

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

The Organisation of Turkic States' Digital Communication and Digital Diplomacy Perspective*

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Abstract

As a result of digitalisation, digital diplomacy is employed to establish and maintain dialogue between publics. Digital diplomacy, a sub-heading of public diplomacy activities, offers a common communication platform for the Organisation of Turkic States and an absolute coordination mechanism in the fight against disinformation, the global security threat of our time. The article discusses the changes and transformations in digital communication and their reflections on the Organisation of Turkic States. The article examines the Organisation of Turkic States' digital communication and digital diplomacy activities as a case study and discusses the role of the effective use of digital media in the Organisation's ability to explain itself in the right way. This study provides a descriptive analysis of the digital communication activities and use of social media by political actors in the Organisation of Turkic States. The limitations of the research are the organisation's digital media activities. The study is the first of its kind to examine the Organisation's digital communication strategy. In conclusion, the Organisation of Turkic States should combat disinformative content by enhancing its common communication platform with digital diplomacy along the axis of digital image and reputation management at the institutional level.

Keywords

Organisation of Turkic States, digital communication, digital diplomacy, disinformation, strategic communication.

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Introduction

In the communication paradigm of the 21st century, which is dominated by global media cartels, combating new media-centred disinformation and exposing manipulations are as important as disseminating knowledge and information. Collaboration between states in the fight against media-based disinformation and manipulation strengthens the countries' hand against multinational media corporations and social media platforms and increases their capacity for sanctions. In the current political paradigm, where digitalisation has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is acknowledged that state independence and digital independence cannot be considered separately.

The encroachment of global popular culture on local cultures, the one-way news flow created by traditional media organisations over the years, and the rise of uninformative content on social media have increased the need for Turkic states to share a common information space. Numerous theoretical and practical studies have been conducted on this topic. Amanova (2011) emphasises the importance of conducting research in this field by using the example of a music channel called TMB to illustrate the youth's interest in popular things and states that they value TRT AVAZ's leadership in this field. Furthermore, Amanova emphasises the importance of efforts to build a common information network by enhancing the flow of information between media outlets.

The Organisation of Turkic States provides a common communication platform for its member and observer states. The Internet's increasing pervasiveness and integration with digital communication technologies and social media enable states and the publics to share a common information pool. Nonetheless, the veracity of this pool of information and knowledge emerges as a significant issue in the current environment. In a digital world where perceptions trump facts and social media and online news outlets suppress content, the Organisation of Turkic States stands out as an organisation that strives to uphold the truth in the communication and media fields.

The Turkic-speaking countries' shared religion, language, history, culture, and civilization make the Organisation of Turkic States stronger than other

international organisations. Yunus Emre Institute (YEE), one of Türkiye's most important public diplomacy actors, assumes a great deal of responsibility in teaching Turkish language by continuing its activities intensively so that Turkish can compete more effectively with English and Russian in regions that Türkiye refers to as "lands dear to our hearts." In addition to these efforts, dialogue channels must be made more effective by eliminating certain differences in the use of Turkish in Turkic states (Demirel 7).

According to data from "We are social" (2021) April 2021, Turkish is the fourth most prevalent language on digital channels in terms of online content (Kemp). It has been observed that Turkish TV series on various digital platforms are as effective in the emergence of Turkish content density as content produced by individual users on social media. Turkish television series dominate the social media agenda in countries where they are aired (Bhutto), thereby increasing the interest of foreign audiences in Turkish culture (Bhutto). In fact, some contend that Turkish television series have become a new type of diplomacy tool as an element of soft power employed by Türkiye (Çevik).

The purpose of this study is to assess the digital communication and social media use of political actors in the Organisation of Turkic States along the axis of digital diplomacy. The digital communication-based activities that the Organisation of Turkic States should implement in the near future are also discussed. In the study, a descriptive analysis is performed in terms of methodology, and a situational analysis is made. The significance of this article lies in the fact that it is the first study of the Organisation's digital communication strategy. Within the scope of the study, a literature review and document analysis of existing sources were also conducted. The limitations of the research are the Organisation of Turkic States' digital media activities. This study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge for future studies examining the digital communication activities of the Organisation of Turkic States.

Conceptual Framework: The Emergence of New Media and Digital Diplomacy

The emergence of the concept of digital diplomacy is linked to groundbreaking advancements in data transfer technologies and the most significant innovation in this context, the Internet. There is no doubt that the Internet,

which emerged concurrently with advances in computer technology, has held a significant place in the evolution of humanity throughout the ages. The Internet has enabled the creation of a global information superhighway and altered the nature and speed of communication. This has profound effects on both international and human relations. In international relations, conventional diplomacy is no longer the only form of diplomacy, and a new form of diplomacy based on the phenomenon of new media has emerged.

The relationship between this new form of diplomacy and new media also determines the nature of the concept. It is common knowledge that the vast majority of new media content is generated by end users. In accordance with the principle of end-user creation, development, and interaction, new media platforms present the technology they produce to their users in the form of a blank template, which the users then fill with their own content (Zagalo et al. 15). This results in content creation that is faster and more dynamic than traditional media production, but also less regulated. However, this speed and the technological support provided by the platforms enable users to deliver their messages and content rapidly and to a large audience. Thus, the perspective of a specific user can reach a large number of people at any given time, and a new form of communication known as “mass self-communication” emerges (Barassi 65). The ability to rapidly communicate one’s personal perspective to a large number of people has caused a paradigm shift that states have also been unable to ignore. The fact that many people, from low-level politicians to heads of state, began to participate in these channels, followed by the emergence of corporate accounts and states, are the most obvious indicators of the paradigm shift, and international relations is another field in which the paradigm shift is reflected.

According to Andreas Sandre, this new phenomenon known as e-diplomacy, digital diplomacy, or twiplomacy, which he identifies with the ancient Roman concept of *Vox Populi*, is altering our perception of the world, the structure of international relations, and our responses to international challenges. Sandre believes that although these concepts are not exact substitutes for one another, the Internet enables the use of information, communication technologies, and social media tools for diplomatic activities and international policymaking. Sabrina Sotiriu also notes that

the concept of digital diplomacy is used interchangeably with terms like e-diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, and twiplomacy, revealing the online nature of the space they encompass. Sotiriu, defines digital diplomacy as the use of the internet and information communication technologies to achieve diplomatic goals or, citing the Foreign Commonwealth Office, to resolve foreign policy issues. According to Sotiriu, the majority of definitions avoid explaining digital diplomacy in a narrow sense only in relation to social media platforms like Twitter, as digital diplomacy should fundamentally be acknowledged and employed as a new and practical extension of soft power and public diplomacy (Sotiriu 35).

Naci Koru, a former deputy undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, defines digital diplomacy as the utilisation of the most advanced technological infrastructure in the development and implementation of foreign policy (Westcott; Ezgin ve Saka 63; Koru). Digital diplomacy should not be limited to the use of social media by key actors. At the heart of digital diplomacy is the process of capitalising on all the opportunities presented by digitalisation. In this context, the method of resolving foreign policy issues and problems via digital tools and social media can be considered digital diplomacy. On the other hand, digital diplomacy refers to the use of social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook, to win over the hearts and minds of foreign publics. Soft power, data visualisation, digital diaspora, digital cultural diplomacy, and digital country branding are all topics of interest in digital diplomacy. Concepts such as futurism, online chat, and cybersecurity are also included in digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy encompasses the use of digital tools by states or non-governmental organisations to communicate and convey information to foreign publics, but not the well-intentioned but irregular use of social media by political actors. This method of diplomacy involves interaction. The correct approach entails bolstering it with positive developments and maintaining it in a planned manner. Digital diplomacy addresses target individuals rather than audiences. Digital diplomacy is a method for preventing crises and risks (Sönmezşık; Varoğlu; Hocking ve Melissen). Digital diplomacy provides swift and practical opportunities to explain and transfer cultural characteristics to foreign societies. In the context of European countries and the current information age, digital diplomacy is the most effective cultural ambassador for reaching all of these stakeholders, from ordinary citizens

to artists and from various organisations to corporations (Grincheva 21). The potential for a negative relationship to develop between social media content and message effectiveness is the crucial issue with digital diplomacy. A simple error in this context can lead to diplomatic issues (Gleb; Digitalaffairs). Michael Habegger and Tobias Lemke both highlight a similar aspect of digital diplomacy. Accordingly, while diplomacy is essentially the ability to resolve conflicts through convergence and reconciliation, the logic of digital communication serves to distance users from one another and radicalise them. This makes it imperative to conclude that social media is not a suitable medium for well-intentioned efforts resembling traditional diplomatic practice, raises significant doubts about the conceptualisation of digital diplomacy, and calls for further work to elucidate this aspect of the issue (Bjola and Zaiotti 259).

The emergence and spread of digital diplomacy are not solely due to advancements in internet and computer technologies that facilitate communication in digital environments. Diplomatic relations between states in the previous century have shifted in the twenty-first century to emphasise inter-communal relations. In this process, the vision and actions of public diplomacy have acquired a strategic dimension. After being used in the 1960s, only in the 1990s was the concept of public diplomacy used as a functional method for diplomatic problem solving and as a state action to inform and influence different societies. In today's world, this approach includes actions by governments, civil society and private organisations that have the ability to cross existing borders by means of political leaders, the internet, social media, tourism, sports, TV series and movies, trade, fashion, news, and so on (Nye 8; Varoğlu 1; Yılmaz 222).

Public diplomacy refers to the skill that enables us to create a meaningful story and communicate it to the target audience using effective communication strategies. Countries that can create good stories and demonstrate effective story-telling abilities are known to be more persuasive and gain the sympathy of societies. (Özkan 23)

Public diplomacy is a strategic communication tool. In essence, it is the sum of all activities aimed at understanding, informing, influencing, and persuading public opinion. Public diplomacy serves various publics by developing a strategic communication concept based on concrete, measurable

data. There are two main contexts in which public diplomacy is practised: 'state-to-public' and 'public-to-public' (Yılmaz 44). Public opinion can be addressed through various forms of public diplomacy, including cultural diplomacy, sports diplomacy, education diplomacy, and gastrodiplomacy. However, given the impact of the internet and social media in order to address the public directly, digital diplomacy stands out as the fastest and most effective type of public diplomacy in modern times.

The US State Department officially launched digital diplomacy activities for the first time in 2002. Great Britain and Sweden are two of the forerunners in this field (Ezgin ve Saka 68). Many countries, ministries, and political actors began actively using social media in 2012, realising the power of social media. Libya represented one of the earliest examples of digital diplomacy in which Türkiye played a central role. The US journalists were rescued in 2011 as a result of Türkiye's strenuous efforts. The Turkish Ambassador to Washington announced the journalists' rescue via Twitter. He then shared photographs of media members. This was an event that demonstrated the power of Turkish digital diplomacy on social media. Again, due to the unavailability of telephone lines during the evacuation of Turkish citizens in Libya in 2011, the evacuation process was carried out by contacting these citizens via the internet (Kasapoğlu). At the beginning of the G20 summit in Türkiye in 2015, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan greeted the participating heads of state in nine languages and sent a message to the global community via his Twitter account. Similar examples have become more common in recent years, and traditional diplomatic moulds have begun to break. Particularly in the new world order that emerged following the COVID-19 pandemic, Turkic states other than Türkiye have turned to digital diplomacy policies to restore their digital image, carry out promotion activities, and build relations. In this regard, digital communication efforts, social media visibility, and posts by heads of state and relevant ministers or senior bureaucrats have a significant impact on both new and conventional media, and it is possible to quickly inform large masses on critical issues. The Organisation of Turkic States and the Common Communication Platform stand out for the capacity to use digital communication and digital diplomacy practises in this context.

Organisation of Turkic States and Common Communication Platform

The structure, which was established on October 3, 2009, as the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council) and later became the Organisation of Turkic States with the signing of the Nakhchivan Agreement, has provided Turkic states with an institutional foundation and a safe roof for unity and solidarity. The Organisation is headquartered in İstanbul, and its Secretary General is Kubanychbek Omuraliev (Turkkon). The Organisation aims to make extensive use of the Turkic world's historical and cultural heritage, as well as to foster multilateral cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries. The primary goal of the Organisation of Turkic States is to increase political solidarity in the Turkic world, raise economic cooperation to the highest levels, establish mutual trust, and turn human relations into robust organisations. Summits of Heads of State of the Organisation of Turkic States are the most important events of this structure. Due to the new circumstances following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a type of forum has emerged with the participation of Türkiye and countries that share the same language with Türkiye. During the process initiated by Türkiye in 1992, ten summits were held until 2022 ("MFA, Türk Konseyi"; Turkkon, *Zirveler*).

The risks and threats that the world faces highlight the importance and function of strategic organisations like the Organisation of Turkic States. The member states of the Organisation of Turkic States are Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan and Hungary are the Organisation's observer members. With the addition of Hungary as an observer in 2018 and Uzbekistan as a member in 2019, the Organisation has expanded and become stronger. Turkmenistan attended the summit held in İstanbul on November 12, 2021, as an observer. The Turkic Council was renamed and became the Organisation of Turkic States at the summit in İstanbul. The efforts undertaken by organisations such as the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation, Turkic Academy, TÜRKSOY, and TÜRKPA, which are affiliated or associated with the organisation, in areas such as parliamentary diplomacy, culture, and education are of great importance in terms of inter-communal relations (Turkkon).

Since its inception, the Organisation of Turkic States has engaged in a wide range of communication-related activities. The Turkic Council Group

for the Establishment of a Joint Educational Television Channel and the Establishment of an International Turkic News Channel held its first meeting under its former name. As the name implies, the purpose of this meeting was to establish a strong common information network among the member states, to establish an international news channel that would broadcast in English, Russian, and the member countries' native languages, to establish a common educational channel, and to collaborate with existing news channels and agencies (Turkkon, *Türk Keneşi Ortak Eğitim*).

On August 18, 2015, the First Meeting of Ministers and High Officials Responsible for Information and Media (Turkkon, *Türk Keneşi 5. Zirvesi*) adopted a protocol on the issues previously discussed at the theoretical level. The Concept Paper on the establishment of the International Turkic News Channel (ITNC) was approved, and the "Protocol of Cooperation among the National TV Channels of the Member States of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States" and the "Memorandum of Understanding for Cooperation among the Official News Agencies of the Member States of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States" were signed. Based on the groundwork laid by these efforts in the field of media and information, the Organisation of Turkic States held its 5th Summit in 2015 under the theme "Common Information Space and Deepening Multilateral Cooperation." The summit aimed to preserve common identity, belonging, culture, and tradition in an international system changing due to globalisation, as well as to develop a common perspective on international events by uniting around this context. The summit agreed to establish a new television channel called "International Turkic News Channel" to create a common media and information space, as well as steps to establish a new centre to implement Turkic-speaking countries' cultural-information development strategy (Turkkon, *Türk Keneşi 5. Zirvesi*).

The year 2021 was a very productive and constructive one for the Organisation of Turkic States. On March 31, 2021, leaders convened for an informal summit held online, and Kazakhstan's city of Turkistan was designated as one of the Spiritual Capitals of the Turkic world. The busy agenda of the Organisation of Turkic States in 2021 included an Extraordinary Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Turkic Council held in İstanbul on September 27, 2021, upon the invitation of Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, to

discuss the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the region. The Turkic Council Media Forum was successfully organised by the Turkish Presidency's Directorate of Communications in İstanbul on October 22-24. The forum agreed to promote greater collaboration among media platforms, national TV channels, and news agencies. The Media Forum was especially important because it coincides with the 30th anniversary of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan's independence (TRT Haber).

At the “Turkic Council Media Forum,” organised by the Presidency's Directorate of Communications in Istanbul, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emphasised the importance of solidarity in the media, which is one of the most abused issues. It was stated that the unregulated space provided by social media poses a threat to democracy, social peace, and the national security of states due to the prevalence of fake and distorted news reports. Erdoğan emphasised digital fascism, noting that the international media pursues a broadcasting policy that is far from objective realities and that this hypocritical attitude was demonstrated once again during the Karabakh War. Erdoğan stated that they wanted to develop cooperation in the Turkic world on issues such as the national information technology move, information security, combating disinformation, and film and TV series projects that prioritise shared culture (Akşam). Hosting the forum, Prof. Fahrettin Altun, Director of Communications of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, outlined a holistic and inclusive framework for past and future cooperation in the field of communication. Furthermore, Altun (2021) stated that they expect member states of the Organisation of Turkic States to support the Türkiye-Azerbaijan Joint Media Platform. All these steps are in line with the principle of “creating a common Turkic Information and Media Space through institutionalised cooperation among media outlets and contributing to initiatives to combat disinformation and information pollution”, which was highlighted in the Turkic World Vision 2040 document of the 8th Summit of the Organisation of Turkic States gathered in Istanbul in 2021 (Turkkon, *Zirveler*).

There are numerous examples of common information and communication platforms around the world. The areas of crisis, disaster, and disinformation have come to the forefront in the formation of a common information

space within international organisations. EPISECC is a European Union-funded collaboration project to create a Common-European Information Space to improve citizen safety. Its goal is to provide disaster-affected people with information on water, food, medicine, and shelter as soon as possible. NATO, as an international military alliance, takes measures to combat disinformation (Lanoszka). Additionally, there are joint activities in the information space with political goals. The media has played a crucial role in the European Union's efforts to foster a shared identity and promote integration. The publication of the Green Paper on the Establishment of a Common Broadcasting Market by the EU Commission in 1984 has addressed the harmonisation of the legislation of the member states (Kihitir), and an attempt has been made to establish a common information space. The 2010 "Television Without Frontiers" Directive is a legal regulation that aims to ensure the free movement of broadcasting services within the internal market and has been proposed to achieve the goal of a shared information space (Tambini ve Rother). BRICS, another organisation with political motives comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, also seeks to establish a common information space. A declaration of intent has been created to strengthen the ties between the leading media organisations in these countries and promote the exchange of information. This cooperation aims to strengthen state-to-state relations and raise awareness among citizens of other states about the cultural characteristics of each state. Among the objectives of this cooperation are the reduction of BRICS countries' reliance on the West for foreign news through the construction of a common media space and the creation of a multipolar world (Shishkov).

On the other hand, there is no international organisation whose objectives are as comprehensive as the Organisation of Turkic States in terms of unity of ideals and scope. The scope of NATO's activities, which it has limited to countering disinformation, is being shaped by a specific perception of the enemy. In addition, the primary goals of both the European Union and the BRICS countries are to counterbalance the unilateral news flow emanating from the United States and to ensure that all countries recognise one another's cultures. In the studies conducted by the Organisation of Turkic States, all of the aforementioned goals, such as combating disinformation, establishing a common information space, and fostering cultural unity, have been

addressed. The Organisation of Turkic States differs from other structures in its efforts regarding the monopoly of social media companies. In the context of combating cultural imperialism, the Organisation of Turkic States' desire for co-productions to preserve the shared cultural heritage is crucial. Although the establishment of a Joint Educational Television Channel of the Organisation of Turkic States and an International Turkic World News Channel are extremely important manifestations of intent, they have not yet been implemented due to the rapid evolution of this field. Utilising valuable examples such as TRT AVAZ and TRT WORLD, the implementation of these channels is of great importance for the Turkic world. As a concrete and operational platform, the Türkiye-Azerbaijan Joint Media Platform is currently of great significance. The six working committees of this platform have been established to address current and potential future issues. In order to establish a common information space, additional focus should be placed on digital diplomacy, cyber security, cyber homeland, inspection, and legal regulations (Directorate of Communications).

Table 1

Institutional Social Media Outlook of the Organisation and the Leaders of the Organisation of the Turkic States' Member and Observer Countries¹

Digital Diplomacy Actors	Twitter (Followers)	Instagram (Followers)	Facebook (Followers)	Youtube (Subscribers)
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (President of Türkiye)	@RTErdogan 19M Followers	rterdogan 10.1M Followers	rterdogan 10M Followers	Rterdogan 225K Subscribers
Ilham Aliyev (President of Azerbaijan)	@azpresident 728K Followers	Presidentaz 1.3M Followers	President Ilham Aliyev 785K Followers	Presidentaz 58.9K Subscribers
Kassym Jomart Tokayev (President of Kazakhstan)	@tokayevkz 297.5K Followers	tokayev_ online 2.2M Followers	AkordaPress 63K Followers	Akordapress 32.05K Subscribers

Sadyr Japarov (President of Kyrgyz Republic)	@SadyrJaparov 919 Followers	SadyrJaparov 395K Followers	japarov.sadyr 63.7K Followers	None available
Shavkat Mirziyoyev (President of Uzbekistan)	@president_uz 60.2K Followers	mirziyoyev_ sh 4M Followers	Mirziyoyev 350K Followers	Shavkat Mirziyoyev's Press-service 126K Subscribers
Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow (President of Turkmenistan)	None available	13BK	None available	None available
Viktor Orbán (Prime Minister of Hungary)	None available	Orbanviktor 156K Followers	Orbanviktor 1.2M Followers	None available
Organisation of Turkic States (Official Accounts)	@Turkic_ States 63.4K Followers	Organisation- ofturkicstates 17.6K Followers	Turkicstates 30K Followers	Organisa- tionofturkic- states 5.59K Subscribers

The social media metrics of the leaders of member and observer countries in the Organisation of Turkic States clearly demonstrate the organisation's digital diplomacy potential. The rapid increase in the online populations of Turkic-speaking countries, as well as the global peak in social media usage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, have prompted the Organisation of Turkic States to utilise digital diplomacy opportunities. The statements, visions, and posts of heads of state on a variety of global, regional, and local issues mobilise the masses on social media, and their messages determine the direction of digital channels.

Table 2

Social Media Outlook of the Ministers and/or Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Organisation of the Turkic States' Member and Observer Countries²

Digital Diplomacy Actors	Twitter (Followers)	Instagram (Followers)	Facebook (Followers)	Youtube (Subscribers)
Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Türkiye)	@MevlutCavusoglu 2M Followers	mevlutcavusoglu 425K Followers	Mevlutcavusoglu 555K Followers	mevlutcavusoglu 20.3K Subscribers
Jeyhun Bayramov (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Azerbaijan)	@bayramov_jeyhun 140K Followers Azerbaijanmfa 161.4K Followers	Azerbaijanmfa 14.2.6K Followers	MFAAzerbaijan 26K Followers	MFAAzerbaijan 877 Subscribers
Mukhtar Tileuberdi (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan)	@MFA_KZ 41.1K Followers	mfa_kz 8,855 Followers	KazakhstanMFA 19K Followers	Foreignministry 4,6K Subscribers
Ruslan Kazakbayev (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic)	@MFA_Kyrgyzstan 6,420 Followers	mfa_kg 10,3 Followers	KyrgyzstanMFA 12K Followers	MFA KR 480 Subscribers
Abdulaziz Khafizovich Kamilov (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan)	@uzbekmfa 2,406 Followers		Mfauzb 25BK Followers	Uzbekmfa 30,3K Subscribers

Rashid Meredov (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan)		
Péter Szijjártó (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary)	Kormanyzat 907K Followers	Kormanyhu 55.1K Subscribers

It is possible to say that statements made at the level of foreign ministers on social media platforms also have a binding effect on the relevant states. The online population can be rapidly informed and enlightened about potential events, particularly during times of war, crisis, and extraordinary developments, without the need for traditional media. Some issues that would take a considerable amount of time to resolve through conventional diplomacy can be resolved through the use of digital diplomacy tools and by gaining the favour of the public in order to break the positive or negative pressure created by social media.

Table 3

Social Media Outlook of the Ministers/Bureaucrats in Charge of Communications and Information of the Organisation of the Turkic States' Member and Observer Countries³

Digital Diplomacy Actors	Twitter (Followers)	Instagram (Followers)	Facebook (Followers)	Youtube (Subscribers)
Fahrettin Altun (Director of Communications of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye)	@fahrettin-altun 1.2M Followers	fahrettinaltun_ 109K Followers	iletisimbaskanligi 608K Followers	Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications 29.1K Subscribers
Hikmet Hajiyev (Assistant of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan)	@HikmetHajiyev 281.7K Followers	None available	None available	None available

Ministry of Information and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan	None available	aqparatogam 5,273 Followers	@aqparatogam 5.8K Followers	None available
Ministry of Culture, Information, Sports and Youth Policy of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan	None available	jashtar.gov.kg 7,683 Followers	-	None available
Asadjon Hodjayev (Director of the Agency of Information and Mass Communications under the Administration of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan)	None available	asadjon_khodjaev 380 Followers	-	None available
Agency of Information and Mass Communications under the Administration of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan	None available	aoka_uz 4,279K Followers	None available	Axborot va ommaviy kommunikatsiyalar agentligi 1.82K Subscribers
Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov (President of Turkmenistan)	@GBerdimuhamedov 98 Followers	gberdimuhamedov 13K Followers	None available	None available

Communication and information ministers/directors are among the most influential members of the Organisation of Turkic States. Communication activities, which are now as important as all diplomatic endeavours, can determine the value and prestige of diplomatic initiatives. Therefore, the efforts of high-level communications officials in digital diplomacy play an indispensable role in the success of the Organisation by setting the agenda in the international arena and achieving positive digital reputation and perception management. On the other hand, high-level public officials of states play a role in building resistance against digital disinformation and proactive digital diplomacy efforts, ensuring the public is informed and crises are managed correctly. In this context, it is necessary to mention the Turkic Council Media Forum. The Forum, which was held in Istanbul in October 2021 and garnered attention as an event in which digital diplomacy tools were utilised, was shared in digital media and social media at every stage of its organisation, from promotion and announcement to the actual events, and had a significant impact on these channels. In addition to the posts of member states, social media content created by participants from various nations ensured that this event dominated the digital space for a period of time. Additionally, by enabling the Organisation to reach a wider audience through digital content created by citizen diplomats, these events strengthen its soft power capacity.

In the context of the digital diplomacy actions of the Organisation of Turkic States, posts on corporate social media accounts, posts before, during, and after summits and events, and posts and digital content shared by leaders and ministers are crucial for presenting a unified viewpoint, political arguments, unity, and a forward-looking perspective among states. Instead of waiting for large stakeholder-attended events to declare their political stance on global issues, heads of state are using social media to set the agenda. The tweets of Hikmet Hajiyev, Vice President of Azerbaijan, in the lead-up to the Karabakh victory are among the most striking examples of digital diplomacy. In addition to informing foreign public opinion, Hajiyev urged international organisations to take action by posting images and photographs of the war crimes committed by Armenia on his social media accounts. Not only did Hajiyev's digital diplomacy initiatives resonate with the public opinion of Turkic states, but they also reached a broad audience via social media. On the other hand, Hikmet Hajiyev's rapid dissemination

of news regarding events in the battlefield via digital communication tools also revealed the subjective editorial policies of international news agencies, and the images of Armenia destroying even cemeteries received widespread coverage in world public opinion, bolstering public support for Azerbaijan. As demonstrated by this instance, digital diplomacy actions during times of war and crisis are of equal strategic value to the fight on the front lines. Digital diplomacy can quickly resolve issues that cannot be resolved through diplomatic initiatives when actual images captured by soldiers or citizens are presented to the world public opinion by senior state officials.

Political Position of Communication and Media in the Organisation of Turkic States Vision – 2040

While the Organisation aims to contribute to regional and international peace and strengthen cooperation and coordination among Turkic-speaking nations, it also serves as a common information, communication, and digital diplomacy platform for member states. In addition to communication and media-related activities, communication objectives, and a digital diplomacy perspective, the Organisation of Turkic States Vision – 2040 document also includes communication and media-related activities. In this context, key elements in the domains of information and communication technologies, information, media, and culture are highlighted, and future projections are made (Turkic World Vision – 2040).

It is intended to ensure strong coordination between Member States and relevant stakeholders on information and communication technologies and to harmonise Member State legislation in the field of Information Communication Technologies (ICT). In terms of digital technology, cooperation projects on e-government and e-services are planned, particularly in the domains of education, health, transportation, and tourism. On the other hand, cybersecurity is accorded a high priority, and it is proposed to influence regional security issues through close collaboration with international cybersecurity centres. In addition, the concentration will be on university-led space studies and research initiatives (Turkic World Vision – 2040).

The values, traditions, and historical elements of the brotherly peoples are prioritised in the field of information and media. In this context, the

objective is to strengthen the dialogue between public communication institutions and private media organs, to increase cooperation with a focus on new media, to benefit from the experience of media professionals, to create a conducive environment for qualified journalism, and to place innovation at the forefront of both traditional and new media. On the other hand, among the priorities is direct support for productions such as television series, films, digital content, animations, and documentaries that emphasise the shared history, culture, and values of the member states. Establishing joint production companies and R&D bodies in order to reach a wider audience, focusing on artificial intelligence studies, and establishing entrepreneurial hubs for digital media stand out as fundamental principles (Turkic World 2040 – Vision).

Culture is one of the vital issues for the Organisation of Turkic States. Therefore, in addition to preserving the Turkic culture, it is crucial to promote it in member states and to a variety of audiences. In this framework, the cultural heritage of Turkic states should be communicated to the world through a variety of activities, actions, productions, and audio-visual programmes in a more accurate and effective manner. By resurrecting collective values that are on the verge of oblivion, it is intended to further strengthen the unity and solidarity of Turkic societies. To attain this objective, it is planned to develop joint cultural and didactic programmes. Particularly, it is intended to expand the influence of eminent scientists, artists, and poets in the development of the Turkic heritage. Popularising the folklore and customs of the member states and enhancing the role of the Turkic world in interpersonal and intercultural relations are also deemed important. Lastly, it is planned to organise joint award ceremonies, art and music activities, and film and documentary festivals on a regular basis to strengthen the friendship between the peoples and promote the exchange of current information (Turkic World Vision – 2040).

Counter Disinformation Strategies and Joint Social Media Networks

Internet users over the age of 18 are extremely concerned that the information they encounter online may be false information or fake/misleading news. 84% of Brazilian internet users, 67.5% of American internet users, and 62.9% of British internet users are very concerned about whether the information they receive online is true or fake. Despite Internet users'

awareness of disinformation and manipulation in the new media, the fact that 63% of them use the Internet as a source of information stands in stark contrast. This demonstrates that the Internet plays a much larger role in our lives than is commonly believed. Another finding of the research pertains to manipulation. In Türkiye, 61.6% of Internet users over the age of 18 are extremely concerned that the information they encounter online may be false information or fake/misleading news (Wearesocial). Another study supporting this finding was conducted by Oxford University. According to the University of Oxford Reuters Institute's 2018 Digital News Report, Türkiye had the highest exposure to disinformation, at 49%, among the 37 countries surveyed. Following Türkiye, the European nations most exposed to disinformation were Greece (44%) and Hungary (42%). This rate remained at 31% in the United States, where the concept of fake news originated (*Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018*).

With the social network map project implemented by the Presidency's Directorate of Communications of the Republic of Türkiye, internet access, device ownership, gaming habits, and social media usage habits are investigated, and the results are transparently shared with the public. This reduces dependence on global organisations and research on big data exploitation, data mining, and journalism. Consequently, data-based disinformation is also prevented. Projects to that end should be implemented in all member states of the Organisation of Turkic States, as well as other countries in the Turkic States' hinterland.

According to a survey conducted by Social Network Map in Türkiye in October 2021 via face-to-face interviews, only 37% of respondents believe that the information they receive from social media is better and of higher quality than the information they receive from traditional media. On the other hand, the protection of the personal data of social media users emerges as another problem. 73% of social media users in Türkiye believe that their personal data is not adequately protected and that their digital privacy is violated. The global crisis of trust in digital content and digital communication is also evident in Türkiye. This suggests that users are concerned about disinformation, either directly or indirectly, and feel compelled to verify the information they acquire from digital platforms.

Digital disinformation and the protection of personal data are global challenges for states. International organisations and structures are attempting to combat digital disinformation through various collaborations and joint sanctions. The European Commission recognises that citizens are exposed to a high level of disinformation in online applications and social networks and that the irregular processing of personal data exposes citizens to micro-targeting, particularly during election periods. Social media platforms that advocate for higher democratic standards are now viewed as a potential threat to European democracy. The European Commission has been focusing on holistic measures to combat disinformation by introducing the 'European Approach' and working on legislation and sanctions to ensure that users have access to accurate information (Nenadić 3) especially in election periods.

Türkiye views disinformation, particularly digital disinformation, as a threat to its national security. To address this sensitive issue, it is working on a confirmation platform, "DOĞRU MU? (IS IT TRUE?)" through the Presidency's Directorate of Communications to monitor fake news and fake content on social media platforms and to inform citizens quickly and accurately about current events, while also organising training programmes. The Organisation of Turkic States should also increase its efforts to counter manipulations through such practises and data-driven journalism (Altaş).

Islamophobic content is among the most prevalent disinformation topics. No tolerance should be shown for any of the concepts, especially "Islamic terrorism," that are disseminated through the media in an effort to defame and smear. In this era, which is synonymous with the concept of "post-truth," an us-versus-them dichotomy is being built through disinformation and misinformation using false and fake news, fictionalised content, and disinformation. New media outlets are the most important players in this process. A significant number of online news media outlets, in particular, disregard the responsible media approach, the principles of press profession and ethics, and the press law, and mislead the public with false news and fake content, gain popularity, obtain political gain, and protect capital owners. To achieve their own goals and objectives, the media distorts the truth in order to create an illusion for their audiences.

As stated in its Vision 2040 document, the Organisation of Turkic States has to fight global lobbies, international news agencies, world-famous singers, social media phenomena, negative perception management, and visual manipulations in the fight against digital disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation. Moreover, the algorithms of social media platforms appear to represent an additional risk. As stated in the preceding subheadings, Western social media platforms are able to deftly and subtly direct users in the context of micro-targeting through the use of sophisticated software and algorithms. Local and national social networks are, therefore, the most essential project of the near future. As previously described, the Armenian lobby and fake social media accounts waged a high-level disinformation campaign against Azerbaijan between September 27 and November 10, 2021, during the liberation of Karabakh by Azerbaijan. While the war continued on the front, another front was opened in the field of communication, where Türkiye provided strategic communication support to Azerbaijan in both conventional and new media, ensuring that the truth was disseminated against disinformation on all digital communication fronts and that Azerbaijan's just cause was quickly and accurately communicated to foreign audiences.

To counter the psychological and asymmetric warfare that may be waged against Turkic states in the international media, international news channels, internet news sites, and social media accounts must be utilised. The political and social agenda must be effectively managed, particularly through positive communication campaigns against disinformation and misinformation. Today, digital disinformation is viewed as a threat to national security and is used as a weapon to destabilise countries. Therefore, the Organisation of Turkic States should jointly adopt legislation to combat disinformation and react to the unlawful actions of social networks and their practises that undermine freedom of expression and democracy. In addition, the risk of steering citizens with powerful software and micro-targeting through social networks, particularly during election periods, must be eradicated by increasing awareness of data mining, digital media literacy, and algorithms (Göksu 205-232).

Current and Potential Collaborations in Digital Diplomacy among Turkic States

In the twenty-first century, any user with even limited access to social media can become a content producer. Web 2.0 technology has improved content creation and given users the ability to disseminate information in addition to conventional media. From the standpoint of states, countries position themselves as a primary source during emergencies by acting swiftly on foreign policy matters. This makes sure that only one reliable source is used to disseminate the necessary information and that any other nefarious groups are kept out. In cases where countries fail to provide sufficient information to citizens regarding domestic or global developments, it becomes essential to counteract disinformation that social media originates.

According to “We Are Social” and “Hootsuite” data from April 2021, out of a global population of 7.85 billion, 5.27 billion are unique mobile phone users, 4.72 billion are internet users, and 4.33 billion are social media users. 2021 saw an increase of 7.6% in internet users and 13.2% in social media users compared to 2020. Globally, internet users between the ages of 16 and 64 spend 6 hours 56 minutes online on average, 2 hours 22 minutes on social media, and 1 hour 56 minutes on any device reading the news and keeping up with the media. 63% of internet users between the ages of 16 and 64 primarily use the internet for “information access.” 52.5% of users in the same age group watch videos, television shows, and movies online (Kemp). According to data from “We Are Social” and “Hootsuite” for January 2021, Türkiye has 65.8 million internet users and 60 million active social media users. Internet users aged 16 to 64 spend an average of 7 hours and 57 minutes online, 2 hours and 57 minutes on social media, and 1 hour and 33 minutes on any device following the media (Wearesocial).

Digital diplomacy is merely a method for persuading users and shaping perceptions along a strategic axis; the crucial question is how states will design digital diplomacy and create contents. Digital diplomacy determines which messages countries will communicate to foreign publics and other stakeholders, as well as how they will present these messages conceptually. According to Corneliu Bjola and Lu Jiang (2015), social media plays a transformative role in the hands of diplomats. The use of social media by diplomats demonstrates the effectiveness of digital diplomacy in setting

agendas, informing audiences, and designing creative communication. Due to the rapid development of new media and digital communication tools, both diplomats and the institutional operation of diplomatic relations have undergone significant transformations (Ezgin ve Saka 69). Traditional methods used for interstate relations have been largely abandoned in recent years, and states now communicate their positions to the public through social media posts, both at the level of heads of state and ministers.

In this regard, it is believed that the Organisation of Turkic States should implement a number of actions in its current and future communications, in addition to actively engaging in all forms of digital communication. In light of the communication, media use, and digital diplomacy objectives outlined in the Organisation's 2040 Vision, it is useful to specify what must be done: All high-quality digital content generated in the Turkic world should be gathered on a single platform to counter the cultural hegemony of global TV series, movies, and video streaming platforms. A media strategy that prioritises its own values should be employed in opposition to media content that promotes immoral behaviour and contradicts its traditions and core values.

The role of new media in our lives is evolving in every way as a result of digitalization, the use of social media, and internet-based video streaming services. In its future planning, the Organisation of Turkic States will place a greater emphasis on digital communication tools, depending on the effects of these tools and investments in new media. It will also safeguard young people, who are surrounded by digital platforms, and bring them accurate information.

It is evident that countries' political borders now begin with their cyber homelands. A more sophisticated form of digital fascism is demonstrated by Instagram and YouTube's censorship policies, which prohibit specific videos and images based on their own anti-democratic standards. As a result, one of the top priorities on the Organisation of Turkic States' agenda should be creating and utilising domestic and national digital applications to safeguard its citizens against all forms of digital fascism. While digital data security is paramount, it is also important to develop domestic and national digital applications, social networks, and games. Furthermore, despite the fact that global social networks generate enormous revenues proportional to the number of users, they evade the digital legal norms of the countries

in which they operate and use various legal loopholes to avoid taxation processes. The Organisation of Turkish States should not only prevent digital platforms from evading taxes but also increase cooperation in this area by acting collaboratively to ensure that countries follow the rules of the law. The role of algorithms and micro-targeting in international politics should be recognised, as should the working styles of technology companies with the ability to manipulate citizens. In this regard, it is necessary to ensure the dissemination of digital media literacy through the use of artificial intelligence technology and the protection of citizens against manipulation by powerful softwares.

We must treat each platform on social media as a digital front. The actions taken by states in the political, social, cultural, economic, and technological realms should be systematically communicated to the public, with representation provided on all platforms, keeping in mind the existence of international media organisations eager to tell the rest of the world about the Turkic states in an unfavourable context. Search engines, global news channels, social media influencers, and celebrity opinions about those countries are just as influential in the twenty-first century as how those countries describe themselves. Therefore, Turkic states should continue their battle on all digital fronts with fresh projects for digital image, digital reputation, and digital perception management and trigger a positive agenda (Göksu 11-36).

Azerbaijan's victory over Armenia in Karabakh in November 2021 also illustrates some of the most significant initiatives of digital diplomacy in recent history. At the end of the 44-day war, the liberation of Karabakh from occupation by Azerbaijan was fictionalised against Azerbaijan in the Western media and international news platforms using biased and non-objective rhetoric. The Armenian lobby attempted to create the impression that Azerbaijan occupied Karabakh by ensuring that many Western statesmen shared various social media posts, as well as laying the groundwork for world-famous figures living in the United States to become involved in the issue through their social media posts. Nevertheless, despite all of these digital initiatives, Türkiye's digital diplomacy and strategic communication support, as well as the support of high-ranking officials of Turkic states to Azerbaijan in its righteous cause through digital content and

the arguments put forth by officials on social media, and effective images from the battlefield depicting Armenia's destruction in Karabakh, played a role in winning the war on the ground as well as on the communication and digital diplomacy fronts.

Conclusion

The digital communication activities and use of social media by political actors involved in the Organisation of Turkic States should be evaluated along the axis of digital diplomacy and reveal the digital capacity of the Organisation. This article examines digital communication strategies that the Organisation of Turkic States could potentially embrace in the years to come. It suggests that Turkic countries should engage in proactive communication and media initiatives, guided by a cohesive and integrated approach within the framework of the Organisation of Turkic States.

In the realms of digital communication and digital diplomacy, Turkic states have, for the first time in recent years, attained the ability to construct their own unique image. The evolution of this situation is notably influenced by the endeavours of the Organisation of Turkic States. To bolster the previously stated stance, it appears significant for the Organisation of Turkish States to pursue specific courses of action. In this regard, the Organisation should target global public opinion to improve the digital image of states. Digital diplomacy is regarded as the optimal approach for this task, as it is recognised that it is essential to communicate with the public and not with states. Digital diplomacy has the potential to prevent crises, resolve ongoing crises, and manage information disorder by rapidly informing large audiences. In the context of digital diplomacy, it is recommended that content be quickly created for use on video streaming platforms in order to more effectively promote Turkic culture to international audiences. It should also be ensured that all information processes carried out using conventional techniques are creatively converted to new media environments in order to establish social media as an information tool.

The establishment of collaborative graduate education programmes is necessary to cultivate the human resources needed to balance the Western-oriented digital communication ecosystem. Additionally, coordinated efforts should be made to develop alternative initiatives to counter the monopolistic

nature of social media platforms. The outage of two major global social media platforms and one messaging application for a duration of 5-6 hours in October 2021 has presented compelling evidence for the need of the Organisation of Turkic States to establish its presence in the global market by creating its own social networks and messaging applications. Under these circumstances, the development of a secure cyber infrastructure is crucial for Turkic-speaking countries to effectively implement their digital applications across different avenues of communication, including mobile applications, social networks, e-sports, digital advertisements, media planning, and streaming platforms. Turkic states, which share a common history, language, culture, and values, must band together to combat external disinformation campaigns and digital communication warfare by collaborating and expressing solidarity in the domains of communication and media. It is critical for Turkic Republics to work together on critical issues such as independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty, as well as to protect national interests, combat misinformation, and resist manipulative content. Additionally, it is essential to establish a strong presence in both mainstream and new media.

In conclusion, the Organisation of Turkic States should prioritise its digital diplomacy strategy along the axis of digital image and reputation management at the institutional level. Turkic states are utilising digital communication and diplomacy in response to growing Islamophobia in Western countries on the one hand, and they should take steps to protect their citizens' personal data based on digital privacy while striving to strengthen digital infrastructures. Furthermore, the digital diplomacy activities of the Turkic states should align with their foreign policy visions. The Organisation of Turkic States should establish emotional connections with the public through digital communication campaigns, thereby introducing ideas and collaborations that promote a sense of affinity with the target audience. Interest and trust from many societies in Turkic states will grow when the international discourse of the Organisation of Turkish States and digital diplomacy efforts are aligned. This, in turn, can amplify the effectiveness of communication activities undertaken by the Organisation of Turkic States in front of the global public.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

Notes

- 1 Updated on June 22, 2022.
- 2 Updated on June 22, 2022. Some countries' foreign ministers do not have personal social media accounts. In such instances, the official ministry accounts are reflected in the table.
- 3 Updated on June 22, 2022. Some countries' Ministers of Communications and Information do not have personal social media accounts. In such instances, the official ministry accounts are reflected in the table.

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Türk Devletleri Teşkilatının Dijital İletişim ve Dijital Diplomasi Perspektifi*

Fatmanur Altun**

Öz

Dijitalleşmenin etkisiyle kamuoyları arasındaki diyalog dijital diplomasiyle kurulmakta ve sürdürülmektedir. Kamu diplomasisi faaliyetlerinin bir alt başlığı olan dijital diplomasi, Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı açısından ortak bir iletişim platformu ve çağımızın küresel güvenlik tehdidi olan dezenformasyonla mücadelede mutlak bir koordinasyon mekanizması sunmaktadır. Makale, dijital iletişimdeki değişim, dönüşüm ve bu değişimlerin Türk Devletleri Teşkilatına yansımalarını ele almaktadır. Makalede örnek olay incelemesi olarak Türk Devletleri Teşkilatının dijital iletişim ve dijital diplomasi faaliyetleri irdelenmekte ve Teşkilatın kendisini doğru şekilde anlatmasında dijital mecraların etkin kullanımının rolü tartışılmaktadır. Çalışmada metodolojik açıdan Türk Devletleri Teşkilatında yer alan siyasal aktörlerin dijital iletişim faaliyetleri ve sosyal medya kullanımları üzerine betimsel analiz gerçekleştirilmiştir. Teşkilatın dijital mecradaki faaliyetleri araştırmanın sınırlılıklarını oluşturmaktadır. Çalışma Teşkilatın dijital iletişim stratejisini konu edinmesi açısından ilk olma özelliğini taşımaktadır. Netice itibarıyla Türk Devletleri Teşkilatının kurumsal düzeyde dijital imaj ve itibar yönetimi ekseninde ve dijital diplomasi ile ortak iletişim platformunu güçlendirerek dezenformatif içeriklerle mücadele etmesi gerektiği söylenebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı, dijital iletişim, dijital diplomasi, dezenformasyon, stratejik iletişim.

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Организация тюркских государств: цифровые коммуникации и перспектива цифровой дипломатии*

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Аннотация

В результате цифровизации цифровая дипломатия используется для установления и поддержания диалога между сообществами. Цифровая дипломатия, подраздел деятельности публичной дипломатии, предлагает общую коммуникационную платформу для Организации тюркских государств и абсолютный механизм координации в борьбе с дезинформацией, глобальной угрозой безопасности современности. В статье рассматриваются изменения и трансформации в цифровой коммуникации и их отражение в Организации тюркских государств. В статье в качестве примера рассматривается деятельность Организации тюркских государств в области цифровой коммуникации и цифровой дипломатии, а также обсуждается роль эффективного использования цифровых медиа в способности Организации правильно объяснять себя. В данном исследовании представлен описательный анализ цифровой коммуникационной деятельности и использования социальных сетей политическими деятелями в Организации тюркских государств. Ограничениями исследования являются деятельность организации в цифровых медиа. Исследование является первым в своем роде исследованием стратегии Организации в области цифровых коммуникаций. В заключение Организация тюркских государств должна бороться с дезинформационным контентом, укрепляя свою общую коммуникационную платформу цифровой дипломатией по оси управления цифровым имиджем и репутацией на институциональном уровне.

Ключевые слова

Организация тюркских государств, цифровая коммуникация, цифровая дипломатия, дезинформация.

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