SOCIAL MEDIA'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL CRISES: A STRATEGIC TOOL FOR INFLUENCE, PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT, AND CRISIS DIPLOMACY (2015-2025)

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Introduction

The creation, sharing, and consumption of information have all undergone significant change as a result of the quick development of digital communication technology. Social media has become a potent instrument among these technologies, not just for individual users but also for governments and political players looking to sway public opinion, create narratives, and communicate diplomatically. Social media has emerged as a crucial tool of statecraft in the context of global crises, enabling superpowers to participate in information warfare, advance their national interests, and project influence globally.

By avoiding the gatekeepers of conventional media, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter have given states direct access to global audiences. This change has made it possible for governments to communicate directly with overseas audiences, quickly spread information, and refute competing narratives. Social media has developed into a strategic tool for superpowers like the US, Russia, and China, enabling them to carry out misinformation operations, propagandize, and participate in public diplomacy.

This essay examines how these superpowers strategically used social media throughout significant global crises from 2015 to 2025. The paper shows how social media has been used as a weapon for narrative control, perception management, and crisis diplomacy by looking at case studies including the US-China trade disputes, the Russia-Ukraine war, and Middle Eastern geopolitical tensions. The study emphasizes how nations employ a variety of strategies to sway public opinion, including as algorithmic manipulation, troll armies, and state-sponsored media accounts.

This study also looks at the moral dilemmas raised by the usage of social media during global emergencies, such as disinformation, state-sponsored propaganda, and online manipulation. For journalists, legislators, and international organizations looking to uphold ethics, openness, and credibility in the digital era, these issues have important ramifications.

This article seeks to further knowledge of digital diplomacy and information warfare by offering a thorough examination of social media's function in global crises. For academics, media professionals, and legislators negotiating the intricate relationship between social media, foreign relations, and crisis communication, it provides insightful information.

1. Social Media Strategies of Great Powers

Great powers now use social media as a crucial tool to shape global narratives, with China, the US, and Russia all using different approaches. Russia has conducted misinformation operations, promoted state-sponsored narratives, and confused audiences throughout the world by using social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram (Hutchings, 2020). For example, Russian social media accounts discredited Western media outlets and promoted pro-Kremlin narratives during the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

The United States has predominantly used social media for public diplomacy and soft power, employing platforms such as Twitter to engage directly with international audiences. US diplomatic missions across the world maintain active social media accounts to promote American principles, challenge disinformation, and communicate with foreign followers. Notably, the United States has utilized social media to spread democratic messages and condemn authoritarian countries.

China has established a comprehensive state-controlled social media strategy, using platforms like Weibo, WeChat, and state-affiliated Twitter accounts to influence worldwide opinions. The Chinese government has propagated narratives stressing China's peaceful growth, denounced Western involvement, and refuted allegations of human rights violations in Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

2. Case Studies: International Crises and Social Media Influence

Between 2015 and 2025, social media has a significant impact on constructing narratives, affecting perceptions, and managing diplomatic engagements amid major international crises. The case studies below show how major powers have strategically used social media to serve their geopolitical objectives and manage crisis narratives.

Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Social media has become an important battleground for narrative control. Russian state-affiliated accounts utilized Twitter, Facebook, and Telegram to spread pro-Kremlin propaganda, undermine Western media, and defend Russia's activities in Ukraine. Simultaneously, Ukrainian official accounts and Western allies utilized social media to refute Russian falsehoods, highlight Ukraine's sovereignty, and garner worldwide support (7).

US-China Trade War: Both the US and China employed social media channels to conduct public diplomacy and economic warfare. US officials used Twitter to criticize China's economic practices, accusing it of unfair trade policies, while Chinese state media and diplomats used the platform to portray China as a victim of harsh US policies. Hashtags such as #ChinaUSTrade and #TariffWar were used to push narratives from both sides (2).

Syrian conflict and Middle Eastern crises: State and non-state players, including regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, used social media extensively. Social media platforms were used to broadcast propaganda, recruit warriors, and communicate ideological messages. For example, ISIS exploited social media to recruit, but Syrian government accounts portrayed Assad's administration as a protector against terrorism (9).

During the 2019 Hong Kong demonstrations, social media was a major battleground. Chinese official media utilized platforms like as Weibo and Twitter to portray the protests as violent and influenced by foreign forces, whilst protestors used Twitter, Instagram, and Telegram to exchange real-time updates, coordinate protests, and get worldwide attention.

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (2020): Both Azerbaijan and Armenia utilized social media to promote national narratives, mobilize support, and broadcast video footage of military victories. Azerbaijan used social media to convey its narrative of territorial integrity, whilst Armenian accounts emphasized historical rights and human rights concerns (3).

3. Strategic Use of Social Media in Crisis Diplomacy

Social media has become an important instrument in crisis diplomacy, allowing nations to control perceptions, manage narratives, and communicate directly with foreign audiences during international crises. Unlike traditional diplomatic channels, social media allows nations to connect in real time and avoid traditional media gatekeepers, therefore directly influencing global audiences (5).

• Narrative Control

One of the most important applications of social media in crisis diplomacy is narrative control. States use social media to promote their accounts of events, highlight positive viewpoints, and undermine alternative narratives. For example, during the Russia-Ukraine war, Russian state-affiliated accounts propagated narratives that justified Russian actions, whilst Ukrainian and Western accounts stressed Ukraine's sovereignty and Russia's violations of international law (6).

• Public Diplomacy

Social media is a crucial instrument for public diplomacy, allowing nations to engage directly with international audiences without the need of middlemen. States can use official social media accounts of diplomatic missions, world leaders, and government agencies to communicate policies, clarify stances, and refute disinformation. For example, the United States utilizes Twitter to promote democratic ideas, condemn authoritarian countries, and interact with its international following. (1)

• Perception Management

Perception management entails utilizing social media to influence worldwide opinion and portray a positive image. China has been particularly adept in this regard, portraying itself as a peaceful emerging power using platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and state-affiliated Twitter accounts, while condemning Western intervention in its domestic affairs. China has also utilized social media to refute narratives surrounding sensitive topics such as Xinjiang and Hong Kong (10).

• Crisis Communication and Rapid Response

During international crises, social media allows nations to interact quickly and directly with local and worldwide audiences. During the COVID-19 epidemic, governments used social media to provide health information, regulate public expectations, and combat disinformation. In crisis scenarios, such as the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, both sides utilized social media to communicate combat updates, raise home support, and shape world perception (4).

• Information Warfare and Disinformation

Social media is also used for information warfare. governments utilize it to disseminate misinformation, alter public views, and carry out psychological operations against other governments. Russia has been extremely active in this area, utilizing troll farms and bot networks to disseminate misinformation in Western nations, particularly during the 2016 US Presidential election and the Russia-Ukraine war (6; 7).

• Direct Diplomacy and Conflict De-Escalation

In certain circumstances, social media has been utilized as a tool for direct diplomacy, in which world leaders communicate directly with one another or with international audiences. Twitter diplomacy has emerged as a recognized method of diplomatic communication, with former US President Donald Trump utilizing the platform to directly engage with other leaders, notably North Korea's Kim Jong-un.

4. Conclusion of Strategic Use

The strategic use of social media in crisis diplomacy has altered international relations, giving nations a direct and effective instrument for influencing, managing perceptions, and controlling narrative. While it has several advantages, like speed, reach, and cost-effectiveness, it also has drawbacks, such as disinformation, propaganda, and ethical problems. Understanding how nations utilize social media during international crises is critical for policymakers, journalists, and scholars trying to negotiate the complicated convergence of digital communication and global diplomacy (11).

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SUMMARY

Social media has emerged as a transformational force in international crises, altering how governments communicate, build narratives, and wield power on a global scale. This article looks at how major nations including the United States, Russia, and China used social media platforms strategical-

ly between 2015 and 2025 to achieve their geopolitical goals. Using a qualitative methodology, the research examines key case studies such as the Russia-Ukraine war (7), US-China trade disputes (2), and Middle Eastern geopolitical concerns (9). These instances demonstrate how social media has been used for a variety of objectives, including propaganda distribution, misinformation operations, public diplomacy, and narrative control.

The results show that social media is a strategic tool of influence as well as a route for communication, allowing governments to project soft power, participate in information warfare, and shape public opinion. The study also looks at the moral dilemmas raised by state-sponsored propaganda, digital distortion, and disinformation on social media. For politicians, media professionals, and academics seeking to negotiate the intricate nexus of digital communication and foreign diplomacy, this research delivers insightful information by offering a thorough examination of social media's involvement in international crises (8).

Keywords: *Social Media, international journalism, Media, International Crises, Public Diplomacy, Strategic Communication, Disinformation, Propaganda, Crisis Diplomacy, Media Strategies.*

XÜLASƏ

Sosial media beynəlxalq böhranlarda çevriliş yaradan bir gücə çevrilib, hökumətlərin necə ünsiyyət qurduğunu, hekayələr yaratdığını və qlobal səviyyədə güc tətbiq etdiyini dəyişib. Bu məqalə 2015-2025-ci illər arasında ABŞ, Rusiya və Çin kimi böyük dövlətlərin sosial media platformalarından strateji şəkildə geosiyasi məqsədlərə nail olmaq üçün necə istifadə etdiyini araşdırır. Keyfiyyətli metodologiya tətbiq edərək, tədqiqat Rusiya-Ukrayna müharibəsi (7), ABŞ-Çin ticarət mübahisələri (2) və Orta Şərq geosiyasi məsələləri (9) kimi əsas vəziyyət araşdırmalarını təhlil edir. Bu nümunələr sosial medianın təbliğatın yayılması, dezinformasiya əməliyyatları, ictimai diplomatiya və hekayə idarəsi kimi müxtəlif məqsədlər üçün necə istifadə edildiyini göstərir.

Nəticələr göstərir ki, sosial media təsir vasitəsi olmaqla yanaşı, eyni zamanda ünsiyyət kanalıdır, hökumətlərə yumşaq güc tətbiq etmək, məlumat müharibələrində iştirak etmək və ictimai rəyi formalaşdırmaq imkanı verir. Tədqiqat həmçinin dövlət dəstəyi ilə yayılan təbliğat, rəqəmsal təhrif və sosial mediada dezinformasiya kimi mənəvi dilemmləri də araşdırır. Siyasətçilər, media mütəxəssisləri və akademiklər üçün rəqəmsal kommunikasiyanın və xarici diplomatiyanın mürəkkəb əlaqəsini başa düşmək istəyənlərə bu tədqiqat sosial medianın beynəlxalq böhranlardakı rolunu əhatəli şəkildə izah edərək dəyərli məlumatlar təqdim edir (8).

Açar sözlər: *sosial media, beynəlxalq jurnalistika, media, beynəlxalq böhranlar, ictimai diplomatiya, strateji kommunikasiya, dezinformasiya, təbliğat, böhran diplomatiyası, media strategiyaları.*