

ExMUN Study Guide

Tuesday, 13th October 2026



Issue: The issue of social media's impact on conflict

Committee: Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC)

Content WARNING

The following study guide contains references to ongoing and past conflicts, which may be upsetting for some readers. Delegates are reminded to use diplomatic language when discussing this issue and are not to give highly graphic details of warfare and the resultant loss of human life. Finally, delegates are expected to remain tolerant when discussing free speech in an ethical manner and be understanding that free speech limits are a controversial issue.

If you have any concerns about this topic at any time, our main point of contact for welfare is our Vice-President Connor Woodsford (cjlw201@exeter.ac.uk) or you can message us on Instagram ([@exetermodelun](https://www.instagram.com/exetermodelun)) so we can support you as much as possible. Alternatively, you can also access the University's wellbeing services (wellbeing@exeter.ac.uk or 01392724381) or the Students' Guild advice team (advice@exeterguild.com).

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Thank you for taking the time to read this warning. The ExMUN committee is here to support you with any concerns you may have at any time.

- Ella Dennes, Internal Training Officer, on behalf of the ExMUN committee

Key Points

- Social Media** allows information to spread largely **unchecked** and **unverified**

- Multiple issues with social media mean that its presence in conflict presents serious **International Security** concerns
- The **24 hour news cycle** creates threats to the security of legitimate military intervention, as it can force reactive international actions
- Preventing the sharing of harmful information has a **high cost** and often falls to one actor
- Concerns over **free speech** mean that strong international action is controversial
- Nations are affected by this issue on an **unbalanced basis**, with nations that are already unstable being most at risk

Topic Background

The rise of social media has changed the way that individuals and groups communicate. With a click of a button, anyone can contact anybody and the dissemination of information can happen just as fast. The effect that this has had on modern conflict cannot be underestimated as technology begins to increasingly permeate all aspects of our lives. Conflicts risk being created or exacerbated due to the increasing use of social media, both by state authorities, non-state actors, and news outlets, who are susceptible to a constant 24 hour cycle of materials. As the 1st UN committee, DISEC deals with disarmament, global challenges and threats to peace which affect the international community and seeks out solutions to the challenges in the international security regime. Social media's relationship with conflict is something particularly of interest to DISEC because of its view that this dissemination of information constitutes an international security threat.

The conflict sphere falls victim to the issues of both **Misinformation** and **Disinformation**. Misinformation is the accidental spreading of incorrect information, whereas Disinformation is false information that is spread on purpose, with the aim to persuade people to think a certain way or behave in a way which offers that person some kind of gain. Misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech can exacerbate conflicts due to existing volatility in fragile and conflict affected states, contributing towards atrocity risks. These risks are difficult to respond to through peacebuilding mechanisms due to limitations in humanitarian regulatory legislation, and the operational difficulties of applying these mechanisms in practice due to institutional barriers and limited public trust in state authorities. Many social media apps have attempted to put systems in place to detect or provide warnings surrounding fake news and disinformation, however automatic fake news detection remains a huge challenge, primarily because the content is designed in a way to closely resemble the truth, and it is often hard to determine its accuracy by AI alone without additional information from third parties. It falls to DISEC to tackle misinformation and disinformation as an international security priority, in order to make sure that citizens have access to accurate information on the issue of conflict.

The relentless pace of the **24 hour news cycle** means that conflict coverage has always been a news category which has been easily accessible to nations who have free press. Traditional news outlets are increasingly setting up accounts on widely-used social media apps such as TikTok, expanding their reach. Whilst constant conflict coverage has always been an international issue, the security concerns posed by constant information access include state actors and hostile groups manipulating rolling media coverage for propaganda and live, dramatic footage of foreign conflicts or humanitarian crises can force **reactive international responses**. The 24 hour news cycle continues to erupt a need in populations for their state to be the one to act, causing heavy handed intervention eroding trust in **international diplomatic pathways**. Normalisation of military interventionist responses creates fear and erodes global stability overall .

DISEC is also invested in the potential for social media to become a tool that becomes utilised primarily for political aims and to spread **propaganda**. The dissemination of political ideas across social media platforms does have benefits - for example, it can help politicians reach a younger audience to promote their views and overall increase the uptake of those engaged in politics. However, the unstable nature of social media means that political perspectives on conflict can be shared unchecked, exacerbating the perspectives of those with extreme views, and meaning the long term impacts of prolonged conflict often go ignored in the search for justice. Furthermore, propaganda is a key threat on social media and has increasing warfare presence. Famous examples have included the Islamic States (IS) use of social media such as Telegram and Facebook which led to a **£2.4 million operation** spearheaded by the UK government in 2013 to deliver “strategic communications and media operations support to the Syrian moderate armed opposition” in the face of social media campaigns by IS and the Assad Regime during ongoing conflict in Syria. The continuing cost of secret service operations to battle these social media forces must not be underestimated as one way they can maintain presence is through social media platforms.

Ultimately, every citizen of the world deserves free access to unbiased coverage of conflict, in any media format they should choose. However, it falls to DISEC to debate what the **international community** can do to **resolve the negative impacts** that social media can have on conflict and to decide how it can legislate to ensure that all citizens have equitable access to information surrounding global conflicts, whilst being prevented from harmful responses from governments and non-state actors based on social media they consume in the interests of international security.

Discussion Points

The issue of free speech

Currently, not every nation has free access to social media with measures like government blackouts and firewalls being put in place to maintain state control. For DISEC, the potential for measures like these to be employed to stop the dissemination of information from non-state actors is an exciting prospect. However, actions like these though useful are largely opposed by Western nations that focus on **freedom of speech**. DISEC is not a binding committee and technologies like this are incredibly expensive so would need **significant support** to be considered as a measure in the face of ongoing UN budget cuts. Furthermore, as a United

Nations sub-committee, DISEC is dedicated to upholding the principles of free speech and so there is high concern over whether these methods can be deployed ethically and fairly.

The issue of unequal susceptibility

Though social media is something that nearly every nation has some access to, there are particular types of conflict which seem to be particularly fuelled by social media interactions. NGOs have found that **ethnic and sectarian tensions** appear particularly susceptible to the weaponization of social media. This appears to be mainly held within the design of mainstream social media apps as social media rewards identification and connection within a group, but this can be at the expense of intergroup cohesion. Essentially, the ability to form strong communities on social media also enables strong divides to be easily inflamed and online platforms routinely fueled communal tensions that centered on ethnic and sectarian identities. DISEC must decide how it should combat the tensions that erupt within conflicts fuelled by identity as these tend to be brutal and long lasting conflicts, which now risk being **prolonged** by social media.

The issue of spillover

The rapid pace of information sharing via social media and the presence of the 24 hour news cycle means that not only does information ‘spill’ from classified sources into mainstream media but there is also a **risk of spillover into populations** that actually have limited internet access. Social media threats are no longer restricted to social media users and online narratives appear to “spill over,” reaching populations with limited or no internet connection. **False or inflammatory narratives** that become popular online may then travel by text or word of mouth further spreading mis/disinformation. DISEC must remain considerate of the fact that social media narratives surrounding conflict are prone to travelling at unmanageable paces, complicating matters.

Bloc Positions

Nations in conflict

The Russian Federation

The ongoing war with Ukraine has led to social media being seen as a battlefield in Russia. The war is seen as having a majorly digital foundation - for example, intelligence on Russian troops’ border movements and **military plans** were **leaked** and trending on social media right before Russian President Vladimir Putin declared the full-scale invasion. Russia has incited anti-Western sympathy and used it to gain ground through social media focusing on countries that have been affected by the practice of Western colonization, such as those in Africa and across Latin America. By reminding citizens of this painful history and stoking renewed anger against Western responses to current events, Russia continues to fuel a mistrust of Western narratives on social media. The Russian Federation is expected to advocate for a free speech perspective on this issue, so that it can safeguard its mechanisms for gaining allies in warfare.

Sudan

Sudan plunged into a civil war in April 2023 after a vicious struggle for power broke out between its army and a powerful paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) which are government backed, contained a unit which has been found to **create fake accounts** to fabricate support for government policies and denounce critical journalists. In Sudan's war, social media has become a central battlefield, where influencers from the diaspora shape narratives, legitimize violence, and deepen polarization. Both sides fervently feel the effect of propaganda and the confusion it can cause. Social media influencers **directly engage** with high up actors with one notable case involving M. B., a pro-RSF influencer who publicly called for the removal of a specific RSF commander in an area of Kordofan, accusing him of corruption and lack of courage. Sudan is expected to demonstrate why this issue is important by highlighting its own situation as an example for why DISEC must take action.

Colombia

Whilst Colombia is not in a conventional international or full-scale civil war, it is experiencing an ongoing, **low-intensity internal armed conflict** involving government security forces, dissident guerrilla factions, and criminal organizations. Colombia's long history of conflict and violent discussion are highlighted as social media continues to gain popularity among Colombian citizens, with these spaces becoming increasingly important venues for seeing, discussing and enacting violence. In Colombia, there are over 36 million adult social media users, highlighting the widespread use of these digital platforms in the country. There have been past examples of **X** (previously known as **Twitter**) being used to threaten journalists covering the armed conflict and **Facebook** groups being used to reinforce prejudice and segregation against those with different political views during peace talks in 2016. Colombia is expected to request that DISEC sets out a roadmap for international action on this issue, so that it can have help with its ongoing situation.

Other Invested Nations

The United States of America

The United States of America has become renowned in recent years for allowing **high tolerance of free speech** across its social media networks. It is also famous for allowing high level political messaging to occur through social media. A 2025 Oxford University Study, showed that the USA is in highest support for users being permitted to post offensive content to criticize certain groups of people globally and citizens are more likely to want free speech to take precedence over content moderation. Thus, the USA is expected to push that free speech should be prioritised in order to enable governments to utilise the resource to quickly provide comments on ongoing conflicts in order to **reassure** its citizens.

Other Western Nations

Western Nations such as the **UK, France, and Germany** are expected to also stand up for free speech whilst recognising that there should be restrictions for social media content surrounding warfare unlike the USA. Many of these nations have existing restrictions for hate speech on social media and so can advise other DISEC members about how best to proceed in the face of increasing interactions between social media platforms and actors involved in conflict. The

Western bloc is able to strike a balance and **serve as mediators** between nations who disagree on the strength of the response that should be given by DISEC, in the face of this highly controversial issue.