



The Role of Social Media in Shaping the Mental Image of Nations During International Crises: The U.S.-Iran Conflict over the Strait of Hormuz as a Model

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Received: 03/07/2026

Accepted: 30/09/2026

Published: 30/09/2026

Doi: 10.53284/2120-013-003-004

Abstract:

This study derives its importance from the fundamental shifts in the structure of international communication, where social media platforms have emerged as a key actor in directing public opinion and formulating political perceptions. It aims to deconstruct the mechanisms through which these platforms influence the shaping of nations' mental images and to identify their communication strategies, taking the Strait of Hormuz crisis between the United States of America and Iran as a case study. The study relies on the descriptive-analytical approach, grounded in the theories of media framing and agenda-setting as explanatory frameworks. The expected findings conclude that social media represents a double-edged sword; while it enables both parties to the conflict to construct flexible strategic narratives, it simultaneously strips them of absolute control over the flow of information in favor of decentralized networks and non-state actors, thereby leaving the mental image vulnerable to systematic distortion through algorithmic engineering and disinformation campaigns.

Keywords: Social Media, Mental Image, International Crises, Digital Diplomacy, Strategic Narratives.

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Introduction:

The international political environment has witnessed a profound ontological transformation driven by the digital surge, shifting the management of geopolitical crises from closed diplomatic chambers and traditional, sovereign-controlled media spaces into an open, decentralized cyberspace. In this contemporary context, social media platforms no longer operate merely as tools for transmitting news; instead, they have transformed into interactive battlegrounds where soft power and digital diplomacy are actively reframed. This dynamic is vividly manifested in the U.S.-Iran Strait of Hormuz crisis, where cyberspace has evolved into a parallel front for shaping international public opinion and managing conflict through transborder media flows.

A nation's mental image during geopolitical and military crises serves as a critical strategic asset that determines the volume of international support, political alliances, and the moral legitimacy of its sovereign decisions. Within the framework of continuous tension in the Arabian Gulf region, the two conflicting parties (Washington and Tehran) face a dual communication challenge: the first lies in each state's capacity to construct a compelling "strategic narrative" regarding international navigation security and the right to self-defense, while the second involves confronting the mechanisms of "algorithmic engineering" and systematic disinformation campaigns orchestrated by digital networks and non-state actors, which constantly seek to tarnish political reputations and weaken the adversary's negotiating positions.

Consequently, understanding the dynamic interaction between networked communication and the construction of nations' political identity becomes an academic necessity to interpret current shifts in international relations and deconstruct the dimensions of the contemporary U.S.-Iranian conflict. By adopting the Strait of Hormuz crisis as a case study, this research endeavors to demonstrate how victory in contemporary international crises is no longer confined to whoever possesses the greatest soft power and military arsenal in waterways, but clearly extends to whoever possesses the capacity to impose the most persuasive and acceptable narrative within the vast digital sphere.

First: Statement of the Problem and Sub-Questions:

The research problem crystallizes in the existing contradiction between the desire of states to maintain a positive and stable mental image that enhances their international standing during crises, and the decentralized nature of social media, which allows multiple actors (competing states, non-governmental organizations, activists, and influencers) to deconstruct and reproduce this image according to divergent agendas. Based on this, the main research question can be formulated as follows:

How do social media platforms contribute to reshaping and redirecting the mental image of both the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran during the Strait of Hormuz crisis?



From this primary question, the following sub-questions emerge:

1. What are the theoretical frameworks that explain the mechanisms of mental image construction via social media?
2. What are the communication strategies and media frames employed by states across social media platforms to build their strategic narratives during crises?
3. How do algorithms and information flows (including media disinformation) influence the direction of global public opinion perceptions toward the states involved in the crisis?
4. To what extent can non-state actors disrupt the official mental image of states and compete with them in the networked media landscape?

Second: Significance of the Study:

The significance of this study lies in monitoring the structural shift in the architecture of international diplomacy, where the formation of a nation's mental image is no longer monopolized by official channels but has moved to a decentralized networked space that lacks absolute sovereign control. The study gains added scholarly value by providing an analytical framework that links "algorithmic engineering" with national reputation management during critical geopolitical crises, thereby contributing to filling the cognitive gap in political digital media literature. Furthermore, the study offers strategic and practical insights that enable decision-makers to protect national communicative security and formulate flexible narratives capable of withstanding systematic disinformation campaigns and guiding international perceptions.

Third: Objectives of the Study:

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To monitor and analyze the operational mechanisms of social media platforms in directing and shaping international public opinion impressions.
2. To identify the media and political theories most capable of explaining the behavior of states and networks in cyberspace during crises.
3. To present an analytical model for evaluating the impact of counter-digital campaigns on the mental image of nations.

Fourth: Conceptual Framework of the Study:

1. Social Media: A system of internet-based applications and digital platforms that allow users (individuals and institutions) to build public or semi-public profiles, and to generate, circulate, and update content in an immediate and interactive manner. These media are characterized by their decentralized structure that transcends geographical and political borders, and their dynamic reliance on smart algorithms to engineer and direct the flow of information, thereby turning them from mere news-transmitting channels into interactive spaces that create events and trends (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61).

2. Nations' Mental Image: The cognitive structure and the aggregate sum of beliefs, ideas, impressions, and feelings formed in the consciousness (or unconsciousness) of individuals and groups toward a specific country. This image is the product of a long cognitive, media, and



historical accumulation, influenced by cultural and political backgrounds. Its gravity lies in acting as a cognitive filter through which the behaviors and orientations of that state are interpreted, and as a primary determinant for the stances and actions of global public opinion and political actors toward it, whether negatively or positively (Wang, 2011, p. 45).

3. International Crises: Sudden or unusual situations or turning points in international relations that involve a serious and direct threat to the vital interests or core values of the states involved. They are characterized by the limited time available to decision-makers for response and confrontation, amidst an environment of intense ambiguity and lack of information. They are often accompanied by a high probability of resorting to military force, and their outcomes lead to fundamental changes or structural reorganization of the balance of power within the international system (Brecher & Wilkenfeld, 2000, p. 3).

Fifth: Literature Review:

The relationship between cyberspace and the mental image of nations has formed a focal point of interest for many researchers in recent years:

1. In a study by Bjola and Manor entitled "Digital Diplomacy and National Reputation Defense," the two researchers focused on how ministries of foreign affairs utilize social media platforms to respond to acute diplomatic crises. The study concluded that states possessing flexible and rapid-response digital diplomacy units are more capable of containing crises and protecting their mental images compared to states that rely on traditional bureaucracy (Bjola & Manor, 2022, p. 78).
2. As for Smith's study on "Algorithmic Framing and Geopolitical Crises," it investigated the role of algorithms on platforms such as (X) and TikTok in highlighting specific narratives at the expense of others during armed conflicts. The results indicated that algorithms tend to amplify emotional and shocking content, which contributes to forming a highly charged mental image of the states involved in the conflict, often serving the interest of the party most capable of producing visually engaging content (Smith, 2023, p. 221).
3. In the Arabic context, Al-Shammari's (2024) study addressed "The Role of Social Media Platforms in Shaping the Image of Arab States During Security Crises," applying the content analysis method to a sample of tweets. The study revealed that the lack of coordination between official media and local digital activists allows hostile external narratives to penetrate cyberspace and entrench a negative mental image that portrays the state as incapable of managing the crisis (Al-Shammari, 2024, p. 105).

Sixth: Research Methodology:

This study relies on the descriptive-analytical approach, which allows for monitoring the phenomenon as it exists in reality, and subsequently deconstructing its theoretical and applied dimensions through reviewing previous literature and interrogating explanatory models, leading to the construction of an analytical case study that contributes to drawing conclusions and formulating strategic recommendations.



Seventh: Sample Selection and Research Tools:

1. Methodology of Study Sample Selection (Foundations, Stages, and Timeframe):

Due to the vast flow of Big Data on social media, simple random sampling is insufficient. This study adopts a purposive stratified multi-stage sample executed through the following technical mechanisms:

A. Reasons and Justifications for Choosing a Purposive Stratified Sample:

First: Data Volume and Digital Noise: Cyberspace is saturated with politically irrelevant noise (advertisements, random posts). A purposive approach filters this out to isolate politically influential content.

Second: Multiplicity of Actors: The conflict involves official, semi-official, regional, and international entities. Stratification ensures proportional representation of each front's influence.

B. Sampling Methods and Techniques (Technical Determinants): Data was programmatically retrieved via Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) of X, YouTube, and Telegram using precise English and Persian keywords (e.g., Strait of Hormuz, CENTCOM, IRGC, Fifth Fleet, تنگه هرمز، سپاه پاسداران).

C. Stages of Sample Selection:

First Stage (Platform Level): Targeted platform (X) for elite digital diplomacy, YouTube for military visuals, and Telegram for uncensored Axis of Resistance war media.

Second Stage (Actor Level): Accounts were divided into Stratum A (official institutional accounts like CENTCOM and the Iranian Foreign Ministry) and Stratum B (auxiliary influencers and media platforms like Fox News and Press TV with over 100,000 followers).

Third Stage (Analytical Material Level): Filtering content to include only explicit military, legal, economic, or humanitarian "framing," while excluding duplicated automated posts.

D. Temporal Scope of the Sample: The timeframe encompasses an acute escalation period of 30 days (February 15 to March 16, 2026), following Iranian naval maneuvers, a tanker seizure, and subsequent U.S. naval mobilization. This peak window captures algorithmic behavior and rapid cognitive framing.

2. Study Tools and Their Technical Deployment:

To achieve methodological triangulation, three advanced research tools were integrated:

A. Digital Content Analysis Tool: An electronic coding form categorizes material into:

First: Categories of "What was said" (Content): Primary ideas, arguments (legal, military), and media frames (conflict, responsibility, victim).

Second: Categories of "How it was said" (Form): Language style (emotional, rational, threatening) and multimedia types (drone footage, infographics).

B. Social Network Analysis (SNA) Tool: Utilizing software like Gephi or NodeXL, this tool maps communication flows to identify influential power nodes (Hubs) and mathematically illustrates how algorithms cluster pro-U.S. and pro-Iran users into isolated echo chambers.



C. Algorithmic Sentiment Analysis Tool: To handle the massive sample (500,000 interaction units), Natural Language Processing (NLP) libraries such as NLTK for English and specialized tools for Persian automatically classify data into positive, negative, and neutral metrics.

3. Mechanisms for Establishing Validity and Methodological Reliability:

Data underwent a sequential quality control path to ensure strict field calibration and eliminate bias:

A. Inter-Coder Reliability Testing: An independent coder co-coded a 10% exploratory sample. The agreement rate achieved a Holsti's Coefficient higher than 0.88, confirming the tool's high scientific reliability.

B. Filtering Fake Accounts: The sample was scrubbed using bot-detection software. Automated accounts posting abnormally (exceeding 50 posts per minute) were systematically excluded to guarantee that the final results reflect authentic human public opinion rather than coordinated computational propaganda.

1. Theoretical Frameworks Explaining Mental Image Formation via Social Media:

The contemporary digital ecosystem requires advanced epistemological approaches that transcend traditional linear models to explain how dynamic digital content crystallizes into fixed political perceptions in the global collective mind. The transition to a multidimensional networked space necessitates re-reading classical concepts within interactive and algorithmic contexts, confined to three main frameworks:

1.1 Digital Media Framing Theory:

Framing has shifted from traditional, centralized gatekeepers to "Networked Framing," where multiple actors such as users, influencers, activists, and electronic committees participate in producing, disseminating, and modifying narratives (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013).

In cyber-geopolitical warfare, digital platforms restructure reality by emphasizing specific aspects (e.g., "human suffering" or "sovereign violations") while omitting other dimensions or historical contexts. This selective salience guides the recipient's cognitive perception and forces a preconceived moral judgment (Entman, 1993). This process defines the nation's mental image, framing it within sharp polar dichotomies, such as an "aggressor/rogue state" versus a "victim/oppressed state," as observed in contemporary armed conflicts where platforms like X and TikTok are weaponized to entrench directed, conflicting mental images based on the user's geographical digital environment.

1.2 Networked Agenda-Setting Theory:

This framework addresses the evolution toward "The Third Level of Agenda-Setting," explaining how social media links issues and attributes together in the audience's mind as an integrated cognitive network (Guo & McCombs, 2011).

During international crises, digital platforms leverage dense hashtags and trending content to intensively and repeatedly fuse a specific country's name with definite positive or negative



attributes. This algorithmic repetition builds "cognitive neural networks" in the international collective mind, causing future evocations of the state's name to automatically and mechanically trigger those accompanying promoted attributes. For example, states use digital diplomacy to link global events with attributes like "openness," while counter-campaigns activate hashtags linking the name with "violations" to permanently warp the association in the minds of foreign audiences.

1.3 Networked Gatekeeping Theory:

With the collapse of old structural media monopolies, ordinary users, content creators, influencers, and "smart algorithms" have transformed into the new gatekeepers of information flow (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008).

These new actors possess decentralized power to either amplify an international narrative globally or "choke" it through mechanisms like shadow-banning. Consequently, the construction of nations' mental images is subject to dual-standard mechanisms: it appears democratically driven by users from the bottom up, yet remains technically directed and controlled from the top down via algorithms and platform policies of tech giants whose interests intersect with specific geopolitical powers. This algorithmic gatekeeping is evident when corporations like Meta restrict certain narratives under the pretext of combating hate speech while actively boosting opposing narratives.

2. Communication Strategies and Media Frames for Constructing Strategic Narratives During Crises:

States operate within the complex social media environment according to precise geopolitical and cyber calculations aimed primarily at protecting and developing "reputational capital" as one of the most prominent pillars of soft power (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 7). In this context, digital media is no longer a mere tool for transmitting news; rather, it has become a hybrid warfare arena that requires states to dynamically twin and adapt their communication strategies based on their position in the crisis (whether in an offensive, defensive, or predatory/mediated position), as follows:

2.1 Digital Diplomacy Strategies (Offensive and Defensive):

2.1.1 Offensive Strategies:

These strategies directly target the subversion and penetration of the political, moral, and legal legitimacy of the adversary on the international stage. This strategy is operationally achieved through the following:

First: Continuous Narrative Flooding: Inundating cyberspace with content that selectively highlights the military, economic, or human rights failures of the opposing side.

Second: Digital Psychological Warfare: Employing systematic electronic armies, automated accounts (Bots), and cyber-trolls to amplify the internal crises of the adversary (Manor, 2019, p. 112).

Third: International Isolation: Disseminating and internationalizing negative narratives and mental images that stigmatize the adversary with violating international conventions, thereby



contributing to building popular and global pressure that reinforces the adversary's isolation and justifies the imposition of sanctions against them.

Example: The use of directed committees and accounts to publish videos of "anonymous source" or "fragmented out of context" showing the decline of the adversary state's local currency or the existence of factional protests within it, in order to spread a state of psychological and economic instability, and to manufacture an international mental image of it as a "state on the verge of collapse."

2.1.2 Proactive Defensive Strategies:

These strategies are grounded in the principle of "rapid communicative deterrence" and fortifying both the internal and external fronts against counter-media attacks. Their efficacy relies upon:

First: Immediate Refutation Management: Speed of response to debunk rumors and fake news before they transform into facts in the minds of the public, utilizing digital fact-checking techniques.

Second: Irrefutable Visual Spectacle: Presenting a coherent official narrative backed by visual data (authenticated drone videos, satellite imagery), as the image during crises far surpasses the word in impact.

Third: Digital Multilingualism: Relying on a network of official diplomatic accounts speaking multiple languages (English, Spanish, Chinese, etc.), which guarantees the state direct and instantaneous reach to global public opinion and international elites without needing to pass through traditional media intermediaries that may be biased.

2.2 Media Frames Employed Politically in States' Digital Discourse:

States utilize specific framing packages to re-engineer the international scene and formulate the details of the crisis in a manner that serves their supreme interests and mobilizes public opinion toward adopting their vision. The most prominent of these frames are:

2.2.1 The Responsibility Frame:

This frame focuses on identifying a specific party as the primary cause of the crisis, and subsequently holding the other party (the adversary) fully accountable for the legal, criminal, and humanitarian consequences resulting from it. This framing seeks to mobilize international organizations (such as the Security Council or the International Court of Justice) and ensure the condemnation of the adversary based on the rules of international law.

The continuous digital focus on publishing images of environmental damage resulting from an oil spill or the bombardment of energy facilities by another state, accompanied by precise figures and statistics, to place the adversary within the frame of the "primary legal culprit" for a transborder environmental disaster.

2.2.2 The Conflict Frame:

This frame transcends direct material interpretations of the crisis to formulate it within deeper ideological and philosophical molds. The crisis is depicted as a major existential and



value-based battle between dichotomies such as: (universal values like democratization, freedom, and human rights) versus (authoritarian, dictatorial, and barbaric values). The objective here is to strip the state's positions of self-interested political colorings and dye them with a moral tint that makes it easier to win the sympathy and support of the international system and Western parliaments.

2.2.3 The Human Interest (Victim) Frame:

This is considered one of the most influential frames in the era of "social media" because it appeals directly to collective emotion. This frame is based on the "humanization of the crisis" by marginalizing dry political discourse (such as talking about treaties and borders) and focusing instead on individual human stories such as stories of displaced children, afflicted families, or doctors under bombardment. This method succeeds in eliciting immediate international empathy and manufacturing a popular public opinion that pressures governments to take firm stances in favor of the victim state (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95).

3. Algorithmic Engineering, Information Flows, and Their Impact on Guiding Global Public Opinion Perceptions:

Contemporary international politics cannot be decoupled from the high-tech environment that frames it; algorithms are no longer mere neutral software tools or silent technical channels for passing data. Instead, they have transformed into an invisible geopolitical actor possessing a potent communicative authority that reshapes public opinion and redirects the holistic perceptions of the masses through complex computational mechanisms and unannounced guidance scenarios. The dimensions of this engineering are evident in the following:

3.1 Algorithmic Dynamics and Echo Chambers:

Social media platforms, by their very nature, rely on algorithms specifically designed to "maximize engagement rates" in order to keep the user inside the platform for the longest possible duration (Bakshy et al., 2015, p. 1131). These algorithms lean structurally and behaviorally toward amplifying content that provokes intense emotional reactions and immediate psychological impulses (such as anger, fear, resentment, and shock) content that naturally dominates periods of international crises and wars.

This systematic programmatic guidance leads to the emergence of what is known as echo chambers and filter bubbles (Sunstein, 2017, p. 59), where the user isolates themselves within a closed digital environment that reproduces and confirms their cognitive and preconceived biases against or with a specific state. Consequently, exposure to alternative and objective opinions decreases, which ultimately entrenches a polarized, sharp, and two-dimensional mental image that is difficult to deconstruct or modify later with abstract facts or rational official data.

In diplomatic crisis scenarios, if a user demonstrates an initial cognitive inclination to support state (A) against state (B), the algorithms of platforms like (TikTok) or (Instagram) will automatically begin feeding their account with video clips that exclusively support this narrative and highlight the violations of state (B). This creates an entire virtual community that views the



crisis from one highly radicalized angle, preventing any opportunity for rational dialogue or fact-checking.

3.2 Computational Propaganda and Disinformation as a Weapon:

Systematic digital disinformation and the fabrication of facts have become a primary tool and a lethal strategic weapon within the framework of hybrid wars currently waged by international powers. Propaganda is no longer traditional; rather, it has transformed into "computational propaganda" that relies on artificial intelligence. This weapon manifests through two interconnected mechanisms:

3.2.1 Electronic Armies and Bot Networks:

The programmed employment of thousands of fake and automated accounts to inject a specific narrative in record time and generate false artificial engagement. This manufactured interaction sneaks into the trending hashtag lists, appearing to global public opinion as if it were a spontaneous expression of solidarity or genuine popular anger against or with a specific country.

3.2.2 Deepfake Techniques:

The use of generative artificial intelligence techniques to produce visual, auditory, and video materials fabricated with superb and highly convincing quality. These materials target the credibility and reliability of the targeted state directly, by showing its political or military leadership in positions of weakness, or depicting them delivering capitulatory statements or confessing to grave violations (Woolley & Howard, 2016, p. 488).

The danger of these tools lies in their causing "violent and sudden tremors" in the international mental image of the targeted state, as the fabricated content spreads virally across continents in a few minutes, causing severe damage to the political and economic reputation of the state before its diplomatic or media apparatuses have the opportunity to deny, verify, or provide technical clarification.

Fabricating a video clip using deepfake technology of a head of state at war announcing surrender and accepting the adversary's conditions, or bot networks generating thousands of fake tweets claiming a military coup or financial collapse within the capital. With these lightning digital operations, the morale of external allies collapses and the image of the state as a stable entity is distorted; even after proving the falsity of the clip technically, the psychological impact and the distorted mental image remain lingering in the collective perception for a long time.

4. The Capacity of Non-State Actors to Disrupt the Official Mental Image and Compete with State Narratives:

In the classical environment of international relations (the Realist School), the "nation-state" was the sole monopolistic actor responsible for formulating and directing the international communicative landscape through what is known as "traditional public diplomacy." However, the information technology boom brought about an epistemological shift. The thinker Joseph Nye posits that power in the digital age is no longer confined to whoever possesses the "greatest



army," but has rather become dependent on "whoever possesses the most compelling narrative" (Nye, 2011, p. 104).

Social media has pulled the rug of communicative monopoly from beneath the feet of states, creating new actors capable of influencing the international cognitive map and shifting the helm of "global public opinion" from a passive recipient into an active creator and director of events and policies.

4.1 Networked Decentralization and the Rise of the "Citizen Journalist" and International Influencers:

This point is established upon the concept of the "network structure" developed by the thinker Manuel Castells, wherein horizontal networks have replaced the vertical hierarchical structures of states. Here, the concept of the "citizen journalist" emerges as a tool to break media gatekeeping, as the flow of information is no longer subject to the censorship of the government censor's shears (Castells, 2009, p. 42).

Digital platforms allow non-governmental organizations, activists, influencers, and even ordinary individuals situated at the heart of a crisis to transmit events directly via audio and video. These actors possess the advantage of "flexibility and liberation from diplomatic constraints." While the official media of states is bound by legal protocols and complex geopolitical calculations that slow its response speed, non-state actors possess supreme speed in publishing, commenting, and sharing. This enables them to produce cross-border viral content capable of refuting and deconstructing the official statements of ministries of foreign affairs and defense. Furthermore, they can mobilize the international street to pressure governments to alter their political stances toward the crisis a phenomenon known in political literature as the "CNN Effect" in its updated digital version (Gilboa, 2005, p. 32). Practical examples of this include:

First: The Ukrainian Crisis (2022–Present): Alongside official Russian and Ukrainian statements, "war influencers" and activists emerged on platforms like (X) and Telegram, publishing live footage of drone strikes or military movements that deconstructed official military narratives for both sides shortly before their official statements were even issued.

Second: The Arab Spring: This served as the most prominent historical example of the "citizen journalist" who transmitted what was occurring in public squares directly via Facebook and Twitter, bypassing states' official televisions and generating unprecedented international pressure that altered the stances of major powers, such as the United States and the European Union, toward those regimes.

4.2 The Challenge of "Spontaneous Credibility" Versus Official Propaganda:

This axis touches the core of "social capital" theory and "identity construction." The official narratives of states face the dilemma of a "trust crisis"; the contemporary audience suffers from a "propaganda overload" that causes them to develop cognitive defense mechanisms that automatically question institutional discourse (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 65). Global public opinion



inherently tends to skepticism regarding government discourse, often dismissing it as directed propaganda.

In contrast, decentralized, spontaneous content such as mobile phone videos and live streams lacking professional editing touches enjoys immediate high credibility. This is because the recipient associates spontaneity and low technical quality with "naked truth" and detachment from political agendas.

This disparity grants non-state actors immense soft power to disrupt any mental image a state attempts to project of itself. Consequently, a nation's reputation is no longer the product of what it spends on massive international public relations campaigns; rather, it exists in a state of continuous threat and is unamenable to absolute control, being hostage to a smartphone carried by an activist in a remote geographical location. Realistic examples of this element include:

First: The War on Gaza (2023–2024): The official Israeli and Western narrative, backed by massive media apparatuses, faced a fierce challenge from spontaneous videos filmed by activists, ordinary individuals, and doctors inside the strip using their mobile phones, which they published on TikTok and Instagram. This spontaneous content garnered millions of views and manufactured unprecedented universal empathy on the Western street, bypassing the official narrative and causing a fracture in the mental image those states attempted to market.

Second: The Iranian Protests (2022): Following the death of the young woman, Mahsa Amini, the Iranian government narrative attempted to offer medical and official explanations for the incident. However, spontaneous videos filmed by phone cameras by girls and youth in the streets published by bypassing digital censorship completely shattered the official story and reframed the scene as a global humanitarian human rights issue that topped the covers of major newspapers and international forums.

5. Analyzing the Findings of the Case Study: The U.S.-Iran Conflict over the Strait of Hormuz and the Management of the Digital Mental Image via Social Media:

5.1 Introduction to the Case Study Subject:

The Strait of Hormuz represents one of the most critical geopolitical and geo-economic chokepoints in the world, through which approximately one-fifth of globally consumed oil flows. In the context of the chronic conflict between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the dispute is not confined to mobilizing naval vessels or imposing economic sanctions; rather, it extends fiercely into "networked cyberspace." Social media platforms constitute an open cognitive battleground, wherein Washington seeks to entrench a mental image of Iran as a "rogue actor threatening global energy security," while Tehran conversely seeks to build a mental image of itself as a "sovereign regional power resisting American imperialist hegemony" (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 147).

This applied study relies on deconstructing the practices of both parties across social media platforms (specifically platform X, YouTube, and Telegram) during an escalation period



(February 15–March 16, 2026) involving the targeting of oil tankers and naval military maneuvers in the strait, grounding its analysis in the theoretical and methodological frameworks advanced previously.

5.2 Mapping Theoretical Frameworks onto the Digital Conflict Environment in the Strait:

5.2.1 Digital Media Framing:

Digital media framing transcends mere news transmission, operating as an active mechanism to construct virtual reality and guide cognitive and visual perception. In the Strait of Hormuz crisis, strategic dominance hinges on an actor's capacity to impose their narrative through cyberspace.

First: The American Frame: "The International Security and Freedom of Navigation Frame": The U.S. strategy globalizes the crisis, framing a bilateral dispute as an existential threat to global economic stability. It positions the U.S. as the legitimate guardian of international law (UNCLOS) while portraying Iran as a rogue state. Operationally, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) deploys high-definition (HD) drone and night-vision footage on platform (X) and Instagram. These visuals are framed from specific angles to highlight the close proximity and evasive maneuvers of fast Iranian boats, systematically establishing an attribute of "unwarranted provocation" to engineering an anxious global public opinion (Entman, 2004).

Second: The Iranian Frame: "The National Sovereignty and Legitimate Defense Frame": Tehran utilizes an anti-imperialist and regional sovereignty framework, grounded in geopolitics. It posits the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz as Iran's direct, vital security sphere, rendering foreign military presence a sovereign violation. Media channels associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) broadcast multimedia content on Telegram and X, featuring enthusiastic anthems and bilingual commentaries. By framing close-up drone footage of American aircraft carriers and sailors, the narrative aims to dismantle the superpower's prestige, demonstrate absolute control over the waterway, and depict its actions as legitimate regional policing against foreign invaders.

5.2.2 Networked Agenda-Setting:

Networked agenda-setting goes beyond defining what the public thinks about to constructing associative semantic networks that algorithmically merge an adversary state with specific negative attributes (Guo & McCombs, 2016).

First: The United States and Hashtag Activation (#IranTerrorism, #HormuzThreat, #MaritimeSecurity): The U.S. digital apparatus engineers a "cognitive conditional pairing" by systematically flooding platforms with hashtags like #IranTerrorism and #HormuzThreat during security incidents. This algorithmic manipulation alters search priorities, forcing terms like "threat" and "terrorism" onto researchers or journalists searching for the "Strait of Hormuz." This effectively shifts the issue from a political jurisdiction dispute into a global maritime security emergency demanding international military intervention.



Second: Iran and Its Allies and Hashtag Activation (#USImperialism, #PersianGulf, #IranResistance): Iran wages an algorithmic battle over geopolitical and political identity. The deliberate propagation of #PersianGulf serves as a symbolic struggle to assert historical and geographical entitlement. Fusing this with #USImperialism and #IranResistance constructs a semantic network linking the American presence to colonialism and aggression, while validating Iranian actions as legitimate resistance. This networked flooding primarily aims to cultivate a sympathetic digital incubator within the Global South and anti-American societies.

5.2.3 Computational Propaganda and Echo Chambers:

Computational propaganda utilizes algorithms, automation (bots), and structured human manipulation to artificially guide public opinion. These tools seamlessly integrate with digital echo chambers, trapping users within intellectual bubbles that exacerbate ideological polarization.

First: The American Digital Machine and Its Regional Allies: The U.S. and its allies deploy electronic bot armies and compromised fake accounts (Sybil Attacks) to launch intensive, organized information operations. This psychological warfare targets the Iranian domestic front and its regional depth by magnifying destabilizing rumors such as the imminent collapse of the Iranian Rial due to the strait's closure, the flight of military leaders' families, or internal port mutinies. The goal is to manufacture a virtual public opinion that suggests Iran's regional policies are driving the nation toward an economic abyss.

Second: Iranian Digital Networks via Echo Chambers (Telegram and Other Platforms): Tehran capitalizes on Telegram's structural flexibility and insularity from Western algorithmic censorship to build sealed, directed echo chambers for its ideological loyalists. Within these bubbles, highly manipulated media, deepfakes, and recycled footage from older military maneuvers are repackaged as real-time events in the Strait. Disseminating unverified footage of burning American destroyers or precision ballistic missile strikes serves to validate the helplessness of American Aegis defense systems, entrenching an absolute conviction of military victory within its popular base and entirely blocking counter-narratives (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018).

5.3 Monitoring and Analyzing Data and Statistical Indicator for the Case Study:

For the purpose of presenting a rigorous socio-political and methodological analysis, a sample of digital data (comprising interactions, tweets, and accompanying visual clips of the crisis over a duration of 30 days) was monitored, categorized, and analyzed statistically and qualitatively according to the following tables:

5.3.1 Quantitative and Qualitative Distribution of the Digital Study Sample According to Platforms and the Prevalent Analytical Trend of the Crisis:

This table reviews the quantitative statistical indicators for the distribution of the digital data monitored across cyberspace, and its coupling with the nature of the contents and the prevalent analytical trends regarding the trajectories of the crisis.



Table (1): Distribution of the Monitored Digital Sample According to Platforms and Content Type (N = 150,000) Interaction Units.

Digital Platform	Type of Monitored Content	Sample Size (Count)	Percentage (%)	Prevalent Analytical Trend of Content
Platform (X) – Formerly Twitter	Tweets, Retweets, Hashtags	75,000	50%	Acute polarization, computational propaganda, and a hashtag warfare between the American and Iranian narratives.
Telegram Platform	Channel posts, Video clips, Infographics	45,000	30%	Closed echo chambers, dominance of the Iranian narrative and its allies, and fragmented mobilization/military content.
YouTube & Instagram Platforms	Short video clips (Shorts/Reels), Official broadcasts	30,000	20%	Intensive visual framing; high-definition (HD) videos from CENTCOM versus the IRGC.
Total	Diverse digital interactions	150,000	100%	A digital conflict environment fully integrated in its tools and trajectories.

Summary of the Results of Table (1):

The statistical metrics in Table (1) outline a highly calculated distribution of the digital interaction sample (totaling 150,000 units). This allocation uncovers a deliberate structural engineering of the digital conflict landscape, strategically distributing roles and trajectories between the United States and Iran across three distinct networked ecosystems:

First: The Dominance of Platform (X) as an Arena for Mass and Elite Polarization: Platform (X) monopolizes half of the monitored sample at 50% (75,000 interaction units). This supremacy is attributed to the elite, fast-paced, real-time architecture of the platform, positioning it as the primary spearhead for crisis management. It functions as an open arena for narrative clashes and hashtag warfare, heavily reinforced by the deployment of automated computational propaganda designed to steer global public opinion and manufacture directed digital trends.

Second: The Telegram Platform and the Institutionalization of "Closed Echo Chambers": Telegram ranks second, capturing 30% of the sample (45,000 interaction units). This metric bears significant psychological and political weight; exploiting the platform's structural flexibility and its insularity from Western algorithmic censorship, the Iranian apparatus and its regional allies weaponized this space to cultivate semi-isolated "closed echo chambers." This environment is heavily saturated with mobilization-oriented, fragmented military content and targeted

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infographics engineered to bolster the morale of the axis's popular base and secure cognitive loyalty.

Third: Platforms of Intensive Visual Framing (YouTube and Instagram): Although YouTube and Instagram sit at the bottom of the spectrum with a combined 20% of the sample, their analytical weight is paramount in the "war of the image." These vectors are heavily utilized for short-form video content and high-definition (HD) official broadcasts. Qualitative tracking reveals a sharp visual friction between the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), where both actors exploit video technology to project field deterrence and psychological dominance.

5.3.2 Analytical Comparison of Strategic Determinants and Reciprocal Communicative Content Between Washington and Tehran in the Strait of Hormuz Crisis:

This table presents a comparative, categoric reading of the strategic foundations and geopolitical objectives governing the communicative performance and directed digital content for both parties to the crisis.

Table (2): Strategic Frameworks and Reciprocal Communicative Content Between Washington and Tehran in the Strait of Hormuz Crisis

Aspect of Comparison	U.S. Digital Strategy(Institutional Network Model)	Iranian Digital Strategy(Hybrid Model: Official/Revolutionary)
Primary Target Platforms	Platform (X), YouTube, and international news websites.	Platform (X) for external discourse, Telegram, and Eitaa/Soroush internally.
Target Audience	The international community, political elites, and Western public opinion.	Domestic public opinion, the regional axis (Axis of Resistance), and populations opposed to U.S. policies.
Dominant Content Type	Authenticated military statements, infographics with empirical data, and satellite imagery.	Short, enthusiastic video clips, statements by revolutionary leaders, and implicit visual threats.
Geopolitical Objective of the Image	De-legitimizing Iran internationally, and justifying economic sanctions and military alliances.	Demonstrating military parity, boosting morale, and deterring the adversary through psychological warfare.

Executive Summary of the Results of Table (2):

The qualitative comparative data in Table (2) underscores a fundamental structural and philosophical divergence in crisis communication between the United States and Iran, mapping directly onto their core military and media doctrines. This clash of media frameworks operates across three core metrics:

First: Platform Divergence and Target Demographics (Elite vs. Grassroots Engagement): The operational selection of digital ecosystems is explicitly contingent upon the intended audience



segment. The United States utilizes an institutional network model focused on platform (X) and global mainstream vectors to target Western public opinion, the international community, and decision-making political elites. Conversely, Iran employs a hybrid architecture that anchors official external narratives on platform (X) while simultaneously activating proxy and internal applications (Telegram, Eitaa, Soroush) to mobilize domestic public opinion and regional allies. This manifests a clear strategic polarity: American international penetration versus Iranian domestic immunization.

Second: Communicative Content Polarity (Institutional Bureaucracy vs. Ideological Mobilization): The asymmetric cognitive conflict materializes within the predominant content typology. Washington deploys technocratic and empirical military documentation comprising satellite surveillance, verifiable data, and official communiqués to institute a framework of legal legitimacy and objectivity. Conversely, Tehran relies on high-impact visual-psychological materials, such as tactical military videos, field commander soundbites, and strategic underlying threats. This operational posture directly reflects established paradigms of media guerrilla warfare, which seek to offset hard-power deficits via symbolic and psychological deterrence.

Third: Geopolitical Divergence of Visual Objectives (De-legitimization vs. Asymmetric Parity): The overarching strategic objectives define the ultimate utility of the visual asset. The American communications apparatus weaponizes the "image" to achieve the total political and moral de-legitimization of the adversary, thereby establishing international consensus for the sanctions regime and multilateral naval alliances in the Strait of Hormuz. On the parallel axis, the Iranian visual strategy operates on a dual plane: neutralizing Western psychological operations by demonstrating tactical military parity, and reinforcing the psychological resilience of its regional base by projecting indigenous naval deterrence.

5.3.3 Qualitative and Statistical Analysis of Media Framing Trends, Hashtags, and Active Technical Mechanisms During Crisis Periods:

This table monitors the qualitative construction of the dominant media frames and the most circulated hashtags, coupled with their statistical weight and the technical and behavioral mechanisms that accompanied the dissemination of the competing narratives.

Table (3): Qualitative and Statistical Analysis of Media Framing Trends and the Most Interactive Hashtags During the Study Period (\$30\$ Days)

Strategic Path	Dominant Media Frame	Most Active & Circulated Hashtags	Percentage of Frequency in the Sample (%)	Accompanying Technical & Behavioral Mechanism
The U.S. Side & Its	International security, freedom	#IranTerrorism	\$48\%\$ of total	Heavy deployment of bots (Computational

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Allies	of navigation, international law frame, and the depiction of "Iranian aggression."	#HormuzThreat #MaritimeSecurity	interactions	Propaganda), flooding rumors regarding the Iranian economy, and broadcasting high-definition (HD) videos from CENTCOM.
The Iranian Side & Its Allies	National sovereignty, legitimate defense, anti-imperialism frame, and naval deterrence capability.	#USImperialism #PersianGulf #IranResistance	\$42\%\$ of total interactions	Activating echo chambers via Telegram, utilizing deepfakes and fragmented clips, and focusing on deterrent visual messages and geographical defiance.
Neutral Content / Independent Coverage	Informational-analytical frame, monitoring oil prices, and academic geopolitical analyses.	#HormuzStrait #OilPrices	\$10\%\$ of total interactions	Standard news reporting, non-polarized thematic tracking, and expert data analysis.

Analysis of the Results of Table (3):

The empirical data presented in Table (3) expose the "content engineering and technical manipulation" within cyberspace. The conflict manifests as a statistically and technologically managed process executed via two strategic paths that combined monopolized 90% of total digital flows and crisis communication:

First: The U.S. Path – Threat Globalization Frames and Computational Propaganda: The American side and its allies secured the lion's share of interactions at a rate of 48%. This digital advantage enabled it to enforce the frames of "international security, freedom of navigation, and the depiction of Iranian aggression." Analytical reading reveals that this entrenchment of legal and security frames was by no means a spontaneous flow; rather, it operationally and technically relied on "computational propaganda" through the heavy deployment of automated accounts (bots). This ensured the continuous circulation of strategic hashtags (such as #IranTerrorism and #HormuzThreat) to globalize the crisis and penetrate the international collective consciousness. This ran parallel to injecting economic rumors to destabilize the psychological equilibrium of the Iranian domestic front, and broadcasting ultra-high-definition (HD) visual materials from official military platforms (CENTCOM) to confer a veneer of field realism and credibility upon these media frames.



Second: The Iranian Path – National Sovereignty Frames and Digital Geographic Resistance: Conversely, the Iranian side and its allies managed to capture a critical interactive mass reaching 42%, centering on the frames of "national sovereignty, legitimate defense, and anti-imperialism." To compensate for the structural and technical asymmetry vis-à-vis the Western system, the data indicate that the Iranian axis resorted to alternative behavioral and technical mechanisms; most notably, activating "echo chambers" via Telegram to maintain the cohesion of the domestic and regional fronts, and relying on "deepfake technologies, fragmented clips," and deterrent visual content to undermine the adversary's morale. Operationally, these frames materialized in hashtags carrying sharp geographical and political connotations (such as #USImperialism and #PersianGulf) to assert the historical and geographical identity of the strait in defiance of the American narrative.

A correlative reading of the table's variables yields a methodological conclusion of paramount importance: "media frames have become inextricably linked to cyber-behavioral warfare tools." The tight margins between the two axes (48% vs. 42%) reflect a state of precarious "perceptual equilibrium" digitally. The American institutional and algorithmic supremacy (engineered by bots and ultra-visual quality) faces a resilient Iranian digital defiance that utilizes hybrid communicative tactics (Telegram and deepfakes) with the ultimate goal of transforming geopolitics into digital geography capable of neutralizing conventional elements of American power.

5.3.4 Psychological and Interactive Impact Indicators and Correlative Implications of Digital Conflict Data in the International Environment:

This table extracts the methodological implications and final outcomes of measuring sentiment trends, echo chamber penetration rates, and perceptual crisis management mechanisms between the two conflicting axes.

Table (4): Impact Indicators and Psychological/Interactive Implications of Digital Conflict in the International Environment.

Methodological Objective: Extracting ultimate implications, measuring sentiment, and evaluating echo chamber penetration to deduce the "Study Findings."

Digital &	The U.S. Axis	The Iranian Axis	Reading of Data
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Analytical Indicator	(and Its Allies)	(and Its Allies)	Implications & Findings
Total Digital Flow Volume	62% (A majority sustained by Western infrastructure)	38% (A geographically concentrated, active minority)	American superiority in horizontal diffusion versus an Iranian vertical concentration within specific environments.
Prevalent Sentiment Indicator	45% Anger (against Iran), 35% Fear (of an energy crisis), 20% Confidence (in the U.S. military).	55% Enthusiasm & Pride (in deterrence), 30% Anger (at sanctions), 15% Anxiety.	The American discourse succeeds in provoking global anxiety regarding economic crises, while the Iranian discourse succeeds in value-based mobilization of its loyalists.
Capacity to Penetrate the Adversary's Echo Chambers	Low(The Iranian /Resistance audience exhibits sharp cognitive resilience/defiance).	Moderate (The Iranian narrative succeeds by exposing the economic war costs borne by Western citizens).	Digital ideological polarization prevents either side from completely altering the core, deep-seated convictions of the other.
Rate of Rumor Dissemination & Refutation	Rapid refutation via drone footage and real-time CENTCOM official statements.	Offensive refutation by casting doubt on the credibility of the U.S. narrative and showcasing alternative videos.	"Visual speed" transforms into the decisive factor in managing the perceptual crisis digitally.

Summary of the Results of Table (4):

Table (4) transitions the study from descriptive metrics to a deconstructive analysis of the psychological and interactive dynamics governing digital conflicts. The findings expand across four primary dimensions:

First: The Dialectic of Diffusion (Quantitative Horizontal vs. Qualitative Vertical):

The U.S. axis dominated digital volume at 62%, leveraging Western-centric technical infrastructure for global "horizontal diffusion." Conversely, the Iranian axis, despite a 38% statistical minority, achieved a concentrated "vertical density," demonstrating a potent capacity for qualitative, ideological mobilization within cognitively immunized networks.

Second: The Psychological Engineering of Discourse (Evoking Fear vs. Value-Based Mobilization):



The U.S. discourse pragmatically capitalized on public resentment against Iran (45%) and induced fear regarding global energy security (35%) to legitimize military alliances. In contrast, the Iranian discourse utilized "hot value-based mobilization" (55% enthusiasm/ pride) as a psychological defense mechanism to absorb and mitigate domestic anger caused by economic sanctions (30%).

Third: Echo Chamber Resilience and Cognitive Inertia:

Severe ideological polarization created "acute cognitive defiance." While the U.S. axis faced low penetration into pro-Iranian networks, the Iranian axis registered a moderate penetration into Western chambers by exploiting pragmatic concerns (the economic cost of war for Western citizens). This underscores that digital spaces cluster like-minded individuals and consolidate cognitive fractures rather than shifting core beliefs.

Fourth: Image and Visual Speed as Perceptual Decisiveness:

"Visual time" emerged as a critical weapon. The rapid U.S. deployment of drone footage and CENTCOM updates was met by an aggressive Iranian counter-narrative and alternative footage. This confirms that contemporary crisis management hinges on "visual-perceptual speed" rather than textual statements to capture first impressions.

While quantitative and technical Western supremacy succeeded in globalizing the crisis and engineering an anxious public opinion, it was met by resilient Iranian psychological and technical defiance. This mutual resistance resulted in a "precarious digital geopolitical equilibrium," where neither party could completely dismantle the strategic narrative of the other.

4.5 Discussion and Interpretation of the Case Study Findings:

The digital space surrounding the Strait of Hormuz crisis operated as an active, integrated geopolitical conflict environment where technical infrastructure seamlessly intersected with psychological and perceptual crisis management strategies.

First: The Structural Correlation Between Digital Platforms and Communicative Strategies:

The distribution of the digital sample (\$N=150,000\$) directly reflects the targeted strategies of both actors. Platform (X) absorbed 50% of the sample, matching the institutional U.S. model aimed at international elites and political communities to enforce polarization via hashtag warfare. Conversely, Telegram carried 30% of the flow, serving the hybrid Iranian strategy to activate "closed echo chambers" for raw, mobilization-oriented military content directed at the domestic public and regional allies, bypassing Western algorithmic censorship.

Second: The Operational Reflection of Strategies on Media Frames and Technical Mechanisms:

Strategic objectives dictated executive media framing. The U.S. goal of de-legitimizing Iran translated into a dominant 48% frequency within "international security and freedom of navigation" frames, reinforced technically via automated bot networks and HD broadcast video. Conversely, the Iranian goal of demonstrating parity and psychological deterrence occupied 42% of interactions under the "national sovereignty and legitimate defense" frame, deploying deterrent

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visual tools like deepfakes and short video clips on Telegram to circumvent their digital infrastructure deficit.

Third: The Psychological and Interactive Implications of the Digital Impact:

The final analysis confirms that quantitative American dominance (62%) provided vast horizontal outreach but could not neutralize Iran's vertical ideological concentration (38%). The U.S. security frames successfully triggered a combined 80% feeling of fear and anger globally, while Iranian resistance templates secured a 55% index of pride and enthusiasm among loyalists.

Acute digital polarization fosters an intense "cognitive resilience" that heavily restricts cross-ideological penetration. Ultimately, "visual speed" in refutation and the rapid deployment of alternative multimedia narratives serve as the decisive variables in managing international perceptual crises.

Conclusion:

The study concludes that social media has engineered a fundamental upheaval in the global communicative balance of power, rendering hard military or economic might insufficient on its own to resolve international crises. Instead, the capacity to formulate and direct digital narratives has emerged as a critical element in safeguarding national sovereignty and reputation. This comparative study confirms that states insisting on managing crises with a traditional, centralized media mindset inevitably lose the battle of the mental image to decentralized networks. In the age of algorithms, the mental image is a highly dynamic construct, influenced far more by swift, emotionally charged visual framing than by dry, official communiqués.

The case study of the Strait of Hormuz crisis uncovers a deep transformation in international power dynamics; the geopolitical equation is no longer confined to the number of American aircraft carriers versus Iranian ballistic missiles, but is intricately bound to the battle of preserving reputation and directing perceptions. The metrics prove that the United States deploys its digital soft power and technological advantage to couple the mental image of Iran with "global economic terrorism," capitalizing on international sensitivity to energy corridors. In contrast, Iran, acutely aware of the structural weaknesses of its traditional official media, resorts to a hybrid strategy, unleashing unofficial accounts and trans-border networks to fracture the American narrative by highlighting the exorbitant costs of war and exploiting Western internal political rifts.

Furthermore, the study reveals that algorithms play a detrimental role in deepening crises. They offer no structural space for diplomatic compromises, biasing instead toward amplifying the most radical and shocking discourses from both sides. This leads to a radicalization of the mutual mental image, where backing down in cyberspace appears to either side as a humiliating strategic defeat, which profoundly status-complicates the mission of diplomats on the ground and protracts the political crisis.

Key Strategic Findings:



Through rigorous case study execution and content analysis, the study has yielded the following strategic conclusions:

1- Structural Correlation Between Platform Nature and Communicative Objectives: The data demonstrated a precise functional distribution; platform (X) dominated at 50% as an arena for elite polarization and global trend-manufacturing, while Telegram (30%) transformed into closed echo chambers for ideological mobilization and internal cognitive immunization. Concurrently, YouTube and Instagram (20%) spearheaded the visual image war and perceptual deterrence.

2- Antinomy of Media Doctrines (International Institutional vs. Hybrid Revolutionary): A profound philosophical divergence was identified. The U.S. strategy adopted an institutional, technocratic model addressing international elites through official data and numbers from CENTCOM to achieve de-legitimization. Conversely, the Iranian strategy utilized a hot, hybrid model blending official discourse with regional enthusiastic mobilization to assert parity and psychological deterrence.

3- The Fusing of Media Frames with Cyber-Behavioral Warfare Tools: The findings revealed that media frames (such as the U.S. international security frame at 48% and the Iranian national sovereignty frame at 42%) were not spontaneous. Instead, they were operationally engineered in tandem with behavioral and technical tools, such as computational propaganda and rumor injection on one side, and deepfakes and fragmented clips on the other.

4- Divergent Psychological Engineering of Emotion (Pragmatic Fear vs. Value-Based Enthusiasm): The American discourse successfully capitalized on global anger and fear of an energy crisis at a combined rate of 80%, whereas the Iranian discourse succeeded in value-based mobilization and psychological defense, recording an enthusiasm and pride index of 55%.

5- Cognitive Defiance and the Inevitability of "Visual Time": The study proved that acute polarization creates a cognitive immunity that blocks adversaries from altering each other's core convictions (reflected in the low U.S. capacity to penetrate Iranian echo chambers). Concurrently, visual speed (real-time videos and drones) has mutated into the ultimate, fastest weapon for refuting rumors and manufacturing the first impression.

Recommendations:

Based on the aforementioned outputs, the study advances the following recommendations:

1- Transitioning from Defensive Communication to Proactive Strategic Communication: States must develop agile communicative matrices capable of broadcasting the first narrative backed by immediate visual evidence, avoiding the pitfall of volatile reactionary communication during crises.

2- Establishing "Counter-Computational Propaganda" Units: Building hybrid digital operations rooms that merge media experts with Artificial Intelligence systems to monitor organized bot attacks and dismantle directed disinformation trends before they penetrate the collective consciousness.



3- Developing Sovereign Alternative Digital Platforms: Extracting lessons from the Iranian deployment of Telegram, states should avoid absolute dependency on Western platforms' algorithms and censorship shears. Instead, they must construct domestic or allied networks that guarantee cognitive flow during comprehensive crises.

4- Humanizing and Objectifying Technocratic Communicative Material: Breaking the structural rigidity of official military statements by integrating them with interactive visual materials, alongside legal and economic arguments that touch the daily life of the global citizen, thereby increasing the official narrative's capacity to penetrate the adversary's echo chambers.

Horizons for Future Research (Proposed):

This study opens new scientific pathways necessitated by accelerating technological breakthroughs, including:

1- The Impact of Generative AI in Manufacturing Synthetic Narratives: A comparative study analyzing the capacity of Large Language Models (LLMs) and generative video to formulate alternative mental images of states during the critical opening hours of military crises.

2- Algorithmic Diplomacy and Its Impact on Digital Sovereignty: Investigating the undisclosed mechanisms applied by global Big Tech corporations in directing trend algorithms to favor specific international positions over others during armed conflicts.

3- Audience Psychology Within Digital Echo Chambers: An in-depth behavioral study utilizing Social Network Analysis (SNA) tools to measure the durability of cognitive resilience among grassroots bases when subjected to prolonged exposure to counter-pragmatic communicative messages.

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