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## India-Pakistan Conflict on the Global Mental Landscape: Media Geographical Focus

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**Abstract.** Presented the results of a study of the behavior of the global Internet audience in relation to the conflict between India and Pakistan. For the first time in scientific research, the media geographic approach is applied to the analysis of this topic. The objective of the study is to identify semantic morphoscultures associated with the relations between India and Pakistan and determine their place in the global mental landscape. The methodology of the study was based on the theory of rank analysis. The chronological framework of the study covers the period from 2004 to May 2025. The results of the analysis of big data extracted using the Google Trends service showed that the semantic morphosculture associated with Indo-Pakistani relations on the mental landscapes of a number of South Asian countries has become the Kashmir conflict. Correlations are revealed between the media space of the conflict, mediated by the world mass media, and the mental space manifested in the search queries of Internet users in different countries of the world. The results of the analysis of the dynamics of reactions of Internet audiences to conflict processes can become the basis for predicting the behavior of the population in conditions of their escalation and modeling solutions.

**Keywords:** international conflicts, Kashmir conflict, rank analysis, media space of conflict, mental space of conflict, semantic morphosculture

**Conflicts of interest.** The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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## Конфликт Индии и Пакистана на глобальном ментальном ландшафте: медиагеографический фокус

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**Аннотация.** Представлены результаты исследования поведения глобальной интернет-аудитории по отношению к конфликту Индии и Пакистана. Впервые в научных исследованиях медиагеографический подход применяется к анализу данной темы. Задача – выявить смысловые морфоскульптуры, связанные с отношениями Индии и Пакистана, определить их место на глобальном ментальном ландшафте, – решалась при помощи медиагеографического инструментария. Методология базировалась на теории рангового анализа. Хронологические рамки исследования охватывают период с 2004 по май 2025 г. Результаты анализа Big Data, извлеченных при помощи сервиса Google Trends, показали, что смысловой морфоскульптурой, связанной с индо-пакистанскими отношениями, в ментальных ландшафтах целого ряда стран Южной Азии стал кашмирский конфликт. Выявлены корреляции между медийным пространством конфликта, опосредованным мировыми средствами массовой информации, ментальным пространством, проявленным в запросах интернет-пользователей разных стран мира. Результаты анализа динамики реакций интернет-аудиторий на конфликтные процессы могут стать основой для прогнозирования поведения населения в условиях их обострения и моделирования решений.

**Ключевые слова:** международные конфликты, кашмирский конфликт, ранговый анализ, медийное пространство конфликта, ментальное пространство конфликта, смысловая морфоскульптура

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### Introduction

The conflict between India and Pakistan has been going on for almost seven decades, since the partition of British India into two independent states in 1947. The subject of the dispute between the two countries was the territory of the princely state of Kashmir, the status of which was not secured by official border agreements. Over the years, the contradictions between the countries have repeatedly escalated and led to wars and local clashes. The terrorist attack in northern India in April 2025 caused a new wave of conflict, which could lead to catastrophic consequences for all of humanity, since both countries possess nuclear weapons. The world mass

media drew attention to the threat of a full-scale war<sup>1</sup>. The United States advocated de-escalation of tensions in the region<sup>2</sup>; China took the same position. The Russian Foreign Ministry called on both countries to engage in constructive dialogue aimed at a peaceful resolution of the conflict<sup>3</sup>. Russia has consistently advocated for the resolution of disputes between India and Pakistan over the past decades<sup>4</sup> and, according to experts, in the current circumstances, the Russian Federation is the only power capable of acting as a mediator in the peaceful settlement of the Kashmir conflict. BRICS, which includes Russia and China, which advocate de-escalation of tensions in Indo-Pakistani relations, can also play an important role as a peacemaker. Within the BRICS framework, major powers can find a mutually acceptable solution for Pakistan and India more successfully than other international organizations. The Indo-Pakistani conflict affects not only regional but also global processes involving both the countries of the South Asian region and other states that shape the nature of modern international relations. In this context, the task of studying the behavior of global Internet audiences in relation to the conflict between India and Pakistan has become relevant, the implementation of which was aimed at the media geographic study of the mental landscapes of the countries of the world. Media geographic tools make it possible to trace the dynamics of changes in the interests of the global Internet audience and identify the main vectors of their development, which can become the basis for modeling its behavior and influence on the development of conflict processes. Theoretical approaches to the study were based on scientific works in the field of history and current state of relations between India and Pakistan (Zaitsev, 2018; Khrisanova, 2014; Makarevich, 2021; Tankhilevich, 2011; Dikih, 2017; Lazareva et al., 2024); international relations and modern world politics (Asmolov, Babaev, 2024; Lebedeva, 2021); practices of resolving international and regional conflicts (Vershina et al., 2023; Kaveshnikov, 2023); theories of journalism and conflictology (Lynch, Galtung, 2010; Merkle, 2020).

## Methods and Context of the Study

The study was based on media geographic approaches to the analysis of media reality (Couldry, McCarthy, 2004; Falkheimer, Jansson, 2005; Relph, 2000; Yanglyaeva, Yakova, 2018; Yakova, Yanglyaeva, 2019). In modern media

<sup>1</sup> Smirnaya E. (2025, April 30). *The threat of a full-scale war between India and Pakistan was assessed*. Lenta.ru. <https://lenta.ru/news/2025/04/30/voyna/>; Mashal, M., & Raj S. (2025, April 25). *As Tensions Rise with Pakistan, a Moment of truth for India's Military*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/26/world/asia/india-pakistan-military-kashmir-attack.html#>

<sup>2</sup> *U.S. and U.N. Urge De-escalation Between India and Pakistan*. (2025, May 1). The New York Times. Retrieved January 1, 2025, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/01/world/asia/india-pakistan-kashmir-de-escalation.html>

<sup>3</sup> *Russia called on Pakistan and India to exercise restraint and engage in constructive dialogue*. (2025, April 28). RBC. Retrieved April 30, 2025, from <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/680fad-ca9a7947a162a050ca>

<sup>4</sup> *Russia and the Search for a Balance between India and Pakistan*. (2019, March 1). Valdai International Discussion Club. Retrieved April 30, 2025, from <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/rossiya-balans-indiya-pakistan/>

geographic studies, the main categories are space and time, which allow us to determine the scale, boundaries and parameters of information flows (Yakova, 2021). The media and mental spaces of the conflict are studied within the framework of the spatio-temporal coordinate system at different levels (from the micro level of the individual to the macro level of the state and the global world). Media and mental spaces and their mutual influence are the focus of media geographic studies of international conflicts. We define the media space of a conflict as a dynamic communicative environment formed by a set of media texts (news reports, analytical materials, visual content, etc.) that construct, broadcast and interpret a conflict situation in the public sphere. The mental space of a conflict is ideas about the conflict in people's minds, subjective images of territories and events formed under the influence of the media and the cultural and historical stereotypes they broadcast, political narratives, manifested in search queries and user reactions. The media and mental spaces of a conflict are linked by a cyclical dependence: the media construct a reality that influences people's consciousness, and their reactions again fall into the media field. Analysis of Internet queries allows us to see where and how different versions of reality are formed. An effective tool for their differentiated study is offered by the theory of rank analysis (Buletova, Sharkevich, 2016), based on the law of rank distribution. The object of the study is the global mental landscape<sup>5</sup>. The objective of the study is to identify the place of the semantic morphosculpture<sup>6</sup> Kashmir conflict (fully correlated with the content of the conflict between India and Pakistan in the global information space) in the mental landscapes of the countries of the world. The main method was the rank analysis of the spectrum of interests of Internet audiences of countries of the world for queries substantively related to the topic of 'conflict between India and Pakistan'. The study of the global English-speaking Internet audience was conducted using the rank analysis method. The empirical base of the study was made up of big data from the Google Trends service, reflecting the Internet behavior of users in relation to the research topic. The chronological framework of the study covers the period from the beginning of the Google Trends service (2004) to May 2025. The comparison of the mental and media spaces of the conflict between India and Pakistan was carried out on the basis of a content analysis of the world mass media (The Times of India (India), Dawn (Pakistan), Straits Times (Singapore), The Kathmandu Post (Nepal), The Bangladesh Today (Bangladesh), The Island (Sri Lanka), Global New Light of Myanmar (Myanmar), The New York Times (USA), The Times (United Kingdom)<sup>7</sup>) and was

<sup>5</sup> Mental landscape in media geography is a way of thinking, attitude to any socially significant phenomena and processes of residents of a certain area, territory. This is the result of the transformation of the spiritual and material world of a person, social ideology and symbols of the state. The mental landscape acts as a semantic center in the creation of a hierarchy of identity (national, regional, local) and forms territorial identity. (Nikolaichuk, et al., 2018, p. 143).

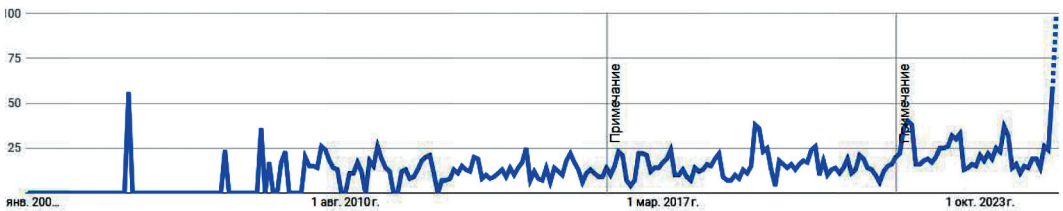
<sup>6</sup> Semantic morphosculptures are specific morphosculptures of mental relief that are related to various local variations in the state and dynamics of public consciousness (Nikolaichuk, et al., 2018, p. 144).

<sup>7</sup> The list of mass media was compiled based on the results of a ranking analysis (by countries occupying the first 7 lines plus the mass media of the USA and United Kingdom).

of a pilot nature (the sample included media texts published during periods of escalation of the Kashmir conflict in August–September 2019 and April–May 2025).

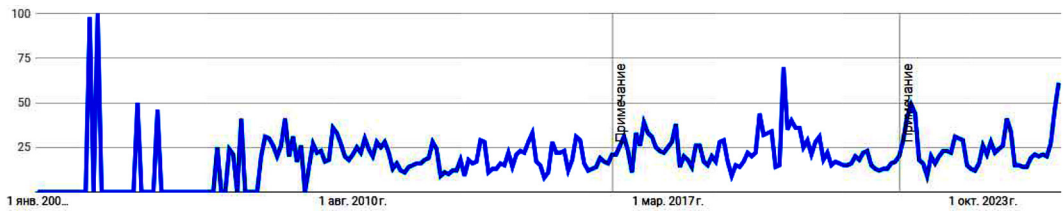
## Results and Discussion

The results of the rank analysis showed that the interest of the global Internet audience in the topic of the conflict between India and Pakistan has been recorded by the Google Trends service since the search engine was launched. The first surges in the number of queries (Figures 1 and 2) were registered in 2005–2006, when incidents occurred on the Indo-Pakistani border and events in the Jammu and Kashmir region (armed clashes in July 2005, the earthquake in Kashmir and the agreement between the countries to cross the dividing line to search for relatives in October 2005, the restoration of rail service in February 2006). The terrorist attacks in 2008 (in Mumbai and other cities) exacerbated the contradictions between the two countries, their missile and nuclear confrontation intensified – since then, the interest of the global Internet audience in the conflict between India and Pakistan (Figure 1) and, especially, in the Kashmir region (Figure 2) has remained consistently high.



**Figure 1.** Dynamics of popularity of the search query conflict between India and Pakistan by country of the world, 2004–2025

Source: completed by Tamara S. Yakova based on Google Trends.



**Figure 2.** Dynamics of popularity of the search query *Kashmir conflict* by country of the world, 2004–2025

Source: completed by Tamara S. Yakova based on Google Trends.

Interest in the topic “conflict between India and Pakistan” is actively demonstrated in 50 countries, excluding territories with a small number of requests. Pakistan, Nepal and India lead the ranking by the relative share of popularity of this topic. Internet users from 52 countries are interested in the topic “Kashmir conflict” (and 93 countries, taking into account territories with a small number of requests). Pakistan tops the ranked list (Table 1); India is in 5th place, the USA is in 11th, and United Kingdom is in 20th place. Since the wording of the requests largely coincides in content, we will consider the dynamics of the relative popularity of the topic “Kashmir conflict” in more detail.

Table 1

**Ratio of popularity of the search query *Kashmir conflict* in countries of the world (20 out of 52), 2004–2025**

Rank	Country	Share of total number of requests, %	Rank	Country	Share of total number of requests, %
1	Pakistan	100	11	USA	9
2	Singapore	23	12	Kenya	9
3	Sri Lanka	19	13	Canada	4
4	Bangladesh	19	14	Sweden	4
5	Myanmar	19	15	Malaysia	4
6	India	19	16	Philippines	4
7	Nepal	14	17	Netherlands	4
8	Qatar	14	18	Australia	4
9	UAE	14	19	Ireland	4
10	Norway	14	20	United Kingdom	4

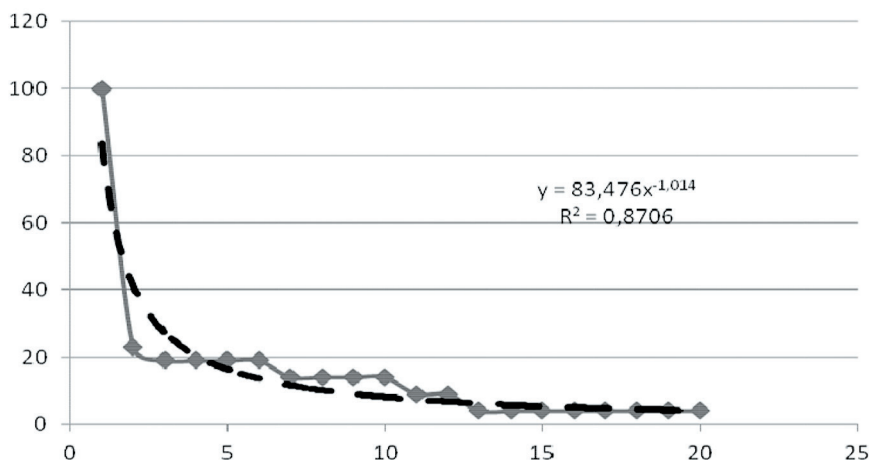
Source: completed by Tamara S. Yakova.

Pakistan tops the ranking list, and this is logical: Pakistanis are as concerned about the problems of the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir as the people of India (sixth place, which is more likely due to the activity of Internet users). But Singapore is in second place, which can be explained, firstly, by the fact that this country has been a key economic and trade partner of India in the ASEAN region in recent years. Both countries confirmed their intentions to continue cooperation in September 2024 during the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Singapore and in January 2025 during the visit of Singaporean President Tharman Shanmugaratnam to New Delhi. Secondly, Singapore has a high proportion of English-speaking population and specialists in international trade and finance interested in political and economic issues in the region. Third place is occupied by Sri Lanka, for which India is the closest neighbor. In addition, both countries have strong civilizational and historical ties. The same can be said about Bangladesh (fourth place in the ranking): the country was part of India and Pakistan and only in 1971 became an independent state, which today maintains close religious, linguistic and cultural ties with the population of both countries. A long common border and ethnic roots link the populations of Myanmar (fifth place) and Nepal (seventh) with India. Quite a high level of interest in the conflict in Kashmir was demonstrated by the Internet audiences of Qatar (eighth place) and the UAE (ninth). This is explained by the fact that since the mid-2010s, the UAE-India and Qatar-India cooperation has noticeably intensified in the economic, financial and trade spheres. The interests of the Internet audiences of other countries included in the ranked list (Norway, Sweden, Kenya, Canada, Malaysia, etc.) are associated with different political, economic and cultural relations with India and Pakistan, which is broadcast by national and global mass media.

The rank distribution for the morphosculpture “Kashmir conflict” (Figure 3) has the form of a hyperbola<sup>8</sup>. The steepness of the hyperbola, constructed according

<sup>8</sup> The calculations were carried out in the Excel program and showed a high degree of reliability (a fairly high correlation coefficient equal to 0.8706). The first rank was assigned to the territorial object with the highest indicator of 100 (Pakistan), where the topic is most popular. Then follow the objects in accordance with their rank (Table 1).

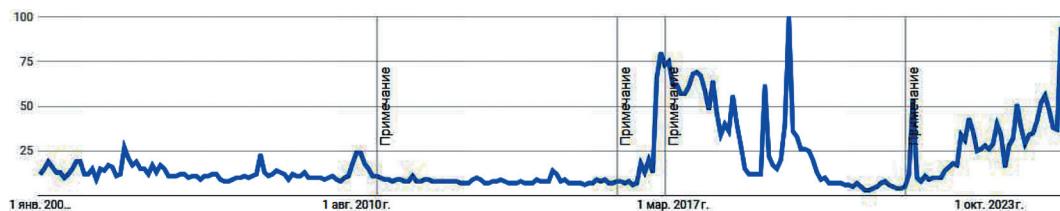
to the formula shown in the figure, indicates that in one country (Pakistan) the level of interest in the topic is extremely high, and then there are a number of countries with approximately the same level of attention to the topic: Singapore, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, Nepal, Qatar, Qatar, etc. The rank distribution demonstrates how the morphosculpture “Kashmir conflict” is positioned by countries of the world.



**Figure 3.** Rank distribution of relative popularity for the search query *Kashmir conflict* by countries of the world

Source: completed by Tamara S. Yakova.

Let us separately consider the changes in the dynamics of the popularity of queries on the topic “Kashmir conflict” for India, Pakistan, Singapore and Nepal (as an example of a state bordering India and historically connected with it), as well as for the USA, United Kingdom and China (37th place in the ranking list), which are actively involved in the conflict processes between India and Pakistan.

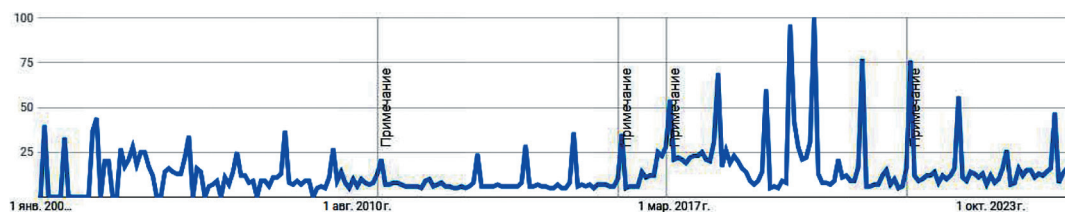


**Figure 4.** Dynamics of popularity of the search query *Kashmir conflict* in India, 2004–2025

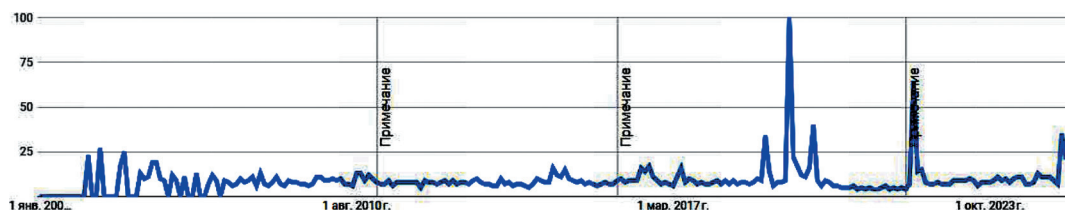
Source: completed by Tamara S. Yakova based on Google Trends.

The topic has attracted attention in all states and union territories of India (Figure 4), with the highest level of relative popularity of Internet user queries recorded in the territories of Jammu and Kashmir (100), Chandigarh (11), Rajasthan (5), Bihar (5) and the National Capital Territory of Delhi (4).

In Pakistan, too, interest in the conflict is countrywide (Figure 5). The ranking list is topped by the Azad Jammu and Kashmir administrative territory (100), followed by Gilgit-Baltistan, Islamabad Capital Territory (19), Sindh (17), Balochistan (15), Punjab (14), Khyber Paitunkhwa (14).

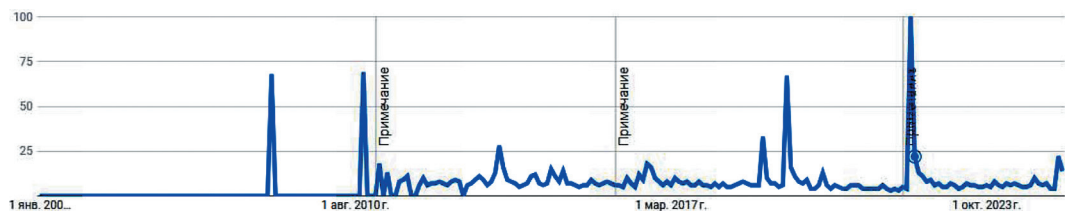


**Figure 5.** Dynamics of popularity of the search query *Kashmir conflict* in Pakistan, 2004–2025  
 Source: completed by Tamara S. Yakova based on Google Trends.



**Figure 6.** Dynamics of popularity of the search query *Kashmir conflict* in Singapore, 2004–2025  
 Source: completed by Tamara S. Yakova based on Google Trends.

Singaporean Internet users showed the greatest interest in August-September 2019 (Figure 6), when the Indian government unilaterally revoked Article 370 of the Constitution, which granted special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The events of April-May 2025 attracted less attention from the Singaporean Internet audience (compared to 2019).



**Figure 7.** Dynamics of popularity of the search query *Kashmir conflict* in Nepal, 2004–2025  
 Source: completed by Tamara S. Yakova based on Google Trends.

Table 2

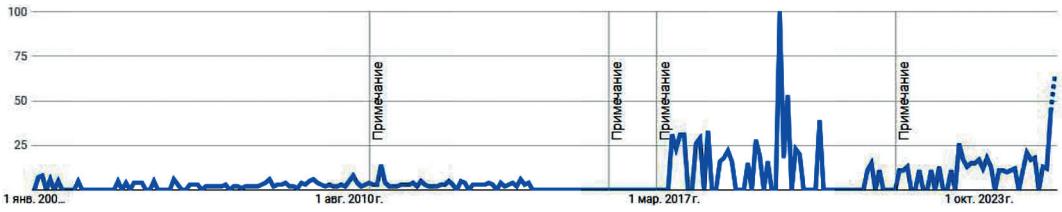
**Ratio of popularity of the search query *Kashmir conflict* in the subregions of Nepal, 2004–2025**

Rank	Subregion	Share of total number of requests, %
1	Central Region	100
2	Western Region	95
3	Eastern Region	90
4	Far-Western Region	89
5	Mid-Western Region	84

Source: completed by Tamara S. Yakova.

In Nepal, Internet users in all administrative sub-regions showed a high level of interest in the conflict in Kashmir, which is confirmed by the high rates of the relative popularity of the query (Table 2, Figure 7). A similar picture is seen in other countries neighboring India (Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar).

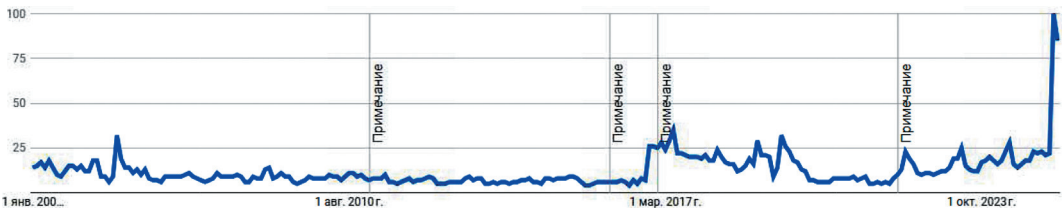




**Figure 8.** Dynamics of popularity of the search query *Kashmir conflict* in China, 2004–2025

Source: completed by Tamara S. Yakova based on Google Trends.

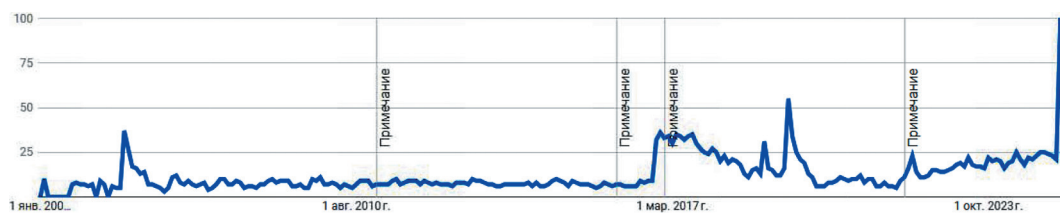
The results of the study of the English-speaking Internet audience in China (Figure 8) are too superficial and include a high margin of error due to restrictions on foreign information resources (including Google) for Chinese Internet users and the low share of the population who speak English. In addition, China has its own national search engine, Baidu. Requests on the topic were registered from 28 administrative-territorial entities of the PRC. The most active were Tibet (100), Tianjin (24), Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (11), Hainan (11), Beijing (9), Fujian (8), Shanghai (8). Interest in the conflict is explained by the fact that the Chinese part of Kashmir (Aksai Chin) is part of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and is of strategic importance for China (despite its isolation and remoteness), since it connects Tibet and Xinjiang. In recent years, the leadership of the PRC and India have taken steps to resolve the military confrontation in the Himalayas. The relationship between China and Pakistan is strategic: Pakistan has received support in developing its own nuclear program not only from the United States, but also from China, and has entered China’s military and economic “ring” around India (Bredikhin, Yadykina, 2023). These aspects are discussed in different interpretations in Chinese, Indian and Pakistani mass media, which has a significant impact on the interests of Internet users in the countries of their affiliation (forms the vectors of their requests).



**Figure 9.** Dynamics of popularity of the search query *Kashmir conflict* in USA, 2004–2025

Source: completed by Tamara S. Yakova based on Google Trends.

In the United States (Figure 9), interest in the Kashmir conflict has been shown in all 50 states (the list is topped by New Jersey (100), Virginia (87), Massachusetts (87), Connecticut (85), and New York (83). An analysis of American media content in August-September 2019 and April-May 2025 showed that close attention is being paid to the topic of relations between India and Pakistan, which is primarily due to the active intervention of the US leadership in political and economic processes in South Asian countries.



**Figure 10.** Dynamics of popularity of the search query *Kashmir conflict* in the United Kingdom, 2004–2025

Source: completed by Tamara S. Yakova based on Google Trends.

Internet users in all parts of the United Kingdom also demonstrated a high level of interest in the topic (Figure 10): in England (100), Scotland (61), Wales (43) and Northern Ireland (38). The high level of relative popularity of queries about the conflict in Kashmir in the UK is based on the ongoing colonial ties with India and Pakistan and the active policy of the country's leadership towards this region. The topic of the Kashmir conflict occupies a significant place in the information agenda of the British mass media. In addition, there are quite a lot of people from India and Pakistan in the country's political and financial elite, and it is to England that Indian and Pakistani emigration has been heading in recent decades (and not to Northern Ireland, for example).

## Conclusion

The results of the media-geographical study of the mental landscapes of countries around the world demonstrated a high interest of the global Internet audience in the topic of the conflict between India and Pakistan. Internet user queries on topics substantively related to the conflict were registered in 93 countries and territories with different administrative status. The greatest attention to the events in the Jammu and Kashmir region (as the most conflict-prone part of the confrontation between India and Pakistan) was shown by Internet users of neighboring states: Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka.

The study covered only the English-speaking part of the global Internet audience, which is the most active part of Internet users interested in international political processes and consuming information from the world mass media in English. The results obtained can be extrapolated to the global Internet audience. The Kashmir conflict is an ingrained morphosculpture on the mental landscapes of a number of South Asian countries. The media space of the conflict, mediated by global mass media, has a significant impact on the formation of the mental space, manifested and recorded in the requests of Internet users in different geographic locations. Analysis of the dynamics of reactions of Internet audiences to the development processes of the Kashmir conflict can become the basis for predicting the behavior of the population of countries of the world in the conditions of exacerbation of crisis processes, influencing the behavior of decision-making elites, and modeling exits and solutions.

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