

## **What Role Does Digital Marketing Play in Nation Branding During War? A Conceptual Model from Ukraine**

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### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini mengusulkan sebuah model konseptual yang menjelaskan bagaimana strategi komunikasi pemasaran digital berperan dalam membentuk ekuitas merek suatu negara di tengah krisis geopolitik. Penelitian ini menggunakan studi kasus perang Rusia-Ukraina. Penelitian ini mengadopsi pendekatan konseptual berbasis model, mengintegrasikan literatur tentang konten narasi digital, diplomasi media sosial, dan orkestrasi multisaluran digital sebagai variabel kunci yang memengaruhi kepercayaan yang dirasakan, keterlibatan emosional, dan reputasi merek digital. Dengan menggunakan kerangka argumen Toulmin, penelitian ini menawarkan sebuah justifikasi logis untuk hubungan antara variabel-variabel tersebut, yang menunjukkan bahwa narasi digital yang otentik dan emosional menumbuhkan kepercayaan publik global, sementara diplomasi digital meningkatkan keterlibatan dan kredibilitas negara, dan orkestrasi multi-saluran memperkuat reputasi melalui konsistensi pesan lintas platform. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa komunikasi pemasaran digital bukan sekadar alat promosi, tetapi merupakan instrumen strategis dalam membangun persepsi global selama masa krisis. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoritis dengan memperluas cakupan teori ekuitas merek dari konteks bisnis ke ranah geopolitik. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga memberikan kerangka kerja praktis bagi negara untuk merumuskan strategi komunikasi digital yang terintegrasi dan responsif di masa konflik.

**Keywords:** Citra Negara, Perang Rusia-Ukraina, Komunikasi Pemasaran Digital, Ekuitas Merek, Model Konseptual

### **Abstract**

*The present research proposes a conceptual model that explains how digital marketing communication strategies play a role in shaping nation brand equity amid geopolitical crises. This assertion is supported by a case study of the Russia-Ukraine war. The research adopts a model-based conceptual approach, integrating literature on digital narrative content, social media diplomacy and digital multichannel orchestration as key variables that influence perceived trust, emotional engagement and digital brand reputation. Utilizing Toulmin's argument framework, the research offers a logical justification for the relationship between the variables, thereby demonstrating that authentic and emotional digital narratives foster global public trust, while digital diplomacy enhances country engagement and credibility, and multichannel orchestration strengthens reputation through cross-platform message consistency. This study concludes that digital marketing communication is not merely a promotional tool, but a strategic instrument in building global perceptions during times of crisis. This research makes a theoretical contribution by expanding the scope of brand equity theory from the business context to the geopolitical realm. Furthermore, it provides a pragmatic framework for states to formulate integrated and responsive digital communication strategies in periods of conflict.*

**Keywords:** Nation Branding, Russia-Ukraine's War, Digital Marketing Communication, Brand Equity, Conceptual Model

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered a multidimensional crisis with far-reaching impacts not only on the political and military sectors but also on the social, psychological, economic, and ecological dimensions across Eastern Europe. This military action has resulted in the displacement of millions of Ukrainians to neighbouring countries, with Poland emerging as a primary host nation. Consequently, this has led to new challenges in the delivery of basic social and healthcare services, including maternal care (Nenko et al., 2024). In addition to the issue of migration, the war has also had a detrimental effect on the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable groups, particularly adolescents. Levin et al. (2025) draw attention to a considerable escalation in cyberhate behaviour among Ukrainian youth, which they attribute to the ongoing conflict. This phenomenon can be explained through the lens of Bandura (1977) Social Learning Theory, which posits that real-world violence and conflict can be transmitted into online behaviours through processes of observation and internalisation.

The Russia-Ukraine war is an illustrative example of how armed conflict can extend beyond territorial ramifications, penetrating deeply into the social and digital fabric (Levin et al., 2025; Nenko et al., 2024), the ecological sphere (Gatti et al., 2025), and the global economy (Li et al., 2024). This reality signals a paradigm shift in the function of digital marketing, which was previously dominated by corporate or commercial interests, but is now being leveraged by nation-states to maintain legitimacy and garner international support. Through the implementation of strategic digital marketing communication, Ukraine has effectively managed its national reputation while fostering international solidarity, which has materialised in the form of military and humanitarian aid from multiple countries. This lends further credence to the notion that well-orchestrated digital campaigns can serve to reinforce a nation's brand perception, particularly in circumstances where the nation is confronted with existential threats.

In this paradigm, the concept of brand equity provides a theoretical basis for understanding the construction of national image and legitimacy through digital strategies. The consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) model developed by Aaker (1996) and Keller (1993) has been widely adapted in place branding, including nation branding, because its basic elements such as brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty are relevant in describing public perceptions of countries (Dinnie, 2022; Mariutti & Giraldi, 2021; Zenker & Braun, 2017). The relevance of CBBE in nation branding is further emphasised by its ability to capture public perceptions of a country's identity, reputation and values, making it a suitable framework for analysing state-led communication strategies.

In the digital context, brand equity has evolved into digital brand equity, which emphasises real-time interaction, digital sentiment and audience engagement through social media platforms (Enes et al., 2024; France et al., 2025). This digital transformation of brand equity is critical in the context of nation branding during crises, when global perceptions are shaped and shift rapidly. In the context of digital nation branding, each dimension of the CBBE is reinterpreted: brand loyalty

translates into international support or alignment, reflecting global solidarity or recognition; brand awareness is seen as visibility in global discourse, measured by media coverage and social media reach; brand associations become the emotional and symbolic values associated with the nation, shaped by narratives and cultural diplomacy; and perceived quality is defined by the credibility and reliability of information disseminated by state actors. These adaptations demonstrate how traditional brand equity principles can be applied to countries as strategic communication tools in digital environments, particularly in times of crisis.

Research in the field of nation branding and digital marketing has evolved into two relatively distinct domains within the existing academic literature. The majority of research on nation branding concentrates on cultural promotion, public diplomacy and destination image in peacetime contexts (Mariutti & Giraldi, 2021; Murti et al., 2023). Concurrently, the extant literature on digital marketing has predominantly focused on visual influence, algorithmic personalisation, and customer engagement in commercial and consumer behaviour settings (Duffett & Maraule, 2024; Li, 2022). Whilst a number of studies have been conducted on the utilisation of digital marketing in times of crisis, such as the Russia–Ukraine war (Dubovyk et al., 2022), these tend to focus on macroeconomic or general digital activity to a greater extent than they do on the strategic design of digital communication as a mechanism for constructing nation brand equity. Consequently, there is currently no conceptual model that systematically integrates digital marketing communication strategies with the development of nation brand equity in the context of armed conflict. This lacuna in the extant literature presents a valuable opportunity to make a theoretical contribution by proposing a framework that explains how states can orchestrate digital communication strategies to effectively shape brand equity perceptions under extreme geopolitical conditions.

The study proposes two research questions, derived from the phenomena and theoretical gaps outlined in the introduction:

**RQ1:** How do nation-states utilise digital marketing communication strategies to build and maintain brand equity during wartime?

**RQ2:** What are the key elements of digital marketing communication strategies that contribute to nation brand equity amid geopolitical crises, such as the Russia–Ukraine war?

The present study provides a theoretical contribution by extending the brand equity framework from corporate contexts to nation-states, particularly in the context of armed conflict. This adaptation is based on the principle that brand equity is a multifaceted construct defined by consumer perceptions of value, trust and reputation that can be applied beyond commercial entities (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Mariutti & Giraldi, 2021). In the realm of nation branding, place branding theory further emphasises that countries, like corporate brands, possess identities, reputations, and emotional associations that influence global perceptions (Anholt, 2002; Zenker & Braun, 2017). This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of armed conflict, where nation-states need to maintain global legitimacy, secure international support, and shape global perceptions through digital communication strategies. Digital

marketing communication strategies; comprising narrative content, social media diplomacy and digital engagement, become critical tools for shaping trust perceptions, emotional engagement and digital reputation, which are the core elements of nation brand equity in crisis situations.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a model-based conceptual approach as classified by Jaakkola (2020), which aims to develop theory through the synthesis and integration of existing literature without relying on primary empirical data. This approach is particularly relevant given its focus on constructing a theoretical framework that explains how digital marketing communication strategies can shape nation brand equity in the context of geopolitical crises, specifically the Russia–Ukraine war. The proposed conceptual model delineates the relationships between three independent variables: Digital Narrative Content, Social Media Diplomacy, and Digital Multichannel Orchestration, and the core elements of nation brand equity, namely Perceived Trust, Emotional Engagement, and Digital Brand Reputation. This approach is considered appropriate as it addresses a theoretical gap in the integration of digital marketing and nation branding within the context of armed conflict, while simultaneously offering a framework applicable for understanding the dynamics of digital nation branding in extreme geopolitical situations.

### **Toulmin Argument Structure**

The present study adopts Toulmin (2012), model of logical argumentation, comprising three core elements: It is asserted that the theoretical underpinnings of the relationships among variables should be strengthened by means of the following three factors: the claim, the ground, and the warrant. These factors are illustrated in Table 1. The claim pertains to the core proposition of the study, which posits that digital marketing communication strategies exert a significant influence on a nation's brand equity during periods of crisis. The Ground is comprised of empirical and theoretical evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of digital communication strategies, such as authentic narrative construction, transparent social media engagement, and the integration of digital channels in reinforcing public perception and national reputation, particularly during wartime, as exemplified by Ukraine's case. The Warrant provides the theoretical rationale underpinning the rationale of this relationship, which is based on brand equity theory. This theory posits that consistent, authentic, and emotionally resonant digital messaging can foster strong brand associations and enhance public trust and global reputation. This structure is of pertinence as it elucidates the theoretical foundation and logical reasoning underlying the variable relationships proposed in this study's conceptual framework.

In order to provide further support for the conceptual argument, the research framework has been constructed using the logical structure of argumentation developed by Toulmin (2012):

Table 1. The Argumentative Structure: An Examination of Logical Argumentation

<b>Argument</b>	
<b>Claim</b>	It is evident that digital marketing communication strategies exert a considerable influence on a nation's brand equity.
<b>Ground</b>	Dubovyk et al. (2022) examined Ukraine's effective utilisation of meticulously devised and emotionally resonant digital campaigns, which culminated in the successful cultivation of a favourable global reputation during periods of conflict.
<b>Warrant</b>	Brand equity theory posits that brand associations and trust are formed through consistent and relevant message exposure, as well as the audience's experience with authentic communication (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993).

Source: Adaptation from Stephen E. Toulmin (2012)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Digital Narrative Content

Digital narrative content is defined as a form of communication that combines storytelling elements with interactive digital media to convey meaning, shape perception, and enhance audience engagement. In the context of strategic state communication during geopolitical crises, digital narratives serve as a central tool for the reframing of national image through narrative experiences accessible to a global public.

As Bellini (2022) emphasises, interactive digital narratives (IDNs) are complex and multilayered, operating within closed-loop systems (feedback loops) involving multimodality, sensorimotor experiences, and the activation of collective memory. This facilitates the effective representation of complex phenomena, such as geopolitical conflict and national resilience, within digital narratives.

As posited by Nicoli et al. (2022), the following four core approaches are identified as effective in the context of digital storytelling on social media: emotional appeal, character relatability, universal representation, and narrative simplicity. These elements are of paramount importance in establishing a connection with the audience, particularly when addressing sensitive issues such as war or disinformation. Digital Storytelling (DST) has been demonstrated to facilitate emotional engagement and active audience participation as co-creators, which is crucial in fostering trust and support for a nation's narrative.

This assertion is further substantiated by Wolff et al. (2007), who demonstrate that digital narrative content can be personalised and restructured through narrative principles embedded in algorithms, thereby enabling the creation of cohesive and meaningful interactive experiences.

This lends further credence to the proposition that digital narrative content functions not merely as a conduit for information dissemination, but also as a medium for engendering cognitive and emotional experiences that serve to fortify national identity in the eyes of the global audience.



### **Social Media Diplomacy**

Social Media Diplomacy (SMD) represents an evolutionary form of public diplomacy that leverages digital platforms for the dissemination of foreign policy narratives, the construction of national image, and direct engagement with global audiences. This form of diplomacy represents an expansion beyond the conventional use of social media by ministries of foreign affairs, encompassing the orchestration of structured messaging designed to influence international public opinion, enhance transparency, and accelerate policy responses.

As posited by Ashbrook & Zalba (2021), the notion of social media diplomacy encompasses not only the shaping of a nation's image but also the influence on the dynamics of international negotiations. This is achieved by means of the reinforcement of public pressure and the establishment of consistent moral representation. In this context, the state assumes dual roles as both a narrative agent and a digital community manager. This form of digital diplomacy fulfils three core functions: first, as a channel for public communication (push messaging); second, as a tool for diplomatic reporting in constrained media environments; and third, as a diagnostic instrument to gauge public opinion and detect weak signals that may impact the success or failure of diplomatic efforts. These functions enable diplomats to go beyond mere messaging and actively interpret social cues that shape international outcomes.

In the Indonesian context, research by Darmastuti et al. (2021) highlights the growing importance of digital diplomacy, particularly in enhancing public engagement among the diaspora in cultural and economic diplomacy. It is evident that social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are utilised by both government and non-state actors to voice national interests and mobilise international public opinion on strategic issues, including tourism promotion and disaster solidarity. Furthermore, citizens themselves can serve as informal diplomatic agents by participating in the promotion of culture, tourism, and crisis solidarity through hashtags or online campaigns.

It is evident that social media diplomacy functions not merely as a digital extension of foreign relations, but as a mechanism for nation branding grounded in public participation, moral storytelling, and value dissemination. This directly influences a country's perceived trust, emotional engagement, and global reputation, particularly in the context of armed conflict.

### **Digital Multichannel Orchestration**

Digital engagement, within the context of a digital marketing communication strategy, can be considered a systematic orchestration process. This process integrates multiple digital touchpoints with a view to creating a cohesive and value-driven customer experience. In the contemporary marketing paradigm, which is predominantly driven by technological advances, the concept of digital engagement encompasses not only the intensity of interaction but also the quality of orchestration across a multitude of channels and the interconnectedness of various actors within a dynamic innovation ecosystem.

Annaram (2021) posits that digital orchestration facilitates organisations in the comprehensive management of the customer experience through the automation of workflows, personalised communication, and the optimisation of digital channels, including chatbots, email, and self-service portals. This orchestration is of critical importance in fostering long-term customer loyalty, including in contexts of systemic stress such as pandemics or geopolitical conflicts. In contrast, Paiola et al. (2023) developed an orchestration model within the healthcare ecosystem, emphasising the role of a keystone player. This is defined as a central actor responsible for relationship coordination, resource allocation, and cross-level digital engagement (micro, meso, macro, mega). This finding suggests that digital engagement is a multifaceted and relational phenomenon.

Furthermore, the notion of digital orchestration is intimately linked with omnichannel methodologies within B2B ecosystems. In such contexts, the maintenance of message consistency and the integration of digital platforms are identified as pivotal factors in optimising user experience and facilitating value co-creation (Paiola et al., 2023). Digital platforms function not only as instruments, but also as dynamic entities that facilitate the integration of actors, data, and business processes. This integration is pivotal in ensuring the continuity and resilience of services in the face of external disruptions.

In accordance with these perspectives, a comprehensive understanding of digital engagement in the context of geopolitical crises necessitates an examination that extends beyond the confines of quantitative metrics of social media interaction. It is imperative that the state, in its capacity as a brand entity, considers how it can orchestrate cross-channel digital messaging, navigate global audience expectations, and activate collective empathy through strategically curated narratives. This approach positions digital engagement as a conceptual variable that not only bridges communication strategies with public response but also serves as a mechanism for building trust and the legitimacy of nation branding amid uncertainty.

### **Perceived Trust**

The concept of perceived trust in digital communication pertains to the extent to which individuals ascribe confidence to the veracity, credibility, and benevolence of digital message sources, particularly in circumstances characterised by uncertainty, such as during wartime or periods of crisis. The trust that consumers place in a brand is not solely derived from the content of the message; it is also influenced by the perceptions of the information provider, the stability of the digital platforms, and the user's prior experiences. In the context of technology use, such as mobile payments or government communication, trust serves as a critical psychological foundation for usage intention and compliance with official digital directives (Tan et al., 2024).

Trust is not shaped by a single factor, but rather by a combination of dimensions, including perceived usefulness, ease of use, security, and user mobility. In times of crisis, the level of trust placed in digital communication is influenced by various factors, including perceptions of information security, the clarity of the message, and the transparency of communication from authoritative sources. As

demonstrated by Ferro et al. (2024), patients' decision to continue radiation therapy during the Israel-Hamas war, despite severe security threats, was primarily influenced by their trust in the professionalism of the medical staff. This demonstrates that trust can supersede fear when bolstered by institutional credibility and coherent communication.

In addition, Dadashzadeh et al. (2025) discovered that in the context of ridesharing during the Ukraine war, trust in service providers and fellow users was a significant predictor in mobility decision-making. In periods of crisis, trust functions as a psychological bridge that enables the continuity of technology-based social and economic activities, while also serving as an indicator of digital resilience in society.

In this model, perceived trust encompasses more than interpersonal or institutional trust alone; it also reflects a psychological dimension reinforced by technology, source credibility, and digital experiences during crisis. This variable is critical in shaping nation brand equity, as trust drives positive perceptions of a country, especially under extreme conditions such as war and geopolitical conflict.

### **Emotional Engagement**

Emotional engagement is defined as the extent of affective involvement that an audience experiences in response to a digitally delivered message or experience, particularly through narrative. In the context of digital communication, emotion is not merely a passive reaction; rather, it serves as a pivotal catalyst that propels audience attachment and resonance with a brand or entity transmitting a message. This form of engagement encompasses feelings, identification, and empathy, all of which are cultivated through strong narrative elements, immersive design, and strategically tailored sensory stimulation.

As demonstrated by numerous studies, emotional engagement is shaped through aesthetic and narrative experiences that activate affective responses to content. In digital contexts, this experience is further intensified by spatial and narrative proximity to the characters or issues being portrayed (Al-Obaydi et al., 2023; Shen et al., 2022). Immersive formats, such as virtual reality journalism, demonstrate that proximity to the story enhances empathetic emotion and cognitive participation in the social realities depicted (Dubovi, 2022; Kukkakorpi & Pantti, 2021).

As posited by Shen et al. (2022), the phenomenon of emotional engagement during live streaming may be understood as involving emotional connections between the audience and the host, or among viewers. These connections are hypothesised to be reinforced through a variety of mechanisms, including chat-based interactions, emotional expressions, and social dynamics throughout the broadcast. The fast-paced, interactive, and responsive nature of digital environments creates an affective space in which audiences feel emotionally “involved” with the content they consume.

In the context of extreme service-based education (e-service learning), emotional engagement has been identified as a significant predictor of intrinsic motivation, active participation, and students' psychological well-being (Marcus et al.,



2021). It has been demonstrated that when learners experience a sense of belonging and feel emotionally stimulated through pride, compassion, or inspiration, they tend to demonstrate higher levels of commitment and engagement in the digital learning process.

In the context of crisis communication and nation digital branding, narratives that evoke emotional themes such as suffering, courage, or global solidarity have strong potential to trigger emotional engagement. This type of engagement becomes a vital instrument in shaping positive perceptions of the nation as a message sender, as emotionally charged messages are more likely to be remembered, shared, and responded to through concrete actions (e.g., donations, campaigns, or advocacy).

### **Digital Brand Reputation**

Digital Brand Reputation can be defined as the aggregate impression formed by stakeholders regarding a brand entity within digital spaces, as evidenced by online conversations, reviews, and interactions. This digital reputation encompasses both rational and emotional perceptions derived from user experiences, exposure to social media content, and online news coverage. As posited by (Rust et al., 2021), measurement of this phenomenon is frequently conducted in real time through the utilisation of sentiment analysis and the volume of discussion on digital platforms, including but not limited to Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

The concept emphasises the significance of users' voices in the dynamic shaping of brand reputation. Rust et al. (2021) developed a brand reputation tracker based on social media, which demonstrated the longitudinal monitoring of brand reputation and its direct linkage to financial performance. The framework underpinning this study identifies three primary drivers of reputation: value drivers, brand drivers, and relationship drivers. Sub-drivers such as innovation, excitement, and trust serve as key determinants of digital reputation perception.

Concurrently, Aboalganam & Alzghoul (2025) findings indicated that digital marketing strategies exert a substantial influence on brand reputation, a relationship that is facilitated by service quality and moderated by brand trust. It was determined that enterprises boasting robust digital reputations frequently possess a competitive advantage in the retention of customer loyalty and the fortification of public perceptions regarding credibility and reliability.

In the context of nation branding, a country's digital reputation becomes essential, especially in extreme situations such as war or geopolitical crises. The manner in which the global populace perceives a nation can be subject to considerable alteration due to the propagation of digital narratives through social media platforms. Consequently, the management of digital reputation represents not merely a corporate concern but also a vital diplomatic strategy. It is evident that governments can proactively utilise an Online Reputation Management (ORM) approach to meticulously monitor, respond to, and shape global perceptions of their national image in real time. This can be achieved by employing sophisticated tactics such as sentiment tracking, digital crisis management, and strategic narrative orchestration (Jain, 2023).

In accordance with this theoretical framework, the digital brand reputation functions as both an indicator of a nation's image performance and a strategic tool that can be dynamically orchestrated to maintain legitimacy, enhance global trust, and expand influence on the international stage.

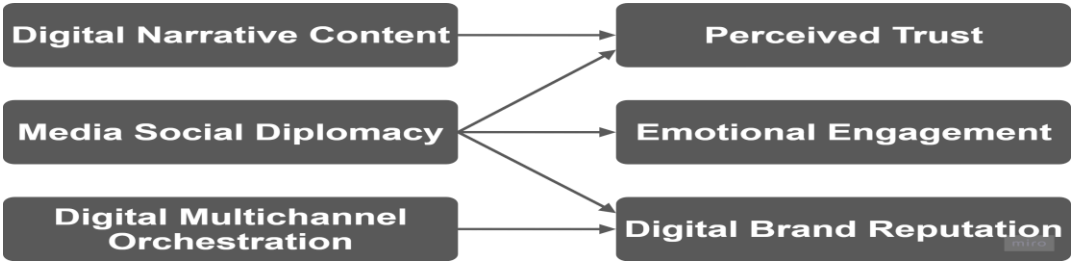


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Digital Marketing Communication Strategy on Nation Brand Equity

The Relationship between Digital Narrative Content and Perceived Trust

Table 2. Justifying the Relationship between Digital Narrative Content & Perceived Trust Using Toulmin's Approach

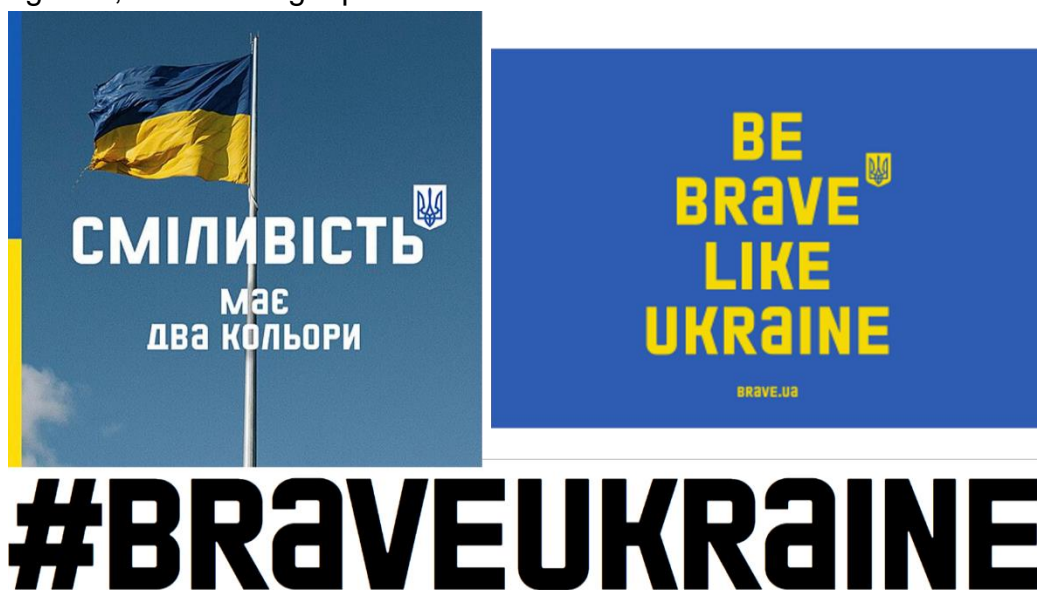
Variable Relationships	Claim	Ground	Warrant
Digital Narrative Content Perceived Trust	Digital narrative content has been demonstrated to be an effective medium for increasing public trust, primarily by reinforcing brand authenticity in the context of digital communications.	It has been demonstrated that authentic digital narratives possess the capacity to initiate narrative transport processes, thereby engendering a reduction in audience resistance and scepticism regarding the message being conveyed (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Kaur et al., 2024; Van Laer et al., 2019)	The following discourse will explore the notion of a trust cycle in digital storytelling, with a particular emphasis on the significance of transparency, social relevance, and honesty in enhancing perceptions of authenticity and maintaining long-term public trust (Copeland & de Moor, 2018; Pera & Viglia, 2016)

Source: Research Results

Digital narrative content has been demonstrated to enhance public trust by reinforcing brand authenticity in digital communication (see Table 2). This claim is founded upon the premise that digital narratives, by employing potent storytelling techniques, possess the capacity to engender profound emotional intimacy between audiences and the entity being represented, thereby directly enhancing public trust (Van Laer et al., 2019). Empirical evidence supports the notion that digital narratives, constructed authentically and featuring real stories or lived experiences, are more likely to be trusted than overtly persuasive or commercial messages (Kaur et al., 2024).

The theoretical ground for this relationship is the concept that authentic digital narratives facilitate the process of narrative transportation, whereby audiences

become engrossed in the narrative, reducing their resistance and scepticism towards the content being conveyed (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Van Laer et al., 2019). This assertion is corroborated by studies demonstrating that user-generated digital storytelling enhances perceptions of authenticity and credibility of the information source (Hochstein et al., 2023; Kitsios et al., 2022). A compelling example of how digital narrative content can build public trust is the Ukrainian government's 'Be Brave Like Ukraine' campaign, launched as a strategic communications initiative during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The campaign used the hashtag #BRAVEUKRAINE (originally in Ukrainian: *#БудьСмеливимЯкУкраїна*) across social media platforms, featuring authentic stories of Ukrainian citizens, volunteers and soldiers showing courage and resilience. A striking visual from this campaign features the phrase “*Смелість має два кольори*” (Bravery has two colors), symbolising the national values of courage represented by the two colours of the Ukrainian flag - blue and yellow (see Figure 2). This narrative not only reinforced Ukraine's image as a symbol of bravery, but also mobilised international solidarity and support. Through these digital narratives, Ukraine effectively reinforced its national image by transforming a national crisis into a message of collective resilience. The campaign successfully demonstrated how authentic digital storytelling can cultivate emotional engagement and trust, aligning global audiences with the values and struggles of the Ukrainian people. It also exemplifies how digital brand equity is constructed in real-time through shared experiences, visual symbolism, and narrative persuasion. The use of authentic stories and a unified narrative under a distinctive hashtag not only enhanced public trust but also amplified the country's global visibility, transforming a national crisis into a message of collective resilience. Such strategic use of digital narratives illustrates the power of storytelling in shaping international perceptions and building trust, even amid geopolitical conflict.



Source: Brave.ua

Figure 2. Authentic digital narrative from the “Be Brave Like Ukraine” campaign

The warrant that underpins this relationship is rooted in the theory of the trust cycle in digital storytelling. This theory posits that audience trust increases significantly when narratives reflect transparency, social relevance, and honesty (Copeland & De Moor, 2018). Digital narrative content characterised by authenticity, user engagement, and consistency in both emotional and cognitive messaging has been shown to capture attention and to sustain public trust over time (Pera & Viglia, 2016).

In crisis contexts, such as that of Ukraine, the use of authentic digital narratives becomes a vital strategy in building and maintaining a positive perception and trust in the nation brand, particularly given the public's heightened need for credible and trustworthy sources of information (Braddock & Morrison, 2018). Consequently, this relationship must not be regarded as a straightforward linear association; rather, it should be considered a complex interaction of psychological and social factors that collectively form a robust foundation for the development of trust through digital narratives.

**The Relationship between Social Media Diplomacy and Trust, Engagement, and Reputation**

The utilisation of social media in diplomatic contexts has been demonstrated to enhance public trust, audience engagement, and a nation's digital reputation. This enhancement is achieved through the capacity for direct interaction and greater transparency that social media offers in comparison with conventional diplomatic practices (see Table 3). This claim is founded on the premise that digital diplomacy, particularly through platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, facilitates real-time, interactive communication, thereby fostering a sense of interconnectedness and trust among audiences towards official state information sources (Ittefaq, 2019; Sevin & Ingenhoff, 2018).

Table 3. Justifying the Relationship between Social Media Diplomacy & Trust, Engagement, and Reputation Using Toulmin's Approach

Variable Relationships	Claim	Ground	Warrant
Social Media Diplomacy Trust, Engagement, Reputation	The utilisation of social media in diplomatic contexts has been demonstrated to enhance public trust, audience engagement, and a nation's digital reputation. This enhancement is achieved through direct interaction and greater transparency when compared with conventional	It has been demonstrated that audiences place a greater degree of trust in diplomatic messages that are delivered in an open, interactive and continuous manner than in one-way messages (Gosling, 2021; Khan et al., 2021; Sevin & Ingenhoff, 2018).	The notion of social capital posits that transparent and open interactions on social media engender trust, openness, credibility, and commitment, thereby exerting a positive influence on a nation's digital reputation (Deos, 2015; Fasinu et al., 2024).

diplomatic practices.

Source: Research Results

The ground for this relationship is that audiences are more likely to trust diplomatic messages when they are delivered in an open, interactive, and consistent manner, rather than through one-way communication (Gosling, 2021; Sevin & Ingenhoff, 2018). This relationship is further reinforced by the capacity of digital diplomacy to significantly increase public engagement, where audiences can directly respond, inquire, and participate in discussions on pressing national issues, thereby fostering authentic emotional involvement (Khan et al., 2021). A prime illustration of the efficacy of social media diplomacy in fostering public trust, audience engagement and digital reputation is evident in the communications strategy adopted by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during the Russian invasion. In order to communicate with the populace in an effective manner, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has utilised social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Telegram to deliver personalised and authentic messages, including a 'selfie' video of him in Kyiv with top officials, which served to emphasise his commitment to stand by the Ukrainian people in the midst of the crisis. This approach was successful in establishing a robust leadership narrative and fostering increased public trust, both domestically and within the international community. Furthermore, the Ukrainian government employed the Telegram platform via official channels such as *@UkraineNOW* to disseminate updates, airstrike warnings, and clarifications on disinformation. These channels have become a reliable source of information for Ukrainian citizens and the international community, with millions of users actively following the updates on a daily basis. This communication strategy achieved two objectives: it increased public engagement, and it strengthened Ukraine's digital reputation as a transparent and responsive country in the face of crisis.

Logically, the warrant for this relationship is logically derived from the concept of social capital, which posits that open and transparent interactions on social media platforms build key relational elements such as trust, openness, credibility, and commitment (Deos, 2015). Empirical studies on the digital diplomacy of the United States and Israel demonstrate that the social capital generated through digital diplomacy leads to more positive public perceptions and strengthens digital reputation, especially when employed during crises that require timely and accurate responses (Deos, 2015; Fasinu et al., 2024). Conversely, failure to maintain transparency and authentic engagement may lead to the spread of disinformation, erode public trust, reduce audience participation, and ultimately damage a nation's reputation (Irfan & Asad, 2024). In this context, social media diplomacy is not merely an auxiliary communication channel, but a strategic element for building a nation's holistic image through authentic, interactive relationships with global audiences.

### **The Relationship between Digital Multichannel Orchestration and Digital Brand Reputation**

Digital multichannel orchestration has been demonstrated to enhance a nation's digital brand reputation, due to its ability to deliver a consistent and



integrated communication experience across multiple touchpoints (see Table 4). The primary ground for this relationship is the acknowledgement that contemporary digital audiences no longer interact with a solitary communication channel, but rather engage with multiple platforms concurrently (Peterson et al., 2010). In periods of crisis, such as that currently being experienced by Ukraine, the importance of consistent messaging across all channels becomes paramount. The dissemination of inconsistent messaging has the potential to exacerbate prevailing negative public perceptions. Empirical studies have demonstrated that cross-channel integration, encompassing social media, official websites and other digital platforms, can yield stronger positive perceptions than single-channel approaches, particularly in dynamic and uncertain contexts (Nova et al., 2020; Peter & Dalla Vecchia, 2021). A notable illustration of the efficacy of digital multichannel orchestration in fostering digital brand reputation is evidenced by the communication strategy employed by the Ukrainian government during the armed conflict with Russia. The Ukrainian government employed a variety of digital channels in a cohesive manner, encompassing official websites (e.g., war.ukraine.ua), social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), mobile applications (e.g., Diia), and instant messaging platforms (e.g., Telegram), to ensure the dissemination of consistent and reliable information to both domestic and international audiences. This approach facilitated the dissemination of consistent messaging, thereby reinforcing Ukraine's image as a transparent and responsive nation in the face of crisis. The integration of these communication channels also contributed to the establishment of public trust and the enhancement of Ukraine's digital reputation in the global community.

Table 4. Justifying the Relationship between Digital Multichannel Orchestration & Digital Brand Reputation Using Toulmin's Approach			
Variable Relationships	Claim	Ground	Warrant
Digital Multichannel Orchestration Digital Brand Reputation	Digital multichannel orchestration has been demonstrated to enhance the nation's digital reputation by ensuring a consistent and integrated communication experience across multiple digital channels.	In the contemporary era, audiences are no longer confined to a single communication channel; rather, they utilise multiple channels concurrently. Consequently, it is imperative for organisations to implement a coherent and consistent message across all their digital platforms in order to prevent the propagation of negative perceptions during a crisis situation (Nova et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2010).	The consistency and coherence of messages across digital channels is indicative of institutional credibility and professional communication. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that such consistency serves to facilitate crisis management and reduce audience confusion (Peter & Dalla Vecchia, 2021; Sakas et al., 2022).

Source: Research Results

The warrant for this relationship can be found in the finding that audiences are more likely to trust a nation or organisation that delivers coherent and consistent information across various digital platforms. Such consistency is indicative of institutional credibility and professional communication management (Sakas et al., 2022). This strategy also supports more effective crisis perception management, as each interaction point reinforces the core message, thereby minimizing confusion or doubt among audiences. Research suggests that the success of digital channel integration is contingent not only on technical coordination, but also on a deep understanding of audience behaviour and preferences (Peterson et al., 2010; Sakas et al., 2022).

Digital multichannel orchestration has the potential to strategically enhance a nation's digital reputation by managing audience experiences in a more integrated and responsive manner, especially in crisis situations where message clarity and communication consistency are of paramount importance.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Digital marketing communication strategies play a pivotal role in shaping and maintaining national brand equity in the context of geopolitical conflicts, such as the Russia–Ukraine war. The digital narrative content strategy effectively builds perceived trust through authenticity and narrative transportation, while social media diplomacy strengthens trust, engagement, and reputation through transparent and interactive direct communication. Furthermore, digital multichannel orchestration has been demonstrated to enhance digital brand reputation by ensuring message consistency and coherence across a variety of digital platforms.

However, the present study is subject to limitations in terms of empirical testing due to its conceptual nature. For future research, it is recommended that this model be empirically tested through case studies on the Russian aggression against Ukraine, as well as through comparative studies involving other geopolitical crises, such as the Syrian conflict, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or other international crises. A comparative analysis of this kind would provide valuable insights into the generalisability and applicability of the model across different types of geopolitical conflicts. Researchers would be able to assess whether digital marketing communication strategies consistently influence nation brand equity in various crisis contexts.

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