

Cross-border Tensions Affecting Sports: A Content Analysis of Reactions to Extreme Decisions Made by Ramiz Raja on Twitter Due to Politics Being Exposed to Sports

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore cross-border tensions affecting sports and how people reacted to the decision made in the wake of those tensions. Fifty Twitter comments were sampled using a purposive method to gain knowledge about the themes in reactions to bold decisions made by Ramiz Raja. Results revealed 11 main themes. The literature suggests that disputes are brought up by politicians, which reflects the general population. The results show that the public does not hold the same views as the politicians, and people are more accepting of moving past conflicts. People are very protective of cricket in both nations. Current events have shown that despite politicians working hard to keep nations apart, the people do not completely agree.

Introduction

We live in a world where cross-border tensions are an unavoidable part of a country's economic, cultural, and social development. Some countries have built and rebuilt friendships with their neighbours to benefit themselves and advance as countries. Some are yet to see the advantages of building those mutual relations and are adamant about bringing up past failures to restrict progress. One prime example of countries letting generational grudges stand in the way of progress is Pakistan and India. When it comes to both countries, many points of contention arise that are dominated by the political landscape. They are all connected to and affected by each other. They all arise because one problem leads to another, which leads to another, and comes back to the same problem, which still cannot be solved. This creates a circle of problems

that keep going in a cycle, and it looks as though there is no way out. Arguably the biggest point of contention for Pakistan and India is the occupation of Kashmir. "After India and Pakistan gained independence, both went about trying to persuade the princely states to join their respective nations (Paul, 2022, p. 18)." Paul (2022) mentioned that it was precisely the location of Kashmir that made it strategic because of the trade routes available to both nations (p. 19). Another reason that it made it so valuable to both nations was that "All the rivers that irrigated the plains of Punjab either originated or were flowing from the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Paul, 2022, p. 19)" Pakistan as a nation always felt there was an act of cruelty involved with the division of water from the Indus River. "Pakistan was severely affected by India's diversion of water from the Indus water system, which was in violation of a previously signed agreement.... (Paul, 2022, p. 19)."

It has been 75 years since this problem started, and there still has not been a solution. Every time there is an opportunity for a solution, these points are brought up by the radicalized on both sides to stall this problem further.

There has always been a point of contention because of India's belief that Pakistan, having a history of terrorism, is not capable of handling conflicts and is dangerous with the possession of nuclear weapons. Abbasi and Ullah (2022) state, "security situation.... is marred by outstanding territorial disputes, the threat of terrorism,...., and a high probability of war due to lack of escalation control mechanisms. (p. 216)" The lack of escalation control mechanisms due to all these outstanding issues is precisely where this nuclear conflict arises from. There have been instances where, because of Jammu and Kashmir and the possession of nuclear weapons, a war almost broke out. Abbasi and Ullah (2022) state the Kargil War of 1999, the Twin Peak crises in 2001-2002, and the Uri attack of 2016, among others, as instances where the escalation was calmed only because of the potential damage of an all-out nuclear war (p. 216). Abbasi and Ullah (2022) also say that the Mumbai attack of 2008 "further exacerbated the mistrust and communication gap between the two states. (p. 216)." Because of the fear of Pakistani terrorists and further potential attacks, India felt the need to protect itself. There have been instances of talks among the nations toward the disarmament of nuclear weapons, but success has never been found. Abbasi and Ullah (2022) indicate that there was an opportunity to put in safeguards and follow guidelines that could reach stability, but they were rejected by India as they further expanded their nuclear program (p. 220). This fear of Pakistan brewing and sending in terrorists to India has led to Islamophobia in India. This stems from "Ongoing conflict over Kashmir—India's Muslim majority province—has also served narratives of militaristic nationalism on both sides at the expense of ordinary Kashmiris.... (Amarasingam et al., 2022)." Amarasingam et al. (2022) state that the televised destruction of Babri Masjid in 1992, because of the belief that Lord Ram was born at the same spot, also led to anti-Muslim riots in India, which then led to police corruption against Muslims in India. Amarasingam et al. (2022) further mention, "Such distorted histories have been weaponized to consistently represent Muslims in India

as medieval foreign invaders who had pillaged the land and dominated over Hindus for centuries."

Traces of promoting Islamophobia are also seen in Bollywood movies that "have pandered to Hindu Nationalist sentiments....and Muslims portrayed as barbaric invaders of Hindu Lands.... (Amarasingam et al., 2022)." Amarasingam et al. (2022) suggest this stems from Hindu nationalist and radicalized political parties, such as the BJP under the leadership of Narendra Modi, promoting this narrative of the jihadis crossing borders and coming to claim India by waging war. The CAA is the citizenship amendment act that would give citizenship to "Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Parsis, and Buddhists from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan...." Amarasingam et al. (2022) further explain, "The act willfully excluded Muslims and persecuted groups...." This leads to the issue of terrorism and Jammu and Kashmir shown when "evidence of IS Khorasan province inciting Muslims to join anti-CAA protests across the country. BJP leaders were quick to take notice... and continued to blame the Islamic State."

Even after there are all these sources of conflict that separate the countries and pit their people against each other, there is only one thing that has provided hope for reconciliation among the nations, and that is the sheer love for cricket. "Cricket, one of the most abiding national passions in South Asia, has been an emblem of national pride as well a unifying force in the States of an otherwise politically turbulent, strategically sensitive and socio-ethnically divided region. (Bandyopadhyay, 2021, p. 1352)." But because of the "...the growth of terrorist and jihadi camps in Pakistan...(Bandyopadhyay, 2021, p. 1353)," a cricket-loving nation has suffered by having no cricket at home for several years. "Cricket matches between India and Pakistan are thinly disguised national wars. (Walle, 2013, p. 301)" "For many people in South Asian diasporas, cricket is an important component in processes of identification and sense of belonging...(Walle, 2013, p. 302)." Walle further talks about visits to Pakistan. "Cricket is able to bring society to a halt... (Walle, 2013, p. 306)." Walle (2013) further reinforces, "The series between India and Pakistan was not just any battle, either; it was the Indian team's first visit to Pakistan in 14 years, and it was marketed as a sign of improving relations between

the geographical neighbours and political foes (p. 306).” Walle (2013) recalls, “Particularly at the Lahore venue, with its closeness to the Indian Border, the stand is packed... not only cheering for their teams but also celebrating the temporary reunification of a divided people. (p. 306).” Cricket bought hope to people who did not wish for this sport to be ruined by political disagreements.

But these political disagreements then bleed into and affect the cultural landscape and sports decision-making processes for both nations. Moolakkattu (2020) mentioned that because of wars fought by both nations over Kashmir, “Cricket matches between India and Pakistan often create a sense of insecurity among Indian Muslims; this arises from accusations of disloyalty that forces them to side with the Indian National teams in most parts of India... (p. 427).” A glimmer of hope was brought by General Zia-ul-Huq, Pakistan's president, when he used the terms “cricket diplomacy” for the first time. He arrived in India to watch a match played in an attempt to “defuse the border situation, (Moolakkattu, 2020, p. 428)” but this did not last as there were only a few matches played from 1987-2004. “In February 1999, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee visited Pakistan... But this cordially was short-lived, and India broke off cricketing ties in May 1999 at the outbreak of the Kargil war (Moolakkattu, 2020, p. 428).” Moolakkattu (2020) mentions that General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's president, also visited India in 2005 to watch a match and held talks about previous incidents (p. 428). Moolakkattu (2020) says, “Cricket helped ease the tense situation in the first case and became an additional Confidence Building Measure (CBM)...(p. 428)”

Due to this, there was a tour of the Indian team, which was received with a lot of great attention and positives. “The goodwill, however, did not last long. The terror attack on Mumbai in 2008 carried out by Pakistani elements affected a heavy blow on cricketing relations, and no Test matches have taken place between the two countries since. (Moolakkattu, 2013, p. 429)” In 2011, there was another glimmer of hope when “Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh..., and Yousuf Raza Gilani, met each other for the World Cup semi-final clash between India and Pakistan... (Moolakkattu, 2013, p. 429)” This led to “a feel-good atmosphere

between the two countries at a time when the atmosphere of suspicion and hostility toward Pakistan in India is very strong (Moolakkattu, 2013, p. 429).” The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is not in control of decisions when it comes to making decisions when playing with Pakistan. Those decisions come from the government, and people in India deny that, but there is proof as the BCCI banned Pakistani players from the Indian Premier League (IPL). “Events in the last two years have created animosity between the two countries, caused mainly by a change in the status of Jammu and Kashmir..... Compounded with these developments is the promulgation of the CAA, that has led to widespread protests..... (Moolakkattu, 2013, p. 431)”

Due to this, “the Pakistan Cricket Board has asked for ‘Visa Assurances’ from India to participate in the upcoming T20 World Cup 2021 and ODI World Cup 2023 to be played in India and the BCCI responded by asking whether Pakistan could guarantee that no terror attack would be carried out in India during the tour (Moolakkattu, 2013, p. 430).” These dates and locations have since changed due to Covid-19. This content analysis is important because it aims to build on how cross-border tensions are bleeding into the sport of cricket. It will add to the discussion of how important decisions are based, not on the development of sports, but on politics.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of comments made on the posts that state Chairman Ramiz Raja's response to ACC's Chairman Jay Shah's decision about BCCI's decision to not visit Pakistan for the upcoming Asia Cup in 2023 and for it to be held at a neutral venue. Out of 2,765 comments made, 25 of the most recent relevant comments were looked at. Another post looked at was Ramiz Raja's statement about Pakistan potentially withdrawing from the World Cup held in India in 2023. Out of 227 comments, the 25 most recent and relevant comments were looked at. There were 25 comments chosen from each post, 50 in total. Twitter was chosen because it can give a wide variety of views of people from all over the world. These posts were chosen because they were made by an authority figure of the PCB and posted by the official Twitter account of the

Pakistan Cricket Board and Pakistan Cricket. These posts were also chosen because of how the comments made on them reflected people's views about how these tensions affected cricket. And it also told us about how people felt about these extreme decisions that were made.

Sample Selection

To find the right comments that could be helpful to the study, all the comments were looked at individually. As there is no filtering option for comments on a Twitter post, the filtering was manually done. The most recent 25 comments that were relevant were chosen from all the comments on the post. This study looked at any tweets that were relevant to the issue talked about in the posts that were looked at. The tweets commenting on the ongoing issue or the remarks made by either party were looked at. A purposive sampling method was used for this study to obtain the relevant information from the chosen sample.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

As this study aimed to explore people's views about these events, any tweets that made derogatory, racist, Islamophobic, radical, or any other kind of inappropriate remarks were excluded. Any comments that were posted solely as an image or a gif or a meme or emoticons without any text were excluded. Comments and replies to them were included as they made comments relevant to the study. Comments made in Urdu and Hindi were included, as well as comments made in English. As this is an ongoing issue, all comments made until the date of finalizing the sample were looked at, which was November 27, 2022.

Units of Analysis

The themes evident in the comments that presented their views about the ongoing conflict were part of the 50 comments looked at. They were looked at to find keywords and tones that could be categorized. For this study, the unit of analysis was to look at comments made on Ramiz Raja's statements to reflect how the general public feels about these issues forced on them by people with political agendas.

Settings and Materials

This study was carried out in one of MacEwan University's classrooms and the MacEwan library. Part

of it was also carried out at the home of the researcher. The materials used to obtain a sample and conduct a content analysis were a laptop, the internet, and a Twitter account. The MacEwan Library database was also utilized for the literature review.

Coding Procedures

Each of the 50 comments was looked at individually to examine the themes evident. They were analyzed to look for keywords, different tones, and different opinions they expressed. The first round of examining them was to highlight the important keywords that reflect ideas, values, and beliefs. The second round of examination was to categorize the comments in terms of the specific ideas they reflected. Based on that, categories revealed themselves, and the comments were placed in the appropriate category.

Results

Different people had all sorts of responses to these decisions. Analyzing the comments revealed 11 main themes. 1) Agreement, 2) Agreement with hopes of a different outcome, 3) Support for the PCB chairman, 4) Sarcasm/Making fun, 5) Praise, 6) Proud, 7) Questioning, 8) Disappointment, 9) Crossing the line, 10) Disagreeing with the decision with optimism, and 11) Disagreement.

Table 1. Main themes.

1. Agreement	<p>“That is the right approach” “Cricket must be kept free from politics.” “Right decision Game should play with respect.Indian unnecessary making it political issue,inspite other countries r sending their teams.” “Pakistan should not go to world cup 2023...”</p>
2. Agreement with hopes of a different outcome	<p>“Best decision self respect is the most important thing if they come then well and good if they don't then we should not also go. Anyways i hope india will come so we can witness two another great matches”</p>

3. Support for the chairman	<p>“We are behind you” “Good decision” “Good Ramiz bhai (brother) good” “Thik ae chairman gee. (that’s right Mr.Chairman) We’re with you.” “Behind you Rambo (nickname for Ramiz)”</p>
4. Sarcasm/Making fun	<p>“Great decision by Ramiz..... this is the only way to eliminate cricket from Pakistan. Future generations will remember this man in Pakistan. Also take the decision.... not to participate in any ICC events.” “If Pakistan won't come to world cup . India and Zimbabwe will lose their free 4 bonus points, “</p>
5. Praise	<p>“Great response by PCB, SHORT, SHAPRT and SWEET” “Good ramiz! What a aggressive stance against so called cricket board Mafia!” “Welldone @iramizraja you are the real Champ love you”</p>
6. Proud	<p>“Rameez sir Hume khuda ne tohfe main diye hain jo din raat Pakistan cricket k lye work kar rahe hain ye chorenge nh ab Pakistan khud aik brand ban gaya hai ab Hume zaroorat nh kisi se darne ki (Ramiz sir is a gift for Pakistan Cricket as he is woking to make sure no one can take advantage of Pakistan, we’re not afraid now)” “Good and bold decision. Much needed decision respected Ramiz raja”.</p>
7. Questioning	<p>“How is Jay Shah even professional if he made those remarks as a ACC president without even calling a meeting?”</p>
8. Disappointment/Regret	<p>“A World Cup without all the big teams participating would be massively devalued to the point of being meaningless.” “yes, and rightfully so. Its unfair to expect them to sacrifice a world cup over an asia cup”</p>
9. Crossing the line	<p>“Don’t come n don’t send terrorist too. The martyrs who sacrificed their lives during</p>

	<p>the heinous 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks will never be forgotten” “Thank u so much for taking this decision bcz we don't want any terrorist come to India to watch a cricket ODI World Cup 2023 so please be on your commitment” “No need to come here in India. We also dont want that terrorist will come to India. Its a pure country for all religon but you support to terrorist. So enjoy in your country. There is no space for terrorist.”</p>
10. Disagreeing with the decision with optimism.	<p>“Why not still go to India and show our sportsmanship and spirit. Let us show the world we are brave enough and despite India not coming to Pakistan, we still go to India”</p>
11. Disagreement.	<p>“one thing is clear we never gonna visit Pak until we have good relations.” “ Wrong decision. We should still go let India miss Asia cup if they want.”</p>

Agreement and Agreement with Hopes of a Different Outcome

Agreement includes comments that agree with the decision and the remarks made by the chairman. Agreement with the hopes of a different outcome mentions comments made that, while agreeing with the chairman regarding the firm stance, are still hoping for the teams to be able to tour the respective countries.

Support for the Chairman

Comments include support for the chairman regardless of the decision he made. These comments are about Pakistanis supporting their cricketers and their management. These comments express the trust and backing that Pakistani cricket fans have for their team.

Sarcasm/Making Fun

These comments are about people who made sarcastic remarks and are taking a jab at the teams and their losses. These are primarily made in good spirits and are mostly non-threatening. They are made in good fun and aren’t meant to be taken seriously.

Praise

These comments are ones that praise the efforts of the chairman. They praise how the chairman is dealing with this situation and is staying firm on his stance of making sure that Pakistani cricket fans are able to see cricket return home.

Proud

These comments reflect people feeling proud of the Chairman and the decisions he is making. People feel proud that someone like Ramiz Raja is making sure that Pakistan is respected around the world and that Pakistani cricketers and their fans are respected wherever they go. People are proud the Chairman is working hard to make sure that he points cricket in the right direction for Pakistan to be able to achieve success.

Questioning

Comments made here are ones that question this hasty decision-making. They are questioning the people in authority and holding them accountable for their decision, which has great effects on both nations. Comments are questioning how they are dealing with sensitive matters.

Disappointment/Regret

These comments talk about how people are regretful and express disappointment about not being able to see both teams play each other in their home countries. It also is regret regarding the missed opportunity at a World Cup if either country pulls out of the tournament.

Crossing the Line

These comments simply cross the line and make comments that are below the belt. There is nothing constructive or positive about these. These just come from a negative place and attempt to create disharmony and conflict.

Disagreeing with the Decision with Optimism and Disagreement

These comments aim to show the opposite side of the agreement. Comments that show disagreement don't have ill meaning but just disagree with the decision. Comments that disagree with the decision but still hope have hope that, for the sake of the game, there can be a solution found and both teams can visit each other's countries to participate in the tournaments.

Discussion

These results show many different sides of the argument. These findings are important in showing the diversity of opinion people have. People have different thoughts based on what they believe. Most of the comments were in support of the chairman and were along the lines of "Good decision." This relates to people being proud of the stance he is taking, referred to in Table 1 as category 6 (proud). Because cricket had been absent from Pakistan for a number of years, this led to Ramiz Raja and his firm stance on bringing cricket back to Pakistan. Referring to category 5 (praise) in Table 1, people are praising this stance because people in Pakistan love cricket, and it is important for people to have cricket at home. Table 1, categories 10 and 11 talk about how some people don't think that Pakistan should be missing their opportunity at a World Cup because of political issues. And some people believe that Pakistan should still go regardless of India's decision because Pakistan should extend a hand of reconciliation and still go to show the world a message. Referring to category 8 (disappointment/regret), people are regretful about the potential of the World Cup and how these tensions are not worth countries missing their chance at a World Cup. The important thing here is that apart from category 9 comments that crossed the line, most comments are positive. This proves that the tensions are politically charged by people who are not willing to grow and evolve. The general public wants to see these nations play against each other and want to see the players play in each other's countries and interact with each other. The limitation associated with this study was the small sample size. Further research will be able to explore a broader population, therefore more range of opinions. It would be helpful to explore not just the

general public but also the players and ex-players and the known personalities related to cricket to see their opinions.

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