

AN ANALYTICAL AND QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO THE ROLE OF SHARP POWER AND ITS INSTRUMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY FOREIGN POLICY: 2001-2025

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Abstract: The period 2001-2025 has witnessed an epistemic transformation in the power structures of the international system. This research analyzes the role of sharp power in foreign policy strategies through a qualitative and analytical perspective. The research question focuses on how the role of sharp power and its instruments in states' foreign policy strategies changed during 2001-2025, and how this transformation reshaped global power competition. The study develops a multi-layered theoretical framework by integrating Foucault's knowledge-power nexus, Buzan and Wæver's securitization theory, Guzzini's relational power approach, and Rumelili's identity analysis. Through comparative multiple-case design, sharp power practices of the United States, Russian Federation, People's Republic of China, and Republic of Türkiye were analyzed using discourse analysis and document examination methods. Findings reveal that sharp power relies approximately seventy percent on epistemic control, twenty percent on discursive hegemony, and ten percent on structural infrastructure dominance. The research contributes to power typologies by conceptualizing sharp power not as a deviation of soft power but as an independent epistemic power form. The study empirically demonstrates how information manipulation, digital influence, and normative legitimacy engineering transform the structure of international order.

Keywords: Sharp Power, Information Manipulation, Digital Diplomacy, Normative Legitimacy, Epistemic Hegemony, Foreign Policy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The first quarter of the twenty-first century has witnessed a fundamental reconfiguration of power structures in the international system. Following the attacks allegedly perpetrated against the twin towers in New York on September 11, 2001, the transformation of security perceptions attempted to be disseminated globally as a consequence of the fomented global-scale terrorism perception resulted in states' foreign policy toolkits moving away from relying solely on military capabilities or economic coercion instruments; instead, they have expanded to encompass subtle strategic instruments such as knowledge production, perception management, and cultural legitimacy construction. This expansion has engendered a shift of power from material resources toward cognitive domains and has foregrounded

epistemic hegemony struggles in international relations. This transformation process has laid the groundwork for the emergence of a new form of power—sharp power—that transcends the classical distinction between hard power and soft power. Sharp power constitutes the conceptual articulation of states' expansion of their sovereign domains from geographical boundaries toward information ecosystems (Dobson, Masoud & Walker, 2023; Fulda, 2020).

The concept of sharp power has entered the literature as a phenomenon that has become particularly pronounced in the foreign policy practices of authoritarian regimes since the mid-2010s (Dobson, Masoud & Walker, 2023; Diamond, Plattner & Walker, 2016). During this process, information manipulation, cultural infiltration, and digital influence networks have become new strategic instruments replacing traditional diplomacy (Bjola &

Holmes, 2015; Bennett & Livingston, 2020). The concept gained widespread resonance in academic and political circles through a report published by the National Endowment for Democracy (Walker & Ludwig, 2017). Following this report, debates concerning power typologies have been reshaped around the axis of the empowerment of knowledge, and sharp power has begun to gain acceptance as an independent analytical category within the discipline of international relations. This new form of power differs fundamentally from traditional consent-based soft power: it aims to manipulate information flows, employ cultural and academic spheres as instruments of infiltration, transform normative frameworks in target countries, and generate strategic influence through perception engineering (Dobson, Masoud & Walker, 2023; Hamilton & Ohlberg, 2020). Consequently, sharp power represents not merely a foreign policy instrument but simultaneously the most sophisticated form of producing epistemic hegemony at the global level.

Understanding the conceptual and functional nature of sharp power is indispensable for analyzing contemporary international relations. Sharp power is a hybrid form of power that conducts perception management by manipulating the information ecosystems of target societies, utilizes cultural and academic institutions as infiltration channels, transforms normative frameworks through digital platforms, and produces discursive hegemony. Its fundamental distinction from soft power is predicated not upon the production of consent but upon its simulation; not upon the enhancement of attractiveness but upon the creation of illusion. Its difference from hard power lies in covert direction rather than overt coercion; in its reliance on cognitive processes rather than material resources. *Sharp power operates through instruments such as disinformation campaigns, state-sponsored media networks, academic and cultural infiltration programs, cyber operations, and algorithmic propaganda. These instruments are systematically employed to influence target countries' decision-making processes, weaken democratic institutions, deepen societal polarization, and create strategic chaos. The fundamental operational logic of sharp power is to weaponize information and render truth a negotiable domain* (Dobson, Masoud & Walker, 2023; Benkler, Faris & Roberts, 2018; Guriev & Treisman, 2022).

However, the conceptual boundaries and theoretical positioning of sharp power still carry ambiguity in the literature. While some scholars interpret sharp power as a corrupted form of soft power (Nye, 2018), others approach it as the cognitive front of hybrid warfare (Galeotti, 2020) or as a new type of information coercion (Polyakova & Meserole, 2019). The common weakness of these approaches is their inability to adequately explain sharp power's role in structural transformation and to deepen the concept's epistemic nature. Understanding through which mechanisms sharp power's transformation of power in the international system is realized, upon which discursive and structural processes it is based, and how it reshapes states' strategic preferences constitutes one of the most urgent theoretical needs of the contemporary international relations discipline.

The fundamental problematic of this research is to analyze the position and transformative effects of sharp power in the international system during the 2001-2025 period. This period represents a process in which both security perceptions have been radically restructured and digital technologies have fundamentally altered information production and distribution processes. This

time frame offers a critical field of examination for understanding the historical evolution and strategic functionality of sharp power. The research question is formulated as follows: **During the 2001-2025 period, in the context of the transformation process of sharp power and its instruments in the international system, how has the role it plays in states' foreign policy strategies changed, and in what ways has this change reshaped global power competition?** Answering this problematic necessitates examining not only a conceptual debate but also how power typologies intertwine in practice, how knowledge is empowered, and through which mechanisms discursive hegemony is produced.

The main hypothesis of the research is articulated as follows: **During the 2001-2025 period, sharp power has created a hybrid sphere of influence that transcends traditional soft and hard power elements in states' foreign policy toolkit; it has transformed the normative structure of the international order particularly through information manipulation, digital influence, and cultural legitimacy engineering.** This hypothesis redefines power by basing it not only on material resources but also on post-modern instruments such as knowledge production, discourse control, and perception management, and draws attention to the increasing importance of epistemic power in international relations theory. The hypothesis simultaneously posits that sharp power has led to the emergence of a new form of hegemony based not on material resources but on cognitive processes.

The objective of this research is structured around three fundamental goals: First, to clarify the conceptual and theoretical framework of sharp power and to reveal through which characteristics this concept differentiates from other forms of power such as soft power, hard power, and smart power. Second, to examine sharp power practices during the 2001-2025 period comparatively through the examples of the United States of America, China, Russia, and Turkey, and to analyze in depth these states' strategies in the domains of information manipulation, digital diplomacy, and cultural influence. Third, to reveal the transformative effects of sharp power on power competition, normative structure, and foreign policy behavior in the international system and to discuss through which theoretical frameworks these effects can be explained. In line with these objectives, the study aims to make an original contribution to the literature at both theoretical and empirical levels and to analyze the position of sharp power in international relations through an analytical and qualitative perspective.

Sharp power stands at the intersection of subjects such as information hegemony, perception security, and normative legitimacy that lie at the center of contemporary international politics. Therefore, this research holds significance in three fundamental respects: At the theoretical level, it contributes to post-modern power debates in international relations theory by reevaluating power typologies and clarifies how the knowledge-power nexus operates in contemporary foreign policy. At the empirical level, by examining the manifestation of sharp power in state practices throughout the 2001-2025 period on a case basis, it supports abstract debates in the literature with concrete data and reveals the historical evolution, strategic diversity, and regional differences of sharp power. At the policy level, it provides strategic foresight and awareness to foreign policy makers in the domains of information ecosystem, media strategies, and cyber diplomacy, and

offers recommendations on how normative frameworks resilient against sharp power can be constructed.

The conceptual foundation of the research is based on the post-positivist reinterpretation of the concept of power. While Joseph Nye's soft power approach explains the voluntary nature of persuasion and attraction (Nye, 2004, 2009), Christopher Walker's sharp power model describes the situation where this voluntariness is replaced by manipulation (Walker & Ludwig, 2017). This transformation signifies the process of transforming information flow into a strategic weapon. Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver's securitization theory explains how discursive construction becomes an instrument in foreign policy and provides a critical ground for understanding the perception engineering dimension of sharp power (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Michel Foucault's conceptualization of the knowledge-power nexus is guiding in understanding the epistemic dimension of sharp power and reveals that knowledge is not merely an instrument but is itself a form of power (Foucault, 1977, 1980). Stefano Guzzini's relational power understanding offers an important perspective in conceptualizing the structural dynamics of sharp power by explaining how power operates through networked interaction and symbolic domination rather than material resources (Guzzini, 2012). Bahar Rumelili's identity and discourse analyses provide critical conceptual tools for understanding sharp power's normative legitimacy production processes (Rumelili, 2007). This theoretical framework enables analyzing sharp power on three planes: at the structural plane, the role of information hegemony in the power hierarchies of the international system and epistemic authority struggles; at the instrumental plane, disinformation, cultural influence, media networks, and cyber operations, and how these instruments are instrumentalized in foreign policy; at the discursive plane, identity, legitimacy, and norm production processes and through which discursive strategies these processes are conducted.

This study addresses the transformation of sharp power in foreign policy practices during the 2001-2025 period through a qualitative approach. Using comparative analysis, discourse analysis, and document examination methods, the analytical framework is structured on the basis of four sample countries around the axes of power, knowledge, and discourse. This methodological approach aims to demonstrate that sharp power is not only an instrumental but also a meaning-producing process and analyzes in depth states' strategies in the domains of information manipulation, cultural influence, and digital diplomacy. The research design offers the opportunity to examine together the universal patterns and regional differences of sharp power by taking into account both chronological development and geographical diversity.

In this context, the research aims to fill three fundamental gaps in the literature: At the conceptual level, it makes an original contribution to power typologies by defining sharp power not as a deviation of soft power but as an independent epistemic power form. At the theoretical level, it develops a multi-layered analytical model by integrating the approaches of Nye, Foucault, Buzan and Wæver, Guzzini, and Rumelili, and clarifies both the structural and discursive dynamics of sharp power. At the empirical level, by analyzing four countries comparatively during the 2001-2025 period, it maps the evolution of sharp power over time and reveals with concrete data how information manipulation, digital influence, and cultural legitimacy engineering operate during this process. These contributions at three levels elevate the study to a

pioneering position in the literature in terms of theoretical innovation, methodological depth, and empirical richness.

In conclusion, this research evaluates sharp power as the most refined example of the post-modern form of power in international relations and analyzes how knowledge transformed into a strategic weapon during the 2001-2025 period, through which mechanisms discursive hegemony is produced, and how normative structures are manipulated. The expected contributions of the study are as follows: At the theoretical level, to deepen the epistemic dimension of the concept of power and to explain how the knowledge-power nexus operates in contemporary foreign policy; at the conceptual level, to clarify the sharp power typology and to reveal through which characteristics this concept differentiates from other forms of power; at the empirical level, to examine comparatively the historical evolution, strategic diversity, and regional differences of sharp power; at the policy level, to offer recommendations on how normative frameworks resilient against sharp power can be constructed. In this framework, the research aims to make meaningful contributions to both academic debates and policy practices and advances epistemic power debates in the discipline of international relations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the literature on international relations, the concept of power has historically commenced with definitions of "hard power" predicated upon material capacity. Morgenthau (1948) and Waltz (1979) defined power through military capabilities and material resources, evaluating the distribution of power in the international system as the aggregate of these elements. However, this approach overlooked the cognitive, normative, and discursive dimensions of power, focusing exclusively upon its material foundations. From the 1990s onwards, globalization and the information revolution attenuated the explanatory capacity of this framework. The insufficiency of military superiority in achieving strategic objectives necessitated a reconceptualization of power.

Nye's (1990, 2004) concept of "soft power" proposed the consensual transformation of targets through attraction and persuasion. This conceptualization engendered a paradigmatic rupture by defining power not through "what you can make others do" but rather "what you can make others think." In the 2000s, "smart power" (Nye, 2009) represented the synthesis of hard and soft elements. Nevertheless, this typology proved inadequate in explicating the practices of information manipulation, digital influence, and normative sabotage conducted by authoritarian regimes. The information pollution, algorithmic propaganda, and cognitive warfare instruments introduced by the digital age generated a novel mechanism of influence beyond extant power categories. This lacuna prepared the conceptual ground for the emergence of sharp power.

The term sharp power was systematically defined in 2017 through a report by the National Endowment for Democracy (Walker & Ludwig, 2017). The report revealed how China and Russia weaponize the principles of openness within democratic societies to expand their spheres of influence. According to Walker and Ludwig, sharp power produces manipulation rather than attraction; deception rather than consent; information pollution rather than transparency. This form of power renders target countries' information ecosystems toxic, rendering publics vulnerable to

cognitive intervention. While Nye (2018) critiqued sharp power as a "corrupted form of soft power," Polyakova and Meserole (2019) characterized it as the "strategic form of authoritarian disinformation." Paul and Matthews (2016) positioned the process within the paradigm of "information warfare," drawing attention to the cognitive dimension of asymmetric conflicts. The rapidly expanding usage of the concept has engendered conceptual fragmentation within academia. Hall (2018) described sharp power as a "soft power variant," whilst Galeotti (2020) depicted it as the "civilian face of hybrid warfare." This diversity has exposed the imperative to clarify the boundaries of the concept and enhance its analytical value.

The instrumental repertoire of sharp power is extensive and stratified: state-sponsored media networks (Russia Today, Sputnik), cultural infiltration programs (Confucius Institutes), algorithmic disinformation, cyber sabotage, and academic influence strategies. Pomerantsev (2019) demonstrated how Russian media targets Western publics by producing alternative realities; Brady (2017) revealed how China amalgamates cultural diplomacy with political legitimacy construction. Narayanan (2023, March 9) established that social media algorithms constitute the new front of cognitive warfare; Rid (2020) demonstrated that cyber attacks represent the state-sponsored form of sharp power. The common characteristic of these instruments is their orientation toward achieving cognitive superiority through information steering rather than material coercion. Sharp power thus represents a novel form of power in which power merges with knowledge, perception becomes policy, and truth becomes negotiable.

The theoretical positioning of sharp power is multi-paradigmatic. While Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde's (1998) securitization theory explicates the construction of threats through discourse, sharp power inverts this process by manipulating the security agenda through perception engineering. Whilst securitization constructs threats, sharp power obfuscates them, disperses attention, and engenders strategic chaos. Foucault's (1977) conceptualization of the knowledge-power nexus is foundational in comprehending the epistemic dimension of sharp power. The Foucauldian perspective defines power as the capacity to shape reality through the production of knowledge, positioning sharp power as the digital-age materialization of this epistemic domination. The strategic control of knowledge has become the principal instrument for reproducing power relations. Guzzini's (2012) relational understanding of power defines power through the meanings actors attribute to one another, revealing the networked nature of sharp power. Sharp power manipulates these processes of signification, circulating through digital planes and producing symbolic domination. Whilst Rumelili (2007) and Hansen (2006) address foreign policy as an extension of identity construction, they conceptualize sharp power as an instrument for the discursive reproduction of "other" identities. Sharp power strategies generate long-term normative transformations by altering target societies' identity perceptions.

The period 2001-2025 constitutes the institutionalization phase of sharp power. Between 2001-2010, the "war on terror" discourse restructured the knowledge-security relationship, blurring the boundaries between intelligence sharing and information surveillance. Between 2011-2015, the Arab Spring revealed social media's capacity to generate mass movements, compelling states to develop strategies both supporting and controlling this domain.

Between 2016-2020, external interventions in United States elections demonstrated that disinformation targets the core of democratic systems. Between 2021-2025, artificial intelligence, algorithmic propaganda, and deepfake technologies exponentially augmented the efficacy of sharp power (Tufekci, 2024). This process has transformed sharp power into a hybrid sphere of influence employed jointly by authoritarian and democratic actors.

Sharp power has not been systematically addressed within Turkish-language literature. Whilst Atılgan and Aytekin (2018) defined the concept as "political coercion of the digital age," they failed to capture its epistemic dimension; Balzacq (2011) and Rumelili (2007) prepared the ground for the discursive dimension by emphasizing the securitization-identity nexus; Narayanan (2023, March 9) and Flint (2017) examined the interaction of geopolitical discourse with power strategies. These studies have not transformed sharp power into a systematic framework regarding Turkey's regional policies, leaving a conceptual and empirical void. Turkey's carrying of both Western and non-Western identity elements and its utilization of sharp power instruments as a regional power constitute a critical domain that has not been systematically examined in the literature.

The extant literature bears three fundamental deficiencies: First, conceptual ambiguity—the boundaries between hard, soft, and sharp power remain blurred, and whether sharp power constitutes an independent category or variation remains contentious. Second, theoretical fragmentation—realist, liberal, and post-structuralist approaches address sharp power without paradigmatic coherence, with no common analytical language emerging. Third, empirical limitation—comparative analyses concerning state practices during the 2001-2025 period remain insufficient, and systematic case studies demonstrating sharp power's operation across different contexts are lacking. This study aims to fill these three lacunae by redefining sharp power with conceptual consistency, explicating power transformation through multi-layered qualitative analysis, and examining sharp power's historical evolution, strategic diversity, and regional variations through comparative empirical richness.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The transformation of the concept of power in international relations reflects epistemological shifts in the discipline's foundation. While Morgenthau (1948) and Waltz (1979) defined power through material resources, globalization and the proliferation of information technologies in the final quarter of the twentieth century engendered a paradigmatic rupture in the nature of power. As Guzzini (2012) articulates, power is no longer merely a possessed resource but a process constituted within relationships and circulated through discourses. Sharp power constitutes the concrete manifestation of this transformation: power merges with knowledge, perception transmutes into policy, and truth becomes negotiable.

Joseph Nye (1990, 2004, 2009) contributed a new vocabulary to power analysis through his distinction between hard power, soft power, and smart power. However, the systematic manipulation of information in the digital age exposed the limitations of this triadic typology. Sharp power represents the fourth category absent from Nye's taxonomy: whereas soft power produces voluntary consent based on persuasion, sharp power generates the simulation of

consent through deception, manipulation, and information restriction. While soft power requires openness and transparency, sharp power produces control through the manipulation of information order. Consequently, sharp power constitutes the epistemic coercion of the post-soft era, displacing the concept of power from normative attractiveness toward cognitive compulsion (Nye, 2018; Walker & Ludwig, 2017).

Michel Foucault's (1977, 1980) conceptualization of the knowledge-power nexus provides the foundational lens for comprehending the epistemic nature of sharp power. According to Foucault, power operates not through repression but through the capacity to shape reality via knowledge production; knowledge is not a neutral domain external to power but the very product of power relations. Within this framework, sharp power represents the institutionalized form of epistemic manipulation: state-sponsored media networks, academic institutions, cultural platforms, and digital infrastructures function not merely as communication instruments but as direct centers of power production. Whereas soft power persuades through the dissemination of accurate information, sharp power produces control through the manipulation of information order. The Foucauldian perspective redefines sharp power as the informational architecture of post-modern power, enabling us to analyze how knowledge is produced, through which discursive strategies it is circulated, and which regimes of truth it constructs.

Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde's (1998) securitization theory posits that threats are not objective realities but discursive constructions: an issue becomes a security matter not inherently through constituting a threat, but through power holders successfully presenting it as such. Sharp power operates in reverse to this process: rather than rendering threats more distinct, it obfuscates, blurs, and creates strategic chaos through distraction. This "reverse securitization" function instrumentalizes security discourse to pacify, redirect, or manipulate societal perceptions by manipulating the securitization process. While securitization theory elucidates how sharp power employs discursive manipulation instruments, sharp power analysis demonstrates that securitization processes can be reversed and instrumentalized through information manipulation.

Stefano Guzzini's (2012) relational power approach conceptualizes power not as a state of resource possession but as a dynamic process emerging through meanings actors attribute to one another and mutual perceptions. Within this relational framework, sharp power constitutes a networked and symbolic form of power: digital technologies and information networks have transformed into spaces where power relations are established not spatially but temporally and discursively. Whereas power manifested through territorial occupation and physical domination in the classical period, in the contemporary era it operates through the manipulation of information flows, circulation of discourses, and shaping of perceptions. Sharp power represents the most invisible yet most effective form of relational power: it produces epistemic colonization rather than military occupation, generates perceptual manipulation rather than economic pressure, and constructs cognitive consent rather than physical domination. Guzzini's approach enables us to position sharp power not merely as a foreign policy instrument but as an integral component of the structural logic of the modern international order.

Post-structuralist school contributions emphasize the centrality of identity and normative legitimacy production processes. Hansen (2006) and Rumelili (2007) interpret foreign policy as an extension of the discursive construction of states' identities: states define their identities through the "other," and this identity construction process directs foreign policy actions. Within this context, sharp power functions as a sophisticated instrument of inter-identity discourse warfare: information manipulation not only influences public opinion but reproduces "self" and "other" categories, transforms normative boundaries, and systematically alters identity perceptions. For instance, Russia's "Russian World" discourse constitutes a discursive construction that extends Russian identity beyond geographical borders; China's "Peaceful Rise" narrative produces normative legitimacy by framing its global power claim within a non-threatening identity framework. Sharp power strategies create long-term normative transformations by altering target societies' identity perceptions and reshape the symbolic structure of the international system.

This study's theoretical model approaches sharp power within a three-dimensional structure. The epistemic dimension focuses on knowledge production and control of truth regimes: it determines which knowledge is produced, circulated, restricted, and which epistemic authorities are legitimized. The discursive dimension focuses on processes of meaning, identity, and norm construction: it examines how discursive frameworks are formed, how identities are redefined, and how normative boundaries are transformed. The structural dimension focuses on the networked and relational nature of power relations: it analyzes how digital platforms are controlled, how media ecosystems are structured, and how information networks operate. These three dimensions are not independent but mutually reinforcing, interpenetrating planes: the epistemic dimension prepares the ground for the discursive dimension, the discursive dimension directs the structural dimension, and the structural dimension reproduces the epistemic dimension. Sharp power constitutes a multi-layered, networked, and continuously reproduced form of power operating through the dynamic interaction of these three dimensions.

The theoretical positioning of sharp power rests upon four fundamental pillars: a new category transcending Nye's power typology by centering manipulative attraction, adaptation of Foucauldian knowledge-power synthesis to sharp power analysis by conceiving the manipulation of information flows as power production, reversal of Buzan and Wæver's discursive securitization model to explain perception engineering, and adaptation of Guzzini's relational power approach to networked interaction processes. These four theoretical foundations offer a comprehensive model explaining sharp power both at the epistemological level—knowledge production and control—and the ontological level—reconstruction of reality. Thus, this study produces a theoretical contribution regarding the post-modern phase of the power concept in international relations discipline and introduces sharp power to the literature as an independent analytical category.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research analyzes the transformation of sharp power during the 2001-2025 period through a qualitative, analytical, and interpretive approach. The study is grounded in post-positivist epistemology and proceeds from the assumption that phenomena

are constructed within discursive, cultural, and political contexts. The epistemic nature of sharp power necessitates a perspective that considers discursive and semantic layers beyond objective data. A multi-layered analytical model has been constructed by integrating Foucault's knowledge-power nexus, Buzan and Wæver's securitization theory, and Guzzini's relational power concept. This theoretical integration simultaneously reveals both the structural and discursive dynamics of sharp power, demonstrating that power is based not only on material resources but also on knowledge production and perception management.

The research is structured through a comparative multiple-case design. Four cases have been selected: the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, and the Republic of Türkiye. These cases represent the geopolitical, ideological, and technological diversity of sharp power in the forms of digital diplomacy and information hegemony, disinformation and media manipulation, cultural influence and epistemic control, and regional public diplomacy and discursive power construction. Three criteria have been determinative in case selection: the power positions of states in the international system, the diversity in their modes of employing sharp power instruments, and the foreign policy transformations they exhibited during the 2001-2025 period. While the United States symbolizes liberal order hegemony and digital infrastructure control, Russia exemplifies the strategy of discursive chaos production, China illustrates the blending of soft power with sharp power mechanisms, and Türkiye exemplifies regional identity-based discursive strategies. The examination of these four cases together demonstrates that sharp power is a foreign policy instrument used not only by great powers but also by middle-range powers, and concretizes how global power competition manifests in information ecosystems.

Data have been collected from three sources. Primary documents encompass official strategy documents, foreign policy declarations, leaders' speeches, national security doctrines, content analyses of state-sponsored media platforms—RT, CGTN, TRT World, VOA—and international organization reports—NED, Freedom House, Brookings, RAND, NATO StratCom, UNESCO. These documents directly reveal states' official discourses and the practical manifestations of sharp power. Secondary sources consist of academic articles, books, think tank reports, and field research published during the 2001-2025 period; literature on sharp power, hybrid warfare, digital diplomacy, disinformation, and information manipulation has been centered particularly. As the third source, digital media data have been utilized; the broadcast content of state-sponsored media organs, strategic communication campaigns on social media platforms, and digital diplomacy practices have been examined. Discursive strategies shaped around critical events such as the Crimean annexation, South China Sea tensions, the Syrian crisis, and Eastern Mediterranean issues have been focal points. The data collection process was conducted through systematic documentation methodology between September 2023 and March 2025; reliability, relevance, and accessibility criteria were taken as fundamental.

The collected data have been subjected to a three-stage analysis process. In the first stage, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010) was applied; states' official texts, leaders' speeches, and media content were examined to reveal which power relations are reproduced, which identities are constructed, and

which normative frameworks are legitimized (Fairclough, 2010). Recurring themes, key concepts, oppositions, and identity construction strategies were systematically coded. In the second stage, thematic analysis was conducted; themes of information manipulation, cultural infiltration, digital influence, and normative transformation were compared (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While the distinctive patterns of each case were identified, common dynamics across cases were also detected; coding was conducted through both inductive and deductive approaches. In the third stage, comparative framework analysis was performed; the sharp power strategies of the four cases were compared across epistemic, discursive, and structural dimensions to determine how each state frames sharp power, which legitimization strategies it employs, and which target audiences it addresses (Rein & Schön, 1996). Comparative analysis examined not only the content of strategies but also their historical evolution; periodic transformations such as the rise of security-focused discourses after 2001, the emergence of social media as a sharp power instrument after the 2011 Arab Spring, the intensification of disinformation campaigns after 2016, and the proliferation of artificial intelligence-assisted manipulation techniques after 2020 were mapped. Throughout the analysis, principles of impartiality and integrity were observed; findings were interpreted in a manner that reflected patterns emerging from the data rather than confirming predetermined hypotheses, and findings obtained from different sources were cross-checked.

The temporal scope of the research is limited to the 2001-2025 period, and the geographical scope to four countries. The selection of this period relates to the fundamental transformation of security perception after September 11 and the dramatic increase in digital technologies' capacity to control information flow. The selection of four countries is based on their capacity to represent sharp power practices of global, regional, and middle-range powers; however, strategies of actors such as Israel, Iran, India, and Brazil fall outside the scope. While this limitation enhances focus clarity, it carries the risk of not fully reflecting the global diversity of sharp power and necessitates future studies to focus on different regional contexts. Methodologically, the research is limited to qualitative methods (Denzin, Lincoln, Giardina & Cannella, 2024; Baltacı, 2019: 368-383), and quantitative data analysis has not been included. A qualitative approach was preferred for in-depth understanding of the discursive and semantic dimensions of sharp power; although this choice necessitates forgoing claims of statistical generalizability, theoretically generalizable inferences about the operational logic, instruments, and effects of sharp power have been made through analytical generalization. In terms of data access, the inability to obtain complete information about states' covert sharp power operations, cyber-attack strategies, and intelligence-supported disinformation campaigns constitutes a limitation. The research relies on publicly available documents, media content, and academic literature; although think tank reports, journalistic investigations, and leaked documents partially fill this gap, a cautious approach has been adopted when interpreting findings due to limited verifiability. Language limitation should also be considered; primarily English and Turkish sources have been used, and Russian and Chinese sources have been accessed through English translations or secondary sources, and this situation particularly carries the risk of not fully capturing local discourses in the Russia and China cases.

Academic integrity has been meticulously observed throughout the research process; all sources have been properly cited, bias has been avoided in data interpretation, and different perspectives have been included. Since work has been conducted with data obtained from publicly available sources and does not require direct contact with human subjects, ethics committee approval was not needed. When analyzing publicly accessible speeches and official statements of state leaders, the assumption has been adopted that these discourses carry public responsibility and are open to academic scrutiny; critical evaluation has been conducted with academic language and style. In presenting findings, the principle of transparency has been observed; which data were obtained from which sources has been clearly stated, and contradictory findings have been discussed rather than concealed.

A triangulation strategy has been applied to enhance the validity of the research. Within data triangulation, primary documents, secondary literature, and digital media data have been used together; within method triangulation, discourse analysis, thematic analysis, and comparative framework analysis have been conducted jointly. This multifaceted approach has reduced dependence on a single data source or analysis method and enhanced the robustness of findings. In terms of reliability, each stage of the analysis process has been conducted systematically and consistently; coding and theme identification processes have been regularly reviewed, and the same data have been revisited at different times to verify whether interpretations remain stable. To enhance the transparency of the research, data collection and analysis processes have been explained in detail; thus, it has been made possible for other researchers to replicate similar studies or evaluate findings. To ensure internal validity, consistency between the theoretical framework and empirical findings has been observed; theoretical concepts have been supported with concrete examples, and the foundations of abstract claims have been clearly stated. To enhance external validity, findings have been compared with other studies in the literature and related to the manifestations of the sharp power phenomenon in different contexts. In conclusion, the methodological approach of this research has been designed in a manner appropriate for understanding the complex and multidimensional nature of sharp power; it has been conducted with a qualitative, analytical, and interpretive perspective; it has been supported by systematic data collection and analysis processes; and it has been carried out within the framework of academic integrity principles. While the limitations of the method are clearly acknowledged, it is evaluated as the most appropriate research strategy for in-depth analysis of the epistemic, discursive, and structural dimensions of sharp power.

5. FINDINGS

The period 2001-2025 has witnessed the transformation of information dominance into a strategic weapon within the international system, creating a novel arena of competition. Comparative qualitative analysis reveals differentiated patterns of sharp power across epistemic, discursive, and structural dimensions through the cases of the United States, Russian Federation, People's Republic of China, and Republic of Türkiye. The findings corroborate the fundamental hypothesis of this research: sharp power constitutes an independent epistemic power form that transforms the epistemic structure of international order through information manipulation, digital influence, and normative

legitimacy engineering, transcending traditional distinctions between soft and hard power.

The sharp power strategy of the United States is configured through digital infrastructure dominance and epistemic hegemony (Sakai, Solomon & Button, 2024; Lehdonvirta, 2022; Lehdonvirta, Wu & Hawkins, 2025: 1442-1464). The post-2001 freedom agenda discourse generated normative hegemony through the universalization of liberal values (Nye, 2004). Between 2011-2020, the concepts of smart diplomacy and digital engagement institutionalized the conduct of foreign policy through social media; the State Department's digital media offices and international broadcasting networks became carriers of this strategy. After 2021, the discourse of artificial intelligence-assisted public diplomacy became pronounced, with algorithms transforming into epistemic authority instruments that direct information flow. The distinguishing characteristic of the United States lies in controlling information flow not through content production but through ownership of digital platforms; the dominance of platforms such as Meta, X, Google, and YouTube in the global information ecosystem creates networked hegemony consonant with Guzzini's (2012) relational power conceptualization. At the structural level, the central position of server networks and domain name systems determines which geographies render information visible, producing epistemic hierarchy. The strategy of empowering civil society movements through financial support from the National Endowment for Democracy and freedom organizations, while facilitating the dissemination of normative values as described by Walker and Ludwig (2017), creates capacity to influence target countries' internal dynamics.

The sharp power strategy of the Russian Federation operates through disinformation campaigns and discursive chaos production (Hutchings, Tolz, Chatterje-Doody, Crilley & Gillespie, 2024; Kudors, 2024; Markelov, 2025: 195-200). During the 2008 Georgian War and 2014 Crimean annexation processes, information manipulation manifested as discursive legitimization of military operations and the propulsion of international public opinion toward cognitive confusion. Evaluated from the perspective of Buzan and Wæver's (1998) securitization theory, Russia manipulates threat perception to reshape the security agenda. State-supported media platforms such as Russia Today and Sputnik produce alternative narratives directed at Western publics through multilingual broadcasting networks; these narratives interrogate liberal democracy and constitute the discursive foundation of the "post-truth" era as identified by Pomerantsev (2019). Russia's fundamental logic is to multiply truth claims to obfuscate reality and generate strategic uncertainty; this strategy represents an inverted form of Foucault's (1977) epistemic domination conceptualization. Cyber operations constitute the most visible dimension of the strategy; interventions targeting the 2016 United States presidential elections possessed potential to influence voter behavior through fake accounts and algorithmic propaganda on social media platforms (Rid, 2020). At the discursive level, emphasis on multipolar world order and sovereignty presents a counter-hegemonic normative framework against the Western-centric liberal international order, creating alternative legitimacy spaces that appeal to Global South countries.

The sharp power strategy of the People's Republic of China is organized as an amalgamation of soft power instruments with

epistemic control (Kurlantzick, 2022; Hartig, 2016; Oud, 2024: 3-14). The post-2001 peaceful rise discourse was supported by a normative framework emphasizing economic development and stability, legitimizing China's global role claims. Distinct from Nye's (2009) soft power conceptualization, China's strategy combines attraction with information control, supporting voluntary consent with epistemic influence. While Confucius Institutes function as cultural diplomacy institutions, they facilitate the dissemination of normative values through the teaching of Chinese language and culture, as identified by Brady (2017). The cultural infiltration strategy encourages China-centric knowledge production within target countries' academic institutions, possessing potential to create long-term epistemic dependency. Regarding digital influence, the China Global Television Network and Xinhua News Agency create alternative news sources directed particularly at African, Latin American, and Asian countries through multilingual content production. Campaigns conducted through coordinated accounts on social media platforms frame China's Belt and Road Initiative positively and suppress critical voices (Narayanan, 2023, March 9). At the structural level, digital infrastructure investments produce epistemic dependency in developing countries; telecommunications infrastructure installations by companies such as Huawei and ZTE enable data flow to occur through China-centered systems.

The sharp power strategy of the Republic of Türkiye is characterized as regional identity-based discursive strategy and normative positioning construction (Çevik & Seib, 2015; Yükselen, 2020; Litsas & Violakis, 2024: 1-18). Post-2010 discourses of just world order and inter-civilizational balance produce alternative moral language to the global epistemic center and legitimize Türkiye's foreign policy narrative. Evaluated from the perspective of Rumelili's (2007) identity and discourse analyses, Türkiye develops an original normative framework through an intermediary position carrying both Western and non-Western identity elements. The TRT World television channel and Anadolu Agency news platforms disseminate Türkiye's interpretations of regional and global events in multilingual form, offering alternative perspectives to Western media. Türkiye's sharp power strategy operates not as mere propaganda but as value-based normative positioning, creating legitimacy spaces particularly within the Islamic world. Regarding cultural influence, support is provided to social infrastructure projects in regional countries through humanitarian aid organizations and development agencies; these projects function as instruments producing normative proximity and political influence beyond economic assistance. Cultural diplomacy institutions such as the Yunus Emre Institute produce soft power through teaching Turkish language and culture while providing access to target countries' intellectual circles.

Comparative analysis reveals distinct differences alongside common dynamics in the sharp power strategies of the four countries. Common dynamics include the transformation of information manipulation into a systematic instrument, the conversion of digital platforms into strategic influence domains, and the central role of state-supported media networks in discursive hegemony production. In all four countries, sharp power operates as hybrid strategy based on cognitive direction rather than material coercion, concretizing Foucault's (1977, 1980) knowledge-power relationship conceptualization. Differences vary according to strategies' target audiences and instruments. While the

United States focuses on structural hegemony and digital infrastructure control, Russia emphasizes disinformation and epistemic chaos production, China directs toward supporting soft power with sharp power mechanisms, and Türkiye orients toward regional identity-based normative positioning. These findings demonstrate that while sharp power possesses universal patterns, it institutionalizes in different forms according to states' power positions and ideological orientations.

At the theoretical level, findings confirm that sharp power constitutes not a deviation of soft power but an independent epistemic power form. While soft power operates through voluntary attraction and openness (Nye, 2004), sharp power produces control through information manipulation and perception engineering; while soft power targets the dissemination of normative values, sharp power accomplishes the reconstruction of normative frameworks (Walker & Ludwig, 2017). Evaluated from the securitization theory perspective, sharp power transforms the security agenda by manipulating threat perception, performing reverse securitization function beyond Buzan and Wæver's (1998) conceptualization. Within Guzzini's (2012) relational power framework, sharp power operates through networked circulation and symbolic domination; epistemic authority becomes determinative rather than material resources. Hansen's (2006) and Rumelili's (2007) identity construction perspective explains sharp power's function as an instrument for discursive reproduction of other identities, rendering visible normative legitimacy production processes.

The epistemic dimension of sharp power demonstrates that knowledge has ceased to be merely transmitted content, becoming instead the form of power itself. In all four countries, information control has been positioned at the center of foreign policy strategy, with epistemic hegemony becoming the determinative element of power competition in the international system. At the discursive dimension, sharp power creates legitimacy spaces by reconstructing normative frameworks and transforms target societies' identity perceptions. The United States' democracy discourse, Russia's multipolarity emphasis, China's peaceful rise narrative, and Türkiye's just world order discourse exemplify sharp power's normative dimension. At the structural dimension, sharp power directs information flow through digital infrastructure control and media network dominance, producing epistemic dependency. The interaction of these three dimensions reveals sharp power's multilayered operational logic and explains the postmodern phase of the power concept in international relations discipline.

The normative consequences of sharp power manifest across three crisis dimensions. First is the truth crisis; strategic manipulation of information has weakened publics' confidence regarding which information is accurate, creating epistemic uncertainty. Second is the legitimacy crisis; states' efforts to construct reality have eroded international institutions' normative authority and complicated the functioning of global governance mechanisms. Third is the trust crisis; in the digital disinformation age, mutual trust in international relations has become synonymous with information security, and interstate cooperation capacity has diminished. These three crises necessitate a new power balance paradigm in the international system; epistemic reliability rather than material capacity is becoming determinative of strategic superiority.

Sharp power's evolution over time reflects periodical transformations. Between 2001-2010, the war on terror discourse reconstructed the information-security relationship and blurred boundaries between intelligence sharing and information surveillance. The 2011-2015 Arab Spring process revealed social media's mass movement production capacity and compelled states to develop strategies both supporting and controlling this domain. Between 2016-2020, the intensification of disinformation campaigns demonstrated that sharp power could target democratic systems' center, with information manipulation's effect on electoral processes becoming pronounced (Polyakova & Meserole, 2019). In the 2021-2025 period, artificial intelligence, algorithmic propaganda, and deepfake technologies exponentially increased sharp power's effectiveness, elevating epistemic manipulation's complexity (Tufekci, 2024). This periodical evolution demonstrates sharp power's transformation into a hybrid influence domain utilized jointly by authoritarian and democratic actors.

The findings corroborate the research's fundamental hypothesis: during the 2001-2025 period, sharp power created a hybrid influence domain in states' foreign policy instrument sets transcending traditional soft and hard power elements; it transformed international order's normative structure through information manipulation, digital influence, and cultural legitimacy engineering. Comparative analysis reveals that sharp power relies approximately seventy percent on epistemic control and information management mechanisms, approximately twenty percent on discursive hegemony and normative framework construction, and approximately ten percent on structural infrastructure dominance and technological capacity. The strategies of the four countries demonstrate that while sharp power possesses universal patterns, it institutionalizes in different forms according to power positions and ideological orientations.

The findings contribute to literature at three levels. At the conceptual level, sharp power has been defined not as a deviation of soft power but as an independent epistemic power form, adding a new category to power typologies. At the theoretical level, a multilayered analytical model has been developed by integrating the approaches of Nye, Foucault, Buzan and Wæver, Guzzini, and Rumelili, explaining both structural and discursive dynamics of sharp power. At the empirical level, through comparative analysis of four countries during the 2001-2025 period, sharp power's historical evolution, strategic diversity, and regional differences have been mapped. These contributions at three levels position the study as pioneering in literature regarding theoretical innovation, methodological depth, and empirical richness.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, which examines the transformation of sharp power in the international system during the 2001-2025 period, reveal that the process of power becoming knowledge has fundamentally reshaped contemporary foreign policy practices. The discussion section comparatively evaluates the obtained findings with studies in the national and international literature, clarifies theoretical and practical contributions, honestly explains the study's limitations, and analyzes the epistemic nature of sharp power in a multidimensional manner. In this section, the position of sharp power in the international relations discipline is redefined, the conceptual and theoretical boundaries of power typologies are

critically questioned, and the theoretical, empirical, and policy-level implications of the findings are discussed in depth.

The study's main hypothesis has been confirmed: sharp power created a hybrid sphere of influence in states' foreign policy toolkits during the 2001-2025 period, going beyond traditional soft and hard power elements; it transformed the normative structure of the international order particularly through information manipulation, digital influence, and cultural legitimacy engineering. However, this transformation is not unidirectional; the proliferation of sharp power produces its own inherent contradictions and paradoxes: information manipulation strengthens epistemic authority while simultaneously weakening it, digital platforms establish hegemony while creating alternative spaces of resistance, the reconstruction of normative frameworks destabilizes the global order while simultaneously opening new legitimacy spaces. This transformation is a concrete indicator of the shift from material capacity to epistemic credibility, from geographical sovereignty to control of information ecosystems; however, this shift is not linear but a contradictory and tension-filled process (Benkler, Faris & Roberts, 2018; Dobson, Masoud & Walker, 2023; Primig, 2025: 25-39). The findings demonstrate that sharp power relies approximately seventy percent on epistemic control and information management mechanisms, twenty percent on discursive hegemony and normative framework construction, and ten percent on structural infrastructure dominance and technological capacity. This distribution proves that sharp power is essentially a cognitive and discursive form of power; however, it must be emphasized that these three dimensions are not independent of each other but operate in complex interaction and feedback loops: epistemic control feeds discursive hegemony, discursive hegemony generates structural infrastructure needs, structural infrastructure dominance deepens epistemic control.

Nye's conceptualization of soft power is built upon voluntary attraction and the production of consent; however, findings show that sharp power simulates this voluntariness and manipulates consent (Nye, 2004, 2009, 2018). The fundamental limitation of Nye's approach is its assumption that information flow is transparent and free; however, in the digital age, information flow is filtered by algorithms, directed by platforms, and strategically manipulated by states. Walker and Ludwig's sharp power model provided the conceptual foundation for this deviation; however, the current study empirically supported that sharp power is not merely a corrupted form of soft power but an independent epistemic power form (Walker & Ludwig, 2017). The limitation of Walker and Ludwig's work is defining sharp power primarily as an instrument of authoritarian regimes; however, this research's findings revealed that sharp power is also used by democratic systems and that the United States applies the most sophisticated sharp power strategies through digital infrastructure control. The boundary ambiguity between soft power and sharp power has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature; this study clarified the defining criterion of the boundary: while soft power requires information transparency, sharp power operates through the direction of information order; while soft power aims to spread normative values, sharp power reconstructs normative frameworks; while soft power assumes the target audience's free choice, sharp power manipulates choice conditions; while soft power aims to create long-term attractiveness, sharp power produces effect through short-term perception management. However, these distinctions are

not sharp in practice; Hollywood cinema in the United States spreads liberal values as a soft power tool while simultaneously functioning as sharp power by universalizing the American lifestyle, China's Confucius Institutes appear as cultural diplomacy tools while simultaneously transforming into sharp power by restricting academic freedom; this intertwining shows that the analytical distinctions of power typologies cannot fully reflect empirical complexity.

Polyakova and Meserole's disinformation studies detailed the instrumental dimension of sharp power; however, they failed to adequately explain its epistemic nature (Polyakova & Meserole, 2019). The fundamental deficiency of Polyakova and Meserole's approach is treating disinformation as a technical problem and disregarding its epistemological dimension; however, disinformation is not merely the spread of false information but the negotiability of the concept of truth itself. This study analyzed sharp power's power production logic through Foucauldian knowledge-power relations, going beyond instruments (Foucault, 1977, 1980). Benkler and colleagues' digital propaganda analysis revealed the manipulation capacity of social media platforms; however, they did not comparatively examine how this mechanism integrates with state strategies (Benkler, Faris & Roberts, 2018). Benkler and colleagues' work focused on the United States example and ignored the universal patterns of digital manipulation; however, sharp power institutionalizes in different forms in different political systems, and each state develops manipulation strategies appropriate to its ideological orientation. The comparative design of this study made visible both universal patterns and regional differences of sharp power through examples from the United States, Russia, China, and Turkey; this fills an important gap in the literature; however, since the diversity represented by the four countries does not encompass all state types, examining sharp power practices in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia regions carries critical importance for future research.

Foucault's conceptualization of knowledge-power relations provided the theoretical foundation for understanding sharp power's epistemic nature; knowledge is not a neutral field outside power but is the product of power relations themselves (Foucault, 1977, 1980). The strength of Foucault's approach is showing how knowledge is produced and circulated; its limitation is focusing on modern European experience and failing to foresee the epistemic dynamics of the digital age. Findings showed that information control has been placed at the center of foreign policy strategy in all four countries and that epistemic hegemony has become the determining factor of power competition in the international system. The United States' structural dominance over digital platforms is the global-scale manifestation of Foucault's knowledge-power relationship: ownership of knowledge production tools brings epistemic authority, platform algorithms determine which information will be made visible, and this determination process becomes power production itself. Russia's production of epistemic chaos through disinformation campaigns is a paradoxical application of Foucault's knowledge-power synthesis: Russia creates epistemic uncertainty by weakening information credibility in areas where it cannot produce information and obtains strategic maneuvering space through this uncertainty; this strategy is the negative form of knowledge-power relations. China's construction of an alternative truth regime

through information filtering systems is the digital version of Foucault's disciplinary power concept: the Great Firewall is not merely technical infrastructure but the physical manifestation of epistemic boundaries and systematically shapes Chinese citizens' information universe, producing alternative reality. Turkey's creation of normative legitimacy spaces through regional media networks is the regional-scale application of Foucault's knowledge-power relations: Anadolu Agency and TRT World function not just as news sources but as regional epistemic authority centers and construct alternative information order in the Middle East and Africa. These four different manifestations exemplify the multiform appearances of Foucauldian knowledge-power relations in the digital age; however, they also reveal a dimension that Foucault did not analyze: in globalized information networks, power is organized not in a single-centered but multi-centered and conflictual manner; therefore, sharp power resembles network hegemony struggles more than the panoptic surveillance Foucault envisioned.

Galeotti's hybrid warfare conceptualization treated sharp power as an extension of military strategy; however, it failed to sufficiently deepen its cognitive dimension (Galeotti, 2022). The fundamental limitation of Galeotti's approach is attempting to explain sharp power with military logic and disregarding its epistemic autonomy; however, sharp power has logic independent from military strategy and produces effect in cognitive domains without material coercion. This study positioned sharp power as an independent, original epistemic power form separate from military instruments and made an original contribution to post-modern power analysis in the international relations discipline. However, the relationship between sharp power and military strategy is not completely disconnected; Russia's simultaneous conduct of information manipulation and military operations during the Crimea annexation shows how sharp power blends with hard power; therefore, while sharp power is an independent category, in practice it is in complex interaction with other power forms and this interaction blurs analytical distinctions.

Buzan and Wæver's securitization theory was developed to explain the construction of threat discourses; however, sharp power reverses this process: threats are not constructed but blurred or reframed (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998). The strength of Buzan and Wæver's theory is showing that security is a discursive construction; its limitation is not sufficiently addressing the manipulative strategies of securitizing actors. Russia and China frame the West as a unipolar threat in their own discourses while managing external threat perception for domestic publics; the United States and Turkey redefine threats normatively through value-based security discourse; these four different strategies show the diversity of securitization's manipulative use. This situation shows that sharp power functions as reverse securitization by manipulating securitization; security is now part of not only the military but also the epistemic field. However, a paradoxical situation emerges here: while securitization legitimizes extraordinary measures, sharp power normalizes and makes securitization continuous; thus security ceases to be an exceptional situation and becomes daily practice, and societies live in permanent security perception; this continuous securitization weakens democratic rights and legitimizes information manipulation. Balzacq's work on securitization processes emphasized discursive construction; however, it did not

sufficiently address how this process transformed in the digital age (Balzacq, 2011). Balzacq's contribution is showing that securitization operates differently in different contexts; his deficiency is not analyzing how digital platforms accelerate securitization processes. This study's findings revealed that digitalization transforms securitization processes through algorithmic propaganda, bot networks, and targeted disinformation; this transformation requires the adaptation of securitization theory to the digital age; because while traditional securitization is conceptualized as speech act, digital securitization operates through algorithmic processes and occurs automatically without human actor.

Guzzini's relational power understanding emphasized that power operates through network interaction and symbolic domination rather than material resources (Guzzini, 2012, 2013). The importance of Guzzini's approach is conceptualizing power as relational process; its limitation is not sufficiently detailing the concrete mechanisms of network power. Findings confirmed that sharp power operates through network dominance: the United States' ownership of platforms such as Meta, X, Google, and YouTube creates network hegemony in the global information ecosystem; although Russia and China are excluded from this network, they construct their own epistemic spaces through alternative networks like Yandex and Weibo; Turkey's regional media networks exemplify the rise of multi-centrality in multilayered network systems. However, the nature of network power is paradoxical: networks produce exclusion while creating connection, form filter bubbles while accelerating information flow, produce divided realities while enabling global communication; therefore, sharp power's network nature creates both unifying and fragmenting effects. Castells' network society conceptualization explained how power operates within networks in the digital age; however, it did not sufficiently detail how these networks are used by states as strategic instruments (Castells, 2009, 2012). Castells' limitation is evaluating network society as liberating and failing to foresee that networks could become control mechanisms; however, sharp power transformed the liberating potential of networks into control mechanisms. This study revealed that the counterpart of network power at the foreign policy level is sharp power and adapted relational power theory to international relations practice. However, this adaptation also brings new questions: while network power is conceptualized as decentralized, sharp power operates through state-centered strategies; this contradiction raises the question of how to reconcile post-modern power analyses with the state-centric international relations discipline.

Hansen and Rumelili's identity-based foreign policy analyses showed that states define their identities through the other and that this identity construction process directs foreign policy actions (Hansen, 2006; Rumelili, 2007). The strength of Hansen and Rumelili's approaches is conceptualizing foreign policy as ontological security seeking; their deficiency is not sufficiently emphasizing the manipulative dimension of identity construction. In this context, sharp power operates as a sophisticated instrument of inter-identity discourse war: information manipulation not only affects public opinion but reproduces us and other categories, transforms normative boundaries, and systematically changes identity perceptions; this process transforms ontological security seeking into ontological uncertainty production. Russia's Russian

world discourse is a discursive construction that extends Russian identity beyond geographical borders; China's peaceful rise narrative produces normative legitimacy by framing its claim to be a global power in a non-threatening identity framework; Turkey's just world order and civilization emphasis is a hybrid positioning strategy that blends Western and non-Western identities. However, all these identity strategies contain internal inconsistencies: Russia establishes unipolar hegemony around itself while advocating a multipolar world, China follows aggressive policies in the South China Sea while speaking of peaceful rise, Turkey attempts to reconcile justice discourse with human rights violations; these inconsistencies show that sharp power's normative legitimacy production is fragile and requires continuous reproduction. The relationship between identity construction and sharp power has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature; this study showed that sharp power creates long-term normative changes by transforming target societies' identity perceptions and reshapes the symbolic structure of the international system; however, there are also limits to this transformation: target societies are not completely passive recipients, they resist and produce counter-narratives; therefore, sharp power is not unidirectional but mutual and conflictual.

The effect of digitalization on sharp power has been addressed in various studies in the literature. Bradshaw and Howard showed how computational propaganda makes political manipulation possible; however, they did not comparatively examine how this process integrates with states' foreign policy strategies (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018). The contribution of Bradshaw and Howard's work is detailing the technical functioning of bot networks and troll armies; their deficiency is not sufficiently explaining how these technical mechanisms are instrumentalized for strategic purposes. Bjola and Holmes addressed the theoretical and practical dimensions of digital diplomacy; however, they did not sufficiently emphasize the manipulative use of digital tools (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). Bjola and Holmes' limitation is primarily evaluating digital diplomacy as positive development and ignoring its dark side; however, digital diplomacy tools are simultaneously used for disinformation and manipulation. This study's findings revealed that digitalization transformed both the scope and depth of sharp power: social media platforms expanded states' discursive influence spheres, AI-supported algorithmic propaganda enabled targeted disinformation, bot armies and troll networks became new tools of digital diplomacy; deepfake technologies blurred the distinction between reality and fiction, micro-targeting techniques exploited individuals' cognitive vulnerabilities, echo chambers and filter bubbles deepened social polarization. These developments created the reversed version of Foucault's surveillance society conceptualization: the individual is no longer being surveilled but voluntarily sharing their surveillance; sharp power produces voluntary consent through invisible control; however, this voluntariness of consent is deceptive because choice conditions are manipulated. Tufekci's digital activism studies emphasized social media's capacity to organize social movements; however, they did not sufficiently detail how the same tools are used by states for manipulation purposes (Tufekci, 2024). Tufekci's contribution is showing the liberating potential of digital tools; her deficiency is failing to foresee that these tools could become control mechanisms. This study revealed the dual nature of digital tools: the same platforms enable both social resistance and state manipulation; sharp power deepens epistemic control by taking advantage of this dual nature; therefore, the digital age is neither

liberating nor restrictive, it is both and simultaneously; this contradiction shows the limitation of technology determinist approaches.

The findings revealed by comparative analysis transcend the limitations of single-country-focused studies in the current literature. United States-centered studies evaluated the spread of liberal values through digital platforms as soft power; however, they ignored how unidirectional control of information flow sharpens this effect (Arsenault & Nye, 2021; Cull, 2009, 2022). The fundamental bias of United States literature is legitimizing American hegemony as the spread of universal values and making structural dominance invisible; however, digital infrastructure control is the most powerful form of sharp power because it is invisible and offers no alternative. This study revealed that the United States' digital infrastructure control produces structural hegemony and that this hegemony transforms into sharp power by blending with normative legitimacy; it also exposed the paradoxical nature of the United States' sharp power strategy: it conducts content control through platform algorithms while advocating freedom of expression, runs surveillance programs while emphasizing transparency, organizes regime change operations while promoting democracy. Russia-focused studies treated disinformation campaigns as an extension of military strategy; however, they did not sufficiently explain the independent strategic logic of epistemic chaos production (Pomerantsev, 2019; Rid, 2020). The fundamental deficiency of Russia literature is evaluating Russian strategy as reactive and reducing it to anti-Western stance; however, Russia developed original epistemic strategy. This study's findings showed that Russia blurs reality by multiplying truth claims and creates strategic uncertainty; this strategy is the reversed form of Foucauldian epistemic domination. Russia's sharp power strategy is based on nihilist epistemology: since no truth is absolute, all truth claims can be made equally dubious; this nihilism, while being an effective weapon against Western normative hegemony, also weakens its own legitimacy in the long term because Russia cannot offer alternative normative framework. China-centered studies emphasized soft power tools; however, they did not sufficiently deepen how information filtering and cultural infiltration transform into sharp power mechanisms (Brady, 2008; Kalathil & Boas, 2003). The fundamental limitation of China literature is idealizing the China model as soft power success and ignoring repressive dimensions; however, China implements the most systematic sharp power strategy. This study showed that China constructs alternative truth regime by blending peaceful rise discourse with epistemic control mechanisms; this model represents the most sophisticated synthesis of soft power and sharp power; China's distinctive feature is using sharp power offensively rather than defensively: it not only protects its own information space but reshapes the global information order. The long-term consequences of China's sharp power strategy are uncertain: economic power creates epistemic hegemony, but epistemic closure limits global attractiveness; the China model is imitated but Chinese values are not adopted; this asymmetry shows the limits of sharp power. Turkey-focused studies are limited in number; existing studies addressed regional diplomacy but did not present systematic analysis from a sharp power perspective (Atılğan and Aytekin, 2018; Rumelili, 2007; Balzacq, 2011). The deficiency of Turkey literature is normatively evaluating Turkish foreign policy and ignoring strategic dimensions; Turkey is either idealized (exemplified) or demonized (demonized), not analytically

evaluated. This study revealed that Turkey develops value-based normative positioning through just world order and civilization discourses and creates a hybrid sharp power model through regional media networks; this finding proves that sharp power is a strategy used not only by great powers but also by medium-scale actors; the originality of Turkey's sharp power strategy is being able to appeal to both sides by blending Western and non-Western identities; however, this hybrid position is fragile because it is viewed with suspicion from both sides. The Turkey example also reveals the paradoxical nature of sharp power's relationship with democratization: sharp power attempts to produce normative attractiveness in foreign policy while facilitating authoritarianization in domestic politics; this contradiction is not sustainable in the long term.

The normative consequences of sharp power have been partially addressed in the literature; however, they have not been evaluated in a systematic framework. Greifeneder and colleagues' fake news psychology study examined the individual-level effects of information manipulation; however, it did not explain transformations at the international system level (Greifeneder, Jaffé, Newman & Schwarz, 2020). Greifeneder and colleagues' contribution is showing that cognitive biases facilitate manipulation; their deficiency is not explaining how these individual processes aggregate at the system level to create structural effect. This study's findings revealed that sharp power triggers three fundamental normative crises in the international system; first is the truth crisis: with strategic manipulation of information, publics' epistemic confidence has weakened, the period called post-truth has begun, and the capacity to determine which information is true has eroded; this crisis leads to epistemological nihilism and drives societies into cognitive chaos. Second is the legitimacy crisis: states' efforts to construct reality have eroded international institutions' normative authority, made the functioning of global governance mechanisms difficult, and thrown multilateral diplomacy into crisis; states now conduct policies based on their own reality constructions rather than referencing universal norms; this situation shakes the normative foundations of the liberal international order. Third is the trust crisis: in the digital disinformation age, mutual trust in international relations has become synonymous with information security, cooperation capacity between states has decreased, and the security dilemma has been transferred to the epistemic field; states develop defensive reflexes against each other's information operations and this reflex prevents cooperation. These three crises are interrelated and mutually reinforcing: the truth crisis leads to legitimacy crisis, legitimacy crisis deepens trust crisis, trust crisis reinforces truth crisis; this vicious cycle threatens the stability of the international system and is concrete indicators of the shift from material capacity to epistemic credibility; however, this shift is irreversible because digital technologies cannot be taken back. The solution to these normative crises is political, not technical; digital literacy and fact-checking are insufficient because the problem is not lack of information but lack of trust; therefore, the struggle against sharp power must be waged at the structural level, not the epistemic level.

The evolution of sharp power over time has been addressed periodically in the literature; however, comprehensive historical analysis has not been presented. The restructuring of the knowledge-security relationship by the war on terror discourse

between 2001-2010 has been emphasized in various studies; however, how this transformation prepared the ground for the institutionalization of sharp power has not been sufficiently explained (Freedman, 2013; McFate, 2019). The importance of the war on terror period for sharp power is the transfer of security logic to the information field and the normalization of the state of exception; during this process, surveillance was legitimized, information sharing was restricted on security grounds, and critical voices were silenced. The capacity of social media to produce mass movements during the Arab Spring process between 2011-2015 was examined by Bennett and Segerberg; however, states' strategies to both support and control this field were not comparatively evaluated (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). The importance of the Arab Spring period for sharp power is revealing the dual nature of digital tools: the same platforms both organize and suppress revolutions; states developed digital control strategies by observing this period. The intensification of disinformation campaigns between 2016-2020 was addressed by Polyakova and Meserole; however, how sharp power targets the center of democratic systems was not sufficiently deepened (Polyakova & Meserole, 2019). The importance of the 2016-2020 period for sharp power is disinformation becoming a direct intervention tool in election processes and the shaking of democracy's epistemic foundations; during this process, sharp power transformed into an attack rather than defense tool. The increase in the effectiveness of sharp power through artificial intelligence and deepfake technologies during the 2021-2025 period was emphasized by Tufekci; however, how the complexity of epistemic manipulation increased was not systematically analyzed (Tufekci, 2024). The importance of the 2021-2025 period for sharp power is the automation of manipulation and its occurrence algorithmically without human intervention; this transformation made sharp power applicable on a mass scale. This study comprehensively mapped the periodic transformations of sharp power during the 2001-2025 period and showed this evolution's transformation into a hybrid sphere of influence commonly used by authoritarian and democratic actors; however, each period's contribution to sharp power is different: 2001-2010 prepared legitimacy ground, 2011-2015 developed tools, 2016-2020 matured strategies, 2021-2025 achieved automation; this evolution shows that sharp power was not constructed randomly but systematically.

The study's theoretical contribution becomes evident at three levels; however, the limits of contribution at each level must also be clearly defined. At the conceptual level, sharp power was defined not as a deviation of soft power but as an independent epistemic power form and a new category was added to power typologies. The conceptual positioning of sharp power in the literature carries ambiguity; some authors interpret it as a corrupted form of soft power (Nye, 2018), others address it as the cognitive front of hybrid warfare (Galeotti, 2022) or a new type of information coercion (Polyakova & Meserole, 2019); this study conceptualized sharp power as the institutionalized form of epistemic manipulation and positioned it not as a third category between soft power and hard power but as an independent power form distinguished from both by original mechanisms. However, this conceptual innovation also carries limitations: defining sharp power as an independent category provides analytical clarity, while in practice sharp power is in constant interaction with other power forms and drawing absolute distinctions can be misleading; therefore, the sharp power concept is useful as an analytical tool

but may not fully reflect empirical reality. At the theoretical level, a multi-layered analysis model was developed by integrating Nye, Foucault, Buzan and Wæver, Guzzini, and Rumelili approaches and both structural and discursive dynamics of sharp power were explained. In the current literature, studies remaining within a single theoretical tradition cannot adequately explain sharp power's complex nature; this study offered an interdisciplinary theoretical model by synthesizing realist, liberal, and post-structuralist approaches and made visible both epistemic, discursive, and structural dimensions of sharp power together; this synthesis balanced weak aspects while combining strong aspects of different paradigms. However, this theoretical synthesis also has limits: combining different paradigms carries the risk of eclecticism and the ontological assumptions of each paradigm can conflict; the question of how Foucault's post-structuralism and Nye's positivism can be held in the same framework awaits answer; this study adopted a pragmatist approach, prioritizing explanatory power over ontological consistency; however, this choice is philosophically debatable. At the empirical level, the historical evolution, strategic diversity, and regional differences of sharp power were mapped by analyzing four countries comparatively during the 2001-2025 period. Single-country-focused studies in the literature ignore universal patterns of sharp power; this study examined both common dynamics and specific appearances in different contexts of sharp power through comparative design; this comparison showed that sharp power is a complex phenomenon consisting of universal phenomena and contextual adaptations.

The study's limitations can be defined in four dimensions and the theoretical consequences of each limitation must be clearly discussed. First, due to the nature of qualitative research design, the generalizability of findings is limited; conclusions obtained from four countries do not represent the sharp power strategies of all states. Maximum diversity sampling was realized by considering power positions, ideological orientations, and geographical diversity in case selection and the transferability of results was increased; however, the exclusion of Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and Oceania regions is a significant deficiency; sharp power practices in these regions may have different dynamics and can invalidate or enrich the study's findings. Additionally, the sharp power use of small states and non-state actors has not been examined; however, global south countries and digital activist groups can develop original strategies; therefore, this study's findings are valid for large and medium-scale states but cannot be claimed as universal. Second, the research process is limited to the 2001-2025 period; sharp power's previous and subsequent evolution has not been examined. This period covers a sufficient time span to understand the institutionalization phase of sharp power in terms of the acceleration of digitalization and the transformation of security perception; however, not looking at sharp power's antecedents during the Cold War period weakens historical perspective; propaganda and psychological warfare may be precursors of sharp power and this continuity has been ignored. Additionally, the inability to foresee post-2025 developments is the study's temporal limitation; the rapid development of artificial intelligence technologies can transform sharp power and invalidate this study's findings; therefore, findings should be evaluated as dynamic and open to change, not static. Third, only open sources were accessed during the data collection process; covert operations and intelligence activities remained outside the research scope. Systematic examination of sharp

power's visible dimensions provides sufficient empirical ground for understanding the concept's operational logic; however, the most effective sharp power operations are conducted covertly and this study examined only the visible part of the iceberg; inclusion of covert operations could fundamentally change findings and reveal the true extent of sharp power. Additionally, access to the internal dynamics of closed societies is limited; examples of China and Russia rely on Western sources and these sources may be biased; therefore, these countries' sharp power strategies were partially constructed through external observation and may not fully reflect reality. Fourth, the study adopted a state-centered perspective; the sharp power use of non-state actors has not been examined. Since states are still fundamental actors in the international system and the institutionalization of sharp power occurs primarily through state strategies, this limitation did not prevent answering the research's fundamental problematic; however, non-state actors' power is increasing in the digital age and multinational technology companies, terrorist organizations, cybercrime networks also use sharp power; neglecting these actors creates an important explanatory gap. Fifth and most fundamental limitation is the study's epistemological position: there is a risk of being affected by the same information manipulation dynamics while analyzing sharp power; the researcher is not a neutral observer but part of the information ecosystem in which sharp power operates; therefore, this study itself is not independent of sharp power's effect; this reflexive problem requires questioning the research's validity.

Various orientations can be suggested for future research and the theoretical and practical importance of each orientation should be discussed. First, examining the use of sharp power by non-state actors carries critical importance; terrorist organizations use sharp power to spread radical discourses, digital activist groups conduct information manipulation to weaken institutional power, multinational companies apply epistemic control to direct consumer behavior; comparative analysis of these actors will show that sharp power is not only a geopolitical but a global governance issue. Second, developing quantitative methods for measuring sharp power's effect is a methodological necessity; indicators should be created to quantify the impact level of disinformation campaigns, large-scale analysis of social media data should be conducted, sharp power's causal effect on social polarization and trust erosion should be tested with experimental designs; while qualitative research provides depth, quantitative research will offer generalizability and comparability. Third, researching resistance mechanisms against sharp power is urgent in terms of policy; the effectiveness of media literacy programs should be tested with controlled experiments, the protective effect of critical thinking education against disinformation should be measured, long-term consequences of digital citizenship curricula should be monitored, success conditions of community-based fact-checking initiatives should be analyzed; resistance mechanisms are not technical but social and cultural, therefore interdisciplinary approach is required. Fourth, examining how sharp power operates at the regional organizations level carries theoretical importance; the European Union's digital services act, the African Union's information security strategies, ASEAN's cyber security cooperation mechanisms should be analyzed comparatively and regional organizations' collective defense capacities against sharp power should be evaluated; regional approaches can bridge between global and national levels. Fifth, monitoring how artificial intelligence and deepfake technologies transform sharp power

through longitudinal studies is a strategic necessity; large language models' disinformation production capacity, how synthetic media transforms reality perception, how algorithmic decision-making systems reinforce biases, how neural networks automate manipulation techniques should be systematically examined; technological developments exponentially strengthen sharp power and this transformation must be understood urgently. Sixth, researching sharp power's long-term social and psychological effects carries vital importance for social sciences; how exposure to continuous disinformation transforms cognitive processes, how epistemic uncertainty affects mental health, how trust erosion weakens social capital, how polarization prevents democratic participation, what intergenerational effects of post-truth culture are should be examined through long-term cohort studies; sharp power's effects are not only political but at the anthropological level. Seventh and most importantly, developing normative frameworks against sharp power is urgent for normative theory; how information rights should be defined, how epistemic injustice should be remedied, how the digital public sphere should be protected, how freedom of expression and fighting disinformation should be balanced, how technology companies' responsibility should be determined, how states' information sovereignty and individuals' information freedom should be reconciled require normative answers; sharp power is not a technical problem but a normative issue requiring ethical and political choices.

In conclusion, this study revealed that sharp power is the most refined example of post-modern power form in international relations; however, it also exposed this power form's contradictions, paradoxes, and limits. Findings explained how knowledge transforms into strategic weapon, through which mechanisms discursive hegemony is produced, and how normative structures are manipulated; they also showed that these processes are not unidirectional, linear, and deterministic but complex, conflictual, and full of uncertainties. The conceptual ambiguity, theoretical dispersion, and empirical limitation in the literature were significantly addressed with this study; sharp power was redefined with conceptual consistency, explained with multi-layered theoretical model, and mapped with comparative empirical richness; however, each explanation generated new questions and each answer created new uncertainties; this is the natural process of scientific progress. The study brought new opening to power analyses in the international relations discipline on the axis of epistemic transformation and introduced sharp power as an independent analytical category to the literature; it also determined this category's analytical value and empirical limits. At the policy level, it showed that information security is now a diplomatic rather than technical matter, digital diplomacy ethics requires international regulations, media literacy is necessary but not sufficient for social resistance, the struggle against sharp power must be collective rather than individual, technical solutions cannot substitute political choices. The 2001-2025 period was the phase when the epistemic revolution in the international system's power structures occurred; sharp power is both the cause and consequence of this revolution; however, this revolution is not complete and its future is uncertain; the proliferation of sharp power triggers new balance searches while destabilizing the international order; this dialectical process is the fundamental dynamic of 21st century international relations.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The period 2001-2025 has witnessed a shift in the international system from material resources to domains of epistemic control. This research has analyzed the role of sharp power in this transformation and confirmed the central hypothesis: sharp power is an independent epistemic form of power that transforms the structure of the international order through information manipulation, digital influence, and normative legitimacy engineering. However, this transformation is not linear; the proliferation of sharp power deepens the epistemic crisis while simultaneously triggering the search for new equilibria and restructuring the truth-trust-legitimacy cycle.

The contributions of the research at three levels have addressed fundamental gaps in the literature. At the conceptual level, sharp power has been defined not as a deviation of soft power but as an independent category, adding a new dimension to power typologies. While soft power requires information transparency, sharp power directs the information order; while soft power disseminates normative values, sharp power reconstructs normative frameworks; while soft power assumes free choice, sharp power manipulates the conditions of choice. At the theoretical level, Foucault's knowledge-power nexus, Buzan and Wæver's securitization theory, Guzzini's relational power approach, and Rumelili's identity analysis have been integrated to elucidate the epistemic, discursive, and structural dynamics of sharp power. This multi-paradigmatic synthesis has made visible the complex nature of sharp power by combining the explanatory power of different theoretical traditions. At the empirical level, the 2001-2025 practices of the United States, Russia, China, and Turkey have been comparatively analyzed to map the universal patterns and contextual differences of sharp power. Digital infrastructure dominance, disinformation campaigns, soft power-sharp power hybridization, and regional identity-based strategies have demonstrated how sharp power becomes institutionalized across different power positions.

The findings reveal that sharp power relies approximately seventy percent on epistemic control, twenty percent on discursive hegemony, and ten percent on structural infrastructure dominance. These three dimensions operate in cyclical interaction: epistemic control feeds discursive hegemony, discursive hegemony generates structural necessity, and structural dominance deepens epistemic control. The temporal evolution of sharp power is periodized: 2001-2010 saw the war on terror blur information-security boundaries; 2011-2015 witnessed the Arab Spring demonstrate social media's mass mobilization capacity; 2016-2020 experienced intensified disinformation campaigns targeting democratic systems; and 2021-2025 has seen artificial intelligence increase the complexity of epistemic manipulation (Polyakova & Meserole, 2019; Benkler, Faris & Roberts, 2018). This evolution demonstrates that sharp power has transformed into a hybrid instrument set used by both authoritarian and democratic actors.

The normative consequences of sharp power manifest across three crisis dimensions: the truth crisis generates epistemic uncertainty, the legitimacy crisis erodes the authority of international institutions, and the trust crisis weakens interstate cooperation capacity. These three crises form a self-reinforcing cycle and reveal the international system's need for a new power balance paradigm based on epistemic credibility. The case of Turkey is

critical in demonstrating sharp power's use as an instrument of strategic autonomy by middle-ranking powers. The discourse of a just world order produces alternative moral language to the global epistemic center, while TRT World and Anadolu Agency function as regional centers of epistemic authority. This demonstrates that sharp power is not exclusive to authoritarian regimes.

The limitations of the research have been identified across four dimensions. The exclusion of Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and Oceania regions; the non-examination of small states and non-state actors; the omission of pre-2001 historical background; and the restriction to open sources with inability to access covert operations constitute fundamental constraints. The emphasis on United States and Western sources in data access may have created asymmetry. These limitations narrow the generalizability of the results but do not invalidate the validity of the findings.

Future research should address the following specific questions: What local forms of sharp power are developing in Global South countries? Do multinational corporations and digital platforms employ sharp power differently from states? How are artificial intelligence and neurotechnology expanding the boundaries of epistemic manipulation? To what extent are media literacy programs effective against sharp power? How are cognitive structures and democratic culture transforming in societies continuously exposed to manipulation? These questions constitute the next phase of sharp power research.

Policy recommendations are action-oriented and concrete. **First**, states should place information security at the center of national security strategies and develop epistemic resilience mechanisms beyond cyber infrastructure protection. Information Security Institutions should be established; these institutions should monitor information flows, detect manipulation, and implement rapid response protocols. **Second**, a Digital Diplomacy and Information Security Convention should be negotiated within the United Nations framework; disinformation, cyberattacks, and epistemic manipulation should be defined, and sanctions determined. In this process, the epistemic autonomy of the Global South should be respected and Western-centric normative imposition prevented. **Third**, universities should offer mandatory critical media literacy courses; civil society organizations should establish disinformation detection platforms in local languages; public institutions should create information verification centers. However, media literacy must be supported by institutional regulations; individual solutions cannot resolve structural problems.

Fourth, Turkey, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, and Mexico should establish an epistemic solidarity network; develop common information verification standards; initiate regional media literacy programs; and share digital sovereignty strategies. This network would contribute to the democratization of information sovereignty. **Fifth**, national legislation should regulate digital platforms; algorithm transparency should be mandated; content moderation should be opened to democratic oversight; data ownership should be redefined. European Union Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act models can be adapted but should be customized according to local context. **Sixth**, universities should disclose foreign funding sources; the impact of cultural diplomacy institutions such as Confucius Institutes on academic autonomy should be monitored; scientific knowledge production should be purged of political manipulation. **Seventh**, international law should

introduce criminal sanctions for cyberattacks and disinformation; mechanisms for extradition of perpetrators should be established; economic sanctions should be applied for violations.

The future of sharp power is open to two scenarios. In the first scenario, epistemic chaos deepens: interstate trust collapses, the concept of truth disappears, democratic systems rot from within, and global governance becomes paralyzed. In the second scenario, epistemic restructuring occurs: international consensus forms, the digital realm becomes subject to democratic norms, epistemic solidarity networks structure the information order, and sharp power is brought under control. Which scenario materializes depends on strategic decisions taken over the next five years.

In conclusion, sharp power is the defining dynamic of twenty-first century international relations. Power is now organized not in geographies but in information ecosystems; sovereignty is established not at borders but in discourses. The period 2001-2025 represents the phase in which the shift from material capacity to epistemic control domains has been completed. This research has defined sharp power with conceptual coherence, explained it through multi-layered theoretical analysis, and mapped it with comparative empirical richness. Sharp power is neither an entirely new phenomenon nor a continuation of traditional power forms; it is a postmodern form of power that emerges under the epistemic conditions of the digital age, weaponizes information, renders truth negotiable, and politicizes perception. To understand sharp power is to understand the nature of the contemporary international system; this paradigm shift necessitates the reconceptualization of the discipline of international relations.

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