



RESEARCH PAPER

Representation of Kashmir's Subjugation through War Photos: A Semiotic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how linguistic features and sign systems in war photographs of Kashmir increase violence, insecurity, and the quest for freedom under subjugation. Recent studies of semiotic analyses on war reveal how photographs influence public perception and political narratives. The Kashmir conflict is understudied, highlighting the interplay of photographs and linguistic elements respectively. Using a purposive sampling approach, data was collected from Indian and Pakistani top three newspapers. We applied Rose's model to analyze the data. The linguistic and semiotic analysis revealed a significant relationship between verbal and visual signs, power dynamics; ideological biases, ethical considerations, and emotional responses. Also, this study found how Indian media portrays Pakistan as the primary instigator of the Kashmir conflict and the harsh challenges faced by Kashmiri civilians. This study provides recommendations for future researchers that how hashtags, captions and user-generated content contribute to the discourse.

KEYWORDS India-Pakistan, Kashmir Conflict, Newspaper Captions, Rose Model, Semiotics

Introduction

The state of Jammu and Kashmir lies in the heart of Asia. In the west, the state is a border with Pakistan, in the east by China, by Afghanistan in the northwest, and in the south by India (Masood, & Muzaffar, 2019). Images offer to bring iconic incidents of oppression, struggle, and resilience to life, often doing a better job than words describing the specifics of conflict. Text cannot adequately convey the human side of the conflict; these images offer profound insights into the lives of those affected daily. Language is a complex tool of communication that reflects the values, conceptions, and cultural constructs of society that shape understanding and interpretation. Rich in cultural allusions and symbolism, war images are fundamental visual representations and vehicles for political and ideological goals. The semiotic analysis of such images sheds light on the intricate interactions between language, imagery, and perception in shaping attitudes toward conflicts, offering insights into how diverse audiences interpret and react to visual stimuli.

Prior semiotic analysis research has focused on a wide range of conflicts, including iconic photos from the Vietnam War, distressed illustrations by Syrian children depicting the severity of combat, and generic war photography from many worldwide contexts. The current study conducts a more detailed analysis, expanding on this corpus of data. Notably, the research explores the semiotic aspects of photographs from the Kashmir War, a conflict-filled with historical, political, and cultural intricacies.

This research examines how imagery affects media narratives and public opinion, primarily through newspapers' role in disseminating information. A comparative analysis of the Kashmir dispute from both Indian and Pakistani perspectives and a theoretical framework for analyzing war photographs and their impact on social and political dynamics are presented. Additionally, cross-border communication is improved. The study dramatically contributes to semiotics, media studies, and conflict resolution by deepening our understanding of how visual imagery and semiotic codes influence narratives in protracted wars. We learn more about power relations and the interaction between media narratives, public discourse, and visual narratives by examining war imagery and its ideological significance.

The study decodes wartime imagery, exposing severe violations of human rights and acts of terrorism committed by Indian soldiers, such as rape, torture, restrictions, and unlawful killings, to comprehend the suffering of Kashmir's impoverished people. It also addresses how things like crime and illiteracy affect kids. The natural beauty and cultural legacy of Kashmir offer great promise for tourism. Still, the continuous violence prevents this sector from growing to the full potential that it could have in terms of boosting local companies, creating jobs, and promoting economic development. A peaceful environment would draw tourists worldwide, encouraging infrastructure development, bilateral trade, and regional cohesion – all of which would support global economic expansion.

Scholars argue that images are more important than words, expressing conflict details by bringing memorable instances of oppression, adversity, and resiliency to life. Text cannot fully capture the human side of conflict; these pictures provide deep insights into the everyday lives of people impacted. Language is a multifaceted communication tool, reflecting society's values, beliefs, and artistic constructions that influence perception and interpretation. Rich with symbolism and cultural references, war images go beyond essential visual representation, serving as conduits for ideological and political objectives. The semiotic investigation of such imagery provides insights into how varied audiences interpret and respond to visual stimuli, shedding light on the complex interplay of language, imagery, and perception in forming attitudes toward conflicts.

Research shows that the media's depiction of the Kashmir conflict via the lens of battle photography has a significant impact on public opinion and debate (ref). Scholars emphasize the importance of critical engagement and ethical considerations in war journalism (ref). Research on Kashmir war images contributes substantively to informed discourse and endeavors towards a peaceful settlement of conflicts, emphasizing human rights concerns and the numerous interactions underlying the Kashmiri quest for independence among established historical, religious, and geopolitical tensions. Headlines are considered an individual genre in modern critical studies and deserve special attention.

Pakistan and India offer a compelling case study due to their shared ancient history as part of a subcontinent before their ideological separation in 1947 based on religion, culture, and social aspects. India, being larger, had initial economic and financial advantages, while Pakistan struggled to unify diverse elements. The 1948 war over Kashmir, a critical region for its water resources, left it divided and remains a contentious issue. Pakistan calls the Indian-administered region "Indian-occupied Kashmir" and vice versa. Politicians in both countries have exploited the Kashmir conflict and mutual animosity to win elections. Militarily, the nations have fought four major wars (1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999) and engaged in regular cross-border firing, with their militaries

benefiting from heightened tensions through larger budgets and influence. The UN maintains a presence to monitor conflicts. Additionally, the media, particularly films and sports, play a role in perpetuating the rivalry.

This research addresses the following questions: How do linguistic features of war images portraying Kashmir contribute to emphasizing violence and insecurity for freedom in the region?

How does the language of sign systems influence meanings in the observation of war images portraying Kashmir?

This research provides significant contributions to the existing literature. First, this research explored the variety of complex issues that Kashmiri youngsters confront, including exposure to criminal activity and restricted access to educational options. Based on Indian economists and activists, the research presents verified instances of security officers participating in inhumane behavior, like kidnapping children during nighttime searches and abusing women and children during dawn raids. Second, this research advances the literature semiotic analysis research, which has previously studied a wide range of conflicts, including the Vietnam War and the Syrian War, by conducting a more in-depth investigation. This framework focused on the semiotic features of photographs taken during the Kashmir War, which were characterized by complex historical, political, and cultural forces with limited understanding of the literature. Further, this research aims to analyze the semiotic challenges present in wartime imagery, focusing on clarifying the unstable conditions that Kashmir's dispossessed population faces. Moreover, this research brings attention to the catastrophic human rights abuses and acts of terrorism that Indian security personnel have committed against residents. These infractions cover a wide range of crimes, such as unlawful executions, sexual assaults, speech restrictions, prohibitions on religious assembly, torture, and enforced disappearances.

The research highlights a more complex comprehension of the Kashmir conflict by highlighting the expressive power of visual media, especially photographs. This research provides the threshold by putting forth the idea that visual documentation of living conditions and human rights violations can effectively convey desired meanings and foster more profound understanding.

Literature Review

In semiotics, the sign concept plays a substantial role as an interpretable entity. According to Pierce, (1931), "Nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign" (quoted in Hameed & Afzal, 2021, p. 86). Signs in Saussure's theory are classified into signifiers and signified. In this regard, the study of signs addresses the link between entities and their meanings (Lee & Goguen, 2003). Mendoza (2016) defined a sign as any entity in the form of an image, word, gesture, thought, or voice which can be decoded for its surface meaning, or even underlying meaning, as it can be understood via ideological links or worldviews. Semiotics was a term Pierce used (1839–1914) to denote an area of knowledge concerning signs study (cited in Chandler, 2007).

Imperial (2020) proposed that the study of signs, from Pierce's perspective, deals with the links between an entity (i.e., a sign) and its subject. Moreover, the concept of a sign was defined by Barthes (1967) as any format such as a word, image, gesture, or even musical note. Later on, Gilian Rose defined the concept of signs; Semiotics "offers a complete box of analytical methods for dissecting an image and tracing how it functions

concerning larger structures of meaning," According to her Semiotics' main advantage is that it is a sophisticated analytical instrument for demonstrating how signs function (Rose, 2001).

Linguistics offers methods for exploring the multimodal nature of war images, which frequently include both visual and textual components (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Scholars can study how language and visual modes interact to build meaning within war images by examining the linguistic aspects of accompanying texts or captions (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Such a multidimensional approach to semiotic analysis allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how war images convey complex narratives and ideologies (Van Leeuwen, 2001). In general, including linguistic theories and methodology in the Semiotic study improves the scope of the language of visual communication in situations of conflict and war. By using a linguistic perspective to examine the structural, cultural, and multimodal components of war images, researchers can find the varied ways in which these images impact perceptions, ideologies, and conflict discourse.

In a study by al-Ali (2011), the ideological discrepancies in the headlines are explained. He used Wodak's Historical Approach and van Dijk's socio-ideological discourse theory to examine how the news reported Saddam Hussain's passing. There is strong evidence of a divide among Arabs between those who support Washington and those who oppose US influence in the area. Arab newspapers' local interpretations and lexicalization openly defend Saddam Hussein and his disobedience of America. The descriptions of the main involvement in each sample often align and conform to the socio-political ideology of the media. The text's vocabulary and rhetorical devices reveal its ideological leanings toward religion.

The research on "Iconic photos of the Vietnam War era, a semiotic analysis as a tool of understanding" was conducted by Lovelace (2010). Although the Vietnam War was referred to in the study as the "first broadcast war," its place in history has been solidified by still images or single frames. Historians cite two examples of "iconic" photos: Nick Ut's shot of a little girl running down the street naked after being seared by napalm, and Eddie Adams' shot of a Viet Cong man being executed on the streets of Saigon. History books have used these famous images as visual representations of the conflict, and popular culture has recreated and recycled them. This study used a semiotic analysis and synthesis of prior research on the images to determine the common characteristics of an image that elevated these particular shots to iconic status. The results showed that all of the memorable pictures had feelings of emotional outrage, naivete, and helplessness.

To study how headlines are utilized to uphold and preserve power relations to establish ideologies, Rotimi Taiwo (2007) studied 300 headlines from Nigerian newspapers. A significant portion of the headlines were political, with crime and corruption taking center stage. Many newspapers used speech headlines to romanticize the social players. Certain headlines were so direct that they took on a confrontational tone. The purpose of these headlines is to instill power dynamics and ideologies in the audience.

Research Methodology

This present study applied the qualitative and descriptive research design to analyze the photographs of the Kashmir War semiotically. Data was collected from various newspapers in Pakistan and Indian media. The selected sample includes six

photos, the initial three from Pakistani newspapers and the last three from Indian journals. These pictures thoroughly depict the conditions in the Kashmir Valley, providing a broad and informative data source for analytical studies. Purposive sampling was used for data collection in this study to align with the research objectives.

Table 1 Sources of data collection

Indian Media	Pakistan
The Times of India	Dawn Newspaper
India.com	The Economic Time
India Today	Hilal English

The Gillian Rose model is applied to interpret the symbolic hidden meaning in the war images of the Kashmir conflict. This study also analyzed perspective, pains, ideologies, inequalities, life living, gender, social practice, and the intended meanings are also analyzed in the study. Purposive sampling was used for data collection in this study to align with the research objectives. Several compelling reasons support this decision.

Limitations & Delimitations

While this study provides valuable information, it is essential to recognize its limitations. The study's scope is limited to examining Kashmir war news photos in Pakistani and Indian newspapers, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other media sources. Furthermore, the study's qualitative nature may restrict the ability to draw quantitative conclusions. Despite these limitations, the Rose model's emphasis on image interpretation allows for various exploration of semiotic aspects.

Results and Discussion

Figure 1, sourced from a Pakistani newspaper (Dawn) in 2017, portrays the Indian Armed Forces and their cruel and merciless behavior toward a kid.



Figure 1: In Kashmir, the brutality of videos deepens anger against India (Published April 26, 2017)

Rose's semiotic analysis of this picture reveals that the child is portrayed as a suppressor in front of the allocated rangers, indicating a lack of rules and protection for

this innocent kid. The police have restricted the area, preventing the public from living their everyday lives and offering no support to save the child from cruelty. The child's punishment symbolizes the pains and sorrows they must endure independently while society suffers under the brutal behavior of the Indian nation. Rose's model of semiotic analysis highlights the image and the child's fearful feelings, with the unconstructed building behind him signifying the ill-treatment of the Kashmiri people by the forces.

The standing positions of the officers illustrate the terror and alertness of the Indian force as five men besiege the innocent boy. The subtitle "In Kashmir, the brutality of videos deepens anger against India" employs linguistic devices to depict Pakistan as a supporter of Kashmiri rights, using expressive language and striking imagery like "brutality" and "deepens anger" to elicit strong emotional reactions. This framing portrays India as the adversary and Pakistan as the defender of justice and human rights in the Kashmir dispute, capitalizing on existing sympathy for the Kashmiri cause and aiming to influence public opinion and garner support for Kashmiri rights in Pakistan.

Figure 2 is from the Pakistani newspaper "The Economic Times," published in 2018. According to Pakistani media, this image depicts the Indian armed forces.



Sample 3: Hilal English

Figure 3 is from Pakistan's Hilal English Newspaper, published in 2018. According to the caption, this image represents the vindication of the Kashmiri people's struggle.



Figure 2: Kashmiris' Struggle Vindicated (Published: 2018)

This work analyzes an evocative image of a wounded girl in these mountains and its symbolic components, drawing on coded images to discover the rich meanings shaped by deep field engagements inside a Kashmir Valley medical facility. Viewed through the grid of Rose's (2001) semiotic scrutiny, a range of strong symbols is revealed to us: that woman wailing; wounds and injections; postures denoting sadness, and on-looking congregations. Such symbols have a profound emotional resonance, with the weeping woman capturing the idea of uncontrolled grief and pain that pellet guns are capable of causing, while as an injured witness this embodies how oppression takes its psychological/physical toll.

The silence is true of the Kashmiri people, who live and die in a shadowy world where their pain invites indifference from those controlling power. The portrayal of misery and sadness filled the air with desolation, as it highlighted the Indian Army's oppressive ways and contributed to bringing to light situations that Kashmiri women are suffering from. The photo bares the administration's contempt for basic rights and the welfare of people when it chooses tyranny over humanity.

Underneath the Pakistani sentiment of grief, some very subtle linguistic strategies began to operate with a conclusion that this caption was expressing: "Kashmiris' Struggle Vindicated". In captioning this image with the phrase "Kashmiris" it provides ownership and an air of unity - a shared struggle between Pakistan & the Kashmiris. Struggle, as a word carries with it the face of all adversity; resistance and persistence form cornerstones in every poem written about Kashmir since time memorial making the whole feel like an evoke of virtuous cause. The use of "vindicated" complicates this, suggesting that Pakistan sees the cause in Kashmir as justified and must be acknowledged - which backs up all its rhetoric about standing side by side with what it describes to be Kashmiri yearnings.

Sample 6: India.com

Figure 6 is a cartoon by Mir Suhail Qadri published in the India.com newspaper in 2016. It depicts how security forces keep the peace in Kashmir and how the media portrays the region's killings.



Figure 3: A cartoon by Mir Suhail Qadri depicting how security forces maintain peace in Kashmir and the media's take on killings in Kashmir (Updated: July 27, 2016)

A cartoon by Mir Suhail Qadri published in India, 2016 Figure 6. The other image, for KatesHiddenCom and reproduced here from his flicker page (photographer credit; does not define the ownership of an image unless explicitly stated by a photographer when posting to this group) illustrates repression in Occupied Kashmir 'how media perceives as peaceful India occupy land but it never tells that what happened on night!

The feature is a cartoon that speaks to the Kashmiri youth and where they stand after Burhan Wani's assassination scrupling on acute social-political problems. It is a scathing indictment of the Indian military presence and paints an eerie atmosphere of continuous bloodshed in Jammu and Kashmir since 1947. The horror of this image reminds us that the brutal militarization in response to Kashmiri demands for self-determination has failed, and focuses national attention on the ongoing agony-including routine torture produced by conditions under a government led by Modi.

The caption, 'This cartoon by Mir Suhail Qadri on how security forces keep peace in Kashmir and media shows the killings of civilians', demonstrates what angle it is coming from. It indicates a study of security forces and how they handled themselves in the volatile sociopolitical space of Kashmir while maintaining the law and order process. It also analyses the role of media in the construction of public opinion and narrative on conflict violence in Kashmir. A more extended reading of it brings out the nuance concepts, social criticism, and mixed perspective that is contained in Qadri's beautiful illustration.

Sample 7: India Today

Figure 7, which appeared in India Today in 2017, depicts how Pakistan funds separatist groups and stone-pelters in Kashmir through illegal trade along the Line of Control (LoC).



Figure 4: How Pakistan funds separatist stone-pelters in Kashmir through illegal barter trade at LoC (Updated: Jun 17, 2017)

Finally, Figure 7 complements the Indian media materials with a visual representation of the Line of Control as a site of perpetual crisis. The chosen image depicts a scenario from Indian documents, suggesting that the teenagers continue combating by throwing stones, and their activities impede peace in the region. It is possible to notice the young people's urgency and disguise because their heads and faces are hidden, which implies their readiness for potential outcomes. The photograph features a few barriers made of poles and stones in a position aimed at restraining access and marking a certain boundary within the context. One may argue that the creation of borders in the picture symbolizes the control task that has become especially relevant amid the recent crises and uncertainties in the world. The text about the image in Indian media material accuses adolescents of deteriorating Kashmir's social order, with no grounds for such a claim.

Additionally, the text emphasizes that youth involvement in criminal actions that destabilize their communities is a severe threat. In essence, Indian media justifies a focus on heroes by addressing the need for order while undermining whom Kashmiri society perceives as distributors. As for the caption, "How Pakistan funds separatists, stone-throwers in Kashmir through illegal barter trade at LoC," the Indian media relies on language... to reflect it as a source of the problem. For example, terms like "allocates," "separatists," and "stone-throwers" include immorality and deception in the way Pakistan supports harmful actions against India. Additionally, the term "illegal barter trade at the LoC" creates a sense of operation outside international law, reinforcing India's need to rectify the situation by neutralizing Pakistan.

Sample 8: The Times of India



Figure 5: Govt blames Pak after local youth rams CRPF convoy with-IED-packed SUV in worst terror hit on J&K forces (Published 15 Feb 2019)

The above Figure 8, from The Times of India) shows something about the continuing resonance of the Pulwama incident (as a tragic event image that is now seared its way somehow into Indian memory), against further signs and symptoms still manage to be unfolded across Kashmir. Over a thousand CRPF officers boarded the bus and out of these at least forty brave soldiers lost their lives when Jammu and Kashmir was struck by a horrific blast that happened right on February 14. In a matter of seconds, the Rose model's analytical framework fixes its gaze on the Indian narrative painting Pakistan as an arch-fiend primarily responsible for facilitating that disgusting act. This perception is part of the status quo in India: that these incidents are no mere accidents but deliberate acts to bleed a thousand cuts through Pakistani fingers.

Dubbed a Black Day, the incident has been widely reported by print media in India and sparked sentiments among masses during mourning and reflection. Indian newspapers largely reported the Pulwama attack in a way that described it as an act of terrorism by Pakistan, further deepening hostility and providing fuel for calls to retaliate against India's nuclear-armed neighbor. This narrative construction by Indian media can be better stated as attempts to infuse and murmur nationalism and patriotism in the minds of citizens while shaping public negative perceptions against Pakistan. The news appears to be part of India's ongoing proxy conduct as well when it attempts to remind the rest of the non-Kashmiri world that Kashmir is a troubled spot within itself but at once puts the entire onus upon somebody foreign (read Pakistan) for their inability wrt security. A linguistic approach in which the caption is deconstructed brings out India's

narrative drive to reinforce its hold over Kashmir and keep demonizing Pakistan as an eternal regional menace.

Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the visual semiotics behind representations embedded within what has become a controversial discourse and thereby unravels complex functions buried at multiple levels that continue to sustain narratives and impressions about this struggle. The research, based on visual analysis of photographs and accompanying text in media of Pakistan and India, identifies trends in visual culture and discusses how media reporting shapes public opinion that in turn affects broader geopolitical factors-in this case, bilateral relations, and regional stability. The emphasis on emotive visual imagery in shaping discourse and the impact it has upon empathy or discord, highlight that media outlets need to be careful when reporting this notoriously complex territorial issue providing pertinent lessons as well from an ethically guided journalistic approach highlighting a fairer and more balanced account of conflict.

The research is intended to provide valuable suggestions regarding promoting enlightened peace activism and policymaking concerning the conflict in Kashmir with implications for various stakeholders involved - from journalists to policymakers, educators, and advocacy organizations. The research brings a clearer understanding and hopefully mitigate any biases in studying semiotics behind conflict imagery by acknowledging research limitations and pointing the direction for future studies such as cross-cultural analyses, or audience reaction studies. In essence, the findings of this study provide a holistic outlook on different aspects shaping the presentation of the Kashmir conflict and suggest interventions that can be made to contribute significantly to bringing peace and resolving issues between both nations.

Therefore, future recommendations propose interdisciplinary approaches to uncover the depth of power relationships from photographs. They consider developing more interdisciplinary approaches that integrate semiotics, visual sociology, and media studies to uncover deeper insights into the power dynamics in photographs. Diverse sampling, thus, is also suggested, including international media coverage, and should be conducted to broaden the understanding of global narratives. The ethical responsibility of media in portraying oppressed communities should also be critically examined. Linguistic analysis requires further research so that different captions and headlines, which support or undermine photographic narratives, can be analyzed in the light of linguistic strategies like metaphor, modality, and presupposition concerning bias, ideology, and emotional touch.

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