LikeWar: The Weaponisation of Social Media,
Singer, P W and Brooking, Emerson T. Houghton
Mifflin Harcourt, 2018, 416.

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In their book, *LikeWar: The Weaponisation of Social Media,* P W Singer
and Emerson T Brooking explored the evolutionary process of social media
and the innovative ways through which it has grown into a new battlefield,
which not only modified the conflicts all over the globe but has also become
a defining feature of the democratic wars of contemporary strategic
environment.

There are eight chapters in the book with epigrammatic titles and
impressive themes. In the first chapter, the debate revolves around the
blurring of the line between the online and offline worlds and how the
"decentralisation of technology" has affected the physical world. The
authors set the tone of the book in this chapter by constructing an analogue
between the Nazi Blitzkrieg war strategy and online campaign by the
Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). How these two powerful forces used
the modern communication technologies of their respective eras to win the
war before the actual attack. The authors strengthen their case by further
discussing the role of social media in instigating violence during the
Chicago Gang war (2017), Russia-Ukraine crisis, Israel-Palestine conflict,
Pakistan-India rivalry and the Colombian civil war. The second chapter
provides an all-encompassing account of how the global communication
system evolved through various critical junctures ranging from the first
printing press in 1438 to the contemporary social media platforms.

The third chapter revolves around the theme that information is
everywhere and actors just have to hunt for the right information at the right
locations. Social media has turned out to be a global avenue of
crowdsourcing and crowdfunding not only for the political leaders and
human rights activists but also for the terrorists, drug smugglers and illegal
arms traders. This digitalisation of crimes has instigated a transfer of

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reliance from human intelligence to big data intelligence within the spy organisations. Likewise, social media has caused a top-down shift in the political power hierarchies through the web-driven transparency and accountability of the governing elite.

In the fourth chapter, the authors expanded this debate by providing an account of how the states across the globe reacted to this transformation by controlling the internet and managed to turn this "tool of liberation" into "tool of propaganda." This chapter is based on the hypothesis that the governments are using the internet curfew, throttling and cyber-balkanisation under the label of national security which has led to the massive human rights violations, censorship and authoritarianism. The authors have proven this hypothesis through interesting and thought-provoking comparison of the American, Chinese, Russian, Iranian, North Korean, Pakistani, Indian and Syrian models of social media regulation.

In the next two chapters, the authors have investigated the crucial question of how fake news works as a tool of irregular warfare in a wider context of national strategic culture and human psychology. The only thing that differentiates fact from opinion is the existence of a consensus. The "monarchs of internet" build a consensus effect through hacking the trends. They conduct massive perception management operations and design the social media projectiles through the innovative utilisation of the anger and attention economy. The distinctive features of fake news like simplicity, consistency, resonance, novelty, arousal and hero frame neutralise the effect of authentic news. Social media is a new war zone where little creativity with the information could produce substantive results in the physical world. ISIS was the first terrorist organisation, which achieved greater success in the virtual world as compared to reality and exploited these platforms for attracting recruits and crowdfunding. The militant outfit proficiently sold the conservative ideology via modern marketing on social media.

After proving the hypothesis that weaponisation of information has led to global online war, the authors take the debate to the financial and psychological motivators of the global online attention economy and outlined the efforts by states at policy and doctrinal levels to minimise its destructive effects in the seventh chapter. The Chinese policy operates in three dimensions of warfare: psychological, public opinion and legal. The

US military is doing a massive "online persona management service." The governments of 61 countries, including Britain, Turkey and Mexico have designed special frameworks to counter the battle of attention. According to the authors, this battle cannot be won by modern weapons but through the authenticity, emotions, inundation and narratives.

The last chapter describes that the biggest impact of the internet on the global political power landscape is the emergence of social media companies as a new stakeholder. The authors outlined the challenges of this political shift in detail as these social media giants are struggling to adjust themselves into their new political role. They conclude the book by identifying the fundamental realities that the internet has reached its mature stage and emerged as a new battlefield which determines how to fight conflicts. It has changed the meaning of war – a war that includes all of us.

Singer and Brooking brilliantly put together a sophisticated but shocking account of the historical and contemporary dynamics of social media. This book is a brilliant attempt to identify the future trajectory of social media technologies. The book is well written and well-researched. The expression is compendious and engaging. In addition to the first-hand knowledge through interviews, this book is an amazing synthesis of conceptual and theoretical knowledge from psychology, computer science, political science, war studies, history and communication studies. This book pairs well with the book by David Patrikarakos titled *War in 140 Characters: how Social Media is Reshaping Conflicts in the Twenty-first Century*.