

The COVID-19 Normalization Process for Turkish Nations in terms of Health Communications: The Case of Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

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Abstract: This study aims to determine how the health ministries of Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) formed health communication strategies through their official Twitter accounts during the normalization process COVID-19 pandemic. Within the scope of the research, based on the date when the normalization process of Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and the TRNC started, one-month Twitter posts were analyzed by the thematic analysis method. The study was diagnosed with the 2020.03 version of the Maxqda program. The findings determined that although the three countries struggled with the COVID-19 pandemic in line with different strategies, health ministries shared the public awareness and awareness in the normalization process of this global pandemic. The most shared content in all three countries is the COVID-19 Table, including the daily number of cases. When examining the impact and transformation of Twitter content based on the epidemic, the Republic of Türkiye has the most comprehensive range about the pandemic, followed by Azerbaijan and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. As a result, the pandemic affects the official Twitter account shares of the Ministry of Health in all three countries.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, health communication strategy, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, TRNC.

Öz: Bu çalışmada COVID-19 pandemisi normalleşme sürecinde Türkiye, Azerbaycan ve Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti sağlık bakanlıklarının resmi Twitter hesapları aracılığıyla sağlık iletişimi stratejisini nasıl oluşturduğunu belirlemek amaçlanmıştır. Araştırma kapsamında Türkiye, Azerbaycan ve KKTC'nin normalleşme sürecinin başladığı tarih baz alınarak bir aylık Twitter paylaşımları tematik analiz yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Çalışma Maxqda programının 2020.03 versiyonuyla analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgulara göre, üç ülke farklı stratejiler doğrultusunda COVID-19 pandemisiyle mücadele etmesine rağmen küresel çaptaki bu pandeminin normalleşme sürecinde toplumda farkındalık oluşturma ve kamuoyunu bilinçlendirme amacıyla paylaşım yapıldığı tespit edilmiştir. Bu bağlamda her üç ülke de en çok paylaşılan içerik günlük vaka sayılarının yer aldığı COVID-19 Tablosudur. Ülkeler bazında Twitter içeriklerinin salgından etkilenmesi ve dönüşümü incelendiğinde, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti pandemi ile ilgili en kapsamlı içeriğe sahipken ardından Azerbaycan ve Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti takip etmektedir. Sonuç olarak pandeminin her üç ülkenin sağlık bakanlığı resmi Twitter hesabı paylaşımları üzerine etkisi bulunduğu görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: COVID-19 Pandemi, sağlık iletişimi stratejisi, Türkiye, Azerbaycan, KKTC.

Jel Code: I18, H12, M38

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Introduction

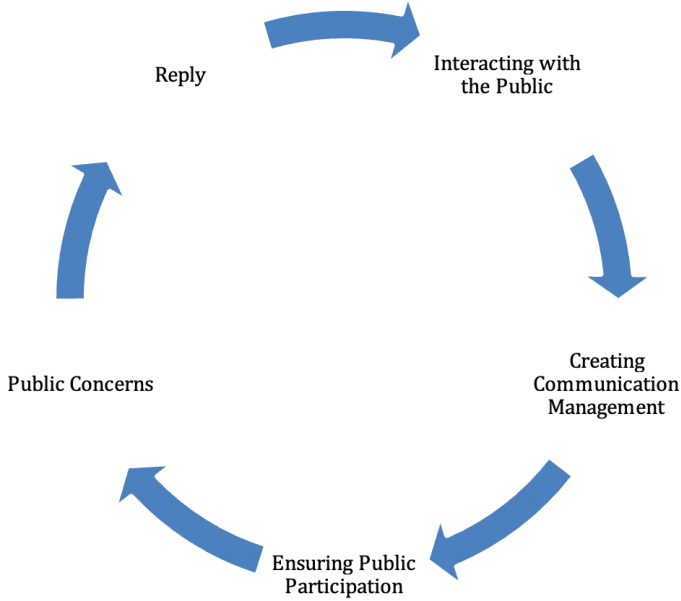
Social media has a significant role in developing communication between individuals and health institutions and improves the communication between individuals and each other in achieving a good health status. Social media increases its power to increase public health communication in proportion to the number of users (Thackeray et al., 2012; Sundararajan & Sundararajan, 2012; Reddick & Aikins, 2012). With the proliferation of new media environments, it can be said that the effect of health communication is proportional to the number of people in these media. Health communication is integrated with the health promotion system; it motivates, informs, and influences institutions, individuals, and the public about serious health problems. It is also aimed that health communication creates an awareness that will create the proper behaviour for the public's health due to cooperation. (Bertot et al, 2010; Ergül, 2013; Khasawneh & Abu-Shanab, 2013) According to Ratzan (1996), health communication is a method that includes art and the scope of health communication. In addition to contributing to the economy, it also helps health policy by improving general health by increasing the quality of life of individuals. In addition, diseases are prevented through health promotion and health communication. Because of all these features, health communication is defined as a communication method that considers social benefits in various aspects.

Public health communication examines the creation and publication of health information through media tools and how this information is used to promote health education and healthcare practices and promote health (Kreps et al., 1998; Işık, 2010). If we evaluate this context, health communication occurs at various levels and is practised over a wide area. According to Gallant et al. (2011), health communication transforms traditional health communication with the spread of interactive media tools and evolves into a more participatory level. When considered in terms of health communication of public institutions, the strategic communication cycle is as follows:

The purpose of health communication is established through social media; to understand the public's perception, accelerate the behavioural modification process, and inform and educate the public about health problems. Finally, it accelerates the information exchange during the pandemic process (Thackeray et al., 2012). The data reveals a latent social disease, accident, and health situation to follow dangerous behaviours and predict diseases that may be pandemics. Studies conducted to reveal the spread tendencies of the virus in flu epidemics and to use of Twitter data can be cited as an example (Mendi, 2015).

Figure 1.

Strategic Communication Cycle



Source: Park & Lim, 2014, p. 84.

In December 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in China's Hubei Province, and patients who tested positive for COVID-19 were detected. Due to the high risk of contagion and infection (Ntv, 2020). The first COVID-19 positive cases were detected in Türkiye on March 11, 2020 (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2020). After the measures were taken, the normalization process started on May 25, 2020 (Ntv, 2020). While the first COVID-19 positive case was detected in Azerbaijan on February 28, 2020, the first COVID-19 positive case was seen on March 13, 2020, in TRNC (Türkölmez, 2020). Statements about the normalization plan made in Azerbaijan were made on May 29, 2020 (Mehrnaw, 2020). In the TRNC, the normalization process started on May 4, 2020 (Hürriyet, 2020). In the scope of the research, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and TRNC Ministry of Health, in the COVID-19 pandemic period, Twitter has been analyzed to reveal how they use it within the scope of health communication. The content analysis method will analyze the monthly shares of these three countries from the announcement of the normalization dates. The research questions are listed as follows:

- Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and TRNC Ministry of Health of the official Twitter account sharing. Are there any elements that will ensure the public's participation?

- Had Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and TRNC been created in the Ministry of Health's official Twitter account conversion shares?
- In the sharing of the Ministry of Health of Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and TRNC, is international cooperation located?
- What is the strategic communication method of the Ministries of Health on Twitter?

Today, it is possible to say that everyone, from bottom to top, can use social media extensively. During the COVID-19 pandemic period, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and the TRNC Ministry of Health, as the official means of communication, Twitter was examined how to use and for what purpose and research are essential for future studies.

Literature Review

New media together increase the intensive use of social media tools. Therefore, social media tools related to health are increasingly being used. It states that the importance of these environments is emerging to promote health and the promotion. In this context, some of the studies dealing with the issue of health communication in social media are as follows; Burtis (2011) argues that health education booklets, detailed health information, and statistical information shared in the official accounts of the ministry about the health system for the disabled will increase awareness about health. Korda and Itani (2013) state that the media has significant potential in health promotion as it is the cheapest tool. Thackeray et al. (2013) determined that health institutions need to interact and have two-way communication on Twitter to achieve successful health communication. Neiger et al. (2013) state a one-way communication on Twitter, arguing that health communication will be more effective when local health institutions interact with followers on public health issues. Yıldırım (2014) determined that the Twitter posts of the Ministry of Health could not have sufficient interaction, although they were about maintaining a healthy life and doing exercises. Mendi (2015) suggests that it would be beneficial for health institutions to make and develop tactical planning to improve health communication on social media.

Gündoğdu and Kılıç (2017) examined the social media accounts of the Ministry of Health as part of the #emeginesaglik campaign. Within the framework of this campaign, they determined that although the ministry effectively used social media accounts, it did not have the desired effect. Sinnenberg et al. (2017) conducted a literature review on the use of Twitter in health communication studies. They

stated that the published studies were on the job posting, participation, monitoring, mediation, and network analysis. Şenol and Avcı (2019) state that the Ministry of Health uses Twitter for health communication purposes and that this social network has a vital role in informing the public. Öztürk and Vardarlıer (2020) emphasize that social media is an effective tool in terms of health communication. Studies address the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on health communication in the literature. Studies handled in this context; Ting et al. (2020) argue that WHO's COVID-19 reports will provide pandemic awareness and improve health communication in third world countries. Chen et al. (2020), Sina Weibo, has analyzed the contents of his account within the scope of health communication. He stated that this account facilitates the communication of the institution-citizen and positively affects the public's participation as a result of the analysis of 1411 shares. Liu et al. (2020) argue that COVID-19 health communication models provide health-related information in media environments. İnce and Evcil (2020) evaluated the three-week precautions and measures taken within the framework of the decisions and circulars published by public institutions and organizations after the first case of the COVID-19 epidemic in Türkiye.

Akgün (2020) evaluated the current situation by comparing Türkiye with Italy, England, and France during the pandemic period. According to Sultanoglu et al. (2020), travel bans, social distance, and hygiene measures prevented the spread of the virus during the pandemic period. Volkan and Volkan (2020) argue that governments should provide psychological protective measures to reduce the workload of psychological helplines, which were established within the scope of combating psychological disorders after the COVID-19 epidemic and provide free service. Selamzade et al. (2020) state that there is no hypersensitivity to the emergence of the pandemic. Amiranashvili et al. (2020) developed a program to detect the spread of the virus by associating the COVID-19 cases with the population data of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Türkiye, and Armenia. Korkmazer et al. (2020) determined that healthcare workers affected by the pandemic are at significant risk in terms of anxiety.

Moreover, it suggests that health workers should provide psychological support to minimize their anxiety levels. Finset et al. (2020) draw attention to social distancing and hand hygiene rules that affect the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to these studies, Gül and Çelebi (2020), in their study, COVID-19, evaluate the epidemic process in crisis management.

Many national and international studies have been conducted on social media and health communication. It is seen that during the COVID-19 pandemic process, studies have been carried out on technological developments, psycho-social situation

assessments, anxiety and anxiety levels of healthcare workers, and crisis management within the scope of health communication. It is necessary to analyze the health authorities' shares and put forward the sharing table of the pandemic process. Thus, it will be determined which warnings and precautions have increased public health during the pandemic where the importance of health communication has increased.

Use of Twitter as a Health Communication Tool and Thematic Content Analysis

The thematic analysis method helps interpret the researchers' perspectives, identify common points in the literature, and reveal differences (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). In addition, the philosophical background, dividing the transfer of knowledge, categorizing in data analysis, explaining, interpreting, considering the data source, and researching the issues are these common points (Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 399). The point that distinguishes thematic analysis from the content analysis is that the text subject to the analysis is dominant in its qualitative aspects that emphasize the existential features (Marks & Yardley, 2004, p. 56).

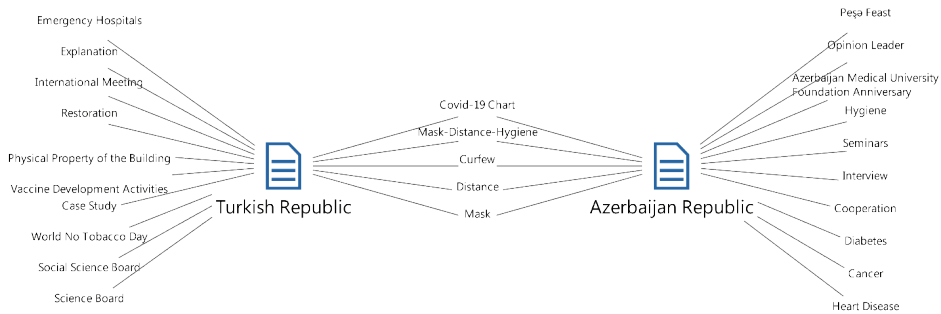
Türkiye Ministry of Health data between May 29-June 29, 2020, the dates were analyzed using the content analysis method. Data from the Azerbaijan Ministry of Health were analyzed between May 29 and June 29. The TRNC Ministry of Health was analyzed between May 4 and June 4, 2020. Due to the nature of the study, the examined contents are limited in the context of the dates of the new normalization process. The normalization of each country on different dates during the COVID-19 epidemic creates uncertainty about whether the process will continue. Depending on this uncertainty, the 1-month period in which the normalization process begins will be analyzed. The data obtained from the observations were analyzed by the thematic analysis method, and the Maxqda program 2020.03 version was used in the analysis process.

Findings

The posts in a new normalization process of Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and TRNC of the Ministry of Health were evaluated separately after explaining via comparison tables.

Figure 2.

Türkiye-Azerbaijan Ministry of Health on Twitter Content Comparison

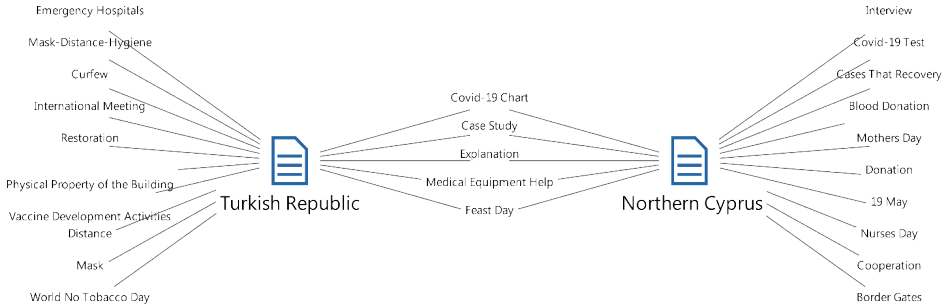


Analysis of data obtained from the official Twitter analysis of the Türkiye and Azerbaijan Ministry of Health is as follows: The dataset is the COVID-19 Table, Mask-distance-hygiene rules, curfews, and finally, the emphasis on the protection of social distance in addition to the warning on the use of masks separately. If we consider the distribution of these data, 61 shares were made in the COVID-19 Table. The frequency of the posts containing mask-distance and hygiene warnings, which have become a part of controlled social life with the pandemic, is 18, while the number of posts containing notifications about the curfew imposed in both countries is 8. The number of posts to explain the importance of maintaining social distance and wearing individual masks is 8. At this point, the contents that differentiate the Twitter posts are the posts regarding the opening of the hospital, the restoration, and the contents describing the physical characteristics of the opened buildings. Statements made during the new normalization process, international meetings, vaccine development activities, analysis of COVID-19 cases, and sharing about the World No Tobacco Day are other factors that reveal this difference-established after the emergence of the pandemic in Türkiye, the shares related to the Science and Society Science Board meetings were held. This is among our differences in managing outbreaks.

Unlike Türkiye, Pesh Feast is one of the most common topics shared by Azerbaijan. Then, the words of opinion leaders and the anniversary sharing of Azerbaijan Medical University are included. In addition, there is an emphasis on hygiene, which has increased with the pandemic, seminars, and interviews with the health minister.

Figure 3.

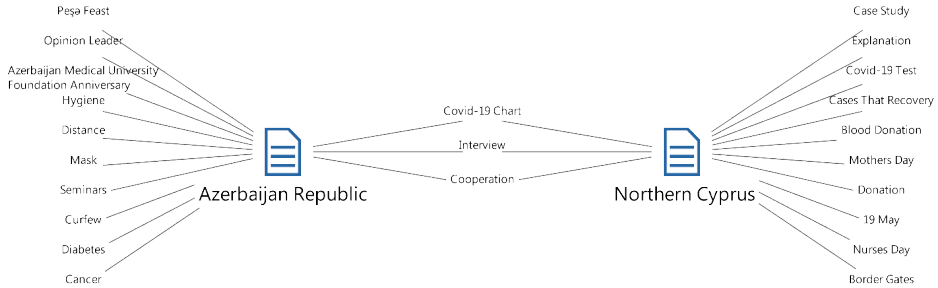
Türkiye-TRNC Ministry of Health on Twitter Content Comparison



Analysis of data obtained from the official Twitter analysis of the Türkiye and TRNC Ministry of Health is as follows: The dataset is the COVID-19 Table, case analysis, explanations, medical equipment aids, and holiday greetings. If we consider the distribution of these data, 63 shares were made in the COVID-19 Table. At this point, the contents that differentiate the Twitter posts are the posts regarding the opening of the hospital, the restoration, and the contents describing the physical characteristics of the opened buildings. There are mask-distance and hygiene warnings, curfews, international meetings, and vaccine development activities that have entered our lives with the pandemic. Finally, some tweets deal with the increasing mask and distance warnings separately during the pandemic and World No Tobacco Day posts. Unlike Türkiye, the interviews made by the minister of health are at the top of the issues shared by the TRNC. COVID-19 test applications and information about the discharge of patients recovering from COVID-19 disease are also shared. There are tweets about blood donation highlights, Mother’s Day, financial donations, and Youth and Sports Day congratulations.

Figure 4.

Azerbaijan-TRNC Ministry of Health on Twitter Content Comparison



Analysis of data obtained from the official Twitter analysis of the Azerbaijan and TRNC Ministry of Health is as follows: The dataset is the COVID-19 Table, interview, and cooperation statements. If we consider the distribution of these data, 64 shares were made in the COVID-19 Table. The most crucial point that reveals the difference in the steps taken by both countries to prevent the epidemic during the COVID-19 pandemic process is the Pesh Festival celebrated by Azerbaijan during the pandemic process. Following the festival celebrations, leaders' opinions and the anniversary messages of Azerbaijan Medical University are included. Some tweets emphasize hygiene, mask, and distance with the effect of the pandemic. Finally, content on curfew, cancer, and diabetes was included in the official Twitter account of the Ministry of Health of Azerbaijan.

Unlike Azerbaijan, COVID-19 case studies are included in the official Twitter account of the TRNC Ministry of Health. In addition to the statements made by the Ministry of Health, information about COVID-19 tests is also provided. Discharge of cases recovering from COVID-19 disease and blood donation announcements are also included. There are also informative statements about the donations made and the opening of the closed border gates as a measure for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1.*Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Health Tweet Content Analysis*

	Mention	Link	Without Link and Mention	Total
Curfew			3.47	3.47
Meeting	1.49	1.49	9.41	12.38
Coronavirus Table		16.33	0.99	17.33
Hospital Opening		0.99	14.85	15.84
Controlled Life			13.37	13.36
Epidemic Measures		5.44		5.44
Disease Information		0.5	1.49	1.98
Special day		0.99	4.95	5.94
Social Partnership	0.99		6.42	7.43
Gratitude			3.47	3.47
Information		0.5	12.87	13.36
Total%	2.48	26.24	71.29	100

The findings are as follows: The use of links and mentions is not included in the posts on curfew. The total frequency rate of the posts about the curfew was 3.47%. The mention and link usage rate in the posts about the meeting is 1.49%. The frequency rate of content without links or mentions is 9.41%. No mention is used in coronavirus table shares, and the rate of link usage is 16.33%, while the rate of posts without mentions and links is 0.99%. While no mention is used in posts related to the hospital's opening, the rate of link usage is 0.99%, and the rate of tweets without both links and mention is 14.85%. Mention and link use are not included in the controlled social life content where the importance of masks, distance, and hygiene are explained. The rate of controlled social life posts that do not include mentions and links is 13.37%. No mention was used in the tweets where epidemic measures were included, and the link usage rate was 5.44%. The mentions are not included in the posts that provide information about diseases, while the link usage is 0.5%. The rate of posts without links and mentions in the disease information category is 1.49%. While mention is not used in posts related to special days, the rate of link usage is 0.99%. The share rate of tweets with unique day content that does not use mentions and links is 4.95%. While the mentioned usage frequency of posts on social partnership is 0.99%, link usage was not preferred in this category. The rate of tweets without mention and links in social partnership content is 6.42%.

The use of links and mentions is not preferred in tweets that share healthcare workers who lost their lives during the pandemic under the headline gratitude, while the rate of these contents is 3.47%. Mention is not preferred in tweets about informative, the frequency of link usage is 0.5%, and the rate of posts without link and mention is 12.87%.

When the Ministry of Health shares in the Twitter account during the normalization process are examined, the mentioned usage rate is 2.48%, while the link usage rate is 26.24%. It was determined that 71.29% of the tweets shared between May-25 June 2020 included neither mention nor link usage. When the data are analyzed in Türkiye, it is the most shared topics coronavirus table with 17.33%. Postings related to opening a hospital take second place with a rate of 15.84%. The controlled social life and information category is third, including masks, distance, and hygiene, 13.36%. The meeting is in fourth place with a rate of 12.38%. In fifth place is the social partnership category with 7.43%. While the posts about the special day are in sixth place with a rate of 5.94%, the posts about the epidemic measures are in seventh place with a rate of 5.44%. In eighth place, the curfew and gratitude category is 3.47%. The disease category is in the last place with 1.98%.

Table 2.

Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Health Tweet Content Analysis

	Mention	Link	Without Link and Mention	Total
Curfew			1.41	1.4
Meeting		2.82	1.41	4.23
Coronavirus Table			43.66	43.66
Hospital Opening				
Controlled Life			14.08	14.08
Epidemic Measures				
Disease Information		4.22		4.23
Special day			18.31	18.31
Social Partnership		1.41	1.41	2.82
Gratitude				
Information		2.82	8.45	11.27
Total%		11.27	88.73	100

The findings are as follows: The use of links and mentions is not included in the curfew posts, and the rate of shared posts is 1.4%. While the link usage rate is 2.82% in tweets with meeting topics, the rate of shares without links and mentions is 1.41%. Links and mentions were not used in the coronavirus table content, and the rate of tweets in this category is 43.66%. There is no link and mention usage in posts emphasizing controlled social life, and the frequency value of these shares is 14.08%. While no mention is used in tweets containing information about diseases, the rate of link usage is 4.22%. The use of links and mentions is not included in the posts regarding special days, and the share rate in this category is 18.31%. While there is no mention of usage in the posts with social partnership topic content, the link usage rate is 1.41%, and the share rate without links and mentions is 1.41%. While mention is not used in informational posts, the rate of link usage is 2.82%, and the rate of tweets without mention and link is 8.45%. When interpreting the data taken in the official Twitter account of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Azerbaijan, it is observed that the ministry does not share the opening of the hospital, epidemic measures, and gratitude the subject content. It is also noteworthy that the Ministry of Health does not use mentions in its Twitter account. The link usage rate is 11.27% within one month, while the total post rate without links and mentions is 88.73%.

Table 3.

Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Ministry of Health Tweet Content Analysis

	Mention	Link	Without Link and Mention	Total
Curfew				
Meeting			1.96	1.96
Coronavirus Table		22.55	32.35	54.91
Hospital Opening				
Controlled Life				
Epidemic Measures		0.98		0.98
Hes Code				
Disease Information				
Special day			9.8	9.8
Social Partnership		3.92	1.97	5.88
Gratitude				
Information		20.59	5.88	26.47
Total%		48.04	51.96	100

observed that ministries used their corporate Twitter accounts on social media to communicate. During the COVID-19 outbreak, public institutions and organizations actively used social media for many reasons, such as sharing up-to-date information with the public, keeping the pulse of the target audience, creating public opinion, and adding strength to their image and reputation. There are case studies, descriptions, located medical equipment assistance, and flag greeting compared to the content of the official Twitter account of Türkiye and the Azerbaijan Health Ministry. The steps taken by both countries to prevent the epidemic during the COVID-19 pandemic have differed. Accordingly, Türkiye opened emergency hospitals during the pandemic period. The announcements made in the new normalization process, international meetings, vaccine development activities, the analysis of COVID-19 cases, and the sharing of the contents of the special day are other factors that reveal this difference. Unlike Türkiye, Pesh Feast is one of the most common topics shared by Azerbaijan. Then, the words of opinion leaders and the anniversary sharing of Azerbaijan Medical University are included. When the official Twitter account of Türkiye and the TRNC Ministry of Health examined COVID-19 Table, case studies, descriptions, medical equipment benefits, and festive greetings were located.

Unlike Türkiye, the interviews made by the minister of health are at the top of the issues shared by the TRNC. COVID-19 test applications and information about the discharge of patients recovering from COVID-19 disease are also shared. Finally, when the contents of the official Twitter accounts of Azerbaijan and TRNC Ministries of Health are compared, the data set that forms the common sharing area of both countries is the COVID-19 Table, interviews, and cooperation statements. The most critical point that reveals the difference in the steps taken by both countries to prevent the epidemic during the COVID-19 pandemic process is the Pesh Festival celebrated by Azerbaijan during the pandemic process. Following the festival celebrations, the opinions of opinion leaders and the anniversary messages of Azerbaijan Medical University are included.

Unlike Azerbaijan, COVID-19 case studies are included in the official Twitter account of the TRNC Ministry of Health. In addition to the statements made by the Ministry of Health, information about COVID-19 tests is also provided. Discharge of cases recovering from COVID-19 disease and blood donation announcements are also included. The only issue that constitutes the standard sharing set of the three countries is the posts of the tables containing the COVID-19 tables. In sharing the Ministry of Health's official Twitter account of Azerbaijan, TRNC, and Türkiye, and when the link and mention utilization is analyzed, Türkiye ranks first with 2.48%. In this context, the fact that the sharing of COVID-19 tables with a country-based

output and photograph of the epidemic in the three countries is in the first place can be interpreted as a document published in response to the accountability request of an open government as well as fulfilling the participation and transparency elements from public relations practices.

When the impact and transformation of Twitter contents are examined, the issues related to the pandemic in Türkiye: Curfew 3.47, COVID-19 Table 17.33, Controlled Life 13.36, epidemic Measures 5.44. The issues reflected in the content of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Health's Twitter posts due to the COVID-19 outbreak: Curfew was 1.4, Coronavirus Table 43.66, Controlled Life 14.08. The pandemic issues in the official Twitter account of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' Ministry of Health: Coronavirus Table 54.91 and Epidemic Measures are given at a rate of 0.98. While the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Türkiye has the most comprehensive content about the pandemic in its official Twitter account shares, it is followed by Azerbaijan and Northern Cyprus. At this point, it is seen that the pandemic is effective on the shares of these countries' ministries of health on official Twitter accounts, and this effect is undeniable.

When Twitter usage is examined in terms of health communication, the three countries participate and share in this channel to interact with the public during the pandemic process. These countries carry out one-way communication management on Twitter with the public they interact with. It was determined that the TRNC made calls for blood donation and gave directions to encourage public participation; Türkiye and Azerbaijan called for observance of mask and distance rules. The three countries do not respond to the public on Twitter as they follow a one-way communication strategy. As a result, a global crisis has been experienced since the day declared the coronavirus disease was a pandemic. In this crisis environment, each country tries to fight the epidemic in line with a different strategy to control the epidemic. Therefore, although there are differences in Twitter posts, coronavirus tables have an important place in the posts of the three countries. Thus, it has been determined that ministries use Twitter in line with factors such as creating social awareness and informing and directing the public in line with the decisions taken under pandemic conditions.

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