

Religious Discourse Across Communicative Platforms: A Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis of Public Perception in Pakistan

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Abstract

The overall approach of this study is convergent mixed-methods design, which explores the influence of religious discourse on public perceptions of politics, gender, public health and national identity in Pakistan. This study uses a Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA) approach and analyzes a corpus containing 240 texts from Friday sermons, newspaper editorials, television debates and social media posts, as well as survey responses from 333 participants. The analysis, in line with Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis and van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach and Foucault's concept of discourse and power, shows that religious discourse is a trans-institutional system of ideological meaning-making. It is not only a justification of political power but also an enactment of gendered moral orders, a formation of public health discourses and a reinforcement of the national imaginary, and is being produced and negotiated in various communicative practices. The study will add to the theoretical knowledge of discourse studies, methodological to mixed methods research, and empirical to religion, media and public communication in Pakistan.

1. Introduction

1.1 Religion, Discourse, and Public Communication

Religion continues to be one of the most powerful symbolic resources for negotiating authority, morality, identity and collective memory in societies. In democratic and non-democratic settings, religious language is not just confined to the realm of worship but also frames political agendas, media coverage, legal discourses, public health communications, and social engagement. Religious discourses are not just expressions of faith but also are used to shape legitimate knowledge, moral conduct and legitimate power structures. It is therefore not surprising that the analysis of religious discourse has become a growing focus in the study of public discourse, political discourse, media discourse and sociolinguistics.

Religion and public discourse have become a very important issue in the digital age. Religious narratives are now reproduced, contested and recontextualized in a myriad of institutional contexts, through the media, on the internet and in interpersonal dialogue, meaning being produced, reproduced and reimagined all the time. What happens in the mosque during worship is not just shared with YouTube but also featured in TV commentary, social media discussions, and political speeches, setting up intertextual discursive chains and not just communicative moments. This circulation expands the scope, distribution, and social impact of religious stories, and provides new opportunities for reinterpretation, opposition, and negotiation of ideas.

Recent scholarship has brought the significance of religion as a communicative phenomenon to the fore, beyond its theological or cultural institutional aspects. Scholars have shown how religious language has helped to build political authority, gender ideology, national identity, and political legitimacy in various socio-political environments. Most of this research however is limited to specific media platforms, political events or specific institutional contexts. Thus, there remains a relative lack of knowledge about the operation of religious discourse in a variety of communicative settings and what impact these

interrelated and interwoven discursive practices have on the perception of the public in modern societies.

Addressing this gap is especially important in Pakistan. Religion has played a pivotal role in debates over constitutions, political discussions, educational policy, media portrayal, and in public life since its inception. Religious language is often used to justify political power, to talk about social change, to explain social problems and to describe the kinds of citizens that are acceptable. Meanwhile, digitalization has radically changed production and circulation of religious narratives. As a result, there are now various traditional religious leaders who coexist with television personalities, journalists, politicians, and social media influencers, all of whom have a role to play in the process of negotiation of religious meanings to an ever-diversifying audience. As these developments have occurred, Pakistan is a significant case of understanding the working of religious discourse in a complex multi-platform communicative environment.

Although the issue of religion is a key part of the public discourse in Pakistan, research has largely focused on the analysis of sermons, political speeches, news media, or social media. These methods help to gain an understanding of specific communicative contexts but do not yield a comprehensive view of how discursive practices circulate beyond institutional boundaries and become at the same time ideologically loaded. Furthermore, discourse analysis tends to be more text-oriented than comparatively audience-oriented and public-oriented in public attitudes and audience reception. In contrast, public opinion surveys are conducted but seldom investigate linguistic processes that influence opinion formation. Bridging these two traditions is possible only by focusing on a framework of analysis that will allow the analysis of the text to be combined with the evidence of audience interpretation.

This study aims to overcome these limitations by using a Corpus Assisted Mixed Methods Critical Discourse Analysis, which integrates the qualitative aspect of religious discourse with quantitative aspects of public perception. The study draws on Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse, van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach and Foucault's conceptualization of discourse as a mechanism of power and knowledge to analyze how religious discourses are produced in the contexts of Friday sermons, newspaper editorials, television debates and social media texts. At the same time, the results of the surveys are analyzed to understand the meanings, consent, challenges, and rejection of these discourses among members of the public. Corpus analysis in combination with Critical Discourse Analysis further enriches the analytical rigor, allowing for a systematic analysis of frequent lexical patterns, collocations and discursive strategies as well as a close qualitative interpretation.

This article proposes that religious discourse is a trans-institutional system of ideologizing in which meaning is produced in a variety of interconnected communicative spaces. Religious discourse is not only a reflection of religious belief but also one that is political in nature, which does not only authorize political authority but also establishes moral boundaries, constructs gender identities, frames public understandings of health, and influences broader processes of ideological reproduction. Audiences are not just consuming such stories; they are also actively interpreting them in the context of their own lives,

media consumption and political/social environments. The study exemplifies such dynamics, and in so doing has implications for the ongoing discussion of discourse, ideology, religion, and democratic communication and offers a methodological approach that combines corpus-assisted discourse analysis with audience perception research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Religious Discourse as Social Practice

The process of the production, negotiation and construction of meaning, identity and power relations has become a central theme in religious discourse, which is increasingly being thought of as a social practice. The sacred continues to influence contemporary social and cultural life despite processes of modernization (Lynch, 2011). In the context of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the discourse is seen as a construction of social reality, influencing institutional practices, ideologies, and public knowledge (Fairclough, 1992, 1995, 2015; van Dijk, 1998, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2023). CDA does not consider language as a neutral medium, but rather it analyses the way in which language choices are used to establish authority, to establish normal social relations and to reproduce inequalities in everyday communication. Corpus-assisted discourse analysis can reveal ideological representations embedded within contemporary media narratives (Elewa, 2025).

The Foucault (1972) idea of discourse as a way of exercising power and knowledge is another aspect in this regard as it is used to explain why certain interpretations are accepted as valid and others are discounted. Such views have led scholars to scrutinize religion beyond its traditional theological role to a discursive resource that builds moral authority, collective identity and political legitimacy. Modern research claims that the space of religious discourse is expanding to more complex institutional and digital spaces where meanings are constantly recontextualized by the interplay of religious actors, politicians, journalists and citizens (Wodak & Meyer, 2023). Similarly, Chilton (2004) explains that political discourse constructs power relations by framing political actors, events, and ideologies through strategic linguistic choices. Political leaders frequently employ rhetorical and metaphorical strategies to construct credibility and persuade audiences (Charteris-Black, 2018).

Methodologically, recent scholarship has enhanced discourse analysis, and a new hybrid approach has begun to emerge in recent years that combines corpus linguistic with qualitative discourse analysis, known as Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS). This method provides statistical support for the identification of regular recurrent linguistic phenomena, yet retains the depth of qualitative discourse analysis (Gillings, Mautner, & Baker, 2023). CADS is an important methodological development, because it tries to overcome concerns of subjectivity by integrating quantitative evidence with critical interpretation. Recent applications illustrate its utility to study ideology, institutional discourse, media representation, as well as political communication in vast amounts of text. Taylor and Marchi (2018) explain that corpus approaches enable researchers to investigate discourse systematically while preserving contextual interpretation.

2.2 Religion, Media and Political Communication

Religion remains important in political communication as a source of symbolism for articulating authority, legitimacy, and collective identity. Religious language is often used to justify policy, build moral authority and garner public backing by political actors. The CDA research shows that political arguments can gain moral legitimacy, that is, legitimacy that goes beyond the traditional political persuasion, through strategies of appeals to authority, moral evaluation, rationalization and historical narratives. Religion and media increasingly interact to shape public beliefs, values, and social identities (Hoover, 2021). Similarly, Hjarvard (2011) explains that media have become central institutions through which religion is communicated and transformed in modern societies.

Recent studies indicate that these processes are becoming more complex in Digital Communication situations. Religious narratives are no longer just shared in the context of religious institutions, but are shared through newspapers, tv shows, news websites and social media, and are reproduced, thrown back, and reshaped repeatedly. Therefore, political legitimacy needs to be viewed as a communicative process that spans more than one platform and is not the result of an isolated political speech or institutional text (Wodak & Meyer, 2023). Digital media have transformed religious communication by extending religious participation beyond traditional institutional settings (Campbell, 2021).

The use of recurring lexical patterns and collocational networks has been shown to be effective in revealing the ideological constructions of religion, nationalism and political identity in media discourse in corpus-assisted studies. These methods allow researchers to uncover hidden systematic patterns that might not be apparent in traditional qualitative analysis and provide the contextual interpretation that is an integral part of the CDA (Gillings et al., 2023). However, most empirical studies remain on a specific communicative context, and not on the circulation of religious narratives between the interweaving media environments. Corpus-assisted discourse analysis can reveal ideological representations of religion within contemporary news media (Oktaviani, 2023).

2.3 Religion, Gender, Public Health, and National Identity

In recent years, religious discourse has been the subject of studies, which have highlighted its impact on gender, morality, public health and national identity. Feminist discourse studies show that religious discourse often creates a narrativized sense of femininity, masculinity, family, and citizenship, as the language used to legitimate social roles and to marginalize other identities recycles in its texts. (Lazar, 2007; Sunderland, 2020) Instead of being based exclusively on explicit ideological statements, these constructions may be located in metaphors, evaluative language, presuppositions, and intertextual references that naturalized the existing gender hierarchy. Language plays a central role in constructing social expectations regarding gender and family roles (Sunderland, 2020). Identities are continuously produced and negotiated through discourse rather than being fixed or essential (Hall, 1996). Likewise national identity is continually reproduced through everyday language, symbols, and routine communicative practices (Billig, 1995). Language both reflects and constructs gender relations within

society (Cameron, 2005). Further Butler (1990) conceptualizes gender as a socially constructed identity that is repeatedly produced and reinforced through discourse and everyday social practices.

COVID-19 pandemic has once again underscored the importance of religious discourse in the public's response to health crises. In a wide variety of societies, both religious authorities and media institutions represented the pandemic as acts of divine punishment, collective responsibility, faith, and the trust in science. The study results have indicated that the religious framing affects the public's attitude towards vaccination, health compliance and trust in institutions, which confirms that health communication cannot be detached from its wider ideological and cultural frameworks. Public health communication is shaped not only by medical evidence but also by cultural values, institutional authority, and media discourse (Briggs and Hallin, 2016). Meanwhile, digital platforms helped to magnify competing interpretations and have enabled official accounts to be strengthened, negotiated or contested in the public sphere. Ratzan et al. (2020) emphasize that effective public health communication requires clear, credible, and culturally appropriate messaging during health crises.

Processes of national identity construction continue to be closely tied to religion, as well. Collective identities are discursively constructed via shared histories, symbolic representations, and moral stories that differentiate insiders from outsiders, according to scholars. Nations are socially constructed through shared narratives and collective imagination rather than purely territorial or political boundaries (Anderson, 2006). This perspective helps explain how religious discourse contributes to the construction of Pakistani national identity. These processes have been further complicated in contemporary media environments by the ability of several actors, such as politicians, journalists, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens to be involved in the production of national narratives at the same time. Yet, only a handful of studies examine the ways in which religious discourse is implicated in political legitimacy, gender ideologies, public health discourses, and national identity through a combined lens. Most studies focus on just one issue or communicative medium, therefore there is limited understanding of the wider discursive forces behind how religious discourse affects public life. Political discourse mobilizes fear, identity, and ideology to shape public opinion (Wodak, 2021).

Research Gap and Contribution of the Present Study

While the significance of religious discourse in relation to politics, media and gender and identity studies have been recognized in research, there are important constraints. First, current research focuses mainly on the analysis of individual communicative contexts, like political speeches, newspapers, or sermons, or social media, but not on the analysis of religious narratives that circulate among and through interconnected communicative spaces. Secondly, discourse analysis research still focuses more on the process of text creation than on the reception and public interpretation of the text. As a result, there is a gap between the construction of ideology in the language and reception of the same in society.

Third, although the methodological developments in Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies have been impressive, there are comparatively very few studies that combine corpus linguistics, Critical Discourse

Analysis and quantitative public opinion analysis in one analysis. Methodological studies in the recent years have emphasized how CADS can enhance the study of discourse with systematic corpus evidence, but there is still a limited number of applications combining textual analysis with the analysis of the audience.

In the current study, these gaps are filled by linking and combining the findings of the quantitative survey and corpus-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the way religious discourse is used in the following media: Friday Sermons, Newspaper Editorial, Television Debates and Social Media in Pakistan. By deconstructing these communicative domains separately, the study understands religious discourse as a trans-institutional system of ideological meaning-making that co-construct and negotiates political authority, gender norms, public health narratives, and national identity. The study, as a text production in combination with audience reception, has theoretical implications for discourse studies, methodological for corpus-assisted CDA, empirical for religion–media–public communication studies.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that considers language a social practice in which power, ideology, and social identities are created and negotiated (Fairclough, 1992, 1995). CDA goes beyond the description of language to look at the ways in which discourse legitimates authority, normalises social relations and reproduces ideology in specific socio-political contexts. The specific focus of the study on religious discourse in various communicative settings makes CDA a suitable framework in which to analyse the linguistic strategies that support the larger context of political legitimation, gender construction, public health communication and national identity formation. Critical Discourse Analysis examines the relationship between language, power, and social inequality by linking textual analysis with broader social contexts (Wodak and Meyer, 2023).

Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-dimensional model that analyses discourse at three interdependent levels namely text, discursive practice and social practice is the basic analytical model used. At the textual level, attention will be paid to the lexical choices, use of metaphors, modality, intertextuality and evaluative language. Discursive practice also takes an interest in the ways in which religious narratives are created, circulated and interpreted in the context of sermons, newspapers, television debates and social media. Social practice places these discourses in the context of Pakistan's socio-political and cultural landscape and analyses how they are part of the reproduction or contestation of the ideology of the structures.

The study builds on van Dijk (1998, 2008)'s socio-cognitive theory, which investigates how the discourse influences the public's cognition of the world by means of shared knowledge, beliefs and ideological representations. This is especially important in regards to the perception of political authority, gender roles, public health, and national identity that can be shaped by salient religious narratives. Van Dijk's theory connects text structure to cognitive processes of readers, and in so doing, it aids in understanding the internalization, negotiation, and/or resistance to ideological meanings. Discourse

influences public cognition by shaping shared knowledge, beliefs, and ideological representations (van Dijk, 2008).

The notion of discourse as a process of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1972) provides further information in the study. According to Foucault, discourse is not just a reflection of reality, but it helps to establish regimes of truth through the legitimation of forms of knowledge. It can be helpful for understanding the ways in which religious discourse validates certain religious conceptualizations of morality, citizenship, governance, and social conduct, yet deems and excludes other accounts.

This research does not focus on the theory separately, but uses a combination of theories analytical approach. Within this overall model of textual and contextual analysis, Fairclough's model is suitable for understanding the relationship between discourse and public perception, while Foucault's theory is useful for understanding the broader power relations that lie in the background of religious communication. These complementary viewpoints facilitate a holistic analysis of religious discourse as a trans-institutional ideology system of meaning making in various communicative spaces.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The convergent mixed methods design was used in this study, involving the combined use of Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA) and the quantitative survey method in order to gain insights into the construction of the religious discourse in public communication and the perception of the religious discourse by the public. The qualitative analysis explored the linguistic and ideological themes found in religious texts, and the quantitative survey explored audience perceptions of the linkages among religion, politics, gender, public health and national identity. The use of the textual and audience data allowed for triangulation and a more complete understanding of religious discourse which neither of these could offer alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). combining corpus linguistics with Critical Discourse Analysis strengthens both the reliability of linguistic evidence and the depth of ideological interpretation (Baker et al., 2008). An overview of the research design, data sources, analytical framework, and software used in the study is presented in **Table 1**.

Component	Description
Research design	Convergent mixed-methods
Corpus	240 texts (60 sermons, 60 editorials, 60 TV debates, 60 social media posts)
Survey	333 respondents
Analytical framework	Fairclough, van Dijk, Foucault
Software	NVivo 14; AntConc 4.3.1
Statistical analysis	Descriptive, χ^2 , correlation, regression

Table.1 Overview of the Research Design

4.2 Data Collection

The qualitative corpus consisted of 240 purposively selected texts belonging to four major communicative domains of Pakistan, that is, Friday sermons (n = 60), newspaper editorials (n = 60), television debates (n = 60), and social media posts (n = 60). The choice of these texts was made because they are significant places in which the production, circulation and contestation of religious narratives take place in contemporary public discourse.

The public was interviewed with a structured questionnaire in addition to the discourse analysis. After screening, 333 valid responses were included for statistical analyses. The survey gauged the participants' perceptions of religious commentaries in political, gender, public health, and national identity aspects.

4.3 Analytical Framework

The qualitative analysis was carried out using Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which focused on the levels of discourse at the textual, discursive practice and social practice. This was complemented by van Dijk's (1998, 2008) socio-cognitive approach, which was used to interpret the ideological meanings and public cognition, and Foucault's (1972) discourse as a mechanism of power and knowledge.

Close qualitative interpretation was used to build up the analysis, and Corpus linguistic techniques were applied to support the analysis by picking up some lexical patterns, keywords, collocations and concordance lines. This corpus-assisted method allowed for the analytical transparency while preserving the contextual depth that is central to Critical Discourse Analysis (Gillings et al., 2023).

Marchi (2025) highlights the importance of hypothesis-driven approaches in corpus-assisted discourse research to strengthen methodological rigour.

4.4 Data Analysis

An iterative approach to thematic coding was used to organize and code the qualitative data in NVivo 14. During the initial open coding, the recurring linguistic and ideological aspects were more precisely identified and then developed into more abstract analytic units representing the themes of political legitimacy, gender and morality, public health, and national identity. To analyze the word frequencies, collocations and concordance patterns, which helped to find the critical interpretation of discourse, Corpus analysis was conducted with the help of AntConc (Version 4.3.1)(Anthony, 2024).

Data analysis of quantitative data was carried out using descriptive and inferential statistics. To complement the qualitative findings, frequencies, percentages, chi-square tests, correlation analysis and multiple regression were used to explore the relationships between key variables.

Leverage the FTC’s guidelines for advertising and endorsements. Adhere to FTC guidelines on advertising and endorsements.

In order to increase the credibility of the study several strategies were used. The integration of several discourse genres and survey results were used to achieve data triangulation. A subsample of qualitative data was independently coded to test interrater reliability and the resulting data showed good interrater reliability (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.82$). The reliability of the survey instrument was satisfactory with Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$. Consent was obtained from all participants and ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authority. The data collected from the survey were anonymized and the media texts were analyzed according to the ethical guidelines that are accepted in discourse research. The qualitative corpus consisted of four communicative domains that capture the diverse contexts in which religious discourse is produced and circulated. The composition of the corpus is summarized in **Table 2**.

Corpus Source	Number of Texts	Primary Focus
Friday sermons	60	Religious guidance
Newspaper editorials	60	Public and political commentary
Television debates	60	Media discussion
Social media posts	60	Public engagement
Total	240	

Table.2 Corpus Composition

The overall conceptual design of the study, including the integration of the qualitative and quantitative components within the corpus-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis framework, is illustrated in Fig. 1.

5. Findings

5.1 Religious Discourse as a Source of Political Legitimacy

The analysis suggests that religious discourse is a major tool to build political legitimacy in the sermons, newspapers, TV debates, and social media. Religious language was often used to suggest that the political role was not only to uphold the Constitution but had a moral, religious duty to do so. The lexical analysis of the corpus showed frequent recurring themes related to Islam, Sharia, Riyasat-e-Madina, Justice, leadership and accountability, which illustrates how politics was discursively linked with Islamic values.

References to the Qur'an and its principles, intertextual references to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the state of Madina were generally employed to validate other contemporary political agendas. Friday sermons focused on 'moral leadership' and 'social justice', whereas newspaper editorials and TV debates took a similar religious script to assess political performance and governance. Social media

also played a role in the dissemination of these narratives, with some selectively quoting, using hashtags, and providing general comments on the topic.

The results of the surveys were corroborated by the qualitative analysis. The majority of those who responded backed religious leaders in politics and a large percentage believed politicians who make reference to Islamic concepts to be more reliable. Meanwhile, there was an obvious mix of acceptance and skepticism around the use of religious influence for political purposes, with many responding to indicate that this is often the case. The results indicate that religious language still has the capacity to be used symbolically by political players and is negotiable and contestable in public discourse. To facilitate comparison between the qualitative and quantitative findings, the major themes identified through corpus-assisted discourse analysis are integrated with the corresponding survey results in

Table 3

Theme	Representative Discursive Strategy	Primary Platform
Political legitimacy	Riyasat-e-Madina, Islamic governance	Sermons, TV
Gender and morality	Modesty, family values	Sermons, Social media
Public health	Divine punishment, responsibility	TV, Social media
National identity	Islamic values, unity	Newspapers, TV

Table.3 Major discursive themes

5.2 Religious Discourse and the Construction of Gendered Morality

The corpus reveals that most of the discourses concerning gender were of moral, familial and social orders. Women were also regularly portrayed in sermons or on television, as connected with modesty, motherhood and family stability, while equality was understood as a policy of cultural authenticity and religious values. Corpus evidence revealed a number of collocations among the two elements of women and modesty, women and family, family and Islamic values, Islamic values and morality, and modesty and morality, which indicated the importance of moral regulation in the context of gender.

The analysis also uncovered conflicting stories, however. Language of constitutional rights, equality and participation crept into newspaper editorials and sections of social media, especially those pertaining to women's education, employment and political representation. These counter-discourses problematized traditional interpretations by highlighting citizenship and equal opportunity as well as religious identity.

The results of this survey were comparable. Most of the respondents were in favour of women's equal involvement in political life but their attitudes were mixed when it came to the concept of traditional gender roles in the family. The co-existence of progressive and conservative attitudes indicates that the religious arena does not lead to a single dominant gender interpretation, it is a place where negotiating between dominant and alternate interpretations of gender occurs.

5.3 Religious framing of public health and national identity

Religious ideas also helped to shape ideas of public health and national identity. Corpus analysis of the COVID-19 and vaccination-related discussions revealed two major interpretive frames. One interpreted the pandemic as a test of faith and morality, the time of repentance and collective responsibility, and the other interpreted it as scientific knowledge and public health measures as Islamic values. They were found in the sermons, in various media and social media discussions, but in different emphases.

This was confirmed by the results of the survey. National crises were identified by many respondents with religious and moral values, but a significant number also deemed vaccination to be compatible with Islam. Given the relatively high level of neutral responses, there is still a lot of uncertainty, and it shows that audiences are not simply accepting one interpretive framework of religious vs. scientific explanations but are actively negotiating them.

National identity was also a product of religious talk. In all of the four communicative platforms, Islam was often portrayed as a basic attribute for Pakistanis in terms of their identity, social cohesion and citizenship. The national identity is strongly associated with Islamic values, as seen from the responses in the survey, this indicates that the centrality of religion in public understanding of the nation.

5.4 Public Negotiation of Religious Discourse

The findings suggest that audiences are not passive recipients of messages of ideology, although religious discourse was still present in all areas of communication. Instead, they engage with, rework and sometimes challenge the hegemonic religious discourse. The trend was most noticeable on social media, where users often questioned official portrayals, added new points of view, and reworked the discussions using satire, personal experience, and political analysis.

The use of corpus analysis and survey evidence indicates that public perception is not merely one of acceptance but of selection. The participants agreed with the moral and ethical aspects of religious speech, but also doubted the instrumentalization of religion in politics and its selective use. This distinction reflects the interaction between the production of discourse and its interpretation by the audience.

In sum, the results illustrate the ability of religious discourse to be a trans-institutional system of the production of ideological meaning. Religious narratives move between communicative settings and are produced, remediated and challenged there, not as isolated parts of sermons, media or digital platforms but as connected parts of communicative spaces. Public perceptions do not just arise out of one discourse, but rather from multiple and overlapping discourses overlapping, which form the perceptions of politics, gender, public health and national identity. The convergence between the corpus analysis and survey findings is summarized in **Table 4**, highlighting how religious discourse shapes public perceptions across the four principal thematic domains.

Theme	Corpus Evidence	Survey Evidence	Interpretation
Political legitimacy	Frequent references to Islamic governance	53.4% supported religious leaders in politics	Religion remains a source of political legitimacy
Gender	Competing narratives of morality and equality	72.7% supported women's political participation	Public attitudes are negotiated rather than uniform
Public health	Divine punishment and scientific responsibility	43.8% viewed vaccination as compatible with Islam	Religious and scientific frames coexist
National identity	Islam linked with citizenship	69.0% linked national identity with Islamic values	Religious identity remains central to nationhood

Table.4 Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

6. Discussion

6.1 Religious discourse a vehicle to political legitimization

The results indicate that religious discourse is an effective tool to build political legitimacy in Pakistan. Political authority was consistently linked to Islamic values, moral obligation, and historical texts like *Riyasat-e-Madina* in Friday sermons, newspaper editorials, TV debates and social media. Such discursive practices were less a representation of political realities and more a means of generating moral legitimacy through portraying governance as a religious responsibility. The result confirms Fairclough's (1992, 1995) assertion that discourse is social reality, influencing the meaning(s) that exist within institutions and legitimizing specific perspectives on these.

The results also support van Leeuwen's (2007) model of legitimation, where legitimation is achieved through moralizing and tradition. Religious references to the Qur'an, Hadith and early Islamic history were not just symbolic resources, but also means of building political credibility. The survey results, however, suggest that this legitimacy isn't absolute. There was general agreement that religion should play a role in the public sphere, but a large number of respondents also held views about the problem of the use of religious authority in political matters. This paradox implies that citizens make the distinction between religion as a moral compass and its instrumental role in the political contest.

These results build on earlier research on religious political communication exploring the creation of legitimacy through individual communicative platforms, rather than by means of one institutional discourse. The overall picture of the religious communication is trans-institutional in today's Pakistan as the sermons, traditional media and digital platforms complement and reframe political narratives. Building on the findings, **Fig. 2** proposes a cross-platform model of religious discourse, demonstrating how narratives are produced, circulated, and negotiated across sermons, traditional media, and digital platforms.

6.2 Negotiations regarding ethical, gender, and social issues

The results also reveal that religious talk is still a key factor in shaping gender norms and moral power. In the majority of texts, women were presented as having a sense of modesty, responsibility for the family, and stability in society. These representations are consistent with feminist CDA scholarship that holds that gender identities are developed through language activities that mainstream certain social prescriptions and submerge other gender identities (Lazar, 2007).

But there were also significant counter-discourses uncovered in the analysis. Newspaper editorials and social media increasingly saw women's participation in education, employment and politics as not conflicting with constitutional rights and/or Islam. The narratives are competing, showing that religious discourse is not monolithic, but rather a space of contestation where different people, groups, and actors contest the meanings of gender, equality, and citizenship.

The findings of the surveys confirm this complexity. While there was strong support for women's political participation, there were more split views on traditional family roles. This means that religion, constitution and evolving social norms are all part of the mix in the formation of public perceptions and do not rely on a single dominant ideology. Thus, religion must be seen as a space of negotiation rather than a rigid tool for social control. Legitimacy is discursively constructed through authority, moral evaluation, rationalization, and appeals to tradition (van Leeuwen, 2007).

6.3 Religious Narratives, Public Health, and National Identity

The results show the role of religious communication in shaping the interpretation of public health and national identity beyond the realm of political communication. In debates about COVID-19, at times opposing sides presented it as a divine challenge to be faced with moral reflection, and sometimes as a public health problem that calls for scientific solutions. These results confirm more recent studies which indicate that religious and scientific discourses are not mutually exclusive explanatory systems.

The survey results also illustrate that although religiously framed interpretations of disease exist, many respondents considered vaccination to be in accord with Islamic beliefs. The relatively high number of neutral responses indicate that audiences are not passively exposing themselves to religious or scientific knowledge, but rather are actively engaging in a process of negotiation. These conflicting stories, from a Foucauldian point of view, serve as a means of understanding the multiple regimes of truth that exist in public discourse, competing for legitimacy by relying on different modes of authority.

Religious speech also played a role in the formation of national identity in its constant association of Islamic values with citizenship, national unity, and collective belonging. The result is consistent with previous studies that have suggested that national identities are "produced" through shared historical narratives and moral values. Through the study, it is visible that religious identity remains an important and symbolic element of Pakistan's understanding, and multiple understandings are present in the public discourse in Pakistan today.

6.4 Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

This research has several contributions to the literature about religious discourse and public communication. Theoretically, it shows that religious discourse is a trans-institutional system of creation of meaning that simultaneously takes place in religious institutions, traditional media and digital platforms of communication. The findings suggest that religious narratives are not confined to sermons, newspapers, television debates, or social media but circulate among them to be adapted, reproduced, and contested. This view is an extension of CDA scholarship, which considers religious discourse as an active network of communicative practices that are not independent events, but are interdependent.

The use of Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis and quantitative survey evidence in a convergent mixed-methods design is methodologically a contribution to the study. Corpus linguistics helps in the systematic identification of recurring linguistic patterns, Critical Discourse Analysis helps interpret the ideological meanings in context, and survey data connects the process of discourse production with the reception of the audience. This way of conducting the study of religious discourse is more complete than studies based on textual or quantitative evidence.

Collectively, the results indicate that religious discourse continues to be vital in influencing public opinion on issues of politics, gender, public health and national identity in Pakistan. Reyes (2011) identifies several discursive strategies through which political actors legitimize authority, including appeals to morality, rationality, and tradition. However, the evidence shows that audiences are active interpreters that selectively accept, negotiate or contest dominant narratives during interpretation. It is important to understanding the dynamic relationship between discourse production and the public interpretation of it in order to further advance research on religion, media and democratic communication in increasingly interconnected societies. The theoretical contribution of this study is summarized in **Figure 3**, which conceptualizes religious discourse as a dynamic network of interconnected communicative institutions rather than a phenomenon confined to individual media or religious settings.

7. Conclusion

This study investigated the construction and negotiation of religion in the context of sermon, editorial, TV debate and social media, and how religious public perception is being formed in Pakistan. The study uses the combination of Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis and quantitative survey data to show that religious discourse is a trans-institutional system of meaning-making that constructs political legitimacy, gender norms, public health narratives, and national identity all in one.

The results suggest that religious language remains to have an impact on public communication, offering symbolic means of legitimating authority, moralizing, and consolidating a collective identity. But the survey findings also show that these stories are not being embraced by audiences without resistance. Rather, people actively negotiate, re-interpret and even challenge the dominant religious discourses, indicating the complex dynamics of institutional communication and public interpretation. The results revealed the dynamism and dynamizing nature of the religious discourse in the Pakistani media in the current scenario.

This study has three major contributions. Theoretically, it is an expansion of Critical Discourse Analysis and sees religious discourse not as a discourse that takes place in one specific institution or one specific media but a communicative system that spreads across various media platforms. In terms of method, it shows the importance of using corpus-based discourse analysis and survey research to complement each other in order to enhance the depth of analysis and methodological triangulation. It is a fact of everyday life that it offers empirical evidence of the power of religion in public attitudes towards politics, gender, public health and nationalism in Pakistan today.

The study does have some limitations, however, with respect to some of these contributions. The corpus was limited to the selected media genres in Pakistan and is socio-political. The results therefore cannot be applied to other religious and cultural contexts. Comparative cross-national designs, engaging further digital platforms, and/or longitudinal designs to explore the changing nature of religious discursivity over time and different political contexts are all suggested areas for future research.

In general, the research confirms that religion continues to play an important role in the public sphere. Meanwhile, it is shaped through a variety of communicative media and engaged audiences that are continually negotiating its meanings, and religious discourse is a dynamic and contested aspect of today's democratic communication.

Declarations

Ethics Declaration

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethical Institutional Review Board (ERB), Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization (ORIC), University of Sialkot, Pakistan. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the University. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

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Competing Interests

The both authors declare that there are no competing interests, financial or non-financial, related to this research.

Author Contribution

All data, methodology, research design and draft was made by Shazia Saleem as first author, while Dr.Ayesha zafar supervised and finalized the manuscript.

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Figures

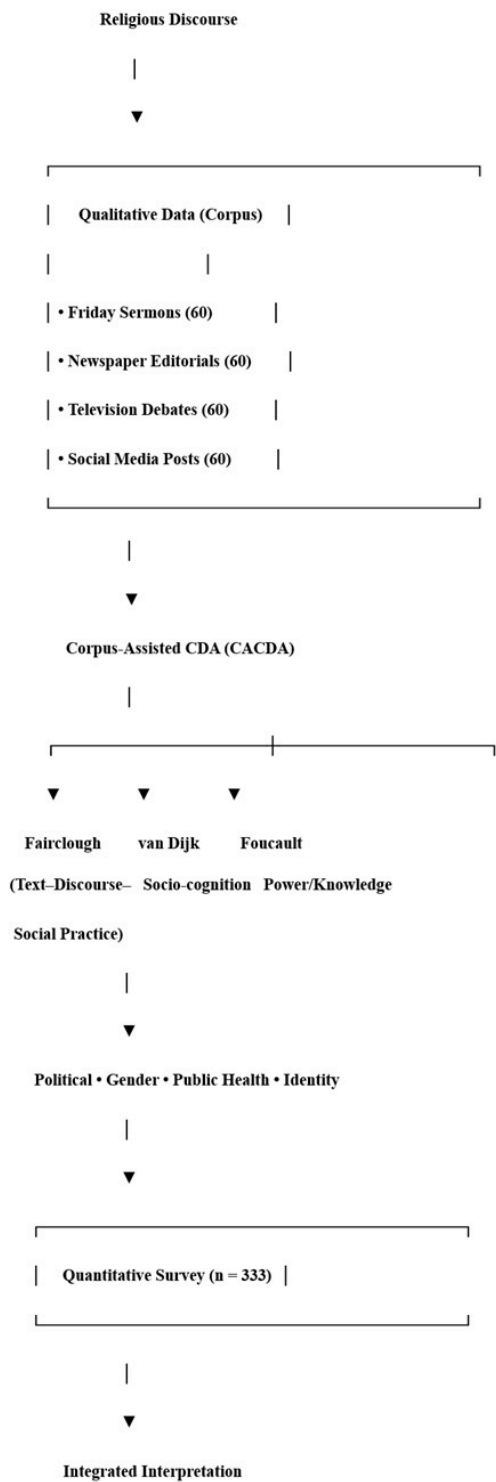


Figure 1

Research framework of the study integrating corpus-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis and survey research.

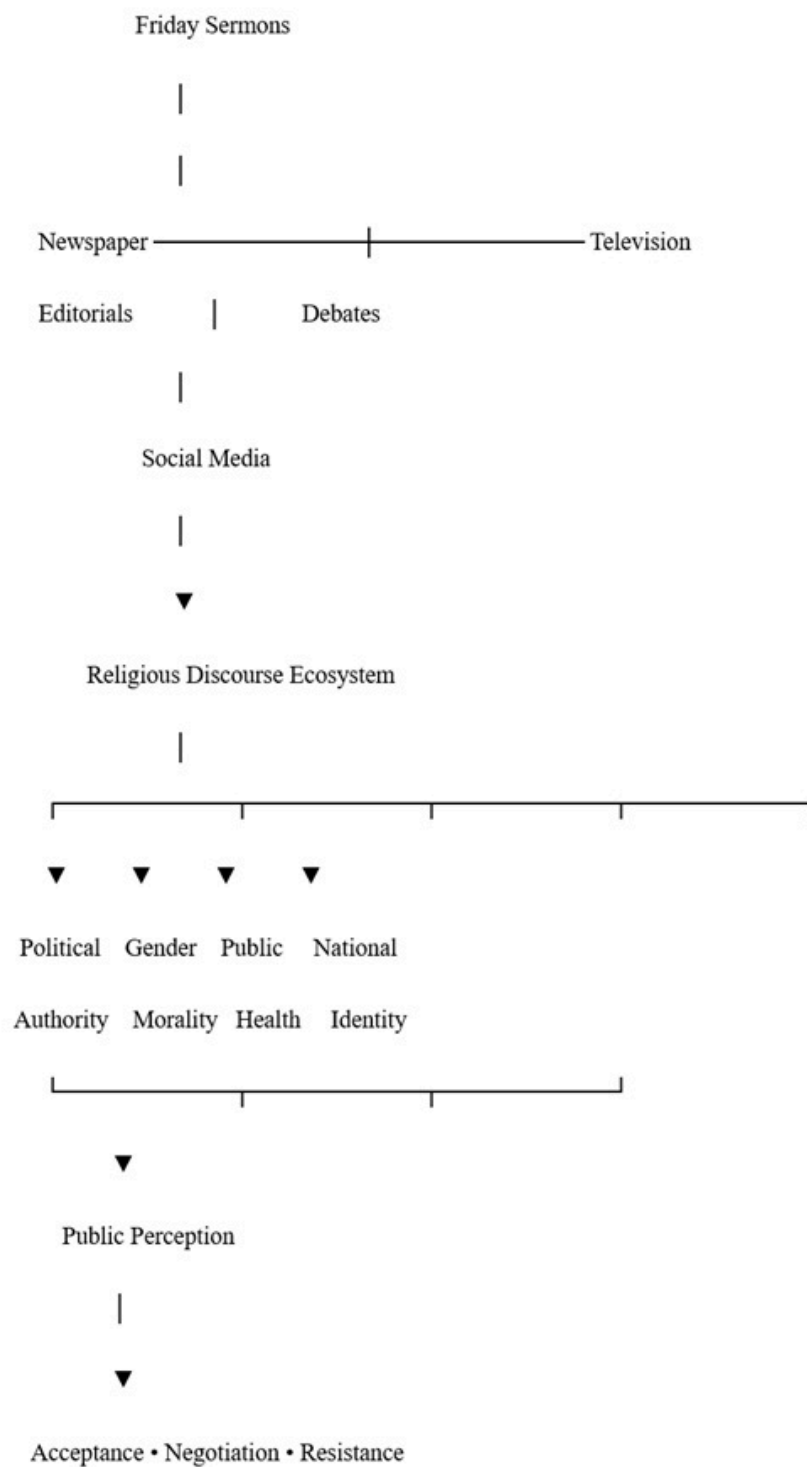


Figure 2

Cross-Platform Religious Discourse Model

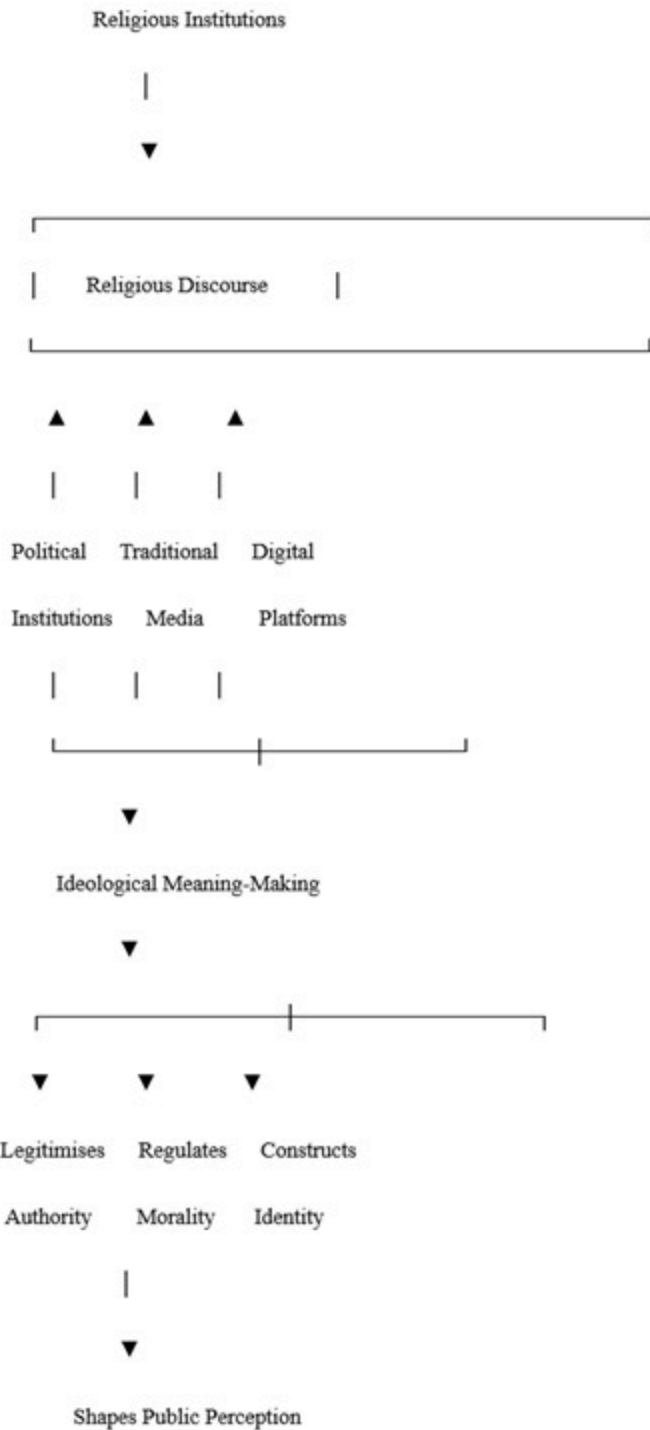


Figure 3

Conceptual model of religious discourse as a trans-institutional system of ideological meaning-making.