



# The Hague International Model United Nations

---

**Forum:** Human Rights Commission 2

**Issue:** The question of the use of social media influencers in international relations

**Student Officers:** Jonathan Shih, Vasiliki Lentoudi, Johan Prinsloo, Mackenzie Dager

**Position:** President and Deputy Presidents of HRC

## Introduction

In recent years, the international community has witnessed a huge transformation in the way states communicate, project power, and influence global audiences. This is a major outcome of the rapid expansion of social media platforms. Influencers, in other words, individuals who command large, engaged following across digital platforms, have strongly influenced public opinion, most of the time beyond national borders. Before the expansion of social media around the globe, international relations were mostly dominated by state actors. Their main job is to utilise diplomacy, military strength, and economic leverage effectively.

However, the digital age has introduced new, informal channels of influence that operate in real time and reach millions worldwide. As a result, influencers are increasingly being utilized as tools of soft power, public diplomacy, and strategic communication in international affairs. Governments and political institutions now collaborate with them to promote national images, advance foreign policy narratives, and counter misinformation.

Influencers can achieve things that other factors have never been able to do so effortlessly. They can humanize state messages, in order make them more relatable and persuasive, particularly among younger populations. During the past years their role has also evolved into a very prominent one, owing to the fact that they can influence international crises, global campaigns, and cultural diplomacy efforts, where traditional diplomatic methods might be more difficult to be implemented. Although their job has been helpful for the international community, it is a matter of utmost importance to admit that their frequent use raises important concerns when it comes to authenticity, accountability, and propaganda matters.

As a result, the growing involvement of social media influencers in international relations has become a

huge challenge for conventional understandings of diplomacy and power. Because of them, there is now no distinction between personal branding and political messaging, or even private influence and public authority. As social media platforms continue to influence and actively shape global communication, it is vital for us to further examine the role of influencers in international relations to provide a better understanding of how power, persuasion, and diplomacy are evolving in our century. As Maria Ressa, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and journalist has once said in one of her speeches, “*Social media bosses are the largest dictators — they can change the way we feel, the way we see the world, and the way we act.*”<sup>1</sup>

## Definition of Key Terms

### Soft Power

Soft power is the ability of a country to influence others through persuasion and attraction rather than through force.<sup>2</sup>

### Public diplomacy

Public diplomacy includes all official efforts to convince targeted sectors of foreign opinion to support or tolerate a government's strategic objectives.<sup>3</sup>

### Digital diplomacy

Digital diplomacy, or Diplomacy, is the use of digital technologies and the internet (social media, apps, video conferencing) by states and diplomats to achieve foreign policy goals, engage foreign publics, manage reputations, and conduct traditional diplomacy in new ways, complementing face-to-face interactions.<sup>4</sup>

### Influencer

An influencer is a person who is regarded as an expert within their particular field that also has a steady following. People trust their opinions, and thus their endorsements carry a considerable amount of weight.<sup>5</sup>

### Agenda-Setting

A situation where critics perceive inexplicit political motives (or an institutional tendency to overlook underprivileged perspectives) to lie behind the choice of topics covered (e.g. in news, current affairs, and documentaries), their relative importance (inferred from sequence and/or the relative amounts of space or time devoted to them), how they are presented, and what issues are

backgrounded or excluded.<sup>6</sup>

## Strategic communication

Strategic communications is a specialized approach to distributing and receiving information. It means communicating the best message, through the correct channels, to the right people, at the right time and using feedback from this process to stay focused on company goals.<sup>7</sup>

## Background Information

The rapid expansion of social media has fundamentally transformed the landscape of international relations by reshaping how states communicate with foreign publics. One of the most significant developments within this transformation is the growing role of social media influencers as non-state actors in global politics. Influencers have increasingly been used to shape narratives, promote national images, and influence public opinion across borders. This phenomenon reflects a broader shift toward digital diplomacy and soft power strategies, where persuasion and attraction replace coercion as primary tools of influence.

The origins of influencer involvement in international relations can be traced to the rise of digital diplomacy in the early 2010s. As platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and later TikTok gained global prominence, foreign ministries and international organizations began using them to engage directly with foreign audiences. This marked a departure from traditional, elite-driven diplomatic communication toward more interactive and public-facing engagement. Influencers emerged organically within this ecosystem as trusted intermediaries who could reach niche and younger audiences that official government channels struggled to access. Their perceived authenticity and relatability allowed them to communicate messages with greater emotional impact than state actors, positioning them as valuable instruments of public diplomacy.

The importance of influencers in international relations lies primarily in their contribution to soft power and nation branding. Governments increasingly collaborate with influencers to promote favorable national narratives abroad. For example, China has worked with popular lifestyle vloggers and cultural influencers whose content subtly highlights Chinese society, technology, and culture, often reaching tens of millions of viewers globally. This approach has proven effective in shaping perceptions, as influencer-generated content tends to be viewed as more credible and less propagandistic than official state messaging. Similarly, during international crises such as the war in Ukraine, micro-influencers and citizen journalists have played a crucial role in documenting events on the ground, shaping international discourse and mobilizing global sympathy through personal storytelling rather than formal reporting.

Several major challenges and sub-issues complicate the use of influencers in international

relations. Misinformation is among the most pressing concerns, as audiences often conflate popularity with credibility. Influencers who spread inaccurate or misleading information—intentionally or otherwise—can exacerbate diplomatic tensions and distort public understanding of international events. Another critical issue is political polarization. Research on influencer behavior indicates that algorithm-driven platforms incentivize emotionally charged and divisive content, which can deepen ideological divides and contribute to international misunderstandings. Additionally, ethical and cultural sensitivity remains a persistent challenge. Influencer campaigns that fail to respect local norms or cultural contexts risk backlash and reputational damage, undermining the very soft power they aim to enhance.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### Russian Federation

The Russian Federation has faced much criticism for their alleged use of Social Media to pedal pro-Russian propaganda, especially in light of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war. In an operation dubbed “DoppelGänger”<sup>8</sup>, the Russian Social Design Agency and Structura National Technologies has been accused of using generative AI and their social media presence to spread disinformation through fake websites and news outlets, including social media outlets. Allegations like this demonstrate the need for clarity of the issue and a collaborative approach to a solution among all member states.

### United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

UNESCO is uniquely situated as a UN organisation to be able to interact with relevant mediums on the issue of social media policy. It is one of the only relevant UN bodies who have conducted relevant work on social media with their November 2024 survey<sup>9</sup>, proving a majority of digital content creators don’t properly scrutinise their information. They would be best suited to create a solution to the problem and work with member states to inform decision making.

### United States of America (USA)

The USA exists as a hotbed of political rallying through social media, on a national and international scale. The US Agency for Global Media<sup>10</sup> (USAGM) sponsors media channels in Asia and Europe which project pro-US channels, and use social media to appeal to different audiences, While they argue that they are providing unfiltered media to regions like Russia and Iran which don’t enjoy free media, others see it as attempting to use media to destabilise a foreign country and therefore influencing international events.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
December, 2003	World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva adopted the WSIS Declaration of Principles, recognizing the central role of the internet and information society in human rights, communication, and development — foundational groundwork for later digital engagement in public life and international affairs.
2003 - 2005	The early rise of social media platforms began with MySpace (2003), the Facebook launch (2004), and YouTube (2005). These platforms later become key arenas for public communication and global discourse, central to public diplomacy and information dissemination.
January, 2014	The Stockholm Initiative for Digital Diplomacy (SIDD) convenes diplomats and digital experts, marking one of the first international efforts to formally consolidate digital diplomacy practice.
2018 - 2019	Studies show that nearly all UN member states' diplomatic services are active on social media, emphasizing how central digital platforms have become to modern public diplomacy and global communication strategies.
2019	The Joint Declaration: Challenges to Freedom of Expression in the Next Decade emphasizes how digital technologies (including social platforms) shape freedom of expression globally — an important normative context for digital content and influencers.
November, 2024	UNESCO releases a global survey showing that 62% of digital content creators (including influencers) do not rigorously fact-check information before sharing, prompting calls for training to improve information reliability and reduce misinformation.

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

### UN

#### *CyberMediation Network*

The UN CyberMediation Network was founded with the overarching goal of using technology, and to assist in mediation of international conflicts. The CyberMediation Network contributes to better understanding the bridge between technology and mediation.<sup>11</sup> Although this is a necessary step in the right direction, it alone has minimal impact on influencers and international relations, and therefore greater steps are required.

#### *Digital Campaigns*

The UN Digital Campaign aims to hire influencers with at least a bachelor's degree in international relations, who speak at least two of the UN languages, to aid in international

digital diplomacy efforts.<sup>12</sup> This is a distinctly more impactful step than the last because it directly impacts influencers and international relations while also setting boundaries for previous training required to be an influencer who aids in diplomacy.

## International Public Diplomacy Campaigns

International Public Diplomacy Campaigns, specifically relating to influencers' impact on international relations, have been used several times throughout modern international digital diplomacy. For example, K-pop stars often play critical roles in Korean Cultural Dispersion, the same way that celebrity involvement in the Israel-Palestine conflict helps to bring wide-spread attention to the issue.<sup>13</sup> However, international public diplomacy campaigns are difficult to regulate, and difficult to ensure are in the best interest for all parties involved, and therefore are an unsustainable solution to the issue.

## Possible Solutions

### Implementing clear ethical guidelines

The implementation of clear ethical guidelines could specifically prohibit influencers from speaking on their personal opinions rather than speaking on behalf of their country, while also ensuring that basic human rights are protected during the age of international digital relations.

### Cultural and diplomatic sensitivity trainings

Training influencers on cultural and diplomatic sensitivity prevents influencers from posting something that inadvertently incites international unrest while also allowing for cultural dispersion.

### Accountability

Holding influencers accountable should they not follow pre-existing cultural sensitivity guidelines reinforces the general social and diplomatic responsibility of these public figures to represent their governmental system.

### Governmental diplomatic influencer transparency

Diplomatic influencer transparency is the responsibility of all member states to inform their public on official government influencers, or a lack thereof, allowing for the public to validate the reliability of the information they are consuming. This, in turn, allows for the public to make informed decisions on where to consume their media from, ultimately preventing the continued spread of misinformation.

## Endnotes

1. "Social Media Bosses Are 'the Largest Dictators', Says Nobel Peace Prize Winner." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 27 May 2024, [www.theguardian.com/media/article/2024/may/27/social-media-bosses-are-the-largest-dictators-says-nobel-peace-prize-winner-maria-ressa](https://www.theguardian.com/media/article/2024/may/27/social-media-bosses-are-the-largest-dictators-says-nobel-peace-prize-winner-maria-ressa)
2. *Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings and Definitions*. 24 Dec. 2025, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/soft-power&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313500100&usg=AOvVaw15-IsOgUyJFgK58jHonwRP](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/soft-power&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313500100&usg=AOvVaw15-IsOgUyJFgK58jHonwRP).
3. Britannica Editors. "public diplomacy". Encyclopedia Britannica, 3 Nov. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/public-diplomacy> . Accessed 26 December 2025.
4. Markovski, Dragana. "Digital Diplomacy in 2025: Geopolitics, New Topics & Tools | Diplo." *Diplo*, [www.diplomacy.edu/topics/digital-diplomacy](http://www.diplomacy.edu/topics/digital-diplomacy) .
5. ---. [www.google.com/url?q=https://www.brightedge.com/glossary/influencer-marketing%23%3A~:text=3DGlossary%2520main%2520page-,Definition,a%2520considerable%2520amount%2520of%2520weight&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313500817&usg=AOvVaw1d4WlfukRqb0xgFvRW8zLA](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.brightedge.com/glossary/influencer-marketing%23%3A~:text=3DGlossary%2520main%2520page-,Definition,a%2520considerable%2520amount%2520of%2520weight&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313500817&usg=AOvVaw1d4WlfukRqb0xgFvRW8zLA) .
6. Chandler, Daniel, and Rod Munday. "A Dictionary of Media and Communication." *Oxford University Press eBooks*, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780199568758.001.0001>.
7. Long, Mary C. *What is Strategic Communications?* 2025, [www.google.com/url?q=https://www.simpplr.com/glossary/strategic-communications/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313501066&usg=AOvVaw3qWRoRiST17uZgJSCYwxMD](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.simpplr.com/glossary/strategic-communications/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313501066&usg=AOvVaw3qWRoRiST17uZgJSCYwxMD) . Accessed 26 Dec. 2025.
8. ---. [www.google.com/url?q=https://www.cybercom.mil/Media/News/Article/3895345/russian-disinformation-campaign-doppelganger-unmasked-a-web-of-deception/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313501808&usg=AOvVaw34ICUsS13SGzNWhMcH2BtK](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.cybercom.mil/Media/News/Article/3895345/russian-disinformation-campaign-doppelganger-unmasked-a-web-of-deception/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313501808&usg=AOvVaw34ICUsS13SGzNWhMcH2BtK) . Accessed 26. Dec 2025
9. "2/3 of Digital Content Creators Do Not Fact-check, UNESCO Survey Reveals." *UN News*, 27 Nov. 2024, [news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1157546](https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1157546) . Accessed 26. Dec 2025
10. "USAGM." *USAGM*, [www.usagm.gov](http://www.usagm.gov) . Accessed 26. Dec 2025
11. *CyberMediation Network* | *Peacemaker*. [peacemaker.un.org/en/networks/cybermediationnetwork](https://peacemaker.un.org/en/networks/cybermediationnetwork) . Accessed 26. Dec 2025
12. *United Nations Social Media Influencer Opportunities – Inspira UN*. [inspira-un.org/united-nations-social-media-influencer-opportunities](https://inspira-un.org/united-nations-social-media-influencer-opportunities) . Accessed 26 Dec. 2025
13. Manfredi, Juan Luis, et al. "Social Media Influencers and Diplomacy's Evolution." *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 4, Oct. 2024, pp. 79–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660x.2024.2434357> . Accessed 26 Dec. 2025.



## Bibliography

- “2/3 of Digital Content Creators Do Not Fact-check, UNESCO Survey Reveals.” *UN News*, 27 Nov. 2024, [news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1157546](https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1157546) . Accessed 26. Dec 2025
- Britannica Editors. "public diplomacy". Encyclopedia Britannica, 3 Nov. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/public-diplomacy> . Accessed 26 December 2025.
- Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings and Definitions*. 24 Dec. 2025, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/soft-power&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313500100&usq=AOvVaw15-IsOgUyJFgK58jHonwRP](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/soft-power&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313500100&usq=AOvVaw15-IsOgUyJFgK58jHonwRP)
- Chandler, Daniel, and Rod Munday. “A Dictionary of Media and Communication.” *Oxford University Press eBooks*, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780199568758.001.0001>. Accessed 26. Dec 2025
- CyberMediation Network | Peacemaker. [peacemaker.un.org/en/networks/cybermediationnetwork](https://peacemaker.un.org/en/networks/cybermediationnetwork) . Accessed 26. Dec 2025
- DiploFoundation. Internet and Social Media: A Focus on Diplomacy. DiploFoundation, Nov. 2021, [www.diplomacy.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Internet-and-social-media\\_-\\_Diplomacy.pdf](https://www.diplomacy.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Internet-and-social-media_-_Diplomacy.pdf)
- Huizi, Unai. “2/3 of Digital Content Creators Do Not Check Their Facts Before Sharing, but Want to Learn How to Do So (UNESCO Survey).” UNESCO, 26 Nov. 2024, [www.unesco.org/en/articles/2-3-digital-content-creators-do-not-check-their-facts-sharing-want-learn-how-do-so-unesco-survey](https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/2-3-digital-content-creators-do-not-check-their-facts-sharing-want-learn-how-do-so-unesco-survey)
- Long, Mary C. *What is Strategic Communications?* 2025, [www.google.com/url?q=https://www.simpplr.com/glossary/strategic-communications/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313501066&usq=AOvVaw3qWRoRiST17uZgJSCYwxMD](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.simpplr.com/glossary/strategic-communications/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313501066&usq=AOvVaw3qWRoRiST17uZgJSCYwxMD) . Accessed 26 Dec. 2025.
- Manfredi, Juan Luis, et al. “Social Media Influencers and Diplomacy’s Evolution.” *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 4, Oct. 2024, pp. 79–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660x.2024.2434357> . Accessed 26 Dec. 2025.
- Markovski, Dragana. “Digital Diplomacy in 2025: Geopolitics, New Topics & Tools | Diplo.” *Diplo*, [www.diplomacy.edu/topics/digital-diplomacy](https://www.diplomacy.edu/topics/digital-diplomacy) .
- Mudric, Mina. “Internet and Social Media: A Focus on Diplomacy - Diplo.” *Diplo*, 5 Feb. 2025, [www.diplomacy.edu/histories/internet-and-social-media-a-focus-on-diplomacy](https://www.diplomacy.edu/histories/internet-and-social-media-a-focus-on-diplomacy).
- Mwago, Wanjira. “How Social Media Shapes Diplomacy & Public Policy.” *Eminent Diplomats*, 27 July 2025, [eminentdiplomats.org/the-double-edged-sword-how-social-media-shapes-diplomacy](https://eminentdiplomats.org/the-double-edged-sword-how-social-media-shapes-diplomacy) . Accessed 26 Dec. 2025.
- Ortiz-Ospina, Esteban. “The Rise of Social Media.” *Our World in Data*, 18 Sept. 2019, [ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media](https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media).



“Social Media Bosses Are ‘the Largest Dictators’, Says Nobel Peace Prize Winner.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 27 May 2024,

[www.theguardian.com/media/article/2024/may/27/social-media-bosses-are-the-largest-dictators-says-nobel-peace-prize-winner-maria-ressa](https://www.theguardian.com/media/article/2024/may/27/social-media-bosses-are-the-largest-dictators-says-nobel-peace-prize-winner-maria-ressa)

“Social Media Influencers and Diplomacy’s Evolution.” *Simon Fraser University*,

[www.sfu.ca/internationalstudies/news-events/news/2024/Social-Media-Influencers-and-Diplomacys-Evolution.html](https://www.sfu.ca/internationalstudies/news-events/news/2024/Social-Media-Influencers-and-Diplomacys-Evolution.html) . Accessed 26 Dec. 2025.

“Statement — Stockholm Initiative for Digital Diplomacy.” Almendron.com,

<https://www.almendron.com/tribuna/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/fff0ecb1.pdf>

*The Rise of Digital Diplomacy: Navigating Influence in a Hyper-Connected World.*

[rsdi.ae/en/publications/the-rise-of-digital-diplomacy-navigating-influence-in-a-hyper-connected-world](https://rsdi.ae/en/publications/the-rise-of-digital-diplomacy-navigating-influence-in-a-hyper-connected-world) . Accessed 26 Dec. 2025

Twentieth Anniversary Joint Declaration: Challenges to Freedom of Expression in the Next Decade. 10 July 2019,

[freedex.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/2015/files/2019/12/JointDeclaration10July2019\\_EN.pdf](https://freedex.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/2015/files/2019/12/JointDeclaration10July2019_EN.pdf).

*United Nations Social Media Influencer Opportunities – Inspira UN.*

[inspira-un.org/united-nations-social-media-influencer-opportunities](https://inspira-un.org/united-nations-social-media-influencer-opportunities) . Accessed 26 Dec. 2025

“USAGM.” USAGM, [www.usagm.gov](https://www.usagm.gov) . Accessed 26. Dec 2025

---

[www.google.com/url?q=https://www.brightedge.com/glossary/influencer-marketing%23%3A~:text=DGlossary%2520main%2520page-.Definition,a%2520considerable%2520amount%2520of%2520weight&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313500817&usg=AOvVaw1d4WlfukRqb0xgFvRW8zLA](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.brightedge.com/glossary/influencer-marketing%23%3A~:text=DGlossary%2520main%2520page-.Definition,a%2520considerable%2520amount%2520of%2520weight&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313500817&usg=AOvVaw1d4WlfukRqb0xgFvRW8zLA) . Accessed 26. Dec 2025

---

[www.google.com/url?q=https://www.cybercom.mil/Media/News/Article/3895345/russian-disinformation-campaign-doppelgnger-unmasked-a-web-of-deception/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313501808&usg=AOvVaw34lCUuS13SGzNWhMcH2BtK](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.cybercom.mil/Media/News/Article/3895345/russian-disinformation-campaign-doppelgnger-unmasked-a-web-of-deception/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1766766313501808&usg=AOvVaw34lCUuS13SGzNWhMcH2BtK) . Accessed 26. Dec 2025