

Turkey's Digital Public Diplomacy in the Age of Uncertainty

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ABSTRACT: *The digital age and social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter) have had a profound impact on the global landscape of diplomatic activities. This article attempts to illustrate the research gaps regarding the underestimated role of citizens and non-governmental actors in shaping public diplomacy at the digital level in semi-democratic countries such as Turkey. In light of this context, the pivotal question here is: how can we strengthen the fundamental framework of digital public diplomacy to effectively counter conflicting digital narratives, such as the rise of digital "erdoganism" in times of crisis? This article also employs a theoretical approach, drawing from both qualitative content and quantitative analysis of 261 tweets from five Turkish institutional X accounts, to investigate the marginalization of digital public diplomacy in Realpolitik decision-making periods. More specifically, there is a focus on a critical overview of the interplay between public diplomacy theory and soft power, while also aiming to specify how Turkey's new public diplomacy tends to transform over time into a mask digital diplomacy. The initial findings indicate that in authoritarian, non-liberal regimes like Turkey, there is a utilization of a person-centered digital diplomacy approach that leans towards a "status-seeking" power, attempting to empower its previous policy aspirations. This research article concludes by suggesting that new public diplomacy has to be further analyzed, combined with AI's challenge and its possible future abuse by non-liberal countries, through Erdoğan's personal digitized public diplomacy example.*

KEYWORDS: digital diplomacy, new public diplomacy, soft power, Turkey, X (formerly Twitter)

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, public diplomacy practices have faced numerous challenges, yet they continue to serve as an indispensable strategic "ally" in fostering further integration, peace and democratization, both domestically and internationally. Moreover, the rise of communication technologies (ICT), the Internet and SNS (Social Networking Sites), it seems affecting the convergence of new communication tools renovating new public

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diplomacy guidelines as a prominent component for a successful two-way communication channel of the public sphere (Frangkonikolopoulos and Spiliotakopoulou, 2022; Frangkonikolopoulos, 2008, 2007). Meanwhile, new forms of diplomacy, including digitized public diplomacy, tackle issues about the quality of networked, interactive communication within the field of diplomacy experts, especially in times of full-scale invasions and domestic tensions. Traditionally, the primary objective of digital public diplomacy has been to encourage transparent communication and foster harmonious global coexistence in periods of mistrust and instability by effectively engaging in mutual interactions among various actors in the multipolar world. This approach goes above the digital hard power narratives that depict conflicts as zero-sum games, such as the "us" against "them" slogan commonly associated with Realpolitik proponents (Merkouraki, 2023).

In the meantime, the expansion of the heteropolar order and widespread geopolitical tensions around the world, such as the Russia-Ukraine War and Israel-Hamas, raise doubts about the survival of new public and digital diplomacy, necessitating the immediate translation of talk into action. This puzzling new international ambiguity raises also questions about whether practitioners of public diplomacy can decode the way people communicate on social media and access information in a conflicting international socio-cultural mosaic and beyond. Furthermore, the adoption of digital public diplomacy tools by illiberal states has sparked discussions about the role of its warranty in the enlargement of international confidence and solidarity, while the spread of fake news, censorship, and peak of propaganda inhibit the development of real-time trustworthiness among the distributor and the receiver of the message (Misyuk 2013; Cull, 2008a; Merkouraki, 2024).

METHOD AND DATA

This research article which consists of four main, distinct sections aspires to examine the dynamics of X as a diplomatic tool to better understand how Turkey's new public diplomacy is shaped. The first part presents the existing literature review on digital diplomacy and new public diplomacy, defining its limitations; the second part conceptualizes Turkish new public diplomacy from a strategic communication perspective during times of crisis, concluding President Erdoğan's personalized digital diplomacy (Merkouraki, 2023). The third part focuses on the analysis and discussion of the findings. In the last part of this research, I recommend the importance for conducting further research on the field of public diplomacy to gain a deeper understanding of its arising challenges in contrast to AI's future entrance into diplomatic practice, observing crucially Erdogan's personal digital public diplomacy example.

The primary question that prompted our research's close attention was, as per below:

RQ1: What is the current status of X's use in Turkey as a tool of soft power? Does public diplomacy really exist at the digital level in Turkey?

In this article, I will conduct a mixed methods analysis of 261 tweets to critically explore the structural basis of Turkish new public diplomacy and its digital narratives to gauge whether the soft or the hard narrative prevails. In addition, to answer the above research question, I used both a qualitative content analysis and a quantitative analysis of the 261 tweets. In general terms, qualitative research is based on a set of procedures and interpretive practices that may draw on a range of representations, videos, photographs, and written or spoken short texts. Qualitative research also ends up focusing on the real meaning. For my analysis I scraped also the tweets via the Twitter API. Since tweets are short texts, they best meet the criteria of qualitative content and quantitative research, allowing for independent analysis (Kolodzy, 2015). I further analyzed the tweets by examining their multiple interpretations of language and the written text's style, which allowed me to easily determine the power relations and ideological orientation of the creators.

The crucial examination period starts on January 1, 2020, and ends on November 5, 2020, by analyzing the following five X accounts: (a) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (@RTERdogan – 21.4M Followers), (b) Turkish Presidency (@trpresidency – 1.1M Followers), (c) Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (@MevlutCavusoglu – 2.3M Followers), (d) Turkish MFA Official Twitter page of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (@MFATurkey -172K Followers), (e) T.C. Millî Savunma Bakanlığı - The Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Turkey (@tcsavunmaHesabi -3.3M Followers). Finally, in my analysis, I specifically focus on the popularity of the accounts under consideration, the precise identification of followers on each individual account, and the precise identification of likes and shares for selected tweets (Usyal & Schroeder, 2019:1–9, Ducombe 2017). Recognized as one of the most demanding periods for Greek-Turkish relations, I decided to choose this period because this time frame significantly influenced every aspect of Turkish public diplomacy and its digital aspects (Frangonikolopoulos, 2012; Cagaptay, 2020).

In summary, the main results highlight the underestimation of the importance of digital public diplomacy as a matrix and major digital hub in promoting peace and stability in an asymmetrical world characterized by hybrid threats. As it appears, Turkey undervalues the role of citizens and non-governmental actors in shaping public diplomacy and equates soft power tools like X with hard power foreign policy components and narrations. Apparently, this choice is not accidental. President Erdoğan is deliberately pushed to use this political tactic, influenced by the following determining factors: (1) First, Erdoğan wants a sufficient share of the energy deposits around Cyprus' EEZ. But, at the same time, it is politically isolated from the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean, such as Greece and Cyprus, which form a strong "alliance" against Erdoğan's imperialist ambitions. (2) Second, Turkey has systematically failed in recent years to transform itself into an all-powerful international and regional leader of the Muslim world. Thirdly, Turkey's relations with the EU and the West appear turbulent due to its conscious rejection of the

Western model. Lastly, a new conflict regime has emerged in the Middle East, characterized by the Iran-Russia-Turkey triangle and the Saudi Arabia-Egypt-United Arab Emirates axis (Altinay, 2008).

Digital Public Diplomacy at the Crossroads

In general, there have been various interpretations and understandings of digital diplomacy. The lack of a conceptual framework in existing research hinders the evaluation of the efficacy of social media, which are fundamental digital tools for engaging in digital public diplomacy and achieving diplomatic objectives (Proedrou and Frangonikolopoulos 2012, Frangonikolopoulos 2007). Since its inception, digital public diplomacy has been conceptually defined alongside other concepts, such as electronic diplomacy (e-diplomacy), cyber diplomacy, or "Twiplomacy" (Bjola & Kornprobst, 2018:71–88; Bjola et al., 2019).

In terms of technological development, modern international political communication underwent a drastic transformation, and social media significantly shaped public diplomacy, leading to the discussion of "transformative" new public diplomacy. For Condoleezza Rice, the new public diplomacy is a set of revised procedures capable of adapting to the new order of things that is taking shape alongside the modern technological background (Duncombe, 2017:545–562).

According to Cull (2008), the new public diplomacy differs from traditional public diplomacy in seven points: First, the mechanisms that states use to practice public diplomacy are based on the internet and new technologies. Secondly, technological advancements have blurred the lines between domestic and foreign audiences (J. S. Nye Jr. 1990, 2002, 2004, 2006). Thirdly, the use of tools based on nation-brand promotion techniques coincides with the development of international networks that serve as conduits for the implementation of soft power foreign policy. Fourth, there is an emphasis on personalized face-to-face communication. Fifth, we cannot ignore other international actors in the international system, such as NGOs. Sixth, it all relies on building cohesive relationships and sharing ideas. Lastly, the importance of soft power theory is expanding (Zaharna, 2007).

A closer observation of the existing literature on digital public diplomacy mostly seems to emphasize a narrow examination of the system-level aspects. Scholars focus on new public diplomacy and digital public diplomacy, testing it as a variable component of any foreign policy seems to overshadow the overall examination of the relationship between specific policies and citizens of civil society. Conflicts between realism, rationalism, revolutionism, and liberalism characterize the field of digital public diplomacy, too. The above scenarios aim to understand the behavior of the public at an individual level while at the same time seeking to understand the particularities of each situation, such as the political and social views involved (Lee, 2009). It is important to always consider the audience's comprehension when utilizing these tools. For example, Bjola et al. (2019) highlight the significance of utilizing digital technology in public diplomacy stressing

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that digital public diplomacy plays a crucial role in connecting communities and fostering online connections.

However, other scholars of new public diplomacy disagree with the findings of Bjola et al. (2019) after analyzing the tweeting behavior of world leaders. They estimate that X serves as an inchoate communication platform without rules. According to Kim (2012), the use of social media in digital diplomacy rarely involves interaction with the public. He also argues that social media is not effective in promoting online conversations. To conclude, X has created his own form of diplomacy by embedding himself to enhance traditional diplomatic functions such as discussion and negotiation (Strauß et al. 2015). Digital diplomacy transforms relationships between states and citizens from a more communicative perspective, giving legitimacy to informal and direct exchanges while adopting the accelerating pace, volume, and scope of information that diplomats need to obtain documented decisions. Nevertheless, it seems, there is no clear conceptualization of digital public diplomacy. This leads to the need to further expand the positive and negative aspects of digitized public diplomacy.

Conceptualizing Turkish Digital Public Diplomacy

Turkey's digital public diplomacy is identified as a guided communication strategy that serves as a secondary tool for promoting a realistic foreign policy. While engagement with social media and other online digital mechanisms has increased in Turkey, particularly since the moderate A.K.P. took power, it is important to recognize that these tools are not aligned with the principles of the digital public diplomacy guidelines. In this context, Turkish officials and other Turkish institutions perceive the adoption of X as a deficit due to a persistent lack of participatory democracy over time.

Users of this digital platform transfer information in a disparate manner. Without a doubt, Turkey utilizes X to implement a powerful and weaponized foreign policy that focuses on disseminating fake news and promoting global misinformation through one-sided and occasionally tightly regulated interactions among users. Under these circumstances, genuine contact and open conversation are impossible due to the absence of a collaborative and mediated communication framework that promotes transparent public diplomacy in all its aspects. Multiple factors influence Turkey's insufficient usage of digital tools, as indicated by a comprehensive review of different perspectives (Usyal & Schroeder, 2019:1–9).

In the last decade, Turkey has been characterized by a lack of specialized training for diplomats and other foreign policy representatives on the strategic role of digital tools as soft power distributors, which improve communication with foreign audiences. A secondary issue impedes the development of digital public diplomacy under Turkish authorities. This issue stems from the country's deceptive portrayal of itself as a democratic state. Despite Turkey's constitutional enshrinement of the democratic state and several important individual freedoms, its persistent political tactics ultimately reveal

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that the country oscillates between a semi-democratic state and authoritarian remnants rooted in the powerful Muslim ideal. Thus, a major problem appears, reflecting Turkey's internal division between western and eastern ideals. In most parts of it, geographically strict absolutist principles and ideologies prevail as the cause. Islam is "fragmented," with intense Westernization and democratic perceptions in other regions (Atasoy, 2005).

This situation, combined with the need for those exercising political power to fully manage in any way the promotion of the country's image abroad, has significantly affected freedom of speech and expression on the Internet. Especially after Erdoğan came to power, the development of a strictly centralized policy led to a series of laws that abolished the free access, freedom of expression, and use of digital tools. Government censorship on the Internet is a long-standing strategic tactic that now extends from the mass media to social media as well. This approach circumvents the fundamental principles of new public diplomacy, which include two-track communication. In fact, through an expanded autocratic legislative framework, the SNS is at Erdoğan's mercy. Recent legislation has made it possible to stop websites at any time without a prior court order. The legislation also expanded Turkish telecommunications' control to the Internet.

Two significant events in 2014 prompted Turkey to pass "disastrous" additional legislation. First, a historical landmark moment for the freedom of expression of political opinions among Turkish citizens was the protest in Gezi Park on May 28, 2013. While the protest initially focused on the citizens' reaction to the park's redevelopment, it eventually transformed into a fierce protest against the obstruction of press freedom and freedom of expression. Second, on March 20, 2014, a court order banned access to X, citing it as a harmful digital tool for Turkish foreign and domestic policy (Onis, 2009, Laswell, 1971). Following these two events in Turkey, the Internet Law was published in 2014, which addressed two significant regulations that restricted freedom on the web. Firstly, the legislation empowered the Telecommunications Authority to block any website without a prior court order, and secondly, it mandated that all Internet service providers store the data of all citizen-users' online activities. This arrangement opened the way for a series of politically motivated cyber-attacks that led to the degradation of the Internet for users, accompanied by heavy censorship and violations of user privacy, while the control and restriction of information to maintain political status implies that social media have ceased to be useful.

A highlight in freedom of expression and freedom of action on the Internet is the recent legislation in June 2020 resulted in the October 2020 fine of ten million pounds on the services X, Instagram, Youtube, and TikTok. The imposed fine validates the Erdoğan government's attempt to suppress any oppositional political opinion, as it stems from the agencies' refusal to designate a local monitoring agent as mandated by the new Turkish law. At that point, it is critical to underline that the combined influence of a cult of personality and erdoğanism appears to be increasing the risk of power consolidation, as

his autocratic rule has strengthened his authority. The country's vulnerability to the international community is increasing.

As stated below, Erdoğan's official X account has verified the consequences of this event. (a) This event strengthens the president's unpredictable leadership; (b) it enforces complete control over social media; and (c) it finally weakens the opposition, leading the government to adopt a more severe and authoritarian approach while embracing Erdoğan's foreign policy positions. Simultaneously, Erdoğan solidified an unwavering and inflexible foreign policy in the digital realm, rooted in the enduring principles of pan-Islamism. The significant coup of July 15, 2016, prompted the implementation of this strict digital policy. Following its prevention, the incumbent Turkish President implemented a more assertive approach rooted in the fundamental tenets of realism theory. The referendum on April 16, 2016, was the culmination of Erdoğan's firm stance. Following that, the Turkish President achieved resounding and widespread success, solidifying his position as Turkey's omnipotent and unquestionable leader. The repercussions of this decisive triumph were promptly evident in the nation's foreign policy as well as in his digital diplomacy.

After the Davutoglu theory failed, a rapid series of actions turned soft power into Realpolitik. Erdoğan's frequent referenced to his Agenda 2023 in numerous tweets something that does not align with Ahmet Davutoglu's strategic depth philosophy. Esteemed scholars characterize this agenda as menacing, originating from distinctive Turkish ideologies that influence the nation's foreign policy and diplomatic stance, and revolving around three fundamental principles: historical narratives, religious values, and patriotic sentiments. These three components have geography as a common factor.

The imperative for Turkey to regain its position as a significant player in the international system, both regionally and globally, drives Erdoğan's new vision. Moreover, digital erdoğanism includes the dissemination of misinformation through social media platforms, which may include the deployment of military operations outside of Turkey's borders disguised as efforts to enhance stability in the surrounding peripheral region. President Erdoğan bases his digital diplomacy on imperialistic tactics he views as "defensive" measures. Erdoğan's official X account has verified the repercussions of this scenario, as stated below: (a) This scenario strengthens the president's unpredictable leadership; (b) it enforces complete control over social media; and (c) it finally weakens the opposition, leading the government to adopt a more severe and authoritarian approach while embracing Erdoğan's foreign policy positions (Merkouraki, 2023).

In short, public diplomacy in Turkey is non-existent. Erdoğan chooses ambivalent, regressive, and coercive digital diplomacy tactics that tend between nominal and pretentious soft power, but ultimately reflect harsh messages on X. This seems to confuse the receiver of the message, regardless of the aspect of the Turkish president's digital diplomacy – foreign or domestic. Simultaneously, the fact that Erdoğan's X

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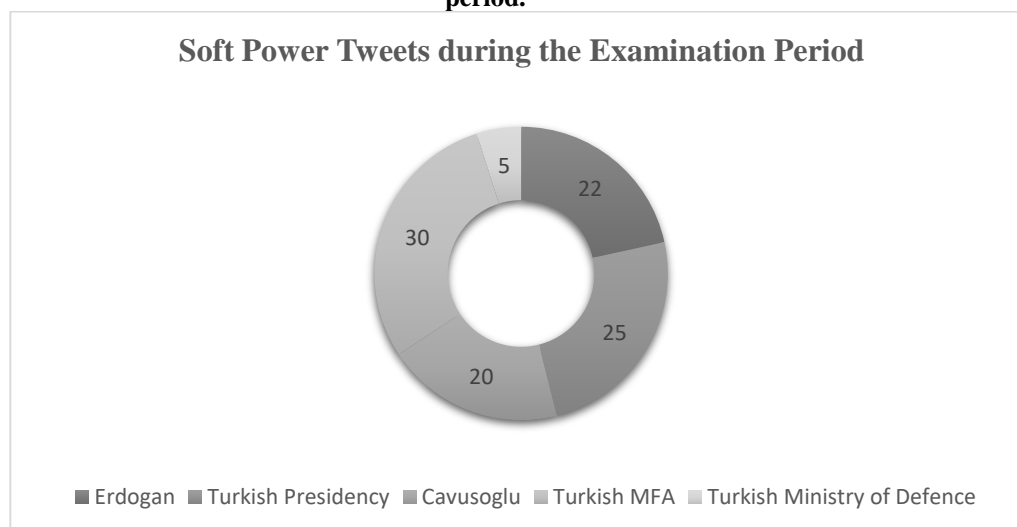
communication with his followers remains strictly monologic normalizes the aggressive and inflammatory narrative while conveying messages concerning its foreign policy by equating soft power with hard rhetoric. On the other, he announces soft power messages through a series of informative tweets, in order to establish a pretentious human-centric public diplomacy and present himself as a peace advocate by tackling issues such as climate change, human rights, and humanitarian aid. In the end, the tweets arising from his X account led to powerful hybrid diaspora of propaganda, which is associated with Erdoğan's digital mask diplomacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ1: What is the current status of X's use in Turkey as a tool of soft power? Does public diplomacy really exist at the digital level in Turkey?

Analyzing 261, it turns out that X is not a real soft power tool for Turkish politicians when practicing public diplomacy. Also, it is clear that there is no substantial development of digital public diplomacy in Turkey. Before proceeding with our analysis, it is worth noting that Turkey has gone to great lengths to align itself with the imperatives of digital public diplomacy, attempting to project itself as a country that desires dialogue, peace, and cooperation. Both on X and on other social media, Turkey "declares" itself an international peace advocate that fights against injustice by promoting democratic values. Indeed, the "Twiplomacy Study" (2018) reveals that President Erdoğan possesses one of the most "powerful" Twitter accounts among global political leaders, placing him among the top ten most influential political leaders in public opinion on X.

Figure 1: Presentation of low percentages of soft power messages during the examination period.



Furthermore, Erdoğan's personal X account for the period from January 1, 2020, to May 11, 2020, as shown by the study of 261 tweets, is the one that gathers the most likes and shares. According to the statistics obtained from the selected tweets, the likes on his X account ranged on average from 21 to 346.8 thousand, while the shares were between 3 and 126 thousand. As it turns out, Erdoğan is quite active on X (Usyal & Schroeder, 2019:1-9).

By contrast, the four accounts in question except Erdoğan's (@trpresidency, @MevlutCavusoglu, @MFATurkey, and @tcsavunmaHesabi) differ in attracting public opinion. First, there is a paradox that confirms the uneven tactics in the exercise of digital public diplomacy. That is, while Erdoğan has about 21 million followers, the other accounts in total do not exceed 5 million. Each account has an average of 1 million followers, which, even with an individual comparison with Erdoğan's account in terms of followers, is low interest. Looking at the tweets, it is estimated that this is due to one reason: these X accounts are not independent, but essentially, even if they come from other institutions, they seem to have a monitoring and auxiliary character in the basic account of Erdoğan (Zhao, 2023).

As a result, the four accounts have very low to non-existent percentages compared to those of the president. The low number of "likes" and "shares" indicates a lack of public diplomacy, as evidenced by the tweet from the @tcsavunma account on 10/08/2020, which states: "The Turkish Armed Forces have taken all necessary measures in the context of the determination to protect our rights, interests, and interests arising from international law in our maritime jurisdiction areas," with only 35 "likes" on an account with 1.7 million followers. This means that the message's subject matter cannot promote genuine digital public diplomacy. However, even with the fact that Erdoğan's account has higher percentages of "likes" and "shares" compared to the general average of the other accounts, which at the level of average "likes" range between 0.2 and 128 thousand maximum and "shares" respectively range between 0.256 and 846 at the top, neither President Erdoğan's account with 18 million followers (approximate) seems to have the required reach, which proves the absence of interaction with their followers (Sevin 2015).

The president's X message on July 24, 2020, "First Friday prayer, @AyaSofiaCamii," serves as a typical example. Despite its automatic sharing via the @AyaSofiaCamii account, the tweet garnered 30 thousand "shares," indicating a minimal impact on the Muslim world (Usyal & Schroeder, 2019:1-9). Other factors that confirm the problematic state of using Twitter as a public diplomacy tool today, as well as its non-use as a soft power tool, are as follows:

(a) First, as demonstrated by the study of the 261 tweets, the primary reason for the existence of these accounts is not public diplomacy but to use them as a tool to idealize President Erdogan. In this case, X is a tool for inflating the phenomenon of a personality cult towards Erdoğan's face. For example, the following tweets confirm the attempt to

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portray Erdoğan as an absolute leader, peacemaker, enlightened thinker, and politician. Noting Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's tweet on July 24, 2020, that says, "Thank you, open #AyasofyaCamii. History has opened a new chapter".

Simultaneously, the history of Turkey's independence unfolds. In the tweet in question, the Minister of Foreign Affairs thanks the absolute leader for doing the best for the country and the Muslim world, which is to turn Hagia Sophia into a mosque. Furthermore, on May 21, 2020, the @turkishpresidency X account published a tweet that confirmed the previous finding. The tweet in question states that "President Erdoğan salutes the ships passing through the Bosphorus on the 567th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul," i.e., the absolute leader who again has the positive white command to shape the political course is overemphasized (Cagaptay, 2014, 2020). Here, X serves as a tool to create an idealized hero leader who receives praise for his decisions. This, of course, is pervasive in all of our survey's tweets.

(b) The fact that Turkey fails to meet its basic requirement of transparency regarding the transmitted message confirms that it does not use X as a tool of public diplomacy. The main problem is that in recent years, there have been a number of virtual X accounts that "follow" Erdoğan. Therefore, the resulting numbers are not real, which means that the percentages of followers, "likes" and "shares" are less than what is shown, while most of them are non-existent. In fact, X's central management company shut down over 7,000 fake Turkish accounts on June 12, 2020. These accounts were automated virtual "algorithmic supporters" of Erdoğan in the form of a follower, and their existence actually greatly skewed the percentages. Both domestic and foreign public opinion fervently supported Erdoğan (Usyal & Schroeder, 2019:1–9). However, Erdoğan's recent legislative movement, which aims to give the state complete control over social media, highlights the problematic approach to digital diplomacy in Turkey.

On October 1, 2020, the aforementioned law came into effect, granting state authorities the authority to remove the opinions of both followers and non-followers from tweets by the president and other public officials. The removal of questionable post content is at the discretion of the country's state bodies. This tactic promotes public aversion, inflated social media abstinence, and aids one-way diplomacy rather than the two-way and transnational diplomatic approach mandated by digital public diplomacy. Therefore, there is an expanded restriction on freedom of speech, which discourages external and internal audiences while simultaneously promoting political censorship, opacity, and one-way information (Kalin, 2011). For example, in the tweet posted by Çavuşoğlu on 06/23/2020, it says: "All kinds of assistance will be provided to address the needs of our Palestinian brothers. Implementing Israel's annexation plan will increase the number of Palestinian refugees and worsen the humanitarian crisis." Following the aforementioned tweet, an array of tweets and messages from both followers and non-followers emerged, all addressing the humanitarian crisis between Israel and Palestine. X "cut" and removed these messages, and it appears that the "likes" and "shares," despite being a matter of

global public opinion and involving Turkey's assistance, did not surpass 769 "likes" and 182 "shares," respectively.

(c) Another important aspect of the ellipsis in Turkish tweets is that their content does not focus on promoting culture, which is considered the most fundamental tool for public diplomacy. The selection of 261 tweets reveals a 100% correlation with Turkey's foreign policy. The tweets thematically frame the critical issues of the country's foreign policy, primarily focusing on bilateral relations within the aforementioned dipoles: (1) Greece-Turkey, (2) Cyprus-Turkey, (3) Turkey-Azerbaijan, (4) Turkey-Israel, (5) Turkey-EU, and (6) "us" and the "Others", i.e., Turkey/Muslims and the Others, Christians. The above topic, due to its contradictory background, cannot cause the "attraction" and "seduction" of a foreign audience (Usyal & Schroeder, 2019:1–9).

However, a military or other motive always coexists with a selectively and fragmentarily displayed tweet containing cultural content. For example, in Erdoğan's tweet on September 19, 2020, he says, "The Republic of Turkey is a state that has its roots in two thousand years of history." "We act dignified and mature without locking ourselves in silos, and we are never interested in persistent challenges." Here, an attempt is made to promote the cultural importance of the Republic, and reference is made to a history spanning two thousand years, wanting to show the country's long contact with democracy and democratic traditions. But suddenly, at the end of the message, he ends up talking about "challenges" of a military and geopolitical nature (Arzu, 2010; Turhan 2023; Wagner, 2008).

(d) Also, the way in which the messages and tweets of the five government accounts of our research are structured shows that they are intended to be addressed mainly to internal public opinion, i.e., they are informative for internal consumption, while they do not seem to be addressed to countries abroad as they have the character of notification and declaration of some political choices addressed by Turkish politicians to Turkish citizens. For example, Erdoğan's X message on July 20, 2020 says: "On the 46th anniversary of the Cyprus Peace Operation, I wholeheartedly congratulate the people of Cyprus on the Day of Peace and Freedom." "I remember with mercy and gratitude the holy martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the struggle for liberation, as well as the veterans with gratitude and respect." In the tweet in question, there is no approach to international public opinion, as the message could be characterized as a message of "internal consumption" (Usyal & Schroeder, 2019:1–9).

(e) Finally, another characteristic of the messages is that the tweets of the five research accounts show that the followers of these accounts, in a percentage of more than 60%, are none other than, as a rule, Turkish leaders or citizens of Muslim origin from other Muslim countries. These accounts fail to achieve the basic rule of public diplomacy, which calls for cooperation between peoples characterized by their differences. According to our research, @TIKA initially searched for most of the tweets published on

the five accounts in question in Arabic, followed by a smaller percentage in English (Usyal & Schroeder, 2019:1–9).

CONCLUSION

New public diplomacy is constantly evolving as it intersects with social media. Nevertheless, both the current study and the case of Turkey demonstrate that a nation has the choice to either adhere to or disregard the principles of public diplomacy. Furthermore, it has the ability to utilize social media in a manner that opposes concepts such as soft power theory and its related concepts. This occurs because, in contemporary socio-political circumstances, the pursuit of national interests often takes precedence over the establishment of trustworthy and cooperative relationships between nations, which are crucial for exerting influence on global online public opinion (Fan, 2008; Leonard, 2002). Therefore, depending on the current political situation and the chosen foreign policy, states may decide to promote a de facto expanded digital form of public diplomacy exploiting the possibilities provided by digital tools, and sometimes, as is the case with Turkey, digital tools can turn into a precursor to propaganda, the manifestation of aggressive diplomatic options, and extreme foreign policies. Therefore, a reasonable question emerges: Is it possible to codify the causes of this uneven and fragmented exercise of digital public diplomacy between different states?

At the level of digital public diplomacy, the weakness of adhering to a global or even regional uniform practice arises from a set of invisible and specific variables that constitute state power. Leadership, bureaucracy, social cohesion, state prestige, and historical origins all have a significant impact on the management of state and extra-state politics. On the other hand, specific factors such as location, population, or the state's economic power have a much greater impact, which raises the question of what the real course of public diplomacy should be in this age of technological convergence. Given the unpredictable and non-static nature of the chosen public diplomacy, does the increased convergence, interaction, and transparency brought about by the social networking media make them perfectly capable of directing the current state-centric system of the respective state? This diplomatic work revealed that states such as Turkey steadfastly opt for a one-man public diplomacy, disregarding the opinions of their citizens or the global public.

Increasingly, this does not mean that in real democracies, citizens and social media are perfectly capable of influencing the default public diplomacy and foreign policy of states (Melissen, 2005; Jr. Nye, 2002). Certainly, they can influence, but in no case can they exclusively define public diplomacy and foreign policy, as each political choice is formed through a series of contextually weighted and unweighted factors and interests that also involve the goals of the respective politicians and economic elites, regardless of existing political systems.

Future Research

To effectively gain the support of global public opinion through effective digital public diplomacy, Turkey should focus on restructuring its administrative institutions to engage with global public opinion (Akyol, 2010). This involves using innovative communication technologies to attract online audiences and globalize the subject matter, fostering a change in the nation's mindset. This will help Turkish individuals gain a comprehensive understanding of global matters and bridge the gap between the Eastern and Western worlds. Ensuring genuine internet freedom will lead to a robust "digital country re-brand" and improved ties with the Turkish Diaspora and other nations. By embracing internet freedom, Turkey can construct a culturally robust identity free from introversion, internal ethnocentrism, and fanaticism. The right use of the internet can also create neutral spaces for international communication, leveraging Turkey's unique strengths.

This research article also finds that there is a need for greater analysis of modern public diplomacy, particularly in relation to the challenges posed by AI. Today, processing AI systems intend to scrutinize and decipher diplomatic communications, including speeches, treaties, and official declarations. Artificial intelligence, through its understanding of subtle distinctions in language and mood, may assist diplomats in assessing the motives of other parties and pinpointing areas of agreement for negotiation. However, the question remains as to what the role of AI could be in non-liberal countries. The essay also highlights the future examination of Erdogan's personal digitalized public diplomacy as a case study to illustrate the potential and limitations of using artificial intelligence in semi-democratic countries.

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