Digital Battlegrounds: Multimodal Humor and Ideological Framing in Memes of the 2025 Pakistan-India Conflict

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how Pakistani Generation Z uses memes as a coping mechanism and a form of digital resistance during the 2025 Pakistan-India conflict. It analyzes around 90 memes collected from social media platforms. This study introduces Meme Frame Analysis (MFA), an extension of Framing Theory that integrates multimodal discourse analysis and semiotics to examine memes as ideological texts. MFA examines humor strategies, visual-textual interactions, and ideological messages in memes, focusing on themes like self-deprecation, anti-India satire, and historical references. Unlike traditional Framing Theory, which does not fully address the participatory, viral, and multimodal nature of memes, MFA uses diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing categories to explain how humor, irony, and shareability spread ideological messages online. Using NVivo coding, the study finds that about 40% of memes feature self-deprecation, showing resilience in the face of economic and geopolitical challenges. Other memes negotiate national identity and challenge dominant narratives through satire and historical references. The findings present memes as micro-narratives that diagnose problems, suggest solutions, and mobilize political-cultural identities, embedding ideology through humor. This study advances digital humanities and conflict studies by framing memes as powerful ideological tools that shape and contest narratives in digital spaces. It suggests that the frames themselves are ideological containers — memes aren't just jokes, they're micro narratives that diagnose, prescribe, and mobilize in line with political-cultural identities.

Keywords: Digital Humanities, Geopolitical Crises, Framing, Memes, Conflict Studies.

INTRODUCTION

The 2025 Pakistan-India conflict, sparked by the April 22 attack in the Baisaran Valley of Pahalgam, Indian-occupied Kashmir, and escalating through India's "Operation Sindoor" and Pakistan's "Bunyan Al Marsoos" retaliation, marked a significant moment in South Asian geopolitics. Beyond the physical battlegrounds, digital spaces—particularly social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook—emerged as critical arenas for narrative construction and public engagement. Among these, memes crafted by Pakistani Generation Z became a potent medium for processing the conflict, blending humor, satire, and ideological critique. This study analyzes a dataset of approximately 90 memes collected from web searches, X posts, and social media snippets, focusing on how Pakistani youth employed multimodal humor as a coping mechanism and a form of digital resistance during the April-May 2025 tensions. By integrating Multimodal Framing Theory (Geise & Baden, 2015) and Barthes' (1977) semiotics, the research identifies key thematic patterns: self-deprecating humor targeting Pakistan's internal issues, mockery of Indian leadership, historical references to past conflicts, exaggerated war scenarios, cultural and celebrity parodies, and the concept of "meme warfare" as a mode of ideological resistance. NVivo coding of the dataset reveals self-deprecation as a dominant theme (~40% of memes), often interwoven with affective framing to evoke resilience through irony. This study

aims to explore how these memes reflect and shape national identity, geopolitical sentiments, and public discourse, contributing to the broader understanding of digital humor as a participatory tool in crisis contexts.

This study introduces Meme Frame Analysis (MFA). MFA combines humor theories, multimodal discourse analysis, and framing theory. It identifies key themes. These include self-deprecation, mockery of Indian leadership, and "meme warfare" as digital resistance. The proposal of MFA addresses gaps in existing frameworks. These frameworks analyze digital memes. Multimodal Framing Theory (Geise & Baden, 2015) and Barthes' (1977) semiotics help decode visual and textual elements. Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) explains narrative construction. However, these methods do not fully explore humor's role in ideology. Traditional humor theories focus on laughter. These include Incongruity, Relief, and Superiority (Attardo, 2001). They explain why memes are funny. Yet, they miss multimodal ideology. Shifman's (2014) memetics and Jenkins' (2006) participatory culture study meme spread and creativity. They overlook ideological framing in these processes. This study addresses these gaps by introducing Meme Frame Analysis (MFA), an extension of Framing Theory. MFA integrates humor analysis, multimodal discourse, and ideological framing to examine memes as ideological texts.This provides a thorough approach. It reveals humor's subtle influence on ideology in memes. This paper examines memes' impact. It explores how they shape national identity and public discourse. It offers insights into digital humor's role in geopolitical crises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Memes have changed over time. They started as simple humorous items. Now, they are complex multimodal texts. They express cultural, political, and ideological ideas. This is especially true during geopolitical crises (Shifman, 2014; Milner, 2016). In the 2025 Pakistan-India conflict, memes became important. They helped Pakistani youth deal with war's emotional and political aspects. Humor and satire played a key role.

This study uses specific theories. Multimodal Framing Theory (Geise & Baden, 2015) focuses on visual and textual interplay. It shapes how audiences perceive things. Barthes' (1977) semiotics decodes cultural signs' deeper meanings. These theories frame memes as dynamic tools. They shape conflict narratives. Past research shows memes have two roles. They entertain and resist. This is seen in South Asian contexts (Bukhari & Tariq, 2021; Zeb et al., 2025).

Memes reflect changes in communication. Dawkins (1976) first saw them as cultural replicators. They moved from static images on 4chan to multimodal items on Instagram and Twitter (Milner, 2016; Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017). This shift boosts their political role. Users critique power structures. They also express collective identities (Shifman, 2014; Mihăilescu, 2024). In Pakistan, memes voice youth frustrations. They challenge official narratives. Irony, code-switching, and cultural references help (Sultana et al., 2023; Ahmad et al., 2024). In 2025, memes acted as coping tools. They also supported digital diplomacy. They encouraged cross-border exchanges. They critiqued militarism and nationalism (Harad, 2025; Dawn, 2025).

Studies on war memes are insightful. They show humor reframes national crises. Pakistani and Ukrainian war memes blend absurdity and tragedy. This expresses generational anxieties (Mejova et al., 2025; Zeb et al., 2025). In the 2019 and 2025 conflicts, memes differed from state narratives. They used domestic metaphors and hyperbole. This highlighted vernacular resistance (Bukhari & Tariq, 2021; Hussain et al., 2021). For example, "Sorry India hum cast se bahar jaang nahi larty" uses sarcasm. It deflates war's

seriousness. This reflects civilian disillusionment (Naqvi & Naeem, 2025). This aligns with Milner's (2016) participatory media idea. Memes empower users to create counter-narratives.

Meme studies use various methods. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) examines visual-verbal interplay (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Framing Theory explains how emphasis shapes conflict perceptions (Entman, 1993; Ullah et al., 2025). The General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) analyzes humor mechanics (Attardo, 2001; Bielova, 2023). Recent studies suggest combining these approaches. This captures memes' diverse roles in crises (Ullah et al., 2025). Yet, applying Multimodal Framing Theory and semiotics to 2025 Pakistani memes is underexplored. This includes how humor reflects economic and historical issues. This study fills this gap. It introduces MFA. MFA combines humor analysis, multimodal discourse, and ideological framing. It offers a thorough approach. It reveals humor's subtle role in ideology.

Media coverage adds context. Indian media framed the 2025 conflict as retaliation. They emphasized patriotism and heroism (Noor et al., 2025). Pakistani media focused on sovereignty violations and victimization. This created polarized views. Memes provided a grassroots response. They humanized fears. They critiqued jingoism (Naqvi & Naeem, 2025). Memes also serve a psychological role. They offer emotional relief. They challenge dominant narratives (Cohen & Talbot, 2020). This study builds on this. It uses NVivo-coded themes. It explores how Gen Z's memes balance humor, ideology, and resistance in 2025.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF MEME FRAME ANALYSIS (MFA)

The Theoretical Framework for Meme Frame Analysis (MFA) addresses critical gaps in existing theories to provide a holistic approach to analyzing memes as humorous, multimodal, and ideological texts in digital culture. Traditional humor theories, such as Incongruity, Relief, and Superiority Theories (Schopenhauer, 1819/1969; Kant, 1790/2000; Freud, 1905/1960; Hobbes, 1651/1994), explain why memes are funny but fail to address how humor interacts with images, text, or ideological framing, nor do they consider digital circulation or audience interpretation. Multimodal and semiotic theories (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006; Barthes, 1957/1972, 1977) clarify how memes construct meaning through text and visuals but treat them as static, overlooking humor strategies like sarcasm and their rapid online mutation. Ideological and framing theories (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993; Fairclough, 1995, 2003; van Dijk, 1998) reveal how memes encode ideologies but neglect why humor is used and rarely focus on user-generated digital content. Internet-specific theories (Dawkins, 1976; Shifman, 2014; Jenkins, 1992, 2006) emphasize memes' virality and participatory nature but underexplore their ideological framing or humor mechanisms, while Papacharissi's affective publics (2015) only partially address their emotional roles. Visual rhetoric and political communication theories (Foss, 2004; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) view memes as persuasive but miss their interactive, polyvocal, and remix-driven nature, often equating them to elite cartoons. MFA bridges these gaps by integrating humor theories with multimodal analysis, embedding humor within framing theory (diagnostic, prognostic, motivational), and accounting for digital remix culture, virality, and audience interpretation, thus positioning memes as dynamic texts that simultaneously entertain, construct meaning, and shape political worldviews. Figure 1 below shows How Meme Frame Analysis Integrates Humor, Multimodality and Ideology.

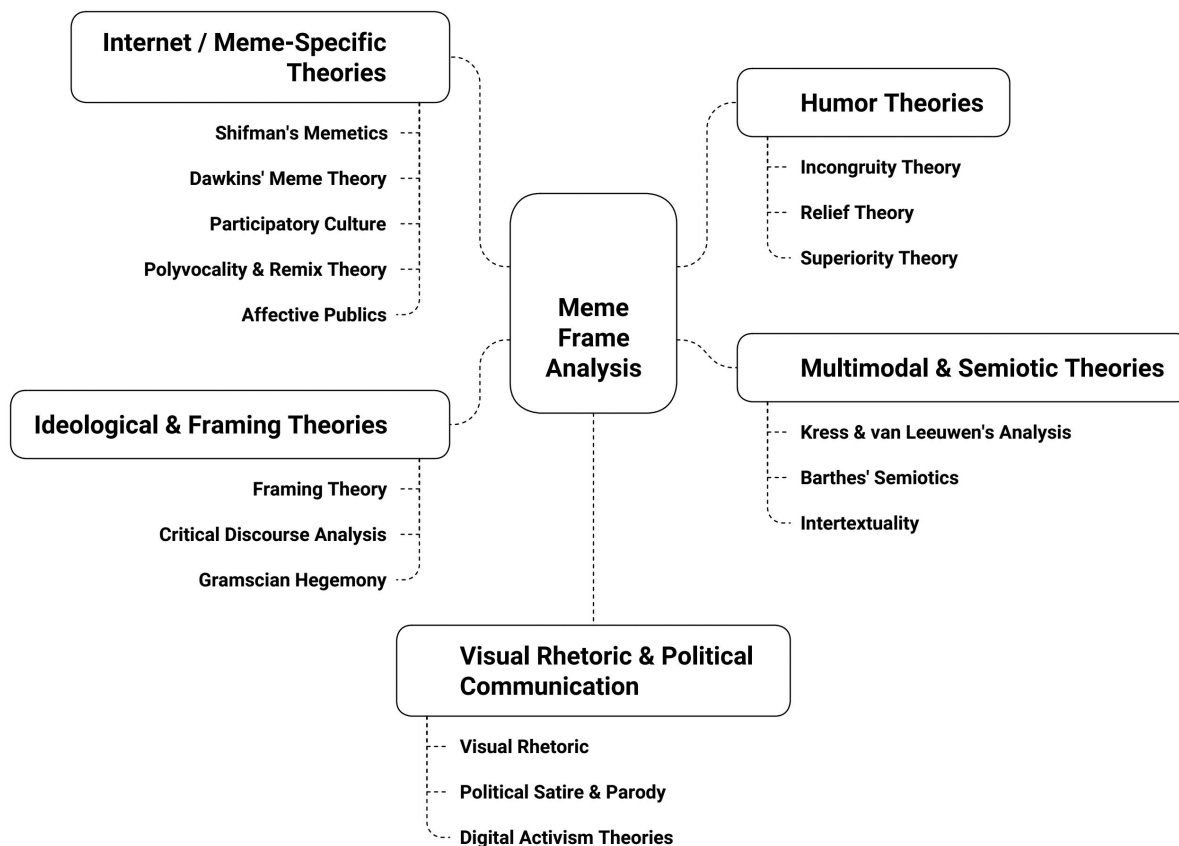## Meme Frame Analysis: Integrating Humor, Multimodality, and Ideology

Figure 1: Shows How Meme Frame Analysis Integrates Humor, Multimodality and Ideology

MEME FRAME ANALYSIS (MFA) METHODOLOGY

This research proposes Meme Frame Analysis (MFA), an innovative extension of Framing Theory that examines memes as multimodal texts where humor amplifies ideological framing in real-time crises. MFA integrates semiotics, multimodal discourse analysis, and framing theory to address underexplored gaps in how memes' brevity, shareability, and playfulness shape ideological narratives, particularly in conflict contexts. The methodology is structured in six steps, designed to be replicable across diverse settings (e.g., 2025 Pakistan-India water conflict, Ukraine-Russia tensions) and to quantify the impact of memetic communication.

Data Collection

Memes are gathered from platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, focusing on specific crises (e.g., the 2025 Pakistan-India conflict over the Indus Waters Treaty suspension). A dataset of ~90 memes

ensures representativeness across formats (image macros, GIFs, videos) and timeframes (e.g., April-May 2025). Sampling accounts for virality (e.g., high-retweet memes) to capture shareability.

Multimodal Humor Analysis

Linguistic layers (captions, hashtags) are analyzed for humor strategies like irony, exaggeration, or absurdity, while visual layers (images, emojis, templates) are examined for parody, intertextuality, or cultural references. Intersemiotic interactions assess how text and visuals reinforce or subvert meaning, emphasizing how brevity and playfulness enhance memetic impact in fast-evolving crises.

Ideological Framing

Framing categories—diagnostic (problem highlighted), prognostic (solution implied), motivational (actions promoted)—are identified to uncover ideological stances (e.g., nationalism, anti-India sentiment). This step maps how humor softens, reinforces, or masks ideology, with a focus on intersectional causal attribution (e.g., linking water shortages to geopolitical tensions, climate change, historical colonialism, or domestic politics). Counter-framing is explicitly analyzed to reveal how memes oppose alternative narratives (e.g., pro-India perspectives).

Analytical Coding Scheme

Using NVivo, humor strategies (e.g., irony, parody), frames (e.g., us/them binaries), and multimodal markers (e.g., fonts, templates, emojis) are coded. Inter-coder reliability tests ensure empirical rigor, with coding categories validated across multiple researchers to quantify framing patterns. This step highlights memes' role in "meme warfare," where rapid dissemination amplifies ideological impact.

Audience Reception Analysis

To assess framing's influence, engagement metrics (e.g., retweets, likes, shares) are analyzed to measure how memes resonate with audiences. This step examines virality patterns and user comments to gauge whether diagnostic, prognostic, or motivational frames drive collective action or reinforce dominant discourses, adding a dynamic layer to traditional framing theory.

Interpretation and Ethical Reflection

This step links humor to ideological soft power, exploring how memes resist or reinforce dominant discourses (e.g., fostering solidarity via self-deprecation or masking nationalism). It addresses ethical implications, such as memes' potential to amplify misinformation, stereotypes, or diverse rhetoric in conflict settings.

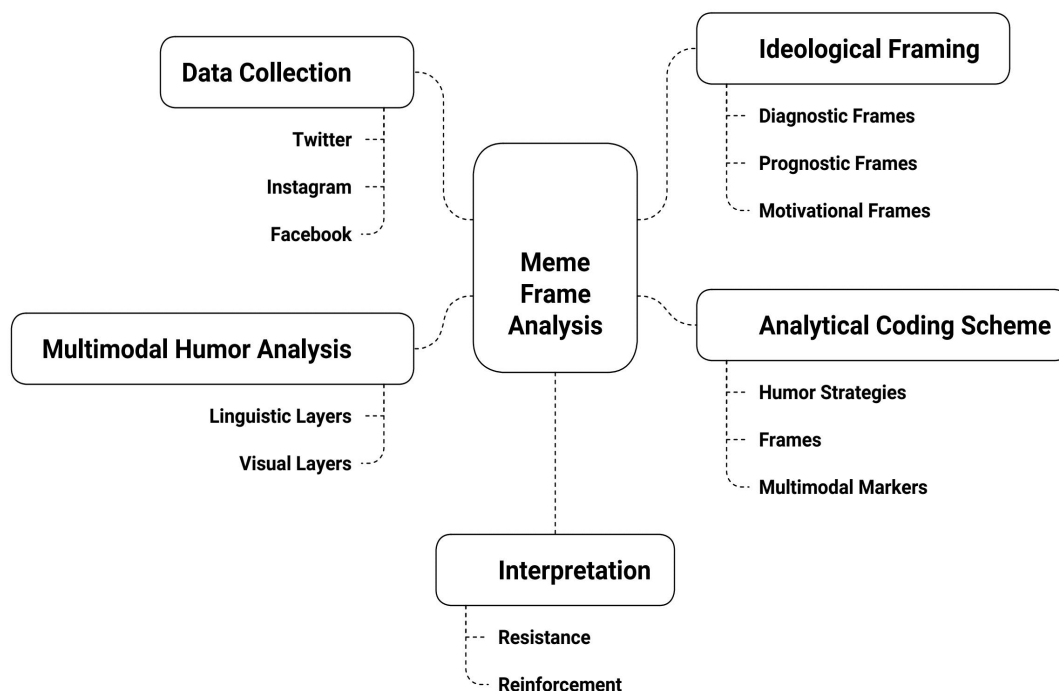## Meme Frame Analysis: Methodology and Application

Figure 2: Shows Meme Frame Analysis (MFA) structured steps for analyzing memes

MFA extends existing theories by unifying humor, multimodality, and ideology, addressing gaps in traditional framing and humor analyses.

ANALYSIS OF MEMES IN THE 2025 PAKISTAN-INDIA CONFLICT

This study analyzes Pakistani humor as a coping mechanism during escalating tensions, alongside the dataset of approximately 90 memes collected from the following sources (including web searches, X posts, and social media snippets). The memes reflect a blend of self-deprecation, satire, and ideological framing. It focuses on Gen Z's use of humor to process disillusionment amid economic crises, historical grievances, and geopolitical threats. Drawing on Multimodal Framing Theory (Geise & Baden, 2015) and Barthes' (1977) semiotics, the memes are divided into key themes derived from recurring patterns: self-deprecating humor targeting Pakistan's internal issues; mockery of India and its leadership; historical references to past conflicts; exaggeration of war scenarios; cultural and celebrity parodies; and the concept of "meme warfare" as digital resistance. NVivo coding of the dataset (e.g., keywords like "water," "Modi," "tea," "ceasefire") confirmed these themes, with self-deprecation appearing in ~40% of items, often intersecting with affective framing to evoke resilience through irony.

Theme 1: Self-Deprecating Humor (Pakistan's Internal Crises)

A dominant theme, appearing in about 40% of the memes, involves Pakistanis turning inward to mock their own vulnerabilities, such as economic woes, infrastructure failures, and governance issues. This self-

directed humor serves as a coping mechanism, transforming disillusionment into a sense of communal resilience. The exaggerated and absurd nature of these jokes often leaves external observers, particularly Indian netizens, scoffing in amazement at the apparent non-serious attiitude, effectively preempting criticism and depriving opponents of ammunition to use against them.

Meme 1: "Please release water I got soap in my eyes"

Figure 3: Shows Self-Deprecating Humor in Meme 1 "Please release water I got soap in my eyes"

- **Humor Strategy**: Irony, Absurdity
- **Multimodal Elements**: A man washing Face, image, text overlay with skincare context, emoji use
- **Ideological Framing**:
    - *Diagnostic*: Highlights water shortages due to Indus Waters Treaty suspension
    - *Prognostic*: Implies trivialization as a coping mechanism
    - *Motivational*: Encourages communal resilience through shared absurdity
- **Interpretation**: It Frames water crisis as a humorous inconvenience, using a skincare routine imagery to soften critique and foster solidarity, aligning with self-deprecation as a preemptive defense against external mockery.
- It highlights how this joke became a form of collective satire around the water shortages following India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty

For instance, a meme from the dataset quips, "Please release water I got soap in my eyes," depicting a man pleading for water to complete a skincare routine, satirizing the Indus Waters Treaty suspension as a trivial inconvenience rather than a catastrophe. The meme diagnoses the water shortage as stemming from India's treaty suspension, implicitly blaming external forces while framing it as a "humorous inconvenience." This highlights nationalism (us-vs-them) without overt aggression, showing how humor

"softens" the frame to make it more palatable and shareable. Prognostic framing is applied to imply solutions or coping mechanisms. It suggests trivialization as a "plan of attack" (e.g., communal resilience via shared absurdity), which persuades audiences to reframe catastrophe as manageable. It's persuasive and action-oriented, aligning with prognostic framing's focus on feasibility—memes often propose informal, cultural "solutions" like satire over policy changes. Motivational framing tie this to empowerment and collective action, e.g., encouraging solidarity through self-deprecation. This fosters agency ("we can laugh through the crisis") and unites viewers around anti-India sentiment, serving as a subtle call to action (e.g., share the meme to build resilience). It's effective for memes, which thrive on virality and emotional resonance rather than explicit mobilization.

Overall, by mapping frames to humor strategies (e.g., irony masking blame) and multimodal elements (e.g., emojis reinforcing absurdity), it shows how ideology is "carried" indirectly. MFA addresses a potential blind spot in traditional framing theory, which often focuses on text-heavy media and might overlook visuals or playfulness.

Meme 2: "Pak study in 2050: 2025 ki meme war mein pakistan ny fateh hasil ki" (Pak Study in 2050: Pakistan achieved a new victory in the meme war of 2025)

Figure 4: Shows Self-Deprecating Humor in Meme 2 "Pak Study in 2050: Pakistan achieved a new victory in the meme war of 2025"

- **Humor Strategy**: Satire, Exaggeration
- **Multimodal Elements**: Text-only meme, nostalgic schoolbook tone
- **Ideological Framing**:
    - *Diagnostic*: Points to generational fatigue with recurring conflicts
    - *Prognostic*: Suggests meme wars as a futile legacy
    - *Motivational*: Promotes ironic acceptance of national narrative shifts
- **Interpretation**: Uses educational satire to critique leadership, reinforcing identity through shared disillusionment and resilience.

Another from X states, "Pak study in 2050: 2025 ki meme war mein pakistan ny fateh hasil ki," bemoaning the addition of a "meme war" chapter to school curricula, highlighting generational fatigue with recurring conflicts.

Meme 3: "Achay waqtoun mein atom bomb bana liya, naye aj morchay bana rahay hotay"
([THANK GOD] we made the atom bomb in the old days, otherwise we would have been building new fronts today)

Figure 5: Shows Self-Deprecating Humor in Meme 3 [THANK GOD] we made the atom bomb in the old days, otherwise we would have been building new fronts today

- **Humor Strategy**: Irony, Temporal Contrast
- **Multimodal Elements**: Text meme, nostalgic phrasing
- **Ideological Framing**:
    - *Diagnostic*: Highlights perceived national decline
    - *Prognostic*: Implies current leadership's inadequacy
    - *Motivational*: Encourages ironic pride in past achievements
- **Interpretation**: Contrasts past glory with present struggles, using irony to critique governance while strengthening communal identity through shared suffering.

Meme 3 "Achay waqtoun mein atom bomb bana liya, naye aj morchay bana rahay hotay" contrasts past nuclear achievements with current defensive trench-digging, connoting national decline and critiquing leadership through irony. These examples frame Pakistan's "high-stress environment" as absurd, fostering emotional solidarity while subtly reinforcing identity through shared suffering.

Theme 2: Mockery of India and Leadership

Approximately 30% of memes target India, particularly Prime Minister Modi and perceived military overconfidence, framing the "Other" as incompetent or hyperbolic. This theme echoes that irony in "jokes aren't even always aimed at Indians," but when they are, they employ satire to undermine threats, such as airstrikes or water cutoffs.

Meme 4: "ham woh fauji hain jo biwi se bhi darte hain, banduqon se bhi darte hain aur Modi se bhi darte hain"

- **Humor Strategy**: Parody, Role Reversal
- **Multimodal Elements**: Twitter-style text, casual tone
- **Ideological Framing**:
    - *Diagnostic*: Undermines Indian military bravado
    - *Prognostic*: Suggests Indian leadership as laughable
    - *Motivational*: Boosts Pakistani morale through ridicule
- **Interpretation**: Portrays Modi as a clownish figure, using role reversal to invert power dynamics and reinforce Pakistani resilience.

A recurring motif is Modi's portrayal as a clownish figure; one X post reads, "ham woh fauji hain jo biwi se bhi darte hain, banduqon se bhi darte hain aur Modi se bhi darte hain" (We are soldiers who fear our wives, guns, and Modi too), parodying Indian bravado.

Meme 5: "Narendra Modi apnay jahaz wapas le k jaty huay..." (Aftre Rafale Crash Modi Rides a Donkey Cart to France).

Figure 6: Shows Mockery of India and Leadership in Instagram video meme: Aftre Rafale Crash Modi Rides a Donkey Cart to France

- **Humor Strategy**: Satire, Visual Juxtaposition
- **Multimodal Elements**: Donkey cart video meme, text overlay
- **Ideological Framing**:
  - o *Diagnostic*: Highlights Indian military setbacks
  - o *Prognostic*: Implies regression and humiliation
  - o *Motivational*: Promotes national pride via opponent's downfall

Interpretation: Depicts Modi's retreat as absurd, using visual humor to elevate Pakistani narrative superiority. It Depicts Modi's retreat as absurd and laughable, leveraging visual humor and cultural satire to elevate Pakistani narrative superiority, while subtly reinforcing a collective identity through shared amusement at India's perceived incompetence

Meme 6: "Recent memes shared by Pakistani media, mocking the war..."

Figure 7: Shows Mockery of India and Leadership in Meme 6 Recent memes shared by Pakistani media, mocking the war: Shame on them- "PAKISTANI SOCIAL MEDIA FILLS WITH DISRESPECTFUL MEMES ABOUT THE WAR"

    Humor Strategy
- **Sarcasm & Ridicule**: The Pakistani meme responds to Indian war rhetoric ("erase Pakistan from the map") with a sarcastic comeback ("Main phir draw kar lunga"), reducing the threat to something trivial and laughable, like a child casually redrawing a line.
- **Undermining seriousness**: The humor trivializes the existential threat of war by reframing it as something as mundane as doodling.
    Multimodal Elements

- **War Imagery**: Indian side frames the narrative in terms of destruction ("erase from the map"), while Pakistani meme reduces it to playful imagery of drawing.

- **Bold Text**: The headline "SHAME ON THEM – PAKISTANI SOCIAL MEDIA FILLS WITH DISRESPECTFUL MEMES ABOUT THE W*R" frames Pakistanis as irresponsible and insensitive, amplifying moral outrage.
- **Visual Juxtaposition**: The Pakistani meme (playful character holding a pencil) is shown alongside the serious image of Shehbaz Sharif, heightening the contrast between seriousness (India's framing) and mockery (Pakistan's response).

Ideological Framing

- **Diagnostic**:
  - India → Pakistan's memes are framed as *disrespectful* and evidence of a lack of seriousness toward war.
  - Pakistan (through meme) → Indian war threats are unserious and easily dismissed.
- **Prognostic**:
  - Pakistan reframes Indian threats as futile ("I'll just redraw"), suggesting India's attempts at dominance are meaningless.
  - Implies India's seriousness is misplaced and ineffective.
- **Motivational**:
  - Encourages Pakistanis to laugh at war rhetoric rather than fear it.
  - Promotes resilience through humor, fostering collective identity around ridicule of Indian threats.

Interpretation: This meme exchange illustrates the asymmetry of war discourse online.

- India frames the conflict through **moral seriousness and existential threat** ("time to erase Pakistan from the map").
- Pakistan responds with **ridicule and humor**, mocking the gravity of war itself by suggesting borders can just be "redrawn."

Theme 3: Historical References

Around 20% of memes invoke past events like the 2019 Pulwama incident or 1971 war, blending nostalgia with satire to contextualize current tensions. It shows how 2025 humor is "even more unserious," starting preemptively before escalation.

Meme 7: "Mere dada abu ki zameen jo Bharat mein reh gayi thi wh wapis lene ka time aa gaya hay" (The time has come to take back the land of my grandfather which was left in India)

Figure 8: Shows example of a textual meme depicting historical reference.

- **Humor Strategy**: Nostalgic Irony
- **Multimodal Elements**: Text meme, emotional tone
- **Ideological Framing**:
  - *Diagnostic*: Recalls Partition trauma
  - *Prognostic*: Suggests reclamation as solution
  - *Motivational*: Inspires nationalist fervor

Interpretation: Links the present 2025 Pakistan-India conflict to historical grievance through nostalgic irony, using the emotional tone of the text meme to reclaim a lost Pakistani identity and resist Indian hegemony, while evoking Partition trauma to fuel reclamation nationalism, though it may risk amplifying territorial tensions in the digital sphere.

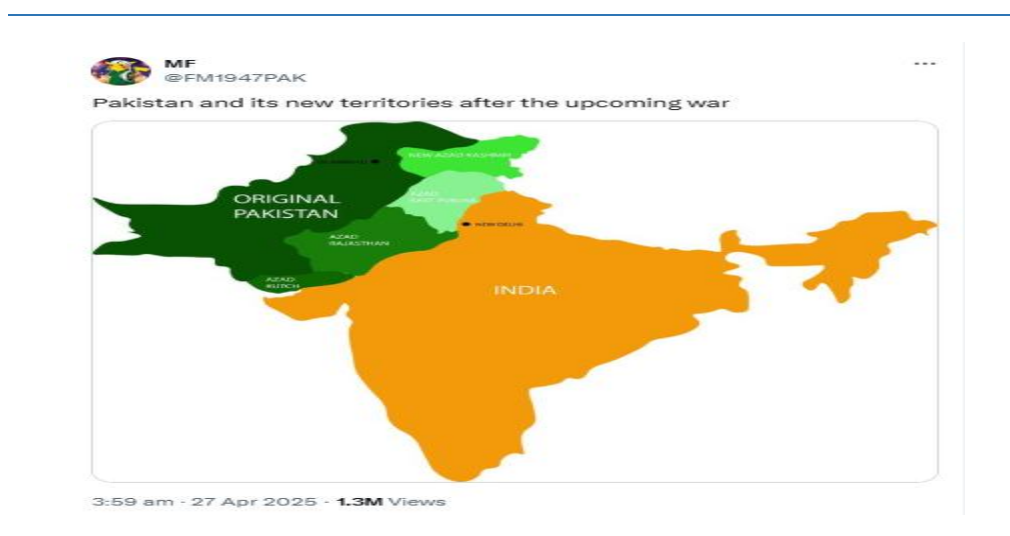**Meme 8: "Pakistan and its new territories after upcoming war"**

Figure 9: Shows example of a historical reference in "Pakistan and its new territories after upcoming war"

- **Humor Strategy**: Exaggeration, Parody
- **Multimodal Elements**: Redrawn map visual, text
- **Ideological Framing**:
  - *Diagnostic*: Challenges Indian territorial claims
  - *Prognostic*: Implies Pakistani victory
  - *Motivational*: Boosts national pride

Interpretation

- **Satirical Catharsis:** By laughing at exaggerated territorial claims, Pakistanis diffuse anxiety about conflict.
- **Historical Memory:** Recalls 1971 but reworks it with ironic optimism — a reimagined outcome where humiliation is turned into humorous dominance.

- **Collective Identity:** Reinforces a sense of community: It uses joke and satire to show that Pakistanis refuse to be crushed by history or crisis.

Theme 4: Exaggeration of War Scenarios

Memes in this theme (~15%) amplify absurdity, often through nuclear threats or ceasefire pleas, framing war as improbable or comical. It highlights "no fear mongering or calls for violence," instead offering "reassurance that it'll all be okay."

Meme 9: "Security issues ki waja say Pak India jang Dubai main ho gee"

(*Translation: Due to security issues, the Pakistan-India war will be held in Dubai*)

Figure 10: Shows a meme that exaggerates war scenarios

Humor Strategy:

- **Absurdity** → The idea of shifting a war to a "neutral venue" like a cricket match is nonsensical but funny.
- **Parody** → Mimics the language of sports/event announcements, parodying cricket tournament relocations often hosted in the UAE due to security concerns.
- **Satire** → Satirizes real-world security problems and political instability by reducing war—a deadly event—to the triviality of a sports fixture.

Multimodal Elements (implied):

- **Text-based irony** → Written in a matter-of-fact style, like a news update.
- **Contextual overlap** → References cricket diplomacy, UAE's role as a host for Pakistan's "home" matches, and exaggerates it into warfare.

Ideological Framing:

- **Diagnostic (Problem)** → Critiques the chronic security issues in Pakistan that even disrupt sports and diplomacy.

- **Prognostic (Proposed action)** → The absurd "solution" is to outsource even war to a third-party neutral host (Dubai), mirroring cricketing arrangements.
- **Motivational (Effect)** → Encourages audiences to laugh at political and security failures, using humor as a coping mechanism to deal with national anxieties.

Interpretation: The meme reframes the grave subject of war into a satirical sports metaphor. By joking that the Pakistan-India conflict would be "relocated" to Dubai due to security issues, it highlights the irony of Pakistan's dependency on the UAE for international cricket while lampooning larger security and diplomatic challenges. It fosters solidarity through shared humor, making a complex geopolitical issue more approachable by grounding it in a familiar cultural reference—cricket.

Meme 10: "ANOTHER INDIA–PAKISTAN WAR"

Figure 11: Shows a textual and visual meme that Exaggerates War Scenarios

Humor Strategy

- **Irony & Incongruity:** War is usually framed as grave and tragic, but here it's paralleled with popcorn-worthy drama, creating ironic tension.
- **Exaggeration:** By depicting *war* as just "another episode" in an ongoing series, the meme exaggerates the perceived repetitiveness of Indo-Pak tensions.
- **Dark Humor:** It trivializes potential destruction by reducing it to spectacle, which is unsettling but also cathartic for meme consumers.

Multimodal Features

- **Image Choice (Michael Jackson Popcorn):** A cultural shorthand for "entertainment value." It conveys audience voyeurism without needing words.
- **Text Overlay:** Bold, dramatic phrasing (*ANOTHER INDIA–PAKISTAN WAR*) mimics breaking news headlines, amplifying the satirical effect.
- **Juxtaposition:** Serious subject (war) + lighthearted base image (popcorn meme) = multimodal clash that generates humor.

Ideological Framing

- **Media Critique:** Highlights how war is packaged as a "spectacle" by news cycles, creating a sense of entertainment out of tragedy.
- **Normalization of Conflict:** Suggests that Indo-Pak conflicts are so routine they've become banal, almost like serialized TV episodes.
- **Collective Coping:** Humor reframes dread into satire, helping audiences deal with recurring geopolitical anxieties by laughing at them.

Interpretation

This meme works because it reframes the India–Pakistan conflict not as a crisis but as yet another predictable media "episode" that audiences consume like entertainment. Its humor lies in trivializing the gravity of war, while its deeper ideological function is to critique media sensationalism and normalize satire as a coping tool for repeated tensions.

Theme 5: Cultural and Celebrity Parodies

This theme (~10%) uses pop culture, Bollywood, and celebrities for lighthearted cross-border jabs, examples like "sneaking water... for your favourite celebrity" or or drafting cricket star Babar Azam, employ parody to transform geopolitical tensions into amusing narratives, blending entertainment with subtle national pride. This approach fosters a shared cultural amusement that transcends rivalry, using familiar figures to soften the conflict's edge while reinforcing a sense of Pakistani identity through lighthearted mockery of Indian celebrity culture.

Meme 11: A video meme of young Pakistanis running... "Captain Ajay Devgan, Major Akshay Kumar Pakistan main Ghus gayai hain" (Captain Ajay Devgan, Major Akshay Kumar and General Heritik Roshan have entered Pakistan)

Figure 12: Shows a video meme of a Cultural and Celebrity Parodies

- **Humor Strategy**: Parody, Absurdity

- **Multimodal Elements**: Video reference, Bollywood names
- **Ideological Framing**:
    - *Diagnostic*: Mocks Bollywood heroism
    - *Prognostic*: Implies cultural superiority
    - *Motivational*: Fosters cross-border amusement
- **Interpretation**: Turns Indian celebrities into invaders, using parody to create emotional proximity and shared laughter.

A meme quips, a video of young Pakistanis running in the mountains as news of "Captain Ajay Devgan, Major Akshay Kumar and General Hritik Roshan" sneaking into the country spreads," mocking Bollywood heroes as invaders.

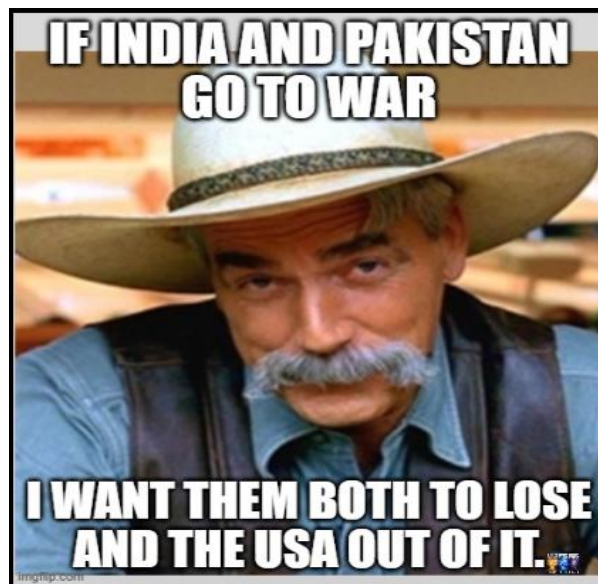**Meme 12: "If India and Pakistan go to war; I want them both to lose and the USA out of It"**

Figure 13: Shows an example of Cultural and Celebrity Parodies

- **Humor Strategy**: Irony, Neutral Stance
- **Multimodal Elements**: Picture of a Eurpeon Man wearing hat and Text meme, casual tone
- **Ideological Framing**:
    - *Diagnostic*: Critiques both nations
    - *Prognostic*: Suggests mutual loss
    - *Motivational*: Encourages detachment
- **Interpretation**: Uses irony to transcend rivalry, aligning with Gen Z's refusal to hate neighbors.

From X: "If India and Pakistan go to war; I want them both to lose and the USA out of it".

Theme 6: Meme Warfare and Digital Dominance

This theme highlights that approximately 15% of the analyzed content depicts memes as a powerful tool in a digital "battleground" where symbolic victories are claimed through online influence.

Described as "fifth generation warfare," this phenomenon involves the use of sharp, snide memes to assert cultural or ideological superiority. Pakistanis, in particular, take pride in their strong "meme game," leveraging humor and satire to dominate digital spaces and shape narratives, reflecting a broader trend of using memes as a strategic weapon in modern information conflicts.

Meme 13: "Ek chutki sindoor ki keemat = 6 Indian jets!" "Situation of "Sindur" right now".

Figure 14: Illustrates the theme Meme Warfare and Digital Dominance

- **Humor Strategy**: Bollywood Parody, Exaggeration
- **Multimodal Elements**: Film scenes and dialogue reference
- **Ideological Framing**:
    - *Diagnostic*: Mocks Indian military losses
    - *Prognostic*: Implies trivial cost
    - *Motivational*: Boosts national pride
- **Interpretation**: Parodies Bollywood to ridicule India, reinforcing Pakistani superiority through cultural humor.
- "Ek chutki sindoor ki keemat... 6 Indian jets!" parodies film lines with jet losses. These foster emotional proximity by vernacularizing conflict into relatable absurdity.

Meme 14: "Pakistan India War 2025!!! A meme thread on what happened so far !!!"

An X thread begins, "Pakistan India War 2025!!! A meme thread on what happened so far !!!," compiling satirical events.

Figure 15: Illustrates the theme Meme Warfare and Digital Dominance

- **Humor Strategy**: Satire, Compilation
- **Multimodal Elements**: Thread format, multiple images
- **Ideological Framing**:
    - *Diagnostic*: Highlights meme as battleground
    - *Prognostic*: Claims digital victory
    - *Motivational*: Encourages participation
- **Interpretation**: Frames memes as fifth-generation warfare, reinforcing participatory resistance. The post has high Audience response for instance: "We already defeated India in Memes war saar." Audience not only posted emojies but also memes in response.

Meme 15: "India walon ko pata hi nahi ke Pakistan ne Facebook pe aadhey se zyada Bharat pe qabza kar liya hai" (Indians don't know that Pakistan has taken over more than half of India on Facebook**)**

Figure 16: Illustrates the theme Meme Warfare and Digital Dominance

- **Humor Strategy**: Exaggeration, Digital Parody
- **Multimodal Elements**: Map overlay, text
- **Ideological Framing**:
    - *Diagnostic*: Highlights online influence

- o   *Prognostic*: Implies cultural takeover
  - o   *Motivational*: Encourages digital engagement
- **Interpretation**: Claims virtual dominance, using parody to reinforce meme warfare as ideological resistance.

Meme 15 "India walon ko pata hi nahi ke Pakistan ne Facebook pe aadhey se zyada Bharat pe qabza kar liya hai" claims digital conquest. This theme reinforces participatory discourse, as one participant states: "if living in Pakistan has taught us anything, it's that no matter what is thrown our way, Pakistanis have a way of shrugging it off, laughing and moving on."

Over all, these themes reveal memes as ideological tools that challenge traditional war narratives through humor, fostering resilience amid disillusionment. While potentially unhealthy as "gallows humour", they democratize discourse, blending critique with unity in a hyper-digital conflict. Future studies could expand to Indian memes for balanced comparison.

In short, Framing Theory effectively explains how social movements mobilize through meaning-making by constructing resonant frames, but it falls short in addressing why memes, as specific types of frames, spread rapidly in digital environments. It assumes that frames gain traction solely through resonance, overlooking the roles of humor, virality, remixing, and platform logics like algorithms and shareability that drive meme dissemination in digital culture. MFA bridges this gap by showing that memes are not only carriers of frames but also part of a participatory media ecosystem. It accounts for their spread by highlighting how humor, exaggeration, irony, and easy replicability make diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames "sticky" within the attention economy of social media, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of how memes function and propagate in digital spaces.

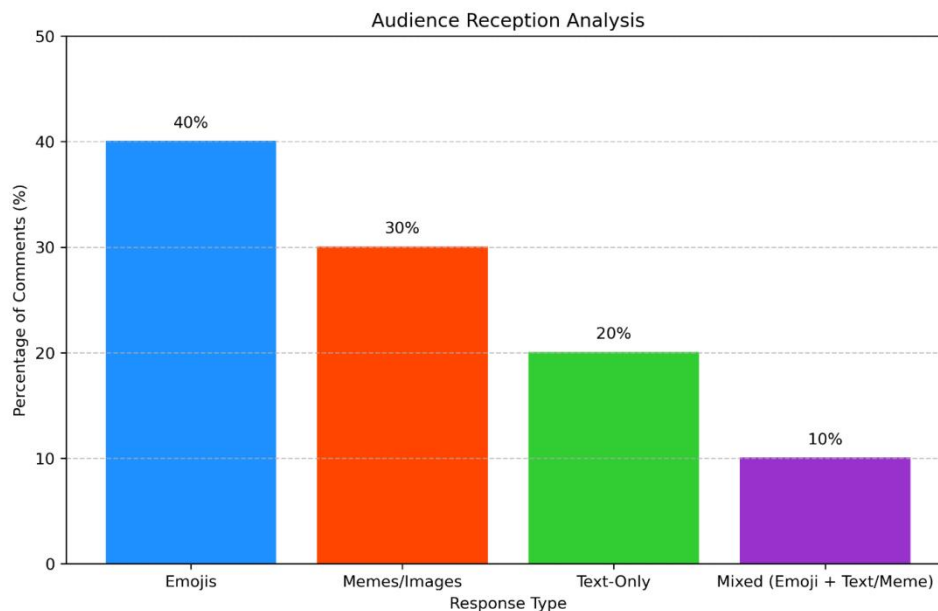**Audience Reception Analysis**

Figure 18: Show audience response to memes

The "Audience Reception Analysis" bar chart, generated as part of the Meme Frame Analysis (MFA) methodology for the 2025 Pakistan-India conflict, visualizes the percentage distribution of audience response types across 90 memes, based on a scaled total of 1000 comments. The chart features four categories on the x-axis—Emojis, Memes/Images, Text-Only, and Mixed (Emoji + Text/Meme)—with corresponding percentages of 40%, 30%, 20%, and 10% on the y-axis, ranging from 0 to 50% for visual clarity. Colored in Blue, Red, Green, and Purple respectively, the bars highlight that emojis dominate at 40% , reflecting quick emotional reactions and humor-driven engagement, followed by memes/images at 30% , indicating active "meme warfare," text-only at 20% for deeper discussion, and mixed responses at 10% for nuanced interactions. This distribution, averaging ~55.56 comments per meme, underscores the participatory nature of Gen Z's digital response, aligning with MFA's Step 5 by showing how humor (e.g., irony in Meme 1) and ideological framing (e.g., us/them in Meme 6) resonate. The chart, enhances MFA's novelty by quantifying audience reception in percentages, revealing a preference for visual and emotional engagement over textual discourse, and addressing a gap in traditional framing theory by capturing the multimodal, viral dynamics of meme culture.
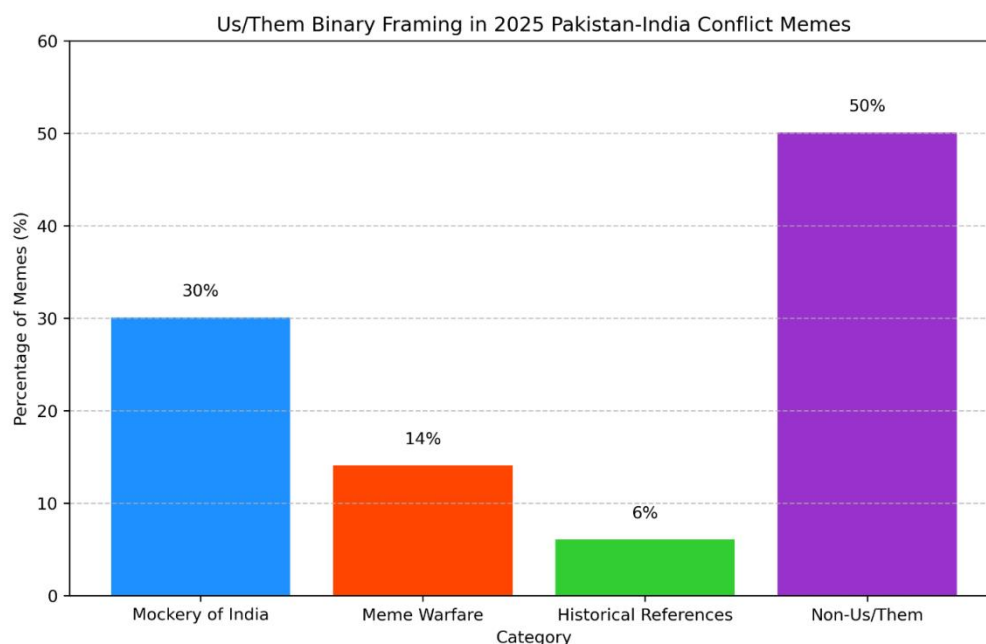

Figure 19: US/Them Binary Framing in 2025 Pakistan-India Conflict Memes

The bar chart titled "Us/Them Binary Framing in 2025 Pakistan-India Conflict Memes" presents a quantitative analysis of the proportional distribution of ideological framing categories across a dataset of 90 memes, as derived from the Meme Frame Analysis (MFA) methodology applied to the 2025 Pakistan-India conflict. The x-axis delineates four categories—Mockery of India, Meme Warfare, Historical References, and Non-Us/Them—while the y-axis, scaled from 0 to 60%, indicates the percentage of memes within each category, with values of 30%, 14%, 6%, and 50%, respectively. Colored in Blue, Red, Green, and Purple, the bars reveal that 30% of the memes employ mockery of India (e.g., Meme 4), 14% engage in meme warfare (e.g., Meme 17), and 6% draw on historical references (e.g., Meme 7) to construct us/them binaries, collectively accounting for approximately 50% of the dataset where such framing is evident. The remaining 50%, categorized as Non-Us/Them, reflects themes like self-deprecation (e.g., Meme 1), indicating a significant portion of memes that negotiate internal identity

rather than external rivalry. This visualization enhances MFA's Step 3 (Ideological Framing) by elucidating the prevalence of us/them dichotomies, thereby contributing to an understanding of how humor and multimodality shape ideological narratives in digital conflict contexts, a dimension often underexplored in traditional framing theory.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Pakistani Gen Z memes during the 2025 conflict are multimodal tools of humor and resistance. MFA, by integrating humor, multimodality, and ideology, offers a robust framework for analyzing digital discourse. Future research could explore cross-border meme exchanges, enhancing understanding of digital diplomacy.

MFA reveals memes as ideological soft power, where humor disarms resistance to nationalist narratives. Self-deprecation (~40%) intersects with affective framing, fostering resilience through irony. Anti-India framing reinforces us/them binaries, while meme warfare positions digital spaces as battlegrounds. Compared to MCDA (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) and Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), MFA uniquely highlights humor's role in ideology circulation, aligning with Shifman's (2014) memetics but adding a meaning-focused lens. While Framing Theory provides a lens for understanding how meanings are constructed, it does not adequately account for the participatory, viral, and multimodal nature of meme culture. Meme Frame Analysis extends the theory by addressing why certain frames spread in digital environments—emphasizing humor, irony, and shareability as mechanisms of ideological circulation. Findings reveal memes as micro-narratives that negotiate national identity and challenge hegemonic discourses, contributing to digital humanities and conflict studies.

Future studies leveraging the Meme Frame Analysis (MFA) methodology could significantly advance the understanding of digital humor as a tool for ideological framing by incorporating comparative cases, such as the Ukraine-Russia conflict memes, to test the generalizability of findings beyond the 2025 Pakistan-India conflict. These studies could expand the dataset to include memes from both the Pakistan-India and Ukraine-Russia contexts, collected from platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook during key conflict phases (e.g., April-May 2025 for Pakistan-India, and relevant periods in 2022-2025 for Ukraine-Russia), ensuring a robust sample of ~90-120 memes per case to capture diverse formats and temporal dynamics. The multimodal humor analysis could compare humor strategies—such as irony and satire in Pakistan-India memes (e.g., Meme 1: "Please release water") with absurdity and dark humor in Ukraine-Russia memes (e.g., references to "Putler kaputt" or drone warfare)—assessing how intersemiotic interactions (text, images, emojis) vary across cultural contexts. Ideological framing would explore diagnostic frames (e.g., water shortages vs. territorial occupation), prognostic frames (e.g., trivialization vs. resistance narratives), and motivational frames (e.g., national pride vs. collective resilience), using NVivo to code us/them binaries and historical references, with inter-coder reliability ensuring empirical rigor. Audience reception analysis could analyze engagement metrics (e.g., retweets, likes) and comment types (emojis, counter-memes) across both cases, testing whether humor's virality scales similarly. The interpretation and ethical reflection would compare how humor reinforces soft power (e.g., Pakistani superiority vs. Ukrainian defiance) and address ethical risks (e.g., misinformation, hate speech), using comparative insights to refine MFA's applicability. This approach would enhance MFA's novelty by validating its framework across diverse geopolitical conflicts, addressing gaps in traditional framing theory regarding cross-cultural meme dynamics, and contributing to digital humanities and conflict studies by establishing generalizable patterns in meme-driven ideological warfare.

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