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Abstract

Extremist narratives construct a morally superior in-group threatened by a dangerous out-group, legitimizing defensive or hostile actions while dismissing opposing viewpoints. These narratives are also observable in internet humour, where memes take on a special protragonism. This article examines how the "Virgin vs. Chad" meme format, as an archetypal representation of the in-group and the out-group, operates as a multimodal vehicle for ideological expression within far-right digital cultures, with a focus on the Spanish case. The analysis is based on a dataset of seventeen memes collected from the platform X as part of the European HORIZON project ARENAS. Using a three-layered analytical framework—narrative ideology, semiotic-linguistic grammar, and humour dynamics—the study explores how political antagonisms are constructed, visualized, and affectively encoded through this meme format.The findings show that the meme format performs symbolic compression by staging binary oppositions between in-group and out-group identities, typically valorising figures associated with nationalism, masculinity, and epistemic certainty, while delegitimizing those aligned with progressivism, pluralism, or emotional expressiveness. These meanings are stabilized through repeated visual and typographic conventions, including character archetypes, split-panel layouts, and indexical stylization. Humour operates not as a peripheral element but as a core logic: it licenses aggression, disciplines ambiguity, and facilitates affective alignment through irony, reversal, and ridicule.By integrating insights from humour theory, narrative framing, and multimodal discourse analysis, this article demonstrates how memes function as affective infrastructures—mechanisms through which ideological content is rendered emotionally resonant and socially permissible. It contributes to scholarship on digital extremism and narrative studies by offering a methodological model for analysing how humour and visual stylization regulate stance, identity, and belonging in online political ecologies.

Keywords: internet humor; memes; multimodal discourse; identity construction; interpersonal communication; extremist narratives

1. Introduction

Humour plays a significant role in shaping interpersonal dynamics in digital environments, where social positioning is continuously negotiated. It contributes to relational practices by reinforcing group belonging, modulating proximity between users, and enabling the indirect expression of beliefs through irony and ambiguity (Attardo, 2024b). In online subcultures, meme-based humour operates as a communicative strategy that aligns affect and marks group identity through contrast with perceived outsiders (Das, 2023; McSwiney et al., 2021).

In far-right digital spaces, humour facilitates the circulation of political ideas while concealing them beneath affective appeal and plausible deniability (Aladro Vico & Requeijo Rey, 2023; Fielitz & Ahmed, 2021). Humour stylizes ideological content in resonant and simplified forms, broadening its reach while deflecting critique (De Keulenaar, 2023; Schmid et al., 2024; Topinka, 2018). It thus acts

simultaneously as signal and shield—expressing affiliation while managing reputational risk (Postigo-Fuentes, 2025).

Memes are central to this process. As multimodal artifacts, they combine visual and textual elements to perform moral evaluations and structure oppositional identities (Sun et al., 2025; Zannettou et al., 2018). Their humour often depends on subcultural literacies that reinforce insider status and gatekeep ideological belonging. In extremist digital cultures, this humour enables inclusion, enforces exclusion, and reframes ideological discourse through ironic detachment (Attardo, 2024a; McSwiney et al., 2021).

This article analyses a meme format that exemplifies these dynamics: the "Virgin vs. Chad" binary. Initially conceived as satire of masculinity and social performance, the format has circulated across diverse online contexts. While not exclusive to far-right discourse, it has been repeatedly appropriated as a vehicle for contrastive archetypes that express normative and moral judgments. This study focuses on its function within far-right meme ecologies, where Virgin and Chad do not merely appear as humorous figures, but as symbolic positions that encode hierarchies of value and ideological stance (Postigo-Fuentes, 2024; Sun et al., 2025).

The analysis approaches the "Virgin vs. Chad" meme as both a narrative structure and a relational index. It draws on theories of extremist narratives (Postigo Fuentes et al., 2024; Postigo-Fuentes et al., In Press), humour (Attardo, 2024a), multimodal discourse (Kress & Leeuwen, 2001), and conceptual framing (Laclau, 2005; Lakoff, 2014) to examine how this format organizes ideological distinctions and facilitates social alignment. Using Spanish-language meme ecologies as a case study, the article explores how archetypal figures like Chad are stabilized and mobilized to perform ideological, affective, and identity-related work.

To do so, it proposes a three-layered analytical framework. The first layer focuses on the narrative structure of ideological binaries; the second, on the semiotic and linguistic features that stabilize these contrasts; and the third, on the humour mechanisms that encode affective and epistemic stance. Accordingly, the three layers create a prism from which to understand the construction of identity and the relationship between in-group and out-group through the "Virgin vs Chad" meme format.

1.1. Humour and Narrative as Relational Structures

Extremist narratives are not transmitted exclusively through explicit ideological claims or actors. Instead, they often emerge through the repeated framing of antagonistic relations between morally charged insider and outsider groups (Berger, 2018; Glazzard, 2017). Such narratives can therefore emerge in any discourse. Their appearance in different types of discourses at the same time can lead to their legitimisation. Through the processes of *memiosis* and viralisation (Attardo, 2024; Osterroth, 2019), memes are particularly suited to this process. They also rely on symbolic compression, repetition, and affective cues to represent opposition in stylized, easily recognisable terms.

Extremist narratives tend to follow a recurring structure (Postigo Fuentes et al., 2024): they define an in-group presented as morally legitimate—often portrayed as vulnerable or under threat—and contrast it with an out-group positioned as dangerous or deficient. This binary is typically accompanied by a diagnosis of the out-group's harmful influence, a stance toward that perceived harm, and a proposed response, which may range from distancing and exclusion to more aggressive forms of resolution.

Humour contributes directly to the operation of this structure. It enables users to signal stance and affiliation without overt political expression. Through shared cues and evaluative contrast—what is laughed at, who is mocked, and how recognition is managed—humour shapes alignment. In the context of extremist narratives, it functions as an indexical resource for reinforcing group boundaries and authorizing exclusion, particularly when mediated through irony or exaggeration (McSwiney & Sengul, 2024; Topinka, 2018). It offers a mode of communication that is affectively charged and socially consequential, even when framed as playful or unserious.

The "Virgin vs. Chad" format reflects these dynamics. It stages two figures—Virgin and Chad—as contrasting embodiments of conduct, disposition, and social value. Virgin is often rendered as anxious, verbose, and deferential; Chad as composed, affectively restrained, and assertive. These portrayals do not only signify personality types—they function as compressed moral positions. The contrast is not arbitrary, but patterned through stable cues that align with broader evaluations of legitimacy, competence, and authenticity. In some contexts, these figures acquire more explicit ideological associations: Chad may be coded as a nationalist or traditionalist, while Virgin may be linked to progressive or pluralist positions.

This structure justifies the first layer of analysis in the article. Understanding the ideological work of the meme requires attention to how it constructs oppositional roles, frames legitimacy, and produces alignment. Before turning to questions of form or affect, it is necessary to examine how narrative contrast shapes the moral and relational dimensions of the meme's meaning.

1.2. Meme Grammar and the Semiotic Constraints of Archetypes

Memes are the most frequently tracked narrative units in political communication research in social media (Schmid et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2025; Zannettou et al., 2018), due to their high visibility and circulation via remix, aesthetic transformation, and recontextualization. Memes function as multimodal texts shaped by participatory remix (Milner, 2016; Shifman, 2013). Their recognizability relies on compositional conventions—such as visual grammar (Kress & Leeuwen, 2001) and intertextual reference—that organize meaning across visual and textual elements. In this context, the "Virgin vs. Chad" format establishes contrastive relations through recurring features: posture, gaze, spatial positioning, and typographic voice. These cues invite attitudinal interpretation and guide evaluations of behaviour, affect, and social positioning.

"Chad" and "Virgin" function as condensed archetypes composed of visual, gestural, and textual features. As mentioned above, Chad, originally circulated as a parody of hypermasculine self-assurance, has undergone a process of enregisterment (Agha, 2024), accruing relatively stable indexical links to dominance, pride, and controlled expression. This process is shaped by viralisation and, above all, *memeiosis* (Attardo, 2024a; Osterroth, 2019), through which meaning is fixed across iterations while allowing for contextual variation.

Precisely this adaptation to the variation of the context implies that there is a process of semiotisation (Kress & Leeuwen, 2001), i.e. the acquisition of new meanings. In Spanish-language far-right meme ecologies, Chad is often framed as the *Verdadero Español*—the True Spaniard—positioned against *la Anti-España* (Forti, 2024). This structure draws on historical binaries, reframed through meme aesthetics. Virgin may be associated with technocracy, cosmopolitanism, or perceived political disloyalty, while Chad absorbs markers of conviction, national identity, and affective clarity.

Although adaptable, these figures are constrained in how they signify. Chad may index confidence, assertiveness, or affiliation with nationalist or traditionalist positions, but not traits such as hesitation or emotional openness. These constraints serve a communicative function: they stabilize the figure as a marker of certainty and coherence (Postigo-Fuentes, 2025). Virgin, by contrast, is characterized through visual and textual cues associated with insecurity, excess, or ideological deviation. These associations vary but often align with progressive or pluralist figures, depending on the interpretive setting.

The circulation of these archetypes is shaped by repetition, but also by platform dynamics. Platforms such as TikTok or Instagram tend to favour stylistic coherence and emotionally charged content, embedding what Zulli & Zulli (2022) term "memetic logic" into their recommendation systems. In this context, Chang et al. (2024) describe the process of generative memesis, in which stylistic repetition plays an increasing role in shaping meaning. As a result, certain visual and affective patterns acquire prominence independent of authorship or explicit intention.

This justifies the second analytical layer of the study: the semiotic and linguistic grammar of the meme. By attending to how archetypes are constructed, constrained, and circulated through formal

features and platform affordances, it becomes possible to analyse how contrastive positions are made interpretable, repeatable, and available for ideological uptake.

1.3. Humour as Ideological Calibration in Meme Discourse

Humour functions as a mechanism for encoding stance and regulating interpretive boundaries. It enables users to express evaluative positions without direct assertion, often relying on contrast, exaggeration, or irony to signal alignment. Within these conditions, humour contributes to how alignment is signalled and received. Schmid et al. (2024) observe that memes combining humour with ideological framing tend to achieve broader circulation.

In the context of extremist narratives, these functions are particularly relevant. Humour facilitates engagement while reducing interpretive commitment, making it a strategic resource for positioning content within contested discursive spaces (Godioli et al., 2025). Also, it reduces the perceived seriousness of a message while maintaining its evaluative force, facilitating circulation and lowering reputational risk. This makes it a key resource for establishing group cohesion, delegitimizing outsiders, and managing ambiguity in politically sensitive content (Fielitz & Ahmed, 2021; Schwarzenegger & Wagner, 2018).

The "Virgin vs. Chad" meme relies on humour as a structural component. Its format consistently stages contrastive figures that embody competing styles of behaviour and self-presentation. These contrasts—rendered through posture, gesture, textual density, and composition—produce a stance-taking effect. Users are invited to recognise which side is framed as desirable or contemptible, often without explicit ideological references. The meme's humour is not incidental; it is what enables the figures to become legible as social and moral types.

To account for these dynamics, the third analytical layer draws on the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) (Attardo, 2024a), adapted for multimodal analysis. The GTVH proposes that humour operates through six interrelated dimensions: script opposition, logical mechanism, situation, target, narrative strategy, and language. In the "Virgin vs. Chad" format, oppositions are established through the spatial and visual organisation of characters. Script oppositions—such as strength versus weakness or detachment versus emotionality—are visually encoded in posture, expression, and design. The logical mechanism often involves contrast or incongruity between figures, while the situation is represented as a stylized or archetypal interaction. These compressed scenarios rely on cultural fluency for interpretation and invite rapid stance recognition.

Targets are marked through visual and textual cues that index difference, often by exaggerating certain traits. This targeting plays a central role in delineating in-group and out-group positions, which is consistent with the boundary-defining logic of extremist discourse. Narrative strategy is typically minimal, often involving a two-part structure that frames one figure as initiating speech or action and the other as embodying resolution. Language is rendered through typography and tone, which function indexically: Chad's text is brief and assertive; Virgin's is often dense or stylised to evoke disalignment.

These elements do not simply produce humour; they shape how content is interpreted, by whom, and under what affective conditions. In this format, humour contributes to the stabilization of archetypes, the framing of opposition, and the affective appeal of ideological stances. Analysing these humour mechanisms is therefore essential to understanding how ideological messages circulate in meme ecologies and how they rely on stylistic, not just propositional, cues for their meaning.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Data Collection

This study draws on a curated subset of memes collected as part of the European Horizon ARENAS project. The dataset comprises 1,225 Spanish-language X Posts published between May 15 and August 5, 2024. Posts were manually coded into four categories: "humor," "potential memes," "potential Chads/Virgins," and "none." From this corpus, seventeen memes that explicitly employed the "Virgin vs. Chad" template were selected for close analysis.

Although the original research design included material from both Spain and Italy, the Italian dataset yielded only one instance of the meme format. Due to its isolated occurrence and limited discursive comparability, it was excluded from the final analysis. The selected dataset does not aim to represent the entirety of far-right meme discourse, but instead enables in-depth, interpretive analysis of a format that has become symbolically dense and ideologically saturated within Spanish meme ecologies.

All data were publicly accessible at the time of collection and analysed in accordance with ethical guidelines for research on open digital content. Personally identifiable information was excluded, and the analysis focused exclusively on symbolic content and communicative patterns. Given the ideologically sensitive nature of the material, the interpretive work was conducted with attention to critical reflexivity and discursive sensitivity.

The research design prioritizes analytical depth over representativeness. Meanings are treated as context-dependent and culturally mediated, shaped by shared literacies, subcultural references, and ideological cues circulating within the communities that produce and engage with these memes. Rather than a limitation, this situatedness is understood as integral to examining the indexical and relational dynamics of meme-based ideological expression.

2.1. Analytical Framework

This study applies a three-layered analytical model to examine how humorous digital outputs can participate in the circulation of extremist narratives. While the framework is potentially applicable to a range of meme formats, it is here applied to the *Virgin vs. Chad* meme, which provides a productive case for analysing identity representation and the construction of in-group/out-group dynamics in far-right digital discourse.

The **first layer** focuses on **narrative structure**. It examines how the meme format constructs oppositional roles between an in-group and an out-group, identifies a problem attributed to the out-group, and implies a stance or solution—whether exclusion, ridicule, or symbolic affirmation. The analysis considers how these narrative elements are embedded in recurring meme templates that organize perceived threats, assign responsibility, and signal moral or ideological positions.

The **second layer** focuses on the **aesthetic and semiotic structure** of the meme. It addresses how compositional features—such as character posture, gaze, spatial layout, typography, and lexis—contribute to the recognizability and uptake of the archetypes. Drawing on theories of multimodal discourse, visual grammar, and enregisterment, the analysis examines how Chad and Virgin function as multimodal linguistic signs. Particular attention is paid to the processes of semiotization and repetition that stabilize their associations, and to the constraints these affordances place on the kinds of roles or values the figures can signify.

The **third layer** addresses the **humour mechanisms** that shape stance and alignment. Drawing on the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), the analysis focuses on features such as script opposition, exaggeration, and narrative compression. These elements are examined across both textual and visual modes to understand how humour structures contrast, manages ambiguity, and cues relational positioning. The analysis considers humour not as secondary but as central to the meme's function in signalling affiliation, managing risk, and modulating interpretation.

This layered approach enables a systematic reading of the memes, linking narrative framing, aesthetic design, and humour dynamics to broader patterns of ideological circulation. The next section presents the results of this analysis following the three-part structure outlined above.

3. Results

3.1. Narrative Structural Layer

Across the dataset, memes consistently deploy binary oppositions to construct symbolic hierarchies, diagnose sociopolitical problems, and imply ideological resolutions. These oppositions function as affectively charged scripts, where "Chad" is positioned as the paradigmatic in-group figure—hypermasculine, nationalist, stoic, and often essentialized through cultural or biological

determinism. By contrast, "Virgin" and related out-group characters are feminized, racialized, emotional, or conspiratorial. These figures are frequently associated with liberal, leftist, globalist, or progressive agendas.

Table 1. Narrative structure.

Title 1	Title 2
In-group Construction	Chad as crusader, Falangist, VOX voter, "based" nationalist, or ascetic sovereign
Out-group Construction	Feminists, LGBTQ+ individuals, Muslims, immigrants, "soyjaks," woke NPCs, Jewish caricatures
Problematizations	Cultural erosion, elite betrayal, demographic decline, religious asymmetry
Variations	Gender ideology, trans rights, taxation, climate politics, sports nationalism, bureaucracy
Ideological Perspective	Far-right authoritarianism with elements of libertarianism, identitarianism, or theocracy
Implied Solutions	Patriarchal restoration, national sovereignty, civilizational confrontation, religious reassertion

These memes construct a worldview in which modernity is framed as decline, inversion, or disruption. The present is depicted through signs of weakness, confusion, and betrayal, while resolution is suggested through archetypes associated with masculine strength, national renewal, or spiritual discipline. Whether articulated through nostalgic imagery (e.g., Crusader Chad) or reframed in ascetic contemporary terms (e.g., Monk Chad), the structure remains consistent: confrontation is valorised over negotiation, and ideological purity is framed as a moral imperative.

In-group construction is achieved through selective incorporation of historical, cultural, and political references. Chad may appear in different forms, such a Christian knight or a nationalist figure. Across these variants, he is consistently characterized by affective restraint, physical control, and unwavering conviction. These traits are not incidental but serve as semiotic cues of sovereign identity—opposed to emotional complexity or interpretive ambiguity.

By contrast, out-group figures are marked by excess, instability, or perceived moral deficiency. Feminists, LGBTQ+ individuals, immigrants, Muslims, and progressives are typically portrayed as verbose, socially over-integrated, or emotionally unregulated. In some cases, caricatured Jewish figures are used to suggest conspiratorial influence, drawing on established antisemitic tropes that frame cultural change as covert manipulation. Even centrists or moderate conservatives may be included among those portrayed as ideologically unreliable or insufficiently committed.

The meme format foregrounds several recurring frames of problematization: cultural decline linked to feminism or progressive values; demographic anxiety tied to immigration and birth rates; perceived betrayal by national elites, often in relation to Israel, the European Union, or multiculturalism; and the erosion of Christian or traditionalist identities. These concerns are presented not as topics for deliberation but as moral threats that require assertive responses.

Solutions, when suggested, tend to emphasize the restoration of patriarchal authority, national unity, and ideological coherence. The format does not accommodate irony, pluralism, or ambiguity. Instead, it privileges assertiveness and moral clarity. The meme's binary structure itself contributes to its ideological function: by reducing complex antagonisms to recognizable visual and narrative contrasts, it reproduces a simplified framework for understanding identity, conflict, and legitimacy.

3.2. Aesthetic Layer

This second analytical layer examines the semiotic and multimodal linguistic structuring of ideological content within the "Virgin vs. Chad" meme format. It distinguishes between **intra-memetic affordances**—those embedded within the meme's compositional design—and **contextual-discursive affordances**, which rely on audience familiarity with ideological, cultural, or memetic

frameworks. Together, these affordances allow the meme to function as a condensed visual ideology: a form that trains recognition, elicits stance, and regulates discursive inclusion.

Table 2. Intra-Memetic Affordances.

Aspects	Recurring Patterns
Character Types	Chad = hypermasculine sovereign; Virgin = verbose, feminized, naïve; Villains = devil Wojak, Jewish caricatures
Layout	Split-panel, timeline sequence, or POV framing to spatialize dichotomies
Speech/Text	Chad: aphorisms or minimal speech; Virgin: verbose, emotional, or slogan-driven
Visual Shorthand	Jawline = strength; tears = ridicule or virtue (context-dependent); rainbow hair = progressive alignment
Meme Grammar	Recurrent templates include "Rebuffed Virgin," "Historical decline → redemption," "Ironic slogan reversal"

These compositional conventions reinforce binary logics through spatial, gestural, and textual contrast. Chad typically occupies the narrative or visual endpoint (e.g., bottom-right panel), anchoring the meme's ideological resolution. His features—defined jawline, upright posture, direct gaze—function as shorthand for embodied sovereignty. His speech is sparse and aphoristic, indexing emotional restraint and epistemic authority. Utterances such as "No." or "Hmm." are not empty; they signify moral detachment and ideological clarity.

In contrast, Virgin and NPC figures are rendered as over-verbalized and affectively unstable. Their speech is dense, slogan-laden, or emotionally exaggerated. These characters frequently cite familiar progressive slogans not as expressions of conviction, but as signs of ideological vacuity. Such utterances operate as *enregistered* speech styles, recognizable to in-group audiences as markers of incoherence or naïveté.

Formally, the memes are designed for rapid legibility. Visual conventions—color-coded hair, symbolic accessories, exaggerated gestures—encode ideological positions with minimal textual effort. This semiotic compression allows for quick interpretation, high reproducibility, and portability across platforms. The meme's visual economy is instrumental to its discursive efficiency.

Table 3. Contextual-Discursive Affordances.

Required Knowledge	Illustrative examples
Ideological Literacy	Familiarity with Wojak variants, "se viene" formats, symbolic use of glowing eyes
Meme Literacy	Historical references, real-time political events (e.g., Trump shooting), symbolic inversions
Intertextual Anchors	Stylized parody of feminist, liberal, or leftist discourse
Speech Enregisterment	Affirmation of ideological insiders; mockery or exclusion of the uninitiated
Normative Gatekeeping	Familiarity with Wojak variants, "se viene" formats, symbolic use of glowing eyes

Contextual-discursive affordances extend the meme's ideological readability beyond its compositional structure. A figure with rainbow-colored hair and teary eyes may be immediately legible to insiders as a caricature of progressive identity—without need for explicit labels. Similarly,

references to the Reconquista, 1492, or crusader iconography evoke nationalist imaginaries, infusing otherwise parodic content with symbolic gravity.

These memes presume high-context interpretive competence. They rely on audiences being conversant not only with meme grammar (e.g., Wojak typologies, NPC templates), but also with broader ideological cues. Terms like "replacement," "se viene," or "based" function as dog whistles, indexing affective and ideological affiliation. In this way, memes act as gatekeeping mechanisms, rewarding semiotic fluency and marginalizing or ridiculing interpretive outsiders.

The format thus performs semiotic disciplining: it organizes how bodies, affects, and utterances are made to signify, and in doing so, distributes legitimacy across political subjectivities. Chad embodies brevity, composure, and visual strength; Virgin is marked by excess, instability, and symbolic noise. These contrastive codings do not merely represent difference—they aestheticize hierarchy.

3.3. Humor Dynamics Layer (GTVH)

This third analytical layer examines how humour operates within the "Virgin vs. Chad" meme format as a structured communicative strategy according to the GTVH (Attardo, 2024a). The analysis approaches humour as a mechanism that supports alignment, encodes contrastive positions, and shapes affective interpretation. Across the dataset, the GTVH framework helps identify recurring dimensions that contribute to the meme's ideological function:

Table 1. Recurrent GTVH Dimensions Across the Dataset.

GTVH Dimension	Application in Memes
Script Opposition	Modernity vs. tradition; weakness vs. strength; relativism vs. faith; discourse vs. action
Logical Mechanism	Irony, reversal, incongruity, and cognitive dissonance (e.g., Chad dancing, "Pasamos")
Situation	Everyday or political contexts reframed as ideological allegories (e.g., voting, transit, sports)
Target	Progressives, feminists, centrists, Muslims, Jews, liberal men, moderate conservatives
Narrative Strategy	Three-phase structure: setup → ideological reversal → affective payoff
Language	Chad: laconic and aphoristic; Virgin/NPCs: verbose, emotional, or slogan-driven

Script oppositions form the central axis of meaning. Contrasts such as traditionalism versus liberal modernity, or stoicism versus emotional instability, are presented as binary evaluations. These oppositions are not framed as open to negotiation, but as categorical distinctions that demand alignment.

Logical mechanisms involve humor devices such as irony, exaggeration, and reversal. These are used to invert or distort commonly recognized political slogans or cultural expressions in ways that cast the out-group as incoherent, performative, or excessive. The humor often relies on producing a sense of dissonance, resolved through an implicit reaffirmation of the in-group's perspective.

Situational elements are frequently drawn from ordinary or familiar settings—public transport, sports, social interactions—which are reframed through ideological lenses. These scenarios acquire symbolic weight by referencing broader cultural or historical narratives, which serve to anchor the meme in a more expansive interpretive frame.

Targeting is consistent across the dataset. The memes do not merely point to out-group figures but frame them through stylized depictions that emphasize instability, verbosity, or aesthetic

nonconformity. The result is not an invitation to debate, but a visual and rhetorical strategy that defines who is outside the bounds of legitimacy.

Narrative strategies typically follow a recognisable rhythm. One figure initiates a claim or action, often framed as misguided or excessive; the other responds, minimally or non-verbally, to reaffirm control or clarity. This structure enables rapid interpretive closure and reinforces the meme's evaluative stance.

Language use reinforces epistemic asymmetry. Chad's text is brief, declarative, and visually consistent. Virgin's is dense, emotionally marked, or parodically stylized. This contrast establishes a communicative hierarchy in which simplicity connotes authenticity, while elaboration is associated with moral or cognitive deviation.

In this context, humor serves to normalize alignment and discredit dissent. It marks acceptable forms of speech and conduct, while ridiculing alternatives as illegitimate or absurd. Rather than introducing ambiguity or playfulness, the humor in these memes supports rigid affective and ideological orientations. It structures how positions are expressed, interpreted, and affiliated with—functioning as a regulatory tool within the meme's communicative system.

4. Discussion

This study examined how the "Virgin vs. Chad" meme format, within Spanish far-right digital environments, provides a recurring structure for articulating symbolic oppositions between identity positions, behavioural traits, and evaluative stances. By applying a three-layered analytical framework—focused on narrative structure, aesthetic form, and humour mechanisms—the analysis identifies how meaning is organized and rendered interpretable within these meme ecologies. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing debates in media and discourse studies about the role of humour, visual structure, and ideological framing in digital communication (Attardo, 2024a; Fielitz & Ahmed, 2021; Shifman, 2013).

At the narrative level, the meme consistently mobilizes symbolic-relational structures (Glazzard, 2017; Postigo Fuentes et al., 2024): moralized oppositions between in-group and out-group figures, a form of problematization associated with the out-group, and the implicit affirmation of in-group values as resolution. These are not presented as arguments but as compressed narrative cues. In the examples examined, the "Chad" character functions as a site of coherence—often marked by nationalist, religious, or traditionalist signifiers—while the "Virgin" figure and related characters are associated with behaviours perceived as excessive, disoriented, or ideologically inconsistent. This type of narrative framing aligns with prior work on extremist storytelling, which shows how identity constructions rely on simplified moral polarities rather than discursive elaboration (Laclau, 2005; Sun et al., 2025).

These narrative roles are formalized through specific aesthetic choices. The second layer of analysis identifies how the meme's design conventions—dual-panel layout, posture contrast, gaze direction, and speech stylization—enable rapid recognition and interpretive uptake. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) argue, visual grammar contributes not only to the readability of multimodal texts but also to their affective and evaluative charge. In this context, the meme's aesthetic economy supports the stabilization of contrasting archetypes. The consistent visual stylization across the dataset suggests a process of enregisterment (Agha, 2024), where certain semiotic traits—minimalist composition, typographic balance, or spatial symmetry—become indexical of ideological stance. While the meme format does not determine ideological interpretation, the surrounding discourse community influences which values and identities these figures are taken to represent (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). This confirms that ideological readability is not embedded in the meme itself but emerges from its contextual uptake.

The third layer examined how mechanisms such as script opposition, incongruity, and reversal operate within this meme format. Humour here is not approached as a universal emotional response, but as a communicative act shaped by cultural knowledge and subcultural familiarity (McSwiney & Sengul, 2024; Vandaele, 2010). What makes the meme interpretable as humorous depends on a shared

understanding of who is being ridiculed, why their position is marked as incoherent or excessive, and which traits are presented as admirable or laughable. Within these digital settings, humour does not neutralize ideological content—it frames it, modulates its delivery, and marks its recognizability.

Taken together, the three layers suggest that the "Virgin vs. Chad" format operates as a regularized structure for enacting identity contrast, affective orientation, and symbolic authority. Rather than transmitting explicit ideological messages, the meme facilitates interpretive patterns that align with far-right discourse. It offers a visual shorthand for expressing relational distinctions and evaluative judgments, shaped by repetition, visual coherence, and humour-driven framing. As De Keulenaar (2023) and Schmid et al. (2024) have argued, such forms of digital humour can play a central role in how ideological preferences are rendered affectively intuitive and socially sharable— especially in contexts where irony, brevity, and aesthetic recognizability are platform-rewarded.

This case study supports broader calls for the integration of humour analysis, multimodal semiotics, and narrative theory in the study of ideological communication online. As this analysis has shown, ideological alignment is often less a matter of explicit declaration than of narrative and aesthetic framing. Memes such as "Virgin vs. Chad" invite interpretation not through argument but through design: they organize attention, prompt identification, and shape relational perception through symbolic structure.

5. Conclusions

This article has examined how the "Virgin vs. Chad" meme format functions as a structured resource for the expression of identity, alignment, and relational positioning in Spanish far-right digital contexts. Through a three-layered framework focused on narrative structure, aesthetic form, and humour dynamics, the study has traced how oppositional identities are constructed and evaluated through multimodal stylization.

Beyond its ideological content, the meme operates as a form of interpersonal communication. It encodes stance, regulates belonging, and structures group boundaries through humour. The analysis shows that humour in this setting is not incidental but central to how users express affiliation, signal distance, and manage interpretive risk. These functions are consistent with core interpersonal processes such as identity display, boundary management, and affective coordination.

By approaching digital humour as a relational device, the study contributes to bridging humour research with interpersonal communication theory. It supports the view that humour can be analysed as a patterned form of stance-taking and identity negotiation—particularly in settings where explicit ideological statements are less socially viable. The "Virgin vs. Chad" meme illustrates how humour shapes both how individuals present themselves and how they recognize or reject others.

This framework may be extended to other humour formats to examine how interpersonal meanings are produced and regulated across contexts. In doing so, the article responds to the call for integrating humour with interpersonal communication research, offering a grounded approach to understanding humour not just as content, but as a social and symbolic practice.

Future work could explore how similar meme formats circulate in other national or linguistic contexts, how meme aesthetics evolve across platforms, or how memetic responses across countries challenge dominant narrative structures. Because of the so-called and enregistered "Chad attitude", it would be interesting to observe whether this framework can be applied to other types of content that are not intentionally humorous. On the other hand, due to the difficulty of regularising the diffusion of extremist narratives, it could be studied whether the use of this dichotomy (Virgin vs. Chad) could be a sign of diffusion or a signal for action in this type of narratives. Finally, the fact that these memes have a fixed and an acquired meaning could help in the future to automatically detect them.

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