



Memetic Warfare: A New Frontline in India–Pakistan Relations

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ABSTRACT

In the age of digitalization, ideological contestations in South Asia are not limited to the traditional military and diplomatic arena but are also taking place in the digital space. This study investigates memetic warfare as a form of ideological warfare in Indo-Pak relations after the 2025 Pahalgam attack and military operations conducted by both countries, India's Operation Sindoor and Pakistan's Operation Bunyan ul Marsoos. Drawing on the theory of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1977) and applying multimodal discourse analysis (van Leeuwen, 2005), it examines how internet memes act as instruments of resistance and misinformation. Through a qualitative analysis of six memes that circulated widely on Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), this research shows how memes challenge state authority, produce alternative political knowledge, and challenge official narratives. The analysis shows how memetic warfare, by shifting the power dynamics from institutional players to common people, empowers ordinary citizens to reinterpret geopolitical narratives through humour and satire. However, the same mechanism that facilitates resistance also allows false information to propagate. These findings illustrate how memes can serve as tools for epistemic risk as well as for ideological subversion, and the need for critical media literacy in regions of conflict, particularly during Indo-Pak conflicts, in which public opinion is rapidly formed based on digital information.

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1. Introduction

The Indo-Pak dispute over Kashmir territory remains unresolved and unstable in modern geopolitics. The latest terror attack on civilians in Pahalgam in April 2025 has drawn attention to the precarious state of peace in Indian-administered Kashmir {Sharma, 2025, May 7 #35}. Two weeks after the deadly militant attack, India conducted a series of strikes against targets in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir (Drury, 2025, May 7). Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari strongly denied India's accusations. Speaking during a National Assembly session on Wednesday, Bilawal declared, "We have truth, justice, and history on our side," while emphasising that "everyone knows Pakistan had no involvement in the attack" (Desk, 2025, May 7). The political and military tensions quickly shifted to the digital space, sparking a new wave of memetic warfare. According to (Gray, 2021), memetic warfare is the use of viral memes, images, phrases, or maxims to embed narrative beliefs within a target audience to achieve specific political objectives. Internet memes are one of the latest evolutions of "leaflet" propaganda and an effective tool in the arsenal of digital persuasion (Nieubuuurt, 2021). Memes are easily designed and circulated on social media after violent incidents and serve as ideologically and culturally symbolic representations of opposition or reinforcement. Memetic warfare differs markedly from the traditional methods of propaganda in that it attempts to aim for a "long-term" effect by creating identity, values, and worldviews. This concept is embedded in information warfare and uses digital tools to disseminate influential narratives widely and swiftly (Gray, 2021; Siegel, 2017).

Operation Sindoor was a large-scale military strike carried out by the Indian army immediately after the attack on Pahalgam on May 6, 2025. According to Al Jazeera (Staff, 2025), the Indian military conducted numerous missile attacks on locations in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir early on Wednesday, referring to the operation as Operation Sindoor. Indian officials argued the strikes were a "proportionate" response to the April massacre, and that Pakistan's response afterward escalated the situation (Mollan, 2025, December 16). The operations were a big step-up in Indo-Pak aggression, aggravating the political argument and the public opinion of both countries. Memes praising military action, lamenting the loss of civilian lives, or denouncing the broader cycle of violence proliferated on social media as pictures and footage of the strikes went viral. ARY News reported, Pakistanis respond to war news with memes on social media, to cope with the rising tensions. Again, digital platforms became ideological battlegrounds, with memetic warfare adding to the narrative polarisation in this elevated environment. The performativity and participatory nature of memes reflect nationalistic fervour and shape the discursive arena in which power relations and geopolitical identities are being actively challenged. "Memetic warfare is a form of information warfare conducted online through memes and other tactics to achieve political, strategic, or ideological objectives. It involves the offensive or defensive circulation of content to influence public opinion, disrupt discourse, and advance the interests of those engaged in the campaign" (Munk, 2023). In retaliation for what it described as India's unwarranted action, Pakistan started Operation Bunyan ul Marsoos on 10th May 2025 targeting Indian military posts near the Line of Control. Al Jazeera reported, the Pakistani authorities presented the action as a strategic and symbolic defence of sovereignty. Like the Indian operation, the Pakistani strikes sparked a new wave of online expression, with reactions from civilians and official statements merging on Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Political Communication and Digital Media in Conflict Zones

Digital media has brought about a radical transformation in political communication, especially in countries at war. (Zeitsoff, 2017) points out that social media platforms have accelerated the dissemination of information and decreased communication costs, giving state and non-state actors new ways to influence public opinion. Although this democratisation of information flow might give voice to underrepresented groups, it also raises the possibility of polarisation and misinformation. However, less focus has been given to participatory modes of discourse, like memes, that are actively constructed by users. In Indo-Pak relations, digital platforms are not only means of communication, but also the fields of symbolic contestation, humour, and political expression of citizens. This gap highlights the need to study memetic warfare as a separate communicative activity in digital conflict situations. Although Zeitsoff's examination highlights structural shifts under digital media, it does

not adequately address how digital platforms facilitate new forms of political engagement that are not part of traditional power systems, including memetic warfare.

2.2. Memes as Tools of Satire, Resistance, and Division

Memes have developed into potent weapons for resisting and reinforcing narratives. Memes and viral content, according to (Moaswes, 2019), can both alleviate local complaints and widen social divides. Memes serve as micro-discourses that enable people to engage in politics and question prevailing ideas (Bracciale, 2020). These studies recognise the potential of memes to both reinforce and subvert state narratives but often overlook the fact that memes can simultaneously reinforce and challenge state narratives, especially in highly polarised environments such as Indo-Pak relations. Memes can have several different functions in conflict situations, such as entertainment, nationalism, propaganda, or public commentary. In Indo-Pak digital interactions, this complexity is specifically seen in memes functioning as a means of resistance and as instruments for strengthening national identities. A more subtle analysis is needed, then, to make sense of the role played by memes in both solidarity and division during periods of political tension. Although memes have been studied in reference to satirical and resistant uses, and political participation in the past, research on how memes affect public discourse in the context of recent Indo-Pak conflicts is still limited. This study aims to fill that gap by examining political memes that were shared during Indo-Pak tension in 2025 in order to understand how they are used to resist, nationalize and communicate politics digitally.

2.3. Theoretical Foundations: Foucault and Van Leeuwen

Foucault's theories of power and knowledge (Gillett, 1999) provide a framework for understanding how memes can challenge and alter prevalent discourse and create alternative knowledge. Multimodal discourse analysis developed by Van Leeuwen {Ledin, 2018 #23} highlights the role of the visual elements (images, colour, typography) in the transmission of ideological meaning. While Foucault and Van Leeuwen offer valuable theoretical lenses, they have often been applied separately in the existing research. It is necessary to have integrated assessments which consider both the discursive and the visual aspects of memetic warfare to create political realities. Most research conducted on memes in the Indo-Pak context has been centred on nationalism or state propaganda, disregarding the grassroots potential of memes to create an alternative discourse and challenge official narratives. While there is plenty of research that examines the power of memes as tools of resistance, there is a lack of analysis around the power of memes as a conduit of misinformation, especially in times of high geopolitical crises. This study fills this gap by using an integrated Foucauldian and multimodal approach to examine the dual nature of memes in the aftermath of the 2025 Pahalgam attack.

2.4. Research Significance

The study is significant as it sheds light on the transformation of political communication in the wake of the Indo-Pak conflict through digital platforms. Issues of a sensitive nature like Kashmir have always been dominated by the mainstream media and by the state actors themselves. The emergence of memetic warfare, however, is a shift in the narrative power, as ordinary users create and circulate visual texts that challenge dominant narratives and shape public opinion. Taking into consideration the theories of Michel Foucault concerning power and knowledge, this study brings out the political role these apparently frivolous and entertaining media forms play in creating knowledge. We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it "excludes," it "represses," it "censors," it "abstracts," it "masks," it "conceals" (Foucault, 1977). Power produces reality, domains of objects, and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained from him belong to this production (Foucault, 1977). Memes allow users, especially those outside elite structures, to wage ideological battles by producing alternative interpretations of events and subtly undermining established truths. This is especially true during times of national crisis like the April 2025 Pahalgam attack, where digital responses often outnumber and outpace official ones. Moreover, by incorporating Van Leeuwen's multimodal discourse analysis, the study explores how the combination of textual, visual, and symbolic aspects of memes construct alternative perspectives that enable them to become potent tools for digital activism and social commentary, hence contributing both to an increased understanding of the mechanisms of digital resistance and how digital creativity turns into political activity within the dynamics of contemporary geopolitics. Young

people use online creativity to express their political views, engage in dialogue, and reclaim their agency in the political process (Kligler-Vilenchik & Literat, 2020).

2.5. Research Questions

1. How do memes serve as discursive devices to build, uphold, or question dominant state regimes of truth in Indo-Pak digital discourse?
2. How can memetic warfare in the Pakistani and Indian digital space be understood within the framework of Foucault's theory of power-knowledge?
3. What roles do multimodal properties of memes play in the generation and dissemination of misinformation in Indo-Pak digital conflicts?

3. Methodology

The nature of this study is qualitative as its goal is to interpret and comprehend the meanings, discourses, and ideologies encoded in memes using Van Leeuwen's multimodal analysis to break down the textual and visual layers. Multimodality offers concepts, methods, and frameworks to help gather and analyse the visual, aural, embodied, and spatial elements of interactions and environments. In the case of internet memes, selection of the resource and social context within which it is understood play an important role in ensuring successful interpretation. Van Leeuwen (2005, p. 285) defines a semiotic resource as all the materials and artefacts or actions that we use to communicate. Therefore, multimodal discourse analysis provides a framework to examine the use of irony and humour to comment on political power and public understanding. Since the study focuses on interpretation, context, and the socio-political implications of digital texts and does not use any form of numerical or statistical analysis, a qualitative methodology is appropriate. Six memes were chosen from a larger collection of memes gathered during and after the Indo-Pak tensions in 2025, as they saw comparatively high engagement rates, in terms of likes, comments, shares and reposts, across Facebook, Instagram and X. The high number of circulation instances and audience reactions suggest a discursive function and impact of the publications in online public discourses during the conflict. Furthermore, the chosen memes illustrated themes that were repeated throughout the entire collection of memes, such as nationalism, military humor, resistance, misinformation and geopolitical competition. The examination of six memes is aimed at providing an interpretation of discourses in Indo-Pak memetic war rather than making a generalizable conclusion about all the memes that were exchanged during the period of conflict.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The foundation of this research lies in Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge (1977), which conceptualises power not only as coercive but also as productive, shaping knowledge, influencing discourse, and forming identities. The core of this theory is the relationship between power and knowledge, which suggests that only certain narratives are accepted as "true" and that the "true" is not a neutral fact, but one that is influenced by the dominant discourses. In every society, the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality (Foucault, 1977). In this sense, memes are discursive artefacts that propagate specific narratives of nationalism, conflict, and the enemy, thereby actively constructing social realities rather than merely reflecting them. Foucault's concept of regimes of truth is central to this study. Foucault argues, "truth isn't outside power, or deprived of power": on the contrary, truth "is produced by virtue of multiple constraints, and it induces regulated effects of power".

This means that "each society has its regime of truth" (Foucault, 1977). In a digital context, the credibility of a meme grows because of its virality and repetition, thus marginalising some opinions and bringing in others. Memes play a role in the building of subjectivities by humour, intertextuality and visual rhetoric, and reinforce certain national subjectivities while mocking the opposition. This aligns with Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, the idea that online publics are governed by subtle cultural mechanisms, including satire and mockery, which shape behaviour and enforce ideological conformity. According to Foucault, in modern societies, social control is based on a form of power known as disciplinary power. Discipline "is the specific technique of power that

regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (Foucault, 1977). The selected memes will be analysed in the light of Van Leeuwen's multimodal discourse analysis, which allows for a close analysis of the construction of meaning in the visual, textual, and symbolic modes. By combining multimodal analysis with Foucault's concepts, this research investigates the dynamics and mechanisms of memetic warfare as a space of discursive contestation and a tool for asserting power, not through brute force, but through the circulation of images, texts, and shared cultural codes in the Indo-Pak digital sphere.

3.2. Data Collection

In the present study, Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) were selected as the prime platforms for meme collection as they are among the dominant platforms shaping political discourse and the dissemination of online stories within the Indo-Pak context. These sites are vital for propagating politically and ideologically charged memes and are crucial in terms of user engagement and virality for visual content. We used purposeful sampling to draw six memes from a larger sample of memes collected from these platforms. Selection was made based on the following considerations: thematic relevance (each meme addressed one or more of the main issues of our study, for example, nationalism, misinformation, military satire, linguistic politics, and regional antagonism), narrative significance (the selected memes were not only funny, but also expressed and propagated different ideological narratives that contributed to larger discourses concerning power, identity, and statecraft), methodological coherence (the memes contained textual and/or visual elements that could be analysed through the lens of multimodal discourse analysis as proposed by Van Leeuwen), and contextual resonance (these memes were shared during key socio-political events (e.g., military conflict, border conflicts) and thus were contextually relevant in terms of the Indo-Pak digital media landscape). The six memes were selected in part due to their high levels of public engagement, and their viral reach, which both indicate their discursive significance. The structured data table in Section 2.1.3 includes detailed engagement metrics. Since the study focused on the generation and propagation of political meaning, memes that were just humorous, vague, or lacked an ideological framing were not included in the analysis.

Table 1: Structured Data

Meme No	Platform	Source Page	URL	English Translation	Likes	Comments
1.	Instagram	@viral.memes 111	https://www.instagram.com/p/DJbyOecMkd3/?igsh=MWx5MHppcTgyeDFxMg==	News confirmed: Two pilots of PAF named captain Syed Qaim Ali Shah and Commander Chahat Fateh Ali Khan are now in Indian custody.	5K	157
2.	Facebook	Kaamics	https://www.facebook.com/share/16emLSHMrU/?mibextid=wwXIfvHa5iE8ADQ&s=09	(Kaamics)"At the end of the day, they will win in their books and we will win in our books"	2.3K	186
3.	Instagram	Saeeginsta	https://www.instagram.com/saeeginsta?igsh=MWkxbmFiMTRvMzZpaQ==	Pakistani flag: The butterfly flew, but couldn't keep flying... Indian flag: The Rafale jet flew, but couldn't keep flying... (smiley face)	6K	30
4.	X	Saeeginsta	https://www.instagram.com/saeeginsta?igsh=MWkxbmFiMTRvMzZpaQ==	"Abhi tak to China ka maal tha, Dr Abdul Qadeer wale maal pe to kapda dala hua hai"	8K	20
5.	X	Farid Khan (@_FaridKhan)	https://x.com/_FaridKhan/status/1921196406242459782	"Please help me" – Modi pleading to Trump in a satirical depiction of India seeking U.S. mediation after Pakistan's Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos	16K	268
6.	Instagram	Indian.tweets	https://www.instagram.com/indian.tweets?igsh=eHg1MWlqNWdnNmt0	At 2 A.M., we made it 12 o'clock for Pakistan	35.9k	223

3.3. Memes Analysis

3.3.1. Meme 1

**They took this too serious i can't believe Yah
haal hai Inka aur inko J*ng krni hai hamse**



This is a strong example of how a meme can be employed to fabricate information using humour and digital media, particularly in a critical geopolitical situation like the current Indo-Pak dispute. The meme, first posted by a Pakistani internet user as a joke, attributed to Syed Qaim Ali Shah and Chahat Fateh Ali Khan, two public figures not affiliated with any branch of the Pakistan military, to suggest that India had captured two Pakistani Air Force pilots. The false stories went viral, as people began to circulate the post without verifying its authenticity and began to perceive it as a victory of the military. Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal analysis shows that a number of significant textual and visual clues are used in the meme to bolster its credibility: Fighter jets, uniformed soldiers, and national flags all visually communicate notions of legitimacy, authority, and battle. The mission of multimodal analysis is to understand the power and meaning of texts that employ several modes, such as visual, verbal, and aural (Kress, 2006). The layout and colour scheme further emphasise India as well organised and victorious, while showing Pakistan as subjugated. The post also includes operation-like hashtags (#IndiaPakistanWar, #OperationSindoor2) and formal-sounding content ("News confirmed") which contribute to making it appear official and may influence both perception and emotion.

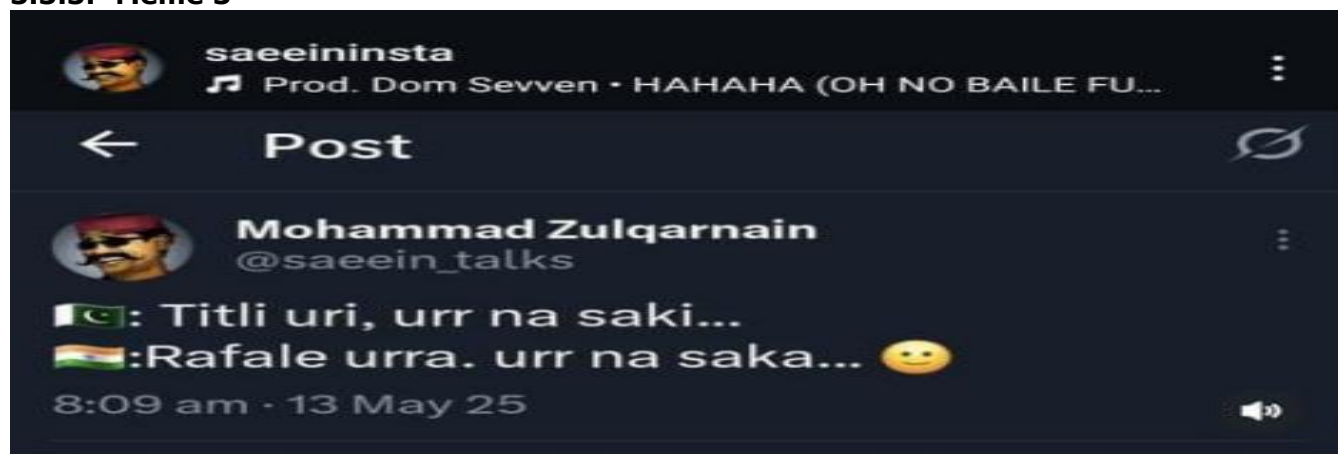
The Foucauldian perspective of power/knowledge can also be used to understand this meme, as it offers an example of the manipulation of information, regardless of its fictional nature, over public reality and comes to be defined as "truth.". According to Foucault, power is not only oppressive but also productive; it creates knowledge, shapes speech, and establishes what constitutes "truth." "Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain...power is employed and exercised through a netlike organisation...individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" (Foucault, 1980). In this case, the meme appears to enter popular discourse as fact despite its fictional and humorous nature, due to its alignment with nationalist sentiment and implicit biases. The proliferation of this meme shows how the digital platform helps dispersed actors create and share knowledge while challenging authorities, such as the government and media. It also showcases how memes can be used for power, influencing perception, fostering ideology, and spreading misinformation in the guise of humour. This meme echoes the critical importance of media literacy and critical engagement in an era where wars are waged online as well as offline, and the battle for the truth is a central aspect of today's conflictual landscape.

3.3.2. Meme 2



The meme, first tweeted by Anas Tipu and further circulated by the meme account *Kaamics*, acts as a kind of digital resistance through its multimodal discourse. With the use of metaphorical language and parallel structure, the statement "At the end of the day, they will win in their books, and we will win in our books" questions the construction of official historical narratives. The image uses a multimodal analysis framework by Van Leeuwen (2005) to encode the dissent by combining the language elements with the visual affordance of social media. The symbolic opposition between "they" and "we" is a rough sketch of the dominant state historiography and the counter public stories. This message turns into a meme, which employs humour to subvert truth claims associated with hegemony without directly opposing censorship as it circulates through Facebook and is accompanied by laughter and shares. 'Power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' so in this sense, it is neither an agency nor a structure (Foucault, 1980). The meme can be read as a critique of official narratives, as defined by (Foucault, 1980) theory of power/knowledge, in which those in power define reality and institutionalise it with discourses such as education, media, and history writing. The meme openly challenges the state's monopoly of historical knowledge by contrasting "their books" with "our books" and makes history a place of struggle between dominant and subjugated knowledge. The institutional archive is represented in their books: State media, nationalistic historiographies and state-approved school textbooks.

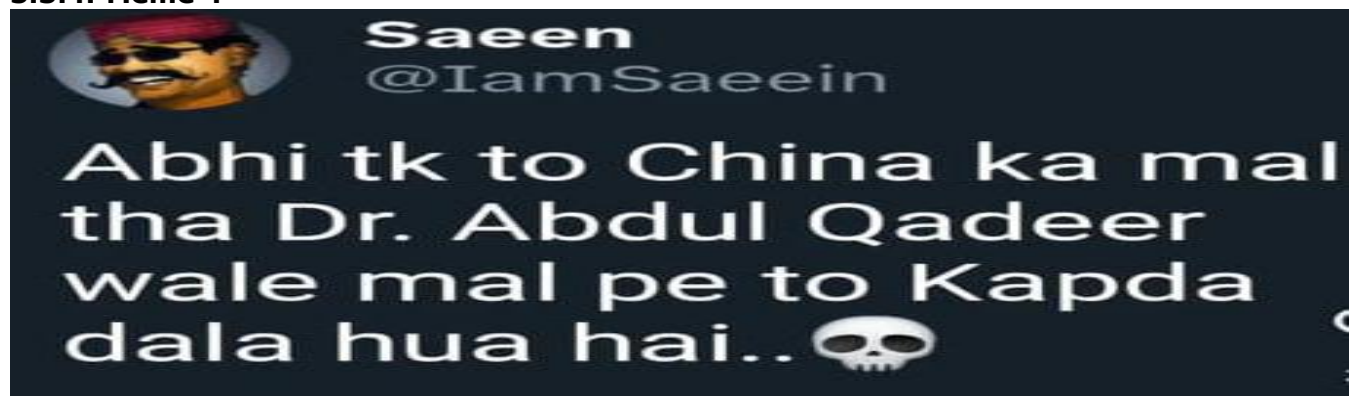
3.3.3. Meme 3



This meme surrounding the tweet by "Mohammad Zulqarnain" is a subtle yet powerful form of discursive war between India and Pakistan using humour. The meme adopts a Foucauldian understanding of discourse, in which humour functions as a resistance device against the dominant military narratives. It serves as a grassroots counter-narrative to the Indian military discourse, particularly in the aftermath of Operation Sindoor. The meme uses sarcastic equivalency to question the success of India's prestigious acquisition of Rafale fighter jets by juxtaposing the words "Titli uri, urr na saki..." with "Rafale urra. urr na saka...." This playful inversion can be understood as a tactical

use of knowledge – mockery as a means of reclaiming discursive power – that challenges nationalistic pride among common social media users. The meme here subverts the dominant narratives using sarcasm in a clever and strategic way that spreads online instead of relying on direct confrontation, shedding light on Foucault's concept of resistance in everyday life. As a daily practice of resistance, memes facilitate the creation of counter-hegemonic narratives and promote wider participation in political discussions {Pavlović, 2016 #38}. According to Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal analysis, the strategic composition of a meme is the key to its power. The serene and mocking tone of the happy emoji, the intertextuality with a well-known children's rhyme, and visual clues through national flags all contribute to meaning across modes. All these make the Rafale symbol's supremacy questionable and turn its technologies into a joke. In this sense comedy is a semiotic weapon in the digital battlefield in which memes are used. This is adding to the greater issue of memetic warfare, which is the latest arm on the spectrum of the Indo-Pak conflict where national identity, military pride, political legitimacy, and interaction metrics (likes, shares, comments) are being fought through pixels and not bullets. In this context, memes are cultural relics and ideological missiles from the screens of regular users.

3.3.4. Meme 4



"Abhi tak to China ka maal tha, Dr Abdul Qadeer wale maal pe to kapda dala hua hai " is a multi-layered discourse on India's defence capabilities from the Pakistani digital public. From a Foucauldian perspective, this meme highlights how visibility and concealment are politically used as tactics of power in geopolitical dialogue. This meme makes a satirical comment about the power of India's army, with the alleged failure of its Rafale fighter jets being one of the main points, and the jets being destroyed with technology developed in conjunction with China. The discussion then shifts to the concept of nuclear deterrence, referencing Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of Pakistan's nuclear programme, thus the true power of Pakistan remains concealed and held in reserve. The distinction is that Foucault's strategic knowledge is demonstrated in the ability to deploy and to conceal visibility. This phrase "kapda dala hua hai" refers to pent-up potential in a mocking tone that conveys calmness and strength. It is a form of "sovereign silence" that enhances the nonverbal control of deterrence. The multimodal analysis by Theo van Leeuwen also sheds light on the functioning of this meme in terms of the interplay between linguistic options, cultural symbols and affective cues. "China ka maal" is a reference to the widely held subcontinental stereotype that Chinese-made goods are cheap or inferior (Srivastava, 2015) that is overturned by the meme hinting that this so-called "inferior" material was able to work against Indian military assets. The next use of "Dr Abdul Qadeer" and the addition of the term "kapda dala hua hai" (covered or unused), suggests that Pakistan has yet to deploy its most powerful strategic weapon – its nuclear arsenal. The skull emoji (💀) is used as dark humour and may be interpreted as a reminder of Pakistan's perceived power if it was released and sarcastically to show the weakness of India. The technique of dark humour seeks to create comedy through the use of satirical wit and grotesque situations {Hobby, 2010 #39}. This meme's tonal hybridity makes it both humorous and menacing. In this online battlefield, humour is weaponised and this ingenious reconfiguration of military asymmetry amplifies Pakistan's supposed ideological edge over its adversaries and makes irony and semiotic inversion successful weapons.

3.3.5. Meme 5



This particular meme, which went viral during Pakistan's Operation Bunyan ul Marsoos, graphically depicts a satirical account of the Indo-Pak battle in the wake of the Pahalgam attack and India's counterattack, Operation Sindoor. This meme can be understood according to the theory of knowledge and power of Michel Foucault, where it transforms from satire to a discursive tool as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seen on his knees before the US President Donald Trump, begging, "Please help me". According to Foucault, power is exercised through the creation and dissemination of knowledge, in addition to physical dominance. The visual story of this meme represents India being dependent on the help of the West, casting doubt on its military and diplomatic prowess. The portrayal of President Modi as a subservient figure and the US as the actual power broker contributes to the creation of a new 'knowledge system' in the digital space, while India is perceived to have lost agency over the situation. Pakistan is portrayed as cool and collected, which may reinforce perceptions of strategic success and restraint. This is a classic example of how a complex piece of geopolitical activity has been reduced to a single, potent picture and how digital information can be utilised as a weapon for attitude, morale and global legitimacy.

Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal discourse analysis highlights the importance of the visual and textual elements in the meme and how they interact to deliver an ideological meaning. The positioning of Trump, with his head held high, giving the impression of being in the middle of the power pyramid, is a signal of authority, while Modi's kneeling posture gives the impression of being at the bottom of the pyramid, in a position of desperation and inadequacy. The speech bubble ("Please help me") is used to provide the text to support the visual story, but the exaggerated expression of helplessness, as seen in the face of the man, also enhances the story of India's perceived vulnerability. In contrast, Pakistan is depicted with its arms crossed and eyes unblinking, suggesting self-assurance and authority. Theo van Leeuwen's theorising sees social actors represented in semiotic forms (gaze, gesture, posture, proximity) which encode power relationships. In this case, the meme symbolically inverts the post-operation world: India, who was the one to initiate Operation Sindoor, is now the one who asks for help; Pakistan, who has gone through Operation Bunyan ul Marsoos, has narrative strength; and the United States is the one in the middle and in charge of the whole situation.

The Indian Air Force launched Operation Sindoor, targeting key Pakistani airbases: Nur Khan Airbase (Chaklala), PAF Base Murid, and PAF Base Rafiqui {Mollan, 2025, December 16 #34}. This meme plays a strategic role in the broader memetic warfare, which is a tactic that involves the dissemination of emotionally charged, culturally loaded images that shape the public opinion and collective understanding, challenging the ideological supremacy, as well as the military power and diplomacy. Following these strikes, social media platforms like Instagram and X were flooded with memes and visual analysis, all of which had nationalist and popular interpretations. One such meme is posted by the account '@indian.tweets', which features an image of a large explosion by night, to

depict the strike, and is captioned with the tweet: "raat ke 2 bje Pakistan ke 12 bja diye" and a crying emoji. This meme can be analysed in Foucauldian sense, as it participates in the construction and circulation of power relation. {Sherris, 2021 #37} discusses how digital technology and social media transform incidents into spectacles, emphasising visibility and normativity in expository society. This meme presents the strike as a humorous celebration of Indian military power rather than an objective discussion of the event, reflecting nationalist sentiments that circulated in online discourse throughout the conflict.

3.3.6. Meme 6



In this way, the meme becomes part of a system of mediated performance, in which viewers and endorsers are more important than the truth. The spread of this material can foster public opinion and provide an example of how digital media can be used as soft power tools in the contemporary social system, normalising ideas and narratives that serve state interests. According to Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal analysis, the image of a burning explosion (high modality), extracted from media or security footage (India, 2025) together with the text, constructs the meaning and serves as visual evidence of the military victory. The bright flare and dark background of the sky create a stark contrast, highlighting the power and accuracy of the strike. The textual overlay, a slang Hindi expression that implies, India "embarrassed" Pakistan at 2am; the phrase is one of jubilation and derision, the former meaning has reduced the violence, the latter has raised it to a symbolic power. The crying emoji adds an emotionally charged dimension to the event, which highlights its drama as well as its triviality, allowing the audience to laugh as they absorb the nationalistic message. The high engagement rate, in terms of likes, comments, and shares, reflected the meme's popularity among the Indian digital population. The meme is a cultural weapon of memetic warfare, combining humour with visual spectacle, as a kind of digital propaganda and intellectual resistance. It also employs humour to re-invent military activity and is illustrative of the active role internet users play in the making of the global discourse in real time.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study shed new light on the functioning of memes in the digital world as popular counter-discourses to dominant discourses. There were three common themes across the six memes analysed. Firstly, memes were sites of discursive resistance that users used to challenge official narratives and create alternative interpretations of political events. Second, memes used multimodal tools, humour and satire to build and transmit ideologies. Thirdly, attributes of resistance also facilitated the circulation of misinformation and alternative knowledge systems. These largely similar patterns across the dataset are summarised in the following discussion. The analysis of the selected memes, particularly Meme 2 reinforces the finding that digital memes serve a discursive function that challenges dominant state narratives, especially state historiography. "They will win in their books, and we will win in ours," directly attacks the state's monopoly over historical truth by

calling into question the way history is constructed and institutionalised for political purposes. (Tufekci, 2017) argues that the internet has become a resource for passive forms of dissent, suggesting that memes serve as symbolic protests, rallying public opinion while supporting grassroots movements. This opposition is part of a general tendency in which memes become spaces for counter-memory and other forms of historiography. What can be seen in the meme is the public realisation that the state's narrative of history is often selective, designed to serve a political agenda and to marginalise or ignore minority voices and nationalistic ideologies. In the process, memes become a discursive device that will take back narrative agency from the official narrative and question its neutrality.

Furthermore, knowledge production is inherently political, and this is reflected in the meme as well, where people seem to realise that what is accepted as "truth" is a result of institutional power, as Foucault would say. In that regard, memes such as these can be thought of as epistemic resistance, as they use humour and simplicity as tools to make complex critiques of power structures accessible and shareable by the masses. They serve as tactics for marginalised groups to challenge dominant power structures through humour and simplicity (Moussa, Benmessaoud, & Douai, 2020). Meme creators and sharers are not simply consumers of state narratives, but also agents of the rewriting of history from the margins, in a way that provides what is often described as fragmented but powerful critique on the hegemonic discourse. Ultimately, digital culture offers new ways to question and challenge dominant historical accounts, with a different approach to narration—one that is more participatory, decentralised and critical than a state-dominated one. This meme promotes historical scepticism and questioning through digital publics because it emphasises the multiplicity of truths instead of replacing official accounts with alternative ones. In Pakistan and India, where identity, politics, and nationalism hold significant importance, memetic wars have emerged as an innovative form of combat through ideas, using imagery and humour rather than weapons. Memetic warfare in Pakistan and the Indian digital environment provides potent examples of Foucault's theory of power and knowledge, as both the state and non-state actors are engaged in creating alternate "regimes of truth." Common social media users, by producing information that challenges the state's official message, engage in discursive rebellion, a pattern evident across several memes, particularly memes 3, 4 and 5. Foucault claims that the application of power produces new objects of knowledge, and that there is continual feedback from knowledge to power.

These memes, through sarcasm and graphic exaggeration and with a reference to the culture, produce alternative truths that challenge the realities produced by the State, including military control, moral legitimacy, and geopolitical control. Through humour, satire, and visual rhetoric, memes create alternative interpretations that contest institutional accounts of events (Mielczarek, 2020). Therefore, memes are a subversive tool that allows for the creation of funny content that can change the perception of people and affect the dominant power system using ideology. While seeming like simple satire, it is a method of resistance, which challenges the authority on defining the terms 'normal,' 'heroic,' and 'truth' in the narrative war between India and Pakistan. Taken together, these memes are not merely mockeries; these memes are generating alternative knowledge that challenge the dominant narratives. The satirical line "Rafale urra, urr na saka" (meme 3) demythologizes the Indian military acquisition process, which was a symbol of power in India, and illustrates Foucault's theory of how power constructs reality and truth. Similarly, Memes 2, 3, and 4 use terms like "kapda dala hua hai," suggesting strength in control and force, and making an indirect allusion to Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan and nuclear power. This is a statement of Foucault's theory that knowledge can be suppressed strategically as a tool of power. Meme 5, which is an illustration of Modi pleading before Trump, undermines India's diplomatic agency and produces a new "truth" about geopolitical dependence. The memes in question illustrate Foucault's assertion that "knowledge engenders power", and that even humour can be an instrument for a discursive resistance in digital warfare. They do more than just react to power; they help to produce new regimes of truth.

The analysis of Meme 6 indicates a broader pattern whereby military actions are reinterpreted through humor and become sources of national pride and entertainment in digital spaces. Users celebrate the operation through a reflection on the advancement and dominance of Indian technology using humour, slang and appealing visuals. The caption of the meme, "raat ke 2 bje Pakistan ke 12 bja diye," undermines the seriousness of the attack, at the same time, glorifies the strike as a cunning

and strong blow. Users praised this mission as a great victory by employing humour, slang terms, and vivid visuals, as well as through an assertion of India's technological superiority and domination. This becomes a virtual celebration ritual: displays of pride/delight/mockery become the norm and conflict becomes entertaining. The digital public affirms state authority collectively in a participatory discourse and emotional endorsement, rather than critically examining its operation, following Foucault's theory of power operating through participatory discourse and emotional endorsement. Perhaps the most significant pattern across all six memes is the simultaneous presence of resistance and misinformation in the same form of communication. Memes are often humorous, relatable, and easily shareable, making them effective vehicles for the spread of information, whether accurate or false (Hamid & Afshana). Memes function as grassroots tools of protest, using humour, intertextuality and cultural mockery to construct alternative discourses against the state's narratives. But they have the potential to spread misinformation due to being ambiguous and viral. Meme 1 analysed in this study is the best example of this paradox, which featured fake Pakistani pilots named 'Captain Syed Qaim Ali Shah' and 'Commander Chahat Fateh Ali Khan'. The meme initially circulated as a humorous prank, but its rapid spread blurred the distinction between satire and factual reporting. Even though it was meant to be humorous, Indian meme pages took it up, and Times Now and other mainstream Indian news channels reported it as breaking news.

4.1. Meme 7



This incident serves as a cautionary tale of the dire consequences of memetic warfare in a media landscape that's strongly politicised. In Foucault's discourse theory, knowledge and power are intertwined, and those who have power over discourse shape perceptions of truth. In this case, the meme purposefully set up a false dichotomy of reality, and it was convincing enough for the national media to use it, not just to endorse opinion. The meme's persuasive design, military iconography, and the use of hashtags such as #OperationSindoor2 gave legitimacy to the meme as a way of accessing public knowledge that could be experienced outside institutional filters. Thus, the memetic war has gone from being symbolic to being a part of the hybrid information warfare mix. The purpose of this study is to show how the digital meme is not only a space of entertainment, but also a potent ideological and epistemological weapon which can shape sentiment, misrepresent the facts, and complicate diplomatic reality.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored memetic warfare in the context of Indo-Pak tensions and how it frames the political discourse and perception of the masses. The results indicated that the meme could be sites of discursive resistance, where users could question the official narrative and create alternative understandings of political events. The analysis also showed how humor, satire, and multimodal features were used to encode ideological stances and how they also set the stage for the circulation of misinformation. The study shows how Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge

can be applied to understand how the use of humour, irony, and intertexts in online communication reshape the boundaries of political engagement and discourse in today's geopolitical struggles. Foucault's theory of power/knowledge and Van Leeuwen's multimodal discourse analysis are brought together in this study, which shows how memes function as discursive artefacts that are involved in the construction, contestation and dissemination of political knowledge. Importantly, the research points to a double-edged sword, because digital discourse can help to decentre the production of knowledge and give people the power to challenge official state narratives, but it can also facilitate the rapid spread of misinformation. The lines between parody and reality are especially difficult to navigate in situations where content is emotionally charged, which may sway public opinion. The study stresses that media literacy and active engagement should be encouraged as digital communication evolves and influences perceptions of national affairs in the community. The importance of comprehending evolving forms of communication is essential in assessing the impacts of digital communication on regional stability, shared memory, and the construction of truths in the digital era, as contemporary conflicts extend beyond physical battlefields into digital spaces. In conclusion, this study contributes to understanding how Memetic warfare works as an ideology resistance tool as well as a misinformation tool in current Indo-Pak digital discourse.

5.1. Recommendations

The increasing impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the creation of memes was not explored in this research. Since artificial intelligence can now generate highly realistic yet completely fake imagery that may influence people's opinions, future studies may focus on examining the role of fake images generated using artificial intelligence in spreading misinformation.

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