

ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social Media, Digital Diplomacy and Diplomatic Crisis: The Case of Yisrael Katz's X Shares

Sosyal Medya, Dijital Diplomasi ve Diplomatik Kriz:
Yisrael Katz'ın X Paylaşımları Örneği

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Abstract

In today's world, where digital diplomacy is gaining momentum via social media, the social media (X) posts of Yisrael Katz – the Israeli Foreign Minister of the time – targeting the President of the Republic of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, attracted attention in 2024. While the relevant posts mediated a “digital” and diplomatic crisis, they also received reactions at various levels in domestic politics in Türkiye. Therefore, in this study, Katz's visually supported tweets on Erdoğan via X were considered as “narratives” and subjected to semiotic analysis based on the “5 codes of narrative” stated by Roland Barthes. Thus, it was aimed to reveal the messages Yisrael Katz wanted to convey through signs. In addition, the study investigated the frequency of Katz's posts on Erdoğan, and the prominent themes and actors in the posts by using content analysis. As a result of the study conducted, it was seen that Katz used the hermeneutic code, proairetic code, semantic code, symbolic code, and cultural code in most of his visually supported posts to criticize Erdoğan, included political actors in his posts, addressed the Turkish people and the opposition as the target audience and generally drew attention to themes such as “dictatorship”, “anti-Semitism”, “freedom of expression”, “future”, “modern Republic”, “Ottoman Empire”. Moreover, Istanbul, the Hagia Sophia Mosque, and the Turkish flag were frequently used signifiers.

Keywords: Social Media, Digital Diplomacy, Diplomatic Crisis, Israel, Türkiye

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Öz

Sosyal medya üzerinden dijital diplomasinin hız kazandığı günümüzde, 2024 yılında dönemin İsrail Dışişleri Bakanı Yisrael Katz'ın Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Devleti Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ı hedef alan sosyal medya (X) paylaşımları dikkat çekmiştir. İlgili paylaşımlar “dijital” ve diplomatik bir krizi aracılarken, Türkiye’de iç siyasette de çeşitli düzeylerde tepkiler almıştır. Bu nedenle bu çalışmada, Katz'ın X üzerinden yaptığı Erdoğan konulu görsel destekli tweet’ler, birer “anlatı” olarak ele alınmış ve Roland Barthes’ın belirttiği “anlatının 5 kodu” temel alınarak göstergebilimsel analize tabi tutulmuştur. Böylelikle Yisrael Katz'ın göstergeler aracılığı ile vermek istediği mesajların ortaya konulması amaçlanmıştır. Çalışmada ayrıca içerik analizinden faydalanarak, Katz'ın Erdoğan konulu paylaşımlarının sıklığı, paylaşımlarda öne çıkan temalar ve aktörler de araştırılmıştır. Yürütülen analizler sonucunda Katz'ın Erdoğan'ı eleştirmek için görsel destekli paylaşımlarının çoğunda hermeneutik kod, proairetik kod, semantik kod, sembolik kod ve kültürel koddan yararlandığı, paylaşımlarında siyasi aktörlere yer verdiği, hedef kitle olarak Türk halkına ve muhalefete seslendiği ve genellikle “diktatörlük”, “antisemitizm”, “ifade özgürlüğü”, “gelecek”, “modern Cumhuriyet”, “Osmanlı İmparatorluğu” gibi temalara dikkat çektiği görülmüştür. Dahası, Ayasofya Camii ve Türk bayrağı birer sembol olarak, sık kullanılan gösterenler olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Diplomasi, Sosyal Medya, Diplomatik Kriz, İsrail, Türkiye

Introduction

In the process of digitalization, which brings legal, social, economic, and political understanding to many phenomena, artificial intelligence is thought about the possible positive effects of it on democracy as well as the negativities that may arise with its malicious use (Adiller & Güreller, 2021; Djukic et al., 2017; Malkoç, 2018). However, it can be concluded that social media transcends borders and mediates a “border-independent” public sphere. However, it is also necessary to mention the debate on defining social media as “public” or “public sphere”. Many studies argue that social media does not meet the qualifications of a public sphere, considering the privilege of social media as a multinational corporation, and the restrictions and censorship of platforms. Some studies suggest that social media can constitute an image of a public space and offer a motivation for people to be present and active there (Adiller & Güreller, 2021; Farahdina et al., 2020).

Similar to the analogy between social media and public space, the concept of “digital public opinion” that characterizes users and their opinions on social networks is also controversial. It is known that there are many fake or bot accounts on social networks; social media environments are frequently used for black or gray propaganda and perception management (Güz et al., 2019, p. 1461; Yegen et al., 2022). In this context, social media is also at the center of digital diplomacy activities, and some platforms, especially X, sometimes run into environments where diplomatic crises arise, flare up, or are defused. For instance, it has been observed that Yisrael Katz – Israeli Foreign Minister of the time – has been making social media (X) posts targeting the President of the Republic of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, especially since the beginning of 2024. Katz's posts harshly criticizing Erdoğan through various symbols and meanings have been discussed in media, politics, and international relations circles. This study examines social media in digital diplomacy and discusses its role in diplomatic crisis management through the aforementioned case study. For this purpose, Katz's Turkish posts on Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on X with visual support were analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis technique.

Digital Diplomacy

While social media platforms have become very important for politics, they are frequently used not only to engage in politics or to access political developments and debates but also to consume news (Casas, 2024). Kreps (2020), while discussing the internet and social media usage debates around the 2016 US elections, draws attention to the potential for foreign governments to use social media for strategic advantages. She believes that the specific mechanisms through which social media influences international politics are underdeveloped, pointing out that the population often seeks information on complex foreign policy issues through social media, which can magnify information and tilt the balance of support on these issues. Emerging terms such as “digital diplomacy”, “e-diplomacy,” or “diplomacy 2.0” describe not only the impact of social media on diplomacy but also how it is changing the field. Digital diplomacy, which refers to the use of digital technologies to support diplomatic objectives, is a field that has gained great momentum with the development of social media (Frey, 2024, p. 107; Kuzniar & Filimoniuk, 2017, p. 34).

The transfer of political communication to public platforms can strengthen democracy, give citizens a voice based on interactivity, and create ties and connections regardless of borders (Kuzniar & Filimoniuk, 2017, p. 34). According to Saldaña et al. (2015, pp. 13–15), the computer-mediated form of political participation mediates more interaction through ease of use based on “onlineness”, by supporting traditional forms as well. Thus, while issues on international or national scales receive attention, subjects such as political actors, political parties, and governments find substantive representation spaces and processes, and even interlocutors and audiences.

Social media also has a structure that mediates political polarization, sometimes increasing it, and making it visible. For example, Yegen, Ayhan, and Demir (2022), in their study titled “Twitter’s Role in Digital Democracy, Post-Truth, and Political Polarization”, examined the agenda of social media on Twitter (X) in the period of Joe Biden’s swearing-in as the 46th President of the United States of America (USA) on January 20th, 2021 following the Presidential election in the USA in November 2020. In the study, the posts reflecting the opinions and attitudes of the users were analyzed through the hashtags #DonaldTrump and #inaugurationday using social network analysis, and it was concluded that the political agenda setters on Twitter dominate the users and resonate with them in the context of interaction. The relevant hashtags also characterized a digital manifestation of political polarization, and the structure of the platform enabled this. This opportunity was also easily followed by the international public and the audience. Many studies on the 45th US President (also the 47th president), Donald Trump’s use of X (Twitter) for digital diplomacy, provide important data. It is argued that Trump feeds on a certain type of populism and that the characteristics of this populism are nativism, anti-globalization, and isolationism. While these phenomena are integrated into American foreign policy, they also affect the perception of the change in the country’s international role. These approaches evaluate Trump’s Twitter diplomacy as “strange” (Eliodori, 2021, pp. 303–304). Investigating Trump’s diplomatic communication on Twitter and whether diplomatic organizations around the world engage in diplomatic exchanges with him, Šimunjak and Caliendo (2019, pp. 13–14) reached important conclusions. The study states that Trump’s diplomatic communication on the platform fuels rumors that he “disrupts traditional diplomatic language codes.” In contrast, it was

observed that other diplomatic organizations mostly remain within the boundaries of traditional concepts of diplomacy by not engaging with Trump. Some approaches emphasize that the United States' digital diplomacy adventure began quite early in 2006, aiming to protect and develop its online interest (Fei & Yao; 2022, p. 197).

Diverging from early, shallow approaches to digitalization or social media, digital diplomacy is now considered a "policy priority" for many Foreign Ministries. Most governments have gone beyond creating the necessary infrastructure for digital diplomacy activities (Bjola, 2018). Some argue that the digital transformation has created a "shift" towards digital diplomacy, predicting that emerging technologies will shape the landscape of international relations in ways that are even more complex and difficult than they are now. According to the same approach, these technologies, which have the potential to automate complex diplomatic negotiations, increase the security of diplomatic communications, and even redefine interactions between states and non-state actors, will have negative and positive consequences. Thus, while diplomacy may be strengthened, it may be vulnerable to cyber threats. Consequently, traditional diplomatic protocols and established strategies may need to be revised. However, what should be seen here is that perhaps as technology advances, societies may face unpredictable situations and movements, and a digital future is coming (Frey, 2024, pp. 107–108).

Current diplomatic trends show that digital diplomacy is considered a "more preferred foreign policy tool" in many parts of the world. Eliminating the "spatial" and "temporal" constraints of traditional diplomacy, digital diplomacy enables countries to utilize soft power in "national image building" and "public diplomacy". In this way, digital diplomacy facilitates the articulation of a country's foreign policy goals and, at the same time, enables the implementation of these goals. Nye (1990, p. 166) points out that soft power, which occurs when "a country persuades other countries to want what it wants", is based on cooperation, as opposed to the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants.

A study focusing on China's digital diplomatic discourse also draws attention to the potential of digital diplomacy to reveal the theoretical measurability between "social identity theories" and "nationalism construction" in light of the conclusion that this discourse can influence the dynamics of domestic nationalist sentiments (Zhang & Tang, 2024, pp. 2–10). Kampf et al. (2015) argue that social media has the potential to foster dialogue between nations and foreign populations and that studies on digital diplomacy should focus on specific uses. While technology has brought about many new-generation communication tools, political use has also developed in many environments and technologies. According to Verrekia (2017), digital diplomacy has been transformed by Twitter accounts as well as smartphones; diplomats, and government officials have begun to use social networks to advance their interests. The possibilities and challenges of digital diplomacy can be used in the development of modern diplomacy through digitalization. In addition, digital tools can be used strategically to improve a country's international relations, though they do not exclude traditional practices such as the need for people on the ground, foreign travel, analyzing information, and providing foreign policy recommendations.

Social media, which makes digital diplomacy effective with its interactive and dialogue-inviting format, is also seen as a tool for bringing some developments to the agenda of the international community for various purposes. For example, nowadays, while the international community, social media users, governments, and indeed the whole of humanity are closely following Israel's operations against Gaza, biased and malicious images on social networks are spread through new communication technologies, and some users even benefit financially from the related content. With the outrage caused by the issue, crises on social networks are inevitable. While some influencers publish images of attacks and deepfake videos, artificial intelligence-mediated fictional photos are also shared with the public and cause controversies (BBC News Turkish, 2023a). For these reasons, it is believed that the Israel-Hamas war, which is said to have erupted on October 7th, took place on the internet, and many posts supporting Israel and the Palestinians were observed on social media. BBC Monitoring Service examined the volume and reach of hashtags in support of Israel and the Palestinians on X (Twitter) between October 7th and 25th. The results showed that the most popular hashtags in support of Israel were #IsraelUnderAttack, #HamasisISIS (Hamas is ISIS), and #HamasMassacre (Hamas massacre) promoted by the Israeli government. At the same time, #FreePalestine, #GazaUnderAttack, and #FreeGaza were the most popular hashtags in support of the Palestinians (BBC News Turkish, 2023b). It should be noted here that during the relevant period, many fake Israeli social media accounts were exposed, and discussions arose about the financing of fake accounts to spread pro-Israeli content (NTV, 2024a). Despite this development, it is considered important to analyze Katz's X posts, which could be considered controversial. In fact, the existence of studies that examine X in terms of influencing public opinion and international society, especially in the posts of political actors and leaders, is also remarkable (Eliodori, 2021; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2024; Guerrero-Solé, 2018). Accordingly, this study aims to contribute to the literature by offering a unique perspective based on its distinctive sample.

Case Study: A Diplomatic Crisis on X: Yisrael Katz

Since the beginning of 2024, Israeli Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz has made social media (X) posts targeting Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and these posts have been widely discussed. The government and the opposition reacted to these posts, and the opposition did not remain silent in the face of Katz's openly targeting Erdoğan, and criticizing him with heavy insinuations, and reacting to the statements against the President of the country. Türkiye's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in response to Israeli Foreign Minister Katz's social media post at the beginning of August 2024, said, "The person in question has long lost the qualification of being a person to be addressed. Türkiye will continue to provide the strongest support to the Palestinians." (Anadolu Agency, 2024). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, with the announcement "No: 120, June 26, 2024, Israeli Foreign Minister's Post on a Social Media Platform" on its official website, stated:

We consider the Israeli Foreign Minister's vulgar post targeting our President as a style that can only be adopted by an official of a state on trial for genocide. Such slander and lies are part of Israel's effort to cover up its crimes. Türkiye will continue to fight for justice and peace. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 2024)

Another statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye regarding the social media posts of Israeli Foreign Minister Katz was as follows: “These lies, which aim to distract attention from the genocide in Gaza, will not be able to prevent our support for the Palestinian people.” Justice and Development Party (AK Party) Spokesperson Ömer Çelik said, “The Israeli Foreign Minister is a fascist liar.” (Hürriyet, 2024a). On the other hand, the Center for Combating Disinformation of the Communications Directorate of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye issued a statement regarding Israeli Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz’s claim of “President Erdoğan refused to transfer Ismail Haniyeh’s fortune of approximately 3 billion dollars in Turkish banks to Haniyeh’s sons”, stating that the claim is not true and that Haniyeh does not have any savings in Turkish banks (Hürriyet, 2024b). Therefore, Katz’s disproportionate attack on Erdoğan on Hamas and Gaza/Palestine via social media (X) is particularly striking. It can be said that Katz uses a platform such as X, which provides opportunities for digital diplomacy activities, in an undiplomatic manner to create a negative perception of Erdoğan. Therefore, in the research section of this study, Katz’s posts on Erdoğan will be evaluated in terms of digital diplomacy and the appearance of the digital crisis on X. Towards the end of the year, Katz was appointed as the country’s “Minister of Defense” after the Israeli Minister of Defense was dismissed at the beginning of November 2024 (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Methodology

In the research conducted within the scope of this study, Roland Barthes’ semiotic analysis technique was used. It is known that the modern term semiotics was first used by John Locke towards the end of “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding”. Charles Peirce, on the other hand, used semiotics as “a term denoting a specific and detailed theory”. It is “ironic” that the main works of Charles Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure, two symbols of semiotics, were published after their deaths. (Rochberg-Halton & McMurtrey, 1983, p. 130). While Peirce laid the foundations of his semiotics in a series of articles published in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* in 1868, the theme of the articles was “the inadequacy of the Cartesian account of science”. Here, Peirce drew attention to semiotics as an alternative to criticism, although it had not yet been named. According to Rochberg-Halton and McMurtrey (1983, pp. 131–132), Peirce’s denial that the individual has the power of intuition is a denial of Cartesian skepticism. Within the post-structuralist context, Barthes (1968) focuses on revealing the sign-signifier-signified relationship through linguistic message, literal and connotative meaning, and metalanguage, and with this formulation, the cultural context is made functional in the process of signification, hence, semiotics includes the created and transmitted meanings. According to Barthes, semiology aims to address a “system of signs” regardless of their contents and boundaries. Barthes states that images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex relations of all these, which constitute the content of ritual, tradition, or public entertainment, constitute “signifying systems” and calls semiology useful as an approach within this framework. Barthes believes that disciplines such as linguistics, epistemology, formal logic, and structural anthropology provide new tools for semantic analysis and that the development in the field of mass communication has spilled over into the media of signification. Stating that Barthes’ “mythologies” is defined as a groundbreaking text in applied semiotic analysis, Berger (2014)

states that to interpret signs correctly, one must have background knowledge of what Chandler calls “codes”. While Chandler says that metaphors can use images, he also points out that they do not have to be verbal. Visual metaphors and codes are often used in advertisements. Metonymy provides representation within rhetorical semiotics. Not knowing the codes required to make sense of signs can lead to their misinterpretation, and a lack of knowledge or wrong thinking can make correct interpretation impossible (Yegen & Berger, 2022, pp. 232–234).

Barthes states that in the relationship between the signifier and the signified in the context of the nature of the sign, the signifier is the material, and the signified is the mental response. Starting from the tools of “Lexia” and “Code”, Barthes considered lexia as “a part of the text that can be analyzed as a unit of meaning and can range from a few words to a few sentences” and codes as “categories into which dictionaries are divided. According to Barthes (1974, pp. 19–20), each code is a “voice touched by the text” and the codes address different aspects of the narrative and the text, and can be classified as “hermeneutic (enigma) code”, “proairetic (action) code”, “semantic code”, “symbolic code” and “cultural code”.

- Hermeneutic Code (Enigma Code): It mediates inferences that the target audience will question, wonder about, and form an opinion about in the narrative, and qualifies the mystery. Various “puzzles”, clues/unexplained, mysterious details can be used for these inferences; sometimes this can even be a “name”.
- Proairetic Code (Action Code): It is related to the actions in the narrative. It points to actions originating from precursor events and what comes after; it mediates the categorization of the actions in the narrative into “semantic fields”, shows progress, and the target audience is curious about the outcome of these actions.
- Semantic Code: It focuses on semantic inferences and associations, and makes it possible to have more information and reveal additional meanings. For example, a narrative’s two lifestyles or characters point to a semantic code.
- Symbolic Code: It mediates a rhetorical interpretation with opposing symbols by drawing attention to contrasts and binary oppositions. There is a question of expressing something, meaning, with a symbol. Opposing meanings in an antithesis create a paradox. Although this situation can be interpreted semantically, the use of antithesis makes the code symbolic. For example, contrasting colors and iconic symbols.
- Cultural Code: There is a reference to an extratextual context, a sociocultural background, which can be seen with “references/allusions”, allowing us to examine the details of the analogy between cultural authorities and social thought.

Within the scope of the study, a quantitative content analysis of Katz’s tweets was also applied to reveal the frequency of Katz’s posts. Krippendorff (2004) considers content analysis to be potentially one of the most important research techniques in social sciences, arguing that the content analyst regards data not as representations of physical events, but as representations of texts, images, and expressions constructed to assess meanings. In the semiotic analysis carried out in the study, an

examination was made in the light of Barthes' 5 narrative codes: Hermeneutic Code, Proairetic Code, Semantic Code, Symbolic Code, and Cultural Code. In this way, an attempt was made to reveal the codes in Katz's tweets about Erdoğan and to reveal elements such as the messages, meanings, elements used, and target audience that the relevant narrative wanted to convey.

The research questions prepared by the researchers, by examining the sample, were sought to be answered. In this context, the research questions were as follows;

- How often did Katz share X about Erdoğan during the analyzed period?
- What is the type/form of these shares/tweets?
- What is the monthly distribution of Katz's X shares about Erdoğan?
- Which codes did Katz use in his tweets?
- Which hermeneutic codes are used to create mystery and curiosity in the relevant tweets?
- Which proairetic codes did Katz use in his tweets?
- Which semantic codes are observed in the tweets?
- Which symbolic codes are observed in the tweets?
- Which cultural codes are observed in the relevant tweets?
- Which theme(s) and actors did Katz emphasize in his shares, and which audiences did he address?

Findings and Analysis

It was seen that Yisrael Katz followed 221 users on his official and approved X account at https://x.com/israel_katz as of November 12th, 2024, and his number of followers was 174,130 (Katz, n.d.). Between January 12th, 2024, and November 12th, 2024, Katz made 52 posts tagging Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's official and approved X account (<https://x.com/RTErdoğan>) as provided (Erdoğan, n.d.).

Starting from January 12, 2024 to November 12, 2024, the date range on which the research data is obtained, all of Katz's tweets were pulled with a script using the Twikit library of the Python programming language, and tweets containing the word "@RTErdoğan" were extracted, resulting in a total of 52 tweets. The universe of the research, Katz's X posts, is the sample of Katz's posts on Erdoğan. The reason for choosing the date range covered in the research is that this is the period when Katz's posts targeting Erdoğan became more frequent. Katz was already appointed Minister of Defense at the beginning of November 2024. Revealing the frequency and rhetoric of these posts is important in terms of cultural and digital diplomacy discussions. It should be noted that the fact that interactions regarding the relevant posts were not addressed is a limitation of this research. The content analysis revealed that the 52 posts he had made by tagging Erdoğan between January 12, 2024, and November 12, 2024, consisted of a total of 26 tweets. Katz shared all of his tweets targeting Erdoğan in three different languages: Turkish, English, and Hebrew. It was observed that most of

the tweets were in the other two languages, so while the number of tweets was 52, the frequency of sharing different tweets was 26. In addition, almost all of the tweets contained images (Table 1).

Table 1

Nature of Tweets

Format	Frequency
Visual	-
Text	8
Image + Text	18
Total	26

Looking at the distribution of Katz's posts on Erdoğan on X in the analysis period, it was observed that the highest number of posts were made following the local elections in Türkiye (April, May) and in August, when the attacks in the Israeli – Palestinian – Hamas war triangle were more on the agenda. The least number of posts were made in January, June, and September (Table 2).

Table 2

Distribution of Tweets (January 12, 2024 – November 12, 2024)

Month	Frequency
January	1
February	0
March	3
April	4
May	4
June	1
July	3
August	7
September	1
October	3
November	0
Total	26

Among the posts about Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on X, five of them, which are in Turkish, and contain visuals and text, were selected through purposive sampling and analyzed. Purposive sampling describes a “population sampling process” in which the researcher selects from the population for research based on characteristics, criteria, and purpose. Purposive sampling is designed to develop “insight” into research questions and is a “form of synthesis research” (Stratton, 2024, pp. 121–122). In this way, it was aimed to reveal the meanings Katz aimed to remark through the signs he used, based on the assumption that he used Turkish to address Turkish citizens. The posts were accessed on X and saved by the researchers. While the relevant posts are preferred when they receive intense comments on the platform, they are also preferred to evaluate visual rhetoric. During the period when the posts were obtained and archived by the researchers (November 12, 2024), Figure

1 (Erdoğan, 2025) received 8.4K comments, Figure 2 33K, Figure 3 1B, Figure 4 1.3K, and Figure 5 8K. The fact that the visuals are quite striking and benefit from various indicators can lead to healthy answers to the research questions.

In the image in Figure 1 shared by Katz on his official account on X, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is seen on a bed. Erdoğan is portrayed as sleepy and tired and is shown as “dreaming of a sultanate” in his mind. The linguistic message in the post is Katz’s statements accusing Erdoğan of wanting to re-establish the Ottoman Empire. The message is also delivered through the words placed on the image. While the denotation of the image is that Erdoğan could be resting, the connotation is that Erdoğan is getting old and tired, yet he dreams of an Ottoman Empire instead of the Republic of Türkiye. The metalanguage of the image, with its reference to Istanbul and Atatürk, Turkish marshal, statesman, writer, commander-in-chief of the Turkish War of Independence, founder of the Republic of Türkiye and its first president could also be Katz’s implication that Erdoğan aims to set Türkiye back (Table 3). Therefore, it can be said that the linguistic message in the visual contains a proairetic code. It can also be seen that the emphasis on the sultanate is used as a semantic code. Atatürk is used as a symbolic code with a rhetorical allusion. Atatürk can also be interpreted as a reference to the modern republic narrative. Caftan and turban are also used as symbolic codes. Istanbul as a cultural code, and the concern for the future of the Republic of Türkiye as a hermeneutic code are used. Istanbul, while addressing the collective memory and past of the Turkish people, also shows Türkiye’s popularity and development.

Figure 1

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is on a Bed, Tweet dated April 26th, 2024



Note. The image is taken from Katz (2024e).

Table 3*Tweet dated April 26th, 2024*

Sign	Signifier	Signified	
		Denotation	Connotation
Man, Object	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Bed/Bedstead, Turban, Caftan, Sultan Pose	Rest, Fatigue, Sleep, Dream, Jerusalem	Erdoğan's Ottoman Dream, Utopia, Ottoman History, Defeat, Regressing the Country (Türkiye)

The linguistic message in Figure 2 is Katz's words written in the post, which appear to be directed at Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In the image in Figure 2, Istanbul is seen burning behind Erdoğan, while the Turkish flag is also in flames. Notably, the image uses the Turkish flag and the Hagia Sophia Mosque to allude to Istanbul, and the connotation may be that Erdoğan is harming the city and its values. The emphasis on the metalanguage can be considered as the implication that Erdoğan threatens the existence of the modern, progressive Republic of Türkiye through his various relations. This emphasis can also be evaluated within the framework of Katz's tagging of Ekrem İmamoğlu, the Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality at the time from the Republican People's Party, in his post. In this way, it can be said that Katz almost warns İmamoğlu and the Republican People's Party and calls them to take action (Table 4). It can be said that Istanbul in red flames was used as a symbolic code to indicate danger. The Turkish flag and the Hagia Sophia Mosque were also used as symbolic codes. Katz may have tried to attract attention by tagging Ekrem İmamoğlu and may have used the hermeneutic code. Katz may have also acted to mobilize the Turkish people with the action codes in the tweet. Erdoğan's regime and attitude are used as semantic codes.

Figure 2*Katz's Tweet dated August 2nd, 2024*

Note. The image is taken from Katz (2024c).

Table 4*Tweet dated August 2nd, 2024*

Sign	Signifier	Signified	
		Denotation	Connotation
Man, Place, Object	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Istanbul, Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Turkish Flag, Fire (Vermeil)	Erdoğan Regime	Regression, Dictatorship, Rebellion Doing Harm to Turkishness and the Country (Türkiye)

Following Katz's tweet, Ekrem İmamoğlu shared the tweet shown in Figure 3 in support of Erdoğan.

Figure 3*Ekrem İmamoğlu's Post Supporting Erdoğan (August 2nd, 2024)*

Note. The image is taken from İmamoğlu (2024).

The linguistic message in Figure 4 reads, "Erdoğan, who has continuously massacred Kurds in Türkiye and the region, accuses Israel of deliberately committing genocide in Gaza. Mr. @RTERdogan, we are not like you. We are fighting your accomplice Hamas, whom you host in Türkiye and enable to commit massacres and murders. You should shut up and be ashamed!" The denotation of the image shows that Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had a meeting through a handshake. The connotation is that Erdoğan supports Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement) (Table 5). This implication can also be seen in the image's metaphor that Hamas is a "criminal organization"

that is said to have committed massacres, and that Erdoğan supports the organization despite his stated opposition to genocide. Ismail Haniyeh is used as a symbolic code by associating it with brutal actions and Hamas. It should be noted here that Ismail Haniyeh was assassinated in Iran on July 31, 2024 while on duty (NTV, 2024b). The use of the Turkish flag and phosphorus can also be seen as symbolic codes in terms of Turkishness. The implication that Erdoğan supports Hamas can be evaluated as a proairetic code. The possible consequences of Erdoğan's closeness to Hamas were tried to be implied to the Turkish people. The implicit emphasis, surprise, and curiosity that the juxtaposition of modern Türkiye and the republic with these facts are remarkable can be evaluated as a hermeneutic code.

Figure 4

Tweet with a picture of Ismail Haniyeh and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, March 1, 2024



Note. The image is taken from Katz (2024f).

Table 5

Tweet dated March 1st, 2024

Sign	Signifier	Signified	
	Ismail Haniyeh, R. Tayyip Erdoğan, Flag (Turkish Flag), Presidential seal	Denotation	Connotation
Men, Object		Hospitality, Meeting/ Interview	Support for Hamas, Ignoring the Genocide

Figure 5 shows an image photoshopped from Katz's post showing Ismail Haniyeh and Erdoğan, replacing Haniyeh with Yahya Sinwar, who was assassinated after Haniyeh, and a tweet shared by Katz. Hamas leader Yahya Ibrahim Hassan Sinwar was killed in a clash with Israel (Tall as-Sultan) on October 16, 2024. On October 18, 2024, Katz posted an image of Sinwar's dead body on X, tagging Erdoğan with the phrase: "@RTErdogan take back your rapist and murderer friend Sinwar" (https://x.com/Israel_katz/status/184.721.6288340267249/photo/1). Katz (2024) had previously posted: "@RTErdogan's new friend, Hamas leader, mass murderer Yahya Sinwar. Turkish nation is ashamed of you."

Figure 5

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Yahya Sinwar Tweet (August 9th, 2024)



Note. The image is taken from Katz (2024a).

The linguistic message in Figure 6 is Katz's claims regarding the support of Hamas. While the denotation of the image in the figure is Katz's statement that Erdoğan supports Hamas technically and educationally and that some Hamas members are trained in Türkiye, the connotation can be expressed as the implication that Erdoğan harbors hatred against Israel. In the metalanguage, based on the visual used, Erdoğan is shown as a child wearing a white outfit with a Turkish flag on it, on

the lap of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, implying that Erdoğan does not obey Iran. The expression "axis of evil" observed in the lexical structure was deliberately chosen to draw attention to cooperation between Iran and Erdoğan. The word "antisemite" was also deliberately chosen to portray Erdoğan as an enemy of the Jews and to provoke the Turkish public (Table 6). The implication that Hamas members were trained in Türkiye was used as a hermeneutic code to attract the attention of the Turkish people and arouse their curiosity. The fact that Erdoğan has given technical and educational support to Hamas shows that the proairetic code is used to make one think about the consequences of this. The hermeneutic code and the proairetic code also express concerns about Türkiye's future. The Turkish flag is used as a symbolic code via Erdoğan's clothes, and the back of the chair Khamenei is sitting in. Showing Erdoğan in this way may also suggest that interest in a child is used as a cultural code. But the semantic code is that Erdogan obeys Khamenei.

Figure 6

Katz's Tweet dated July 21th, 2024



Note. The image is taken from Katz (2024d).

Table 6

Tweet dated July 21st, 2024

Sign	Signifier	Signified	
		Denotation	Connotation
Man, Object	Ali Khamenei, R. Tayyip Erdoğan, Toy/Child, Armchair, Flag-Turkish Flag	The Claim that Türkiye and Erdoğan Support Hamas	Anti-Israel, Contempt for Erdoğan, Iran-Türkiye Alliance

It is important that one of the conclusions of Goren's (2020) study, in which he examined Katz's first year in office when was appointed as the interim (at first) Foreign Minister of Israel in 2019, based on media reports and information published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), was that "Katz acted in the heavy shadow of Netanyahu". Indeed, in some of his posts, Katz associates Erdoğan with Hamas (Figure 4) and Khamenei, and even portrays Erdoğan as the toy of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in Figure 6.

The linguistic message of Figure 7 is in the direction of Katz's accusations against Erdoğan through one of his statements. The denotation refers to Erdoğan's attack on the US and Western countries for supporting Israel and the Instagram ban in Türkiye. Katz, who criticizes Erdoğan over the restriction of Instagram in Türkiye at the beginning of August 2024 and the inaccessibility of the platform, uses the numerical rhetoric with the phrase "57 million Turkish Instagram users". In addition, the terms "dictator" and "antisemite" are also deliberately used in the lexical structure. The implication in the metalanguage is that Erdoğan is an anti-Semitic dictator who restricts the freedom of communication of Turkish citizens and does so for Hamas and Iran (Table 7). Drawing attention to the Instagram ban can be evaluated as a hermeneutic code; Erdoğan's support for the Instagram ban but his use of the application is worrying in the context of freedom of expression and questions Türkiye's communicative future in the digital age. In this context, Erdoğan's negative attitude towards the USA and Western countries can be considered a proairetic code. The numerical emphasis also points to the symbolic code. The crescent star symbolizes the Turkish flag and mobile phone communication, too. The expressions dictator and anti-Semite can be evaluated as semantic codes. The fact that Turkish citizens are shown under pressure against Erdoğan can be interpreted as a cultural code that requires an awakening in terms of the characteristics and historical struggle of the Turkish nation.

Figure 7

Katz's Tweet dated August 6th, 2024



Note. The image is taken from Katz (2024b).

Table 7*Tweet dated August 6th, 2024*

Sign	Signifier	Signified	
		Denotation	Connotation
Man, Place, Icon	R. Tayyip Erdoğan, Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Mobile Phone, Crescent, Vermeil	Istanbul, Türkiye, Islam and Turkishness	Instagram Restriction, Turkishness and Islam are in Danger, Anti-Erdoğanism, Anti-Progressivism

A study that examines Israel's current attitude towards Gaza within the framework of Türkiye's "Gaza Diplomacy" after October 7 and the construction of peace for Palestine has concluded that "the understanding put forward by Türkiye has brought significant innovations" in this context. The study also draws attention to the fact that there are many studies that find Türkiye's approach towards Gaza positive (Mengüaslan, 2024, p. 252).

Radpey (2024) claims that Israeli Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz challenged United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres with a tweet on October 24, 2024, claiming that "Türkiye attacked Kurdish towns, villages and economic infrastructures in Iraq and Syria and remained silent about it." Katz went further, implicitly asking about the UN Security Council's "urgent action" against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and "where is the International Criminal Court complaint?" and comparing the Palestinian and Kurdish peoples. Mengüaslan (2024, pp. 251–252) states that the attitudes of countries such as the US and England on the Palestinian issue are of a nature that blocks the United Nations Security Council. Politicians use cultural diplomacy to develop certain relationships (Kupreishvili & Kobaidze, 2024, pp. 96–97). However, considering the activities that have now evolved into "digital" diplomacy, it can be thought that Katz uses the X platform as a propaganda tool rather than these.

Erdoğan Şafak (2024) thinks that Turkish – Israeli relations, which have been "fluctuations" for more than half a century, have become the most heated during the AK Party period. In contrast, it should be noted that "normalization" discussions, which have the opportunity to "transform" the "economic" dimension of Turkish – Israeli relations along with their "political" dimension, have also been on the agenda at various times (Belder & Muminov, 2023, p. 360; Sariaslan, 2023). It is known that Türkiye has been closely following the approach of the State of Israel towards Palestine since its establishment. It is observed in some studies that it is predicted that Türkiye will continue to support the Palestinian cause in the process (Bayraktar, 2019, pp. 42–44). Despite all these discussions, it is observed that Israeli – Palestinian tensions continue at various levels.

Conclusion

The semiotic analysis revealed that Katz had frequently used the codes listed by Barthes as the 5 codes of narrative (Hermeneutic Code, Proairetic Code, Semantic Code, Symbolic Code, and Cultural Code) in his tweets. It has been observed that the hermeneutic code is generally used in references to concerns about the future of Türkiye and the Turkish people, to attract their attention,

to make them wonder about the future of the country, and to question the Erdoğan administration. While symbolic codes manifest themselves with certain symbols and rhetorical uses, in this context, elements such as the “Turkish flag” (crescent star, red & white colors), flames, fire, and the “Hagia Sophia Mosque” have drawn attention. The action code, on the other hand, has often been observed in written statements to draw attention to Erdoğan’s actions and their possible results and effects. The use of the semantic code has been observed in references to the need to problematize the Erdoğan regime and Erdoğan’s attitudes. The cultural code, on the other hand, has been a tool used in terms of expectations from the Turkish people. Katz invites the Turkish people to a change of behavior by portraying Erdoğan as a leader who is far from progressivism and who aims to distance the country from its modernity and the understanding of the Republic.

In the study, following the analysis on Katz X posts, the oppositions that stand out in the visuals can be listed as follows: “Progress-Regression”, “Modern Türkiye – Ancient Türkiye”, “Dictatorship – Democracy/Freedom”, “Anti-Semite – Semite”, “Ruling Türkiye – Ruled Türkiye”, “Supporting Hamas – Anti-Hamas”. However, it can be said that some of the visuals/tweets are intended to create an opposition between the Republic of Türkiye and the Ottoman Empire. It can be said that these oppositions target the Turkish people. Almost all of Yisrael Katz’s posts warn the Turkish people against Erdoğan and call them to take action. On the other hand, it is also striking that Katz made his posts in 3 languages: Turkish, English, and Hebrew. Katz, who is observed to have mostly targeted the Turkish people, may have wanted to eliminate the boundaries of his target audience and aim for interaction by sharing the same tweet in different languages. It has also been observed that Katz uses political actors in almost all of his tweets.

Individuals also demonstrate social benefit by engaging in “civil” and “political” activities. Gearhart et al. (2024), who think that using online forums like X for democratic participation is now commonplace, say that there are no “definitive” findings on whether “offline” and “online” activities result in concrete participation. X, especially in recent years, has been an effective platform for political discourse while allowing politicians to reach votes independently of traditional media and gatekeepers. Nuttaki et al. (2025) state that some research conducted before Elon Musk purchased the platform showed that “Twitter may be biased against right-wing content”, and drew attention to the fact that the change of ownership in October 2022 will change the platform’s policies, especially among political ideologies. Considering the highly critical posts of Yisrael Katz towards Erdoğan observed in this analysis, it can be considered that there has not been a “more objective” change in the platform’s line in light of the relevant discussions. Nevertheless, Katz used the power of persuasion and convincing in his tweets and tried to attract the attention of the masses by using strange and remarkable visuals. However, he did so in a very harsh and non-diplomatic manner against Erdoğan. In this sense, it can be thought that Katz uses social media, especially X, as a tool to create a digital diplomatic crisis rather than a digital diplomacy tool.

The most important feature of this study that distinguishes it from other political communication studies using the semiotic method is that it attempts to reveal areas where meanings and inferences are confined by using Barthes’ comprehensive code technique. In this context, the integration of quantitative data alongside qualitative analysis enhances the originality of the study. The research

aims to shed light on the current use and representation of the concept of digital diplomacy, while also serving as a source of inspiration for future studies. Furthermore, it is recommended that digital diplomacy activities be examined across a variety of platforms to capture a more comprehensive understanding of its dynamics.

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