a leader of the party, Imran Khan expressed his condolences and prayed for the deceased man's family. Because he is a true leader of the party, his personality shines through as that of a caring leader for the people that work for his party.

Construction of Sentence

Active voice

Lexical Choices

The tweet has phrases that accurately convey the sadness felt by a leader over the passing of one of his dedicated employees. In addition, the leader stresses the importance of adhering to the SOPs for protection from the Corona Virus.

Tweet: January 21, 2022

"Additionally, Since the outbreak of Covid, Pandemic Pakistan has ranked among the top three countries on the normalcy index, indicating saving jobs and saving lives. The economist recognised this in its latest normalcy index.

Table 11.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Ranked among the top three countries	Active Voice	Saving jobs and saving lives

Discursive Tactics

Imran Khan emphasises the positive things about Pakistan's circumstances and explains that Pakistan is amongst the top three nations in job-saving.

Labelling

Pakistan's positive image is appreciated by referring to the normalcy index report. Pakistan ranked among the top three countries, and its performance is applauded.

Construction of Sentence

Active voice

Lexical Choices

Saving lives and saving jobs are specially referred to here as a win because many developed countries had to bear the loss of lives, and people got jobless

in this pandemic. But Pakistan, despite being a developing country, followed the best strategy to bear less loss of jobs and lives.

Tweet: January 23, 2022

"Concerned to hear that the President Of the Maldives, Ibrahim Mohammad Sobhli, tested covid positive. My prayers for you for a speedy recovery and good health."

Table 12.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Concerned, my prayers	Active Voice	Speedy recovery and good health

Discursive Tactics

The tweet has a concerned but positive tone as Imran Khan showed concern for the health of another nation's leader.

Lexical Choices

The tweet is about showing concern for the President of Maldives. So Imran Khan prays for his speedy recovery and good health. Here he personifies himself as a caring leader and a well-wisher.

Labelling

Here are the words used to show positivity for the President of Maldives. It reflects the positive image of the Pakistani Government and the public and highlights the quality of care for others.

Tweet: February 5, 2022

"I just learnt that my brother Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President of Turkey and Madame Emine Erdogan tested positive for Covid-19 Omicron. On behalf of our government, the people of Pakistan, and on my own behalf, I wish them a swift and complete recovery."

Construction of Sentence

Active voice

Table 13.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
My brother, on behalf of our Government, the people of Pakistan	Active Voice	Swift, complete recovery

Discursive Tactics

It emphasises positive things about us.

Lexical Choices

Imran Khan showed his love and affection for the Turkish President and prayed for him to recover soon.

Labelling

Imran Khan used positive and brotherhood words to show love for the Turkish President. He prayed to him for a speedy recovery.

Tweet: March 23, 2022

"I congratulate my Government on the excellent strategy that has been adopted to deal with the Corona epidemic. Our plan against the global epidemic was undoubtedly better than all the countries in South Asia"

Construction of Sentence

Active voice

Table 14.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
My government, our strategy	Active Voice	Excellent strategy, corona epidemic, undoubtedly better

Discursive Tactics

It emphasises positive things about us.

Labelling

Here Imran Khan appraised the government strategy to deal with the corona pandemic. He shared the South Asian index, which shows the lowest unemployment rate in the region.

Construction of Sentence

Active voice

Lexical Choices

By sharing the South Asian index, Imran Khan happily said that Pakistan has the lowest unemployment rank. He personifies here that in his South Asian regime, he was the best prime minister and implemented the best strategy to combat this pandemic.

Tweet: April 24, 2022

"I want to express our solidarity with the People of India as they battle a dangerous wave of Covid -19. Our prayers for a speedy recovery go to all those suffering from the Pandemic in our neighbourhood and world. We must fight this global challenge confronting humanity together."

Table 15.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Express our, with the people of India, must fight, our neighbourhood and world	Active Voice	Solidarity, humanity together, speedy recovery, global challenge

Discursive Tactics

It emphasises positive things about us.

Labelling

Imran Khan showed his unity with the Indian People and prayed for them. He praised their courage for fighting this disease bravely. He also gave emphasis on the need for togetherness of humanity in this global pandemic. He labelled a Pakistani nation here as a humanitarian rather than an enemy of the Indian people.

Construction of Sentence

Active voice

Lexical Choices

Imran Khan has used the word solidarity in a significant way. Pakistan has long tensions with Indians, but the leader of the Pakistani nation still showed unity, love, and prayer for the Indian nation affected by this pandemic. A global pandemic hit the earth, and the Pakistani leader voiced for togetherness and unity.

Tweets of Maryam Nawaz

Tweet: March 19, 2020

"Pakistan is facing one of the gravest crises in recent memory. The spread of Coronavirus poses a serious threat that needs to be fought at all levels. In the hour of trial, we must take precautions, follow the medical guidelines & pray to Allah SWT for His protection."

Table 16.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Pray to Allah, follow guidelines	Active Voice	Precaution, serious threat, gravest crises

Discursive Tactics

It emphasises hope and safety measures in the nation.

Labelling

Here are the words used to show positivity and hope, and advice. This tweet reflects what Maryam

Nawaz hopes for better conditions if the nation follows the guidelines for Coronavirus.

Construction of Sentence

Active voice

Lexical Choices

The tweet contains terminology that is pertinent to the issue of the nation's greatest threat. This tweet explains the most recent pandemic that has swept the globe. It poses grave threats to all levels and people on the earth. Guidelines for medical treatment and preventative measures will avoid substantial damage to the nation; meanwhile, let us

pray to Allah for a brighter future.

Tweet: June 2 01, 2020

"While people are suffering & losing their lives not only to Corona but to unprecedented & unbelievable incompetence, criminal negligence & apathy, the govt continues to incurably suffer from Nawaz Sharif syndrome."

Table 17.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Unbelievable incompetence, incurably suffer	Active Voice	Nawaz Sharif syndrome, unprecedented, criminal negligence, apathy

Discursive Tactics

It criticises the government, and the GOP should focus on policies of Covid -19 rather than opposition party leader syndrome.

saying that amidst all the incompetency, negligence, and criminal acts, the government seems to still suffer from Nawaz Sharif Syndrome, pointing toward the government's initiative throughout its regime to hold Nawaz Sharif accountable for his wrongdoings.

Labelling

Maryam Nawaz is criticising the negative image of government policies regarding Covid 19.

Tweet: April 3 26, 2021

"At a loss to understand why GOP hell-bent on imperilling lives of children by forcing them to take Cambridge exams when it has miserably failed to provide a safe environment. GOP to b held responsible if a single child contracts COVID. Will IK take the same decision for his sons?"

Construction of Sentence

Active voice

Lexical Choices

Maryam Nawaz takes a jab at the government by

Table 18.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Hell-bent, take the same decision, son	Active Voice	Imperilling, miserable, forced, failed, safe environment

Discursive Tactics

It emphasises the criticism of the Government of Pakistan pointing to Imran Khan, particularly in this tweet.

Construction of Sentence

Active voice

Labelling

These words indicate that Imran Khan is self-centred and making poor decisions by mandating that students take Cambridge exams. The man will not make the same decision for himself and his son. This tweet expressed dread if the GOP failed to ensure a corona-free atmosphere.

Lexical Choices

The tweet demonstrates that the Government of Pakistan is not taking the Coronavirus seriously and is still requiring students to take exams despite their health risks. It demonstrates the Prime Minister's (Imran Khan) callous disregard for the kids' well-being. The Government of Pakistan is to blame for every single instance that has been reported.

Tweet: November 20, 2022

“While a mask gives you protection from COVID-19, ‘Vote ko izzat do’ narrative & struggle will protect you

from ‘Covid-18’ & all such future attempts, Insha’Allah. Protect yourself, protect your vote.

ووٹ کو عزت دو۔ ہمارے ووٹ پہ ڈاکے نامنظور۔

Table 19.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Protect yourself, protect your vote	Active Voice	Future attempts, struggle, Covid-18

Discursive Tactics

It labels that mask is important to save you from the virus. Similarly, the struggle of the nation protects it from bad happenings if it uses the right to vote for PMLN.

Labelling

Imran Khan showed his unity with the Indian People and prayed for them. He praised their courage for fighting this disease bravely. He also gave humanity togetherness lessons in this global pandemic. He labelled a Pakistani nation here as a humanitarian rather than an enemy of the Indian People.

Table 20.

Labelling	Construction of Sentence	Lexical Choice
Covid negative	Passive Voice	Alhamdulillah, 🙏

Discursive Tactics

Maryam Nawaz has used this tweet to announce her recovery from Covid-19 with the use of minimal words. She used religious tactics in her discourse, along with the addition of a symbol of praying hands.

Labelling

The tweet being very concise, conveys the message of Maryam Nawaz getting rid of covid by getting a negative test report.

Construction of sentence

The sentence is in passive voice, where she herself is the implied subject, without the use of any direct words for referring to the subject.

Construction of sentence

Active voice

Lexical Choices

“ووٹ کو عزت دو۔ ہمارے ووٹ پہ ڈاکے نامنظور” is a narrative built by Maryam Nawaz over a long time. The slogan translates to "Respect the vote - cheating on our vote is unacceptable". She emphasises casting a vote with responsibility and also points toward a long debate in Pakistan about rigging in elections. She uses the term 'Covid-18' to refer to the government elected in the year 2018 as a disease.

Tweet: March 22, 2022

“Alhamdulillah better. Covid negative 🙏”

Lexical Choices

Starting the tweet with the Arabic word "Alhamdulillah", which means 'praise be to God', Maryam is putting a focus on her belief in God. This shows that only God had a role in improving her health situation. There is the use of an emoticon at the end of the tweet showing praying hands, which gives more emphasis to her thankfulness to God for saving her from the disease.

Discursive Tactics in Tweets of Major Political Leaders During Covid-19

For answering RQ3, the overall techniques used in the discourse around Covid-19 have been analysed for each of the political leaders under study.

Discursive Tactics Of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari In Tweets During Covid-19

The tweets of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari with reference to Covid-19 are mostly either replies or retweets of tweets by other Twitter accounts, especially the official account of his party PPP. It is evident from the tweets of Bilawal that he is constantly targeting his rival political party PTI. His Twitter discourse revolves around revealing the incompetency in the PTI's governance. His tweets also frequently use embedded YouTube links for video material. He sternly puts PTI in a negative light while positively highlighting his own party. Even though the party held mass gatherings during Covid times, the party Chair man has requested to follow Covid SOPs.

Discursive Tactics of Imran Khan in Tweets During Covid-19

Most of Imran Khan's tweets focus on presenting a positive global image of Pakistan. The tweets appreciate the efforts of overseas Pakistani to maintain remittances; they also emphasise following the standard operating procedures for dealing with Coronavirus; they express condolences for the departed souls and, thus, depict how a Pakistani leader has helped improve his country's image. He expressed concern for other nations' well-being and emphasised the good aspects by explaining that Pakistan is in the top three countries for job preservation. He cautioned the people to adhere to the stringent SOPs to protect themselves from the virus. Another major discourse in the Covid-related tweets of Imran Khan is his prayers for the political leaders across the globe who were fighting Covid. Additionally, he expressed his condolences and prayed for those who had lost loved ones as a result of this epidemic, specifically in India, which is generally considered the arch-rival of Pakistan.

Discursive Tactics of Maryam Nawaz in Tweets During Covid-19

The tweets of Maryam Nawaz mainly focus on either the severity of the disease or the government's incompetence in handling the outbreak in the country. Mainly, the tweets carry criticism of the Government of Pakistan that points the finger at Imran Khan. She often combined the topic of

Covid with some other political narrative. In one instance, she goes to the extent of equating the protection of a mask against Covid with voting for her party as protection against 'Covid-18', which meant the current government which came into power in 2018.

A few of the tweets emphasise the precautions the nation should take while identifying the use of masks as being essential in protection from the virus. She also gave religious dimension to her tweets by adding references to God, such as the use of words like Alhamdulillah, Masha'Allah etc.

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the tweets made by the major political leaders of Pakistan during the time of Covid-19 clearly shows the angle of the discourse different leaders have tried to portray. The conversations created are very clear in their purpose. It was seen that both the political leaders from the opposition side of the Government harshly criticised the current Government or PTI; however, both the leaders requested the public to follow Covid SOPs on occasion. The use of Urdu was predominantly seen in their tweets which suggests mainly targeting the sentiments of the Pakistani public. In comparison, the sitting Prime Minister at the time, Imran Khan, refrained from political attacks while focusing on optimism and encouragement for efforts surrounding Covid. He often expressed his well-wishes for political leaders of the world suffering from Covid-19, which shows his global approach.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari mostly tweeted along with the details of his press conferences either by retweeting the tweet posted on his official party handle or by adding video links. His main narrative revolved around highlighting the incompetency of the then Government in dealing with Covid-19 as well as other issues plaguing the nation. He did also encourage following Covid SOPs.

Imran Khan focused on the positive aspects of Pakistan's efforts against Covid. He made no negative comments about any other political party. He did not take advantage of the pandemic to create a narrative that attacked his opponents. Instead of focusing on the negative side of the situation, he used Twitter as a platform to reach out to the global leaders and thus cultivate a good image of Pakistan as a progressive nation.

Maryam Nawaz attempted to use the pandemic politically by exploiting the situation for her party's gains. Even though she slightly even mentioned Covid in her tweets, she used it as an opportunity to majorly criticised the Government of Pakistan for its ineffective administrative practices regarding Covid-19. She mostly included her party's slogan, 'respect the vote,' in her tweets to promote her political perspective. She used figurative language, even relating voting for her party as similar to a mask, posing that exercising the right to vote for the PMLN will act as a shield against the ill effects of the current Government. Rarely Maryam Nawaz called on the public to

adhere to the recommendations established for the prevention of the Coronavirus.

In short, Pakistani political figures took to Twitter to express their concerns over the outbreak. Imran Khan tweeted extremely responsibly and made an effort to construct a positive narrative about the people of Pakistan. However, his being the central part of the Government needs to be considered here. Both Maryam Nawaz and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari strongly criticised the Government while suggesting that the GOP should concentrate their efforts on dealing with Covid-19 in a rather more efficient manner.

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