The use of digital diplomacy as a tool for symbolic violence: Framing analysis of Russian–Turkish relations on Twitter

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The use of digital diplomacy as a tool for symbolic violence: Framing analysis of Russian–Turkish relations on Twitter

Symbolic violence in the context of social media diplomacy

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Abstract

Symbols are primarily used by diplomatic actors to better project the core ideas behind certain political initiatives. Author defines symbolic violence as a practice, manifested in deliberate action of a given diplomatic actor to damage his adversary’s reputation, status and dignity through a certain set of actions, such as linguistic violence (e.g., insult, intimidation), disobeying diplomatic tact and so forth. This study aims to examine whether it is possible to establish how a change in practice (in the example of Russia–Turkey relations before and after the downing of the Russian fighter plane Su-24) originates, utilising an alternative practice – theoretical toolkit – contradictory framing of the past. To achieve this, the author examines what potentially might cause a change in practice in the Russia–Turkish case and to what extent the potential of social media can be harnessed by governments to shape public opinion and influence diplomatic actors’ international reputation. The methodology employed was based on previous practice and framing studies that have perfected the tools necessary for the detection and analysis of frames. In this research, these tools were employed on 140-character-long tweets. Identifying general themes was achieved through thematic analysis, the method for identifying, analyzing and reporting on patterns, or themes, within data corpus. The paper mentions that both Russia and Turkey attempted to narrate each other’s behaviour through framing one another on Twitter focusing on the legitimacy and morality of each other’s policies to limit the opponent’s ability to carry out the latter’s foreign political prerogatives. Moreover, as the Twitter analysis of the Russian and Turkish framing of one another showed, governments can and do harness the potential of using images and words as the weapons of symbolic violence when they attempt to impose their own narration on a given event or situation.

Symbolic domination [...] is something you absorb like air, something you don’t feel pressured by; it is everywhere and nowhere, and to escape from that is very difficult [...] with the mechanism of symbolic violence, domination tends to take the form of a more effective, and in this sense more brutal, means of oppression [...] the violence has become soft, invisible.¹

Introduction

The area of diplomacy has always been rich in symbols and symbolic actions. Symbols are primarily used by diplomatic actors to better project the core ideas behind certain political initiatives. In other words, diplomatic actors send each other certain messages about their intentions through symbolic actions and interactions: the level of state representation in the country of arrival, official gifts, ceremonies and so forth. Non-observance of diplomatic rituals and norms is perceived by the other side as an insult. Consequently, it may cause complications in bilateral relations. For this reason, symbolism is an indispensable part of diplomatic relations. Another importance of symbolism in diplomacy is explained by the fact that it helps people to have an understanding about world politics and have an insight into relations between states. “Symbolism is one of the means of social construction of states and international politics, and it allows people to deal with states as real entities, not just as abstract concepts. The state as an abstract concept cannot mobilize people and has little affective power or appeal to the masses and individuals.”

As it can be inferred from the aforementioned idea, symbolism helps people to socially construct their perceptions of states and international affairs resting upon their personal knowledge and experience. From the perspective of international practice theory, along with the cost–benefit analysis that politicians make in their calculations, the strategic interaction of states is significantly affected by the ideas and knowledge of the people involved and the discourse they use to communicate. To develop their analysis goes far beyond abovementioned factors: they maintain the idea that states’ actions and their interactions towards each other are constituted by the practices they share.

This research paper goes beyond Bourdieusian perspective of practice in explaining the cause of change in practice. Bourdieusian habitus formed from the past experiences cannot fully grasp the way changes originate from practice. Therefore, an alternative theoretical interpretation proposed in this paper, the contradictory framing of the past, can be instrumental in explaining the change in practice. The methodology employed in this paper was based on previous framing studies that have perfected the tools necessary for the detection and analysis of frames in the offline world such as Entman’s definition of framing and Semetko and Valkenburg’s tools for the detection of generic frames. In this research, however, these tools were employed on 140-character-long tweets rather than newspaper articles or televised newscasts.

Following the tragedy of 9/11, international community once again realized the need to consolidate efforts on a global war against terrorism. There emerged a number of fields — arenas for state actors — that concentrated international military operations: Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and some others. International communities, especially states that faced terrorist acts on their own territories, evaluated the importance of deploying troops of coalition forces in the war against terrorism. In particular, the escalating Syrian crisis, where Western coalition forces along with those from Russia and Turkey conducted military operations against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Islamist militants located in the country, illustrates this. In this paper, we look at a change in practice in the example of Russian–Turkish relations before and after the downing of the Russian fighter plane Su-24 by Turkey. In this paper, we elaborate this point empirically, resting upon an alternative practice – theoretical point — contradictory framing of the past and through framing analysis.

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Research questions

Research question 1 was defined as follows: How can the cause of change in practice be explained in the example of Russian and Turkish relations following the downing of the Russian pilot of Su-24? To respond to this question, we have approached an alternative mechanism for change in practices — contradictory framing of the past. To do this, we have had to analyze all tweets in the given time intervals and construct a codebook for the purpose of this research. It is worthwhile to mention that the given research was largely influenced and enriched by the Entman’s definition of framing.7

Research question 2 was defined as: To what extent the potential of social media can be harnessed by governments to shape public opinion and influence diplomatic actors’ international reputation? To achieve this, the tone of messages on both the English and Russian Twitter channels of Russia and Turkey were examined. Bearing in mind that the two nations often refer to one another on digital technologies, we were confident Russia and Turkey would provide rich research material for the purpose of this study.

To date, many researches have been made pertaining to violence and international relations (IR), yet the topic of symbolic violence and its relationship with the realm of IR has had little attention from IR scholars. Bourdieu8 developed the concept of “symbolic violence.” After Bourdieu,9 several other publications on “symbolic politics” came into existence.

In his works, Bourdieu touched upon several forms of domination10 and pointed out that the critical outcome of them is symbolic violence.11 Speaking about the relationship between symbolic violence and social reality, Bourdieu et al.12 maintain the theory that symbolic violence possesses an ability to manage social interactions, rejecting the existence of social reality. The potential of symbolic violence to manage social interactions can be projected to the realm of IR, where diplomatic actors may inflict symbolic violence on one another to undermine each other’s diplomatic activities. A potent power of symbolic violence to manage strategic interactions can be illustrated in the mutual interactions of Russia and Turkey following the downing of the Russian fighter plane Su-24. Both Russia and Turkey attempted to construct an image of one another in a negative light by calling into question the legality of each other’s actions and the credibility of the regimes in these countries. Their stance effectively took the form of symbolic violence, since the two parties — Russia on the one hand and Turkey on the other hand — have continuously attempted to tarnish these countries. The quintessence of narrations consciously built by diplomatic actors to discredit one another. For

7 Entman, “Framing,”
10 Bourdieu and Wacquant, An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology.
12 Bourdieu et al., The Weight of the World.
this reason, the general public tends to build its opinion about the parties involved in exercising symbolic violence based on the information it is fed.

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant, symbolic violence can be defined as the violence carried out in relation to a social agent with the latter’s complicity. The parties that are subject to symbolic violence regard their condition as legitimate, admitting a system of values imposed on them. Developing symbolic violence, a form of social domination, assumes application of meaning and ideology, manifested in the form of narrations, language and images, with respect to social actors. Once a given diplomatic actor issues symbolic violence on his adversary through the use of posts and comments, which contain insults, intimidation, disrespect and so forth, it intentionally hurts his adversary’s international status, reputation and honour.

In this paper, we maintain the idea that Adler and Pouliot’s Bourdieusian analysis of international affairs is unable to grasp how change originates in practice. We share the theorists’ idea stating that practices are structured by past experiences that orient actions in the present. Yet in contrast to Bourdieu, we believe that practices are not stable. Thus, it is hard to unequivocally point to the future merely based on the past experiences. We elaborate this argument through an alternative practice — theoretical interpretation of change — contradictory framing of the past and framing analysis in the empirical part.

Symbolic violence and digital diplomacy

Diplomacy has long acted as an indispensable instrument of foreign political activity. In the course of the past several decades, it has undergone several institutional changes and has become multifaceted: cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, digital diplomacy and so forth. Moreover, the development of sophisticated information technologies has created a new platform of diplomatic interaction. Several definitions of the term digital diplomacy have been proposed by academics. In particular, Hanson uses the term to refer to the use of Internet and information and communication technologies to achieve diplomatic ends. According to the Foreign Commonwealth Office, digital diplomacy is an instrument to resolve foreign policy issues. Broadly speaking, digital diplomacy refers to an extensive use of Internet and digital technologies by government bodies and diplomatic missions abroad to monitor, inform and engage foreign public. In doing so, it heavily rests upon the potential of social media, a group of web-based digital technologies such as Twitter (a microblog), Facebook, VKontakte (social networking sites), YouTube, Flickr video and photo sharing and some others.

The last decade has witnessed an increase of interest among diplomatic actors in digital diplomacy in realizing their foreign political objectives. The United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Scandinavian countries, Russia, Japan, China, India and others began to gradually develop their own digital diplomacy strategy. Nowadays around two-thirds of the 193 United Nations member states have Twitter accounts. State’s public diplomacy institutions are increasingly actively using the potential of social media to engage foreign publics abroad. To illustrate this point further, the

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Indian Ministry of External Affairs possesses its own blog account and Twitter page, platforms to provide information and engage foreign publics on issues related to Indian foreign policy.19

Today, the number of countries possessing manuals on social media use is increasingly growing. For instance, the US State Department’s manual on using social media is an example of a document that provides guidance for the use of digital technologies for conducting foreign policy. In fact, the manual is based on the State Department’s social media strategy, which covers opportunities and challenges to the use of social media at a contemporary stage.

With regards to other countries, it is fair to mention the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Since December 2010, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been following its “Digital Strategy” devised by the dedicated Digital Transformation Unit. The strategy envisages using the potential of social media to conduct foreign political activities.

It is not accidental that diplomatic actors attach a significant interest to social media platforms. The point is that social media is an increasingly strategic communication instrument of foreign policy. It can be used not only to communicate diplomatic actors’ messages but also to serve as a source of information, a necessary channel for dialogue with people and an instrument for monitoring hot issues. In other words, making strategic use of social media means evaluating target groups and intended messages, as well as identifying preferred communication channels.

For the time being, an overt physical force has almost been replaced by symbolic forms of potential power — “prestige” or “reputation.”20 In that sense in the world of today, not only military, economic, political and other parameters but also status and reputation of the given state by and large determine its power. Any attempt to damage another diplomatic actor’s reputation is regarded by the latter as an act to tarnish his international status. Thus, it is of paramount importance for states to save their faces, prestige and status to be heard and be respected by international community.

Development of sophisticated information and telecommunication technologies and wide penetration of Internet into the life of people brought about certain changes in diplomatic practice. In many countries, government agencies and high-ranking politicians, diplomats and other group of government representatives are increasingly utilizing social media to influence and shape public opinion in such a way as to influence the foreign political decisions of their governments. Given the wide penetration of digital technologies, social media platforms may in some cases be harnessed to weaken an adversary’s international credibility and image. The decision of some high-ranking politicians to maintain a social media presence in the given foreign country is explained by their desire to win the war for “hearts and minds.” To achieve this, heads of states and governments launch their own account on social media platforms, accruing numerous followers. In exploiting the potential of these tools, politicians actively use language symbolism to attract sympathetic public.

A case study of Russian–Turkish framing of each other on social media

A practice explanation of strategic interaction has important implications for our research on symbolic violence in digital diplomacy and more broadly with international affairs. It is worth mentioning that practice theory comprises an international change component. Thus, digital diplomacy as a form of international practice should not be treated merely as public diplomacy strategy, rather it may act as a foreign political instrument to manage international change. To illustrate the political situation in Syria in 2015, characterized by the presence of several foreign countries on the territory of Syria to conduct military operations against IS, and later involvement of Russian airspace forces, followed by the shift of European nations’ policies from European

continental issues towards Russia, may be seen as a change in structural conditions. Consequently, these types of events, especially in times of crises, are capable of introducing changes to practices.

In this part, we are going to examine how the cause of change in practice can be explained in the example of Russian and Turkish relations following the downing of the Russian pilot of Su-24 and to analyze to what extent the potential of social media can be harnessed by governments to shape public opinion and influence diplomatic actors’ international reputation.

The empirical part of research

We have seen a change in practices in relationship between Russia and Turkey because of a fundamental difference in perceiving and framing the incident with the Russian pilot and uncertainty for Russian policy makers whether Turkey shared their vision of ensuring security through war against ISIL or whether the Turkish side showed double standards by defending their positions and buying ISIL oil. In this section, we elaborate this point empirically based on an alternative practice — theoretical interpretation of change — contradictory framing of the past and framing analysis.

Our proposed theoretical toolkit of contradictory framing of the past assumes perceiving the given situation by political actors at individual level and framing it in the way consistent with their political ambitions. In the given situation with Russian-Su-24, the two opposing parties had from the outbreak of conflict their own line of argumentation for taking their stands. For Turkey, the routine violations of Turkish airspace by Russia and the continued ignoring of warnings from the Turkish side resulted in Turkey downing the Russian aircraft. Russia viewed the issue as a “stab in the back,” criticizing Turkey for siding with Islamic State of Iraq and Levant. The same incident has been framed differently, leading to the changes in behaviour of Russia and Turkey, introducing changes to practices in Syria given time lag. For the Russian ruling elite and security practitioners, Turkey’s decision to down the Russian pilot violated the rules of establishing security in the region and led to certain social and economic transformations in the wider Eurasian region. To illustrate, Russia imposed a package of sanctions mostly of an economic and military character vis-à-vis Turkey, causing serious damage to the Turkish economy and the welfare of its people. It opened up its agricultural market for alternative countries like Uzbekistan, Egypt and some others to access. With regards to the character of military operations in Syria, Russia concentrated its efforts on gathering intelligence data about the possible relationship between the Turkish Government and ISIL and actively striking military bases and camps of Islamist militants with daily information support on mass media. This reaction has been a product of the Russian perception of Turkey’s actions and not a shift in the objective structure of the field.

The given research explored the manner in which a dyad of countries, Russia and Turkey, framed one another by focusing on English and Russian language content published by these countries’ official institutional accounts as well as individual accounts of some high-profile politicians from both countries. Research evidence has studied the official accounts of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, presidencies, governments and embassies of Russia and Turkey and Twitter accounts of politicians. In total, 19 Russian accounts and 16 Turkish accounts have been analyzed in this paper. Deriving from research questions that look at practicing symbolic violence in the context of digital diplomacy as well as to enrich the methodology of the given research paper, the researcher decided to refer to some recent researches focusing on government framing on social networking sites as well.

To illustrate, Manor explored the manner in which a dyad of countries, the United States and Russia, frame one another on SNS. His research encompasses a major global conflict surrounding Crimea’s annexation by Russia. His analysis offers important insight into government framing, i.e., the framing of foreign countries seems to be influenced by the existence or absence of conflict. Manor believes that framing analysis of MFAs’ SNS could be used to characterize the relations that exist between specific nations. Moreover, the study also revealed that the detection of generic frames in both dyads indicates that governments do in fact frame one another on SNS.

Yet his research sample was limited to English language SNS channels. Thus, it was not possible to establish whether the content published by such MFAs on local language channels differs from the content published on English channels. Another important limitation of his research was his use of a short research period spanning just 3 months. This short research period means that this research cannot be seen as offering a definitive answer to the questions it was seeking to examine.

The given research addressed these gaps by exploring contents published in both English and Russian language channels. The research covered a 10-month period that finishes with withdrawal of Russian airspace forces from the territory of Syria.

**Methodology**

The tweets in which one country in the dyad mentioned the other were examined to answer the two research questions. The given research involves tweets published during two time intervals: 1 June 2015 to 24 November 2015 and 24 November 2015 to 17 March 2016. For research purposes, these two periods were selected as they include tweets published before and after important world event — the downing of the Russian Su-24 by Turkey.

Analyses of the two time intervals clearly show that tensions between Turkey and Russia arose with Russian involvement in the Syrian Civil War. After the downing of the Russian fighter plane Su-24, relations between the two nations became understandably strained.

In total, 262 tweets published by Russian and Turkish MFA’s were analyzed. For this purpose, a special codebook was constructed and used.

**Codebook construction**

A codebook was created specifically for the purposes of finding out the extent that Russia and Turkey exercise symbolic violence in their digital diplomacy activities vis-à-vis each other and revealing the manner they construct each other’s image on social media platforms. A topic and the existence of generic frames constitute essential parts of the codebook. To develop the given research focuses on revealing the four elements necessary for framing according to Entman and generic frames investigated by Semetko and Valkenburg.

The codebook included components previously researched by Entman (see supporting material S1 for codebook for framing analysis of individual tweets). Following his definition of framing, each tweet was examined by four questions based on the definition of frames: Is a problem defined, is there a causal interpretation, is there a moral judgment, and is a specific remedy recommended? Each question was answered in a binary manner (Yes/No). For each tweet, the average of all four questions was calculated. Tweets scoring 0.5 on the Entman scale were those that included two of the four elements of framing. Given the exploratory nature of the given research, it was decided that tweets scoring 0.5 or higher on the Entman scale would be regarded as tweets that meet Entman’s definition of framing.

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23 Manor, “Framing Adversaries.”
24 Semetko and Valkenburg, “Framing European politics.”
25 Entman, “Framing.”
Each tweet was analyzed to identify the following generic frames: conflict, human interest, attribution of responsibility, morality and the economic consequence frame. A list of 20 questions were prepared with 5 questions designed to identify the responsibility and human interest, 4 questions for conflict frame, and 3 questions to identify the moral and economic consequence frames.

Due to the exploratory nature of this research, only tweets that scored 0.5 or higher on any generic frame scale were considered to include the relevant frame. A high score on the attribution of responsibility scale (0.5 or higher) meant that one government portrayed the other as responsible for a certain problem or situation. To be clear, a high score on the economic consequence scale meant that one country might use financial leverage against the other and/or a high score on the conflict scale meant that tweets highlighted a conflict between two or more parties.

In some cases, when several tweets dealt with the same topic, they were examined as a single component. The Entman and Generic frames scales were evaluated by using a dichotomy of below or equal and above of 0.5.

Finally, once all the tweets had been coded and analyzed, a second phase began: identifying a general topic. To achieve this, the researcher has selected certain aspects of a perceived reality reflected on individual tweets and made them salient in a respective context based on their repetition.

The final stage, identifying general themes, was achieved through thematic analysis, the method for identifying, analyzing and reporting on patterns, or themes, within data corpus.26 During the first phase, about 66% of all the tweets (with the exception of general statements) in which one country references the other one in the dyad were reviewed and categorized based on their subject matter, their underlying assumptions and ideology. During the next phase, these tweets were reviewed once more to ensure the relevance of the identified categories. Finally, the category with the greatest prevalence was chosen as the one that characterizes the manner in which one nation in the dyad references another.

**Results**

Throughout the research period, Turkey was mentioned in 159 tweets published on the Russia’s English and Russian language Twitter channels. Of these 159 tweets, 114 were analyzed and coded as the remaining tweets were general statements such as a link to a summary of meetings and statements. Of the 114 tweets analyzed, 19 tweets were published during the first time interval as opposed to 95 that were published during the second time interval. Turkey referred to Russia in 102 tweets published during the research period. Of the 102 tweets, 59 were analyzed and coded as the remaining tweets included general statements. Of the 59 tweets analyzed, 10 tweets were published during first time interval as opposed to 49 that were published during the second time interval. These figures demonstrate that both nations referred to one another more frequently following the downing of the Russian Su-24.

During both time intervals, the research corpus included tweets that scored 0 on the Entman and the generic frames scales. However, several tweets as below stating the same content were reviewed as one unit and were scored respectively:

Medvedev: “Turkey’s criminal actions have led to three consequences. First, a dangerous aggravation between Russia and NATO.”27 Dmitry Medvedev: “Second, Turkey has demonstrated that it is protecting ISIS. Third, friendly relations between Russia and Turkey have been undermined.”28


27 Dmitry Medvedev, posted on twitter 25 November 2015. Accessed 30 November 2015, @MedvedevRussiaE.

28 Medvedev, 25 November 2015, @MedvedevRussiaE.
In these tweets, the problem is presented as criminal actions committed by Turkey. The downing of the Russian Su-24 is the cause of the problem. There is a moral evaluation as the second tweet includes the terms “friendly relations,” indicating that Turkey has undermined them.

**Entman scale**

As can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, during the first time interval, 50% of Russian tweets mentioning Turkey scored 0.5 or higher on the Entman scale as opposed to 79% during the second time interval.

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Figure 1. Percentage of Russian tweets mentioning Turkey to score 0.5 or higher on the Entman Scale.

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Figure 2. Percentage of Turkish tweets mentioning Russia to score 0.5 or higher on the Entman Scale.
interval. Likewise, 24% Turkish tweets mentioning Russia scored 0.5 or higher on the Entman scale during the first time interval as opposed to 39% during the second time interval.

The reason for this substantial gap might be that during the first time interval, Russia and Turkey worked closely on energy projects and common security issues; they saw each other as partners working together to tackle the Syrian civil war. Yet during the second time interval, the downing of the Russian Su-24 damaged bilateral relations. Thus, the two nations found themselves involved in conflict with each other defining the cause of conflict, giving moral judgments and offering possible solutions to the problem.

### Prevalence of generic frames

Figures 3 and 4 exhibit the relative frequency of generic frames in Russian tweets mentioning Turkey during both time intervals.

As can be seen in Figures 3 and 4, the most prevalent generic frame used by Russia when framing Turkey during both time intervals was the conflict frame (50% during first time interval and 63% during second time interval). During the first time interval, tweets that scored 0.5 or higher on the attribution scale often dealt with the different strategic approaches of the two governments on Russian involvement in the Syrian crisis.

During the second time interval, tweets scoring 0.5 or higher on the attribution of responsibility scale Russia blames Turkey in criminal actions for downing the Russian Su-24. Such is the case with the tweets above by the Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, which deal with the consequences that resulted from the downing of a Russian pilot.

The second most prevalent frame in Russian tweets during the first time interval was the attribution of responsibility frame (42%). This generic frame was also the second most prevalent frame used by Russia during the second time interval (45%). During the first time interval, tweets that scored 0.5 or higher on the attribution scale dealt with fighting Kurds instead of ISIL militants to retain Turkish power. During the second time interval, tweets scoring 0.5 or higher on the attribution scale frame Turkey as responsible for the tensions between Russia and Turkey and for the crisis in Syria.
Tweets dealing with the downing of the Russian pilot and fighting Kurds scored 0.5 or higher on the human interest frame. Morality frame was the third most prevalent frame during both time intervals (28% and 41% accordingly), and the fourth prevalent frame was human interest frame. The fifth prevalent frame used by Russia was the economic consequence frame, which was not prevalent during the first time interval and 9% prevalent during the second time interval. This could be result of the fact that Russia used this frame when commenting on Russian sanctions imposed on Turkey, following the downing of the Russian Su-24.

As can be seen in Figures 5 and 6, the most prevalent generic frame used by Turkey when framing Russia during both time intervals was the conflict frame (69% during first time interval and 66% during second time interval). This indicates that Turkey framed Russia as its rival over approaches taken on the Syrian issue and assigning blame to Russia for deteriorating bilateral relations between the two nations.

The second most prevalent frame used by Turkey during both time intervals was the attribution of responsibility frame (40% and 47% accordingly). This indicates that Turkey framed Russia, as tweets show below, as responsible for both strikes on Syrian civilians and damaging relations between Turkey and Russia.


The third most prevalent frame used by Turkey when mentioning Russia was morality frame (30% and 40%, respectively). Russia used the morality frame to portray Turkey as morally bankrupt, whereas Turkey used the morality frame to highlight the oppression of Crimean Tatars within the framework of the illegal annexation of Crimea.

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29 Turkish Presidency, posted on twitter 6 February 2016, accessed 17 February 2016, @trpresidency.
The fourth most prevalent frame used by Turkey was the human interest frame (17% and 31%, respectively). Turkey referred to this frame more than Russia during both time intervals, which suggests that Turkey went to even greater lengths to portray “human face” in the given issue of Syrian conflict. No Turkish tweets mentioning Russia scored 0.5 or higher on the economic consequence frame during the first time interval. This altered during the second time interval when Turkey referred to this frame when Turkish government called for economic cooperation with Russia instead of embargoes (1%).
Topics addressed in tweets

With regard to the topics addressed in Russian tweets mentioning Turkey, during the first time interval, 37% of the tweets dealt with the situation in Syria and common efforts against IS, 13% dealt with fighting Syrian Kurds by Turkey, 13% dealt with Turkish stream and trade relations, 11% dealt with airspace violation and Russian military involvement in Syria and 26% dealt with different other topics. During the second time interval, 36% of all tweets mentioning Turkey dealt with Turkish support of militants in Syria, 17% dealt with the downing of the Russian Su-24, 14% dealt with the Turkish responsibility for deteriorating relations with Russia, 12% dealt with media censorship and the state of democracy in Turkey, 12% other related topics and only 9% dealt with Turkey’s military involvement in Iraq.

Similarly, during the first time interval, Turkish tweets referencing Russia dealt with Joint meetings on bilateral cooperation and security issues (52%), accusations for targeting non-DAESH groups (17%), Turkish stream and trade relations (7%), statements on mutual cooperation and assistance (7%), Russian violations of Turkish airspace (3%) and other related topics (14%). During the second time interval, 29% of Turkey’s tweets mentioning Russia dealt with joint meetings and general statements on bilateral cooperation, 22% dealt with oppression of Crimean Tatars and human rights issue, 18% dealt with accusations for targeting non-DAESH groups, 16% dealt with framing opponent as the threat for stability and security, 7% dealt with responsibility for deteriorating relations with Turkey and 8% dealt with other related topics.

The results presented in this section suggest that during the second time interval, in contrast to Russian framing of Turkey, Turkey’s tweets referencing Russia focused more on meetings and statements on bilateral cooperation. One possible explanation for this might be that the Turkish Government was making efforts to use diplomatic and military channels to restore relations with Russia during the given period.

This research focused on the manner in which both civil servants and government institutions use Twitter to frame foreign governments. Given the desire to understand how nations frame one another, it was decided to examine a dyad of countries. The research corpus included all tweets in which one country in the dyad referred to the other during two time intervals encompassing more than 10 months and separated by serious political event — the downing of the Russian Su-24 by Turkey. A total of 262 tweets were analyzed using a codebook constructed specifically for the purpose of this research. This codebook was used to examine the manner in which a dyad of nations frames one another as well as to develop a methodology for analyzing frames at the level of the individual tweet.

What characterized the Russia–Turkey dyad was that the manner in which both nations referred to one another altered between the two time intervals. During the first time interval, both nations chose to illustrate their cooperation over the situation in Syria, highlighting common efforts against IS and trade relations. During the second time interval, both nations framed one another as responsible for escalating the situation in Syria and causing damage to bilateral relations. This was made evident by an increase in the amount of tweets published by both nations that reached the 0.5 threshold on the Entman scale and the 0.5 threshold on the generic frames scales (see Figure 3–Figure 6). An explanation for this finding could lie in the fact that during the second time interval, both nations found themselves engulfed in conflict in which each country in the dyad attempted to offer its own interpretation to the events in Ukraine by defining the cause of the conflict, passing moral judgments and offering solutions to the crisis.

The most prevalent generic frame used by Russia to frame Turkey during both time intervals was the conflict frame. This was also the most prevalent frame used by Turkey. This finding suggests that both nations framed one another as military adversaries. More importantly, when using this frame, both nations publicized their disagreements on a wide range of issues and not solely on the escalating conflict in Syria.
The second most prevalent frame used by the two nations during both time intervals was the attribution of responsibility frame. This finding indicates that both nations used Twitter to frame the other as responsible for the rising tensions between Russia and Turkey and for the crisis in Syria, thereby justifying their own actions. This assertion is strengthened by the finding that among the five generic frames, the one containing the highest proportion of tweets reaching the threshold of 0.5 was the attribution of responsibility frame. This study also found that both nations frequently used the morality frame. The third most prevalent frame used by both Russia and Turkey was the morality frame. This finding indicates that framing might indeed be viewed as an attempt to damage the adversary’s reputation by calling into question his morality.

Such framing may also be viewed as an attempt by one nation to tarnish the image of another. By framing Russia as a menace to global peace, Turkey was promoting a specific image of Russia to foreign audiences. This in turn may have infringed on Russia’s own attempt to manage its global image. Thus, social media may be regarded as a tool that enables one to restrain a foreign country’s soft power resources. By tarnishing a foreign country’s image, nations can undermine each other’s public diplomatic activities.

The fourth generic used by both parties was the human interest frame. Russian tweets pointed at Turkey fighting Syrian Kurds, Turkish media censorship and the state of democracy, whereas Turkish tweets meanwhile referred to Russia as responsible for the oppression of Crimean Tatars and suggested human rights violations. It is reasonable to infer that both countries may have been attempting to frame the other as morally bankrupt.

Finally, the economic consequence frame was the least used frame of the five. Russia used this frame when commenting on Russian sanctions imposed on Turkey, following the downing of the Russian Su-24. No Turkish tweets mentioning Russia scored 0.5 or higher on the economic consequence frame during the first time interval. This altered during the second time interval when Turkey referred to this frame when Turkish Government called for economic cooperation with Russia instead of embargoes.

Conducting analysis on both English and Russian language tweets allowed the researcher to assess whether the framing of a country differs with regard to the target audience. Analysis showed that Russian framing of Turkey was the same on its Russian language Twitter channel. Russia and Turkey entered the field, Syria, with shared goals and dispositions to liquidate ISIL in the territory of Syria. Their practice of involvement in the Syrian crisis was shaped from the past that characterized relations between the two nations as important trade and economic partners and their common vision on security issues, in particular, the war against ISIL. Yet following the downing of the Russian Su-24, this “honeymoon” period in bilateral relations ended completely, and diplomatic relations between the two nations dipped to a critical point leading to social and economic transformations in the wider Eurasian region. From Bourdieusian practice theory, logic, in the given situation, a practice change in bilateral relations might result from a shift in the objective structure of the field (Syrian region) and/or outdated dispositions of one of the actors involved in the conflict. Yet each social dealing following the outbreak of conflict between the two nation — the downing the Russian pilot and the subsequent reluctance of Turkish authorities’ to convey apologies over the incident and so forth — had the potential to change the meaning of the past. Accordingly, this led to the change in practices. Our analysis in this subsection provides empirical support for the arguments that highlight the instability of practice.

**Conclusion**

In summary, digital diplomacy does indeed contain symbolic violence vis-à-vis other diplomatic actors. When an actor, involved in digital diplomacy, issues a symbolic violence on his adversary, he aims to hurt his adversary’s dignity, honour and reputation through the use of posts and
comments, containing insults, intimidation, disrespect and deliberate non-observance of diplomatic tact. To achieve this, social media platforms, which are increasingly popular among diplomatic actors, proved to be a potent instrument. As of today, diplomatic actors keep on exploiting not only institutional accounts but also their individual working accounts\footnote{Individual working accounts are given by governmental institutions to their staff. The latter are expected to represent their office on social media platforms. Unlike institutional accounts, which tend to have more discrete language and exclusively informative character, holders of individual working accounts try to engage general public. Yet they are asked to refrain from posting any information relating to their personal life.} to damage the international status and reputation of their adversaries.

This study aimed to examine whether it was possible to establish how a change in practice (in the example of Russia–Turkey relations before and after the downing of the Russian Su-24) originates utilising an alternative practice – theoretical toolkit – contradictory framing of the past. To achieve this, we have examined what potentially might cause a change in practice in the Russia–Turkish case and to what extent the potential of social media can be harnessed by governments to shape public opinion and influence diplomatic actors’ international reputation. As the proposed theoretical toolkit of contradictory framing of the past assumed parties involved in the conflict perceived the situation with the downing of a Russian pilot at an individual level, the same incident has been framed differently by each of them on social networking sites. To develop each social action from the outbreak of conflict between the two nations — the downing of the Russian pilot and the reluctance of the Turkish authorities’ to convey apologies and so forth — had the potential to change the meaning of the past and therefore the interpretation of the present. This eventually led to the change in practices.

The exercise of invisible power by Russia and Turkey with one another’s complicity takes the form of routine symbolic violence. Both Russia and Turkey attempted to narrate each other’s behaviour through framing one another on Twitter focusing on the legitimacy and morality of each other’s policies. In that sense, it can be viewed as an act of imposing violence as it aims to limit the opponent’s ability to carry out the latter’s foreign political prerogatives. Moreover, as the twitter analysis of the Russian and Turkish framing of one another showed that governments can and do harness the potential of using images and words as the weapons of symbolic violence when they attempt to impose their own narration on a given event or situation.

To continue, the two nations in our analysis tried to display perceived reality to twitter followers in accordance with their own ideological orientations. Through framing and narration, Russia and Turkey continued to use Twitter as an arena for ideological struggles in which each nation promotes its own truth. Consequently, the true power struggles between nations might be hidden from the public. Twitter followers may view a Russian tweet about fighting Syrian Kurds by Turkey as a fact rather than one element of a larger picture aimed at discrediting the other side. Turkish twitter followers, for instance, may fail to view information tweeted by the Turkish Government bodies and institutions as part of ideological narration. The lack of structural common knowledge and the existence of conflicting positions resulted in routine acts of symbolic violence, utilising digital technologies.

As far as the limitations of this research is concerned, due to the relatively recent experience of applying framing tools to social media in international communications field, the majority of tweets examined in this paper did not meet all elements of Entman’s definition of frames and all elements of generic frames. Thus, the results of this research offer only a partial answer to our research questions and warrants further investigation.

To develop our interpretation of change that results from contradictory framing of the past by parties involved in the conflict cannot claim to be a comprehensive theory of how international practices change: we can speak about other alternative mechanisms to ones we have proposed. Given the lack of clear articulations of change by practice theorists, in this paper, we attempted to
elaborate a mechanism of change in international practices in the context of Russian and Turkish relations before and after the downing of the Russian pilot of Su-24.

Studying the role of symbolic violence in the context of social media diplomacy has indicated that digital communication technologies have in recent years been used as powerful weapons in international affairs. Governments are becoming increasingly aware of social media’s huge potential as a means of immediate and direct communication with an international community. Social media possess the potential to impact on public perception of reality and the ability to focus on international attention to a given country with great immediacy. Apart from this, social media acts as a platform for political and civil discourse where the symbols and their underlying meaning can be discussed. It has the potential to connect people in a way that they have never been connected before.

Supporting material

S1. Codebook for framing analysis of individual tweets. (DOCX)

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Declaration of interest

Sherzod Arapov declares that he has no conflict of interest.