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POLITICAL DISCOURSE, MEDIA NARRATIVES, AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AMONG YOUNG PAKISTANI SOCIAL MEDIA USERS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become an influential platform for political communication, public debate, identity formation, and the negotiation of social power in contemporary Pakistani society. Platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube provide young people with opportunities to express political opinions, discuss national issues, challenge established narratives, and participate in digital public discussions. At the same time, political communication on these platforms is influenced by ideological differences, media framing, linguistic choices, emotional expressions, and competing representations of national identity. This study examines the relationship between political discourse, media narratives, and identity construction among young Pakistani social media users in 2026. Particular attention is given to the ways political language, hashtags, digital expressions, online discussions, and media representations influence young people's political identities and perceptions of national belonging. The research investigates how social media users negotiate political differences, express ideological positions, and construct collective identities through digital communication. It also examines the role of Urdu, English, and regional languages in shaping political participation and the representation of different social groups. A qualitative research approach based on Critical Discourse Analysis and digital media discourse analysis is proposed. Publicly available political posts, comments, hashtags, and media narratives will be examined to identify recurring patterns of political representation, ideological positioning, and identity construction. The study aims to demonstrate that social media is not merely a platform for exchanging political information but also an important space where language, power, ideology, and collective identity interact. It further emphasizes the importance of responsible digital communication, media literacy, and inclusive political participation among young people in Pakistan.

KEYWORDS

Political Discourse, Media Narratives, Identity Construction, Pakistani Youth, Social Media, Digital Communication, Political Ideology, National Identity, Critical Discourse Analysis, Online Political Participation.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has transformed political communication by providing individuals with opportunities to express opinions, participate in public discussions, and engage with political developments beyond traditional media institutions. In Pakistan, digital platforms have become important spaces for political information, public debate, ideological expression, and collective identity formation. Young people increasingly encounter political narratives through Facebook,

X, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where political leaders, journalists, activists, institutions, and ordinary citizens communicate competing interpretations of national events. These platforms allow young users to participate in political conversations through posts, comments, videos, hashtags, and shared media content. Consequently, political discourse has become an important dimension of digital identity and social interaction among Pakistani youth.Political language plays a significant role in shaping how young people understand political events, national institutions, leadership, and social responsibilities. Words, slogans, metaphors, emotional expressions, and ideological labels can influence how political groups are represented and how individuals position themselves within public discussions. Political communication is therefore not limited to the exchange of information; it also involves the construction of meanings, relationships, and competing interpretations of social reality. Fairclough's (1995) approach to Critical Discourse Analysis provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding how language, ideology, and power operate within media communication. Through this perspective, political posts and online discussions can be examined as forms of discourse that reflect wider social and institutional relationships.In Pakistan, political narratives circulating through social media frequently involve discussions about democracy, governance, accountability, national development, economic conditions, and political leadership. Young users encounter different interpretations of these issues through news reports, political statements, opinion videos, and online commentary. Such narratives can influence their understanding of political identities and encourage identification with particular ideological positions or social groups. Political communication may also establish distinctions between supporters and opponents by using language that emphasizes loyalty, disagreement, legitimacy, and political belonging. These distinctions demonstrate how digital discourse can contribute to the construction of collective identities within contemporary Pakistani society.

The relationship between media narratives and identity construction is particularly important because social media users are not simply passive receivers of political information. They actively interpret, share, challenge, and reproduce political messages through their own communication practices. A young person may express political identity through a particular hashtag, share a political video, comment on a national issue, or participate in an online debate. These activities can establish a sense of belonging to a particular political community while also creating boundaries between different ideological groups. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) provide a useful sociocultural linguistic perspective by explaining that identity emerges through interaction and social meaning-making rather than existing as a completely fixed personal characteristic.Social media has also changed the relationship between political participation and public identity. Young people can use digital platforms to communicate political preferences, support social movements, question public institutions, and participate in discussions concerning national development. However, online participation does not always produce informed political

engagement because users may encounter misleading information, emotionally charged content, and highly selective political narratives. Ahmed et al. (2026), in their research on political awareness among Pakistani youth, identify social media as an important source of political information while highlighting concerns about misinformation, credibility, and limited political engagement. These findings demonstrate the importance of examining not only the availability of political content but also the ways young people interpret and evaluate it.

Another important dimension is political polarization, which can influence how young users construct their identities and interact with individuals holding different political opinions. Online political discussions sometimes involve ideological divisions, negative representations of opposing groups, and emotionally charged expressions. Such communication can strengthen political group identification while reducing opportunities for constructive dialogue. Baqir et al. (2026), in their study of social media polarization and political realignment in Pakistan, examine political interactions on X using data from 2018 to 2022. Their findings identify changes in political affiliations, audience alignment, and patterns of interaction between political groups. This research provides an important foundation for understanding how digital political networks reflect wider political transformations in Pakistan. Language is particularly important in the construction of political identity within Pakistan's multilingual society. Young social media users communicate through Urdu, English, Roman Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, and other linguistic resources. The choice of language can reflect cultural belonging, political affiliation, educational background, and social positioning. Political slogans, hashtags, and multilingual expressions can also communicate solidarity and opposition. Hadir et al. (2026) examine how Pakistani youth construct digital identities through translanguaging, slang, emojis, hashtags, and platform-specific language practices. Their research demonstrates that multilingual communication enables young users to negotiate social belonging, express criticism, and participate in digital cultural practices. The relationship between social media and political socialization is also significant because young users develop political knowledge through interactions with digital content, family members, educational institutions, peers, and traditional media. Social media can provide access to political discussions that may not be available through conventional communication channels. However, political awareness and political participation are influenced by users' ability to evaluate information, develop political trust, and understand competing viewpoints. Ishaq et al. (2026), in their study of youth political socialization in Hazara Division, Pakistan, investigate social media exposure, political awareness, information evaluation, trust, discussion, and participation. Their findings demonstrate that digital platforms contribute to political socialization but operate alongside family, education, peers, and traditional media. Political efficacy is another important factor in understanding the relationship between digital communication and youth identity. Political efficacy refers to individuals' perceptions that they can understand political issues and influence political processes through their participation.

Social media may strengthen these perceptions by providing opportunities to express opinions, communicate with political representatives, and participate in online campaigns. Iqbal et al. (2026) investigate the relationship between social media political activities, political efficacy, and political participation among students at public universities in Islamabad. Their research identifies significant associations between political efficacy, online political engagement, and participation. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding how digital communication can contribute to young people's perceptions of themselves as politically active citizens.

The influence of short-form political content is another important development in contemporary digital communication. TikTok and Instagram Reels provide political messages through brief videos, visual symbols, emotional expressions, and simplified narratives. These formats can make political information accessible to young users, but they may also encourage selective exposure to particular ideological viewpoints. Shahid et al. (2026) investigate algorithmically recommended political videos and affective polarization among Pakistani youth in Lahore. Their study highlights the relationship between repeated exposure to similar political viewpoints, perceived echo chambers, and emotional attachment to political groups. These findings demonstrate why the relationship between algorithmic media narratives and political identity requires further scholarly attention. Although existing research has examined political awareness, online activism, political polarization, and digital identity separately, further investigation is required into how these processes interact through language and media narratives. The present study therefore examines political discourse as a social and linguistic practice through which young Pakistani users construct ideological positions, express collective belonging, and negotiate political differences. It focuses on the relationship between political language, media framing, multilingual communication, and identity formation, providing an integrated perspective on contemporary Pakistani digital society.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the linguistic and discursive strategies through which young Pakistani social media users express political opinions and construct political identities.
2. To investigate how digital media narratives, political framing, and ideological polarization influence identity formation among Pakistani youth.
3. To analyze how multilingual communication and online political participation contribute to collective identity, political belonging, and social awareness.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do young Pakistani social media users employ language and digital discourse to express political opinions and construct political identities?
2. How do media narratives, political framing, and ideological polarization influence the political identities of young social media users?
3. How do multilingual communication and online political participation shape collective identity, political belonging, and social awareness among Pakistani youth?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between political discourse and digital identity has become an important subject within contemporary media and sociolinguistic research. Social media platforms have changed how political messages are produced, distributed, interpreted, and challenged. Unlike traditional media, digital platforms allow users to participate directly in political discussions and construct their own representations of political events. Hadir et al. (2026) examine digital identity construction among Pakistani youth and demonstrate how translanguaging, slang, hashtags, emojis, and platform-specific expressions contribute to online identity formation. Their research is relevant to the present study because political identities are also communicated through these linguistic and multimodal resources. It provides a foundation for investigating how young people use digital language to establish social belonging, communicate ideological positions, and express political disagreement.Political polarization represents another important dimension of digital political communication. Baqir et al. (2026) investigate social media polarization and political realignment in Pakistan through an analysis of X data covering the period from 2018 to 2022. Their research examines the online activities and audiences of major political actors and identifies changes in political alignment and interaction between political groups. The study demonstrates that online political networks can reflect wider transformations within the national political environment. Its contribution is particularly important because it moves beyond individual political opinions and examines relationships between political communities. The present research builds upon this perspective by examining how such political divisions are communicated through language and incorporated into the identities of young social media users.

Research on political awareness among Pakistani youth further demonstrates the importance of social media in contemporary political communication. Ahmed et al. (2026) investigate the role of digital platforms in shaping political awareness among young people in Pakistan. Their quantitative study examines political information exposure, political knowledge, trust, and misinformation. The findings suggest that social media can increase political awareness, although concerns about credibility and selective exposure may limit its effectiveness as a

reliable source of political information. This research provides an important foundation for understanding the relationship between media narratives and political interpretation. It also indicates that political identity formation should be examined alongside users' ability to evaluate information and recognize misleading political content.Political socialization is another major area of research relevant to the present study. Ishaq et al. (2026) investigate the role of social media in political socialization among university and college students in Hazara Division, Pakistan. Their research examines political exposure, awareness, trust, information evaluation, discussion, and participation. The findings indicate that social media contributes to young people's political learning but does not operate independently of family, education, peer relationships, and traditional media. The study is particularly relevant because it explains political socialization as an interactive process rather than a direct consequence of social media use. It also provides an important basis for examining how political identities develop through multiple sources of information and social interaction.

Iqbal et al. (2026) examine the relationship between online political activities, political efficacy, and political participation among Pakistani university students. Their research investigates how social media provides opportunities for young people to communicate political preferences, engage with political content, and participate in civic activities. The study identifies significant associations between political efficacy and political engagement, suggesting that young users' perceptions of political influence are connected with their digital participation. This research contributes to understanding the relationship between online communication and active citizenship. The present study extends this discussion by investigating how political participation is expressed through language, ideological narratives, and collective identity.Another important contribution concerns the influence of algorithmic media environments on political perceptions. Shahid et al. (2026) investigate the relationship between short-form political videos, algorithmic personalization, and affective political polarization among young social media users in Lahore. Their research identifies how repeated exposure to similar political viewpoints may reinforce existing beliefs and reduce encounters with opposing perspectives. The study highlights the importance of digital platforms in shaping political information environments and emotional relationships between political groups. This perspective is relevant to the present research because algorithmically selected content can influence which political narratives young users encounter and how they construct identities in relation to competing ideological communities.Mumtaz et al. (2026) investigate the influence of social media on youth political mobilization in Pakistan. Their research explores how digital platforms contribute to political awareness, online activism, collective action, and political participation. It also identifies challenges involving misinformation, political polarization, algorithmic bias, and concerns about digital expression. The study demonstrates that social media can provide young people with opportunities to participate in political communication beyond traditional media institutions.

However, the effectiveness of digital political engagement depends on information quality, digital literacy, and the wider political environment. These findings support the argument that political identity is constructed through both opportunities for participation and the challenges associated with online communication.Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that political discourse, media narratives, and identity construction are closely interconnected within Pakistan's digital environment. Existing 2026 studies provide important evidence concerning political polarization, youth political socialization, online activism, political awareness, and digital linguistic practices. However, the relationship between language choice, political framing, ideological belonging, and collective identity requires further integrated examination. The present study addresses this research gap by bringing sociolinguistic and critical media perspectives together to understand how young Pakistani social media users construct and negotiate political identities through digital communication.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative research methodology to investigate political discourse, media narratives, and identity construction among young Pakistani social media users. The research focuses on the linguistic, ideological, and communicative practices through which young people express political opinions, establish group affiliations, and negotiate their positions within digital political environments. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study aims to understand the meanings, interpretations, and social implications of political communication rather than measure political preferences exclusively through numerical indicators. The methodological framework combines Critical Discourse Analysis with digital media discourse analysis to examine how political language and media representations communicate power, ideology, and collective identity.The proposed research population will consist of Pakistani social media users aged between 18 and 30 years who actively engage with political content on digital platforms. The research will examine publicly accessible political posts, comments, hashtags, captions, and video discussions from Facebook, X, Instagram, and TikTok. A purposive sample of approximately 240 digital items will be selected to represent different political viewpoints, communication styles, linguistic practices, and forms of online participation. The selection will include political discussions concerning democracy, governance, national identity, public accountability, political leadership, and social development. Particular attention will be given to posts that demonstrate ideological positioning, political disagreement, collective identification, and expressions of national belonging.

The primary data will consist of publicly available digital communication produced by or directed towards young Pakistani social media users. Relevant textual and visual materials will be collected and organized according to their platforms, linguistic characteristics, political

themes, and communicative purposes. The research will examine the use of Urdu, English, Roman Urdu, and regional languages in political expression. It will also investigate the role of hashtags, slogans, emojis, memes, and short-form political videos in communicating ideological positions. Where relevant, video content will be transcribed to identify the linguistic and rhetorical strategies used to construct political narratives.The analysis will be guided by Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, particularly the relationship between textual features, discursive practices, and wider social structures. The textual dimension will examine vocabulary, metaphors, political labels, emotional expressions, and patterns of argumentation. The discursive dimension will investigate how political messages are produced, circulated, shared, and interpreted within digital environments. The social dimension will connect these practices with political ideology, group identity, power relations, and broader social developments in Pakistan. The methodological approach will also draw upon recent digital identity and political communication research by Hadir et al. (2026), Baqir et al. (2026), and Ishaq et al. (2026).Ethical considerations will remain central throughout the research process. Only publicly accessible content will be considered, and private messages, restricted groups, and confidential accounts will be excluded. Personal usernames and identifying details will not be reproduced in the research report. Political expressions will be interpreted within their original contexts to avoid misrepresentation, and the analysis will maintain neutrality towards competing political positions. The research will distinguish between publicly expressed political opinions and verified factual information, particularly when examining controversial political claims and media narratives.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employs a qualitative descriptive and interpretive research design based on Critical Discourse Analysis. This design provides an appropriate framework for examining how political meanings are communicated through digital language and how young people construct identities through interaction with political content. The research will compare political communication across different social media platforms to identify similarities and differences in language use, ideological representation, and patterns of collective identification. The comparative approach will help establish how platform-specific communication practices influence the presentation and interpretation of political messages.The research design will organize the investigation around three interconnected dimensions: political discourse, media narratives, and identity construction. Political discourse will examine how users express ideological positions, criticize political institutions, support political groups, and participate in public debates. Media narratives will focus on the framing of political events, the selection of information, the representation of political actors, and the circulation of competing interpretations. Identity construction will investigate how users establish political belonging through linguistic choices, hashtags, symbols,

shared expressions, and collective participation.The study will also incorporate a comparative examination of multilingual political communication. English, Urdu, Roman Urdu, and regional languages will be analyzed to understand how language choices communicate political affiliation, cultural belonging, and social positioning. Particular attention will be given to code-switching and translanguaging because users may combine different languages to communicate complex political meanings. These practices will be examined in relation to the audiences, political contexts, and communicative purposes of individual posts.The final dimension of the research design will examine the relationship between political participation and digital identity. It will consider how sharing political information, commenting on public issues, participating in hashtag campaigns, and responding to political narratives contribute to users' perceptions of collective membership and civic responsibility. The research will also examine the influence of algorithmic exposure and online political polarization where these processes are evident in the selected material. This integrated design will provide a comprehensive understanding of how political communication operates as a linguistic and social process within Pakistan's digital environment.

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected digital material will be analyzed through systematic qualitative coding and Critical Discourse Analysis. The first stage will involve organizing the selected posts, comments, hashtags, and video transcripts according to political themes and linguistic characteristics. The material will be examined to identify recurring expressions concerning political leadership, democracy, national development, accountability, governance, and collective political identity. Particular attention will be given to the vocabulary and rhetorical expressions through which users communicate support, criticism, disagreement, and ideological affiliation. Baqir et al. (2026) provide a relevant foundation for understanding how online political networks and interactions reflect broader political divisions in Pakistan.The second stage will investigate media framing and narrative construction. Political posts and shared media content will be examined to identify how particular events are presented, which aspects of political developments receive attention, and how political actors are positively or negatively represented. The analysis will also consider emotional language, slogans, metaphors, and selective descriptions that may influence the interpretation of political information. Ahmed et al. (2026) and Shahid et al. (2026) provide relevant research perspectives for examining political information exposure, misinformation concerns, and the influence of algorithmically selected political content among Pakistani youth.

The third stage will focus on linguistic identity and political belonging. The analysis will examine how users employ Urdu, English, Roman Urdu, and regional languages to communicate

political preferences and establish connections with particular social groups. Code-switching, hashtags, memes, emojis, and culturally recognizable expressions will be investigated as resources for communicating identity and solidarity. Particular attention will be given to the ways multilingual communication can express national belonging, regional affiliation, political criticism, and ideological differences. Hadir et al. (2026) provide an important analytical foundation for understanding the relationship between multilingual digital communication and identity construction among Pakistani youth.The fourth stage will investigate political participation and the construction of collective identities. The selected material will be examined to understand how users participate in political discussions, support public campaigns, respond to opposing viewpoints, and communicate a sense of political influence. The analysis will distinguish between expressions of political awareness, symbolic participation, online activism, and more direct forms of civic engagement. Iqbal et al. (2026) and Ishaq et al. (2026) provide relevant evidence concerning the relationship between social media engagement, political efficacy, and youth political socialization in Pakistan.Finally, the findings from the different analytical dimensions will be integrated to identify the relationship between language, ideology, media representation, and political identity. Similarities and differences across platforms will be examined to understand how digital communication practices influence political expression. The analysis will distinguish between the representation of political events and independently verified information, avoiding the treatment of social media claims as established facts. The interpretation will remain grounded in the selected digital material and its social context.

FINDINGS

The literature-based analysis suggests that social media has become an important environment for the expression and negotiation of political identities among young Pakistani users. Digital platforms provide opportunities to communicate political preferences, support public campaigns, discuss national issues, and establish connections with individuals sharing similar ideological positions. Through posts, comments, hashtags, and shared political content, young people can present themselves as politically aware and socially engaged citizens. Research by Ishaq et al. (2026) supports the importance of social media in youth political socialization, while Iqbal et al. (2026) identify meaningful relationships between digital political activities, political efficacy, and participation.Another anticipated finding concerns the influence of political language on the construction of group identities. Political slogans, ideological labels, emotional expressions, and collective references can create distinctions between supporters and opponents of particular political positions. Such expressions may strengthen feelings of belonging among users who share similar beliefs, while also increasing social distance between competing political communities. Baqir et al. (2026) identify patterns of political polarization and audience realignment in Pakistani social media networks, demonstrating the importance of examining

online political interactions within their wider social and political contexts.

The analysis is also expected to demonstrate that media framing influences how young users interpret political events and develop political opinions. Repeated exposure to particular narratives may strengthen existing perceptions, while selective presentation of information can limit awareness of alternative interpretations. Political videos, headlines, images, and shared posts may communicate emotional or ideological messages that influence users' understanding of political developments. Ahmed et al. (2026) identify concerns about misinformation and credibility in digital political communication, while Shahid et al. (2026) highlight the relationship between algorithmically personalized political content and affective polarization.A further anticipated finding concerns the importance of multilingual communication in political identity construction. Young Pakistani users may combine Urdu, English, Roman Urdu, and regional languages to communicate political preferences and express cultural belonging. Different language choices can communicate particular social relationships, educational backgrounds, regional affiliations, and political meanings. Hadir et al. (2026) demonstrate that multilingual digital expressions, hashtags, slang, and emojis are important resources through which Pakistani youth negotiate online identities. These practices suggest that political identity is communicated through both the content of political opinions and the linguistic forms used to express them.The study is also expected to identify a relationship between digital participation and perceptions of political influence. Commenting on political issues, sharing information, participating in online campaigns, and communicating with political communities may strengthen young people's perceptions that they can contribute to public discussions. However, digital participation does not necessarily indicate informed political understanding or direct political involvement. Ishaq et al. (2026) emphasize that political socialization involves multiple influences, including family, education, peers, and traditional media. This suggests that social media should be understood as one important component of a broader political learning environment.Overall, the anticipated findings indicate that political discourse and media narratives contribute to the construction of individual and collective identities among young Pakistani social media users. Digital platforms provide opportunities for political expression and participation, but they also create challenges involving misinformation, ideological polarization, selective exposure, and competing representations of national identity. These findings remain provisional and must be confirmed through the proposed collection and analysis of digital material rather than presented as completed empirical results.

CONCLUSION

The present study examines the relationship between political discourse, media narratives, and identity construction among young Pakistani social media users in contemporary society. It

highlights the importance of digital communication in shaping political opinions, ideological affiliations, collective identities, and perceptions of national belonging. Social media platforms have created new opportunities for young people to participate in political discussions, express their opinions, challenge established narratives, and communicate with individuals from different social and cultural backgrounds. These developments demonstrate that political identity is increasingly negotiated through digital communication and everyday linguistic practices.The study further emphasizes that political language is an important instrument through which ideological positions and social relationships are communicated. Political slogans, hashtags, metaphors, emotional expressions, and multilingual communication contribute to the construction of political meanings and collective affiliations. Young people use Urdu, English, Roman Urdu, and regional languages to communicate their political preferences and express their cultural identities. These linguistic practices demonstrate that political identity is not simply determined by political preferences but is also shaped by language, social interaction, and cultural belonging.

Another important conclusion concerns the influence of media narratives and political polarization on digital identity formation. Social media provides access to diverse political perspectives, but algorithmic personalization, misinformation, and selective exposure can influence how users understand political developments. Repeated engagement with similar political viewpoints may strengthen ideological divisions and reduce opportunities for meaningful interaction between opposing groups. Therefore, responsible political communication requires critical evaluation of information, awareness of media framing, and respect for differing political perspectives.The research also highlights the importance of youth political participation in strengthening democratic communication and public awareness. Digital platforms can provide young citizens with opportunities to discuss national issues, question public decisions, support social causes, and communicate their concerns. However, meaningful political participation requires more than sharing posts or expressing opinions. It also requires political knowledge, critical thinking, responsible communication, and an understanding of democratic values. Educational institutions, media organizations, and digital platforms should therefore encourage media literacy and constructive political dialogue.In conclusion, political discourse and media narratives are important forces in shaping contemporary youth identities in Pakistan. Social media should be understood as both a space for political expression and an environment in which ideological competition, collective belonging, and social power are continuously negotiated. Promoting responsible digital participation, inclusive political communication, multilingual recognition, and critical media literacy can contribute to a more informed and constructive political culture. The present study provides a foundation for further research into the relationship between language, politics, media, and identity in Pakistan's

evolving digital society.

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