

## **Evaluation of Soft Power Strategies through the Personal Influence Model: The Case of the Republic of Turkey**

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### **Abstract**

The personal influence model is a model that states that culture is determinant in public relations and that cultural dynamics should be utilized in the way of establishing relationships with target audiences. However, the application practices of the personal influence model are not clearly defined. This study attempts to define the application practices of the personal influence model. The study aims to examine the theoretical and practical relationship between the personal influence model and soft power practices in the context of Turkey.

In order to identify the application practices of the Personal Influence model, categories were created for content analysis based on previous studies investigating personal influence in the public relations literature. The data obtained were interpreted according to the descriptive analysis method.

In order to determine whether the personal influence model is used in soft power strategies, the content of soft power strategies, official reports, press releases, strategy documents, international media campaigns and public platforms in Turkey between 2018 and 2025 were analyzed.

The findings reveal that the applications of the personal influence model can be used to develop soft power strategies. According to the data, the practices of the personal influence model can be categorized into three categories: hospitality, cultural rituals and gift-giving relations. Soft power strategies and personal influence model practices are used in parallel with each other to develop diplomatic relations with different countries.

This research provides a categorization of the application practices of the personal influence model and tries to reveal the similarities between the soft power strategies used by Turkey in public diplomacy and the applications of the personal influence model. It also provides a reassessment of

the theoretical foundations of the personal influence model and offers elements for improving public relations education.

The study provides evidence and examples of how the practices of the personal influence model are used in Turkish public relations practices and Turkey's soft power strategies.

**Keyword:** Turkey, Content Analysis, Public relations, Soft power, Personal influence

## **Introduction**

The theoretical infrastructure of public relations discipline is based on the classification of public relations practices by Grunig and Hunt in their 1984 book. The mobility of political, economic and cultural variables in the world, changes in global marketing understanding, technological developments, differentiation of target audiences and expectations have enabled public relations practices to move in a different direction from their past practices. The theoretical infrastructure of the public relations discipline has also continued to develop in this context. In 1985, as a result of the Excellence Project supported by IABC, many researchers and academics came together to enrich the theoretical infrastructure of the public relations discipline. The most concrete approach that emerged was the excellence in public relations approach to bring national and international standardization to the discipline and practices of public relations and to determine the roles and ethical standards of public relations practitioners. However, subsequent research (e.g., Huang, 2000; Sriramesh, 1992; Sriramesh, 2000; Sriramesh & Takasaki, 1999) has shown that culture is important and determinative in public relations activities in different geographies. The personal influence model has come to the forefront with Asia-centered research and has revealed the decisive role of cultural contexts on public relations practices. Considering that each culture has different communication dynamics, it is inevitable that the ways of developing personal influence in public relations practices may also differ. The personal influence model and cultural values have led to the emergence of concepts such as "Guanxi (building and maintaining a fraternal relationship between the people involved)" in China, "nomu (drinking time with members of the media to emphasize the importance of their personal influence)" and "amae (the desire to be committed to the well-being of others)" in Japan, "hospitality relations" in India, and the adoption of the notion of "always conceal yourself" in Korea and the use of metaphors (especially in the media) rather than explicit expression (Puspa, 2007; Sriramesh, Kim and Takasaki, 1999). In addition, cultural elements such as face culture, Confucian values (Netayavichit and Tan-intaraarj, 2024), and omotenashi (Wijayanti and Saifudin, 2021) are widely utilized in public relations strategies in Asian countries. In Turkish culture, hospitality practices are perceived as "God's

guest" and the value given to the guest is carried out in the form of entertaining in the best way, pleasing, establishing sincerity and strengthening ties.

Although the concepts used and the ways of implementation differ, these cultural dynamics should be utilized when implementing public relations strategies in different cultures. For this reason, cultural concepts such as hospitality, cultural rituals (e.g. birthdays, celebration of special occasions, religious ceremonies and invitations, e.g. Iftar, circumcision, weddings, etc.), and gift-giving should be integrated to expand the cultural richness of the way the personal influence model is applied.

Public diplomacy activities called soft power, are carried out effectively in order to maintain the communication of nations with each other in the world and to gain mutual trust and common sense of the peoples. Soft power practices, which include public relations activities carried out by countries towards citizens of different countries, emerge from the values, cultures, norms that organizations or countries express in their own cultures, the examples they exhibit with their internal practices and policies, and the way they maintain their relations with others (Nye, 2020). The cultural values and symbols of countries influence international relations and public relations and are used as an effective tool in the activities to be implemented.

Therefore, public relations practices are needed to create soft power strategies. In public relations practices, theoretical practices should be utilized in order to create the right communication strategies. The practices of the personal influence model and soft power practices are similar in many respects. In this context, determining the application practices of the personal influence model will be an important guide for soft power practices.

This study aims to examine the theoretical and practical relationship between the personal influence model and soft power practices in the context of Turkey. Public diplomacy practices in Turkey are carried out by many institutions and organizations. These institutions include the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Presidency of Communication, the Turkish Tourism Publicity and Development Agency, Embassies and Press Counsellors' Offices abroad, and domestic public institutions and organizations. These institutions coordinate Turkey's image management, cultural promotion, counter-disinformation and strategic public diplomacy activities in the international arena. The activities carried out by different institutions to protect national interests and build trust-based, sustainable relations provide a suitable case study to analyze the contribution of personal influence mechanisms such as interaction with key stakeholders, communication with opinion leaders, direct contact with the target audience, hospitality relations, sharing cultural rituals, and gift-giving relations to soft power.

From the perspective of public relations models especially the personal influence model, no previous study has been conducted on the case of Turkey. In this context, this study aims both to provide a theoretical contribution to the personal influence model and to evaluate the communicative dimension of Turkey's public diplomacy strategies.

How hospitality relations, cultural rituals and gift-giving relations in public relations practices carried out within the scope of the personal influence model can expand the boundaries of soft power is an important research topic. In this context, the main research question is;

- How can the concepts of hospitality, cultural rituals and gifting, which are the practices of the personal influence model, contribute to the reinterpretation of soft power practices?

The objectives of this study are;

- Analyze the key elements of the personal impact model,
- To reveal the function of hospitality, cultural rituals and gift-giving concepts in public relations,
- To examine the intersection of the soft power approach and the personal influence model,
- To search for traces of the personal influence model in the soft power strategies of the Republic of Turkey.

This study aims to make a twofold contribution to the reader. At the theoretical level, to bring a new perspective to the discipline of public relations with the integration of cultural elements into the personal influence model, and at the practical level, to help practitioners develop more effective strategies in communication that can be carried out within the scope of soft power. Especially considering the increasing importance of soft power in institutional relations, determining the role of hospitality relations, cultural rituals and gift-giving relations, which can be evaluated within the scope of the practices of the personal influence model, in soft power strategies is a critical research area in terms of the success of the activities and the strategies that can be developed afterwards.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Personal Influence Model**

The personal influence model was first explored by Sriramesh and J. E. Grunig (1988) in an exploratory study of public relations in India. The study found that public relations practitioners used interpersonal communication to develop personal influence with key people, especially among the media, government and activists (Sriramesh, Kim, & Takasaki, 1999). To test the validity of the personal

influence model, J. Grunig, L. Grunig, K. Sriramesh, Y.H. Huang, and A. Lyra (1995) conducted a study entitled "Models of Public Relations in an International Setting". In this study, the conformity of public relations activities in India, Greece and Taiwan with the public relations models classified by Grunig and Hunt (1984) was tried to be measured. Prior to this study, each of the researchers (Sriramesh, 1991; Lyra, 1991; Huang, 1990) conducted qualitative and quantitative studies to identify the public relations activities conducted in their respective countries and then brought their studies together to produce a meta-analysis. According to the research findings, although public relations practitioners stated that the values and goals of professional public relations are ideal methods, it was found that many practitioners lacked practical knowledge of these values and goals. They also found that two parameters other than Grunig and Hunt's modeling were encountered in public relations activities. These parameters were named as "personal influence and cultural interpretivist model" (Grunig, Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang & Lyra, 1995). Sriramesh, Kim and Takasaki (1999) in their study "Public Relations in Three Asian Cultures: An Analysis", they found that the personal influence model is also used in other Asian countries. In the study, the personal influence model was defined as a reciprocity relationship between the public relations practitioner and strategically placed individuals such as government regulators, members of the media and tax officials (Sriramesh, Kim and Takasaki; 1999). According to the personal influence model, organizational representatives and public relations practitioners engage in interpersonal communication with strategic individuals in order to achieve public relations objectives, hospitality relations is not a function of public relations but is an essential task of management, and an organization's image is not only product/service oriented but also hospitality relations is important for the quality of the overall opinion of the organization (Sriramesh, 2000).

The applications of the personal influence model include primary relationships, important day celebrations, organizing invitations or participating in the invitations of key stakeholders, gift-giving relationships, hospitality relationships, and hospitality relationships that public relations professionals carry out in order to reflect the positive effects of their close relationships with key stakeholders such as influential journalists, public officials working in the government, former diplomats, activists, and NGO officials on public relations activities. Apart from these, collecting detailed up-to-date data on people who can harm the organization, who are the competitors of the organization, opinion leaders who can be decisive in society, influential columnists in the market, important people who shape the society, etc. can also be considered within these practices (Güner Koçak & Akdağ, 2021).

The personal influence model involves a polycentric approach that focuses on cultural values in terms of its applications and strategies and tactics should be developed according to the determinants in cultural communication. When the research on personal influence model is examined;

it is seen that most of the studies are clustered in Asian countries (Sriramesh & Takasaki, 1999; Sriramesh, 1999; K. Sriramesh, Kim, & Takasaki, 1999; Huang, 2000; Puspa, 2007; Yudarwati, 2008; Yudarwati, 2010, Güner Koçak & Akdağ, 2021 etc.). Sriramesh (2021) emphasizes that the personal influence model should not be perceived as an "Asian Phenomenon" since most of the studies were conducted in Asia. Apart from Asia, there are other studies in the USA (O'Neil, 2003; Toth, 2000; Wu, 2005; Johnson, 2008; White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2008; Valentini, 2009; Somfai, 2009; Falconi, 2011; Wakefield, 2013; Meng & Neill, 2022), Europe (Schriner, 2008; Garcia, 2024; Valentini & Sriramesh, 2024 etc.) and Africa (Kiambi & Nadler, 2012; Anani Bossman, 2022; Anani-Bossman & Tandoh, 2023; Al Abdullah, 2021; Abdelhay, 2014). Although cultural dynamics, social culture and organizational culture, institutional and cultural communication dynamics have been examined in studies related to the personal influence model, there have been critical studies (Valentini, 2009) that emphasize the negative features of this model and highlight unethical practices. However, considering that the culture of each society is different and the form of communication to be carried out cannot be the same, it is known that different forms of communication can be established in different cultures. In some societies, gift-giving relationships are welcomed for cultural and religious reasons, while in others it may be perceived as bribery. While in some societies, personal closeness, acquaintance and developing good relations with powerful people are very important factors in terms of image and reputation (an important proverb in Turkish culture: "tell me who your friend is and I will tell you who you are"), in some societies it may be considered as abuse of relationships and unethical communication. For this reason, it is not possible for the relationship style used in every culture to find its counterpart in other cultures.

Although the cultural rituals of the personal influence model in public relations may differ, the strategies for establishing close relationships with key stakeholders are similar.

## 2.2. Personal Influence Model Strategies

Hospitality, cultural rituals (which may vary according to different cultures), and gift-giving relations should be considered as three important strategies for determining the limits of personal influence practices in public relations.

Personel Influence Strategies		
Hospitality	Cultural Rituals	Gift-giving Relations

Tablo 1. Personel Influence Strategies (Created by the author)

## Hospitality relations

In many cultures, hospitality is seen as an indicator of the value placed on the guest, of hospitality and reciprocity. Hospitality refers to both cultural and local traditions in which hosts care about the welfare of guests (Lashley, 2008). According to Derrida (2002), there is no single culture of hospitality, there is no culture without a culture of hospitality. Cultures compete with each other for hospitality relations and try to show that they are better than others (Lashley, 2008). As Derrida states, hospitality cultures are differentiated. The most specific example of hospitality relations in Asia is the "Omotenashi" culture in Japan. It is a form of hospitality that is based on meeting the needs of the people who are accepted as guests without telling them, includes elements of "sense of reciprocity", "sense of equality" and "sense of dignity" and is different from the traditional understanding of hospitality (Goantara, 2019). In Africa, "Ubuntu" refers to a cultural belief based on a sense of unity among people on all continents (Imamaliyeva, 2023), evoking phenomena such as hospitality, trust and honesty. According to Derrida's (2020) conditional-unconditional hospitality relations are seen and certain classifications are made that it is important to host the guest, but the freedom areas and boundaries of the guest and the host are certain (cited in Kocaer, 2024).

In Turkey, guests are called "guests of God" and can be considered as a social and cultural element. Guests are offered tea and traditional Turkish coffee, a table is set if they are hungry, a place to stay is arranged and this situation functions as a cultural obligation. The ahilik system seen in the Turkish state structure in history, caravanserais, inns, baths and guest rooms in old houses are proof of the hospitality of Turks (Toprak, 2019). In some cultures, hospitality relations are carried out in the form of moral obligation, solidarity, social harmony, generosity, social honor, social status within the community, and in some cultures, respect for individual spaces and privacy. However, in every culture, hospitality relations are an important function for maintaining social relations. With hospitality relations, the bonds of love and trust between individuals are strengthened, and many functions such as socializing, reinforcing friendships, sharing happiness and having fun are fulfilled (Kocaer, 2024).

The general purpose of hospitality relations, which is one of the important applications of the personal influence model, is to establish a lasting relationship with journalists or other key individuals at important decision-making points. Sriramesh states that organizational representatives establish interpersonal contacts with strategic individuals to achieve public relations objectives, and even a senior executive of a public organization stated that hospitality relations is not a function of public relations but is a core task of management and that an organization's image is not only product/service oriented, but that hospitality relations is also important for the quality of the overall opinion of the organization (Sriramesh, 1999). Public relations practitioners who conduct hospitality relations give

gifts, organize luncheons or dinners to the people they want to connect with, gain their appreciation and keep an important channel open to ask for favors on behalf of the organization when necessary (Grunig et al., 1995).

Eating meals, drinking beverages (Sriramesh, 2000; Sriramesh, Kim, & Takasaki, 1999), doing sports activities (Yudarwati, 2010), organizing invitations and trips both at work and outside are considered as hospitality relations with key stakeholders with whom it is aimed to establish strong relationships in hospitality relations.

### **Cultural Rituals**

Cultural rituals are symbolic actions that function to protect, maintain and reproduce the collective memory of societies. Each culture has different rituals according to its social values, traditions, customs, belief systems, norms, relations and communication styles. In particular, the communication styles of societies with common rituals aim to create a common ideology (Subtil, 2014; Lei et al. 2023) that enables individuals to express their beliefs, maintain emotional ties, and ensure social cohesion and stability.

Cultural rituals are characterized by qualitative features of communication (appeal to emotions, use of images and symbols, elements of ostentation, contribution to participants' identification). Depending on this, it can be decisive in the process of influencing public opinion in public relations practices (Mantulo, 2020).

In the context of public relations, cultural rituals can be used as a strategic way to create emotional connections with target audiences, build social capital and internalize corporate values (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003). Public relations practitioners are expected to observe what cultural rituals mean to a society and act in accordance with the requirements of cultural rituals in order to be able to contact the society or to develop a dialogue with powerful stakeholders in the society. Because the functions of cultural rituals are somehow related to the goals and practices of public relations, which makes it possible to apply ritualization techniques in public relations practice (Mantulo, 2020). However, the most important thing for public relations practitioners to remember is that each cultural ritual is unique to its culture and society. For example, in Asia, rituals such as guanxi and mizanzi (Buckley et al., 2006), ren (benevolence), yuan (predetermined relationship), (Servaes, 2016), Confucianism, tataeme, nomu (Sriramesh, Kim, & Takasaki, 1999) are practiced; in the Middle East and Africa, "majilis" (Badran et al, 2003), "ubuntu" (İmamaliyeva, 2023); in Turkey, cultural rituals such as setting the table, Turkish coffee, and feasting (Güner Koçak & Akdağ, 2021); Thanksgiving in America (Pleck, 1999); and Royal Events in England. The ritual of each culture may be different from the other

culture and confusion may arise in practice. For this reason, it is necessary to act in accordance with the rituals of the society.

When public relations practitioners relate to the public they want to have a personal impact on through cultural ritual practices, this will increase the strength and sincerity of the relationship, create an emotional bond that can build cultural belonging and identity, and make it possible to support national identity building and soft power strategies that will ensure social integration. Through the communication network developed based on cultural rituals, image and identity construction, crisis prevention, post-crisis recovery and cultural adaptation processes can be realized.

### **Gift Giving Relations**

Gift-giving is recognized as a symbolic way of generating reciprocity, gratitude, loyalty and social balance in society. In addition, a social obligation emerges with gift-giving. According to Mauss, a triple obligation emerges in gift-giving relationships as "giving-receiving and reciprocating" (Mauss, 1966). Among public relations practitioners, the timing, value and contextual meaning of the "corporate gift" are critical. The nature of the relationship, the cultural context, the symbolic meaning, and the financial value of the gift are all important for the long-term and sustainable communication with key stakeholders. The fact that gift-giving relationships create a sense of reciprocity and gratitude can be used as an advantage for public relations practitioners who give or receive gifts. In the personal influence model, through gifts given to those who are desired to be connected, the appreciation of these people is gained and an important channel is kept open to ask for favors on behalf of the organization when necessary (Grunig et al., 1995).

Gift-giving carries a symbolic value in public relations and has different meanings in different cultures. Using the practices of the personal influence model, South Korean public relations practitioners regularly send gifts and Ddukgab (money to buy Korean cakes) to important government officials and members of the media. "Giving Ddukgab" is a culturally acceptable custom that does not pose any legal obstacles (Sriramesh, et al., 1999). In Turkey, gift-giving is intertwined with the culture of "taking hearts" and "not going empty-handed". During holidays, official visits and opening ceremonies, gift-giving is considered an indispensable part of establishing and maintaining relationships. Tile plates, local products or books presented during protocol visits are symbolic means of representation. Such gifts have the meaning of keeping relations warm and expressing respect and loyalty.

In some societies, however, the financial value of the gift and the nature of the relationship raise ethical questions. In the United Arab Emirates, the gifts and other contributions that some public relations agencies and organizations offer to media professionals in exchange for positive editorial

coverage raise serious ethical issues. There is anecdotal evidence of reporters and editors in the UAE being offered expensive products as "gifts" (Badran et al. 2003). Valentini (2009) emphasizes that societies accustomed to informal relationships through gift-giving, exchange of services, dinners and cocktails with journalists, etc., often experience corruption of moderate severity when considered from an international perspective, not only in countries in the South and developing countries, but also in the US, Belgium, France, etc.

Gift-giving should be considered as a cross-cultural strategy in the context of public relations. Gift-giving, which is integrated with the personal influence model in Asian countries and limited in the West, is an important element of PR strategies in terms of both trust building and symbolic power generation.

### **2.3. Intersection of Soft Power and Personal Influence Model**

Soft power refers to the communication efforts of a country towards the citizens of different countries other than its own citizens. Soft power can be defined as the efforts of governments to communicate with global publics and to inform, influence and persuade these publics in line with national interests and foreign policies (Snow, 2020). Through soft power, host countries or governments aim to promote their foreign policy goals, objectives and cultures to target publics in order to create attitudes or, in the case of negative opinions, to change them into positive ones. Since soft power is based on communication, promotion, persuasion, attraction and encouragement, it creates a diplomatic balance between countries. According to Nye (2020), soft power is the ability of a country's culture, political ideals and policies to appeal and be seen as legitimate by others in order to shape the preferences of different publics. In the international conjuncture, the sources that generate soft power emerge from the values that an organization or country expresses in its culture, the examples it sets through its internal practices and policies, and the way it maintains relations with targets (Nye, 2020).

Soft power strategies have three dimensions. The first is daily communications, which involves explaining the scope of domestic and foreign policy decisions. This daily communication dimension includes being prepared to deal with crises and responding to attacks, and responding promptly. The second dimension is strategic communications. This is the planning of symbolic events and communications throughout the year to brand key themes or advance specific government policies. The third is the development of long-term relationships with "key people" over the years through scholarships, exchange programs, internships, seminars, conferences and access to media channels (Nye, 2020). When soft power strategies and personal influence strategies are evaluated, it is seen that the communication objectives and strategies used are quite parallel and even interchangeable.

In the personal influence model, long-term relationships need to be established with government representatives, civil society leaders, opinion leaders, journalists, activists, artists, in short, key stakeholders with the potential to influence the target audience. While establishing and building these strategic relationships, the sustainability of the relationship is ensured through hospitality relations, cultural rituals, gift-giving relations and mutual trust is built. As a result of the personal influences created, it is necessary to prevent crises that may arise about the organization, ask for favors from these people on behalf of the organization, and to be in strategic communication efforts for the image and reputation of the organization.

Similarly, in order to increase the image and reputation of the country with soft power strategies, long-term communication based on reciprocity with key stakeholders should be established, and cultural elements, hospitality relations, and gift-giving relations should be at the forefront in this form of communication. For this reason, it would be appropriate to say that countries conduct soft power communication within the scope of the personal influence model.

There is a misconception that the personal influence model as a public relations model is used especially in Asian countries (the Asian phenomenon). However, almost all countries use soft power strategies to conduct diplomatic relations with different countries and their publics. This shows that countries actually utilize the personal influence model to some extent. The fact that cultural contexts differ does not mean that the personal influence model is not applied. There may be differences in the form of the relationship and the techniques used. But the aim is long-term, trust-based and reciprocal, proactive communication efforts to prevent organizations from facing possible crises.

### **3. Method and Case Study**

#### **3.1. Method**

Using a qualitative content analysis method, this study aims to reveal how the concepts of personal influence model and soft power intersect in the public diplomacy activities of the Republic of Turkey. Qualitative research aims to emphasize the interaction, flexibility, and relationship between the various stages of the research process and enables contextual evaluation of complex communication processes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The research process in qualitative methods includes the development of questions and process steps, collecting data from the participants' own environments, inductive data analysis by reaching general themes from specific situations, and the researcher's interpretation of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2017). Data collection methods in qualitative research can be classified in different ways. In qualitative research methods; Creswell, observations, interviews, documents, audio-visual materials (2017); Merriam, interviews, observations

and documents (2018); Karasar, observations, interviews, correspondence, documentary review (2019). Document analysis technique was adopted in the study.

In 2018, the Presidential Communications Directorate was established to implement professional soft power strategies in Turkey. However, since public diplomacy activities are strategic and multifaceted, they are carried out with the support of the Presidency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Turkish Tourism Publicity and Development Agency, embassies abroad, press consultancies, and public institutions and organizations organized domestically. Within the scope of the study, the content of soft power projects, official reports, press releases, strategy documents, international media campaigns and public platforms between 2018 and 2025 were analyzed.

The main purpose of content analysis is to find concepts and relationships that can explain the collected data. Data that are summarized and interpreted in descriptive analysis are subjected to a deeper processing in content analysis, and concepts and themes that are not noticed in a descriptive approach can be discovered as a result of this analysis. For this purpose, the collected data must first be conceptualized and then organized logically according to the emerging concepts (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Within the scope of the study, the activities carried out by the Republic of Turkey were categorized according to hospitality relations, cultural rituals and gift-giving relations, which are personal influence model implementation strategies. The data obtained were interpreted according to the descriptive analysis method.

Table 2. Hospitality Relationship Codes

Code Name	Definition
Official Hospitality	Hosting delegations, foreign journalists or state representatives in Turkey
Trips	Organizing trips for foreign guests to promote the country

Table 2. Hospitality Relationship Codes (Created by the author)

Hospitality relations, official hospitality; organizing events to invite the primary stakeholders (government representatives, journalists, delegations, academics, representatives of civil society organizations, etc.), trips; organizing trips to introduce the cultural-historical-geographical areas of the country to the primary stakeholders were examined within the scope of the research.

Table 3. Cultural Rituals Codes

Code Name	Definition
Ceremony-Recognition Ceremonies	International events organized on national/cultural special days
Cultural Symbolism	Music, food, historical narratives, practices referring to religious/secular traditions
Shared Cultural Memory	Narratives, visuals, themes (Traditions, customs) to build bonds through common past and heritage

Table 3. Cultural Rituals Codes (Created by the author)

Kültürel ritüeller kodlama ölçeğinde törenler ve anma törenleri; şölen ritüeli (dini, milli ve kültürel); kültürel sembolizmde kültüre özgü yemekler (gastrodiplomasi faaliyetleri-Türk kahvesi geleneği), müzik-dinletiler, tarihi anlatılar (milli kahramanlık, Mevlevilik, Bektaşılık vb.); ortak kültürel bellekte benzer gelenek, görenek, inanç ve bilince sahip insanlarla kurulan duygusal bağ yer almaktadır.

Table 4. Gift-giving Relationship Codes

Code Name	Definition
Symbolic Gifts	Material elements presented such as cultural objects, books, art products, etc.

Table 4. Gift-giving Relationship Codes (Created by the author)

Symbolic gifts in gifting relations include culture-specific objects, local products, weavings, country-specific technological tools produced in Turkey, etc., given to show gratitude, leave a memory and honor.

Within the scope of the study, the data were obtained from the annual activity reports published on the official website of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, the Annual Reports of the Turkish Tourism Publicity and Development Agency, the publications of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Unesco Intangible Cultural Heritage List, news about international visits and events organized. The categories were prepared by utilizing the research literature.

### 3.2. Case: Communication Strategies of the Soft Power Generating Units of the Republic of Turkey

Established in 2018 under the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, the Directorate of Communications has become the center of Turkey's international communication strategies. The Directorate operates in areas such as public diplomacy, strategic communication, crisis communication, perception management, countering disinformation, media coordination and cultural promotion (Directorate of Communication, 2024).

Beyond traditional media activities, the soft power activities of the Presidency include relational strategies based on direct contact with the target country populations and opinion leaders. One of the primary objectives of the Directorate of Communication is to cooperate and coordinate with public institutions and organizations and non-governmental organizations to ensure that the international community is properly informed. In this context, the Directorate provides services such as accreditation, guidance, hosting, hospitality, catering and vehicle allocation to foreign delegations and accompanying media members who come to events organized by the Directorate or for international meetings or official visits. In particular, activities aimed at the Turkish diaspora abroad, one-on-one meetings with foreign media representatives, preparing social programs with the participation of members of the international press to promote the country, organizing trips, ensuring their participation in festivals organized by various organizations, hosting foreign media representatives and diplomatic leaders (Presidency of Communications, 2024) can be considered as typical practices of the personal impact model. In addition, direct perception-building initiatives carried out under the "Turkey Brand Office" can also be considered among the methods of the personal influence model.

In terms of creating soft power strategies, only the activities of the Presidential Communications Directorate are not sufficient. The Ministry of Tourism is the main institution responsible for the protection, maintenance and international promotion of Turkey's tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The Ministry supports the production of Turkey's soft power based on identity representation by promoting geographical areas, tourism routes and destinations, and publicizing Turkish culture, values, traditions, customs, belief system, language, history and art. The Turkish Tourism Publicity and Development Agency under the Ministry of Tourism also works to promote cultural, gastronomic and geographical diversity in the languages of target countries through digital storytelling. Embassies and Consulates abroad carry out cultural and protocol activities, as well as establishing relations with local communities and engaging with diaspora communities. All relevant institutions and organizations establish strategic relations with target publics in order to represent Turkey's identity, manage its image and reputation, and conduct crisis communication when necessary. The basic communication style of these relations is in line with the practices of the personal influence model in terms of hospitality relations, cultural elements being determinant in communication and gift-giving relations.

As a result, the Republic of Turkey's public diplomacy-soft power strategies are based on making efforts to ensure the sustainability of communication with key stakeholders emphasized in the personal impact model, hospitality relations, emphasizing cultural codes in communication and even building many communications on cultural codes, and conducting gift-giving relations to strengthen relations.

## 4. Findings and Analysis

### 4.1. Soft Power Practices Based on Hospitality Relations

Hospitality has functioned as a fundamental cultural value in the establishment and maintenance of social relations throughout history. Especially in societies with strong traditional codes like Turkey, hosting guests is not only an ethical behavior but also a form of identity, belonging and representation. When this value intersects with the personal influence model, one of the basic dynamics of public diplomacy, it transforms into a communication strategy based on interpersonal trust. In this model, it is essential to establish direct contact with the target person, develop empathy and provide relationship-based interaction. In this framework, hospitality becomes not only a cultural ritual but also an effective tool of soft power strategies that states can carry out towards international public opinion. When hospitality relations are evaluated within the scope of the personal impact model, hospitality relations can be divided into three categories in terms of hospitality relations carried out officially, i.e. diplomatically, hosting delegations from abroad in the country and conducting hospitality relations there when visiting a foreign country.

**Official Hospitality:** In Turkey's public diplomacy strategies, hospitality is not only a traditional cultural code but also an institutionalized communication tool. In this context, official hospitality involves hosting foreign media representatives, opinion leaders, diplomats and academics in Turkey, especially through state-sponsored programs. Such practices embody the elements of one-to-one contact, trust building and relationship management that form the basis of the personal influence model in the field.

The "Foreign Press Members Guest Program" conducted by the Presidential Directorate of Communications is the most specific example in this context. As a soft power strategy, the Directorate of Communications has set the goal of "initiating, following up, and coordinating the work and procedures related to the signing of agreements, memorandums of understanding and cooperation protocols in the fields of media and communication with the counterpart institutions of the counterpart country in order to develop cooperation with foreign countries in the fields of communication and media or to further improve existing relations" (Directorate of Communications, 2024). Since 2018, various organizations (panels, workshops, congresses, information meetings, thematic media gatherings, etc.) have been organized to invite foreign media representatives to the country. In order to establish contact with members of the media, visits to the other side are organized first. As stated in the 2019 annual report of the Directorate of Communications, meetings were held with the Washington Post Editorial Board, Turkish Press Members Residing in Washington and New York, Nikkei Newspaper Representatives, and Financial Times Editorial Board (Directorate of

Communications, 2019). These meetings were held with different media institutions and organizations every year. In 2025, within the scope of the "Special media program for July 15th", the Presidency's Directorate of Communications organized meetings with 81 cities in Turkey, as well as Hungary, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, Serbia, South Korea, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Senegal, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Cameroon, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, North Macedonia, Greece. A program was organized with the participation of media members from Kazakhstan, France, Switzerland, Germany, Uganda, Kenya, Georgia, Bulgaria, Austria, Burundi, Gambia, Ghana, Tanzania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia, Uzbekistan, Morocco, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Mauritania, Tunisia, Lebanon, Kuwait and TRNC (Anadolu Agency, 2025). Media members participating in the program are hosted in cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Konya, Gaziantep, Konya, Konya, and Gaziantep; exhibitions, museums, historical sites, cultural centers, and media institutions are visited; and Turkey's historical, modern, and traditional aspects are introduced simultaneously. These programs include various symbolic hospitality practices such as presentations of Turkish cuisine, interaction with local people, and meetings with experts.

The Stratcom (strategic communication) platform, created by the Directorate of Communication and organized annually since 2021, is an initiative that aims to bring together representatives from various countries and sectors to discuss global issues and trends shaping strategic communication. The Stratcom Summit brings together thousands of participants and speakers from more than 50 countries, and a global network has been established through the Stratcom Public Forum, Stratcom Youth and Stratcom Podcast brands (Stratcom, 2025). At Stratcom Summit 24, 64 local and foreign experts from leading public, private sector, civil society, media, academia and think tanks from 30 countries took part as speakers, and more than 3,000 local and foreign guests were hosted with the forum consisting of 8 panels, 4 speeches and 6 one-on-one sessions (Presidency of Communications, 2025a). Not only the content of the Stratcom Summit, but also the way the event was organized is an important example of how Turkey's culture of hospitality is integrated into public diplomacy.

Trips: As part of its public diplomacy practices, Turkey organizes thematic and cultural trips for members of the media, opinion leaders, academics and diaspora representatives invited from abroad to directly observe the social fabric of the country. In this context, the guests invited to Turkey are taken around by the Turkish Tourism Publicity and Development Agency. February 2025; Snowboard World Cup 2025 Press Hospitality (in Erzurum, Azerbaijan - Kazakhstan - Kyrgyzstan), The Christian Post Columnist Hospitality (in Istanbul and Bursa - USA), Sports and Culture Themed Influencer Hospitality (in Istanbul and Erzurum - Greece), MPI EMEC 2025 Conference Press Hospitality (in Istanbul, USA - UK), Saveurs Magazine Press Hospitality (in Istanbul - France), Eastern Express Themed Press

Hospitality (press members from Denmark - Germany - France - Indonesia - England - Finland on the Erzurum, Ankara, Kars, Erzincan and Sivas route) (TTGA February, 2025); Ramadan Themed Press Hospitality (Malaysia - Indonesia in Istanbul), Art and Luxury Themed Press Hospitality (Russia press team in Istanbul) in March (TTGA, March; 2025); UNESCO Route in Mesopotamia Themed Press Hospitality in April (Belgium - Poland - Netherlands - Hungary on the Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Mardin route), Western Anatolian History and Mythology Themed Press Hospitality (Norway - Estonia - Finland - Lithuania on the Balıkesir, Çanakkale, İzmir route) (TTGA, April; 2025), 60th Presidential Cycling Tour Press Hospitality in May. Cycling Tour Press Hospitality (Germany - Netherlands - Italy on the route of İzmir, Antalya), Manisa Culture Road Festival Press Hospitality (Serbia - Bosnia and Herzegovina - Bulgaria in Manisa) (TTGA, May, 2025) etc. trips were organized. The accommodation, meals, itinerary, guidance services, accreditation procedures of the invited guests are provided through the Presidential Communications Directorate.

The aim of these trips is not only to promote Turkey to government representatives, diplomats, journalists, opinion leaders and academics, but also to generate secondary soft power by allowing the guests to share their experiences with their target publics.

#### **4.2. Public Diplomacy Practices Based on Cultural Rituals**

The most important practice that enables the application of personal influence in public relations is the use of cultural elements and rituals. Through cultural rituals, emotional appeal, cultural belonging and shared memory can be created. This helps to strengthen ties, mutual understanding and trust between the communicating and interacting parties. Cultural rituals are used as strategic communication tools in a significant part of the Republic of Turkey's soft power strategies. These activities aim to both publicize Turkey's historical, cultural and social identity in the international arena and to create sympathy for the culture.

**Ceremonies and Commemorations:** Holidays in Turkey are divided into two categories: official and religious. The official holidays are April 23rd National Sovereignty and Children's Day, May 19th Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day, July 15th Democracy and National Unity Day and August 30th Victory Day. These are holidays with specific dates, celebrated for centuries, with themes of liberation, democracy, freedom and sovereignty, adopted by all institutions and organizations of the country and celebrated with ceremonies. Religious holidays are those in which religious rituals are practiced and whose dates vary each year. The most recent of these holidays is the July 15th Democracy and National Unity Day. For this reason, an intensive effort is being made to explain July 15th accurately to both national and international publics. In order to convey the value of July 15th Democracy and National Unity Day for Turkey to foreign publics, visuals were shared on a vehicle with

a digital screen circulating in Times Square in New York, a July 15th exhibition was organized at the NATO Headquarters with the participation of high-level NATO officials, and a number of other events were organized in Athens, Berlin, Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia, In the Consulates and Press Consultancies of Cairo, Kuala Lumpur, Nicosia, Paris, Beijing, Sarajevo, Tashkent, Beijing, Sarajevo, Tashkent, a symbolic commemoration ceremony was organized in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin with a coffin wrapped in the Turkish flag representing the citizens who lost their lives (251 people). In addition to these, invitations were organized and commemoration ceremonies were held at consulates abroad within the scope of August 30 Victory Day and October 29 Republic Day (Presidency of Communications, 2019).

Media professionals, NGO representatives and opinion leaders were invited to the commemoration ceremonies organized at Turkish Embassies and Press Consulates abroad. Video narrations, flag ceremonies and promotional publications were used. These ceremonies emphasized Turkey's message of "national resistance" and "protecting democratic values".

**Cultural Symbolism:** Supported by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey, "Turkish Cuisine Week" is celebrated between May 21-27 both in Turkey and in Turkish representations abroad (Consulates, Press Consulates, NGOs, etc.). Turkish Cuisine Week aims to convey Anatolian values such as hospitality, togetherness and unity, Turkish food culture and the tradition of setting the table for guests. For this reason, invitations and organizations are organized both at home and abroad in order to tell the classic and traditional dishes and stories of Turkish cuisine. The invitations are attended by government representatives, journalists, famous chefs and representatives of non-governmental organizations (Turkish Cuisine Week, 2025).

In order to promote Turkish coffee, which was included in the "Intangible Cultural Heritage List" by UNESCO in 2013 (UNESCO, 2025), a "Turkish Coffee Truck" (Gastronomy Turkey, 2025) is driven around the United States, Turkish coffee is offered to people on the streets and avenues it travels, and the history and stories of Turkish coffee are told. In addition, December 5, the date of the registration of Turkish coffee, is celebrated as "World Turkish Coffee Day" (TTGA, 2025a). Turkish coffee is a cultural memory-making tool that is considered a symbol of Turkish culture. According to Turkish culture, Turkish coffee is served to deepen conversations and establish sincere relationships between people. In fact, the proverb "A cup of coffee has 40 years of memory" is used among people who drink Turkish coffee together. Turkish coffee is served to deepen personal relationships.

**Shared Cultural Memory:** Celebrated with local rituals and beliefs in a vast region from Central Asia to the nations in the Balkans, Nowruz is a day that each nation identifies and symbolizes with its own cultural values and basically welcomes the arrival of spring. Nevruz, which is accepted as a Turkish

holiday, is celebrated on March 21 with various traditions and ceremonies (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2025). Fires are lit and jumped over, food is eaten and dances are performed. Nevruz, which is thought to bring abundance and fertility, is celebrated as a feast in communities. During Nowruz, a warm and sincere communication is established between people and cultural values are shared.

The "Çanakkale Victory" and Commemoration Ceremony, celebrated every year on March 18, is an important ceremony that highlights collective narratives of historical intersections, shared experiences and shared tragedies. The March 18, 1915 Çanakkale Victory has left deep traces not only in the national memory of Turkey, but also in the collective consciousness of the peoples of other countries that participated in the war. The Gallipoli Front has a central place in the historical narratives of countries such as Australia, New Zealand (ANZAC), Britain, France and India. In this respect, Çanakkale constitutes the basic ground for a narrative that turns from enmity to friendship between the opposing sides. In Turkey, "Çanakkale Victory" is celebrated with various ceremonies, exhibitions and religious rituals on March 18 (Presidency of Communication, 2025b). In Australia, April 25 is also recognized as "Anzac Day". Delegations coming from Australia to Çanakkale organize commemoration ceremonies for the martyrs and perform various rituals (Anzac Day, 2025). March 18 commemoration ceremonies organized by Turkey's foreign missions aim to transform historical pain into a universal message of peace. The diplomatic discourses on the theme of "from enemy to friend" used in the Çanakkale narrative can be considered as a symbolic representation of soft power.

#### **4.3. Public Diplomacy Practices Based on Gift Giving**

Gifting is one of the oldest and universal forms of communication that enables the symbolic exchange of cultural codes. In Turkish culture, a gift is not only a form of presentation; it is also loaded with meanings such as respect, gratitude, loyalty, and heartwarming. In this respect, gifting is closely related to soft power generation and personal influence model, which is an important pillar of public diplomacy.

**Symbolic Gifts:** Symbolic gifts used in Turkey's soft power practices both contain the aesthetic codes of national culture and represent the power and capabilities of the country. The President's gift of "TOGG", Turkey's first domestic and national vehicle, to the countries with which he has diplomatic contacts and visits is the most specific example that can be considered in this context. TOGG is a representation of Turkey's national technology vision, domestic production capacity and global prestige claim. First, President Erdoğan presented TOGG vehicles to UAE President Al Nahyan during his visit on July 19, 2023 (Anadolu Agency, 2023a). In subsequent diplomatic visits, the President presented TOGG, Turkey's domestic automobile, to the Emir of Qatar Al Sani (Directorate of Communications, 2023a), Crown Prince Salman of Saudi Arabia (Directorate of Communications,

2023b), President of Kazakhstan Kasım Cömert Tokayev (Directorate of Communications, 2023c), President of Kyrgyzstan Caparov (Directorate of Communications, 2024a), President of Indonesia Subianto (Anadolu Agency, 2025a), and Prime Minister Sharif of Pakistan (Directorate of Communications, 2025c). There are some sub-messages in presenting TOGG to other country presidents. These include the technological representation of the country, national identity and cultural pride. Gifting a product that is valuable for Turkey to primary stakeholders with whom Turkey has close diplomatic contacts allows for the establishment of long-term relations of friendship and reciprocity.

## **5. Overall Evaluation and Discussion**

The findings of this study, when evaluated within the framework of personal influence model strategies and soft power practices, reveal that Turkey's public diplomacy practices are strategically planned based on cultural representation, with a focus on building mutual trust and sustainable relations. Practices such as hospitality, cultural rituals and gift-giving are not only symbolic gestures; they are also strategic message carriers directed at the public opinion of the other country. Diplomacy conducted through personal ties shows that Turkey's preferred model of public diplomacy is individual-oriented, contact-based and has a high emotional impact.

The personal impact model is implemented through personalized representations within institutional diplomacy in Turkey, and the practices of the Presidential Communications Directorate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Turkish Tourism Promotion and Development Agency exemplify this model. Actions such as the gift of TOGG, one-to-one contact with participants at the Stratcom Summit, and honorary awards given to diaspora individuals offer a "hybrid" implementation model that blends corporate diplomacy with personal gestures. Turkey's approach differs from Western traditions of institutional public diplomacy and reflects a more relationship-oriented model that is nourished by the cultural context.

The coding analysis of the study revealed that Turkey's soft power strategies are structured around three main categories: (1) hospitality relations, (2) cultural rituals, and (3) gift-giving practices. Strategies based on these categories demonstrate the ability to reach different target groups with different soft power tools. For example, it was observed that hospitality-based strategies generate institutional sympathy, cultural rituals are effective in historical memory creation and national narrative construction, and gift-giving has both symbolic and emotional impact. Thus, the categorical diversification of strategies makes Turkey's soft power capacity target-sensitive.

Institutions and organizations that strive to generate soft power for the Republic of Turkey play a leading role not only in content production and media relations management, but also in

Turkey's international image-building, value-based diplomatic interaction and the production of emotionally charged messages. International summits, media forums, diaspora events and symbolic gifting activities reposition Turkey's public diplomacy on the axis of normative attraction. In the activities carried out, the communication strategies envisaged by the personal impact model appear to be an effective way to achieve the goal and success.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The answer to the question "How can the concepts of hospitality, cultural rituals and gift-giving, which are the practices of the personal influence model, contribute to the reinterpretation of soft power practices?" can be summarized as follows through the analysis of the Turkish case:

The Republic of Turkey's public diplomacy activities represent a modernized and institutionalized version of the personal influence model. The forms of hospitality, cultural rituals and gift-giving used in the personal influence model, when evaluated in the specific context of diplomatic relations, ensure the representation of culture, the development of warmer and more sincere relations between cultures, sincerity, trust and reciprocity in the relations aimed to be established.

This research reinterprets the personal influence model not only as a trust-based relationship model between individuals, but also as a public diplomacy strategy integrated into state representation. Especially in the Turkish context, this model has been enriched with cultural codes (e.g. coffee, hospitality, symbolic gifts) and has become a soft power tool with increased emotional impact capacity. Therefore, this study makes an important theoretical contribution to the literature emphasizing the cultural and symbolic aspects of public diplomacy.

This study is limited to document analysis and content analysis methods. Future research can be supported by surveys and focus group studies on the perceptions of foreign target audiences to generate more versatile data. In the future, comparative regional analyses can be conducted on the contexts and effects of Turkey's use of tools such as hospitality, gifting and cultural rituals. Micro-level case studies on how the personal influence model is institutionalized through civil society, university, private sector and media actors are also suggested.

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