

► **Verbo-Visual Pun in Memetic Warfare Against Russia's Aggression in Ukraine**

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Purpose: In a time when war-torn Ukraine faces a grave crisis amid Russia's invasion attempt, social media chooses humor over aggression to fight back. Humor has long been known as a kind of coping mechanism in extreme crises wherein the world of jokes is quite similar with the world of memes, which instantly reacts to resonating events. Puns and memes, armed with words and images, become weapons of mass disruption, influencing the hearts and minds of a target audience. This invites the examination of how memes detailing the Russian-Ukrainian military crisis employ verbo-visual puns as a discursive strategy of information warfare to counter Putin's propaganda.

Design/methodology/approach: This study illustrates a specific mechanism of processing verbo-visual puns representing the Russian-Ukrainian war in English-language memes, and explores how these puns are strategically used in crisis communication. It proposes an interdisciplinary template of the analysis of puns and draws on multimodal social semiotics, cognitive linguistics, a critical study of multimodality, and crisis communication analysis.

Findings: This paper reveals cognitive and semiotic triggers of puns as well as their ability to serve as a powerful tool to generate strong public reaction to Russia's military aggression in Ukraine reaching the intended goals of crisis communication.

Research limitations/implications: The description of all memes depicting the Russian-Ukrainian war exceeds the scope of this article, so it focuses exclusively on the verbo-visual response to the crisis and is limited to six cases.

Practical implications: The research is especially timely in the face of the advanced spread of Russian propaganda against world democracies, including Ukraine. Its major practical contribution is that it provides much needed insight into how English-language memes, as the new frontier of information warfare against Russia's aggression in Ukraine, can pursue a competitive advantage over the enemy.

Originality/Value: This paper has not been previously published, in whole or in part, in any other journal or scientific publishing company.

Keywords: *pun, multimodality, Internet-meme, strategic communication.*

Research type: Research paper.