

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Safeguarding Truth in Turmoil: A Study of the Turkish Government's Strategic Deployment of Twitter during the February 6, 2023, Earthquakes*

Sibel Hoştut**

İsmail Aışad Güdekli***

Fırat Güzeldağ****

Abstract

This article examines crisis communication and public diplomacy through social media, especially in the context of the earthquakes that occurred in Türkiye on February 6, 2023. The study underscores the critical roles of accurate information dissemination, public trust cultivation, and disinformation prevention. Focusing on the experiences of leading government offices, particularly their Twitter responses, this research demonstrates the interconnectedness of crisis communication, digital diplomacy and central importance of strategic integration in the digital age. Using a dataset of 2,997 tweets from six government Twitter accounts, the MAXQDA 2020 analysis explores the dynamics of the relationship between Turkish public diplomacy, crisis communication, and social media, and offers insights into resilient communication frameworks in global governance. The effectiveness of the

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** Assoc. Prof., Akdeniz University, Department of Public Relations and Publicity – Antalya/Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0002-5372-1499
shostut@akdeniz.edu.tr

*** Assoc. Prof., Akdeniz University, Department of Public Relations and Publicity – Antalya/Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0002-6599-8452
gudekli@akdeniz.edu.tr

**** PhD Student, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, Department of International Relations – Ankara/Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0001-9214-6506
firat.guzeldag@gmail.com

government's communication efforts is evident in the strategic use of Twitter as a dynamic tool for real-time dissemination of information during crises, underlining the government's proactive and responsive stance in crisis communication.

Keywords

Crisis communication, disinformation, public diplomacy, social media, earthquake, Türkiye.

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape, the confluence of crisis communication, public diplomacy, and the pervasive influence of social media has emerged as a crucible for governments and public institutions worldwide. The interconnectedness of these realms is particularly evident during times of crisis, where the dissemination of accurate information, the cultivation of public trust, and the prevention of disinformation play pivotal roles in shaping societal resilience and perceptions (Engblom 3). This article seeks to explore the intricate web that binds crisis communication, public diplomacy, and the imperative task of mitigating disinformation on social media platforms, with a focused lens on the experiences of major Turkish government offices during the Earthquakes of February 6, 2023. Crisis communication is not a new concept (Coombs 14-17), but its critical role has recently become more prominent due to events such as September 11 attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic (Abd-Alrazaq et al.; Mayer; Su et al.; Zhou et al.; Aldamen and Hacimic), or the earthquakes in southern Türkiye, close to Syria's northern border in 2023.

The ubiquity of social media platforms has transformed the landscape of crisis communication, offering unprecedented opportunities for instant information dissemination, but also posing profound challenges in managing narratives and preventing the spread of disinformation. Governments, as primary communicators in times of crisis, are faced with the dual task of providing accurate and timely information to the public while combating with the viral nature of misinformation and disinformation. Especially in times of crisis, people are more susceptible to disinformation from easily accessible social media accounts (Kuwahara 3), so government

communication is an essential system through which citizens are informed and decisions are explained (John et al. 2). Digital diplomacy, as an extension of these efforts, becomes a crucial instrument in reinforcing national resilience, shaping international perceptions, and maintaining diplomatic credibility, based on communication and new technical capabilities. The role of emotions in digital diplomacy strategies is crucial to understanding the power of social media. Statements on social media can provoke strong emotions that have the potential to damage previously positive diplomatic relations or provide communicative improvements to resolve crises (Duncombe 102). Research on digital diplomacy has been dominated by studies on the digitalization of public diplomacy, a concept sometimes included in the definition of the term *new* public diplomacy (Hedling and Bremberg 1597). This article posits that crisis communication strategies are inherently entwined with the principles of public diplomacy, wherein the effective management of information during crises contributes not only to domestic stability but also to the cultivation of a positive international image. Furthermore, the rapid dissemination of information on social media platforms demands a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms that underpin the spread of disinformation, necessitating a strategic approach that integrates crisis communication and digital diplomacy to counteract misinformation effectively. Through a contextual examination of the February 6 earthquakes in Türkiye and the response of major government offices on Twitter, this research aims to unravel the complexities inherent in this tripartite relationship. By dissecting the strategies employed, challenges faced, and lessons learned, the article seeks to contribute to the evolving discourse on crisis communication, public diplomacy, and the prevention of disinformation on social media. Ultimately, the findings aim to provide actionable insights that can inform the development of more resilient communication frameworks for governments globally, fostering a symbiotic relationship between crisis communication, public diplomacy, and the preservation of information integrity in the digital age.

Background of February 2023 Earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria

The strongest earthquakes of the last 80 years occurred on February 6, 2023, with a magnitude of 7.8 and 7.5 in the southern and central parts of Türkiye and the northern and western parts of Syria, also home to many

Syrian refugees and humanitarian aid organizations (Center for Disaster Philanthropy). It caused destruction in 11 provinces, more than 9 million people were affected, 50,096 people lost their lives, and 107,204 were confirmed injured (*Yeni Şafak*, "Türkiye'nin Acı Günü"). The Turkish government and civil society organizations responded quickly to the emergency with a series of measures. The Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared a three-month state of emergency in the earthquake zone and the state authorities declared a level 4 emergency and called for international support. The Turkish government led the intervention through the coordination of the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) and the Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay), while international and local non-governmental organizations provided urgent assistance and humanitarian response (Center for Disaster Philanthropy; *Bond*). Official estimates suggested that 30 percent of the existing building stock (more than 230,000 buildings) would have to be demolished. The Turkish government's announcements included the construction of housing, schools, and hospitals in the affected area within a year, as well as the strengthening of existing damaged properties and the improvement of infrastructures such as roads and bridges (Elgendi). In addition, the Turkish Enterprise and Business Confederation and Business for Goals, members of the OCHA-UNDP Connecting Business Initiative (CBI), activated more than 54,000 Turkish businesses to support the affected areas with financial contributions, primary equipment, and logistics services (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Presidency of Strategy and Budget 8-11; Türkonfed).

In the aftermath of the earthquakes, the use of social media has played a vital role, especially in helping people communicate to share information and provide material and moral support to affected groups (Palen et al. 467; Amiresmaili et al. 1; Maghsoudi and Moshtari 107). Various examples of individuals raising public awareness through social media postings, sharing addresses of those trapped under debris and those seeking help, disseminating information about the needs, collecting aid, organizing volunteers, and coordinating efforts underlined the active and rapid role of social media. Many foundations, organizations, and associations supported the disaster victims such as the Turkish Red Crescent, Turkish Youth Foundation (TÜGVA), İHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, Association for Women and Democracy (KADEM), Search and Rescue Association (AKUT), Anatolian

People and Peace Platform (AHBAP) and many more alongside numerous artists, celebrities, and various social media users took part in social media communication after the earthquake. These individuals and organizations made contributions by sharing information, gathering aid, and orchestrating relief efforts through social media platforms (Anadolu Agency).

Communication in times of crisis

Due to the advanced development of mobile technologies, social media is widely used for crisis communication during disasters (Wang and Zhuang 1145) as it offers the opportunity to communicate accurate information quickly and publicly (Malecki et al. 702). It serves as a crucial communication and information-sharing platform during natural disasters, enabling real-time updates on incident details, damage severity, and necessary warnings. Its role extends beyond immediate response, facilitating ongoing relief efforts, resource coordination, and community support, highlighting its significant impact on disaster management and public awareness. Amiresmaili et al. (5-7) conducted a systematic review emphasizing four key aspects of social media's role in earthquake response: identification, information dissemination, requests for help, and storage/retrieval of information. The study highlights Twitter as a primary platform for sharing incident details and damage severity, using hashtags for efficient categorization. The initial focus on incident details and health-related topics transitions to relief efforts and requests for financial aid, medical items, and food over time. Social media plays a pivotal role in identifying and rescuing individuals, assessing medical and nutritional needs, providing incident details, issuing warnings, and soliciting assistance. Additionally, shared information can be stored for future crises, relief efforts, mapping affected areas, and developing emergency response systems. Kemavuthanon and Uchida (199) explore Twitter's role during disasters, highlighting its critical function in disseminating crucial information illustrated through specific content during the Osaka North Earthquake in 2018. Campbell (131) analysed the crisis communication strategies of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) post-Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant disaster, critiquing TEPCO's initial portrayal, downplaying risks, and prioritizing financial reputation. The study underscores the importance of situational crisis communication theory and raises questions about media's role in shaping public trust.

Lovari and Bowen (4-5) investigated government officials' disaster response strategies, and underlined the significant role of social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, in disseminating information during flood disasters. The study recommends training programs, content management guidelines, and ethical considerations to prevent panic and maintain trust. Boas et al. (7-8) challenge the perception of social media as a primary information source during disasters, asserting the trustworthiness of official government information. The study, conducted in China, emphasizes the context-dependent nature of social media's role, with official information more valued, especially in China's top-down command and control structure. The research underscores the importance of understanding the context and citizens' perception of government responsibility in assessing the role of social media during disasters.

In response to the extraordinary situation in the aftermath of the earthquakes in Türkiye, there was a significant increase in information dissemination and intense sharing activities on social media platforms, almost all of which focused primarily on earthquake-related content. Amidst this chaotic environment, communication, coordination of aid efforts, and the exchange of informational content have been impeded by the proliferation of disinformation generated with a specific agenda. Disinformation is defined as information that is false or misleading and is spread deliberately (Muhammed and Mathew 271). Particularly on Twitter, the dissemination of such content has contributed to the widespread of disinformation and the peak of confusion. The February 6 earthquakes in Türkiye serve as a critical backdrop to this research due to the inherent challenges posed by a natural disaster. During such events, effective crisis communication becomes paramount in managing public perception, disseminating accurate information, and mitigating the spread of disinformation. The problem lies in understanding how major Turkish government offices navigated the complexities of crisis communication on social media platforms during this specific earthquake, declared as the *disaster of the century* (Anadolu Agency). The potential issues include the rapid dissemination of inaccurate information, the influence of disinformation on public opinion, and the overall effectiveness of government communication strategies in the digital age.

Addressing these challenges is crucial not only for improving the specific response to the February 6 earthquakes but also for developing more robust crisis communication protocols that can be applied to future events. Moreover, the research aims to contribute valuable insights to the broader field of public diplomacy, shedding light on the interplay between government communication, social media, and public perception in times of crisis. Ultimately, the study aspires to offer recommendations for optimizing crisis communication strategies for Turkish government offices and similar entities facing analogous challenges globally.

According to Sandre (27), digital diplomacy is merely a tool employed through social networks such as Twitter and Facebook to activate certain e-diplomacy programs. Ovalı (27-28) emphasizes that digital diplomacy represents a new dimension of 21st century diplomacy and in this context, Twitter should be seen as “a tool for conducting new diplomacy”. In this process, the term “twiplomacy” has entered the literature as a novel concept. Many countries, including the United States and Türkiye, have successfully managed this digital transformation process, even establishing themselves as brand leaders (Ercan 145; İris and Akdemir 52). Twiplomacy, according to the World Leader Power Ranking, highlights the most influential world leaders on Twitter, with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi leading, followed closely by U.S. President Joe Biden and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. These individuals are known for using Twitter as a direct communication channel (*Yeni Şafak*, “Cumhurbaşkanı”). In 2022, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, a key figure shaping the contours of digital diplomacy, also secured the title of European Leader. A study by Çağlayan and Pelenk Özel (243), analyzing the Twitter usage purposes of the top 10 most influential world leaders, reveals that leaders are active in various diplomatic areas such as public affairs, summits, humanitarian issues, economy, trade, environment, faith, and energy. However, they note a lack of consistency in managing their accounts in a holistic manner concerning interactive and personalized communication, expressing emotions, sharing information, transparent communication, and building networks.

Communication is a critical aspect of disaster management following a major natural disaster such as the February 6 earthquakes. However, it must be recognized that this communication process also has its drawbacks. In

such situations, the dissemination of unverified or false claims can occur rapidly, leading to heightened panic among the affected population. These untruthful assertions, whether intentional or unintentional, have the potential to sow confusion and fear, hindering effective disaster response and recovery efforts. Moreover, the spread of misinformation can erode public trust in government authorities, as individuals may become sceptical of the accuracy and reliability of official communications. Therefore, while communication is essential for keeping the public informed and facilitating coordinated responses, it is imperative to address and mitigate the negative consequences of misinformation to maintain public confidence in the wake of a natural disaster. Governments ought to employ efficacious measures and adopt a proactive stance to counteract the propagation of disinformation in the aftermath of natural disasters. As part of these efforts, the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communication established the Center for Combating Disinformation in August 2022 and published the “Earthquake Disinformation Bulletins” daily for a month after the earthquake. These bulletins dealt with false claims such as “No search and rescue efforts are being made in the earthquake region”, “The Red Crescent Regional Blood Center in Malatya was destroyed after the earthquake”, and “AFAD announced that an earthquake of 8.5 magnitude is expected in the evening hours”, “A 100 Lira blanket in Uşak after the earthquake became 250 Lira in a day” (Dezenformasyonla Mücadele Merkezi). The potential consequences of the false claims in the context of a post-earthquake disaster, if not adequately addressed by government communication efforts, unveil several adverse outcomes. These adverse outcomes include the creation of widespread panic and despair, hindering genuine relief operations by fostering a sense of abandonment within affected communities, reducing potential blood donors, intensifying shortages, impeding medical response capabilities, creating unwarranted fear, leading to unnecessary evacuations, and straining emergency services, and the initiating economic exploitation, exacerbating resource scarcity and negatively affecting vulnerable populations. In the absence of effective government communication efforts to counteract these false claims, the cumulative effect could lead to increased chaos, impede relief efforts, and erode public trust in official disaster response mechanisms.

Research Design

This research aims to comprehensively investigate the dynamics of crisis communication and the spread of disinformation on social media platforms by major Turkish government offices during the February 6 earthquakes in Türkiye. The study aims to gain a detailed understanding of how government entities utilize communication strategies in times of crisis, specifically focusing on the role of social media and its impact on public diplomacy. By delving into the communication practices employed by government offices, the research seeks to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in crisis communication strategies, contributing to the enhancement of overall digital public diplomacy efforts.

The research attempts to address the following questions:

- 1) What characterizes the Twitter usage patterns of political leaders and units?
- 2) What prevalent messaging strategies are employed by political leaders and units on Twitter?
- 3) Which countries constitute the geographical focus of foreign policy efforts of political leaders and units?

To address these inquiries, a dataset was compiled from 2,997 tweets originating from the Twitter accounts of key entities, including the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı), Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı), Republic of Türkiye Presidency (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı), the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), shared between the dates 11.01.2023-01.03.2023.

To derive meaningful insights from the dataset, frequency analyses were conducted on various parameters, including sharing day, time, type, commonly used words and tags, language, retweets, likes, and followers. Subsequently, a comprehensive examination of the tweets was undertaken to extract insights concerning frequently used words, tags, and hashtags. Lastly, an exploration of the interrelation among tweets was facilitated through an auto-coding process using hashtags, enabling an analysis of the relationships between the generated codes. All analyses were performed using the MaxQDA 2020 software to extract meaningful insights.

The main contribution of this study is to enrich the existing literature by providing a better understanding of public diplomacy practices in Türkiye. It also aims to provide valuable insights to inform the selection of topics for future research efforts.

In the initial segment of this research, an examination of the practices employed by political leaders and units employing Twitter as a social media platform within the framework of public diplomacy is conducted through a descriptive analysis methodology. The primary phase of the inquiry involves the identification of the preeminent social media tool in Turkish public diplomacy. In pursuit of this objective, an analysis of accounts expressly dedicated to digital diplomacy led to the inclusion of the following Twitter accounts in the sample: @RTErdogan, @tcbestepe, @MevlutCavusoglu, @TC_Disisleri, @iletisim, and @Tika_Turkiye. As posited by Öztemel, social media functions as a conduit for the rapid, extensive, and cost-free transmission of information. Notably, Twitter serves as a dynamic tool for news organizations, facilitating the expeditious sharing of real-time information during crises, emergencies, or natural disasters, as well as the dissemination of pertinent information to stakeholders of diverse institutions or organizations (Jansen et al. 2173). The ensuing sections present a descriptive profile analysis of each account managed by the political leaders and units under examination, accompanied by daily averages and more specific data about the preceding 30 days, as delineated in the subsequent tables.

Table 1
Twitter Analytics

User Name	Account	Creation Date	Follower	Following	Tweets	Likes	Penetration coefficient
T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı	@iletisim	24.09.2010	1.607.754	107	39.706	6.497	15.025
T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı	@TC_Disisleri	07.12.2009	1.692.277	264	25.225	520	6.410
T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı	@tcbestepe	26.03.2011	9.449.951	9	18.027	18	1.049.994
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	@RTErdogan	22.08.2009	20.134.032	105	11.169	127	191.752

Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu	@MevlutCavusoglu	28.01.2010	2.332.517	139	23.3947.210	16.780
TİKA	@Tika_Turkiye	17.08.2011	273.172	116	23.535 293	2.354

Source: Social Blade. Penetration coefficients are calculated by the researchers.

A descriptive analysis of Twitter metrics including account creation dates, follower and following counts, frequency of tweets and likes, along with influence coefficients managed by the leaders and units studied, is presented in Table 1. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan commands the highest followership at 20,134,032, while the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs boasts the preeminent number of tweets (264). The Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications holds the highest number of likes at 39,706, and Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu attains the most likes with 7,210. The Republic of Türkiye Presidency demonstrates the highest influence coefficient at 1,049,994. Noteworthy is the observation that each leader or unit, in this context, attains the highest value within a specific category (twitter).

Results

Figure 1 and Table 1 present descriptive findings concerning the Twitter usage patterns of leaders and political units.

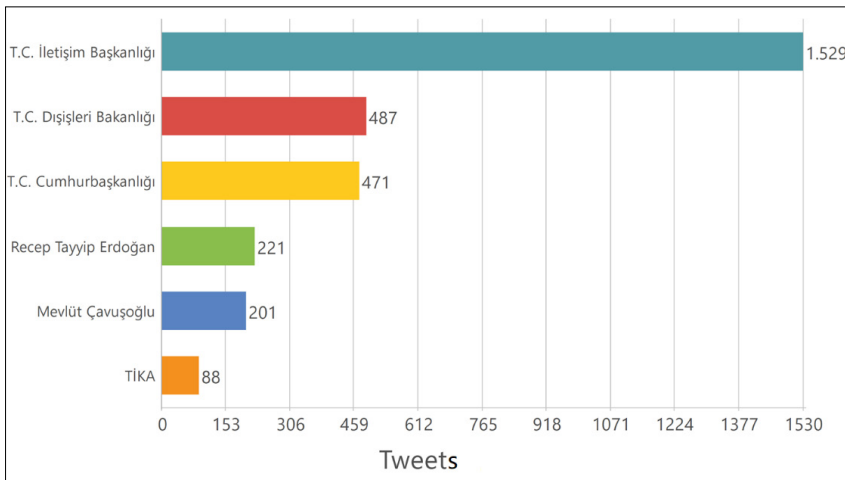


Figure 1. *Frequencies of Tweets According to Account Names*

Figure 2 presents the distribution of tweets among the sampled entities. The majority, constituting 51% were shared from the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, 16.2% from the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15.7% from the Republic of Türkiye Presidency, 7.4% from the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 6.7% from the Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşođlu and 2.9% from TİKA. This breakdown elucidates the proportional representation of each government entity within the dataset, facilitating a detailed understanding of their respective contributions to the overall Twitter discourse during the specified period.

Table 2

Frequency of Tweets

Accounts	Frequency	Percentage
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	20030881	56,71
T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı	9414422	26,65
Mevlüt Çavuşođlu	2317742	6,56
T.C. Dışışleri Bakanlığı	1689876	4,78
T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı	1594012	4,51
TİKA	272772	0,77
Total	35319705	100,00

In the realm of social media following within the context of the Republic of Türkiye (R.T.), Recep Tayyip Erdoğan demonstrates a leading digital presence with the highest number of followers at 20,030,881. Following Erdoğan, the official R.T. Presidency account maintains a substantial following of 9,414,422. Mevlüt Çavuşođlu's account, with 2,317,742 followers, holds a notable position, followed by the R.T. Ministry of Foreign Affairs with 1,689,876 followers, the R.T. Directorate of Communications with 1,594,012 followers, and TİKA with 272,772 followers.

However, a discerning analysis of the data presented in Figure 1 and Table 2 reveals a lack of direct proportionality between follower count and tweet frequency. Notably, the account with the highest number of followers does not consistently align with the account generating the highest volume of tweets. Specifically, while Recep Tayyip Erdoğan commands the greatest number of

followers, his tweet contribution constitutes only 7.4% of the overall tweets. In contrast, the Presidency of T.R. accounts for 4.51% of the aggregate followers, revealing a lack of congruence between follower count and tweet dissemination. Remarkably, the Directorate of Communications emerges as a distinctive outlier by contributing to 51% of the total tweet volume, underscoring a notable incongruity in the social media engagement patterns across these accounts.

Upon classifying social media engagements on their types, as shown in Table 3, a predominant proportion are retweets, constituting 55.7% of the total, whereas the tweet category encompasses 38.9%. Conversely, the reply type, recognized as a pivotal feature of digital communication facilitating dialogic interactions, manifests at a notably diminished percentage, accounting for only 5.4% of the overall tweets.

Table 3
Social Media Engagement Types

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Retweet	1670	55,72
Tweet	1166	38,91
Response	161	5,37
Total	2997	100,00

Retweeting predominates within the landscape of Twitter activity, particularly evident in the official accounts associated with the Republic of Türkiye. Notably, the Directorate of Communications exhibits the highest incidence of retweets, constituting 64.2% of its overall tweet composition. The R.T. Ministry of Foreign Affairs follows suit with a substantial retweet rate of 19.2%, while the R.T. Presidency engages in retweeting at a noteworthy rate of 13.1%. Conversely, accounts affiliated with Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and TİKA display markedly lower retweet rates, standing at 1.8%, 0.8%, and 0.8%, respectively.

The propensity to share tweets varies significantly among these organizations. Predominantly, the R.T. Directorate of Communications spearheads this domain, accounting for 33.6% of all tweets shared, while the R.T. Presidency, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, R.T. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan closely trail one another with sharing rates ranging from 13.8% to 17.6%. TİKA has a very low share with 0.8%.

In terms of responsiveness to tweets, the Republic of Türkiye, as embodied by the Directorate of Communications, emerges as the most proactive participant, constituting 40.4% of all responses. In stark contrast, the R.T. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and TİKA exhibit substantially lower response rates at 0.6% and 1.2%, respectively. The R.T. Presidency and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan contribute meaningfully to dialogic communication, accounting for 29.2% and 28.6% of responses, respectively.

An examination of language utilization reveals a dominance of Turkish, comprising 92.83% of the linguistic content in the posts, with English constituting a comparatively minor proportion at 5.27%. Many tweets (88.6%) assume the form of retweets, with only 11.4% originating as original tweets. Remarkably, no responses were tendered in English. Among English tweets, the Republic of Türkiye operationalized through the Directorate of Communications, is responsible for 86.7% of the dissemination.

The temporal dynamics of tweet activity unveil a continuous 24/7 pattern, with Monday accounting for the highest share at 20.9%. Furthermore, the timeframe between 15:00-15:59 emerges as the most popular period for tweet dissemination. The distribution of posts across the remaining days of the week is as follows: Tuesday (16.9%), Wednesday (14.2%), Thursday (12.8%), Friday (16.5%), Saturday (12.5%), and Sunday (6.2%).

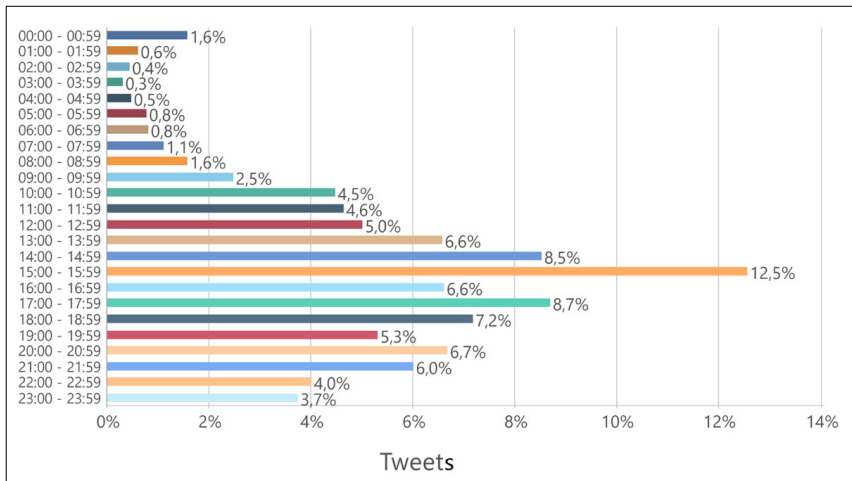


Figure 2. *Social Media Engagement Rates by Time Periods*

By the data presented in Figure 2, a consistent pattern of tweet dissemination is discerned, with no discernible temporal gap in sharing activities. Notwithstanding this continuity, the time span characterized by the least frequent shares corresponds to the interval between 01:00 and 07:59. Account proprietors possess a spectrum of tools at their disposal for social media post management. As indicated in Table 4, iPhone devices are the preeminent platform for sharing. Specifically, the R.T. Directorate of Communications adeptly employs both iPhone and Twitter Web App for effective management. Conversely, the R.T. Ministry of Foreign Affairs relies on the Twitter Web App and TweetDeck applications. The R.T. Presidency, in managing its account, leverages the iPhone in conjunction with Twitter Media Studio, while Recep Tayyip Erdoğan exhibits a preference for TweetDeck and Twitter Media Studio applications. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu employs iPhone, Twitter Media Studio, and Twitter Ads applications, whereas TİKA utilizes iPhone, Android, and Twitter Web App applications.

Table 4
Resource Preferences in Account Management

User Name	Twitter for iPhone	Twitter Web App	Tweet-Deck	Twitter Media Studio	TweetDeck Web App	Twitter for Android	Twitter Ads
T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı	1052	475	--	2	--	--	--
T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı	1	94	315	2	75	--	--
T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı	416	--	--	55	--	--	--
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	--	--	142	79	--	--	--
Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu	146	--	--	54	--	--	1
TİKA	29	28	--	--	--	31	--

The utilization of the '#' symbol on Twitter serves the purpose of appending keywords to an index, thereby facilitating streamlined tracking mechanisms. Within the purview of the scrutinized Twitter accounts, a total of 945

hashtags were identified. Preeminent among these hashtags in terms of frequency were #earthquake (#deprem), accounting for 16.72% of instances, and #alive (#canlı), which constituted 15.87% of the total occurrences.

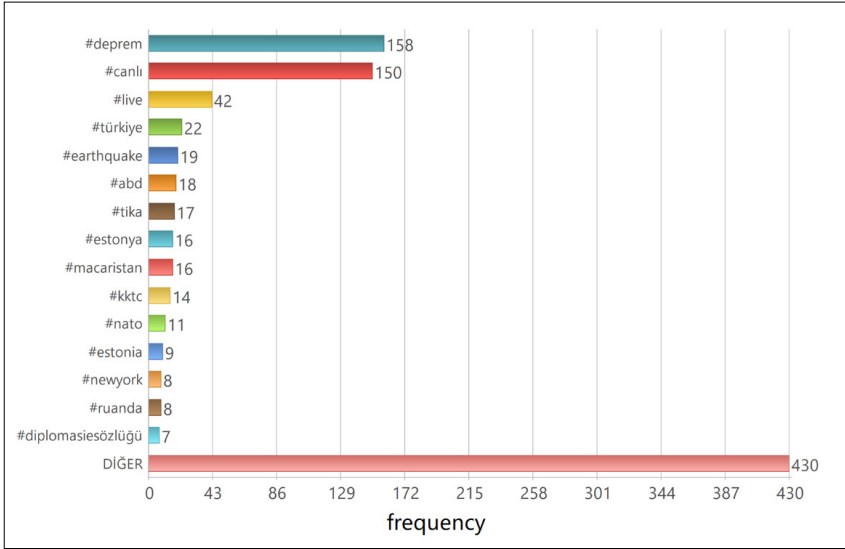


Figure 3. *Hashtags*

The prevalence of hashtags exhibits variability across distinct Twitter accounts. Specifically, the R.T. Directorate of Communications prominently features #earthquake at a rate of 41.6%, while the R.T. Ministry of Foreign Affairs favors the same hashtag with a prevalence of 20%. In contrast, the R.T. Presidency predominantly uses the hashtag #alive, which accounts for 52.1% of hashtag usage. Notably, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan singularly utilizes #gsbyurtsatcamp in 100% of instances, Mevlüt Çavuşođlu predominantly incorporates #alive with a frequency of 9.4%, and TİKA consistently deploys #tika at a rate of 26.2%.

In the context of mentions on Twitter, where individuals are specifically addressed and tagged, the “@” symbol is used, taking advantage of Twitter’s interactive feature known as the mention application. The most frequently referenced accounts in tweets include @RTErdogan (871), @AFADBaskanlik (173), trthabercanli (173), @fahrettinaltun (159), AACanli (98), MevlutCavusoglu (90), tcbestepe (82), @Kizilay (77), @

associated concepts, governmental entities, and their constituent units, as well as endeavors related to aid provision and rescue operations within the earthquake-affected regions. It is noteworthy that Mister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's account exhibits a notable incorporation of English words. Table 5 highlights the thematic content in each account by providing a list of the 25 most frequently used words.

Table 5
Word Analysis of Examined Accounts

T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı	T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı	T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu	TİKA
Cumhurbaşkanımız 540	Yardım 175	Cumhurbaşkanı 250	Biz 36	Dışişleri 65	Tika 61
Deprem 354	Ülkemizde 125	Deprem 140	Türkiye 34	Bakanı 56	Başkanı 58
Açıklama 174	Deprem 118	Erdoğan 134	Ülkemize 30	Basın 47	Sn 55
Vatandaşımız 157	Bakanı 95	Açıklama 79	Deprem 27	Toplantısı 35	Ziyaret 29
Bakanı 153	Büyükelçi 95	Bulundu 79	Bölgesi 25	Minister 34	Turizm 16
Kahramanmaraş 125	Dışişleri 93	Bakanı 73	Açıklama 23	Ortak 31	Beraberindeki 15
Türkiye 112	Felaketi 70	Telefon 70	Açılış 23	Teşekkür 31	Heyet 15
Başkanı 111	Bakan 66	İletti 54	Bugün 23	Ettik 28	Kültür 15
Afad 101	Ziyaret 66	Başkanı 52	Yeni 23	Press 24	Tarafından 13
Devlet 97	Gelen 62	Dileklerini 49	TR 23	Destek 22	Bakan 12
Kurtarma 96	Sayın 56	Yapıyor 36	Basın 21	Dayanışma 20	Eğitim 12
Dezenformasyon 84	Arama 50	Geçmiş 35	Hayırlı 21	Açıklama 18	Dr 11
Etkilenen 78	Kurtarma 48	Olsun 34	Olsun 18	İşbirliği 18	Açıldı 9

Basın 77	Ekipleri 43	Arayarak 31	Teşekkürler 17	Meeting 17	Birlikte 9
Hatay 77	Ekrem 42	Kahramanmaraş 28	İnşallah 14	Genel 16	İş 9
Devam 71	Yasin 42	Genel 27	Töreni 14	Türkiye 16	Bulunan 8
Erdoğan 69	Dayanışma 38	Arama 26	Muğla 13	Antalya 15	Büyükelçisi 8
Yapıyor 67	Destek 39	Başbakanı 26	Büyük 12	President 15	Desteği 8
Arama 62	Bugün 35	Devlet 25	Cumhurbaşkanı 12	Deprem 11	Genel 8
Genel 54	Cumhurbaşkanı 32	Hayatını 25	Çok 12	Economy 10	Programı 8
Bulunuyor 51	Ortak 31	Kurtarma 24	İlk 12	Stratejik 10	Yardımcımız 8
Büyük 50	Meydana 30	Türkiye 23	Milyon 12	TR 10	Devam 7
Dağıtım 50	Yaşanan 29	Açılış 22	Birlikte 11	Ağırladık 9	Katıldığı 7
Noktalarımız 50	Yurtdışından 29	Cumhurbaşkanlığı 21	Milyar 11	Başkanı 9	Temin 7
Son 49	Taziye 26	Taziyelerini 21	Toplantısı 11	Bölgesel 9	Türk 7

The tweet data underwent automated coding through the application of hashtags, and subsequently, an analysis was conducted on the associations among the codes. Figure 5 depicts the code co-occurrence map utilized for the analysis of relationships. The proximity of codes co-assigned in the figure, coupled with the overlay of codes, serves as an indicator of the semantic proximity among the expressions used in the tweets. Code co-occurrence analysis involves examining the simultaneous presence or occurrence of different codes, categories, or themes within a dataset. This analysis provides insights into the relationships, connections, or associations between the identified codes. When codes co-occur frequently, it suggests a thematic or conceptual link between them. On the other hand, if certain codes consistently appear together, it may indicate a pattern of co-expression or a common context in which those codes are used.

In the context of social media or textual data, code co-occurrence analysis can reveal underlying patterns of communication, recurring themes, or relationships between topics. It helps researchers understand how certain

concepts or ideas are interconnected and how they manifest together in the analysed content. This type of analysis is particularly valuable for uncovering implicit relationships and exploring the structure of information within a dataset.

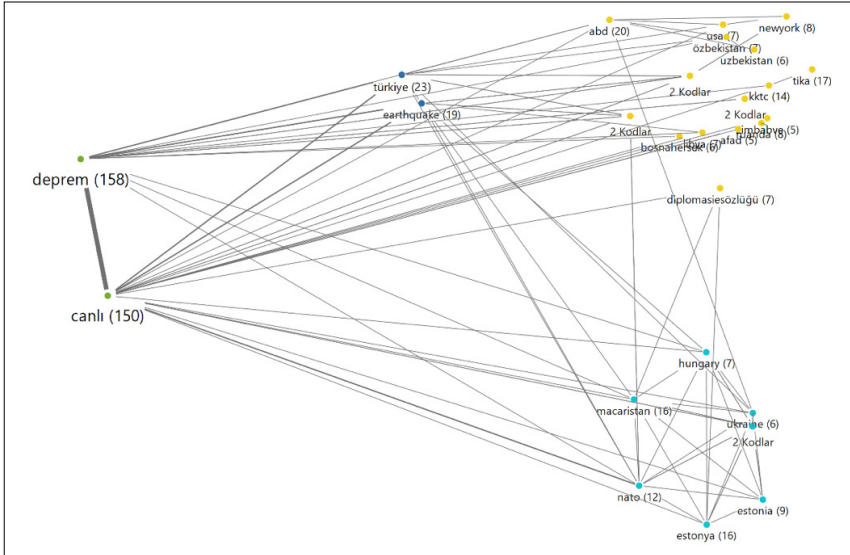


Figure 5. Code Co-occurrence Map of Autocoded Hashtags

The robust co-occurrence relationship between the hashtags “alive” and “earthquake” in the coding map reveals a compelling thematic convergence within the analysed dataset. This correlation suggests a notable intersection between discussions related to survivors (“alive”) of the disaster (“earthquake”), prompting a closer examination of the contextual dynamics shaping this association. This could encompass real-time updates on rescue operations, personal stories of resilience in the aftermath of earthquakes, or conversations surrounding the human impact and response to the earthquake.

The tweet data exhibits a categorization into distinct clusters, with an analytical focus on four specific clusters. The delineation of clusters is visually represented by distinctive colors (green, blue, yellow, turquoise), and the interconnections between these clusters, represented by varying line thickness (thin, thick), elucidate the relationships among them. The font size and line width employed in the visualization correspondingly

reflect the frequency of occurrence for the respective codes. Notably, the largest clusters, comprising 158 instances, pertain to the thematic content of “earthquake,” while the “live” cluster, denoting live broadcasts, closely follows with a frequency of 150 instances.

Within the second cluster, a thematic association is established between “earthquake” and “Türkiye” (Turkey). The third cluster encompasses a diverse range of codes, including “USA”, “New York”, “TİKA”, “TRNC”, “Uzbekistan”, “tekmilletikidevlet”, “türkiyetekyürek”, “Zimbabwe”, “Rwanda”, “AFAD”, “Libya”, “Bosnia and Herzegovina,” and “dictionary of diplomacy.” The co-occurrence of these codes within the third cluster signifies their semantic proximity. In the fourth cluster, the inclusion of codes such as “Hungary”, “Ukraine”, “Estonia”, and “NATO” indicates a thematic association to specific geographical entities.

An analysis of the connections between codes reveals that the most significant intersections occur between the “earthquake,” “live,” and “Türkiye” codes. This observation underscores the interconnectedness and thematic alignment among these codes. Figure 6 illustrates the countries occupying a geographical focal point within the foreign policy considerations of leaders and political entities.

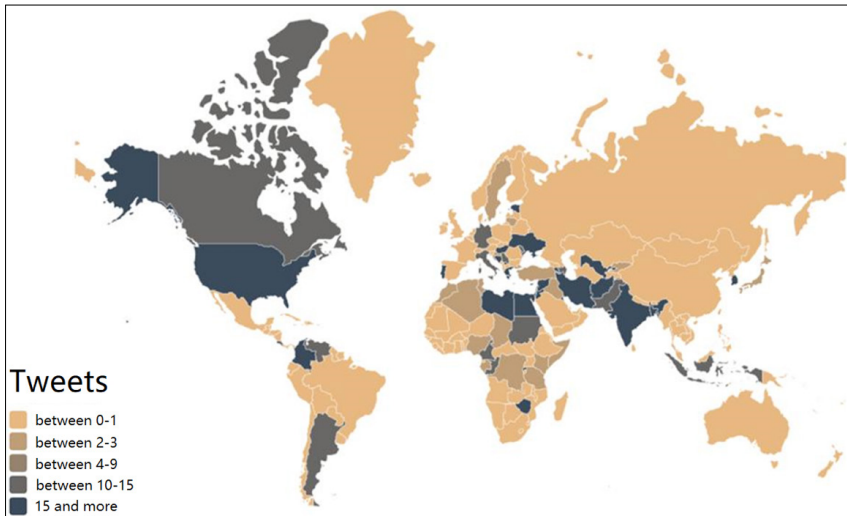


Figure 6. *Distribution of Geographic Focus in Tweets*

The analysis of Twitter diplomacy practices, focusing on messages disseminated by key political figures, presidencies, and ministries engaged in public diplomacy in Türkiye, has revealed noteworthy patterns and insights. Within the dataset encompassing 65 countries as subjects of foreign policy discussions, heightened attention is drawn to specific nations, namely the USA, Hungary, TRNC, Uzbekistan, Estonia, Rwanda, Libya, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armenia, Egypt, Ukraine, and Jordan, due to their marked thematic density. The factors contributing to this concentration are multifaceted, encompassing strategic relations, Türkiye's acknowledged role in pivotal regions, economic cooperation, trade relations, geopolitical positioning, commitment to stability against security concerns, and historical and cultural ties.

Conclusion

This comprehensive research on the dynamics of crisis communication and disinformation spread on social media platforms during the February 6 earthquakes in Türkiye sheds light on the effective strategies employed by major Turkish government offices. The study focused on the Twitter usage patterns, messaging strategies, and geographical focal points of key political leaders and units, contributing valuable insights to the realm of digital public diplomacy.

The success of the government's communication efforts is evident in the strategic utilization of Twitter as a dynamic tool for disseminating real-time information during crises. The analysis of Twitter metrics, engagement types, and language utilization highlights the government's proactive and responsive approach to crisis communication. Notably, the R.T. Directorate of Communications emerged as a distinctive outlier, demonstrating a significant impact by contributing to 51% of the total tweet volume. Additionally, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, commanding the highest Twitter followership at 20,134,032, emerges as the most influential actor. However, this impact goes beyond the number of followers to include active engagement, as exemplified by the R.T. Directorate of Communications' adept utilization of digital diplomacy tools. A detailed examination of retweets, tweets, and replies across sampled accounts underscores the R.T. Directorate of Communications as the most prolific in retweeting, tweeting, and responding. Notably, the R.T. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and TİKA

exhibit limited activity in responding, suggesting a prevalent top-down communication approach in digital diplomacy.

A significant finding is the prevalence of retweets surpassing tweets, indicating differentiated usage strategies among the examined accounts. The study notes a dearth of interactive communication with the public, signalling a persistence of one-way, top-down political communication within the digital realm. The occurrence of earthquakes during the data collection period significantly shaped the thematic content of tweets, with the earthquake dominating discussions and prompting heightened focus on related topics, including aid and rescue efforts.

Hashtag auto-coding analysis reveals distinct clusters, with the most prominent being earthquake and live broadcasts. Geographical and foreign policy-focused clusters further underscore the significance of specific nations in the discourse. Despite contributing insights to the digital diplomacy literature, it is imperative to acknowledge the study's limitations, particularly the confined scope of the sampled accounts and the descriptive nature of the analysis. Future investigations should explore the content structures of posts in greater depth within the evolving landscape of digital diplomacy concepts.

The study also revealed a lack of direct proportionality between follower count and tweet frequency, emphasizing that the account with the highest number of followers does not consistently align with the account generating the highest volume of tweets. This nuanced understanding challenges conventional assumptions about the correlation between digital presence and engagement on social media platforms.

Furthermore, the analysis of social media engagement types, language utilization, and temporal dynamics showcased the government's adeptness in leveraging retweets for information dissemination and maintaining a continuous 24/7 pattern of tweet activity. The use of hashtags and mentions demonstrated a keen awareness of social media functionalities for effective communication and engagement with the public. The thematic analysis of the most frequently used words provided insights into the government's focus on the earthquake, aid provision, and rescue operations. The co-occurrence analysis of hashtags revealed a compelling thematic convergence,

particularly between discussions related to survivors and the earthquake. In terms of foreign policy discussions, the research highlighted specific nations that received heightened attention in the tweets, showcasing Türkiye's strategic considerations and interests. The distribution of geographic focus in tweets illustrated the multifaceted factors contributing to the concentration of attention on specific countries.

Overall, this research contributes significantly to the enhancement of our understanding of Turkish public diplomacy practices and crisis communication strategies. The success of the government's communication efforts, as evidenced by the effective use of social media platforms, underscores the importance of digital public diplomacy in the contemporary landscape. The findings provide a valuable foundation for future research endeavours and offer practical insights for governments and organizations navigating crisis communication on social media.

Contribution Rate Statement

The authors' contribution rates in this study are equal.

Conflict of Interest Statement

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

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Zor Zamanlarda Hakikati Koruma: 6 Şubat 2023 Depremleri Sırasında Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Hükümetinin Stratejik Twitter Kullanımı*

Sibel Hoştut**

İsmail Aışad Güdeklı***

Fırat Güzeldağ****

Öz

Bu çalışma, kriz iletişimi, kamu diplomasisi ve sosyal medya etkisi konularını ele alarak 6 Şubat 2023 tarihinde Türkiye’de gerçekleşen deprem sürecine odaklanmaktadır. Çalışmada, doğru bilgi yayılmasının, kamu güveninin oluşturulmasının ve dezenformasyonun önlenmesinin kritik rollerini vurgulanmaktadır. Özellikle Türkiye Cumhuriyeti hükümetinin önemli kurumlarının deneyimlerine odaklanan araştırma, kriz iletişimi, dijital diplomasi ve dezenformasyonla mücadelenin birbirine bağı olduğunu, dijital çağda stratejik entegrasyonu gerektirdiğini savunmaktadır. Altı hükümet Twitter hesabından alınan 2.997 tweetten oluşan bir veri kümesinin kullanıldığı analiz, MAXQDA 2020’yi kullanarak kriz iletişimindeki güçlü yönleri, zayıf yönleri ve iyileştirilecek alanları tespit ederek Türk kamu diplomasisi uygulamalarının anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmakta ve gelecekteki araştırmalara

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** Doç. Dr., Akdeniz Üniversitesi, Halkla İlişkiler ve Tanıtım Bölümü – Antalya/Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0002-5372-1499
shostut@akdeniz.edu.tr

*** Doç. Dr., Akdeniz Üniversitesi, Halkla İlişkiler ve Tanıtım Bölümü – Antalya/Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0002-6599-8452
gudekli@akdeniz.edu.tr

**** Doktora Öğrencisi, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü – Ankara/Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0001-9214-6506
firat.guzeldag@gmail.com

yol göstermektedir. Araştırma, önde gelen devlet kurumlarının kullandığı etkili stratejileri ortaya çıkararak, takipçi sayısı ile tweet sıklığı arasındaki detaylı ilişkiyi vurgulayarak ve sosyal medyayı kriz anlarında takip etme konusunda pratik içgörüler sunarak sona ermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Kriz iletişimi, dezenformasyon, kamu diplomasisi, sosyal medya, deprem, Türkiye.

Защита правды в трудные времена: исследование стратегического использования Twitter правительством Турецкой Республики во время землетрясений 6 февраля 2023 года^{*}

Сибель Хоштут^{**}
Исмаил Айшад Гюдекли^{***}
Фырат Гюзельдаг^{****}

Аннотация

В данном исследовании основное внимание уделяется землетрясению, произошедшему в Турции 6 февраля 2023 года, и рассматриваются аспекты кризисной коммуникации, публичной дипломатии и воздействия социальных сетей. В работе акцентируется важнейшая роль точного распространения информации, укрепления общественного доверия и предотвращения дезинформации. Сфокусировав внимание на опыте ведущих институтов правительства Турецкой Республики, исследование утверждает, что кризисная коммуникация, цифровая дипломатия и борьба с дезинформацией тесно взаимосвязаны и требуют стратегической интеграции в эпоху цифровых технологий. С использованием набора данных из 2997 твитов, поступивших из шести правительственных аккаунтов в Твиттере,

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^{**} Доц., Университет Акдениз, факультет связей с общественностью и рекламы – Анталия/Турция
ORCID: 0000-0002-5372-1499
shostut@akdeniz.edu.tr

^{***} Доц., Университет Акдениз, факультет связей с общественностью и рекламы – Анталия/Турция
ORCID: 0000-0002-6599-8452
gudekli@akdeniz.edu.tr

^{****} Аспирант, Университет Хаджи Байрам Вели, Анкара, кафедра международных отношений – Анкара/Турция
ORCID: 0000-0001-9214-6506
firat.guzeldag@gmail.com

анализ способствует более глубокому пониманию практик публичной дипломатии в Турции и направляет будущие исследования, выявляя сильные и слабые стороны, а также области для улучшения кризисной коммуникации с применением MAXQDA 2020. В заключении исследования раскрываются эффективные стратегии, используемые ведущими правительственными учреждениями, акцентируется подробная взаимосвязь между числом подписчиков и частотой твитов, а также предлагаются практические идеи по мониторингу социальных сетей в период кризиса.

Ключевые слова

Кризисная коммуникация, дезинформация, публичная дипломатия, социальные сети, землетрясение, Турция.