# The Digital Turn in Nation Branding during Crisis: A Systematic Review of Ukraine's Communication Strategies in the Russia-Ukraine War

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#### Abstrak

Perang Rusia-Ukraina sejak Februari 2022 telah memunculkan urgensi baru dalam nation branding, di mana komunikasi pemasaran digital menjadi alat utama dalam membangun dan mempertahankan ekuitas citra negara. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memetakan secara sistematis strategi, variabel utama, dan hasil yang dicapai dari penerapan komunikasi pemasaran digital dalam nation branding Ukraina selama masa perang. Studi ini menggunakan metode systematic literature review (SLR) berbasis PRISMA terhadap 42 artikel terindeks Scopus terbitan tahun 2022 hingga 2025. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa orkestrasi komunikasi digital melalui media sosial, kampanye daring, dan diplomasi multisaluran sangat krusial dalam membangun narasi solidaritas, kepercayaan publik, dan reputasi global Ukraina. Temuan utama penelitian ini memperlihatkan kolaborasi erat antara negara, pemerintah daerah, diaspora, dan aktor global dalam memanfaatkan berbagai platform seperti Twitter/X, TikTok, website, crowdfunding, meme, dan layanan cloud untuk menyebarkan narasi nasional, membangun keterlibatan audiens, serta mengelola opini publik secara real-time. Studi ini juga menegaskan bahwa strategi nation branding telah bergeser dari diplomasi konvensional menuju pendekatan digital-first, di mana keberhasilan komunikasi sangat dipengaruhi oleh konsistensi pesan, adaptasi teknologi, dan kolaborasi lintas aktor. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada pengembangan framework konseptual nation branding digital, sekaligus menawarkan rekomendasi praktis bagi pemerintah dan praktisi komunikasi digital dalam membangun citra negara di era konflik.

**Kata kunci:** Ekuitas Merek Digital, Komunikasi Pemasaran, Komunikasi Digital, Perang Rusia-Ukraina, Tinjauan Sistematis

#### Abstract

Since February 2022, the Russia-Ukraine war has intensified the urgency of nation branding, positioning digital marketing communication as a crucial tool for building and maintaining national brand equity. This study aims to systematically map strategies, key variables, and the outcomes achieved through digital marketing communication in Ukraine's nation branding during wartime. Employing a PRISMA-based systematic literature review (SLR) of 42 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2022 and 2025, the study finds that the orchestration of digital communication via social media, online campaigns, and multichannel diplomacy is essential in constructing narratives of solidarity, public trust, and Ukraine's global reputation. The main findings reveal strong collaboration among the state, local governments, diaspora, and global actors who leverage various platforms such as Twitter/X, TikTok, websites, crowdfunding, memes, and cloud services to disseminate national narratives, foster audience engagement, and manage public opinion in real time. The study further highlights a shift in nation branding strategies from conventional diplomacy to a digital-first approach, where success is driven by message consistency, technological adaptation, and multi-actor collaboration. This research contributes a conceptual framework for digital nation branding and offers practical recommendations for governments and digital communication practitioners seeking to build national image in times of conflict.

**Keywords**: Digital Brand Equity, Marketing Communication, Digital Communication, Russia-Ukraine War, Systematic Review Article History: Submitted: June 9, 2025 Revised: June 22, 2025 Accepted: June 27, 2025

# INTRODUCTION

The Russia–Ukraine war, which commenced in February 2022, has precipitated not only geopolitical and humanitarian disruption, but also marked a new chapter in how a nation's image is contested and rehabilitated in the digital realm. President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, together with his team, has strategically orchestrated digital communication across multiple platforms from social media to international forums to strengthen international solidarity and sustain the narrative of Ukraine's struggle in the global arena. These efforts have encompassed viral messaging, digital fundraising campaigns, and the utilisation of influencers and international celebrities as instruments of unconventional diplomacy (Serafin, 2022). By harnessing the power of digital media, President Zelensky has not only fostered domestic psychological resilience, but also shaped international opinion to maintain ongoing support for Ukraine.

The digitalisation of communication in the context of this war has also amplified the role of non-state actors such as technology corporations, international organisations, and cyber communities in shaping public perception and implementing a "digital blockade" against Russia (Serafin, 2022). Furthermore, the increased utilisation of technology, including the Starlink satellite internet network, has become a vital infrastructure for maintaining the flow of information amid physical and cyber assaults (Serafin, 2022). This phenomenon underscores that a nation's image is now contested not only on the battlefield, but also within the global digital ecosystem, where information, solidarity, and public perception serve as strategic weapons in defending sovereignty.

The application of digital marketing communication has proven crucial in building and sustaining nation brand equity during wartime, as demonstrated in the case of Ukraine. Reztrianti et al. (2025a) identify that, in situations of geopolitical crisis such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a nation does not rely solely on traditional diplomacy but also adopts structured and responsive digital communication strategies to shape global perceptions. This approach encompasses authentic and emotional digital narratives, diplomacy through social media, and the orchestration of multichannel digital platforms, all of which simultaneously contribute to enhancing international public trust, emotional engagement, and the country's digital reputation. This conceptual model is supported by brand equity theory, which emphasises that consistent, authentic, and emotionally resonant digital messaging can strengthen nation brand associations, while also fostering trust and loyalty among global audiences (Aaker, 1996).

The concrete implementation of this strategy is clearly evident in the various digital campaigns conducted by the Ukrainian government throughout the war. Both the Ukrainian government and the city of Kyiv have actively utilised official Twitter

accounts as tools for crisis communication, public diplomacy, and nation building, sharing real-time narratives, visualisations of war casualties, and messages of solidarity that have successfully captured international attention and strengthened the national identity of the Ukrainian people (Boatwright & Pyle, 2023a). Notably, viral hashtags such as #FuckPutin on Twitter have served as instruments of global digital solidarity, not only expressing collective outrage but also fostering communities of support and expanding advocacy networks for Ukraine through massive emotional expression (Dynel, 2023a). Beyond governmental institutions, international organisations such as FIFA have also repositioned their digital communications by openly condemning the invasion and imposing social sanctions on Russia, thereby increasing engagement and the resonance of these issues among global stakeholders (Halabi & O'Connell, 2024a). These collective efforts demonstrate that integrated and adaptive digital communication has become a central pillar in maintaining, and even enhancing, Ukraine's brand equity in the eyes of the international community during wartime.

The concept of nation branding refers to a country's strategic efforts to build, manage, and communicate its national image and identity at the international level, with the aim of enhancing reputation, attracting investment and tourism, and strengthening diplomacy (Anholt, 2002; Dinnie, 2022). Over time, digitalisation has significantly transformed the landscape of national marketing communication. According to Kotler, P., & Keller (2016), digital marketing communication involves leveraging various digital channels such as social media, websites, and online campaigns to foster engagement, disseminate narratives, and influence audience perceptions broadly and in real time.

The concept of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) underscores the necessity of integrating and maintaining consistency in marketing communications across a variety of channels, both conventional and digital, to create strong brand equity and a cohesive image in the minds of the audience (Belch & Belch, 2018). In the context of nation branding, the application of IMC becomes even more critical, particularly when a nation is confronted with crisis situations such as war. The synergy between social media, official government websites, digital campaigns, and public diplomacy messages enables a country not only to communicate its narrative more effectively, but also to build sustained engagement and trust at a global level. Thus, IMC serves as a strategic framework that unifies various national digital communication efforts to achieve nation branding objectives that are adaptive and relevant to the dynamics of the digital era. Previous studies affirm that the synergy between nation branding and digital communication has become increasingly important in times of crisis, when countries are no longer reliant solely on traditional diplomacy but are also proactively utilising digital platforms to strengthen national narratives and respond adaptively to the shifting dynamics of global public opinion (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015; Melissen, 2011).

Nation branding in times of conflict has undergone a fundamental shift from conventional approaches to a digital-first strategy, whereby the use of digital

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platforms and social media has become the backbone of state communication in constructing narratives and shaping public perception. Whereas in the past a country's image was largely built through formal diplomacy and offline activities, digital communication now serves as the primary tool for reaching global audiences in real time, managing crises, and mobilising international solidarity, as identified by Reztrianti et al. (2025b) in the conceptual framework for Ukrainian nation branding. The study by Obłój & Voronovska (2024) further asserts that, in the context of war, companies and institutions in Ukraine have adopted adaptive and multichannel communication strategies to ensure business continuity and reinforce the national narrative amidst uncertainty.

The importance of conducting a systematic analysis of the literature has become increasingly pronounced in the rapidly evolving and highly uncertain context of the Russia–Ukraine war. Numerous studies have indicated that this large-scale conflict has had a direct impact on public perception and trust, both towards the aggressor state and the victim. For instance, Yudaruddin & Lesmana (2024) highlight that the Russian invasion has triggered significant shocks within the international banking sector, resulting in volatility and instability in global capital markets and financial institutions. Raza et al. (2024) similarly demonstrate that the conflict has contributed to global inflationary pressures, disrupted commodity markets, and affected international supply chains. Nowinska & Roslyng Olesen (2025) as well as Kostruba (2024) further note that corporate investment has persisted despite the escalation of the war, driven by a mix of institutional, profit-seeking, and altruistic motives. However, their studies do not address nation branding aspects grounded in digital marketing communication.

There is a clear research gap, as the majority of previous studies have tended to focus on the war's effects on financial markets (Raza et al., 2024), the banking sector (Yudaruddin & Lesmana, 2024), corporate investment (Nowinska & Roslyng Olesen, 2025), and business dynamics more broadly (Kostruba, 2024; Obłój & Voronovska, 2024). Few studies have comprehensively examined the integration of digital communication strategies and nation branding narratives in conflict-affected countries such as Ukraine. Research that specifically links digital platforms, social media diplomacy, and the strengthening of nation brand equity during wartime remains highly limited.

Therefore, this systematic literature review (SLR) aims to systematically map the strategies, variables, and outcomes that emerge within the literature on nation branding based on digital communication during the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The primary focus is to identify the digital communication models employed by the Ukrainian government, the mechanisms for disseminating national narratives via digital platforms, and their influence on both domestic and global public perception and trust. Thus, the findings of this SLR are expected to address the theoretical gap while simultaneously reinforcing the foundation for developing a conceptual framework that may be empirically tested in subsequent stages of research.

#### METHODS

The research method employed in this study is a systematic literature review (SLR), structured in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). The choice of this method is grounded in the need to ensure that all processes of identifying, selecting, and analysing scholarly articles are conducted in a systematic, transparent, accurate, and objective manner. The SLR approach enables researchers to integrate a range of findings from relevant literature, while also mapping the development and research gaps concerning the shift in nation branding strategies from conventional to digital-first approaches, particularly within the context of geopolitical crises.

# **Formulation of Research Questions**

- **RQ1.** How is digital marketing communication strategy used to build and maintain Ukraine's nation brand equity during the Russian-Ukrainian war?
- **RQ2.** What are the main variables, digital platforms, and communication elements identified in the literature related to digital-based nation branding during the war in Ukraine?
- **RQ3.** What outcomes are generated from the application of digital marketing communication in nation branding, both in the domestic context (public trust, national solidarity) and internationally (global support, national reputation)?
- **RQ4.** How did digital-based nation branding strategies change and differ before and during the war, and what factors influenced their effectiveness?

The research question also focuses SLR on exploring concrete digital communication strategies, identifying key variables that strengthen the country's image in times of crisis, and analysing the outcomes and strategic impact of digital nation branding for Ukraine.

# Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy in this study focused on two main Scopusindexed databases, namely ScienceDirect and Emerald, to ensure the coverage of credible and reputable sources. The keywords used in the search process consisted of a combination of: '(Nation Branding OR Country Branding OR Place Branding) AND (Digital Marketing OR Social Media OR Digital Communication) AND (War OR Crisis) AND Ukraine'. The use of these keywords aims to obtain articles relevant to the topic of nation branding and digital marketing communication in the context of the war in Ukraine. The publication year range set is February 2022 to June 2025, to ensure that the analysed literature accurately reflects the dynamics and current phenomena since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war. With this strategy, it is hoped that all selected articles reflect the latest developments in nation branding practices and studies within the realm of digital communication during the crisis period.

To clarify the selection process, Table 1 below shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria used in this study:

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Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria			
Inclusion	Exclusion		
Feb 2022– May 2025	Before February 2022		
Research article & review article	Editorials, opinions, book chapters, encyclopaedias, and non-peer-reviewed articles		
English	Not English		
Full text available	Not Full-text		
Nation branding/country branding/place branding based on digital marketing/social media/digital communication	Nation branding without digital communication aspects, or without relevance to the context of the war in Ukraine		
Study in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war Source: Authors own work, 20	Study outside the context of the Russia-Ukraine war		

#### **Article Selection Process**

The article selection process in this study followed the PRISMA flow described in Figure 1. In the initial identification stage, searches were conducted using targeted keywords in the Scopus database, specifically ScienceDirect and Emerald. The search results identified 835 articles.

The first selection stage involved excluding articles published outside the 2022–2025 timeframe and articles that were not reviews or research articles, leaving 405 articles for the next stage. Subsequently, 9 articles were eliminated because they were not available in full-text format or were not in English.

During the abstract screening stage, 145 articles were excluded because they were not relevant to the research topic, namely digital communication and nation branding in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. Further selection was conducted on 251 full-text articles to ensure alignment with the research questions (RQ1–RQ4), resulting in 209 articles not proceeding to the synthesis stage. Finally, 42 articles passed the selection and were analysed further because they met all the inclusion criteria and focused on the issues of digital communication (social media, websites, and digital media) and nation branding during the Russia-Ukraine war.

This selection process not only ensured the validity and quality of the literature used in the SLR but also emphasised the transparency of the research process in a systematic and measurable manner (see Figure 1).

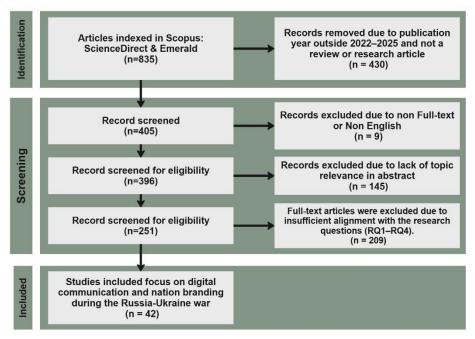


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart of the Article Selection Process, 2025

The distribution of articles successfully included in this SLR analysis is shown in Figure 2. This graph shows an increasing trend in the number of publications related to digital communication in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, especially in 2023–2024, with Elsevier and Emerald as the most dominant publishers. This visualisation confirms that the issue of digital communication in the Ukraine crisis has become a major focus for various international publishers, and its annual distribution reflects the escalation of the topic and its global relevance.

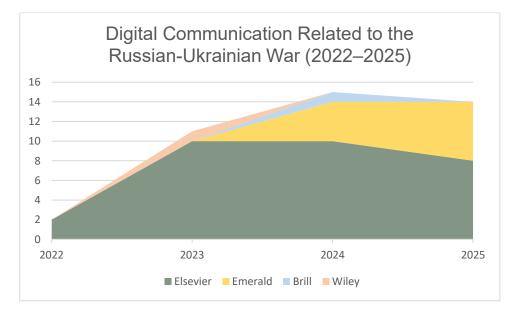


Figure 2. Distribution of Articles by Year and Publisher

. All articles selected in the selection process are mapped in detail in Table 2. The presentation of this article matrix aims to provide a clear picture of the scope and diversity of scientific sources that form the basis of the discussion of the literature

sources used, while ensuring transparency and traceability of the references used in this study.

Table 2. List of Included Articles				
Paper Code	Authors	Year	Journal Name	Publisher
A1	Zalietok	2025	Women's Studies International Forum	Elsevier
A2	Halabi & O'Connell	2024	Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal	Emerald
A3	Aslan	2023	Applied Soft Computing	Elsevier
A4	Lahutina et al.	2024	Neuroscience Applied	Elsevier
A5	V. Jones et al.	2024	Dialogues in Health	Elsevier
A6	Hoch et al.	2025	Journal of Comparative Economics	Elsevier
A7	Levin et al.	2025	Computers in Human Behavior	Elsevier
A8	Boatwright & Pyle	2023	Public Relations Review	Elsevier
A9	Ertem-Eray & Ki	2025	Journal of Communication Management	Emerald
A10	Sinha et al.	2024	Procedia Computer Science	Elsevier
A11	Dynel	2023	Journal of Pragmatics	Elsevier
A12	Popova et al.	2024	Heliyon	Elsevier
A13	Asogwa et al.	2025	Journal of Agribusiness in Developing and Emerging Economies	Emerald
A14	Polyzos	2023	Research in International Business and Finance	Elsevier
A15	Gulzar et al.	2025	Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication	Emerald
A16	Savolainen	2024	Journal of Documentation	Emerald
A17	Fischmann & Xu	2024	Telematics and Informatics	Elsevier
A18	Abakah et al.	2023	International Review of Financial Analysis	Elsevier
A19	Gever et al.	2023	Journal of Pediatric Nursing	Elsevier
A20	A. Jones	2024	Political Geography	Elsevier
A21	Pham et al.	2023	Journal of Comparative Economics	
A22	Szpargała	2024	Innovation in the Social Brill Sciences	
A23	Liagusha & Iarovyi	2025	Social Sciences & Elsevier Humanities Open	

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A24	Asanov et al.	2023	Heliyon	Elsevier
A25	Baysha	2022	Social Sciences & Humanities Open	Elsevier
A26	Pitono & Fauzi	2025	International Journal of Public Leadership	Emerald
A27	Ghosh et al.	2024	International Review of Financial Analysis	Elsevier
A28	ltzhak & Ferri	2023	International Journal of Critical Infrastructure Protection	Elsevier
A29	Lim et al.	2025	Journal of Communication Management	Emerald
A30	Yadav et al.	2025	Information Technology & People	Emerald
A31	Nicolau et al.	2024	Tourism Management	Elsevier
A32	Schmidt & Simha	2025	Business Horizons (IN-PRESS)	Elsevier
A33	Maathuis & Kerkhof	2023	Regional Science Policy & Practice	Wiley
A34	Li et al.	2023	Computers in Human Behavior	Elsevier
A35	Oleksiyuk	2025	Social Sciences & Humanities Open	Elsevier
A36	Lemoine- Rodríguez et al.	2024	Information Processing and Management	Elsevier
A37	Kim	2024	Journal of Communication Management	Emerald
A38	Talabi et al.	2022	Telematics and Informatics	Elsevier
A39	Verbytska	2024	Language & Communication	Elsevier
A40	Aygun et al.	2025	Global Food Security	Elsevier
A41	Islam et al.	2025	Expert Systems With Apps	Elsevier
A42	Siddiqui et al.	2024	International Journal of Tourism Cities	Emerald
Source: Authors own work, 2025				

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# **Process of Analysis and Synthesis of Findings**

The synthesis process in Table 2 will be carried out narratively, namely by grouping and comparing the main findings based on categories relevant to the research questions. Although 42 articles were selected and included as inclusion articles according to the PRISMA flow (Figure 1), not all of these articles were analysed for each research question. Therefore, the number of articles synthesised for each RQ may vary, depending on the relevance and depth of discussion in each article regarding the main issue being studied.

This narrative synthesis aims to identify common patterns, differences between studies, and reveal existing research gaps in the study of digital communicationbased nation branding during the Ukraine war. The results of this analysis also serve as the basis for determining and developing the proposed conceptual framework, which can then be used as a foundation for empirical research in the next phase.

# **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

# RQ1: How is digital marketing communication strategy used to build and maintain Ukraine's nation brand equity during the Russian-Ukrainian war?

The digital marketing communication strategy implemented by Ukraine in building and maintaining nation brand equity during the Russia-Ukraine war demonstrates an adaptive, multidimensional approach to the dynamics of conflict and media globalisation. The role of digital media, whether through military, civilian, or feminist channels, has proven to be the primary means of constructing national narratives and reinforcing the representation of military women as part of a progressive national image (Zalietok, 2025). Meanwhile, the involvement of international actors such as FIFA through Twitter underscores that digital communication is an effective medium for fostering global solidarity and establishing the legitimacy of Ukraine's cause on the world stage (Halabi & O'Connell, 2024b). Twitter (also known X) is also maximised for sentiment analysis and topic modelling, mapping global public opinion and supporting the real-time formation of nation brand equity in times of crisis(Aslan, 2023).

Technological innovations, such as the development of digital chatbots for mental health, have further enhanced Ukraine's image as a responsive, humanistic, and innovative nation during wartime (Lahutina et al., 2024). Additionally, TikTok content created by the African diaspora in Ukraine has successfully constructed counternarratives, advocacy, and solidarity through structured digital storytelling, thereby underscoring the importance of managing national reputation in the online sphere (V. Jones et al., 2024). Efforts to address cyberhate among adolescents represent a significant facet of nation branding, as the country is portrayed as adaptive and attentive to social issues and the strengthening of digital education (Levin et al., 2025). Crisis communication strategies and digital diplomacy via the official Twitter accounts of the government and major cities such as Kyiv serve as compelling evidence of the importance of digital nation building in confronting the Russian invasion (Boatwright & Pyle, 2023b).

Furthermore, political corporate social responsibility (PCSR) initiatives undertaken by multinational corporations through digital means have contributed to the construction of Ukraine's nation brand equity, via corporate diplomacy that is adaptive to geopolitical realities (Ertem-Eray & Ki, 2024). Public sentiment, as monitored through Twitter/X, also plays a crucial role in shaping the national narrative and influencing global perceptions throughout the war (Sinha et al., 2024). In the agribusiness sector, the adoption of digital platforms within the food supply chain and the management of food crises can be clearly mapped, demonstrating that nation

branding strategies can be strengthened through digital transformation in vital national sectors (Asogwa et al., 2023; Aygun et al., 2025). The use of crowdfunding via GoFundMe has not only fostered international solidarity, but has also shaped Ukraine's image as a resilient country, emotionally connected to the global community through effective digital storytelling (Fischmann & Xu, 2024).

The state's response to the online labour market has become an indicator of the shift towards nation branding based on digital labour market intelligence, illustrating how the country rapidly manages change amid crisis (Pham et al., 2023). Conversely, resistance and discourse surrounding the banning of opposition TV channels and the utilisation of digital networks highlight the importance of openness in the digital sphere and plurality of narratives as integral elements of nation branding strategies during times of crisis (Baysha, 2022). The successful development of digital resilience and digital sovereignty, facilitated by the support of global technology companies, has further strengthened Ukraine's nation brand equity as an innovative and digitally sovereign nation (Itzhak & Ferri, 2023).

President Zelenskyy's communication strategy through digital media has served as the backbone of both national and global nation branding, particularly in consolidating collective narratives and engaging in assertive digital diplomacy throughout the crisis (Lim et al., 2025). Research on emotional diplomacy at the United Nations Security Council highlights the importance of linguistic calculation, digital diplomatic performance, and emotion in sustaining the country's image on the international stage (A. Jones, 2024). Equally noteworthy is the use of memes as tools for nation branding and psychological resistance in the digital age, which contributes to the construction of national identity and fluid, viral global solidarity (Liagusha & larovyi, 2025).

The effectiveness of digital communication in building trust, leadership, and nation brand equity during crises is evidenced by analyses of public opinion on social media, where speed, transparency, and consistency of messaging are key to the success of digital nation branding strategies (Pitono & Fauzi, 2025). Overall, previous studies have demonstrated that Ukraine's nation branding during the war has been profoundly influenced by dynamic, participatory digital marketing communication strategies, supported by multi-actor collaboration involving government, the public, the diaspora, technology companies, and the international community.

# RQ2: What are the main variables, digital platforms, and communication elements identified in the literature related to digital-based nation branding during the war in Ukraine?

The literature on digital-based nation branding during the war in Ukraine identifies a range of key variables, digital platforms, and communication elements that reinforce nation branding strategies in times of conflict. One major finding is the significance of digital narratives in constructing gender representation and national identity, as demonstrated by Zalietok (2025), who examines the role of digital media in shaping the image of female soldiers through discourses of aesthetics, objectification, and feminist critique on online news portals and social media.

Meanwhile, a Twitter/X content analysis by Halabi & O'Connell (2024b) highlights the strategies of digital communication, engagement, and impression management employed by international actors such as FIFA, reaffirming Twitter's status as a primary platform for disclosure and the legitimisation of global narratives.

Social media-based studies consistently identify sentiment, emotion, solidarity, and digital narrative as key variables. Sentiment analysis and topic modelling on Twitter/X by Aslan (2023), Gulzar et al. (2023), Pitono & Fauzi (2025), Polyzos (2023), and Sinha et al. (2024) confirm that public perception, the distribution of opinions, and changes in emotion are fundamental elements influencing Ukraine's nation brand equity. TikTok has also been identified as a tool for advocacy and counternarratives, with awareness, discrimination, and digital advocacy as its principal variables (V. Jones et al., 2024). In addition, social media serves as a crucial arena for socialisation, the enhancement of digital education, and the mitigation of cyberhate and victimisation among adolescents (Levin et al., 2025).

Twitter/X, both through official state accounts and public profiles, has played a central role in crisis communication, digital diplomacy, and narratives of solidarity (Boatwright & Pyle, 2023b; Pitono & Fauzi, 2025). Digital initiatives by multinational corporations have further broadened the spectrum of communication elements through corporate diplomacy, digital solidarity, and advocacy (Ertem-Eray & Ki, 2024; Nicolau et al., 2024). GoFundMe, as a crowdfunding platform, has demonstrated variables such as trust, sadness, alignment of values, and 'cheap talk' in global solidarity campaigns for Ukraine (Fischmann & Xu, 2024).

Digital transformation in farmers' food supply chains (Asogwa et al., 2023), the national digital ecosystem (Itzhak & Ferri, 2023), and online job vacancies (Pham et al., 2023) have introduced new dimensions to nation branding through food distribution, motivation, skills, and digital governance. In addition, analyses of digital memes (Liagusha & Iarovyi, 2025), hashtags, and keyword clusters (Ghosh et al., 2024) have revealed virality, collective participation, and information disorder as relevant communication elements within the context of digital conflict.

Other identified communication elements include discourse closure, plurality of digital opinions, and government narratives on YouTube and digital TV (Baysha, 2022), as well as the framing of narratives in official speeches and interviews with national leaders in digital media (Lim et al., 2025). Analyses of digital solidarity among hospitality companies and CSR initiatives (Nicolau et al., 2024), economic sentiment (Polyzos, 2023), and interventions such as art and drama therapy on social media (Gever et al., 2023), further expand our understanding of the role of cross-sector digital communication in Ukraine's nation branding during wartime.

Overall, the synthesis of these 22 articles (see Tabel 3) demonstrates that Ukraine's digital-based nation branding strategy during the conflict relies heavily on a diversity of variables (sentiment, emotion, solidarity, trust, advocacy), the utilisation of a wide range of digital platforms (Twitter/X, TikTok, websites, mobile applications, GoFundMe, Reddit, memes, cloud, digital TV), as well as the deployment of communication elements such as digital narratives, advocacy, plurality of opinion,

and effective message framing. These dynamics highlight the critical importance of integrated and adaptive digital communication in strengthening nation brand equity in times of war.

Article Code	Platform/ Context	Methods	Sample/ Data	Key Findings
A1	Ukrainian (Digital) Media	CDA (Discourse Analysis)	54 media articles	Ukrainian media remain biased towards the beauty and femininity of female soldiers, although some change has occurred since the onset of the war. Feminist media have promoted narratives of equality; however, their influence remains limited.
A2	Twitter/X (FIFA)	Content & engagement analysis	33 FIFA tweets (3 key tweets on Ukraine war), 100 fan replies	FIFA's tweets on the Ukraine war generated high engagement and polarised responses. Digital communication by global organisations can support nation branding and solidarity, but may also provoke resistance.
A3	Global Twitter/X	Deep learning, Sentiment & Topic Modelling	192,915 tweets, 4 Mar– 23 May 2022	Global sentiment was predominantly negative towards the conflict. Twitter emerged as a primary platform for shaping nation branding narratives, trending topics, and global solidarity with Ukraine. The MF-CNN-BiLSTM model proved highly accurate for sentiment analysis.
A5	TikTok, social media	Mixed- methods descriptive, content analysis	100 TikTok videos	Main themes: raising awareness (67%) and racial discrimination (64%). TikTok is effective for counternarrative crisis communication.
A7	Digital Survey, social media	Cross- sectional survey	4,160 Ukrainian adolescents	A strong cycle of cyberhate exists in war zones; most perpetrators are male, and victims often become perpetrators.

Table 3. Overview of Relevant Articles on Digital Nation Branding during the Ukraine War

A8	Twitter/X @Ukraine, @Kyiv	Qualitative (content analysis)	Tweets from official Ukraine & Kyiv accounts	Official state accounts are effective tools for crisis communication, public diplomacy, nation building, and shaping global image.
A9	Official websites of Fortune MNCs	Qualitative (thematic content analysis)	98 news releases from 50 global MNCs	PCSR and corporate diplomacy by MNCs strengthen the nation brand and global solidarity through digital communication.
A10	Twitter/X	Sentiment analysis, machine learning	Thousands of war-related tweets	Social media is effective in monitoring public sentiment dynamics; key findings inform national narratives.
A13	Social media, websites, app	Online survey, ANOVA	325 Ukrainian farmers	Digital platforms are crucial for food distribution during war, with adaptive responses and high predicted adoption rates.
A15	Twitter/X	Sentiment analysis, data minning	206,608 tweets	Negative sentiment predominates; Twitter is effective in monitoring global opinion.
A17	GoFundMe (crowdfunding)	NLP, sentiment analysis, ML	452 (320 in English) campaigns	Trust and anti-Putin narratives increase donations, while sadness reduces them.
A21	Online job boards, digital job portals (Jooble.org)	Quantitative, secondary data	5.4 million Ukrainian & Polish online vacancies	Demand for Ukrainian workers in Poland surged; demand for soft skills increased; wages declined in Ukraine.
A22	Social media, online campaigns, digital solidarity actions	Qualitative, document study	National data, observation, media, NGOs	Poland's policy response and solidarity are exceptionally high; digital solidarity narratives are effective.
A23	Digital memes, social media, digital public spaces	Conceptual, literature study	Study of war- related digital memes	Memes serve as tools of information warfare, building narratives, identity, and solidarity.
A25	Digital media, TV channels, YouTube, talk shows	Critical discourse analysis	96 TV talk shows, President Zelensky's speeches, digital data	Government attempts to silence opposition narratives failed due to resistance and digital contestation; discursive closure remains unattainable in the digital era.

A26	Social media (Twitter/X), sentiment analysis	Content & sentiment analysis	108,486 direct tweets, 1.9 million indirect tweets, 7 world leaders (inc. Zelensky)	Public trust in leaders is highly influenced by digital narratives; Zelensky is perceived in terms of trust, sadness, and anticipation. Strategic digital communication is crucial for building trust and perception during crises.
A27	Reddit (discussion social media), Metaverse communities	Sentiment analysis, Wavelet, XGBR	Reddit posts & Metaverse coin data	Reddit public sentiment on the war and Metaverse significantly affects digital coin prices.
A28	Cloud, digital infrastructure, websites, digital communication services	Grey literature review, thematic analysis	Industry reports, websites, news	Digital resilience strategies and technology company support for Ukraine, including cloud migration.
A29	Leadership speeches, video press releases, digital media & online broadcasts	Case study, Qualitative	77 speeches and interviews by Zelensky	Zelensky's communication strategy is effective in constructing national and global narratives.
A31	Company websites, press releases, corporate social media	Event study	117 hotel/restaurant companies	Rapid and moderate solidarity actions have a positive impact on company value.
A33	Telegram	Design science research, ML	9,736 Telegram messages	Telegram acts as a principal digital battlefield; public sentiment and topics shift dynamically as the war escalates.
A34	Multi-platform (social media survey)	Longitudinal survey	890 US respondents	Social media action effectively mobilises collective action; cues are less influential; a digital- solidarity feedback loop exists.

Source: Authors own work, 2025

RQ3: What outcomes are generated from the application of digital marketing communication in nation branding, both in the domestic context (public trust, national solidarity) and internationally (global support, national reputation)?

Various studies within the literature indicate that the outcomes of Ukraine's digital marketing communication strategies during the Russia–Ukraine war are diverse and far-reaching, both domestically and internationally. The shift in media narratives surrounding female soldiers, which were initially dominated by gender bias, has increasingly been influenced by feminist media agendas promoting

Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 398-421 E-ISSN: 3026-3220 DOI: <u>https://doi.org/10.61787/xafz3h03</u>

equality. The primary outcome of this narrative shift is an enhanced domestic public perception that is more inclusive, contributing to gender reform and reinforcing a progressive national image (Zalietok, 2025). At the global level, digital communication strategies by international actors such as FIFA via Twitter have led to increased engagement and global attention towards the issue of Russian aggression against Ukraine, simultaneously strengthening global solidarity, although resistance still persists (Halabi & O'Connell, 2024b).

Sentiment and topic analyses, as well as hashtags on social media platforms like Twitter, have produced outcomes such as the detection of international solidarity and resistance, providing strategic insights for the Ukrainian government to construct supportive nation brand narratives in a responsive and adaptive manner (Aslan, 2023; Dynel, 2023b; Sinha et al., 2024). The utilisation of digital chatbots in mental health services demonstrates that digital communication innovation not only helps mitigate public stress, but also enhances Ukraine's image as an innovative and responsive country in times of crisis (Lahutina et al., 2024). onversely, the use of TikTok by the African diaspora has generated global solidarity and digital advocacy, pressuring the government to respond to discrimination issues and thereby strengthening the nation's brand as an inclusive state (V. Jones et al., 2024).

The strengthening of internal solidarity, changes in social capital, and increased public trust in institutions have emerged as crucial outcomes of digital communication strategies amid the war, although these strategies may also result in decreased trust in certain institutions (Hoch et al., 2025; Levin et al., 2025). Crisis communication conducted by the government via official Twitter/X accounts, as well as digital diplomacy spearheaded by multinational corporations through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and digital advocacy, have produced outcomes in the form of enhanced public diplomacy, global solidarity, and the construction of Ukraine's image as a democratic, resilient, and open nation (Boatwright & Pyle, 2023b; Ertem-Eray & Ki, 2024).

Crowdfunding via GoFundMe has underscored outcomes such as global solidarity, successful fundraising, and the strengthening of the country's international reputation through emotional and effective digital narratives (Fischmann & Xu, 2024). In the food and employment sectors, the adaptation of digital communication within supply chains and labour markets has resulted in national food security, the resilience of farmers, shifts in worker perceptions, and the reinforcement of Ukraine's reputation as an adaptive producer and workforce (Asogwa et al., 2023; Pham et al., 2023). Meanwhile, resistance to closure and the plurality of digital opinions within online media spaces have strengthened national identity whilst enriching the plurality of nation brand narratives (Baysha, 2022).

Digital resilience, digital sovereignty, and the continuity of governmental operations during wartime—supported by a robust digital ecosystem and global actors (notably big tech)—have emerged as key outcomes, further consolidating Ukraine's brand as a digital survivor (Itzhak & Ferri, 2023). President Zelenskyy's leadership communication through digital media has made a significant contribution

#### JISOSEPOL: JURNAL ILMU SOSIAL EKONOMI DAN POLITIK Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 398-421 E-ISSN: 3026-3220

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to consolidating both domestic and global support, as well as to the formation of a collective national narrative that strengthens public perceptions of the nation's brand (Lim et al., 2025). These outcomes are reinforced by the state's growing capacity to maintain its narrative amid information warfare, ensuring that global public perception is preserved through consistent digital communication (Itzhak & Ferri, 2023).

The ability to predict financial market sentiment based on social media analysis during wartime has also contributed to the stability of economic trust and further bolstered the nation's image as a stable economic actor in times of crisis (Ghosh et al., 2024). Collectively, these outcomes demonstrate that the success of digital marketing communication in Ukraine's nation branding during the war lies in its capacity to generate solidarity, enhance trust, build inclusive narratives, and reinforce the country's image both domestically and globally.

# RQ4: How did digital-based nation branding strategies change and differ before and during the war, and what factors influenced their effectiveness?

The evolution of digital-based nation branding strategies in Ukraine, both before and during the Russia–Ukraine war, has been marked by shifts in narrative orientation, platform utilisation, and the adaptation of actors and messages in response to the dynamics of the crisis. Zalietok (2025) demonstrates that, prior to the invasion, Ukrainian digital media tended to uphold traditional and prescriptive norms, for example in their portrayal of female soldiers. However, following the escalation of the war, there was a transition towards more critical and progressive narratives, with the incorporation of feminist agendas and demands for gender reform as an emergency response (Zalietok, 2025). A similar shift is observable in the digital communication strategies of global organisations such as FIFA, which were previously largely apolitical but, during the war, opted to use Twitter to highlight issues related to Ukraine—resulting in increased engagement and global solidarity, while also provoking public resistance (Halabi & O'Connell, 2024b).

Transformation has also been identified in the dynamics of social media sentiment. Aslan (2023) documents how Twitter/X has become a principal barometer of changes in public opinion and international solidarity, with sentiment and trending topics shifting dynamically in line with the phases of the crisis. Boatwright & Pyle (2023b) found that the official Twitter/X accounts @Ukraine and @Kyiv drastically altered their messaging frequency, message framing, and digital engagement tactics, thus strengthening their capacity to address crisis communication and conduct public diplomacy in a manner adaptive to evolving circumstances. Meanwhile, Sinha et al. (2024) emphasise the importance of real-time monitoring of shifts in global opinion through sentiment analysis, allowing state digital communication strategies to be continuously refined in a responsive and effective manner.

The adaptation of digital strategies has also occurred across non-governmental sectors. Asogwa et al. (2023) demonstrate a shift in food distribution from conventional models to digital channels, with social media, mobile applications, and websites being adopted on a massive scale to sustain agribusiness resilience amid conflict. This innovation not only represents nation branding as a resilient country but also underscores the effectiveness of multi-sector collaboration during times of crisis. In the sphere of international crowdfunding, Fischmann & Xu (2024) document a transition from conventional fundraising towards emotionally driven and anti-Putin

Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 398-421 E-ISSN: 3026-3220 DOI: <u>https://doi.org/10.61787/xafz3h03</u>

narratives on the GoFundMe platform, where trust and alignment of values are key determinants of successful digital communication.

In the labour market, Pham et al. (2023) have identified changes in required skills, the emergence of digital labour market intelligence narratives, and workforce adaptation, highlighting the digitalisation of Ukraine's branding strategy as a supplier of adaptive labour. In the management of public opinion, Baysha (2022) discusses governmental efforts to silence opposition discourse through media bans; however, the open digital ecosystem instead fosters resistance and reinforces the plurality of national narratives.

Itzhak & Ferri (2023) highlight the transformation of digital governance and resilience, with cloud migration and digital sovereignty emerging as central to nation branding that is adaptive to disruption. At the level of national leadership, Lim et al. (2025) describe a shift in President Zelenskyy's communication strategy from conventional speeches to the extensive use of digital media to construct collective national and global narratives. In terms of public behaviour, Yadav et al. (2024) show that social media, once primarily a tool for information and mobilisation, is now strategically employed as an instrument for depolarising behaviour and managing public opinion.

Additionally, A. Jones (2024) emphasises a shift in emotional diplomacy, whereby Ukraine utilises performative language and digital rhetoric in international forums to enhance influence and build national image. Liagusha & larovyi (2025) underline the evolution of digital meme usage, which, during periods of escalating conflict, has developed into a tool for psychological resistance, solidarity, and information warfare in nation branding. Finally, Pitono & Fauzi (2025) underscore changes in public expectations and the effectiveness of state digital communication strategies, with emotion and perceptions of trust emerging as the primary determinants of nation brand equity during the crisis.

Thus, this synthesis of the literature indicates that the transformation of Ukraine's digital nation branding strategies has been profoundly influenced by the need to adapt to the dynamics of war, the evolution of digital technologies, responses to global public opinion, and internal factors such as leadership, multi-actor collaboration, and innovation in digital governance. Each stage of strategic adjustment not only responds to the demands of the digital era, but also ensures that national narratives and identity remain relevant, inclusive, and effective in fostering trust and public support at both the national and international levels.

# **Proposed Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework developed from the synthesis of this SLR arises from the pressing need for digital-based nation branding amidst the Russia–Ukraine war (see Figure 3). Recent research demonstrates that the digitalisation of state communication strategies has now become a primary instrument in building and sustaining nation brand equity during times of conflict. This transformation is driven not only by technological advancements, but also by the urgent necessity to construct, mobilise, and amplify narratives, solidarity, and reputation rapidly and on a large scale in the face of global uncertainty.

Within this framework, a diverse array of actors plays a central role. The Ukrainian government, diaspora, global communities, influencers, and multinational corporations all participate in shaping, disseminating, and reinforcing strategic

messages through digital channels. The involvement of such varied actors allows for the construction of narratives that are more inclusive and capable of reaching audiences from different backgrounds, both nationally and internationally. Furthermore, the selection of various digital platforms—such as Twitter, TikTok, Telegram, official websites, crowdfunding platforms, memes, and cloud infrastructure—not only expands the reach of messages but also enables segmentation and the tailoring of content according to user characteristics and emerging issues.

The communication strategies employed are highly adaptive. State actors, corporations, and communities alike actively employ approaches such as crisis communication, digital storytelling, digital diplomacy, advocacy, as well as usergenerated content (UGC) and political corporate social responsibility (PCSR). These approaches have proven effective in developing narratives that are responsive, relevant, and participatory in a highly dynamic context. The interaction of these diverse strategies gives rise to a range of communication and narrative elements, including public trust, both national and international solidarity, social media engagement, robust issue framing, as well as the strengthening of public sentiment and digital resilience. These elements directly contribute to the formation of public perceptions, emotions, and more focused reactions to the strategic narratives being promoted.

At the outcome level, all these processes and interactions culminate in the creation of digital nation brand equity, greater public trust, the growth of national solidarity, an increased willingness to support in the form of donations and advocacy, community resilience, and the consolidation of Ukraine's digital sovereignty. On the other hand, this framework also incorporates moderator variables such as the phase of the war (pre-, during, or post-conflict), the intensity of disinformation, and the level of digital technology adoption as factors that can influence or enhance the effectiveness of each strategy, and the outcomes achieved. Through this synthesis, the resulting framework not only illustrates the relationships between components, but also underscores the critical importance of integrated, collaborative, and responsive digital communication strategies as a fundamental foundation for strengthening Ukraine's nation branding amidst the challenges of conflict and digital disruption.

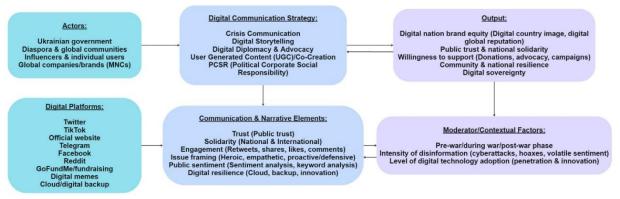


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework Digital Nation Brand Equity

#### CONCLUSION

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution to the literature on digital nation branding, particularly within the context of countries experiencing conflict or war. By synthesising findings from 42 articles, this research highlights a fundamental shift from conventional approaches to digitally based strategies and proposes a novel conceptual framework that is ready for future empirical testing. The framework developed in this study integrates the roles of key actors, the diversity of digital communication strategies, principal narrative elements, and contextual factors that collectively construct and sustain Ukraine's digital nation brand equity throughout the war. Thus, this research adds to the body of knowledge regarding the optimisation of digital communication in building reputation, solidarity, and public trust amid global crises.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer strategic guidance that may be adopted by governments, diplomatic institutions, and digital marketing practitioners in designing and managing digital communications during periods of crisis. The framework presented serves as a concrete reference for countries or institutions seeking to build or restore their national image through various digital platforms. Public communication practitioners and diplomats may utilise the results of this study to identify the most effective digital channels, design appropriate narrative strategies, and engage a broad spectrum of actors from government bodies to diaspora communities and global business stakeholders. The implementation of these strategies is increasingly critical, given that public opinion and international support are now strongly influenced by narratives and perceptions formed on social media and other digital spaces.

Despite its strong contributions, this study has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. The scope of the research was confined to two major databases, namely ScienceDirect and Emerald, which means that significant literature outside these sources may not have been captured. Additionally, the study focused solely on the Russia–Ukraine war within the period from February 2022 to May 2025; thus, its findings require further testing in other country contexts or different periods of conflict. Consequently, future research should consider longitudinal and crosscountry comparative analyses, empirical testing of the conceptual model, and the exploration of the roles of communities, diasporas, and user-generated content in the co-creation of digital narratives.

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#### JISOSEPOL: JURNAL ILMU SOSIAL EKONOMI DAN POLITIK Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 398-421

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