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# EVALUATION OF UNIVERSITY'S TWEETS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Birol BÜYÜKDOĞAN\*

## Abstract

Public diplomacy is one of the significant elements of current diplomatic activities. Public diplomacy is an activity that should be taken into consideration not only by the state but also by various institutions, including NGOs. Universities have undertaken a significant role in terms of public diplomacy since they engage in foreign students. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the university twitter posts within the framework of public diplomacy. The population of the study is the universities engaging with foreign students in Türkiye. The sample of the study is the top five universities with the highest number of foreign students in Türkiye. This study is a qualitative cross-sectional study. The document analysis technique is applied as the data collection technique in the research. The tweets of universities are evaluated within the framework of soft powers of public diplomacy. In the study, 367 tweets are reviewed. It was determined that more than half of the posts in the study were shared by İstanbul and Anadolu University. While most of the university posts were in a form of tweets, some of them were shared as retweets. While half of the tweets have hashtags and photos, very few of which have videos, links, and mentions. The followers of all universities have interacted through comments, shares, and likes. According to the study, about one-third of the posts are about education. The posts about education are in first, or second place in all universities. The posts about science and publicity are in second, or third place in all universities. Although the subjects of culture, art, media, sports, and international students hold an undeniable role for public diplomacy in university posts, they are shared in a small number. In the study, it has been determined that approximately one third of the posts are on subjects other than public diplomacy. Most of the topics are about the academic and administrative announcements topic. Other topics are followed “celebration and commemoration”, “remembrance of old teacher”, “online patients’ examination”, and “recommendations of the chairman of the board of trustees”.

**Keywords:** public diplomacy, international public relation, international students, universities.

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\*Associate Professor, KTO Karatay University, birol.buyukdogan@karatay.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-9873-4317

## **Introduction**

With the advance development in communication technologies, the world is becoming more aware of each other. Especially with the development and spread of social networks, everyone has become a journalist and announced every event to the world instantly. In addition to informing, social networks also have the feature of creating an agenda through tagging. By creating an agenda, not only the citizens of a country, but the whole world can focus on a subject, which makes them come together on issues ranging from natural disasters to terrorist incidents and united as one heart.

Public diplomacy can be defined as the art of tempting the hearts and minds of the citizens and government of another country. Citizens and governments whose hearts and minds are won will have a more sympathetic view of the country. While this perspective primarily affects tourism, it will enable more positive decisions to be taken in parliaments or international organizations in favor of the country.

Education is also one of the tools of public diplomacy. Foreign students at a university can become voluntary ambassadors of the same country in the future. Therefore, a series of activities and arrangements should be planned for foreign students so as to form a positive impression on them.

## **Public Diplomacy and Soft Powers**

Although the concept of public diplomacy coined in the literature in the 1960s, many cultural events and propaganda activities of the states and the applications of the concept date back to earlier times (Sancar Demren, 2022, p. 111). Melissen (2005) is in the same opinion. To his point of view, it is possible to “see public diplomacy as old wine in new bottles”. Official communication to foreign societies is not a new phenomenon in international relations. Image development, propaganda, and activities, which we now call public diplomacy, are almost as old as diplomacy itself (p. 3).

Cull (2009) defines public diplomacy as short of war elements that an international actor uses to manage the international order. These international actors can be a state, a multinational corporation, a non-governmental organization, an international organization aiming to operate worldwide (p. 12). Public diplomacy is the promotion of national interests to shape, engage and influence people around the world (Dejerijan, 2003, p. 13). Civil society and human-to-human diplomacy are more prominent in today's public diplomacy. This structure is based on technological communication and place and country branding (Özkan, 2010, p. 69).

Public diplomacy is mainly based on the concept of "soft power". Power is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one wants (Nye J. S., 2021, p. 197). According to Nye, soft power is the ability of an international actor to obtain what it desires in the international arena with the influence of his culture in addition to its hard power namely military and economic power (Cull, 2009, pp. 14-15). A country can achieve the desired results in world politics by means of other countries that admire its values, imitate its example, and aspire to its prosperity and openness (Nye J. , 2005, p. 12). The actors of public diplomacy are non-governmental organizations, universities, opinion leaders, internal target audience, media and news agencies, private sector and global companies and supra-state organizations (Özkan, 2010, p. 86). According to Nye (2005), a country's soft power is basically based on three things. These are: 1. The culture of places where it is attractive to others, 2. Its political values when it lives up to them at home and abroad, and 3. Its foreign policies when it is accepted as legitimate (p. 12).

One of the public diplomacy factors is student exchange programs. Students who go to other countries by participating in these programs are influenced by the cultures of the host country. These students are expected to be more sympathetic towards the country they are studying when they become a senior manager or opinion leader in their home country in the future. US Secretary of State, Colin Powell was a politician who apprehended the importance of exchange programs. Powell had the following approach to foreign students studying at US Universities. "I cannot think of a more valuable asset for our country than the friendship of future world leaders educated in the USA" (Nye J. , 2005, p. 13).

Türkiye is one of the countries doing the honor's student exchange programs. According to YÖK data, 223,978 foreign students studied at 198 universities in the 2020-2021 academic year. The top five universities with the highest number of foreign students are Anadolu University with 11,663 students, Karabük University with 9,787 students, İstanbul University with 8,290 students, Bursa Uludağ University with 5,348 students, and İstanbul Aydın University with 5,204 students (YÖK, 2022, pp. 89-90).

## **Methodology**

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the university twitter posts within the framework of public diplomacy. For this purpose, the answers to the following questions will be looked for:

1. What features of Twitter do the universities use in their posts?
2. How often do the universities share a post?
3. Which components of public diplomacy do universities' Twitter posts refer to?

This study was conducted between 1<sup>st</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> December 2022. In the study, other social networks are excluded from the analysis, only Twitter posts are analyzed. The reason why Twitter was chosen as a sample is that it is more suitable for sharing ideas and announcements as a corporate. The population of the study is the universities with foreign students in Türkiye. The sample of the study is the top five universities with the highest number of foreign students in Türkiye. These universities are Anadolu University, Karabük University, İstanbul University, Bursa Uludağ University, and İstanbul Aydın University, respectively (YÖK, 2022, p. 90). Purposive sampling technique is applied in the study. Judgement sampling (purposive sampling) is the sampling made with the assumption that it will represent the universe according to various criteria (İslamoğlu & Alnıaçık, 2014, p. 194). Purposive sampling (also known as judgement selective or subjective sampling) is a sampling technique in which the researcher relies on his or her judgement when selecting population members to participate (BRM, 2022). SPSS-22 is used in the analysis of the study. Percentages, frequencies, and cross tables are obtained through SPSS-22.

This study is a qualitative cross-sectional study. The document analysis technique is employed as the data collection technique in the research. The tweets of universities are evaluated within the framework of soft powers of public diplomacy. These soft powers components are economy, culture, art, media, publicity, education, sport, and science. In the analysis, all the posts of the universities are included, and the posts other than public diplomacy are examined under the title the other topic.

## Finding and Discussion

In this study, tweets shared by universities are examined within the framework of public diplomacy. The posts of five universities, which are taken as a sample, for the month of December 2022 are examined. In the study, 367 tweets are evaluated. The distribution of these posts by universities is given in Table 1.

*Table 1: Distribution of Posts by Universities*

Universities	Frequency	Percentage (%)
İstanbul University	116	31.6%
Anadolu University	95	25.9%
İstanbul Aydın University	67	18.3%
Uludağ University	62	16.9%
Karabük University	27	7.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

According to table 1, 31.6% of the tweets are shared by İstanbul University, 25.9% by Anadolu University, 18.3% by İstanbul Aydın University, and 16.9% by Karabük University. While the highest number of tweets posted by İstanbul University, the lowest one posted by Karabük University. The distribution of tweets shared by universities according to their types is in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of Tweets by Type

Universities	Tweet	Retweet	Total
İstanbul University	83	33	116
	71.6%	28.4%	100.0%
Anadolu University	95	0	95
	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
İstanbul Aydın University	58	9	67
	86.6%	13.4%	100.0%
Uludağ University	57	5	62
	91.9%	81.1%	100.0%
Karabük University	27	0	27
	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>367</b>
	<b>87.2%</b>	<b>12.8%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

According to table 2, 87.2% of the posts are tweets, while 12.8% are retweets. 71.6% of the posts of İstanbul University are tweets and 28.4% are retweets. İstanbul university retweets are in the form of university subunits sharing their posts again. All the posts of Anadolu University and Karabük University are tweets. 86.6% of the posts of İstanbul Aydın University are tweets and 13.4% are retweets. All of İstanbul Aydın University retweets are in the form of re-sharing the posts of the chairman of the board of trustees. The distribution of attachments used in tweets is in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of Attachment of Tweets

Attachments	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Hashtag	360	48.0%
Photograph	336	44.8%
Video	32	4.2%
Link	15	2.0%
Mention	7	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

According to Table 3, 48.0% of tweets have hashtags, 44.8% photos, 4.2% videos, 2.0% links and 1% mentions. Almost all the tweets used hashtags, photos, or banners. The reactions of the followers to the posts are in Table 4.

Table 4: Distribution of Followers' Interaction to Shares

University	Comment	Shares	Like	Total Interaction	Viewing/ Ratio of Reaction to views
İstanbul University	305	1266	12114	13685	737462-1.86%
Anadolu University	1973	259	2659	4891	379446-1.29%
İstanbul Aydın Uni.	13	606	1592	2211	62273-3.55%
Uludağ University	15	120	1483	1618	79717-2.03%
Karabük University	4	14	443	461	33806-1.36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2310</b>	<b>2265</b>	<b>18291</b>	<b>22866</b>	<b>1292704-1.77%</b>

According to Table 4, the number of interactions given to the tweets of universities are İstanbul, Anadolu, İstanbul Aydın, Uludağ and Karabük universities, respectively. However, when the number of views of the tweets and the interactions are compared, the followers of İstanbul Aydın University react more to the posts. According to the viewing, the least interaction is detected in the followers of Karabük University. According to the general average, 1.77% of those who view the tweets give an interaction.

The most interaction in İstanbul University is 2969 interactions regarding the sharing of a graduate student starting to work in Aziz Sancar laboratory. The most interaction at Anadolu University is 1118 interactions for international students' new year messages. The most interaction in İstanbul Aydın University is 179 interactions with the recommendation of the chairman of the board of trustees to read a book. The most interaction at Uludağ University is 684 interactions for participation in the technofest event. The most interaction at Karabük University is 70 interactions for sharing photos from the campus. The distribution of the posts according to the subjects is in Table 5.



Table 5: Distribution of Shares by Topics

University	Culture	Art	Media	Publicity	Education	Sport	Science	International Students	Other	Total
İstanbul University	7 6.0%	23 19.8%	1 0.9%	11 9.5%	22 19.0%	0 0.0%	21 18.1%	0 0.0%	31 26.7%	116 100.0%
Anadolu University	6 6.3%	6 6.3%	4 4.2%	13 13.7%	33 34.7%	0 0.0%	3 3.2%	4 4.2%	26 27.4%	95 100.0%
İstanbul Aydın Uni.	0 0.0%	1 1.5%	0 0.0%	4 6.0%	32 47.8%	2 3.0%	5 7.5%	0 0.0%	23 34.3%	67 100.0%
Uludağ University	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 1.6%	8 12.9%	18 29.0%	0 0.0%	20 32.3%	0 0.0%	15 24.2%	62 100.0%
Karabük University	0 0.0%	4 14.8%	0 0.0%	1 3.7%	12 44.4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 7.4%	8 29.6%	27 100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b> <b>3.5%</b>	<b>34</b> <b>9.3%</b>	<b>6</b> <b>1.6%</b>	<b>37</b> <b>10.0%</b>	<b>117</b> <b>31.9%</b>	<b>2</b> <b>0.5%</b>	<b>49</b> <b>13.4%</b>	<b>6</b> <b>1.6%</b>	<b>103</b> <b>28.1%</b>	<b>367</b> <b>100.0%</b>

According to Table 5, 31.9% of the 367 tweets are in the first place with the education topic. Other topics are followed by 28.1%, science with 13.4%, publicity with 10.0%, art with 9.3%, culture with 3.5%, international students with 1.6%, media with 1.6% and sports with 0.5%. The tweets about education cover the first, or second place in all universities. The tweets about science and publicity are in second, or third place in all universities. Although the subjects of culture, art, media, sports, and international students are very important for public diplomacy in university posts, they are shared in a small number. The topics of the study comprise culture, art, media, promotion, education, sports, science, international students, and other topics.

Some tweets take place as culture topic like the book promotion, cultural collaborations, and nostalgia train posts in this study. For example, the Turkish maqam music album shared by Anadolu University on December 14 can be shown as an exemplary post under the title of culture. But the considering the number of posts of Uludağ, İstanbul Aydın and Karabük Universities on culture topic is seen at very low level in terms of public diplomacy.

Some tweets can be categorized under the art topic like concert, theatre, cinema films, student exhibition. The new year concert organized by Anadolu University and “hello winter concert” organized by Karabük University are evaluated as an important step in terms of art. In addition, movies and theater performances are seen among the art subjects of Anadolu University and Karabük University. For example, the “hello winter concert” shared by Karabük University on December 22 can be shown as an exemplary post for art. The fact that almost all the art tweets are shared by the İstanbul University shows its sensitivity towards art. But Twitter

posts of Uludağ and Karabük Universities on art topic is seen at very low level in terms of public diplomacy.

Some tweets can be regarded as media topic like radio, and e-journal. Among the analyzed universities, only Anadolu University has a radio broadcast. The posts of Anadolu University's radio broadcasts are significant tool of public diplomacy. At the same time, university journals are among the tools that shape university communication capacity while manipulating perception of its image. Bursa Uludağ University e-journal "Uludağ Postası" can be given as an example. However, the fact that Karabük and İstanbul Aydın Universities do not share anything about the media is not promising in terms of public diplomacy.

Some tweets are lined under the topic of publicity like photos from the campus, the university's success ranking in the world, the success of university faculty members around the world, student achievements, and collaborations with world universities. Except for Karabük University, all universities shared different ratios about publicity. The first example of the subject of publicity is Prof. Zinet Selmin Burak from the İstanbul University was elected to the board of directors of the World Water Council on 18 December. Another example is the awarding of Uludağ University students at the İstanbul Gastronomy Festival on 27 December. Another example is the collaboration of İstanbul Aydın University with the Sapienze University of Rome on 14 December. La Sapienza University is among the top list in the world ranking and has 7 Nobel Prize-winning professors. Apart from these, İstanbul, Anadolu and Karabük Universities contributed to their publicity by sharing photos from their campuses. Publicity post of İstanbul, Anadolu and Uludağ universities is sufficient, but the ones of İstanbul Aydın and Karabük Universities are insufficient.

Education is the most shared topic by universities with ratio of 32%. Educational topics include academic meetings organized by universities, courses for students, internship programs and scholarships. The first example for education subjects is the Borsa İstanbul Education Program organized by Anadolu University for students on 28 December. Another example is the Addiction Panel organized by Karabük University on 28 December. Another example is the National Internship Program announcement shared by İstanbul University on 29 December. Tweets on education are sufficient for all universities in terms of public diplomacy. The fire drill held by İstanbul Aydın University on December 26 sets a good example for education subjects.

Sports is the subject with the lowest ratio with 0.5%. In this title, only İstanbul Aydın University has two tweets compared to other universities. These are the sports tournament held for the disabled on 27 December and the first place among foundation universities with 17

medals in UNIF on 6 December. Although the subject of sports is another subtopic of public diplomacy, it is insufficient that only two tweets were shared by universities.

Science is the third most shared topic by universities with 13.4%. Topics which is under the title of science are projects such as projects supported by TÜBİTAK, technokent studies, accepted patents. Anadolu University's technocity center post on 28 December, İstanbul University's patent registration post on 30 December, Uludağ University's project promotion post on 30 December, and İstanbul Aydın University's post of the project on 30 December can be given as examples of science.

International students are the second but least shared topic. Only Anadolu and Karabük Universities shared post under this title. Anadolu University's video about the New Year's messages of international students on December 31 and the post of those who want to host international students on December 28 are examples in this regard. International students are the most important issue for universities in terms of public diplomacy. The scarcity of posts is assessed as negative in this respect. The other topics are in Table 6.

Table 6: Distribution of Other Topics

University	Celebration and Commemoration	Announcements	Remembrance of Old Teachers	Online Patient Examination	Recommendations of the Chairman of The Board of Trustees	Total
İstanbul University	3 9.4%	10 31.3%	15 46.9%	4 12.5%	0 0.0%	32 100.0%
Anadolu University	3 12.0%	22 88.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	25 100.0%
İstanbul Aydın University	7 30.4%	15 65.2%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 4.3%	23 100.0%
Uludağ University	1 6.7%	12 80.0%	2 13.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	15 100.0%
Karabük University	5 62.5%	3 37.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	8 100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b> <b>18.4%</b>	<b>62</b> <b>60.2%</b>	<b>17</b> <b>16.5%</b>	<b>4</b> <b>3.9%</b>	<b>1</b> <b>1.0%</b>	<b>103</b> <b>100.0%</b>

According to Table 5, there are 103 tweets on the other topic. 60.2% of the 103 tweets are in the first place with academic and administrative announcements topic. Other topics are followed “celebration and commemoration” with 18.4%, “remembrance of old teacher” with 16.5%, “online patients’ examination” with 3.4%, and “recommendations of the chairman of the board of trustees” with 1.0%. Celebrations and commemorations include posts about celebrating days such as New Year's Day and the day of disabled people, and commemorations such as Mehmet Akif Ersoy's death anniversary. All universities shared celebrations and

commemorations at different rates. Academic and administrative announcements include academic and administrative calendar issues such as exam dates, weekly events, building openings. It contains the most shared topic under the other title. Remembering the old teachers especially includes the sharing made by İstanbul University and which is an example of loyalty. Online patient examination was shared as a service announced by İstanbul University. The recommendation of the chairman of the board of trustees includes the advice of Mustafa Aydın, the chairman of the board of trustees of İstanbul Aydın University, on reading books.

## **Conclusion**

Public diplomacy very important factor of today's diplomatic activities. Public diplomacy is a sort of activity that should be considered not only by the state but also by many institutions, including NGOs. Universities play an undeniable role in the field of public diplomacy since they host foreign students. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the university twitter posts within the framework of public diplomacy. These universities are Anadolu University, Karabük University, İstanbul University, Bursa Uludağ University, and İstanbul Aydın University, respectively.

In this study, tweets shared by universities are analyzed within the framework of public diplomacy. The topics of the study ranges from culture, art, media, promotion, education, sports, science, international students to other topics. The posts of five universities, which are taken as a sample, for the month of December 2022 are examined. In the study, 367 tweets are evaluated. It was determined that more than half of the posts in the study were shared by İstanbul and Anadolu University. While most of the university posts were in a form of tweets, some of them were shared as retweets. While half of the tweets have hashtags and photos, very few of them have videos, links, and mentions. The followers of all universities interacted via comments, shares, and likes. However, when the number of views of the posts and the interactions are compared, the followers of İstanbul Aydın University react more to the posts.

The most interaction in İstanbul University is regarding the sharing of a graduate student who is employed in Aziz Sancar laboratory. The most interaction at Anadolu University is international students' new year messages. The most interaction in İstanbul Aydın University is recommendation of the chairman of the board of trustees to read a book. The most interaction at Uludağ University is technofest event. The most interaction at Karabük University is photos from the campus.

According to the study, about one-third of the posts are about education. The posts about education are in first, or second place in all universities. The posts about science and publicity

are in second, or third place in all universities. Even though the subjects of culture, art, media, sports, and international students are among the indispensable tools for public diplomacy in university posts, they are shared in a small number.

In the study, it has been determined that approximately one third of the shares are on subjects other than public diplomacy. Most of the other topics is about the academic and administrative announcements topic. Other topics are followed “celebration and commemoration”, “remembrance of old teacher”, “online patients’ examination”, and “recommendations of the chairman of the board of trustees”.

Aslan and Öztekin (2020) aimed to examine the effects of the workshops on foreign students participating in RTÜK workshops in terms of public diplomacy. Considering the data obtained through the study, it was determined that the foreign students participating in the workshop seized important information about the Republic of Türkiye thanks to different activities. It has been determined that the opinions of foreign students participating in the study about the Republic of Türkiye have changed in a positive way by 64% (Aslan & Öztekin, 2020, p. 1437).

Ozel (2021) aimed to figure out the thoughts of foreign students studying in Türkiye with the Erasmus+ exchange program about Türkiye in terms of public diplomacy. At the end of the study, it was revealed that the Erasmus+ program improves intercultural communication and mutual understanding, establishes long-term relationships, builds trust and peace, establishes collaborations, and prevents cultural conflicts by destroying prejudices (p. 963).

Sustarcic and Cheng (2022) conducted a study on secondary school students studying in exchange programs in the USA. At the end of this study, the participants stated that change provides personal development, enriches their life experiences, and expands their worldview. Changes in behavior such as apolitical activism among students have shown that graduates have become representatives of public diplomacy (p. 129)

According to the results of three different studies listed above, educational activities have profound contribution to public diplomacy. These contributions have been in the form of the change of students' worldviews, their development, and the formation of positive thoughts about the country they study.

Following the above research results, the following recommendations are listed. Universities are required to make at least three posts every day, regardless of weekdays or weekends. Universities need to share more on culture, art, and sports. It should be noted that each tweet shared by universities also serves public diplomacy. It should not be forgotten that each of the foreign students is a volunteer ambassador. For this purpose, activities should be

organized to introduce the culture, art, science, and touristic places of the country to foreign students.

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