Twitter and politics: a framing analysis of Maryam Nawaz and Imran Khan's social media discourse

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This study explores the framing strategies employed by influential Pakistani political figures, Imran Khan, and Maryam Nawaz, on Twitter. By adopting Hallahan's framing theory as an analytical framework, we analyze their tweets to reveal how they strategically shape political narratives and influence public perceptions. The study enhances our understanding of the interplay between political communication and political identities, shedding light on the nuanced strategies used by political actors to construct persuasive narratives. Our findings provide evidence of Twitter's significant role as a powerful tool for political communication and discourse in the Pakistani context. This research contributes to the broader landscape of Pakistani political communication and the intersection between social media, politics, and framing strategies.

KEYWORDS

Twitter, framing strategies, political communication, Pakistan, Pakistani politicians

1 Introduction

Social media networks have significantly influenced the political landscape by offering new modes of communication and discourse in the realm of politics. The emergence of social media platforms has transformed traditional political discourses and provided politicians with alternative means to engage with the public (Hsu et al., 2013; Himelboim et al., 2016). This transformative impact of social media networks, particularly Twitter, on political communication extends to Pakistan as well. In the Pakistani context, politicians harness Twitter as an effective tool to construct narratives through their tweets, strategically shaping the perception of their followers (Kruikemeier et al., 2014). By carefully framing their messages and utilizing rhetorical strategies, Pakistani politicians, like other global leaders, aim to shape the audience's interpretation, reinforcing specific agendas and ideologies. Thus, it is argued here that political communication in Pakistan is a fiercely contested arena where power dynamics are at play (Masroor et al., 2019). This phenomenon becomes evident in the discourse presented through the tweets shared by Imran Khan and Maryam Nawaz, leaders of opposing political parties. The strategic use of Twitter by both Khan and Nawaz has generated considerable interest, particularly following the political turmoil of April 2022, as they tactically leverage the platform to disseminate their political views and construct political identities that align with their agendas. Significantly, the tweets of Khan and Nawaz not only serve as vehicles for political expression but also provide glimpses of their political identities. This underscores the intricate ways in which political actors strategically employ Twitter to shape public opinion, forge their political

personas, and negotiate their political identities within the realm of political communication. Drawing on Hallahan's (1999, 2011) framing theory, the present study investigates the following research question:

> RQ 1: How and in what ways do Maryam Nawaz and Imran Khan utilize framing techniques on Twitter to construct their political identities?

Adopting Hallahan's (1999, 2011) framing theory as an analytical framework, the research delves into the intricate mechanisms underlying language and rhetorical strategies used to frame political messages on social media. This theoretical exploration advances our understanding of framing techniques in the digital era, where social media platforms play a crucial role in shaping political discourse and communication strategies (Hsu et al., 2013). Additionally, the study contributes to framing theory by extending its application to the specific context of Pakistani politics, revealing the complexities of power dynamics within this contested landscape. This examination highlights the unique challenges and opportunities of political communication in Pakistan and underscores the versatility of framing theory in understanding diverse scenarios.

2 Contextualization of the study

Pakistan's political landscape has long been characterized by turmoil and power struggles. The post-April 2022 period witnessed a significant political upheaval, resulting in the removal of Prime Minister Imran Khan from office (Venema and Davies, 2023). This unrest was triggered by Khan's ousting in a vote of no confidence, which he vehemently contested through rallies and protests. The subsequent legal battles and allegations of terrorism, corruption, and contempt of court has further intensified the political deadlock (Saifi, 2023). Meanwhile, Pakistan's institutions faced scrutiny, with divisions within the judiciary and concerns about the credibility of the establishment. These events unfolded against a backdrop of serious crises, including economic struggles, increasing terror attacks, and societal challenges (Wilson, 2022). Amidst this turmoil, Maryam Nawaz, the Senior Vice President of the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), has played a prominent role by actively challenging Khan through her tweets and public speeches. She has questioned Khan's performance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, criticized his claims of being a target for assassination plots, and accused him of deflecting blame onto others, including political opponents and intelligence agencies. Nawaz's engagement with Khan through social media reflects the increasingly influential role of digital platforms in shaping political discourse and public opinion (Mufti, 2023). Maryam Nawaz's involvement in political affairs stems from her family lineage, as she is the daughter of Mian Nawaz Sharif, a former prime minister of Pakistan and the founder of PML-N. Her political influence and position within the party are further enhanced by being the eldest daughter, which positions her as a significant figure in the party and political circles (Masroor et al., 2019). Imran Khan, on the other hand, gained popularity and respect in Pakistan through his successful career as a cricketer and philanthropic

endeavors, notably establishing a charitable cancer hospital. His decision to enter politics was motivated by a desire to combat corruption, and his large fan following provided him with a substantial support base for his political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI).

The ongoing political turmoil in Pakistan, coupled with the active engagement of leaders like Maryam Nawaz and Imran Khan, underscores the need for comprehensive research on power dynamics, political communication strategies, and framing techniques employed in this context. By analyzing these complex dynamics, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of political communication and power struggles in Pakistan, shedding light on the political identity construction and strategic communication strategies employed by political leaders.

3 Twitter and political communication: an overview

Globally, the relationship between Twitter and political communication has been examined from various perspectives, shedding light on its multifaceted impact. Scholars have emphasized the mediated nature of Twitter communication about politics (Jungherr and Jungherr, 2015) and identified prevalent methodological trends, including software dependency in research (Álvarez-Peralta et al., 2023). Twitter has been explored as a substitute channel or amplifier for politicians (Silva and Proksch, 2022), with calls for combining qualitative methods with large-scale data analysis (Pal and Gonawela, 2017). Studies have also focused on opinion inversion (Matalon et al., 2021), disintermediation in political actors' social networks (Eldridge et al., 2019), and the construction of collective identity within social movements (Karataş, 2023). Additionally, research has investigated political polarization (Conover et al., 2011) and the delivery structure of nationalism messages (Sari et al., 2022) on Twitter.

Turning to the context of Pakistani politics, studies have yielded valuable insights into the impact of Twitter. Zaman and Abbas (2022), for instance, have highlighted Twitter's influence on citizen decisions and narrative-building during political turmoil, while Shami et al. (2019) have examined politicians' public relations strategies on Twitter, revealing language use and content. Diou et al. (2018) examined the integration of political participation and media, particularly the popularity of social networking sites among the youth in Khairpur district, Sindh, Pakistan, highlighting their active engagement, support for political leaders, and the cost-effectiveness of platforms like Facebook and YouTube in facilitating political participation. Mir et al. (2022) have discussed social media coalitions among political actors in Pakistan, and Shafiq (2021) has investigated political hate speech on Twitter, identifying language patterns. Kugelman (2012) has explored the communication aspects of social media in Pakistan, and Masroor et al. (2019) have uncovered ideological strategies in the tweets of Pakistani political figures. Furthermore, Sajjad et al. (2018) has conducted a critical discourse analysis of political discourse on Twitter, focusing on identity construction. These studies collectively contribute to our understanding of the role of

Twitter in Pakistani politics, addressing aspects such as political turmoil, public image, sentiment, coalitions, hate speech, and ideological dynamics.

This study employs a dual-focused approach: firstly, it integrates the investigation within overarching theoretical and empirical domains, and secondly, it explains its potential contributions to both existing scholarship and pressing social concerns. Positioned at the nexus of technological advances, political communication, and social transformation, this article is relevant to the turbulent political context of Pakistan. *Firstly*, from a theoretical standpoint, the study doesn't merely apply Hallahan's (1999, 2011) framing theory in a passive sense; it contributes to the ongoing academic dialogue about the theory's versatility and adaptability. By applying the framework to the specific political dynamics of Pakistan—a context marked by complex power relations, societal upheaval, and technological change (Wilson, 2022; Mufti, 2023)—the study offers a nuanced understanding that broadens the theory's applicability. Furthermore, by focusing on the specific framing techniques employed by Maryam Nawaz and Imran Khan, this study addresses a lacuna in the literature that has often tended to generalize political actors or overlook the significance of individual agency in shaping political narratives. The narrow focus on two key figures allows for an in-depth exploration of identity construction within political discourse, thereby responding to Sajjad et al.'s (2018) call for a more concentrated analysis of identity politics within social media environments.

Secondly, from an empirical standpoint, this study is amplified by the volatile political climate of Pakistan, specifically the post-April 2022 upheavals (Wilson, 2022). This is a dynamic backdrop against which new modes of political communication are being trailed and optimized, thereby constituting a real-time experiment in public persuasion and sentiment manipulation. By intervening at this crucial juncture, the study does not simply record or interpret these changes; it provides an informed lens through which they can be understood, critiqued, and perhaps even anticipated. Moreover, this study supplements and expands upon existing studies on Pakistani politics and Twitter, such as the work of Diou et al. (2018), Masroor et al. (2019), and Zaman and Abbas (2022), among others. While these studies have examined various aspects like public sentiment, political participation, and ideological strategies, the present study examines the nuances of how framing techniques contribute to the construction of political identities—a facet hitherto underexplored. Hence, this study provides a capstone to the previous studies, synthesizing and extending their findings within a cohesive analytical framework. In sum, this study offers a multi-layered contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it advances our understanding of framing theory in a specific socio-political context, thereby adding depth and nuance to the theory itself. Empirically, it captures the zeitgeist of a politically turbulent period in Pakistan, thus serving as both a lens and a mirror reflecting complex socio-political phenomena. Collectively, these contributions not only fortify the study's importance but also secure its position within the broader contours of political communication scholarship within the context of Pakistan.

4 Study design

4.1 Data collection

For this study, tweets from two prominent Pakistani political figures, Maryam Nawaz, and Imran Khan, were collected using Twitter's API from April 2022 to March 2023. The cumulative annual tweet output from both political figures collectively amounted to 3,650 tweets. More significantly, this data collection period was chosen due to the heightened political activity, particularly on social media, following the ousting of the Khan government (Venema and Davies, 2023). The tweets exchanged between these politicians during this period provide an interesting case for investigating the framing of their political discourse on Twitter. More importantly, this time period was chosen to capture a snapshot of the framing strategies employed by Nawaz and Khan within a specific context of political developments in Pakistan. It is acknowledged that framing is a dynamic process, susceptible to change in response to shifting political landscapes, news cycles, and public opinion (Hallahan, 2011). However, the chosen time frame allows for a more focused analysis, providing a detailed understanding of the framing strategies during this period, which is of particular interest due to not only the political unrest that occurred during this period but also this timeframe coincides with critical political-legal cases and judiciary decisions, influencing public discourse and putting both politicians at the center of national attention. This period thus offers a unique opportunity to analyze how both politicians engage in framing amidst heightened political tension and public scrutiny. While a longer time frame would indeed offer a more comprehensive picture of evolving strategies, it would also present challenges in terms of data manageability and the clarity of the research focus.

Furthermore, the rationale behind choosing Maryam Nawaz and Imran Khan for this study is supported by their influential roles within their respective political parties. Maryam Nawaz possesses a significant presence on social media platforms, with ~8 million followers, while Imran Khan enjoys a substantial following of ~14.4 million. These large numbers of followers indicate the wide reach and potential impact of their social media activities and messaging. Moreover, PML-N and PTI are major political parties in Pakistan (Masroor et al., 2019; Batool et al., 2022), characterized by fierce rivalry, making their narrative-building strategies valuable for analysis. The study also considers the distinct political identities represented by Nawaz and Khan, allowing for a comparison of different approaches to constructing political identities on social media.

Contrary to an understanding that might deem this focus too narrow, the two figures serve as illustrating exemplars that resonate strongly with the multifaceted sociopolitical fabric of contemporary Pakistan (Masroor et al., 2019; Wilson, 2022; Mufti, 2023). At this particular historical juncture—characterized by intense political turmoil—the salience of these individuals transcends their personal profiles; they embody broader ideological frameworks, represent significant social constituents, and engage in actions that echo across the Pakistani political spectrum. In focusing on Nawaz and Khan, the study captures a distillation of complex political and social dynamics that cannot be dismissed as mere

idiosyncratic phenomena. Their tweets, actions, and discourses offer a rich repository of data through which to understand how political communication is strategically crafted and disseminated to shape public opinion and wield influence. Moreover, it is insufficient to label Nawaz and Khan merely as politicians; they are more accurately described as strategic architects of political communication especially in the contemporary Pakistani context. Operating in an intricate landscape shaped by national and international interests, their communication practices are not isolated utterances, but rather meticulously constructed messages designed to set the agenda not just for their followers but for subsequent political discourse in the nation. Their approaches to framing and rhetoric essentially serve as exploratory mechanisms for a deeper, more nuanced academic inquiry into the political communication strategies deployed by influential figures. While it is acknowledged that the study does not provide an exhaustive account of all political communication in Pakistan, the selection of these two figures is justified given their centrality to current political debates and their role as trendsetters in strategic political communication (Khawar, 2017). Thus, in terms of both academic rigor and societal relevance, the seemingly narrow scope yields an analytical richness that contributes significantly to our understanding of political identity construction and strategic framing within the complex milieu of Pakistani politics.

More importantly, it is crucial to clarify that the study's emphasis on Twitter is an intentional epistemological choice, underpinned by various factors that are highly relevant to the contemporary political landscape in Pakistan. First, the existing literature has empirically demonstrated Twitter's significant role in shaping political discourse within Pakistan (Masroor et al., 2019; Haq et al., 2023). Twitter is the preferred platform for political engagement among Pakistani politicians (Khawar, 2017). While other platforms like Facebook and YouTube do feature in the landscape of Pakistani politics, their usage appears to be supplementary rather than primary. The platform's robust metrics of follower counts for key politicians, high frequency of political discourse, and targeted demographic reach particularly among youth, all collectively substantiate Twitter's primacy in the political landscape of Pakistan (Khawar, 2017; Haq et al., 2023). Further, it is worth noting that Twitter plays an outsized role in engaging Pakistani youth in politics. According to the report "Digital Pakistan 2019" (2019), the male population, particularly youth aged 18–24, is more actively engaged on social media than females. Past studies, such as those by Ahmed and Skoric (2015), have also shown how online campaigns on platforms like Twitter have successfully increased voter turnout. Research has further illuminated the role of Twitter in political information sharing among educated Pakistani youth. For instance, the emerging party Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) has been found to play a substantial role in increasing social media traffic (Eijaz, 2013; Wodak and Forchtner, 2017). This validates the study's choice of Twitter as it not only affects the social media sphere but also, as cited by Qaisar and Riaz (2020), influences traditional print media, enhancing the study's overall sociopolitical relevance. Second, the selection of Twitter provides a cohesive, unified data corpus that enables nuanced textual and thematic analyses. The relatively standard format of Twitter—character limitations, hashtags, and retweets—offers a consistent framework that ensures

methodological rigor. Finally, Twitter's capacities for real-time, succinct communication harmonize with the unique political and social dynamics in Pakistan, as has been highlighted by instances such as the 2018 elections and PTI's hashtag campaigns (Batool et al., 2022).

4.2 Analytical framework

Framing theory, initially proposed by Goffman (1974), examines the influence of information presentation, known as "the frame," on individuals' interpretation and understanding of that information. It recognizes that individuals perceive the world through pre-existing frameworks that shape their understanding of data. Entman (1993) further advanced framing theory within the field of communication, emphasizing its role in shaping public discourse, media coverage, and the construction of collective meaning. A more specific definition is offered by Entman:

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

The present study makes use of Hallahan's (1999, 2011) theory of framing, which specifically centers on the application of framing within the realm of public relations. Hallahan (1999, 2011) describes framing theory as a framework that involves strategically selecting and presenting information to shape public perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. *Frames* serve as cognitive structures that guide individuals' interpretation of information and influence their judgments and actions. In the context of public relations, framing theory facilitates effective communication and relationship-building between organizations and their target publics (2011, p. 210). Further, scholars like Duhe and Zoch (1994) argue that framing constitutes a crucial process in shaping social reality by influencing individuals' perspectives and perceptions of the world. While public relations practitioners often employ framing to construct effective messages, the framing metaphor is better conceptualized as a window or portrait frame that delineates information, directing attention to specific elements and delimiting the subject matter. Consequently, framing entails both the *inclusion* and *exclusion* of information, as well as the emphasis placed on particular aspects.

This choice of analytical framework is justified by the recognition that the tweets of political leaders, Maryam Nawaz, and Imran Khan, can be seen as acts of public relationing, serving as means to communicate with followers and strategically establish relationships within the political establishment. By applying Hallahan's theory, this study aims to analyze the framing strategies employed in the tweets to shape public perceptions, attitudes, and relationships within the broader political landscape. Specifically, three framing strategies within Hallahan (1999, p. 207–209) framework were examined: *valence framing, semantic framing, and story framing*. For instance, valence framing was identified through careful examination of the tweets for tone, choice of words, and rhetorical devices that conveyed a positive

or negative attitude toward specific issues, events, or actors. Semantic framing, on the other hand, was assessed by examining the terminology and phrasing used to discuss or describe an event, policy, or public figure. Storytelling framing was identified through narrative structures or thematic arcs evident within the tweets that contributed to the politicians' self-presentation and framing of issues. Thus, the theoretical underpinnings of these strategies are deeply rooted in the extensive work of Hallahan (1999), who identified seven distinct types of framing applicable to public relations. These types encompass the framing of *situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues, responsibility, and news*, each offering unique lenses through which public relations messages and audience responses can be examined. Our selection of the three specific framing strategies is grounded in this framework, ensuring our analytical approach aligns with established scholarly discourse. Additionally, it is not out of place to mention here that the specific objective of the study was to examine how these framing techniques contribute to the construction of political identity by Nawaz and Khan, rather than merely categorizing or quantifying the tweets. By employing this theory, the study aimed to analyze how these political leaders strategically shape the presentation of their political messages and construct their desired political identities. Recognizing the tweets as sites of not only Nawaz and Khan's political identity construction but also as acts of public relationing, the study aimed to uncover persuasive techniques employed to influence public perceptions and attitudes.

Moreover, the aim of this article is not to provide an exhaustive account of all possible facets of Twitter activity by the politicians in question, but rather to conduct an in-depth, qualitative examination of their framing techniques. While quantitative analyses, such as sentiment analysis, may offer valuable insights into frequency and distribution of frames or sentiments, they often lack the depth needed to understand the subtle nuances of political framing strategies, especially in the context of a complex socio-political landscape like Pakistan's. The focus on qualitative aspects like valence, semantics, and storytelling allows this study to delve into the intricate ways in which Nawaz and Khan construct their political identities, offering insights that mere quantitative data might not fully capture.

4.3 Data analysis

Initially, the dataset comprising 3,650 tweets was methodically segmented, preparing it for a detailed coding process. Each tweet was examined and coded, a process that involved identifying and tagging elements of the tweets that corresponded to the predefined framing strategies—valence framing, semantic framing, and story framing. Each tweet was scrutinized to determine how it portrayed its subject matter, the language used, and the narrative it presented, all of which are pivotal in identifying the framing strategy employed.

Following the coding process, each tweet was independently categorized under one of the predefined framing strategies. This phase of the analysis was crucial for ensuring objectivity and minimizing individual researcher bias. Post categorization,

a comparative evaluation of the authors' interpretations was conducted. This step was not merely a formality but an essential process for ensuring the reliability and consistency of our categorizations. Discrepancies in interpretations—an inevitable and valuable aspect of qualitative research—were collaboratively discussed and reconciled. This reconciliation process was a vital part of our analytical rigor, ensuring that our categorizations were not only consistent but also collectively agreed upon, reflecting a shared understanding of the framing strategies at play.

To further augment the validity of our study, the tweets showcased in the data analysis were carefully selected as archetypical instances. These instances were not arbitrarily chosen; they were emblematic of the larger dataset and effectively illustrated the identified framing strategies in action. This selection ensured that the examples used in the analysis were representative of broader trends and patterns observed in the dataset. Each chosen tweet served as a clear exemplar of one of the framing strategies, providing concrete illustrations of how political figures use language and narrative to frame their messages and shape public perception. More importantly, in implementing these framing strategies, our analysis was not merely a superficial categorization of tweets. Instead, it was an intricate process of dissecting and understanding the multi-layered nature of political communication on social media in the context of Pakistan. Each tweet was analyzed not only for its content but also for the underlying framing strategy, as defined by Hallahan's (1999, 2011) theoretical model. This process ensured that our categorization and subsequent analysis were both methodologically sound and theoretically grounded.

The analysis of the data thus, provides evidence of the distinct framing strategies employed by Imran Khan and Maryam Nawaz, which serve to mobilize and garner public support. Imran Khan strategically constructs his framing around the central themes of corruption, accountability, and justice, positioning himself as a transformative force capable of addressing Pakistan's multifaceted challenges. Notably, Khan's use of assertive language, authoritative references, and the emphasis on justice allows him to effectively project himself as a resolute and authoritative leader. In contrast, Maryam Nawaz adopts a framing approach by focusing on narratives of victimization experienced by her and her family, highlighting oppression and resistance, largely attributing these experiences to Imran Khan, Pakistani judiciary, and establishment. By employing personal anecdotes, emotive appeals, and victimization narratives, Nawaz effectively engenders empathy and solidarity among her followers, fostering a sense of shared experience and collective resilience. The divergent framing strategies employed by Khan and Nawaz demonstrate their nuanced understanding of political communication and their ability to strategically position themselves within the discourse, catering to the diverse needs and perceptions of their respective audiences. By examining these strategies, we aim to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which they construct and frame their respective narratives.

1. Framing strategies

    1.1 Valence framing

    1.2 Semantic framing

    1.3 Story framing

These framing strategies are analyzed comprehensively below.

4.3.1 Framing strategies
4.3.1.1 Valence framing

Both Khan and Nawaz strategically utilize negative valence framing to target their opponents and construct their political narratives, aiming to create a sense of dissatisfaction, disapproval, or disdain toward their adversaries (McDonald et al., 2021). This framing technique allows them to highlight perceived flaws, shortcomings, or unethical behaviors of their opponents, diminishing their credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the audience (Bizer et al., 2011). By evoking emotional responses and mobilizing support, both leaders strengthen their positions as agents of change, effectively shaping public perceptions and discourse to further their political agendas. For instance, Khan strategically emphasizes the failures, corruption, and wrongdoings of the political elites, positioning himself and his party as the driving force for rectification and rallying support behind his cause.

> **Tweet 1:**
> *The way we have descended into becoming a banana republic where there is no Rule of Law & only law of the jungle, it is clear that this reign of terror is not controlled by PDM puppets but by another force that sees itself totally above the law. Our ppl are abducted & afterwards sham FIRs are registered. As bail in one FIR is granted, another FIR pops up. I have over 145 FIRs against me. It's a circus of FIRs. My Bani Gala caretaker, my Zaman Park cook, our social media's Mashwani, Waqas & my security incharge Ghumman—all abducted & tortured to try & update their software. Ali Amin got bail in one sham case, & another FIR popped up & now another one with police taking him to Lahore. Despite his falling ill on the way & being taken to hospital, he was removed from hospital before he had stabilized. Now total fascism prevails.*

In this tweet, Imran Khan employs a negative valence framing strategy to highlight what he perceives as a deteriorating political situation characterized by the absence of the rule of law and the presence of coercion and oppression. The use of words and phrases such as "*banana republic*," "*law of the jungle*," and "*reign of terror*" contribute to the negative tone and emphasize the breakdown of institutional integrity and justice within the system. In particular, such phrases serve as a rhetorical strategy to evoke strong negative emotions (Jerit, 2004) and paint a vivid picture of the political situation he is criticizing. These phrases invoke imagery associated with instability, lawlessness, and fear. The term "banana republic" for instance, implies a state characterized by political instability, corruption, and a lack of respect for the rule of law in Pakistan. It evokes the image of a weak and dysfunctional Pakistani government, reinforcing the idea that the country is in a state of disarray. Similarly, the phrase "law of the jungle" conveys the notion of a society governed by ruthless competition and survival of the fittest, suggesting a lack of order and fairness in the political system. The mention of a "reign of terror" further amplifies the negative valence of the framing, invoking a sense

of fear and intimidation (Bizer et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2021). This phrase connotes a period marked by widespread violence, repression, and a disregard for basic human rights. By associating the current political climate with a "reign of terror," Khan seeks to create a perception of a highly oppressive and authoritarian regime. Ending his tweet with "*now total fascism prevails*" implies a critical evaluation of the current political situation. The use of the term "*fascism*" suggests an extreme form of authoritarianism and suppression of individual freedoms. By employing this term, Khan indicates that the prevailing Pakistani political system is characterized by a disregard for democratic principles, a concentration of power, and the stifling of dissent. The word "*total*" intensifies the assertion, emphasizing the extent and pervasiveness of what Khan perceives as fascist tendencies. It suggests that the entire political landscape is dominated by authoritarian practices and that there is little room for democratic processes or open dialogue.

Further, Khan describes the alleged abduction and torture of individuals, the filing of what he refers to as "*sham FIRs*" (First Information Reports), and the continuous emergence of new FIRs even after bail is granted in previous cases. The repeated use of terms like "*circus of FIRs*" suggests a sense of chaos and abuse of legal processes. By highlighting his own experiences of facing multiple FIRs and the mistreatment of his associates, Khan aims to portray himself as a victim of an unjust and oppressive system. Moreover, Khan introduces the notion of an external force that he claims is controlling this alleged reign of terror, distancing himself from responsibility while implying a larger conspiracy at play. The mention of individuals who have been allegedly abducted and tortured, including his caretaker and cook, serves to personalize, and dramatize the impact of these actions, further eliciting public sympathy and outrage. Through this negative valence framing (Bizer et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2021), Khan not only seeks to create a sense of urgency, moral outrage and mobilize public support for his cause but also portrays the current political situation as a dire threat to democracy, freedom, and individual rights. By portraying the current situation as a manifestation of total fascism, he positions himself as a defender of justice and a voice against oppression.

Nawaz also employs a negative valence framing approach in her communication, targeting Imran Khan and his perceived allies by critiquing the decision-making process and governance in Pakistan (Beard, 2000). Through confrontational language and references to sedition and chaos, she highlights perceived shortcomings of her opponents, presenting herself as a vocal advocate against flaws in the decision-making process (Bizer et al., 2011; Hallahan, 2011; McDonald et al., 2021). This framing strategy aims to undermine the legitimacy and credibility of her political rivals, particularly Imran Khan, while mobilizing support and cultivating public sentiment in her favor.

> **Tweet 2:**
> *My father (ex-Prime Minister of Pakistan) was not afraid of oppression after being expelled three times, what do you think, you will scare him by threatening him after five years of oppression? Maryam Nawaz has gone through these troubles for five years. Listen carefully, Maryam will not be afraid. The entire*

gang of jackals on one side and the bravery of Maryam Nawaz alone on one side. Ladla's (uses this for Khan) supporters would be called out. Awry scales would not be taken lying down. You (referring to khan) are also corrupt and the judges protecting you are also corrupt. It is a network of avoiding corruption and accountability that is no longer there. You are drowning!

In this tweet, Maryam Nawaz employs a strong negative valence framing strategy to convey her message. She starts by invoking her father's resilience in the face of oppression, emphasizing his unwavering spirit, and implying that she, too, shares the same strength. More importantly, Nawaz frames the experiences of her family as a series of injustices and oppression. She portrays herself and her family as victims of a biased political and judicial system, emphasizing the hardships they have endured over the years. By using rhetorical phrases (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) such as "*five years of oppression*" and "*Maryam Nawaz has gone through these troubles for five years,*" she underscores the duration and severity of the perceived mistreatment. She thus creates a narrative of endurance and perseverance, positioning herself as a voice against what she portrays as systemic flaws and corruption within the political system. By positioning herself as the torchbearer of her father's legacy, she appeals to the emotions of her supporters who perceive her family as victims of political persecution.

Further, by using confrontational language (Beard, 2000) such as "gang of jackals" and accusations of corruption directed at Imran Khan and the judiciary, Maryam creates a sense of outrage and indignation among her followers. By questioning the integrity Khan and his facilitators, she seeks to undermine their credibility and present herself as a viable alternative. In particular, her rhetorical statement (Wodak and Forchtner, 2017) "*Listen carefully, Maryam will not be afraid. The entire gang of jackals on one side and the bravery of Maryam Nawaz alone on one side*" holds significant implications in her tweet. Firstly, through this statement she emphasizes her fearlessness, and it enables her to present herself as a confident, strong, and resolute leader who is unyielding in her pursuit of justice. This assertion aims to inspire trust and admiration among her supporters, portraying her as a courageous figure standing against a formidable opposition. The phrase "*the entire gang of jackals on one side*" carries a negative connotation, suggesting that Maryam perceives her opponents, that is Imran Khan and his allies, as a group of unscrupulous individuals. This framing strategy serves to demonize her rivals and discredit their actions and motives, further bolstering her own credibility and positioning herself as the righteous defender (Frank, 1990; Wodak and Forchtner, 2017). Additionally, by juxtaposing the "*bravery of Maryam Nawaz alone on one side*" against the collective opposition, Maryam seeks to highlight her individual strength and resilience. This positioning implies that she possesses the qualities necessary to challenge and overcome the obstacles she faces, portraying herself as a lone warrior fighting against corruption and injustice. Furthermore, Maryam's assertion that the network of corruption and lack of accountability is pervasive suggests that she is fighting against deeply entrenched systems of power. She, in particular, makes use of the word "*Ladla*" for Imran Khan which carries certain implications (Otieno et al., 2016). "Ladla" is a term commonly used Urdu term which is used to describe someone

who is favored or pampered, often with a sense of sarcasm or disdain. By using this term, Maryam Nawaz aims to portray Imran Khan as someone who is perceived to be receiving preferential treatment or being protected by certain individuals or institutions. The implication is that Imran Khan's supporters are blindly loyal and fail to recognize any flaws or shortcomings in his leadership. This choice of word serves to undermine Imran Khan's credibility and create a sense of resentment among her own supporters and those who are critical of his leadership. It reinforces the narrative that Imran Khan is not deserving of the adulation he receives and suggests that he is shielded from accountability. Overall, the use of the term "*Ladla*" in this context is a rhetorical strategy employed by Maryam Nawaz to delegitimize Imran Khan and question the authenticity of his popular support base (Frank, 1990). Additionally, the use of the phrase "*You are drowning!*" serves as a rhetorical flourish, conveying the message that her opponents are facing imminent defeat and their actions are futile. This statement not only asserts her confidence but also attempts to demoralize her rivals and rally her supporters. Overall, Maryam Nawaz's tweet effectively utilizes negative valence framing to construct her narrative, portraying herself as a resilient leader fighting against corruption and injustice. By employing confrontational language and challenging the credibility of her opponents, she aims to mobilize public support, solidify her political identity, and position herself as a force to be reckoned with in Pakistani politics.

4.3.1.2 Semantic framing

In terms of semantic framing, both Imran Khan and Maryam Nawaz strategically employ a range of semantic and rhetorical devices to advance their political agendas and shape their political narratives. These devices are employed in distinct ways that align with their respective goals and ideologies (Jasim and Mustafa, 2020). By carefully selecting words and phrases, utilizing emotional appeals, and employing persuasive techniques, they aim to sway public opinion and strengthen their positions as political actors. For instance, Khan's use of strong and assertive language such as "corrupt mafia," "injustice" and "looters" triggers a sense of outrage and frustration among his followers, aligning with his narrative of fighting against corruption and holding the political elite accountable. This is illustrated in his following tweet:

Tweet 3:
PTI women have been abducted and are being mistreated in jails, kept under inhumane conditions, and subjected to severe mental torture when none were involved in the arson. They were humiliated while protesting peacefully only to terrorize and scare women from exercising their fundamental right of protest in future and to depoliticize them. I am proud of the way all our women have withstood everything with such dignity and courage. The way Pakistani women stood up for Haqeeqi Azadi, they will be remembered and become part of our democratic history. Also, what will never be forgotten is the brutality of our security forces and the shameless way they went out of their way to abuse, hurt, and humiliate our women. Hundreds are languishing in jail in terrible conditions. This too won't be forgotten. Never did I imagine women in our society would be treated so shamefully and the sanctity of chadar and char dewari so violated.

In this tweet, Imran Khan strategically employs various rhetorical and semantic devices to convey his message and shape public opinion. For instance, by using enumeration (Prasetya, 2020), Khan lists multiple alleged mistreatments suffered by PTI women, aiming to emphasize the severity and extent of the perceived injustices. Additionally, he employs emotive language (Macagno and Walton, 2014), such as "*abducted,*" "*mistreated,*" "*inhumane conditions,*" and "*severe mental torture,*" to evoke strong emotional responses and elicit sympathy for the PTI women. These linguistic devices are strategically employed to portray the PTI women as victims of injustice and to draw attention to the alleged brutality they have endured. Furthermore, Khan utilizes contrast and juxtaposition (Bull and Fetzer, 2010) by highlighting the peaceful nature of the protest and the subsequent mistreatment of the women. This contrasting approach serves to amplify the perceived injustice and draw attention to the violation of their fundamental rights. The phrases "*terrorize and scare women*" and "*depoliticize them*" are used purposefully to suggest a deliberate attempt to suppress women's participation in political activities and protests, appealing to notions of gender equality and women's empowerment. Khan's tweet also incorporates commemoration and historical reference (Gkinopoulos and Hegarty, 2018) by asserting that the women who stood up for "*Haqeeqi Azadi*" (real freedom) will be remembered and become part of democratic history. This device elevates the women's actions and positions them as heroic figures in the struggle for democracy. Furthermore, the tweet contains a moral evaluation (Spencer-Bennett, 2018) by emphasizing the shamefulness of the treatment of women and the violation of societal norms, such as the "*sanctity of chadar and char dewari*" (the dignity and privacy of women within the four walls).

More importantly, such type of semantic framing helps him shape his political narrative in several ways. Firstly, by highlighting the mistreatment and abuse faced by PTI women, he portrays himself as a leader who empathizes with the struggles of ordinary citizens, particularly women. This framing positions him as a voice against injustice and positions his party, PTI, as the party that stands up for the rights and dignity of women. Furthermore, by emphasizing the bravery and resilience of PTI women in the face of adversity, Khan constructs a narrative of strength and courage, not only for his party but also for himself as a leader. This framing helps to create a positive image of Khan as a leader who inspires and supports his party members, particularly women, in their fight for justice. Additionally, by condemning the mistreatment and humiliation of women by security forces, Khan seeks to establish a contrast between the oppressive forces and his own progressive and empathetic stance. This framing positions him as a leader who values human rights, particularly women's rights, and strengthens his appeal to voters who prioritize these issues. Overall, by utilizing semantic framing (Hallahan, 2011) in this manner, Khan shapes his political narrative as a leader who champions the rights and dignity of women, portrays himself as a compassionate and empathetic figure, and distinguishes himself from oppressive forces. This framing strategy aims to garner public support, reinforce his political identity, and mobilize voters who prioritize gender equality and social justice.

On the other hand, Maryam Nawaz positions herself as a resilient and courageous figure who has faced oppression and injustice. Her use of words like "oppression," "victim," and "struggle" evokes empathy and portrays her as a victim of political persecution. By framing herself as a voice against perceived biases and unfairness, she presents herself as a defender of rights and a symbol of resistance. This is exemplified in her following tweet:

Tweet 4:
Those who (referring to Imran Khan) cancel "movements" due to the fear of the police, those who stay at home because of fear are called jackals, and those who break every obstacle of dictator Musharraf's stand, lead from the front and, by the grace of Allah, restore the judiciary before reaching Gujranwala. This lion-hearted leader is called Nawaz Sharif! When Musharraf took over, Kulsoom Nawaz Sharif (mother), who emerged as a powerful voice within PML-N, was also a leader and trendsetter. At the time of NAB appearance, stones were being pelted on my car, I came out of the car, there are videos, I stood outside the door of NAB office asking them to open the door, I did not sit inside, how could I sit in the bullet proof car and get my workers hit with sticks and stones?

In this tweet, Maryam Nawaz strategically employs a range of semantic, linguistic, and rhetorical devices (Jasim and Mustafa, 2020) to shape her political narrative and influence public opinion. Using metaphors and similes (Mussolff and Zinken, 2009), she characterizes Imran Khan as someone who cancels "movements" due to fear, positioning him as weak and indecisive, while presenting herself as a fearless leader who breaks obstacles and leads from the front, invoking images of strength and determination. More specifically, she describes her father, Nawaz Sharif, as a "lion-hearted leader," employing the metaphor of a lion to convey strength, bravery, and leadership qualities (Ritchie, 2013). By characterizing her father as a lion, she emphasizes his boldness, courage, and fearlessness in the face of challenges. This metaphor serves to create an image of Nawaz Sharif as a powerful and influential figure within the Pakistani political landscape. This metaphor also evokes a sense of pride and admiration (Ritchie, 2013), portraying Nawaz Sharif as a formidable force in the political arena. In comparison to the metaphorical image of Nawaz Sharif as a lion, Maryam Nawaz uses the term "*jackal*" to refer to Imran Khan. The use of this metaphor creates a sharp contrast between the two leaders. While a lion is traditionally associated with power, courage, and nobility, a jackal is often associated with cunning, opportunism, and scavenging behavior (Mussolff and Zinken, 2009; Ritchie, 2013). By characterizing Imran Khan as a jackal, Maryam implies that he lacks the strength, integrity, and leadership qualities attributed to her father. It serves to portray Khan as someone who is untrustworthy, opportunistic, and lacking in genuine leadership skills. Thus, the metaphorical depiction of Nawaz Sharif as a lion and Imran Khan as a jackal in Maryam Nawaz's tweet aims to reinforce the image of her father as a strong and respected leader, while undermining the credibility and qualities associated with Imran Khan. This rhetorical strategy (Wodak and Forchtner, 2017) seeks to position Nawaz Sharif as a more desirable and capable leader in contrast to Khan. This framing strategy aims to evoke negative perceptions of Khan among her followers and diminish his standing in the eyes of the public. Moreover, Maryam strategically

references her mother, Kulsoom Nawaz Sharif, as a powerful voice within the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). By associating herself with her mother's leadership, she establishes a lineage of leadership and reinforces her own credibility and legitimacy (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). This reference not only highlights the influential role her mother played within the party but also appeals to the emotions and sentiments of PML-N supporters who hold Kulsoom Nawaz in high regard. It serves to strengthen Maryam's own image as a capable and experienced leader, inheriting the legacy of her mother's leadership within the party. Furthermore, Maryam Nawaz recounts incidents of her car being pelted with stones during her National Accountability Bureau (NAB) appearance, using descriptive language (Wilson, 2015) to evoke a sense of victimization and oppression. By highlighting these personal experiences, she seeks to position herself as a courageous figure who fearlessly confronts challenges and remains steadfast in upholding her principles. This narrative of resilience and determination is designed to elicit empathy and solidarity from her audience, reinforcing her image as a strong and principled leader.

The use of such provocative language and descriptors (Wilson, 2015; Wodak and Forchtner, 2017) in Maryam Nawaz's tweet serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it aims to elicit strong emotional responses from her supporters, generating feelings of empathy, anger, and solidarity. This emotional engagement strengthens the connection between Maryam Nawaz and her followers, fostering a sense of shared experiences and common goals. Secondly, by constructing a narrative of victimization and oppression, she seeks to present herself as a courageous and principled leader who remains undeterred by challenges and adversity. This positioning helps to shape her political identity and reinforces her credibility and legitimacy among her supporters. Overall, Maryam Nawaz's use of provocative language and descriptors in her tweet is a deliberate rhetorical strategy aimed at evoking strong emotional responses and solidifying her political narrative.

4.3.1.3 Story framing

Both Imran Khan and Maryam Nawaz employ story framing techniques in their tweets, strategically selecting key themes and utilizing various storytelling devices to advance their political agendas. These storytelling devices include *anecdotes, personal experiences, vivid descriptions, and narratives of struggle and resilience.* These devices aim to captivate the audience's attention, evoke empathy, and create a sense of connection with the storyteller. Imran Khan's tweets focus on themes of corruption, accountability, and justice, utilizing syntactical structures to emphasize the failures of political elites. Through script structures, he presents a predictable sequence of events, positioning himself as a catalyst for change. Thematic structures are evident in his use of propositions that establish causal relationships between elements, constructing a narrative of cause and effect. For instance, this is elucidated in his following tweet:

Tweet 5:

Year 2022: "it was the best of times; it was the worst of times." When Man, God's greatest creation, falls, he descends below animals even. The ones who tortured Ali Bilal, our Zille Shah, to death are worse than animals. A govt with one of the best economic performances was removed through a conspiracy

triggered by supreme self-interest; & Pakistan was handed over to a bunch of criminals. They ran economy to the ground, gave themselves NRO2 (National Reconciliation Ordinance) massive public support won 75% of bye elections & established itself as a truly national Party. Despite the gloom right now, especially of a possible default, I have faith in Almighty Allah & confidence in our people that without doubt in 2023 through elections PTI will form strong government & bring about substantive structural reforms to get Pakistan out of the crisis the Imported government & its backers have plunged the country into.

In this tweet, Khan strategically employs storytelling techniques and constructs the narrative through implicit means, such as the sequencing of events and the use of descriptive language. The tweet incorporates storytelling techniques by presenting a contrasting theme, emphasizing the characterization of individuals (Polletta, 2015), and recounting past events to create a sense of conflict and progression. For instance, the opening line, "*it was the best of times, it was the worst of times,*" establishes a contrasting theme that captures the reader's attention and creates a sense of anticipation (Polletta, 2015; Salmon, 2017). This technique draws the audience into the narrative, setting the stage for the subsequent message. By borrowing a quote from Charles Dickens' "A Tale of Two Cities," Khan evokes a familiar literary reference, which adds credibility and depth to his narrative. Furthermore, Khan employs the technique of characterization (Polletta, 2015) by referring to "*Man, God's greatest creation.*" This rhetorical device serves to elevate the significance of the events being described and reinforces the importance of human beings within the narrative (Jerit, 2004). By invoking a sense of humanity's value, Khan positions himself as a champion for the wellbeing and dignity of individuals, framing his narrative as a struggle against injustice and the dehumanizing treatment of others. The use of provocative language (Obeng, 1997), such as labeling those who tortured Ali Bilal as "*worse than animals,*" serves to create emotional impact and intensify the conflict within the narrative. This choice of words evokes strong emotions and portrays the perpetrators as morally reprehensible, thus generating a sense of outrage and solidarity among the audience. By highlighting such extreme acts of cruelty, Khan aims to position himself as a voice of justice and advocate for accountability.

Further, Khan constructs a narrative that revolves around the themes of injustice and political resurgence. He presents a conflict by describing the removal of a government with a strong economic performance through a conspiracy driven by self-interest. This conflict can be considered an element of the plot (Jackson, 2013), as it introduces tension and sets the stage for Khan's positioning as a voice against corruption and criminality. Regarding script structures (Tannen, 1993), the tweet follows a chronological order in recounting past events. Khan references the NRO2 and the party's resurgence in byelections, which can be seen as an orderly sequencing of events that contribute to the overall narrative. The mention of the government's economic downfall and the country's crisis adds further elements to the script structure, as they depict a series of interconnected events leading to the present situation. By incorporating these plot and script structures, Khan effectively constructs a narrative that supports his key themes and reinforces his political stance. The coherent sequencing of events and the

portrayal of a cause-and-effect relationship contribute to the overall persuasive impact of the tweet.

Moreover, toward the end of his tweet, he uses the phrase "*Despite the gloom right now*" which can be seen as a storytelling technique known as foreshadowing. Foreshadowing is the use of hints or clues to suggest future events or outcomes (Bae and Young, 2008). In this case, Khan uses the phrase to acknowledge the current challenges or difficulties faced by the country or his party. By acknowledging the gloom, he creates a sense of anticipation and sets the stage for a potential positive turn of events in the future. The significance of this statement lies in its ability to create a contrast between the current negative circumstances and the anticipated positive outcome. It serves to generate hope and optimism among his followers, suggesting that despite the challenges faced at present, there is a potential for a better future. This technique engages the audience's imagination and emotions, drawing them further into the narrative (Bae and Young, 2008) and reinforcing Khan's positioning as a leader who is committed to overcoming obstacles and bringing about positive change. Overall, Imran Khan's tweet effectively employs vivid language, metaphors, and storytelling elements to position himself as a leader fighting against injustice and corruption. The narrative revolves around themes of political resurgence and the need for reform. Through emotional descriptors and a subjective point of view, Khan engages the audience and conveys a sense of urgency and determination in his political agenda.

Maryam Nawaz on the other hand, effectively incorporates elements such as theme, characterization, conflict, and moral lessons (Jackson, 2013; Salmon, 2017) to construct storylines that resonate with her intended audience. Through the selection of key themes and the incorporation of storytelling devices, she creates a coherent and persuasive narrative that supports her political agenda and positions herself as a victim of injustice.

Tweet 6:
These reeks of extreme mental disorder (referring to khan). It is nothing but his own sins and excesses coming to haunt him. This also is an admission of his foul play against MNS, his removal from office in particular. What he basically is saying is that what he did to us was so wrong that it's natural consequence should have been revenge. However, neither MNS, nor I believe in revenge and would never resort to it but yes, we do believe in Divine Retribution and that is exactly what we are seeing. Poetic justice is another phrase for that. Lesson for the mankind.

In this tweet, Maryam Nawaz strategically utilizes storytelling techniques to shape her narrative and establish her position vis-à-vis Imran Khan. The deliberate application of techniques like characterization, provocative opener and moral policing enhances the persuasive impact of her message (Jackson, 2013; Polletta, 2015; Salmon, 2017) and constructs a compelling storyline. One noteworthy aspect of her tweet is the use of the phrase "*These reeks of extreme mental disorder*" at the beginning. This can be regarded as a storytelling technique known as a provocative opener (Alexander, 2017). By employing such provocative language, Maryam captures the audience's attention and creates a sense of intrigue and curiosity. This technique aims to hook the readers

from the outset and entice them to further engage with the narrative (Alexander, 2017). Additionally, the characterization of Khan as afflicted by extreme mental disorder sets a tone of criticism and serves as a rhetorical device to undermine his credibility and position Maryam as a victim of his actions. It establishes an immediate conflict and positions Maryam as a figure who is challenging the alleged wrongdoings of Khan. By commencing her tweet with such a strong and attention-grabbing statement, Maryam employs a storytelling technique that leverages the power of language and rhetoric to shape the narrative and position herself as a credible and righteous voice in opposition to Khan. The provocative opener not only establishes the conflict but also sets the stage for the subsequent unfolding of the storyline, capturing the audience's interest and encouraging them to delve further into her perspective (Alexander, 2017).

Maryam also employs script structures by presenting a sequence of events in a predictable pattern (Tannen, 1993; Hallahan, 2011). She outlines Khan's alleged wrongdoings against her and her family, establishes herself as a victim, and introduces the concept of *divine retribution* as a natural consequence. This orderly sequencing enhances the coherence and comprehensibility of her narrative, ensuring that the audience can easily follow the storyline. Furthermore, thematic structures (Mitchell and Chuah, 2013) are evident in Maryam's use of propositions and hypotheses to explain the relations between the elements within her tweet. She argues that Khan's actions warrant consequences, justifying this belief with the concept of divine retribution. The presence of contrastive words like "*but*" and "*however*" reinforces the thematic structure, highlighting the distinction between her principled approach and the notion of revenge. The positioning of the statement "*we do believe in Divine Retribution and that is exactly what we are seeing. Poetic justice is another phrase for that. Lesson for mankind*" toward the conclusion of Maryam's tweet serves as a storytelling technique known as a moral lesson (Cronon, 2013). This narrative device carries significance in terms of reinforcing her message and influencing the audience. By invoking the concept of "*Divine Retribution*" and "*poetic justice*," Maryam implies that the unfolding events, which she interprets as Imran Khan facing the consequences of his actions, are a manifestation of divine intervention and a just outcome. This strategic employment of a moral lesson aims to add depth and moral weight (Cronon, 2013) to her narrative, positioning herself as a defender of principles and a proponent of justice. Moreover, the reference to a "*lesson for mankind*" suggests a broader implication beyond the immediate context. By framing the narrative as a moral tale with universal relevance, Maryam attempts to resonate with the audience's sense of justice and moral values. This storytelling technique aims to provoke reflection and encourage the audience to align themselves with Maryam's perspective, reinforcing her credibility and appeal as a leader. In essence, the utilization of this storytelling technique allows Maryam to construct a persuasive narrative, assert her moral stance, and position herself as a righteous advocate of justice. By incorporating a moral lesson toward the end of her tweet, she seeks to solidify her position as a principled leader and evoke a sense of resonance among her audience, ultimately bolstering her influence and support.

5 Discussion

Building on Hallahan's (1999, 2011) theory of framing, which emphasizes the selection and presentation of information to shape public perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, our study delves into the specific framing strategies employed by Nawaz and Khan in the socio-political context of Pakistan. This theoretical approach was instrumental in understanding how these Pakistani political leaders use framing as a tool to guide individuals' interpretation of information and influence their judgments and actions, particularly in the realm of public relations and political communication.

The distinct cultural fabric of Pakistan, characterized by its history, diverse religious practices, and complex socio-political dynamics, plays a crucial role in how political messages are framed and received. The historical narratives and religious references, integral to the Pakistani societal fabric are deftly woven into Nawaz and Khan's communication strategies. These elements cater to and influence the deeply ingrained religious sentiments and national identity of the population, adding a powerful emotive dimension to their political narratives. Moreover, the socio-political context of Pakistan, marked by issues such as governance, civil rights, and regional conflicts, is a critical factor in shaping the framing strategies of these leaders. Their approach to addressing these issues on Twitter reflects their political stance and actively engages with public sentiment around these concerns. This understanding of the cultural and political landscape of Pakistan is imperative in comprehending how framing strategies are tailored by Nawaz and Khan to resonate with their audience, thereby influencing public perception and engagement in a manner that transcends mere political rhetoric.

In situating our study within the broader context of previous research on political communication and Twitter, we find resonance with the burgeoning body of research that examines the multifaceted impact of Twitter on political communication. Scholars like Hermida (2010), Bruns and Burgess (2011), and Van Dijck (2013) have emphasized Twitter's role in the global public sphere, particularly its influence on political processes and communication dynamics. The findings of Bessi and Ferrara (2016) and Howard and Kollanyi (2016) on the unforeseen results of significant political events like Brexit and Trump's election underscore the transformative impact of social media in political narratives. Furthermore, the focus on Twitter in the Pakistani political context echoes the emphasis on regional specificity and cultural matrices in political communication research, as noted in the Ibero-American Cultural Space (ECI) studies (Álvarez-Peralta et al., 2023). The emphasis of our study on Twitter within the Pakistani political landscape is a deliberate, strategic decision that aligns with the growing scholarly acknowledgment of the importance of regional specificity and cultural matrices in political communication research. This focus responds to the call for a deeper understanding of how social media platforms, particularly Twitter, function within specific cultural and political contexts. Moreover, in a country like Pakistan where traditional media has often been subject to state control or self-censorship (Yusuf and Schoemaker, 2013), Twitter provides an alternative platform for political figures to communicate directly with the public (Lee and Shin, 2014). This direct communication allows for the bypassing of traditional gatekeeping mechanisms of information, but it also

requires an understanding of how messages are received and interpreted within the Pakistani sociocultural milieu. Our study, therefore, adds to this discourse by providing insights into the unique sociopolitical dynamics of Pakistan and how they are reflected and influenced by political communication on Twitter.

6 Conclusion

While the study is embedded in the production side of political communication, the potential implications of these framing strategies in shaping public opinion and voter behavior cannot be overlooked. Research has shown that framing can significantly impact both individual voter choices and broader public narratives (Entman, 1993; Hallahan, 2011). Therefore, the findings from this study hold utility for political communication strategists. They offer insights into how messages can be carefully constructed to align with or manipulate public perceptions, thereby serving as a tactical guide for political communication in digital spaces.

The limitations of this study primarily rest in its scope, which was confined to the analysis of how the two Pakistani politicians frame and construct their political identities. Moreover, the methodological orientation of this research precluded an exploration of audience reception and interpretation, thereby offering a one-sided view of the communication process. Despite these limitations, the study holds practical implications. Political actors and public relations professionals may find the analyses useful for crafting communication strategies that resonate with specific political and cultural contexts. Additionally, public policy advocates and media analysts could leverage these insights to better interpret the framing techniques used in political discourse and consequently, the potential shifts in public opinion they might instigate especially in the volatile context of Pakistani politics.

For future research, the study opens several avenues. An audience-based analysis could provide a complementary perspective, enriching our understanding of the dynamics between framing strategies and public interpretation. Similarly, a comparative study involving a more diverse range of political actors could broaden the scope and applicability of the findings. Given the ever-evolving nature of social media platforms, longitudinal studies could also offer valuable insights into how framing strategies adapt over time. More importantly, the ever-evolving landscape of social media demands a dynamic understanding of political communication strategies. The insights gained from this study offer a foundational framework for interpreting future political messages on platforms like Twitter. By dissecting the specific framing techniques utilized by political figures, we arm future researchers, strategists, and even the public with tools to discern the underlying objectives and persuasive elements in online political dialogue. Additionally, as social media algorithms and public sentiment change, the strategies highlighted here could serve as benchmarks to evaluate shifts in framing techniques. In a future where social media is likely to grow even more intertwined with politics, the ability to critically assess and understand framing strategies will become increasingly vital. Therefore, this study serves not only as a snapshot of current practices but also as a reference point for evaluating future developments in political communication on social media. In sum, while this study makes a

focused contribution to understanding how Pakistani politicians frame and construct their political identities on Twitter, it simultaneously recognizes the existence of multiple perspectives and interpretations that warrant future scholarly exploration. Therefore, the study serves as both a preliminary analysis and a foundational base for more comprehensive investigations into the intricate dynamics of political communication in the digital age.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

RS-S: Funding acquisition, Writing – original draft. SS: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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