

Corpus-Based Multimodal Analysis of Pakistan–India War Memes Conflict 2025 (PIWMC)

ABSTRACT:

Internet memes have become an important type of participatory digital culture, and the spread of social media has drastically changed public communication during times of geopolitical crisis. This study examines how memes influenced public opinion during the recent Pakistan-India conflict using a corpus-based multimodal approach. The study uses a two-tiered analytical framework to analyze 280 memes, 140 of which are from Pakistan and 140 from India. A qualitative semiotic analysis is used to decipher cultural and ideological meanings, while a quantitative sentiment and emotion analysis is used to map the affective landscape of the discourse. The results show that memes from both nations served as a virtual battlefield, expressing pride in one's country, spreading enemy caricatures, and using humor as a satirical and coping strategy. The analysis exposes major thematic dichotomies, such as "Tea vs. War," "Economic Disparity," and "Military vs. Memetic Superiority," illustrating how humor and satire were weaponized to influence online audiences. By offering a sophisticated comprehension of meme discourse within the framework of South Asian geopolitical tensions, the study advances the field of digital media scholarship.

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Introduction

According to Highfield (2016), the emergence of social media has significantly changed how civilizations interact during times of conflict. According to Shifman (2014), memes satirical pictures, films, or text-based visuals that become viral online have become a significant aspect of participatory digital culture. They are effective instruments for influencing conversation because of their distinctive blend of satire and comedy, particularly during politically delicate occasions (Ahmed, 2019). Memes expressing rage, mockery, pride in one's country, and solidarity have become increasingly popular in both countries as a result of the recent conflict between India and Pakistan. Memes served as a digital battlefield in both countries, heavily disseminating propaganda, enemy caricatures, and nationalistic narratives (Burroughs, 2020).

In the context of South Asia, this study places memes as cultural and political artifacts (Baishya, 2021). It looks at how national ideology, propaganda, and online audiences have been represented in Pakistani and Indian memes. The study aims to close gaps in conflict studies and

digital media scholarship by firmly establishing the analysis in empirical data and theoretical viewpoints (Gupta, 2023).

Problem Statement

Even though memes are often used during emergencies, relatively little study has been done on their political and cultural effects in South Asia. Previous research has mostly concentrated on Western settings, ignoring the ways in which memes function in narratives that are fueled by conflict between adjacent nations like India and Pakistan (Baishya, 2021). One significant gap is the lack of comprehensive documentation of memes throughout the most recent battle. Scholars and decision-makers run the risk of underestimating the impact of memes on national identity, public discourse, and conflict perceptions if they don't examine this phenomenon.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the thematic and multimodal strategies of Pakistani and Indian memes during the conflict.
2. To assess how memes shape public perception and function as digital propaganda

Research Questions

1. How are the thematic and multimodal strategies of Pakistani and Indian memes during the conflict analyzed?
2. How do memes influence public perception and serve as tools of digital propaganda?

Significance of the Study

According to Abbas et al. (2024), this study provides advancements to a number of academic disciplines, such as linguistic analysis, conflict communication, and critical discourse analysis. The study tackles an understudied aspect of political communication in Pakistan and India by concentrating on memes (Ahmed, 2019). Memes function as instruments of "memetic warfare," in which satire, comedy, and symbolism are used as weapons to shape public perceptions during times of conflict (Peters & Allan, 2022). The results are also applicable in real-world settings. Policymakers, media professionals, and civil society organizations should better understand memes as digital propaganda tools and their role in influencing public opinion and online nationalism during times of crisis (Zannettou, 2022). Additionally, the study promotes multimodal approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis by fusing quantitative sentiment and emotion mapping with qualitative semiotic analysis. (Fairclough, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen,

1996).

Literature Review

Since memes are now seen as more than just humor but as significant components of digital culture, the scholarly study of them has expanded dramatically over the past ten years (Shifman, 2014). Richard Dawkins, a biologist, first used the term "meme" in 1976 to refer to a "unit of cultural information" that has the same replication, evolution, and dissemination capabilities as a gene (Dawkins, 1976). Memes are seen as content units that circulate throughout online platforms, maintaining a basic message while undergoing modifications and reinterpretations by other users. This fundamental idea has been repurposed for the digital age. Memes are a dynamic form of communication that can reflect and shape cultural narratives at a never-before-seen pace because of this process of variation and selective retention (Milner, 2016).

Research on memes' function in contemporary political communication is crucial, emphasizing how they may be both entertaining and effective propaganda. Memes and related social media activities, according to academics like Tim Highfield (2016), are an essential component of "everyday politics," a type of political discourse that develops spontaneously from the public rather than from established political organizations. Memes' capacity to condense complicated political concerns into formats that are easily assimilated and shared makes them especially useful in this field. They are an important topic for comprehending modern political discourse and its cultural nuances because of their accessibility, which enables them to impact public opinion and penetrate public consciousness in ways that traditional political communication frequently cannot (Highfield, 2016).

According to Burroughs (2020), the term "memetic warfare" refers to the deliberate deployment of memes to influence public opinion and mold political narratives, especially during times of conflict. This differs from traditional propaganda since memes can avoid direct regulation and seem more genuine because they frequently operate in the gray region between humor and sarcasm. It has been discovered that both state and non-state actors use satirical and hilarious content to reinforce ideological frames, propagate misinformation, and caricature opponents (Peters & Allan, 2022). Using memes' contagious nature to further political objectives, this kind of warfare is characterized by the deliberate and purposeful use of memetic imagery to attack, disrupt, or reclaim discursive positions on public affairs problems (Peters & Allan, 2022).

Memes are effective instruments for forming groups, resulting in what some academics refer to as "invented communities" (Gupta, 2023). Memes function as a common language or a type of social currency in these communities, which are frequently based around political figures, cultural events, or shared ideological positions. Making and disseminating memes turns into a performative activity that identifies a person with a community and fortifies ties within it. A sense of solidarity and collective identity are fostered by this shared understanding and involvement, and they can be especially powerful in online settings where participants may be spread out geographically (Zannettou et al., 2018).

According to Zannettou et al. (2018), these online communities have the potential to become significant players in the larger meme ecology by creating a lot of content and successfully promoting stories.

In the setting of war, when it can be utilized to reduce fear and foster a sense of group resilience, the mechanics of comedy in memes become more complicated. For example, research on the Russian-Ukrainian war has demonstrated how digital communities use comedy as a weapon to dehumanize and mock perceived out-groups while also fostering group identity (Zannettou, 2022). As a "disciplinary mechanism," this kind of comedy can serve to uphold particular ideological boundaries and demonstrate one's superiority over the opposition. Common motifs in this discourse include the exaltation of military might and the derision of "weak" or "cowardly" individuals, which ultimately leads to a militarized masculinity that is justified by military service and a patriotic narrative (Zannettou, 2022).

Memes are an essential instrument for political engagement beyond confrontation, particularly for younger demographics that might be disenchanted with traditional politics. For instance, research on the 2019 Indonesian presidential election revealed that memes significantly impacted novice voters (Febriana et al., 2023). These memes, which were frequently narrative-driven and amusing, increased young people's political participation by providing them with an approachable introduction to political issues and politicians. As an example of how memes can be used to mobilize public opinion and draw in a new generation of voters, these amusing memes stood apart from traditional political memes that frequently use hate speech by interacting with voters through positive and interesting content (Febriana et al., 2023).

Memes had a deeper function throughout the Syrian civil war, serving as instruments for

resistance, sorrow, and visual restitution (Mielczarek, 2018). For example, a series of memes that served as a means of subverting and renegotiating the horrific reality of the refugee crisis swiftly adopted the terrible picture of a little refugee boy named Aylan Kurdi. These memes offered a counter-narrative to the way the incident was portrayed in the mainstream media, allowing both makers and viewers to express their sorrow and look for a kind of atonement by offering a "better ending" for the child. This illustration demonstrates how memes can evolve from straightforward visual criticism to a means of evoking a group emotional reaction, pushing us to think beyond their humorous potential in terms of their social function (Mielczarek, 2018).

Research has demonstrated that memes in the South Asian setting subtly reflect identity politics and nationalism. The term "memetic visibility" was created by Anirban K. Baishya (2021) to characterize the way memes, particularly those that criticize India's ruling Hindu right-wing, contribute to a global language of online political discourse. These criticisms challenge authority and promote a political community based on common viewing habits by using comedy as a kind of "light critique." Through this process, seemingly insignificant objects are transformed into a forum for important political discussions, where textual and visual components collaborate to create a shared identity among ideological peers (Baishya, 2021; Gupta, 2023).

According to Javed et al. (2022), research on Pakistani political memes has also examined how they serve as a platform for social and political criticism, uncovering themes and messages concealed inside amusing visuals. This study demonstrates that memes are used to reflect and critique society, politicians, and social norms in addition to being utilized for amusement (Javed et al., 2022). Memes' vocabulary, which frequently combines linguistic and visual components, is essential for communicating a maker's point and influencing how an audience views a person or an event. Memes are also tools for social learning and critical engagement in the digital environment, as audiences are increasingly forming a habit of critically assessing material by deciphering the underlying meanings (Javed et al., 2022).

Memes' influence on political discourse also includes the promotion of affective polarization, a condition in which political disputes become intensely personal and emotional (Khan, 2024). This polarization can be accelerated by memes, which have the capacity to dehumanize, mock, and create "us versus them" narratives. According to a study on Pakistani political memes on Twitter, these memes frequently used delegitimization, labeling, and

trivialization discourses to disparagingly assess political rivals. According to this perspective, memes are used to attack and condemn people in addition to expressing political opinions, which exacerbates social differences and creates a more hostile online political climate (Khan, 2024).

The ethical aspect of studying political memes is also important, especially when it comes to the dissemination of false information and transgressions of moral standards (Saleem et al., 2022). Memes can swiftly spread inaccurate or misleading information due to their decentralized and viral character. According to a 2022 No-Confidence Motion study on Pakistani political memes, meme makers frequently transgressed moral standards and established predetermined goals in order to disparage a specific political party. This draws attention to a crucial issue facing platforms and regulators: how to strike a balance between the necessity to stop the dissemination of political propaganda and damaging content that can deepen societal divisions and skew public opinion and the inherent freedom of expression in meme culture (Saleem et al., 2022).

Research Methodology

The research design employs a mixed-approaches strategy. A multimodal examination of memes at three different levels, the denotative level (literal description), the connotative level (cultural and ideological implications), and rhetorical techniques (irony, satire, etc.) was used to conduct the qualitative analysis. At the same time, the frequency of mood, emotion, and rhetorical techniques was examined using a quantitative approach. Political critique was mapped to "anger + anticipation" and satire to a combination of "joy + disgust" according to Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions.

Data Collection

The study employed a systematic strategy to gather data, concentrating on the three weeks immediately following the conflict between India and Pakistan in order to document the early spike in online conversation. Memes were collected from popular websites such as Google Images, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter/X. A multi-step procedure was used to guarantee a large and representative sample:

1. Identification: Specific keywords and hashtags, including (#IndiaPakistanWar and #MemeWar), were used to find memes.
2. Exclusion: Low-resolution memes and duplicates were eliminated.

3. Logging: Metadata such as the date, source platform, language, and country of origin were recorded for every meme.

With a balanced distribution of 140 memes from Indian and 140 from Pakistani sources, the final corpus included 280 memes.

Sampling Techniques and Criteria

The study employed a purposeful and criterion-based sampling strategy to ensure that the memes collected were relevant to its objectives. If a meme satisfied the following requirements, it was included to the corpus:

- They made explicit mention of the conflict between India and Pakistan or its cultural and ideological ramifications.
- They showed notable circulation and virality, as shown by having more than 50 likes, shares, or comments; they also included enough textual and/or visual data for multimodal analysis.
- They stood for propaganda, satire, humor, or conflict-related symbolic speech.
- Off-topic, unintelligible, or repetitive memes were not included. Capturing both popular and culturally meaningful information was the goal of this strategy.

Table 1

Summary of Collected Memes

Meme ID	Text Content	Source	Country	Emotion	Sentiment	Intensity
Meme 1	“Unfortunately, the war has been cancelled 😐 try again next year.”	Instagram	Pakistan	Humorous / Sarcastic	Negative (due to war cancellation context)	Medium
Meme 2	“Indians Preparing for War: Pakistani making memes	Instagram	Pakistan	Humorous / Sarcastic	Negative (mocking)	Medium

							
Meme 3	“THEY THINK WE’LL SERVE THEM TEA AGAIN.”	Instagram	Pakistan	Sarcastic Defiant	/	Negative (dismissive)	Medium
Meme 4	“India paani kholo bartan dhony hen.” <i>(India, open the water, dishes need to be washed)</i>	Instagram	Pakistan	Humorous Sarcastic	/	Negative (mocking)	Medium
Meme 5	“Indians and Pakistanis in Dubai metro now.”	Instagram	Pakistan	Neutral Observational	/	Neutral	Low

Models of Analysis

The analysis of the memes was grounded in two established theoretical frameworks (Janks, 1997; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996):

The 3D model of Fairclough: A text, a discursive practice, and a social practice are the three interrelated dimensions of every discursive event, according to this paradigm, which is essential to critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Janks, 1997). The following is the analysis for each dimension

- Text Analysis (Description): This entails explaining the meme's linguistic and visual components, such as the language employed, rhetorical strategies, and visual components (Fairclough, 2003).
- Discursive Practice (Interpretation): This dimension examines the creation and consumption processes, examining the origins of the meme, its target audience, and its likely interpretation.

- **Social Practice (Explanation):** This analyzes how the meme reflects or contradicts hegemonic narratives, ideologies, and power dynamics in a larger sociopolitical framework (Fairclough, 2003).

The Grammar of Visual Design by Kress and van Leeuwen: This framework offers an organized method for examining visual communication. It uses two primary components to classify visual elements:

- **Represented Participants:** These are the individuals or things that are shown in the picture. These individuals' associations are regarded as syntactic (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).
- **Interactive Participants:** These are the meme's producers and consumers, and their interactions are practical. The model aids in comprehending how the observer is influenced and given meaning by visual aspects (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

Data Analysis

There were clear differences between the ways that Indian and Pakistani internet users used memes throughout the crisis, according to the multimodal analysis of the corpus of 280 memes. According to the findings, memes from both sides served as a virtual battlefield, but with distinct emotive and rhetorical tenets. As a coping strategy and a form of rebellion, Pakistani memes mostly used humor, satire, and cultural allusions. Indian memes, on the other hand, were distinguished by a more overt display of nationalism, hostility, and mockery of the political and economic situation of the adversary. To demonstrate these thematic and rhetorical differences, this section offers a thorough examination of particular meme examples from both sides.

Pakistani Memes:

Pakistani memes often turned geopolitical tensions into a source of communal cohesion and amusement by using comedy as a means of defiance and patriotism. A complicated coping mechanism was evident in the sentiment, which was a combination of victorious ridicule and self-deprecating irony. A high frequency of hilarious and caustic content can be seen in the quantitative data from the corpus of 140 Pakistani memes.

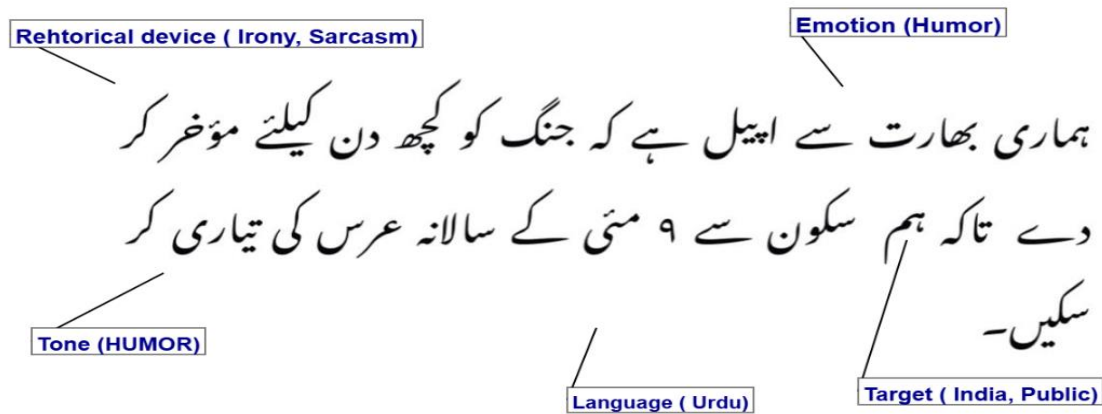
Table 2

Frequency of Pakistani Memes

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency
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Emotion	Humorous/Sarcastic	81
	Triumphant/Pride	9
	Mockery	10
	Anxiety/Despair	7
	Criticism/Satire	7
	Other	5
Sentiment	Sarcastic/Humorous	76
	Negative	45
	Positive	7
	Neutral	6
Intensity	High	55
	Medium	66
	Low	5

Figure 1. The “War has been Cancelled” Meme (Pakistani)



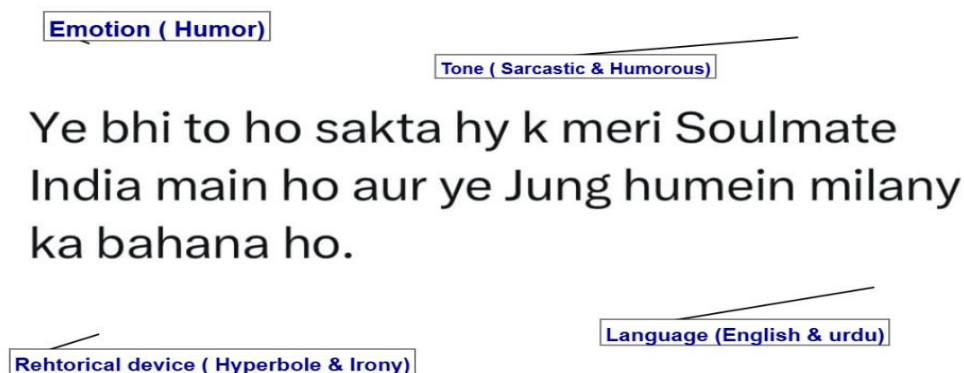
Textual Analysis (Description): This meme features handwritten Urdu writing on a plain white background. The phrase means: "We appeal to India to postpone the war for a few days so that we can prepare for the annual Urs of 9th of May." The purposeful formality of the language ("We appeal to India") contrasts ironically with the subsequent ridiculous plea. The punchline, which alludes to a religious holiday, makes the conflict seem insignificant by using humor to

contrast a serious subject (war) with a fun cultural occasion. There are no visual players or intricate visuals in the humor; it is entirely text-based.

Discursive Practice (Interpretation): The developer of the meme, who is probably a Pakistani social media user, uses an "in-group" humor that is only understandable to those who are familiar with the Urs holiday. People who "get it" get a sense of belonging and solidarity as a result of this utilization of shared cultural context. The meme is seen as a coping mechanism, a means for individuals to turn conflict into a joke in order to manage their anxieties, rather than as a serious political statement.

Social Practice (Justification): This meme is a kind of discursive opposition to the prevalent, state-sponsored war narrative. It trivializes the discourse of fear and permits the expression of humor and resiliency instead of violence by downplaying the gravity of the issue. It gently challenges the prevailing image of unending hostility by reflecting a public opinion that values cultural and religious life over political strife (Mielczarek, 2018).

Figure 2. *The "Soulmate in India" Meme (Pakistani)*



Textual Analysis (Description): This meme, which combines Urdu and English, is also text-only: "It's also possible that my soulmate is in India and this war is just an excuse to bring us together." By using the rhetorical device of hyperbole, the severe, collective reality of war is playfully contrasted with a romantic, personal scenario. The conversational language suggests a young, creative person from the city.

Discursive Practice (Interpretation): The audience's knowledge of political context and romantic tropes greatly influences the meaning of this meme. It serves as a coping strategy for

wartime fears and a humorous outlet for the creator's annoyance. The intended audience is one that is familiar with these cultural allusions, and the goal is not political but rather personal and communal.

Social Practice (Explanation): This meme offers a potent illustration of language that challenges hegemony. It gently challenges the official state-driven narrative that frequently demonizes the enemy by humanizing the "other" and implying a shared yearning for peace and connection. It contributes to a more complex public picture by framing those on the other side as humans with similar lives and goals rather than as adversaries.

Figure 3. Case 3. The "Twitter Post" Meme (Pakistani)

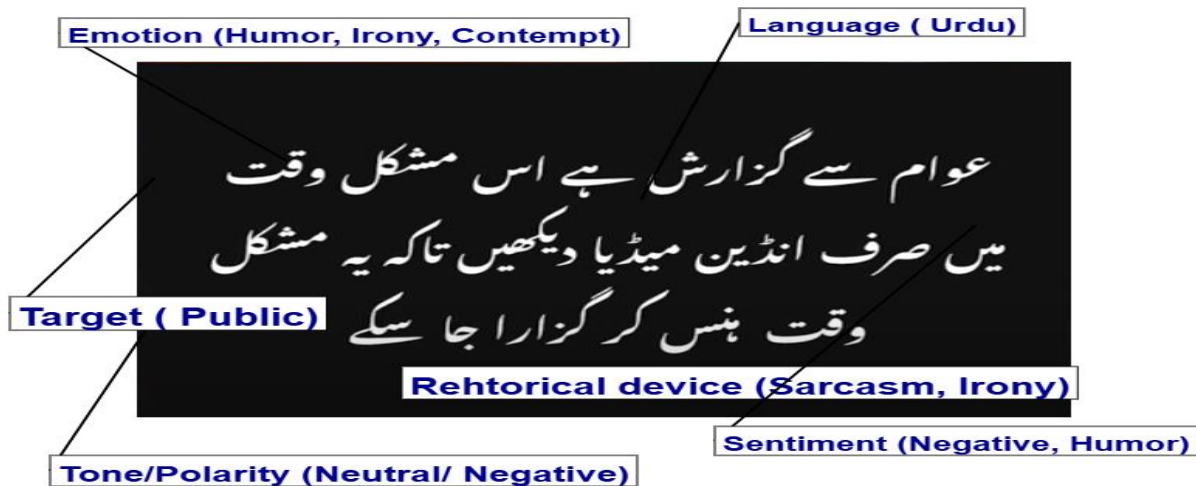


Textual Analysis (Description): An image of a Twitter post screenshot serves as the meme. Authenticity and "real-time" criticism are provided by this popular meme type. It says, "idr jung honay lagi hn aur ami pouch rhi hn khala ky bethy ma akhir kya kami hn," which translates to, "There's a war about to happen here, and my mom is asking what is wrong with my aunt's son." The message is written in a combination of Urdu and English. Linguistic Features: The language is informal and conversational, combining English and Urdu slang that is frequently found on social media. The culturally particular terms "ami" (mom) and "khala" (aunt) anchor the meme inside the South Asian or Pakistani home environment.

Discursive Practice (Interpretation): The production and consumption of texts, such as memes, are the main topics of this portion of Fairclough's theory. It transcends the text's "what" itself. The production (who made it and why) and consumption (who sees it and how they perceive it) are both examined. This entails being aware of the particular platforms (like social media) on which it is shared as well as any cultural or intertextual allusions it may include. It's about the social processes that give the text life and significance, to put it simply.

Sociocultural Practice (Explanation): The meme is positioned in the larger sociopolitical framework of the Pakistan-India conflict in this section. It provides an explanation for the meme's existence as well as insights into public opinion. This entails examining the meme's relationship to hegemony, ideology, and power relations. It demonstrates how the ostensibly straightforward process of producing a meme may either support or contradict prevailing narratives of the conflict. A meme might, for instance, employ comedy to normalize a hostile situation or to criticize a government's position. It's about how social actions like memes both reflect and influence society.

Figure 4. The “Indian Media” Meme (Pakistani)



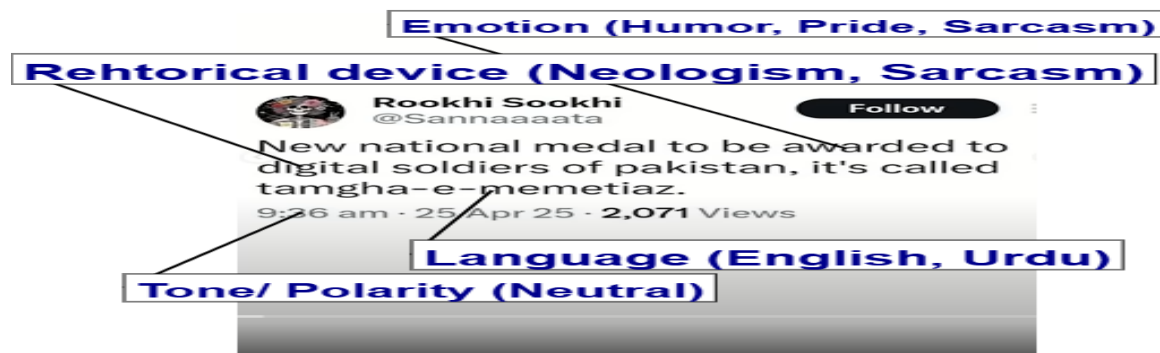
Textual Analysis (Description): The meme is a black and white image with Urdu text. It says: "عوام سے گزارش ہے اس مشکل وقت میں صرف انڈین میڈیا دیکھیں تاکہ یہ مشکل وقت ہنس کر گزارا جا سکے" which translates to: "The public is requested to watch only Indian media during this difficult time so that this difficult time can be passed by laughing." The primary rhetorical device is sarcasm and irony. The statement uses formal language ("The public is requested") to deliver a contemptuous and humorous message, directly mocking Indian media's coverage of the conflict.

Discursive Practice (Interpretation): The meme's humor is based on a shared, negative perception of Indian media among a Pakistani audience. It's an intertextual reference to a common sentiment that Indian media's coverage is exaggerated. By suggesting that watching it is a form of entertainment, the meme re-frames a source of political tension into a source of mockery and amusement, allowing the audience to process their feelings of animosity through humor.

Sociocultural Practice (Explanation): This meme is a form of counter-discourse. It

directly challenges the narrative of the "enemy media" by turning it on its head. Instead of portraying Indian media as a serious threat, it depicts it as a comedic spectacle. This reframing serves to de-legitimize and de-power the opposing side's narrative. It reinforces a sense of shared identity and superiority among the audience, suggesting that they are too clever to be swayed by what they perceive as absurd propaganda. It reflects a public sentiment of contempt and a need to manage conflict-related anxiety through humor.

Figure 5. The “Tamgha-e-Memetiaz” Meme (Pakistani)



Textual Analysis: The text announces a "new national medal" for "digital soldiers," named "tamgha-e-memetiaz." This is a neologism and a pun on "Tamgha-e-Imtiaz," a real civil honor in Pakistan. The humor and sarcasm come from elevating online meme creators to the status of national heroes. The tone is deceptively "neutral," which enhances the satirical effect.

Discursive Practice: This meme is a form of meta-commentary. It is a discourse about discourse. The creator's purpose is to recognize and ironically celebrate the role of online activism and meme culture in the geopolitical conflict. It acknowledges that social media is a new battlefield and that "digital soldiers" are a new kind of combatant. The use of code-switching (English/Urdu) signals that it is made for a tech-savvy, online audience.

Sociocultural Practice: This meme reflects and shapes the public perception of modern conflict. It signals a collective awareness that the "battle" is no longer confined to the physical realm but also takes place online. It subtly asserts the importance and power of social media to

influence public opinion and national pride, a sentiment that is both humorous and genuinely held.

Indian Memes:

Indian memes were marked by overt negativity, violence, and a strong emphasis on nationalist pride and the sense of military dominance, in contrast to Pakistani memes that focused on humor as a coping mechanism. In an attempt to make fun of Pakistan's political and economic instability, the tone was frequently offensive. The majority of sentiments were negative, with trolling and ridicule being the most common emotions, according to a corpus study of 140 Indian memes.

Table 3

Frequency of Indian Memes

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency
Emotion	Mockery/Trolling	30
	Humor/Sarcasm	12
	Provocation/Threat	4
	Patriotism	3
	Frustration	3
	Other	5
Sentiment	Negative	44
	Neutral	9
	Humorous/Sarcastic	4
	Positive	3
Intensity	High	48
	Medium	17
	Low	5

Figure 6. *The “Dear Indians, Lahoris” Meme (Indian)*



Textual Analysis: This meme is multimodal, combining an image of a serious press conference with text. The text, a mix of Hindi/Urdu and English, humorously asks if the "BTS Army" will support India or Pakistan. The rhetorical device is hyperbole and irony, using a global pop culture reference to mock the seriousness of the conflict.

Discursive Practice: The humor depends on the audience's knowledge of both the India-Pakistan conflict and the global pop culture phenomenon of the BTS fan base. By bringing in a neutral, non-political entity, the meme serves as ironic commentary on the nationalistic fervor surrounding the conflict. It's created and shared by a young, online audience that understands and uses such cultural references to make a point.

Sociocultural Practice: This meme is a form of counter-hegemonic discourse. It subtly critiques the official, nationalistic narrative by highlighting its absurdity. By suggesting that a global pop culture group could be involved in the war, it diminishes the conflict's jingoistic rhetoric and reflects a public perception that finds the over-the-top nationalism a subject of mockery.

Figure 7. The "India vs Pak >> Anything Else" Meme (Indian)



Textual Analysis: The meme uses a sarcastic rhetorical question in a mix of English and Urdu to mock online behavior. The question, "Pakistanis, tweeting about war, should we wear our home clothes or is there a dress code?" highlights the perceived absurdity of a "Twitter war." The screenshot format lends it a sense of authenticity.

Discursive Practice: The meme's humor is directed at online "warriors" and their behavior, not at the conflict itself. It's a form of counter-discourse that uses irony to critique online jingoism. The intended audience is one that finds such behavior absurd and disconnected from reality.

Sociocultural Practice: This meme reflects and reinforces a public sentiment of contempt for performative online nationalism. By mocking the "digital soldiers" of the opposing side, it works to delegitimize their efforts and their narrative, suggesting that their actions are trivial and out of touch with the reality of war.

Figure 8. The "Dress Code for War" Meme (Indian)



Textual Analysis (Description): The mode of the meme is primarily linguistic, embedded in an Instagram comment screenshot format. Language: Code-mixed Urdu and English ("Dear Indians... jung ky doran..."). This bilingual style mirrors everyday online discourse in South Asia. Rhetorical device: Sarcasm and irony. It humorously warns Indians not to ask Lahoris (residents of Lahore) for directions in war a joke based on cultural stereotypes of Lahoris being overly hospitable or comically misleading in giving directions. Visual: The screenshot format (username, timestamp, heart icon) adds authenticity, implying it is a real comment, not fabricated. This strengthens its humor and relatability.

Discursive Practice (Interpretation): Production: Likely created by an Indian social

media user as a playful jab at cultural stereotypes, targeting both Indians and Pakistanis familiar with Lahore’s reputation. Consumption: The intended audience is the online public in South Asia, particularly those who recognize stereotypes about Lahoris. The humor depends on shared cultural knowledge. Interpretation: Rather than direct hostility, the meme uses mock-serious advice to reduce war seriousness into a mundane, funny warning. It pokes fun at both the enemy and at cultural quirks, showing how online users trivialize war rhetoric.

Sociocultural Practice (Explanation): The meme reflects counter-discourse to nationalist militarism. Instead of aggressive slogans, it reframes war in terms of local cultural humor. By joking about asking Lahoris for directions, it humanizes the conflict transforming the enemy into familiar “neighbors” with quirks. It also critiques online jingoism by trivializing war into something absurd, reflecting public skepticism about militaristic narratives. This aligns with the idea of “memetic warfare” (Peters & Allan, 2022), where humor becomes a strategy to reframe power discourses and cope with political anxiety. This meme is a screenshot of an Instagram comment, and its multimodality is primarily a blend of linguistic and contextual modes. The visual is minimal, but crucial to its function as a meme.

Figure 9. The “Lahoris Giving Directions” Meme (Indian)



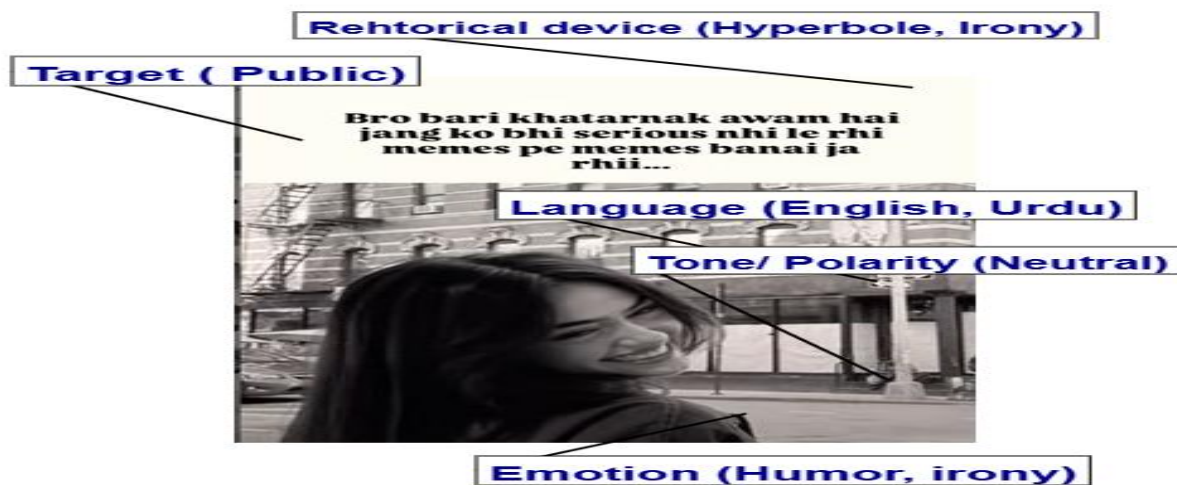
Textual analysis: This meme combines both linguistic and visual modes to highlight the significance of the India–Pakistan rivalry. The text, “Aap apne weekend plans rakh lijiye, main ghar baithke India Vs Pakistan dekh lunga,” employs a mix of formal Hindi/Urdu phrasing with a casual tone, while the header “India vs Pak >> Anything Else 😊” exaggerates the rivalry’s importance. The visual element of a serious-looking man in a professional office setting adds irony to the statement, as it contrasts the gravity of his appearance with the trivial act of watching a cricket match. This incongruity creates humor through irony and exaggeration, treating the rivalry

as more significant than any personal or social obligation.

Discursive perspective: The meme is produced by Indian social media users for audiences deeply familiar with the cultural and emotional weight of the India–Pakistan competition, particularly in sports. Its consumption is grounded in shared knowledge of this rivalry, allowing the humor to resonate with a collective audience who sees the rivalry as more than just a game. The meme functions as a lighthearted glorification of national pride, drawing the audience into a sense of collective identity through shared laughter and irony.

Sociocultural analysis: The meme reflects how the India–Pakistan rivalry is not only a political or military matter but also a deeply rooted cultural phenomenon. By humorously portraying the rivalry as superior to any other weekend activity, it reinforces nationalist pride and normalizes the obsession with this competition. It also shows how humor and satire serve to embed nationalist ideologies into everyday discourse, blending entertainment with subtle forms of propaganda. Thus, the meme becomes more than a joke it is a cultural text that both entertains and reaffirms collective sentiments of national identity and pride.

Figure 10. *The “Not Taking War Seriously” Meme (Indian)*



Textual Analysis: The meme is a meta-commentary a meme about making memes during a conflict. The text, in a mix of English and Urdu, uses hyperbole and irony to point out that "the public is not taking the war seriously." The image of a smiling person contrasts with the

"dangerous" situation, creating a humorous effect.

Discursive Practice: The humor is self-aware and targets an audience actively participating in the online meme culture of the conflict. It's a way for the audience to acknowledge their own behavior and the surreal nature of the situation. The casual language ("Bro") signals its purpose for a younger, online-native demographic.

Sociocultural Practice: This meme reflects and shapes a collective feeling of ironic detachment from the conflict. By pointing out the public's humorous response, it both critiques and participates in the very behavior it describes. It highlights how digital humor is a powerful tool for processing and controlling anxieties in a tense political climate.

Discussion and Findings

Memes were actively used as strategic weapons of communication, identity formation, and digital warfare during the Pakistan-India conflict, as this study has shown. A corpus of 280 memes was analyzed, and the results showed a pronounced difference between the rhetorical and thematic approaches used by users in the two nations. Indian memes tended toward overt hostility and a straightforward declaration of nationalistic supremacy, whereas Pakistani memes primarily used comedy as a defense mechanism and a sort of oblique critique.

This fundamental discovery is supported by the frequency data shown in the analysis tables: While "Negative" sentiments (44 instances) and "Mockery/Trolling" (30 instances) predominated in Indian memes, "Humorous/Sarcastic" attitude was more prevalent in Pakistani memes (76 instances). When paired with the in-depth qualitative examination of certain memes, this quantitative data demonstrates a fully integrated mixed-methods approach.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) approach, memes from both sides successfully blended text and images to produce layered meanings. However, Pakistani memes frequently used text-heavy, locally specific comedy that used irony to criticize the ridiculousness of war. On the other hand, as demonstrated by the examples, Indian memes frequently employed visually prominent templates, including well-known movie sequences or caricatures, to emphasize their sentiments of pride and aggression.

According to the study, memes are a type of "memetic warfare" in which humor is used as a weapon to challenge narratives and influence public opinion. The identified thematic dichotomies, including "Military vs. Meme Superiority" and "Tea vs. War," were periodic

discourse patterns that reflected and strengthened national ideologies rather than being isolated jokes. The results align with previous research that portrays memes as potent political imagery generators that can form "invented communities" and elicit strong emotions.

Conclusion

According to this study, memes during the Pakistan-India conflict served as virtual battlefields where nationalism, satire, and comedy influenced popular opinion. While Indian memes promoted nationalist pride and aggressiveness, Pakistani memes used humor to defuse tensions. Memes' function in propaganda and perception-building, their validation as participatory cultural texts, and the way multimodal tactics mirror national ideologies are some of the ways the research advances the fields of digital media studies, conflict communication, and cultural and discourse studies.

The results show that while Indian memes focused on aggression and nationalist pride, sustaining hegemonic narratives of superiority, Pakistani memes mostly used humor and irony to frame the conflict, acting as coping mechanisms and counter-discourses against militaristic rhetoric. Collectively, these trends show how, during geopolitical conflicts, memes are used to weaponize humor, spread propaganda, and create enemy caricatures. Memes are essentially potent tools of resistance, identity, and propaganda in the internet age rather than just being online jokes.

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