



THE

OKARA-SAHIWAL

MEME WAR:

When Satire, AI, and Misinformation
Collide in Pakistan's Digital Spaces

By Minaihil Zahid & Taha Muhammad

Okara

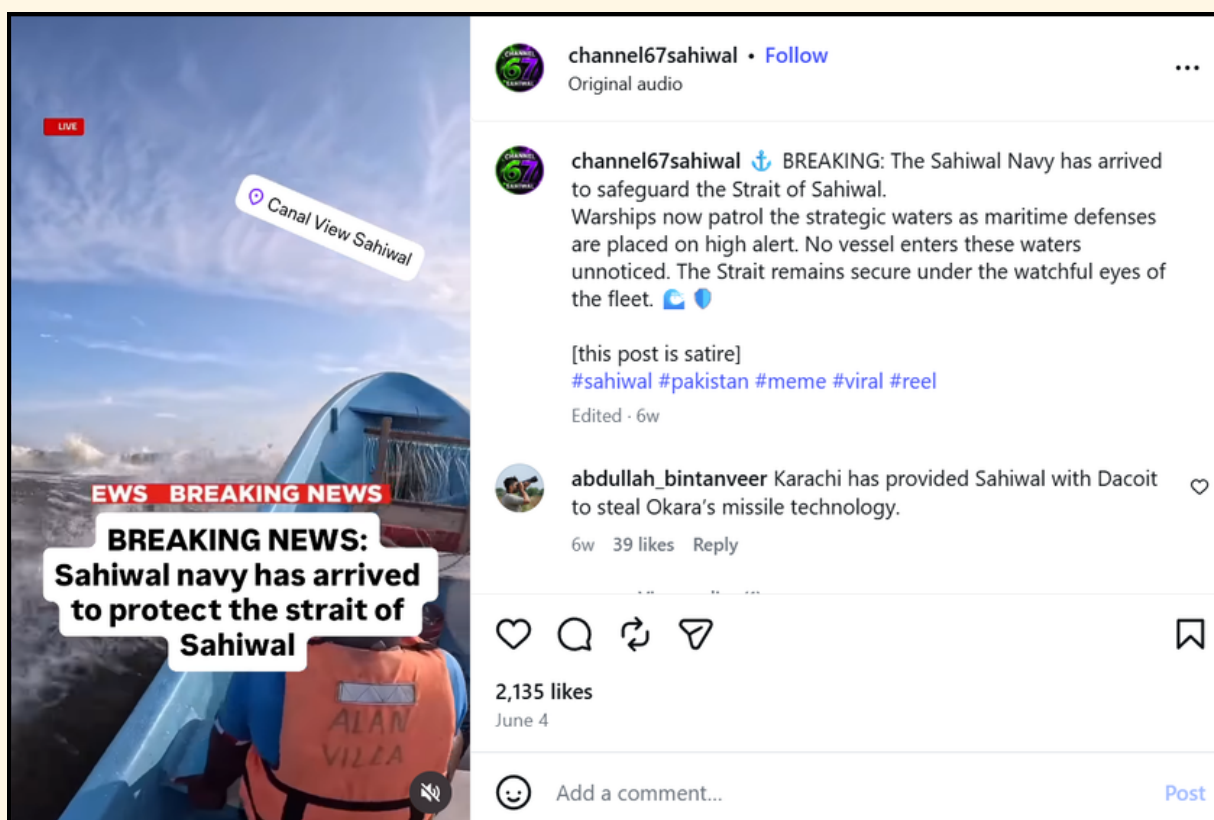
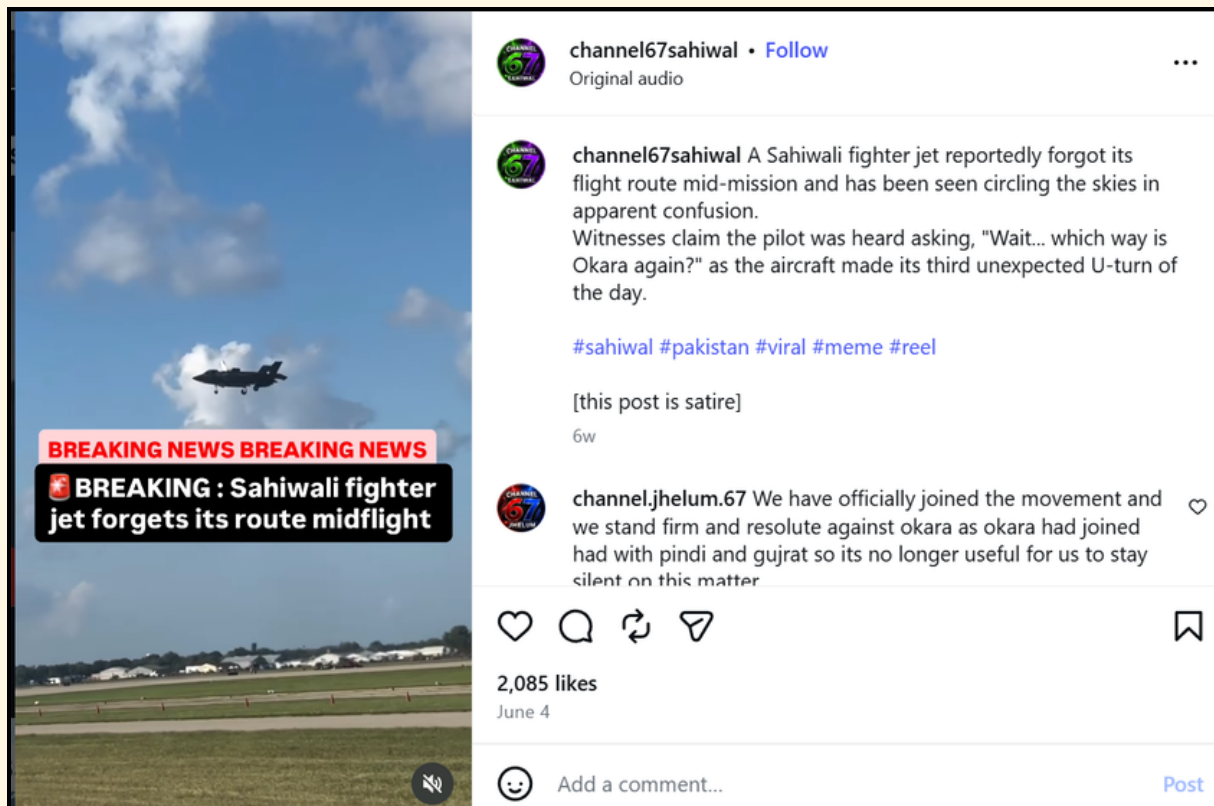
Sahiwal

N-5

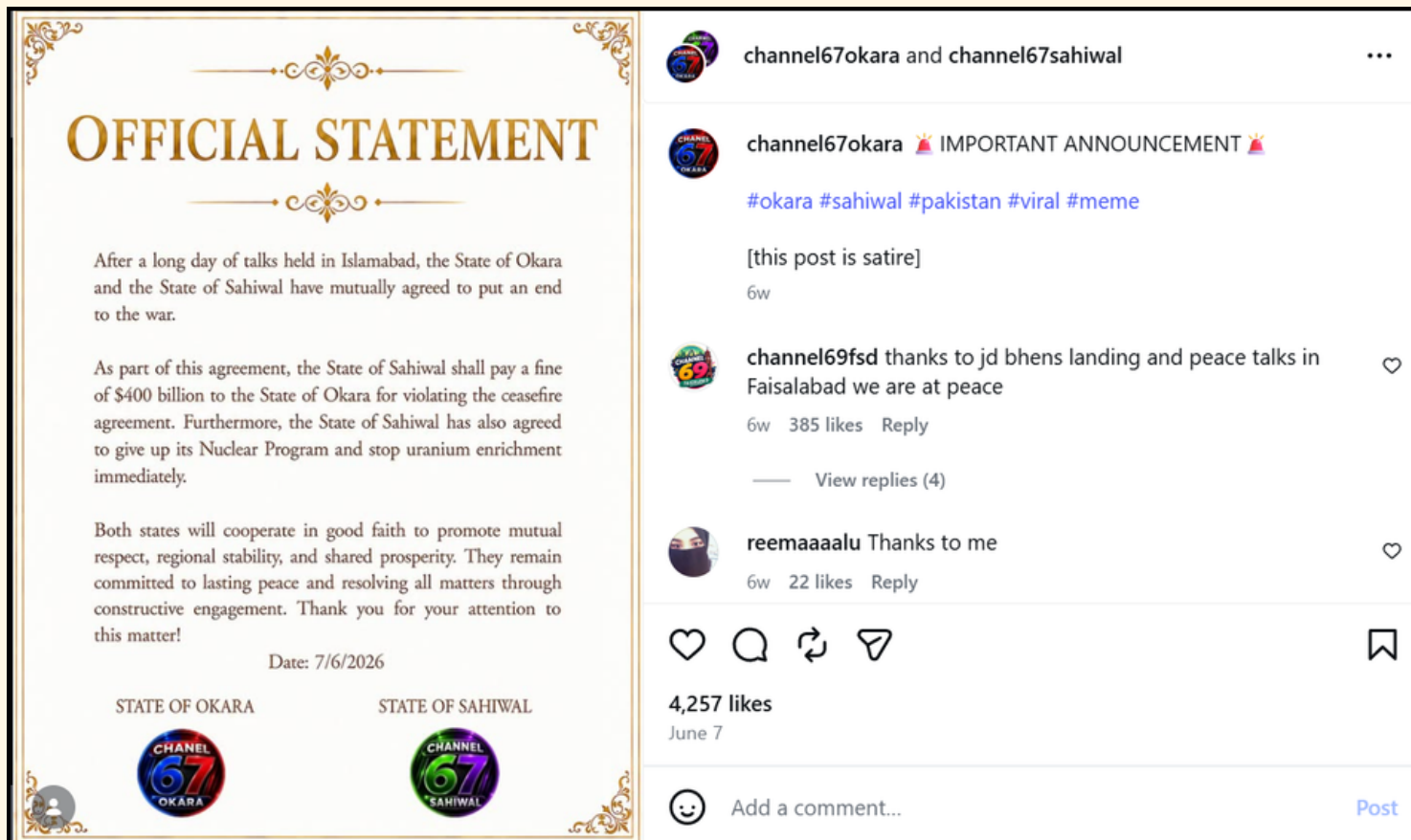
In early June, social media encountered a meme war between two cities in Punjab, Pakistan: Okara and Sahiwal. What initially emerged as a meme exchanger, quickly turned into a nationwide alliance. The incident revealed the potential of a generation who can create a massive impact on nations through social media platforms by shedding light on their creative capabilities along with the pressing need for digital literacy. This pseudo-rivalry of two cities created a fictional battlefield where fake military updates, AI driven war content, alliances and breaking news style headlines were widespread. The swift popularity gain turned into legitimate news for a fraction who were unaware of this meme situation and as it propagated, an urgent question presented itself: where should a line be drawn between satire and misinformation?

The meme war presented collaborative conduct, algorithmic amplification and increasingly authentic artificial content, making digital literacy a necessity of today's world. This short piece will delve how it is disseminated, resonated and transformed into its present form. The meme originated as a fictional narrative of rivalry between Sahiwal Federation and Republic of Okara, and which got accelerated when everyone started jumping on the bandwagon online.

Before getting into what this all means, it helps to look at what the "war" actually looked like on people's screens. In no time, an online joke turned into an engineered reality aided by the innovative capacity of the people. Instagram pages named, channel67okara and channel67sahiwal became the source of persistent updates of bombing, munition, alliances and diplomatic negotiations. There were breaking news style graphics, AI made images of jets and missiles, and captions written like military press releases.



One of the most talked about details was the arrest of Wing Commander Chahat Fateh Ali Khan, shown being taken into custody by Okara's forces. Other cities picked sides too. Lahore and Peshawar backed Sahiwal, while Karachi and Rahim Yar Khan backed Okara. It all ended with a peace deal in Islamabad, where Sahiwal agreed to pay Okara \$400 billion. War, retaliation, missiles and airstrikes – nothing was real, but millions of likes, reports, reshares and comments were.



It reinforces participatory culture as elucidated by [Henry Jenkins](#), which refers to how consumers start taking part in the production of content, shifting their role to active participant from passive viewer. It can be witnessed in real war scenarios, for instance, during the India-Pakistan conflict where the public from both sides took part in memes.

The reason this meme war spread so fast was not just humour. Algorithms on Instagram, X and Facebook are built to reward engagement, not accuracy. The most dramatic posts: an airstrike clip, a captured commander, a city alliance announcement, got pushed far beyond the pages that started the joke, often with no sign left that it was satire. [Dunya Digital](#) covered the incident almost like a real situation report, tracking how the war was getting along and how it ended with Sahiwal agreeing to shut down its "nuclear programme." The detail was specific enough that someone reading it with no context could easily mistake it for real news. A decade ago, staging a convincing battlefield scene would have needed real money and real equipment. Today, generative AI

has made this kind of scene easy to fake, and these tools are becoming easier and easier to access, often with no proper restrictions or regulations in place to control how they get used. [Dawn Images'](#) coverage of the war captured this well, following how it grew from one missile clip into full claims of air supremacy and entire alliance systems.



What came out of this was not misinformation in the usual sense of someone lying on purpose. It was more like a story that thousands of people built together, one post at a time, without anyone planning to trick anyone. But that is exactly what makes it worth paying attention to. It shows how easily a big, believable false situation can now be built up from scratch by ordinary people, using emerging technologies that are becoming easier and easier to access, without any proper restrictions or regulations in place. And that raises a real question about who is responsible when things go

wrong, the platforms that push the most dramatic version of any story, the people who post a joke with no idea how far it will travel, or the viewers who see it with zero context and have no way of knowing where it started.

It also reiterates the need for digital literacy – one that goes beyond simply knowing how to use technology and software. It should involve teaching people how to spot fake news in the first place, understand what AI generated content looks like, and recognize the real risks that images and videos like this can pose once they start spreading, especially when they look convincing. This matters even more in Pakistan, where digital literacy levels are still low, and even lower among women. People need real, accessible ways to learn how to spot satire, verify unfamiliar posts, and pause before reacting to something just because it looks real.

This is not something users should have to handle alone. [UNESCO's guidance on media and information literacy](#) in the age of generative AI says user awareness needs to go hand in hand with platform accountability and proper regulation, not replace it. Educators, journalists, platforms and fact checking groups like Geo Fact Check all have a part to play here, and so do digital rights groups like the [Digital Rights Foundation](#), who have been raising awareness on how media literacy needs to catch up with how fast fake content can be made and spread across Pakistan's online spaces.

It is also worth thinking about where this could go next. The Okara-Sahawal meme war was harmless fun, but it shows exactly how easy it is now to build a convincing fake version of events using AI. That same skill set does not stay harmless when it is pointed at something real. During actual conflict, unrest, or disaster, whether

political, climate related, or social, the same kind of AI generated visuals and fake breaking news style posts can be used to spread real misinformation, not just jokes. During the 2025 India-Pakistan tensions, which Dawn's own coverage referenced as a precedent for this meme war, fake claims about shot down aircraft spread online and were treated as fact by some. In the Russia-Ukraine war, memes and doctored images have been used as an actual tool of information warfare, shaping how people see the conflict on both sides. Similarly in 2026, [CNN reported on an AI meme war between the US and Iran](#), where both sides used AI generated content to mock and pressure each other during real tensions. The line between a joke and a weapon is thinner than it looks.



None of this means the humor itself was the problem. The Okara-Sahiwal meme war was a genuine creative piece of storytelling. The real challenge is learning to tell the difference between content that is just for laughs and content that is quietly shaping what people believe, especially when both can look exactly the same. Digital literacy now means understanding not just whether something is true, but how it was made, why it spreads, and what missing context could change everything about it.

Okara and Sahiwal are just the latest, and probably not the last, example of this becoming a global pattern rather than a local one. That is exactly why it deserves a real conversation, not just a laugh and a scroll. Participatory culture, algorithmic amplification and increasingly convincing AI generated content are together reshaping how information gets created and consumed, often faster than we can keep up with. This meme war showed how humor can bring online communities together and give ordinary people a way to be creative. But as AI tools that create this kind of content become easier to use, the gap between a harmless joke and a believable lie keeps shrinking.

Maybe the real lesson from the Okara-Sahiwal meme war is not to stop making jokes online, but to get into the habit of checking things before believing them, no matter how real they look, and to take digital literacy seriously in a world where anyone can build a convincing fake reality in a few clicks.



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