



## **Political Public Relations 2.0 and the Use of Twitter of Political Leaders in Turkey**

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### **Abstract**

Political public relations is a tool of transmission of messages for political parties to their voters. One of the conditions of symmetrical communication is feedback. Dialogical approach requires the change on policies according to public demand and aims manufacturing consent within two way concessions. Within public relations 2.0, the communication process between political sources and their target audience has been facilitated. This paper will be analyzing the effective usage of Twitter, by the political party leaders who have been represented in TBMM (Grand National Assembly of Turkey) and also Abdullah Gül; the president of the Republic of Turkey. Leaders' Twitter accounts will be followed between 1-29 February and will be examined in terms of messages for the media agenda, messages for the trend topics, and messages for replying to followers, retweets and the frequency of using twitter. According to the findings, the effective use of Twitter is provided only by two leaders, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and Selahattin Demirtaş. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan often uses Twitter effectively but he also has to follow people for dialogical communication. Abdullah Gül is a less effective Twitter user but with his number of followers, he's the most fancied leader. And finally, Devlet Bahçeli is the most unused of Twitter.

**Keywords:** Political Public Relations, Public Relations 2.0, Twitter, Dialogic Communication.



## **Introduction**

As a tool for transmission of messages for political parties to their voters, political public relations aim sustainability of political parties and their government. In political public relations, one of the conditions of symmetrical communication and dialogue is feedback and it becomes more important within the new communication technologies. In political public relations, dialogical approach analyzes the impact of policies conducted by politicians and political constitutions, on public opinion and according to public demand and expectation and it requires revision and change on policies. Within public relations 2.0, the distance between the source and the receiver has been getting shorter and the communication process between political constitutions, political leaders and their target audience has been facilitated.

This paper aims to explain the role of the effective usage of social media in political public relations, and to prove effective dialogue based communication process through Twitter. To this end, a literature review on political public relations, and public relations 2.0 will be studied. For discussing the effective usage of Twitter as a tool of dialogic communication, five political leaders' Twitter accounts will be analyzed. The accounts are chosen according to political parties who have been represented in TBMM (Grand National Assembly of Turkey); Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from Justice and Development Party (AKP), Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu from People's Republican Party (CHP), Devlet Bahçeli from Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Selahattin Demirtaş from Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and the president of the Republic of Turkey Abdullah Gül. According the results, the efficiently usage of Twitter and its suitability as a dialogical political public relations tool will be discussed.

## **The Importance of Dialogical Approach in Political Public Relations**

Political organization's public relations activities are all of the communication activities considering the mutual benefits for different target groups in order to create a positive and honest perception. According to Louw, the resultant 'PR-ization of politics' has brought the demagoguery underpinning the political process into the open (2005) In any society, political communication both expresses and sustains the institutions of governance, the polity itself (the political system) and the political culture reflected in the character of those institutions and the polity (Nimmo and Swanson, 1990) Within political public relations, political party



leaders understood their need for sustainable communication to their audiences. Sustaining communication is vital for sustaining political system and political institutions.

According to Kışlalı, “The loose of relations between governors and their target audiences, and the bureaucracy on these relationships, conduce the communication process’s interruption. (2007) As government becomes more complex and ubiquitous, the challenge of maintaining citizen involvement and ensuring that government is responsive to societal needs becomes more difficult. Elected officials often claim credit for their election on their ability to keep a finger on the pulse of constituents. However because of the sheer magnitude and complexity of the job, most of that responsibility falls government public relations specialists. (Cutlip, Center& Broom, 1994) In this bureaucratic process, the political parties’ self-description in the right way can be aided, and the frustration caused by the misunderstandings can be corrected by the usage of public relations techniques. Public relations methods and techniques are the most important part of the political communication process aiming to correct public perception of political parties and successful transmission of the desired image. According to Grunig, with the two-way asymmetrical model, practitioners conduct scientific research to determine how to persuade publics to behave in the ways their client organizations wish. With the two-way symmetrical model, practitioners use research and dialogue to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes and behaviors of both their organizations and publics. Symmetry in public relations really is about balancing the interests of organizations and publics, of balancing advocacy and accommodation. (2000) Without dialogue and change on policies, symmetrical communication could not be effective in political process for political parties and their leaders. Change following dialogue is the key instrument for the real symmetrical communication. Cutlip, Center and Broom also pointed that “successful government maintains responsive, mutual understanding based on two-way communication with citizens” (1994) Not for only governments, but for all the actors of political communication process, the two-way communication requires dialogue and listening.

Political public relations specialist analyzes the effect of policies, methods, and actions on public opinion, and according to findings regarding the public demand, desire and expectation, the political public relations actions must be altered. Political public relations aim for a positive identity image toward social responsibility and balancing public interests



and political party's sustainability (Oktay, 2002). In this sense, the analysis of the effects of policies driven by political public relations specialists and the alterations according the results openly indicates that communication process is two way. But a critical view on public relations, underlines the relationship between hegemony and two-way communication.

Symmetrical communication can be seen as an ongoing process rather than a one-off event. So too is hegemony by definition. Hegemony is maintained through a process of concessions to challenges at multiple points over time. (Roper, 2005) As Roper discusses, symmetrical communication provides two way concessions. Through concessions, organizations or constitutions manufacture consent of their audiences. And concessions are the key points for the sustainability of organizations and their businesses.

As Grunig pointed out “organizations get more of what they want when they give up some of they want”. (Grunig, 2000) Within symmetrical communication, organizations' self abandonment in some of their interests, returns as more benefit, more money and more prestige. Dialogue used as a tool for gaining more interest, needs rhetoric for building relationships. According to Corcoran, “in all of its manifestations- narratives, texts, “authorities”, and speech practices- we read and rewrite the “texture of social relationships”. (1990) And public relations 2.0 used by politicians, help for reading and rewriting of these texture of relationships. For relationship building and more success, politicians must be doing research for the creation of better policies.

Political public relations must be able to conduct research. Researching what messages work best with different voter profiles; and researching what messages trigger unintended or negative responses. Researching the opposition is another important dimension of politics. (Louw, 2005) Such information enables the practitioners for better understanding their target audiences. According the research process, message's creation for different audiences and construction of new policies also will be necessary.

### **Political Public Relations 2.0. and the Use of Twitter**

The explosive growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web has created a form of mass communication unlike any other. Today, the Internet is a household world and a global communications tool for millions of people.(Wilcox and Cameron, 2006) You have access to



all information that others make available from their systems throughout the Internet. (Holtz, 1999) In the mid to late 1990's, Brian Solis observed a shift in public relations, which he termed PR 2.0- in recognition of the impact that the web would have on public relations and how the communications industry would be forced to eventually connect with customers directly.(Solis& Breakenridge, 2009) The 2.0 world is not limited to Westerners with broadband Internet connections. Mobile phones, which are more widely accessible than the Internet, provide both indirect and direct points of entry. (Arsenault, 2009)

Public relations 2.0 is the realization that PR now provides an unprecedented opportunity not only to work with traditional journalists, but also to engage directly with a new set of accidental influencers. We can now talk with customers directly through social networks, wikis, micromedia communities, online forums, groups and blogs. (Solis& Breakenridge, 2009) Among all the communications tools available to public relations practitioners, online-communications are uniquely equipped to allow organizations and their constituents to engage in two-way communications. (Hallahan, 2006) Two way communication process comes with interactivity.

The key point of public relations 2.0 is interactivity. Web users are active because the Internet demands their constant feedback. Moreover, Web audiences are not mere observers they are participants. (Selnow, 2000) Social networking sites, email, instant messaging, chat rooms, discussion groups and blogs all permit interaction. And the dialogic approach seeks to develop relationships. The interactive nature of the internet makes it a potentially effective tool for relationship building through dialogic communication. (Coombs and Holladay, 2010) For all stakeholders, public relations 2.0 serve as a platform for dialogue. Political parties and politicians use it for their campaigns and message transfers. Using public relations 2.0 for the aims of political public relations can be defined as the political public relations 2.0.

PR 2.0 is the greatest means to provide different groups with the communication they need. Social media applications enable you to go directly to the consumer. (Breakenridge, 2008) Social media can be all sorts of different things and it can be produced in all sorts of different ways. Perhaps the best definition of social media, though, is content that has been created by its audience. (Comm, 2010) PR 2.0 provide to their consumers create their own content and



be a part of communication process, sometimes as a receiver sometimes as a sender through micro blogs like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and MySpace.

“Micromedia represent a significant change in how we create and share content online and it continues to rapidly evolve. It also challenging public relations professionals with a type of communication that is different from any other channel in how and when we communicate with people. Micromedia is transforming the dynamics and engagement for public relations. Twitter answers a simple question: “What are you doing?” It also shares the answers among family, friends, coworkers and those who chose to follow your updates”. (Solis& Breakenridge, 2009) The service was founded by programmers Evan Williams, Jack Dorsey and Biz Stone in July 2006. (Comm, 2010) Twitter is a slimmed down and portable version of a blog. Twitter allows people to post messages up to 140 characters long. They can even post messages using text messaging from a cell phone. Other people can follow your messages by subscribing your “feed”.(Coombs and Holladay, 2010)

In addition, Twitter is an important tool for research process. It will enable politicians to know their target audience’s perception of them and to see feedbacks. “These micro format tools can help companies track discussions related to their brand in real time. They can see these conversations are taking place without their support, advice or insight. Keywords such as #hashtags are a growing trend within the service. Hashtags enable users to call out specific topics. They are a community driven convention for adding context and metadata to tweets”. (Solis& Breakenridge, 2009)

One of the most enjoyable aspects of using Twitter is that you can do it spontaneously. Tweeting happens in real time, and it’s most effective when your followers online. (Comm, 2010) The spontaneous message posting is one of the most interesting reasons for following people. Voters are curious about any political leader’s life style, ideas and comments. Political leaders’ messages related with these subject areas can be regarded as a bridge for relationship building with their voters.

## **Methods**

To discuss the effective usage of Twitter as a tool of dialogic communication, five political leaders’ Twitter accounts will be analyzed. Political party leaders’ accounts who have been

represented in TBMM (Grand National Assembly of Turkey) and the president of the Republic of Turkey Abdullah Gül will be followed between the dates 1-29 February 2012. Most read four newspapers according to Basın İlan Kurumu (Zaman: 979.271, Posta: 465.326, Hürriyet: 417.190, Sabah: 352.815) will be examined between these dates for defining media agenda. The internet sites will be examined to find out their first five agenda headlines. Posta will not be examined as it does not have an online archive. According the results of the media agenda survey, the content of posts will be examined. The accounts will be examined in terms of media agenda related messages, hashtagged messages and the related trend topics, reply messages to followers, retweets, the frequency of twitter usage and the number of followings. According the results, the suitability of twitter as a dialogical public relations tool will be discussed

## Results

Table 1: Number of Following, Followers and Tweets (These numbers are based 3 March 2012)

Person	Number of Following	Number of Followers	Number of Tweets
Abdullah Gül	2	1.529.465	680
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	1	1.095.958	401
Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu	118	575.687	519
Devlet Bahçeli	0	258.953	640
Selahattin Demirtaş	506	40.422	626

According the table 1, the leader who has the most followers is Abdullah Gül. After Abdullah Gül, comes Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Devlet Bahçeli and Selahattin Demirtaş. According the number of tweets, Abdullah Gül is the leader who posts most tweets. After Abdullah Gül, Devlet Bahçeli is in the second place that tweets most. Selahattin Demirtaş, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan tweets less than the other two.

Number of followings is important because when leaders do not follow others, it means that twitter is used for one way communication, that is, only for giving information but not for listening, or any kind of dialogue and relationship building. According to table 1, only

Selahattin Demirtaş and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu use twitter for dialogue. And Selahattin Demirtaş aims more dialogue than Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. Abdullah Gül has two followings and these are Turkish Presidency and T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı. As it can be seen the accounts followed by Abdullah Gül are official accounts of the Turkish Presidency. According to the table 1, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also has one following account. He is following only Abdullah Gül.

Table 2: Politicians Uses of Twitter/ Frequency per one month (February 2012)

Person	Use of twitter/ Frequency
Abdullah Gül	1 day
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	13 days
Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu	17 days
Devlet Bahçeli	4 days
Selahattin Demirtaş	10 days

According to the table 2, in February, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is in the first place in Twitter usage rank with 17 days, following Recep Tayyip Erdoğan with 13 days, Selahattin Demirtaş with 10 days, and Devlet Bahçeli with 4 days. The least user is Abdullah Gül with 1 day.

Table 3: Number of Tweets, Retweets, in Reply, @mention and Hashtags (Between 1-29 February)

Person	Number of Tweets	Number of Retweets	Number of in Reply	Number of @mention	Number of Hashtags
Abdullah Gül	7	-	-	-	-
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	54	-	-	2	3
Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu	79	29	1	1	2
Devlet Bahçeli	41	-	-	-	-
Selahattin Demirtaş	48	3	12	-	-

Number of tweets is also important for frequency of using Twitter. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu with his 79 tweets and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan with his 54 tweets are the first two leaders who use Twitter frequently. Selahattin Demirtaş is in the third place with his 48 tweets and then comes Devlet Bahçeli with his 41 tweets. And the leader who uses Twitter least is Abdullah Gül with 7 tweets. Number of retweets is also important as retweeting mainly represents dialogue and sharing. And Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is the one who retweets most with 29 retweets. His 22 retweets are the responses of his followers. And it means that Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu reads his @mentions and retweets them.

After Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Selahattin Demirtaş is in the second place that retweets. Abdullah Gül, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Devlet Bahçeli are not following other accounts and therefore do not receive any incoming tweets. As a result, they cannot retweet any coming tweets. In addition, although they receive mentions, they do not retweet any of the mentions and therefore they cannot realize a dialogic relationship. Another important indicator of dialogue is the number of replies. Selahattin Demirtaş is the one who replies others most with 12 given replies. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu comes in the second place with his number of replies. Number of hashtags is not an indicator of dialogue. It can create dialogue but it is mainly used to direct the attention (of the audience) to a specific subject area. But it gives a point of view of effective use of twitter. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's tweets contain hashtags. These two leaders use hashtags in an effective way when compared to others.

Table 4: Number of Video Posts, Link Posts and Picture Posts (Between 1-29 February)

Person	Number of Video Posts	Number of Picture Posts	Number of Link Posts
Abdullah Gül	-	4	-
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	6	1	3
Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu	3	1	4
Devlet Bahçeli	-	-	-
Selahattin Demirtaş	-	-	-

Number of video posts, picture posts and link posts are not indicators of dialogue in Twitter. But these can represent the effective usage of Twitter for the sake of sharing information. However, like hashtags, these can also start communication/dialogue and also with the spreading of these, they can start buzz. According to table 4, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is the leader who uses Twitter most effectively in this very respect. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is in the second place and the third is Abdullah Gül.

On special days, the usage of Twitter increases. Leaders' sensibilities on these special days are important for their audiences and this allows sympathy between them. Abdullah Gül and Selahattin Demirtaş do not post messages on special days. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Devlet Bahçeli post messages on the birthday of the Prophet Muhammed and the anniversary of the massacre of Hocalı. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu posts messages on the birthday of the Prophet Muhammed and the Valentine's day.

Table 5: Messages Contents

Person	Number of Tweets	Media Agenda	Self Agenda of Users and critiques	Daily Messages
Abdullah Gül	7	-	7	-
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	54	10	38	6
Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu	79	21	44	14
Devlet Bahçeli	41	5	32	4
Selahattin Demirtaş	48	6	26	16

Abdullah Gül's tweets are about his visit regarding the military exercises in Kars. He also posts pictures of his visit. As it can be seen, he does not post about media agenda or he does not post daily messages. He posts about his own agenda, and creates media agenda also.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's many tweets create the next day's media agenda. He posts messages full of criticism regarding CHP. He also writes about topics on media agenda like Syria, his operation on his digestive system, and 28 February coup. He creates his own agenda on issues such as Fatih project, democracy, human rights violation of young girls, a new religious generation. He also posts messages about daily issues like his health, his birthday,

and his condolences to Erbakan's death anniversary. Erdoğan's tweets about 28 February cup, his birthday with the related hashtag 'iyikidogdunbüyükusta', TBMM's platform with the related hashtag 'isgaleson' are messages that become trend topics.

Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's tweets are based mostly on government critics. Creating his own agenda; he talks about young people, journalists and deputies who are in jail, unemployment issues, timeout in judgment process, and Deniz Feneri subject. He also talks about secularity, Turkish Republic values, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his Turkish war on independence, his condolences for Cem Karaca. He also gives messages by using poems. He posts Attila İlhan's lines. Some of his posts are about media agenda, his party congress, Hrant Dink's murder, the death of the theater artist Baykal Kent, internal regulation discussions, National Intelligence Organization (MİT) and Hakan Fidan and Doğan Yurdakul's discharge from jail. Kılıçdaroğlu's posts on daily issues contain his wishes on getting well to his friend. His wishes on Valentine's Day aim at building sympathy especially among young followers. His tweets about Doğan Yurdakul's discharge from jail, Valentine's Day, freedom for TBMM platform, Cem Karaca and Baykal Kent are messages that become trend topic.

Devlet Bahçeli prefers writing paragraph like tweets. In other words, he divides paragraphs into several tweets. He uses old Turkish words . He has tweets like "God will be your love and help you". His tweets are emotional. Most of his tweets can be regarded as wishful tweets. He does not criticize openly but in his wishes, he is a bit demanding for a more peaceful country. He does analogies; instead of "snow" he uses "white mercy". Before tweeting, he does explanations what he will be tweeting about. Before and after tweeting he says "my dear followers, More power to you", "I wish you good nights; I hope that your body, your heart and your dreams will never be cold". He has only two topics on media agenda; one of them is on the birthday of the Prophet Muhammed and the other one is on winter conditions.

Selahattin Demirtaş's tweets about media agenda are National Intelligence Organization (MİT) and Hakan Fidan. He usually creates his own agenda like his party group meeting and he mentions his listening to the music group, Grup Yorum. He talks about TRT 6 and its Kurdish language broadcasting. He criticizes AKP about Uludere subject. Instead of using the word Uludere, he uses "Roboski" that is the Kurdish word for the geographical area. He posts



tweets in Kurdish language, but these tweets are not clear to some followers. And these tweets are classified as daily messages because they are too short and they repeat the same things to different people. Demirtaş also has one message for trend topic; his tweets related with Grup Yorum are classified as trend topic.

Finally, a tweet sent to all five leaders gives us a clue whether they use Twitter as a means of dialogue. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, by using @mention, they were asked whether they manage their account by themselves or not. None of them replied to this @mention and none of them tweeted about this subject.

### **Conclusion**

In a symmetrical communication, two way concessions, according to Grunig and Roper, build hegemony in a positive sense. According to them, mutual concessions allow hegemony and mutual changes. In this respect, hegemony is a social construction of people's way of thinking in a positive way. But the mutuality of concessions and pseudo changes can be a new form of public relations manufacturing consent process. This new rhetoric of symmetrical communication serves as sustainability of organizations and political parties.

Political public relations 2.0. provides interactivity and communication with different groups/parties. Twitter, used as a tool of political public relations 2.0. for building relationships, realizes the aim of this new rhetoric of symmetrical communication. Effective use of Twitter can build mutual understanding, and give the opportunity of research to political parties. In order to create, build and maintain symmetrical communication, political parties must care about feedback as Twitter is a powerful tool for dialogue. Leaders creating their own agenda in Twitter can manipulate the next day's media agenda.

In Turkey, according to the findings, the effective use of Twitter is provided only by two leaders, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and Selahattin Demirtaş. The most effective Twitter user is Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. And the second is Selahattin Demirtaş. The two leaders with their following numbers have potential to have dialogue based relationships in Twitter. The other three leaders use Twitter for one way communication, and therefore they are not able to build relationships with their audiences. Their use of Twitter is limited, they have followers but they do not allow people in both sides. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan often uses Twitter effectively



but he also has to follow people for dialogical communication. Abdullah Gül is a less effective Twitter user but with his number of followers, he's the most fancied leader. And finally, Devlet Bahçeli is the most unused of Twitter. He has to create short messages and not post messages like paragraphs.

In order to have effective usage of Twitter, politicians must use Twitter instantaneous; not for sharing their press releases or their speech and they must not post paragraphs like political party manifestos. Politicians must post messages related with their daily lives in order to attract more followers. They have to follow others and they have to respond to their followers for dialogic communication. Creating political agenda through Twitter is a good strategy for been followed. And posting messages about trend topics and doing hashtags are also necessary tools to be followed. In order to attract the attention of related target audiences, leaders should ask questions and do competitions in Twitter. If leaders use Twitter according to these suggestions, they will be able to build better dialogues with audiences. And this process will serve to the sustainability of political parties and Twitter will be an effective tool of political public relations 2.0.



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