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Digital Platforms as Instruments of Soft Power: A Sociological Analysis of International Relations in the Digital Age

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Abstract

The digitalization of international communication has transformed soft power operations, shifting influence from material resources toward strategic meaning management in digital spaces. This study examines how TRT World, Turkey's international broadcaster, utilizes digital platforms as instruments of soft power production and international image construction. Drawing on Nye's soft power concept, Bourdieu's symbolic capital framework, and Castells' network society theory, the study analyzes framing strategies and symbolic patterns in TRT World's digital content. Using purposive sampling, 50 content units were selected from Instagram (n=20), YouTube (n=15), and the official website (n=15), and subjected to qualitative content analysis across five categories: political framing, humanitarian framing, cultural framing, positive image construction, and international audience orientation. Findings reveal that political framing was dominant in 78% of all the units, supported by a humanitarian layer (62%) and a limited cultural dimension (26%). Positive image construction was observed in 46% of the segments, while an international audience orientation was observed in all units (100%); this points to consistent multi-platform communication strategy. The study concludes that TRT World's digital platforms operate as active symbolic spaces that reproduce international identity and transform influence dynamics in the global public sphere. On this basis, the study proposes a network-based model of symbolic power production.

Keywords

Digital Platforms, Soft Power, Symbolic Power, International Relations, TRT World

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