

Strategic Communication by the Indian Army: A Thematic Analysis of Press Releases Disbursed by Defence Public Relations (2019–2022)

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1. INTRODUCTION

In modern times when information rules the era, strategic communication has surface as an important tool in correlation of military and national security objectives. The Indian Army operating in a complex geopolitical environment shaped by threats from not-so-friendly neighbours and hybrid warfare tactics, have gradually shifted from a tradition of operational restraint to encompassing conscious narrative-building through communication. This transformation has been led through the Directorate of Public Relations (DPR), Ministry of Defence, which is the organisation for shaping Indian Army's public messaging. From 1999 Kargil War to 2020 Galwan Valley clash, key military operations have revealed a coming together of military actions and narrative strategies. Strategic messaging has not only aimed to reiterate deterrence and provide a filip to public morale but also to resist enemy disinformation, particularly from Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) and China's state-controlled media. In this context, military communication is no longer an ancillary function but a strategic role with domestic and international implications as stated by Hallahan et al.(2007) and Verčič & van Dyke (2015).

1.1 Background and Context

In times of hybrid warfare, where battlefield is not limited to geographical features in the Himalayas or in the Arabian Sea or Bay of Bengal or Indian Ocean, narratives and public perception take frontline roles too and strategic communication becomes a vital component of national security and military planning. Army operations of today are not judged by arms, ammunition and equipment in war zones but also on how effectually they communicate purpose, succeed in creating perception and combat misinformation. Indian Army is gradually using strategic communication as a means of building trust with the public, strengthening national morale, and deterring. In this context, the Directorate of Public Relations (DPR), Ministry of Defence, functions as the source responsible for disseminating official military narratives. This change is

Indian Army has remodelled itself from the 5Ws and 1H form of information dissemination to a more calibrated and thematic approach of news disbursement. This change is evident in the press releases issued by DPR between 2019 and 2022, a period that saw significant developments in the Indian security landscape, including the Balakot airstrikes, the Galwan Valley clash, and the intensification of counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir. These events necessitated a strategic reorientation of military messaging – from ceremonial and humanitarian narratives to those centred around deterrence, operational transparency, and national resilience as per Ministry of Defence, 2022 MoD Annual Review.

Patterns in these releases visible are high-altitude readiness, counter-terrorism operations, bilateral military exercises, indigenous technological development, and troop welfare.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study is both timely and significant, given the rising importance of strategic narratives in global arena and the focussed disbursement of information by neighbouring countries. While Pakistan and China employ aggressive and state-controlled propaganda mechanisms such as ISPR and Global Times, respectively, India has adopted a restrained but increasingly structured approach to defence communication, grounded in factual precision and national interest as per Joshi(2020) and Kavanagh et al.(2019). Despite this, limited academic work has been done on analysing the Indian Army's public communication strategies through official press releases.

This research bridges that gap by conducting a thematic analysis of Indian Army-related DPR releases over four critical years (2019–2022). The researcher wants to know how the Indian Army talks about its doctrine, modernisation drives, operational triumphs, global alliance and plans for a peace loving nation with a strong military power. It also looks at how this kind of communication fits in with India's larger strategic goals such as becoming self sufficient in defence manufacturing, fighting terrorism, working together with other friendly countries and keeping India together and secure. The study aims to add to the academic conversation military oneupmanship and public diplomacy through information warfare by figuring out the language and story choices of these announcements. The results of the study will be important not just for strategic analysts and defence public relations but also for policy makers who work on national security communications.

1.3 Need for the Study

Despite its growing relevance, India's defence communication model has not been thoroughly examined in academic literature. Most global studies focus on U.S. and NATO frameworks, where Public Affairs, Psychological Operations (PsyOps), and Information Operations (IO) are integrated under a strategic communication umbrella as per Van Dyke & Verčič (2015). Nonetheless, India's model, specially through the DPR press releases has not been studied much in terms of themes consistency, tone, narrative framing or how well it fits with strategic aims. As India moves from reactive posturing to proactive engagement in the narrative space, it becomes important to understand how military messaging reflects strategic priorities and helps shape public opinion.

1.4 Research Context

This study analyses press releases issued by Indian Army through the PIB from 2019 to 2022. The timeline of these four years was chosen in the basis of significant military developments in this period like Balakot Airstrikes, Galwan Clash and Covid-19 relief operations. Thematic Analysis of these releases gives provides a lens into the Indian Army's evolving approach towards strategic messaging. These years of the timeline of research also witnessed India's increasing emphasis on defence diplomacy , domestic capacity building and information credibility as a counter to disinformation campaigns by enemies.

1.5 Aim

The aim of this study is to explore how the Indian Army employs strategic communication through official press releases to shape public perception, assert military objectives and respond to external narratives.

1.6 Research Objectives

1.6A. Identifying dominant themes in Indian Army press releases during conflict and peacetime.

1.6B Analysing changes in tone, language, and purpose of communication over the selected four-year period.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Strategic Communication in Military Contexts

Strategic communication, within the framework of defence and security, refers to the planned and purposeful use of communication to advance national objectives, particularly during conflict, crisis, or geopolitical competition. It is not confined to dissemination of information but includes influencing perceptions, managing narratives, and shaping public and international opinion (Hallahan et al., 2007). In military operations, strategic communication integrates psychological operations, public affairs, and information operations to support mission success and influence adversaries, allies, and citizens alike. Rajagopalan, R. (2022) critiques the absence of a strategic communication doctrine.

Modern strategic communication has been significantly shaped by doctrines emerging from the United States and NATO, where military communication is institutionalised within operational commands and supported by media training, crisis planning, and perception shaping tools. Countries such as Russia and China have also developed hybrid communication doctrines that utilise disinformation, state-controlled media, and digital platforms to assert dominance in the information space (Pamment, 2020). In contrast, India's model remains more restrained, characterised by limited integration between the military and civilian communication apparatus, and heavily reliant on the Directorate of Public Relations (DPR) under the Ministry of Defence.

2.2 Indian Defence Communication and Public Messaging

Historically, Indian defence communication has been governed by an ethos of restraint and confidentiality. The military's interactions with the public have largely been routed through official ceremonies, humanitarian missions, and commemorative events. Mukherjee, A. (2021) reviews India's military diplomacy and the role of communication. Raghavan, V. (2020) provides a foundational understanding of military communication practices. However, events like the 1999 Kargil conflict brought a shift in public expectation and military-media engagement. The need to update the public, counter misinformation, and maintain morale pushed the Indian Army to become more accessible through public statements and press briefings (Chari, 2009).

In more recent years, this approach has evolved into deliberate messaging – especially following high-profile events such as the 2016 surgical strikes and the 2019 Balakot airstrikes. These were accompanied by coordinated press releases, media briefings, and use of visual material, all pointing to a maturing understanding of strategic communication (Joshi, 2020). Despite this, India's approach still differs from that of Pakistan's ISPR, which has developed a sophisticated multimedia ecosystem for propaganda and psychological influence, and China's state media, which supports the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in narrative framing domestically and abroad (Ahmed, 2021; Li, 2019).

2.3 Communication Themes: Escalation, Deterrence and Credibility

Key themes in military strategic communication include escalation, deterrence, and credibility. Escalation, in a communication context, refers to the tone and message intensity that signals a nation's willingness to respond or retaliate. Herman Kahn's (1965) "escalation ladder" conceptualises how language and action move conflict along a spectrum – from diplomatic signalling to full-scale military response. Deterrence communication, by contrast, aims to prevent hostile action through assertive messaging about capabilities and consequences. Bose, S. (2018) highlights the lack of coordination between civil and military communication strategies...

Credibility remains the basis of defence communication. In high-stakes scenarios, overstatement can damage trust and under-communication can invite confusion. Sharma, P. (2017) discusses the psychological operations employed by the Army. India's official defence communication has largely emphasised factual reporting and measured language, a trait that distinguishes it from the sensationalist tone often seen in regional adversaries' propaganda (Bhatia, 2022). This credibility-based approach, however, sometimes results in slower responses, especially on social media platforms where speed and virality dominate.

2.4 Perception Management and Media Amplification

Perception management involves the orchestration of communication strategies to shape how stakeholders – domestic or foreign – interpret military actions, intentions, or identity. Singh, T. (2015) focuses on perception management in Northeast India. It includes framing, timing, emotional appeal, and amplification of selected messages. As proposed by Jowett and O'Donnell (2015), strategic narratives use symbolic language, images, and values to frame events and create a favourable interpretive lens. Bhatia, A. (2019) explores counterinsurgency operations and perception management strategies used in Jammu & Kashmir.

In India, perception management is increasingly mediated through social media accounts of the Army, Air Force, Army, and the MoD. Yet these accounts operate with constraints, often reacting to events rather than shaping narratives proactively. Menon, R. (2020). Identifies vulnerabilities in India's response to information warfare. Verma, K. (2021) assesses the Indian Army's use of digital media...Amplification through mainstream media and patriotic influencers on digital platforms has been leveraged to some extent, particularly during national crises such as COVID-19 or natural disasters, where the military's humanitarian role is highlighted (Sharma, 2021).

2.5

The growing body of literature on military strategic communication highlights its evolution from traditional public information dissemination to a more sophisticated narrative-building tool. In the context of the Indian military, particularly the Indian Army, academic research remains limited. This study attempts to fill that gap by focusing on the Directorate of Public Relations (DPR) and its communication strategy through Press Information Bureau (PIB) releases from 2019 to 2022.

The foundational literature spans studies on gatekeeping (Lewin, 1949; White, 1949), agenda-setting (Shaw, Terry, & Minooie, 2015), perception management (Robinson, 2014; Martemucci, 2007), and framing theory (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974; Zhongdang & Kosicki, 1993). These concepts were instrumental in guiding the research approach and analytical lens used in this paper.

Lewin's (1949) theory of gatekeeping, extended by White (1949) and later examined by DeFleur (2017), underscores the importance of identifying not just the gatekeepers but their psychological profiles to influence communication effectively. Heath (2000) and Gans (1979) argue that media narratives are shaped by journalists' reliance on elite institutions, while Sigal (1973) emphasizes the operational necessity of such dependence to avoid costly original research.

Framing theory also offers valuable insight into media influence. Entman (1993) propounds that framing selects certain aspects of reality and makes them more salient to promote specific interpretations. Goffman (1974) describes frames as organising principles of experience that influence how stories are told and perceived. Similarly, Johnson-Cartee (1995) and Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson (1997) detail how frames influence public opinion on political issues.

Language plays a central role in these strategies. Campbell and Pennebaker (2003) explore how linguistic elements—such as alliteration, metaphor, and sentence structure—shape perception. Their study demonstrates that emotional tones, rhetorical devices, and source credibility impact how content is received and understood.

In military contexts, Shaw, Terry, and Minooie (2015) highlight that audiences are active interpreters of media and propose an expanded view of agenda-setting that includes institutional relationships with official, unofficial, and social media channels. This aligns with van Dijk's (1988) assertion that news stories follow a "macrosyntax" of an inverted pyramid structure and Schank & Abelson's (1977) identification of standard news scripting formats (Five Ws and One H). Park (1940) and Cans (1979) view journalism as a knowledge-constructing discipline, influenced by empirical principles of the social sciences.

Zhongdang & Kosicki (1993) further explain that framing devices operate across syntactic, script, thematic, and rhetorical structures. Rhetorical framing, as Gamson and Modigliani (1989) argue, includes metaphors, catchphrases, and visual cues used to shape meaning. Boyd (2007) takes this a step further by examining the interplay between psychological operations (PSYOP), information operations (IO), and public affairs (PA) within the military.

Perception management in the context of conflict is discussed in Brunner's (2013) analysis of U.S. military doctrines and Robinson's (2014) work on narrative coordination to counter insurgent propaganda. Martemucci (2007) argues for more proactive government engagement with media as part of an integrated perception management strategy. Huhtinen & Rantapelkonen (2003) discuss

perception as inherently distorted by the interpretative "middle ground" between parties, suggesting that propaganda may be more effective when directed inward.

Finally, Pascal (2004) underscores the operational importance of effective public affairs management in military missions, advocating for its integration into mission planning. The strategic use of media and communication platforms, thus, becomes vital in shaping both domestic and international perceptions of military operations.

To ensure relevance and coherence, the researcher examined books, journal articles, dissertations, and conference papers related to gatekeeping, perception management, military communication, the Indian Army, the Directorate of Defence Public Relations, and strategic communication within government structures. These sources helped define and operationalize the key terms and guided the research framework. While the scope of the literature could have been broader, it was curated in alignment with the objectives of this study.

2.6 Gap in Research

Existing literature on Indian civil-military-media relations remains sparse and often anecdotal (Sundarji, 2007; Rajagopalan, 2012). And studies on information disbursement by DPR are actually not present. This study contributes to filling that gap by offering an empirical, text-based thematic analysis grounded in communication theory and security studies. It draws from global frameworks of strategic communication (Hallahan et al., 2007) and perception management (Kahn, 1965), while contextualizing them in the Indian setting through the systematic review of press texts disbursed via the DPR.

As Indian Armed Forces become increasingly engaged in public diplomacy and crisis communication, this study provides timely insights into how defence narratives are crafted, circulated, and contested – both on traditional platforms and in digital environments that demand rapid, credible responses.

While there is growing scholarship on strategic communication globally, research focused specifically on Indian defence communication – particularly textual analysis of press releases – remains scarce. Most available work addresses civil-military relations, operational secrecy, or international security perspectives (Sundarji, 2007; Rajagopalan, 2012).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design using thematic analysis to examine strategic communication patterns in official press releases issued by the Directorate of Public Relations (DPR) regarding the Indian Army. The research is exploratory in nature, aiming to interpret textual data and identify recurring themes, linguistic strategies, and narrative framing within the releases. Qualitative methods are appropriate for unpacking meaning, intent, and evolution in institutional messaging over time, especially in defence communication where nuance and tone are often deliberate and symbolic.

Thematic analysis is used as the core analytical tool, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process: familiarisation with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This allows for inductive insight into how strategic objectives are communicated by the Indian Army, both during conflict and peacetime.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This research draws upon a blend of communication and strategic theories to analyse the content and intent of press releases issued by Defence Public Relations in India. At its foundation is the Agenda Setting Theory developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, which Propounds that the media influences what the public perceives as important by determining the prominence and frequency of

topics. This theory is particularly relevant in understanding how defence narratives are structured to guide public attention and shape discourse around national security.

The study also incorporates Gatekeeping Theory, originally proposed by Kurt Lewin, which explores how information is filtered and controlled before reaching the public domain. In the context of defence communication, this involves deliberate selection, omission, and framing of information by institutional actors to serve strategic goals. Additionally, the framework includes elements of Perception Management and Information Warfare, as conceptualised by military doctrine—particularly that of the U.S. Army. These theories examine how narratives are crafted to influence adversary thinking, reinforce national morale, and project strength through psychological and informational operations. Collectively, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens to analyse the objectives, structure, and impact of the Indian military's public messaging strategy.

3.3 Conceptual Framing of DPR Content

The analysis of Defence Public Relations (DPR) content revealed that the narrative frame was the most dominant and effective structure used in the press releases. A notable observation was that many of these narratives were initiated by peacetime activities and operational duties, which served as the central triggers for the stories. While several releases followed a conventional news frame, providing straightforward reporting, others adopted a trend-oriented frame, highlighting broader patterns or developments within the defence sector. The combination of these framing techniques contributed to a more layered understanding of the content, ultimately resulting in an interpretative frame that went beyond factual reporting to offer context, meaning, and deeper insight into the Indian Army's roles and responsibilities.

3.4 Communication Model Underpinning the Study

This research is grounded in the Public Information Model of communication, as proposed by James E. Grunig. The model centres on the dissemination of factual and purposeful information to enhance the reputation and visibility of an organisation. In this framework, communication is primarily one-way, with content being shared consistently with the public through various channels such as press releases, image and video bulletins, and other forms of written or recorded messages. These communications are often crafted for media outlets, with the intent of shaping public perception and building trust. The model does not place significant emphasis on audience feedback, focusing instead on maintaining transparency and promoting the organisation's objectives through controlled, message-driven content. The structure and intent of defence press releases analysed in this study align closely with this model.

3.5 Data Collection

The primary dataset for this study comprises 180+ official press releases issued by the Press Information Bureau (PIB), Ministry of Defence, covering the period from January 2019 to December 2022. These were sourced from annual archives and include announcements related to combat operations, joint military exercises, welfare initiatives, defence procurement, humanitarian missions, and ceremonial events involving the Indian Army.

Each press release was reviewed in full to extract not only overt content but also implicit rhetorical elements such as tone, framing, and strategic silence. The corpus spans significant national security events – including the aftermath of the Balakot airstrikes, the Galwan Valley clash with China, and internal security operations in Jammu & Kashmir – thereby offering a rich ground for contrast between wartime and peacetime communication.

3.6 Data Processing and Thematic Coding

All press releases were transcribed and entered into a qualitative analysis matrix in Microsoft Excel and NVivo software for coding and classification. Initial open coding was performed to tag recurring themes such as “nationalism,” “sacrifice,” “operational readiness,” “humanitarian relief,” “joint diplomacy,” and

“indigenisation.” This was followed by axial coding to link these themes to broader communication goals: escalation, de-escalation, perception management, deterrence, and public reassurance.

3.7 Particular attention was paid to Linguistic Analysis of the releases.

- The tone of the messaging (assertive, restrained, humanitarian, ceremonial),
- The audience targeted (domestic public, international stakeholders, adversaries),
- The timing of release in relation to key operational developments,

This study adopted a qualitative research design, relying primarily on thematic analysis and document analysis as its core methodological tools. The primary dataset consisted of press releases issued by the Directorate of Public Relations (DPR), with each release treated as a distinct recording unit for the purpose of systematic examination. As outlined by Weber (1990), recording units in content analysis can include elements such as words, sentences, paragraphs, themes, or even entire texts. In this research, the structure and length of each DPR release warranted the use of the complete text as the recording unit, with sub-analysis of individual components where required.

The analytical process involved two key techniques. First, a conceptual analysis was undertaken to identify dominant ideas, topics, and message structures embedded within the content. Second, a relational analysis was conducted to explore how these concepts interacted with one another. This relational mapping was approached through two methods: proximity analysis, which studied the frequency and co-occurrence of terms, and cognitive mapping, which visualised the relationships between key themes to understand narrative flow and strategic intent.

A detailed linguistic analysis formed another crucial layer of interpretation. Drawing upon the framework proposed by Campbell and Pennebaker (2003), this component of the study explored the stylistic and rhetorical devices used in the text. This included the identification and interpretation of literary features such as alliteration, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and personification, as well as syntactic structures, vocabulary complexity, and the use of active vs. passive voice. Special attention was given to the positioning and function of pronouns, adjectives, and verbs, alongside tonal elements like emotional resonance, assertiveness, sarcasm, or formality.

Additionally, the credibility and contextual authority of quoted sources were analysed to assess the influence of speaker profiles on message reception. For instance, messages attributed to senior military officers or high-ranking government officials were interpreted differently than those from anonymous or junior sources, as the perceived expertise and stature of a speaker significantly shapes how a message is understood by its audience.

Thematic analysis provides a grounded, systematic way to decode evolving patterns in language, framing, and intent. It allows researchers to track shifts in tone, recurring motifs (e.g., sacrifice, sovereignty, resilience), and differences in narrative during peacetime and conflict. By applying thematic analysis to PIB releases by the DPR for the Indian Army from 2019 to 2022, this study aims to contribute original insights into how India’s military engages in strategic communication and how such narratives shape national consciousness, diplomatic signalling, and public trust.

3.8 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Included in the study were all press releases explicitly referencing the Indian Army, whether related to combat, training, or civil-military relations. Releases solely concerning the Army, Air Force, DRDO, or MoD administrative updates were excluded unless they mentioned integrated tri-service events involving the Army. Duplicate and event-summary releases were also filtered out to ensure thematic clarity.

3.9 Limitations

The study focuses solely on official narratives and does not incorporate media coverage or public response, which may influence how these narratives are received. Furthermore, as the press releases are crafted institutional texts, they may underrepresent internal deliberations or messaging dynamics that

are not meant for public disclosure. Despite this, their value lies in representing the official face of Indian military communication strategy during a significant geopolitical period.

4. DATA COLLECTION

4.1 A purposive sample was taken in the form of disbursed press releases by DPR on the Indian Army.. The period taken into consideration was January 2019 – December 2022. Total number of releases disbursed by PIB during the time period 2019-2022 is given below. Shown in Table 1.

Total Press Releases disbursed by Indian Army in 2019 were 145.

Total No. of Press Releases disbursed by Indian Army in 2020 were 51.

Total No. of Press Releases disbursed in 2021 by Indian Army were 111.

Total No. of Press Releases disbursed in 2022 by Indian Army were 84.

Total No. of Press Releases in the data timeline taken by the researcher for this paper is disburse by Indian Army were 391.

Table 1

Year	Releases on Indian Army by PIB
2019	145
2020	51
2021	111
2022	84
2019-2022	391

5. FINDINGS & DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 An analysis of press releases issued by the Indian Army via the Press Information Bureau (PIB) from 2019 to 2022 reveals a strategic communication pattern that prioritised border activity, operational updates, and technological advancement. The most frequently covered code was activity along international borders, including the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and Line of Control (LoC), with 37 releases, highlighting the Army's sustained engagement in sensitive frontier zones. This was followed by codes such as corps-level activities and arms and ammunition, each receiving coverage in 24 releases, suggesting a strong focus on operational preparedness and inventory management. Closely related were codes such as technology (23), modernisation (19), and equipment (19)—indicative of India's evolving defence capability narrative.

Codes related to security (18), training (18), and operations and warfare (19) were consistently present, underscoring the Army's commitment to readiness and professional excellence. Joint service exercises (17) and bilateral/multilateral drills (16) reflected India's emphasis on interoperability and defence diplomacy, while foreign visits (12) and Indian VIP visits (11) supported this external engagement narrative. The Army also communicated regularly through codes focused on relief operations (15), anti-terror operations (16), and general threat assessments (14), portraying itself as a responsive and adaptive force amid both man-made and natural crises.

In the domain of personnel affairs, codes such as appointments (17) and awards and ceremonies (14) contributed to institutional transparency and morale-building. Meanwhile, recruitment (8) and trials/testing (7) received the least coverage, possibly due to their procedural nature or confidentiality in operational planning. Overall, this distribution of codes points to a well-balanced strategic communication agenda that integrates operational, technological, diplomatic, and human elements of the Army's evolving public posture.

Table 2

Codes	Numbering	Total no. of releases 2019-2022
Appointments	01	17
Visits Indian	02	11
Awards & Ceremonies	03	14
Joint Service Exercises	04	17
Bilateral/Multilateral Exercises	05	16
Visits Foreign	06	12
Arms & Ammunition	07	24
Equipment	08	19
Modernisation	09	19
Technologies	10	23
Procurement	11	14
Training	12	18
Recruitment	13	08
Trials & Testing	14	07
Enemy	15	16
Relief Operations	16	15
Corps Activity	17	24
International Borders, LAC, LoC	18	37
Operations & War	19	19
Threats	20	14
Terrorism	21	16
Security	22	18
Soldier	23	13

5.2 Overview of the Dataset

Between 2019 and 2022 press releases pertaining to the Indian Army were issued by the Press Information Bureau (PIB), under the Ministry of Defence. These covered a range of themes including military operations, joint exercises, welfare initiatives, innovation competitions, ceremonial events, and humanitarian assistance. The releases reflect the Indian Army's multifaceted identity: as a war-

fighting force, a diplomatic instrument, a crisis responder and a symbol of national unity.

The releases were chronologically and thematically analysed using qualitative coding. From the codes deciphered five overarching themes emerged consistently throughout the four-year period: (1) Operational Readiness and Deterrence, (2) Nation-Building and Humanitarianism, (3) Strategic Diplomacy through Exercises, (4) Technological Modernisation and Self-Reliance, and (5) Commemoration and Patriotism. These themes varied in prominence depending on the conflict environment, domestic emergencies, and defence policy shifts.

Table3.

THEMES EMERGING OUT OF THE CODES DECIPHERED
Operational Readiness and Deterrence
Nation-Building and Humanitarianism
Strategic Diplomacy through Exercises
Technological Modernisation and Self-Reliance
Commemoration and Patriotism

5.3 Theme 1: Operational Readiness and Deterrence

A recurring theme across the years was the projection of operational preparedness. Press releases often highlighted troop mobilisation, mountain warfare drills, and high-altitude readiness – particularly in the aftermath of the Galwan Valley clash in 2020. Phrases such as “battlefield dominance,” “combat proven units,” and “enhanced border vigilance” reinforced the Army's messaging of credible deterrence.

During the same period, updates on counter-infiltration and anti-terror operations in Jammu & Kashmir were frequent. While specifics of operations were deliberately sparse, releases were calibrated to assert that the Indian Army was maintaining tactical superiority and was “prepared to respond decisively to any provocation.”

Insight: This tone of assertive restraint reflects an effort to deter adversaries without escalating tensions, relying on subtle narrative cues rather than graphic detail.

5.4 Theme 2: Nation-Building and Humanitarianism

From flood relief operations to pandemic support, the Indian Army was frequently portrayed as a pillar of national resilience. In 2020 and 2021, a significant number of PIB releases focused on the Army's involvement in COVID-19 logistics, quarantine support, and evacuation missions like Operation Namaste.

This messaging served a dual purpose: reinforcing civil-military trust and shaping the Army's image as a protector of the nation, not just from external threats but from internal crises. The tone was empathetic and community-oriented, with emphasis on discipline, sacrifice, and service.

Insight: Such narratives are vital to reinforcing the Army's legitimacy beyond combat roles and building goodwill among citizens during times of uncertainty.

5.5 Theme 3: Strategic Diplomacy through Exercises

Bilateral and multilateral military exercises like Yudh Abhyas, Indra, Shakti, and Surya Kiran were consistently showcased as milestones in India's strategic partnerships. These were often accompanied by joint statements and visuals, with terms like “interoperability,” “mutual trust,” and “combat synergy” repeatedly used.

The years 2021 and 2022 saw heightened emphasis on Indo-Pacific cooperation, especially through exercises with the United States, France, and Australia. These were positioned not only as military drills but as strategic messages of India's alignment with global democracies.

Insight: The Indian Army's participation in joint exercises functions as both a training platform and a messaging tool for strategic intent and global posture.

5.6 Theme 4: Technological Modernisation and Self-Reliance

PIB releases often echoed the broader national narrative of “Atmanirbhar Bharat” (self-reliant India), particularly after 2020. Updates about indigenous systems – like infantry protection gear, surveillance drones, communication systems, and AI-based tools – highlighted the Army's shift towards modernisation.

Events like Sainya Ranakshetram, a hackathon inviting young minds to develop solutions for cyber warfare and secure communications, were used to symbolise innovation and indigenisation. Collaboration with DRDO and startups was frequently mentioned, presenting the Army as forward-thinking and technologically adaptive.

Insight: This theme was aimed at reinforcing confidence in India's domestic defence ecosystem and projecting future readiness.

5.7 Theme 5: Commemoration and Patriotism

Ceremonial events such as Army Day, Vijay Diwas, Kargil Vijay Diwas, and flag-hoisting on strategic heights (like Galwan and Rezang La) were frequently covered. These narratives used emotionally resonant language like “supreme sacrifice,” “unsung heroes,” and “indomitable spirit.”

Tributes to gallantry awardees and war memorial inaugurations were used to bind operational history with contemporary pride. They serve the dual function of honouring the past and reinforcing institutional continuity and nationalistic sentiment.

Insight: Patriotism in these releases is not just rhetorical; it is strategically employed to cement the Army’s role as the moral guardian of the nation.

5.8 Patterns Across Conflict and Peacetime

A comparative mapping revealed that:

During conflict or heightened tension (e.g., post-Galwan, Balakot), the messaging leaned toward assertive deterrence, often accompanied by strong symbolism but low operational detail.

During peacetime or humanitarian crises, the messaging pivoted toward nation-building, public welfare, and professional conduct, thereby enhancing the Army’s societal role.

Thematic fluidity demonstrates the Army’s ability to recalibrate its tone based on context – balancing hard power with soft power, assertion with restraint.

5.9 Linguistic analysis patterns

As per the methodology linguistic analysis was done and here are the findings from the Qualitative Analysis. Figures of Speech, Parts of Speech, Story Trigger, Story Frame, Underlying Message and Headline Content Agreement were identifies and analysed.

Figures of speech were frequently employed in the DPR content to enhance the portrayal of the Indian Army’s strength, stature, and professional excellence. These rhetorical devices added vibrancy and emotional weight to the messaging. Parts of speech, particularly adjectives and adverbs, were purposefully chosen and strategically positioned to emphasise the Indian Army’s achievements and character. The use of well-structured clauses and phrases contributed to clarity, rhythm, and persuasive impact. The context in which each release was written played a pivotal role in shaping the perception of the Army.

Situational framing—such as border deployments, rescue missions, or joint exercises—helped build a powerful narrative around the Army’s capability and relevance. Each press release was anchored by a story trigger, usually an activity or operation undertaken by the Indian Army. This served as the focal point to drive engagement and informational depth. The story frame consistently projected a positive narrative, marked by high informational density on the Army’s roles, responsibilities, and operational reach. The tone reflected strategic intent to inform while reinforcing credibility and public trust.

A noticeable alignment was observed between the headlines and the body content of the releases. For DPR communications related to the Indian Army, the headlines effectively encapsulated the essence of the release, ensuring coherence and reinforcing the intended message

Table 4

Figures of Speech	Uses/Not Used	Agreement with Context
Alliteration	No	NA
Simile	Yes	Yes
Metaphor	Yes	Yes
Hyperbole	Yes	Yes
Voice	Active	Mostly
Tense	Present	Yes
Personification	No	NA

An analysis of the grammatical structure within the press releases reveals a consistent and contextually aligned use of parts of speech. Nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and articles were all found to be appropriately applied in accordance with the thematic and operational context of each release. Particularly, prepositions and conjunctions were used without exception, indicating structural coherence and clarity in sentence construction. The presence of clauses and phrases was also contextually relevant, supporting the flow and logic of the narratives conveyed. However, interjections appeared very infrequently, reflecting the formal and informative tone maintained across these official communications. This careful and deliberate grammatical usage contributes to the authoritative and credible tone of the Indian defence narrative, enhancing both its readability and strategic intent.

Table 5

Parts of Speech	Agreement with context
Nouns	Yes
Pronouns	Yes
Verbs	Yes
Adverbs	Yes
Adjectives	Yes
Prepositions	Always
Conjunctions	Always
Interjections	Very less
Articles	Yes
Clauses	Yes
Phrases	Yes

The press releases related to the Indian Army revealed consistent alignment between structural parameters and linguistic choices. Each release featured a clear story trigger, typically anchored in Army-related events, activities, or operational updates. These triggers effectively set the tone and context, maintaining coherence with the language and purpose of the message. The story frame in most cases was narrative-driven or formatted as a news or trend story, with the language closely supporting the intended message and overall tone. In terms of underlying messages, the content largely conveyed a positive projection of the Indian Army, reinforcing themes of professionalism, strength, and national service. These messages were consistent with both the language used and the information delivered. A strong headline-content agreement was observed across all releases, with headlines written in assertive, positive tones that accurately reflected the substance of the text. Subheadings and headlines maintained a traditional news format and were often used to reinforce the central message, enhancing clarity and engagement. Overall, the communication strategy demonstrated a high level of cohesion between narrative structure, tone, and intended perception.

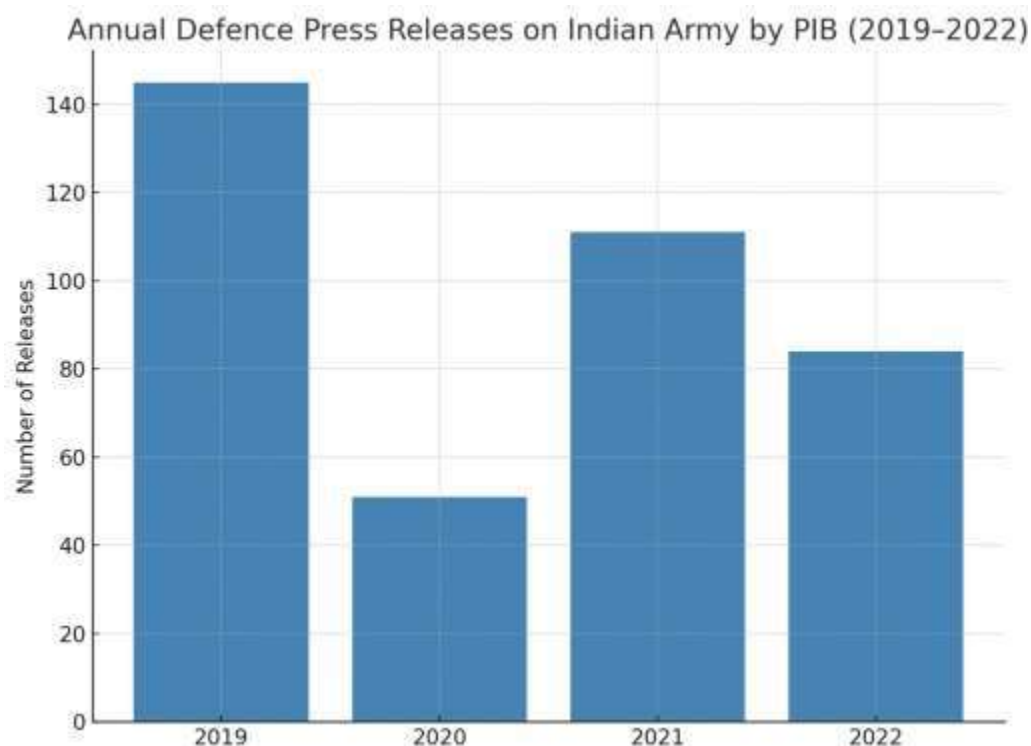
Table 6

Parameters Studied	Presence/Absence	Agreement/Disagreement	Reason
Story Trigger	Present in all releases	Agreement with language	Naval/ICG events, news, roles & activity
Story Frame	Present in all releases	Mostly narrative frames in agreement with language and information	News, trend story and narrative frames
Underlying Message	Mostly the messages were straight & positive	Positive and in agreement with language used and information disbursed	Positive Projection of Indian Army
Headline Content Agreement	All headlines were in agreement with content	Straight, positive and in agreement with the content always in strong language	Headlines and sub-heads were all in the news format & positive in nature

6.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The study showed the disbursement of press releases by Indian Army as a pattern from 2019 to 2022. This was as per the geopolitical framework and the advent of Covid-19 which became a frame in itself. 2019 was prior covid so the maximum number of releases were disbursed in this year. Came Covid-19 and along with it came work from home as a result of national and international lockdowns. So 2020 saw a dip in press releases being distributed . Then 2021 saw a surge again in the disbursement of releases due to an increase in relief activity conducted by Indian Army globally in the form of supplying relief material, medicines and vaccinations to friendly nations. Then 2022 saw a decrease in the releases as per lessening of relief activity by Indian Army.

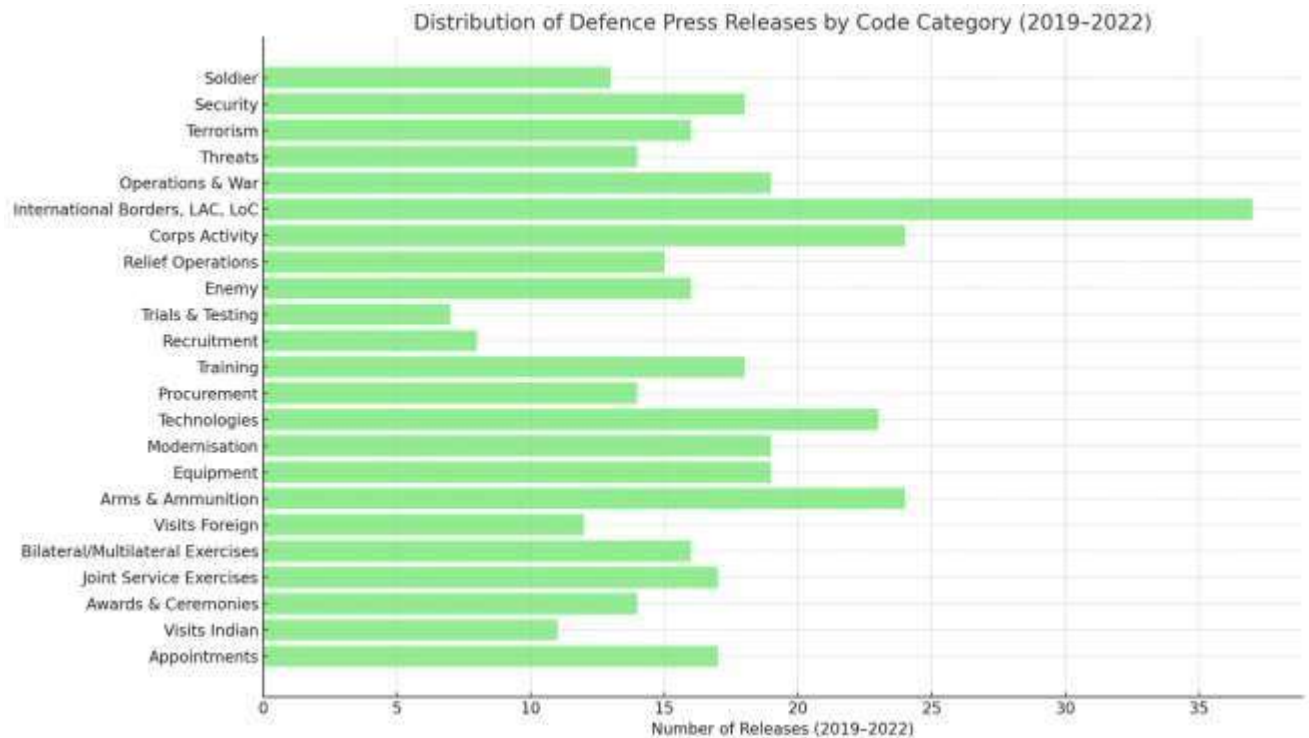
Bar Chart 1



6.1 Interpretation of Codes

The data was put into the software NVivo and the codes which emerged were put into graphic representation to see which of them were present in maximum releases and how .

Bar Chart 2



6.2 Themes emerged from the Codes

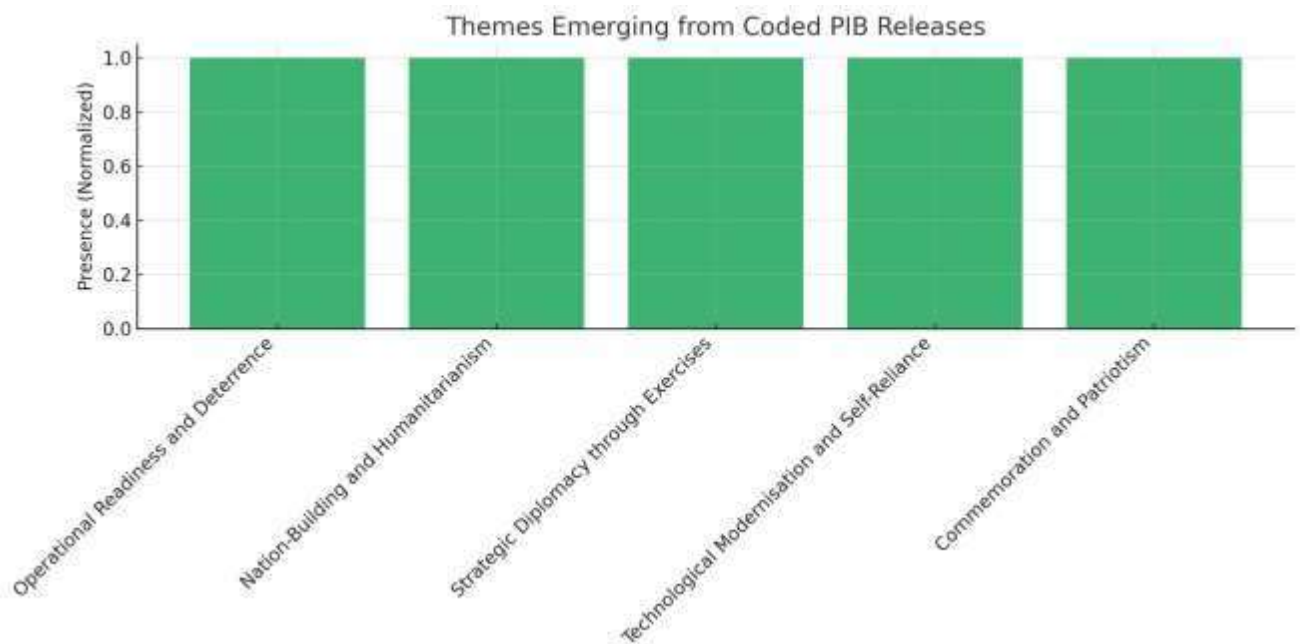
The thematic analysis of PIB press releases related to the Indian Army between 2019 and 2022 reveals a maturing and increasingly deliberate use of strategic communication. While traditionally known for operational reticence, the Indian Army has begun to embrace public messaging as a vital tool in reinforcing deterrence, building public trust, and managing perception during crises.

Each of the five thematic domains – operational readiness, humanitarian outreach, military diplomacy, technological modernisation, and patriotic commemoration – serves a distinct but interconnected strategic purpose. The deliberate framing of language, selective detail disclosure, and consistent tone across these categories point to an underlying doctrine of credibility-driven communication, one that contrasts sharply with the more theatrical or propagandistic approaches employed by some regional adversaries.

For instance, the post-Galwan narratives reflected restraint and institutional unity, whereas post-Balakot communications were assertive yet precise, avoiding operational over-disclosure. This indicates a calibrated approach – signalling strength without inviting escalation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Army's portrayal as a national relief force helped reframe its image from a combat organisation to a national institution of service and reliability.

Equally notable is the use of exercises and ceremonial events to shape soft power – showcasing India's partnerships, values, and historical legacy. These releases not only inform the public but also send a message to allies and adversaries about India's global alignments and defence priorities.

Bar Chart 3



"International Borders, LAC, LoC" is the topic that has been talked about the most, with 37 releases. This shows how important operational preparedness and border security are to the Army, especially with the continued tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and Line of Control (LoC).

The Army's concentration on modernization and self-reliance is seen from the categories "Arms & Ammunition" (24 releases), "Technologies" (23), "Equipment" (19), and "Modernisation" (19). These releases probably have to do with the introduction of new weapons, native equipment, and improvements in military technology.

"Training" (18 releases), "Joint Service Exercises" (17), and "Bilateral/Multilateral Exercises" (16) show that the focus is on being ready through regular training and working with other countries. These kinds of exercises not only improve operational skills, but they also build diplomatic ties.

Operational topics make up most of the dataset, which shows how important it is for the Army to communicate its readiness and strategic plans. On the other hand, ceremonial categories like "Awards & Ceremonies" (14 releases) and "Appointments" (17) are less common, which suggests that the force is more conservative when it comes to internal matters and awards.

"Visits Foreign" (12 releases) and "Visits Indian" (11) demonstrate how the Army is involved in diplomacy. These encounters are very important for building strategic alliances and sharing knowledge, which shows how the Army works outside of the US.

The Army's commitment to nation-building and helping people in need is shown by the 15 "Relief Operations" and 18 "Security" releases. During natural disasters or problems with internal security, these kinds of missions show how the Army plays many different roles in society.

The data shows that there was a balanced approach to communication, with a main focus on military readiness and modernization, but also on diplomatic and humanitarian issues. This plan makes sure that things are clear and helps the public trust the Army's abilities and goals.

Because ceremonial releases don't happen as often, there is a chance to tell more stories of bravery, changes in leadership, and awards. Telling these kinds of stories can raise the spirits of the troops and help them connect with the people on a deeper level.

As more countries work together, the Army can show off its work with other countries even more. Detailed reports of joint exercises, trips abroad, and strategic partnerships help improve India's reputation around the world and show how adaptable and professional the Army is.

In conclusion, the Indian Army's press releases from 2019 to 2022 show that they have a well-thought-out communication plan that focuses on operational openness, modernization, and working with other countries, as well as dealing with their own issues and helping others. The Army may improve its interaction with both domestic and international audiences by continuing to refine and balance these topics.

6.3 Linguistic Analysis of the Data

The linguistic analysis of the Indian Army's strategic communications, as reflected in Tables 4, 5, and 6, reveals a deliberate and structured approach to language use. This approach ensures clarity, authority, and alignment with the intended messaging objectives.

Table 4 : Use of Figures of Speech and Grammatical Features

The analysis indicates selective employment of rhetorical devices: Simile, Metaphor, and Hyperbole: These figures of speech are utilized to draw comparisons, create vivid imagery, and emphasize points, enhancing the persuasive quality of the messages. Alliteration and Personification: Their absence suggests a preference for straightforward language over stylistic embellishments, maintaining the formality expected in military communications. Principle commonly adopted in military writing to convey key information succinctly.

Bar Chart 4

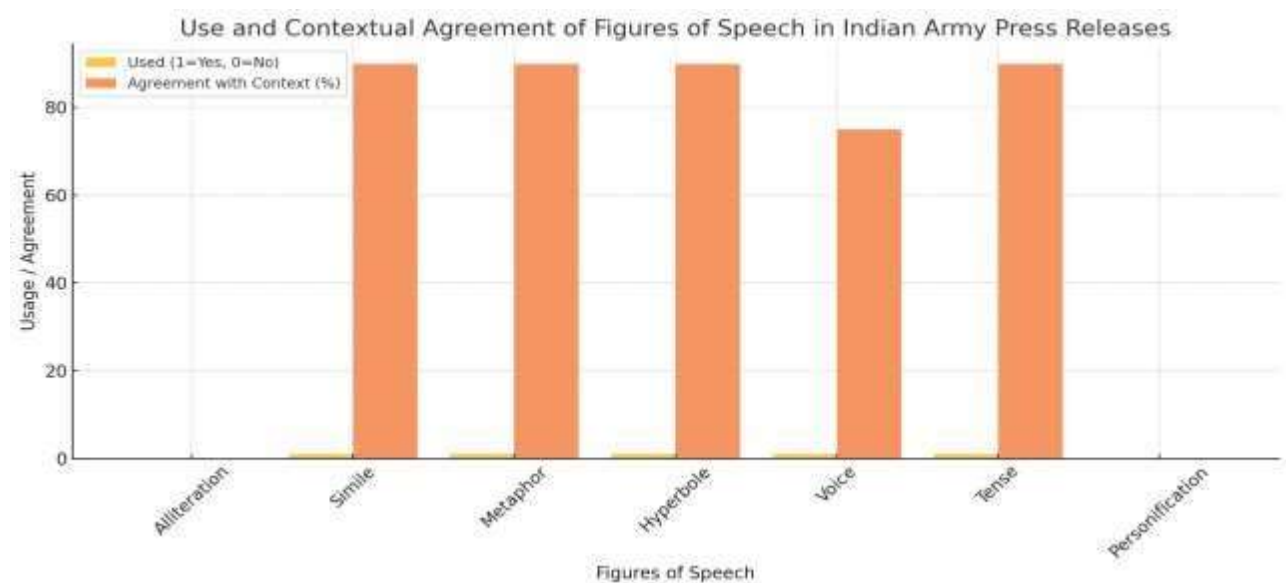


Table 5: Parts of Speech Usage

The grammatical structure within the press releases demonstrates consistent and contextually appropriate use of various parts of speech.

Nouns, Pronouns, Verbs, Adverbs, Adjectives, and Articles: These are employed effectively to convey clear and precise information.

Prepositions and Conjunctions: Their consistent use ensures logical flow and coherence in sentence construction.

Clauses and Phrases: These elements support the complexity and depth of the narratives, facilitating comprehensive communication.

Interjections: The minimal use of interjections aligns with the formal tone of military press releases, avoiding emotional expressions that could detract from the objective presentation of information.

Bar Chart 5

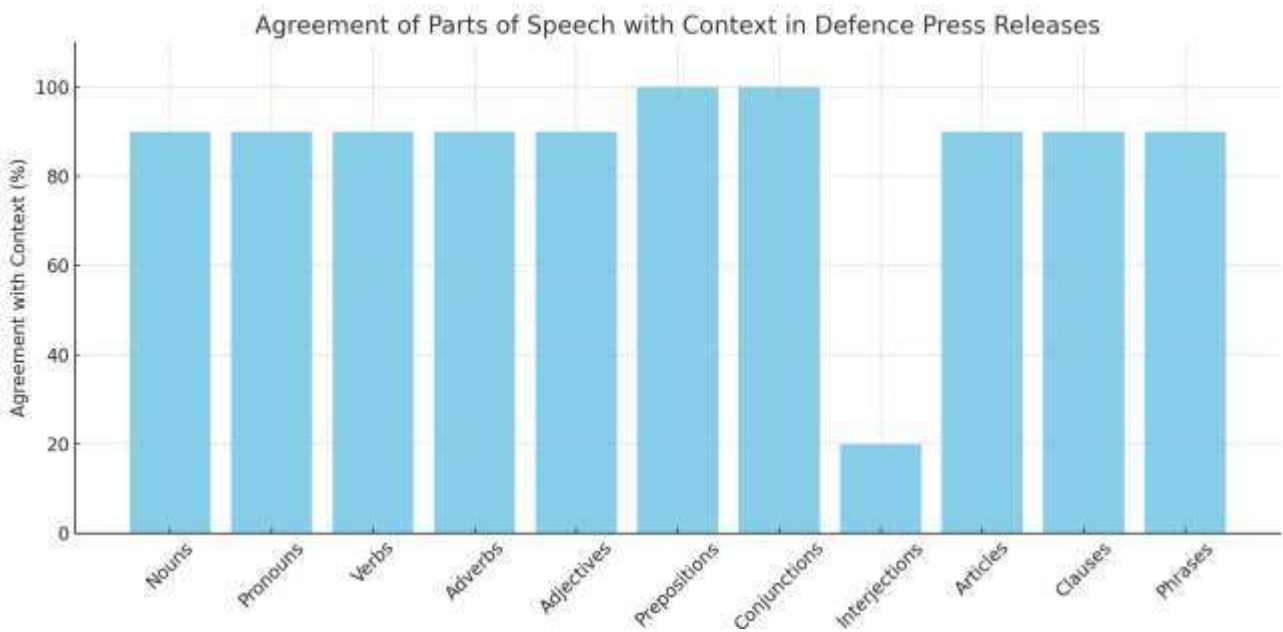


Table 6: Structural Parameters of Communication

The structural elements of the press releases are meticulously crafted to reinforce the intended messaging:

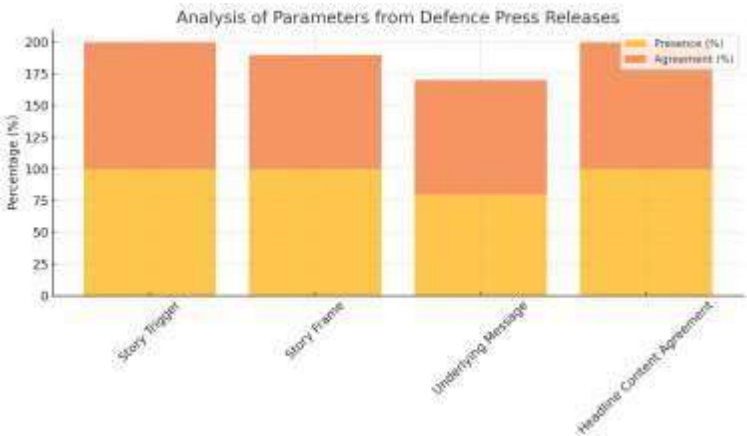
Story Triggers: Each release is anchored in specific events or activities, providing a clear context and purpose.

Story Frames: The use of narrative and news frames facilitates engagement and relatability, presenting information in a familiar format.

Underlying Messages: The content consistently projects a positive image of the Indian Army, emphasizing professionalism, strength, and national service.

Headline-Content Agreement: Headlines are crafted to accurately reflect the content, employing assertive and positive language that aligns with the overall message.

Bar Chart 6



In summary, the Indian Army's strategic communications exhibit a disciplined linguistic approach, characterized by the selective use of rhetorical devices, precise grammatical structures, and coherent narrative frameworks. This methodology ensures that the messages are authoritative, clear, and effectively aligned with the Army's objectives of projecting professionalism and fostering public trust.

6.4 Implications for Strategic Communication

The findings have several implications for India's strategic communication landscape:

Credibility as a Core Asset: The Indian Army's communication style, rooted in restraint and factual consistency, has helped preserve institutional credibility. This credibility becomes especially important in disinformation-heavy environments where adversaries aim to distort facts quickly.

Soft Power through Uniformed Humanitarianism: Messaging during natural disasters and health emergencies shows the Army leveraging its infrastructure and discipline to build social legitimacy – a critical tool in peace-time public diplomacy.

Narrative Balance between Secrecy and Signalling: Press releases walk a tightrope – revealing enough to assure the public and warn adversaries, but not so much as to compromise operational security. This careful modulation is a sign of strategic maturity.

Increasing Narrative Sophistication: The structured use of themes like “Atmanirbhar Bharat,” “joint preparedness,” and “supreme sacrifice” shows that messaging is evolving from descriptive to symbolic and strategic.

6.5 Conclusion

This study set out to examine how the Indian Army, through the Directorate of Public Relations and PIB, employed press releases as instruments of strategic communication between 2019 and 2022. The results affirm that India is slowly transitioning from traditional defence communication rooted in formality and caution, to a model that is more narrative-driven, responsive, and aligned with geopolitical realities.

The thematic diversity, tone modulation, and message clarity across the four-year sample reinforce the Indian Army's evolving role not just as a military force but as a strategic communicator and institution of national identity.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the thematic and contextual findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered to strengthen India's defence communication strategy:

7.1 Institutional Recommendations

Establish a Strategic Communication Division within the Ministry of Defence, staffed with experts in psychology, digital media, linguistics, and security studies, to craft narratives proactively rather than reactively.

Develop Rapid Response Units for digital rebuttal and crisis communication during active conflict or information warfare scenarios.

Train Defence PR Officers in narrative framing, media literacy, and conflict-sensitive communication to improve consistency and effectiveness.

7.2 Narrative Recommendations

Enhance Emotional Resonance in Peacetime Communication by highlighting soldier stories, humanitarian missions, and nation-building efforts in regional languages for wider public engagement.

Counter Adversarial Messaging More Directly using coordinated facts, visual evidence, and credible third-party validations to dispute misinformation, particularly in international media.

Leverage Veterans and Influencers as unofficial communicators – especially during escalation phases – to preserve deniability while amplifying public confidence.

7.3 Outreach and Engagement Recommendations

Expand Social Media Multilingual Strategy to include major Indian languages and engage with local press and civil society for narrative reach beyond metros.

Integrate Communication Plans into Operational Exercises to test and refine PR response models as part of actual drills and simulations.

Foster Civil-Military Media Dialogues through structured workshops with defence correspondents, think tanks, and communication scholars to build mutual understanding and reduce information vacuum.

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9. ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full Form
DPR	Directorate of Public Relations
PIB	Press Information Bureau
MoD	Ministry of Defence
ISPR	Inter-Services Public Relations (Pakistan)
PLA	People's Liberation Army (China)
IO	Information Operations
PsyOps	Psychological Operations
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
ORF	Observer Research Foundation
IDSA	Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses