



SOFT POWER OF THE UNITED STATES: IMPACT OF THE UNIVERSAL VALUES ON TURKEY

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Abstract

This study was conducted in order to reveal the perceptions of the students of the Department of Journalism in the Faculty of Communication in Turkey on the America's soft power, with reference to the recent discussions on the soft power of the United States. In the study, in which the focus group discussion technique was used, it was researched whether universal values had an impact on the positive view towards the United States and whether they built trust and credibility. Discussions, which involve three focus group sessions with 120-minute interviews, were held. In the study, in which the obtained data is supported by the literature, the impact of universal values on the positive view towards the United States and on the building of trust and credibility was assessed by participants in terms of United States internal and external politics. At the end of the study, it was emphasized that universal values would not build trust and credibility for the United States if the inconsistent political approaches were not shown and dialogue was not established, and that they could not achieve the desired behavior on the target group.

Keywords: Soft Power, Universal Values, United States, America, Turkey, Trust, Credibility.

1. Introduction

Soft power is strategically important because of the advantages it has in the process of foreign policy and diplomacy. Thanks to its elements, soft power brings countries into different points. In addition, soft power is used for foreign policy and diplomatic goals.

In the realization of the targets soft power receivers are foreign state governments and the public (Nye, 2008:107). The transfer of the local values to the target groups takes place using soft power. At this point, a local story can be transformed into a global dominant narrative with communication synergy. The conviction and appeal of the narrative to be given outside the national and cultural boundaries is carried with soft power (Zaharna, 2007:221).

In recent years, the United States has remarkably lost its soft power. Europe, Latin America, and, to a significant extent, the whole Muslim world, have shown that there is a serious decline in America's attractiveness (Nye, 2010:4). So far, especially in the Arab and Islamic world, the United States public opinion perceptions have increased strongly in a negative way (Zaharna, 2007:214). With the purpose of preventing this decline, the United States is using its soft power based on values such as democracy, human rights and rule of law to gain confidence and reputation.

2. Purpose of the Study

This study was conducted with the students of of the Department of Journalism in the Faculty of Communication in Turkey using focus group interview method. The study sought to answer the two questions. Firstly, the effects of democracy, human rights and the rule of law on the views towards United States were researched. Secondly, participants were asked whether the use of universal values builds trust and credibility for the United States. From these questions, it is aimed to learn in depth and in detail how students perceive the effect of universal values in this research. Another aim of this study is to approach the soft power of the United States from various perspectives and to provide further information by obtaining primary data on the problem of approaching universal values.

3. Significance of the Study

All people have certain values that guide their actions. When the complexity of politics all around the world is taken into consideration, universal values are an approach that transcends the boundaries of ideology, engraving freedom, human rights, democracy in the hearts and memories of people. At this point, universal values are used to focus on establishing desired behavior standards on the target group in order to create a common society. The most important point of the United States to use universal values is that universal values have a nature that can be shared socially. The tactics, message presentation style, effective usage of international media and new media in the foreign policy as a political key incorporated in the

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United States soft power may increase the effectiveness. As a rhetoric, the United States is trying to dig into people's minds itself as a country that promises its soft power as hope, supports democracy and defends freedom ideals.

Democracy, individual freedom and the rule of law are considered as the United States' most attractive soft power elements by the majority of the people all around the world (Nye and Welch, 2013:415). Issues such as developing open markets, democracy and human rights play a significant role in United States foreign policy. The points to be taken into account is that it is easier to direct people's attention to democracy, instead of forcing them to become democratic (Nye, 2005:15-25). But it is also stated that the universal values of the United States cannot be a soft power source, but encouraging such values or universal cultures is an effective soft power or a hegemonic strategy (Zahran and Ramos, 2010:24). According to this strategy, the soft power of the United States is the center of the global culture hegemonically (Allison, 2008:107).

There is no consensus on the impact of attractiveness sources such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law on the target group. Accordingly, it is essential to carry out in-depth interview to obtain accurate and reliable information. Comprehensive researches on public opinion can play a critical role in the formation of foreign policy strategies, the harmonization of message strategies with policies and the development of mutual understanding.

4. Soft Power

Soft power cooperates with people rather than force them. A country, which wants to accomplish results from the world politics, can attain these results while the other countries want to pursue it, admire its values, envy the model it represents, want to reach its level of prosperity and openness. In such a situation it is important to attract other countries and force them to change. In this context, soft power is to make the others want to whatever you want for yourself (Nye, 2003:10-11).

Soft power is the protection and maintenance of national interests. Soft power is a tool that focuses on attraction with a realistic idea, that directs the governments of other countries with the support of the public opinion in their own desire, strengthens the position of a country, strengthens ties with the citizens of other countries by carrying out cultural studies, serves the purpose of implementation of foreign policy.

Soft power is an attraction ability without convincing the others and attractiveness is to make the opposite party to give consent. The soft power, which is an attractive power, arises from the values that create attraction. Soft power depends on the presence of volunteer commentators and consumers. In other words, attractiveness has a general and scattered impact, rather than a specific action that can be observed easily (Nye, 2005:15-24). In this respect, soft power sometimes has a direct impact on certain objectives, but rather has an impact on the overall objectives of a country (Nye, 2005:25).

The easiest way to attract democracy in the globalization process is universal values. The universal values directly and indirectly affect the public opinion and the states. Nowadays, a political value vision, in which the classical concept of political value has changed, where the countries take place in the international platform by determining their own values according to their potentials, and in which the arguments such as justice, democracy and human rights are used by actualization, draws attention. These values are essentially concepts that are related to the universe. The use of universal values in terms of soft power also refers to all types of common area.

5. Soft Power of the United States

The United States, acting on the basis of reality and propaganda, determines the distribution of geographical and functional actions within its political objectives according to existing regional priorities. Before and after the Cold War, the United States had the desire to break the soft power of the Communist ideology with universal values and politics after the September 11 attacks gained a different dimension. After the September 11th, the United States saw the Middle East as its current regional priority, and the soft power messages were built upon the universal values and transmitted to the target group to win the minds of the young people.

During the Cold War, United States soft power helped to encourage their own policies (Kurlantzick, 2007:7). When the Cold War came to an end, the United States remained alone as a superpower rising on the world stage (Armitage and Nye, 2007:19). After the September 11th, United States foreign policy has lost its legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the others. During this period, Germany participated in the military operation against the terrorist organization Al-Qaida and in the conducted researches, Germans sympathized with the United States. However, when the United States boosted its speed for the Iraq war, the Germans pointed out that they did not believe the reasons of war such as US's allegations that Iraq was



linked to the September 11th and the threat of mass destruction weapons. The fact that the United States media transmitted news on the battle in a prejudiced manner to provide clear view to the targets of the United States, the so-called mass destruction weapons cannot be found and the Iraq's connection with the September 11th cannot be proven has increased the suspicion of the Germans. According to a survey conducted by Reuters in July 2003, a third of Germans under the age of 30 described the September 11 attacks as a project designed by the American government (Nye, 2005:127). It left a similar impression on the world, as it was in Germany. After the President Bush's statement that those who does not stand back of us are terrorists which explicitly means polarization, the United States' long-term endeavor to fight against terrorism has been supported by a large percentage of the world public opinion. During the years and months following the September 2001, the international public opinion changed, and in March 2003 the Iraq War accelerated (Solomon, 2014:734).

Although the American democracy character is used as an argument to increase soft power, some events that take place in foreign policy can disrupt the character of democracy. At this point the events such as Al-Qaida's capacity to damage the character of American democracy, Operation Iraqi Freedom which has been seen by the international community as Iraq's invasion and occupation and Cuba's detention facility in Guantanamo Bay where the terrorists have been detained have damaged the soft power attractiveness of the United States. After these events, the principles of democracy, individual freedom and the rule of law, which are expressed as the most attractive soft power of the United States by many people in the world, have been interpreted as a step back (Nye and Welch, 2013:415) and the international media's reporting of this incident has raised questions about America.

Soft power is widely an effective means of legitimizing United States sovereignty and security. Soft power emphasizes the need for multilateral movement for the US. This is achieved through the attraction power of America's democratic ideals and political institutions and through international institutions (Layne, 2010:58). The attractiveness and foreign policy of the United States essentially depends on the universal values that it expresses. The relevant values are used to make them attractive to others and the interests of the public are looked after. The United States makes its soft power legitimate in this way (Nye, 2005:65-66). To achieve this goal, the United States transmits the sources of attractions such as democracy, human rights and popular culture, which are among the basic instruments of soft power, in its publications to promote peace, prosperity and cooperation in order to change misperceptions about itself.

The United States is the most powerful nation of the world in terms of its military and economic power. The attraction of the American culture and ideology makes the other countries voluntary to follow the United States. The United States is increasing the possibility of its actions seen as legitimate in the eyes of others by shaping the international laws in accordance with its interests and values (Nye, 2005:7-19). But the soft power, which is not a political slogan for the United States, is not the solution of all the problems. For example, although the North Korean dictator Kim Jong II likes to watch Hollywood movies, he does not make any changes to the nuclear weapons program (Nye, 2010:8). The Serbians wearing Levi's and eating at McDonald's have supported the Kosovo bureaucracy and used the Hollywood production *Wag the Dog* to mock the United States while the war is going on. In Sierra Leone, a West African country, child soldiers cut the hands of civilians while they wear the uniforms of American sports teams (Nye, 2003:86-87). As one can see, the universal values used by the United States may not succeed in reaching political and ideological goals.

On the other hand, the soft power can also provide benefit to the United States. In this context, when compared to the other countries, Anti-Americanism is becoming quieter in the various Muslim countries where United States non-governmental organizations and women's rights groups have extensively assisted them (Kurlantzick, 2005:422).

6. Method

Focus group interview was used in this research. Focus group methodology has gained popularity in recent years among researchers in social sciences as an academic research area. Focus group methodology generally focuses on specific responses (Liamputtong, 2011:2) Focus group discussions, which is chosen from a particular sector to discuss a particular theme or view and in which the obtained interaction leads to data and results, are one of the qualitative research methods (Cohen, Manion and Marrison, 2000) This method is among the most systematic data collection methods in social sciences. The comprehensive data obtained from the focus group discussions provide a solid basis for one on one interviews and surveys (Kitzinger, 1995:299-302).



The focus group discussions are based on an individual interview method based on open-ended questions (Kruager and Casey, 2000). Focus group research is a useful method for revealing participants' feelings, experiences, behaviors and beliefs by means of interaction. Focus group research is important for discovering new information, and with the statements of the participants, various perspectives are acquired for the same topic. Focus groups can be used to discover the reason of a remarkable subject (Litosseliti, 2007:16-24). Focus group discussion focuses on a specific topic or a limited number of topics. Enough time is given to discuss each of them (Hennink, 2014:1-3).

In the focus group interview conducted on the basis of the basic research question and the group that was applied, the questions were asked open-ended in accordance with the purpose of the subject. The questions were formed in daily speech. The questions are arranged in a logical way to complement each other. The templates why and what for were not included in the inquiries and it is intended to make exploration by expecting profound responses. The interview was flexible from time to time and it was directed in accordance with the current situation. Participants were not criticized in any respect, personal opinions were not reported, and the statements were repeated to prevent misunderstandings. Group members consisted of participants with similar characteristics. Focus groups were chosen from 2nd and 4th class students studying at the Department of Journalism in the Faculty of Communication. Participants who were most likely to participate in discussions were invited to the meetings. In the discussions where a total of thirty-six persons between the ages of 19-24 were present, three different groups of twelve persons were formed. An open communication was established with each group for 120 minutes. A social environment was provided where the physical conditions of the discussion environment are good, relaxed, pleasant and people feel comfortable. A seating arrangement was created in which all participants could see each other. Participants were informed about the method before the interview and a preliminary explanation was given to them. Discussions were recorded on the video camera during the whole session and written notes were taken. The notes taken during the discussions were summarized systematically and the videos were reviewed after the discussions. Expression style, body language and determination of the participants were taken into consideration in the analyzes. The consistency between the participants' thoughts and how many people made the same/alike interpretation were assessed. Content analysis was carried out with the obtained data and the research was reported.

7. Result

RQ1. Do values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law have an impact on the positive view towards the United States?

Among the participants, 19 answered "yes", 9 answered "no" and 8 responded partially to this question. Many of the participants, who pointed out that the United States was a country governed by universal values, emphasized that values such as rule of law and democracy imposed an American dream on them. The participants, who expressed that the United States is seen as a savior because of the fact that it offered universal values, noted that the United States' practice of its own rule of law affects people. Most of the participants stated that the visa ban, which was adopted by the United States President Donald Trump, was removed especially by a judge and it had a positive impact on their views on the United States. They said that this impact has given individual democracy and law-related hopes individually in countries where troubles related to justice, democracy and law exist and it causes them to see America as a savior.

One of the participants stated that the United States' promise of freedom was attractive to the countries which have concerns about freedom, and the used values attracted them. The participant personally stated that the United States meets the need for freedom.

However most of the participants stated that the values of democracy, rule of law and human rights have positive effects on their own view, they also underlined the fact that universal values are actually used by the United States for foreign policy purposes. Participants stated that the United States uses values such as democracy, rule of law and justice only in its national boundaries. On the other hand, it was stated that these values are used to influence the target group in foreign policy implementations and United States' promises turn into empty in foreign policy implementations and the values are not embodied in the implementations.

Participants generally saw universal values as a manner of approach. Part of the participants stood over the examples of Afghanistan and Iraq and pointed out that these countries could not be liberated by the United States, but the people living there were hurt. But the participants, who underlined the fact that the arguments used by the United States were frequently spoken by citizens, expressed that United States presidents are also very important in shaping their views. The participants, who stated that Trump's



discourse on racism had a negative impact on the view towards United States, underlined the fact that Barack Obama's character and his democratic rhetoric influenced their views positively.

Most of the participants stated that the United States is using the universal values very well through the media and that the given messages influence them positively. They emphasized the fact that it began with cartoons that they are influenced by the United States and following this especially the Hollywood movies had a positive impact on their views towards the United States.

Some of the participants noted that the United States is not convincing to use universal values, that there is racism in the United States, that what has been done to the black people is known by the whole world, and that universal values are presented to the target group as a solution to the international problems. Despite the fact that these participants stated that they don't want the United States to influence their own views, they said that they want to live in United States.

Some participants emphasized that the United States' freedom promises and the freedom of expression within the United States immediately affects them and that they want to work in the United States, considering the problems they will get through in their own countries because of the relevant freedoms. The United States was evaluated as a country which gives value to employees, protects successful people and provides other people with an environment to live freely especially by the participants.

RQ2. Does the use of universal values build trust and credibility for the United States?

The number of those who answered "yes" to this question was 4, the number of those who answered "no" was 19, and the number of those who answered "partially" was 10. Participants who gave the answer yes are underlining that the strength of the United States' armed forces causes the United States to be viewed as a savior. Participants also expressed that the freedom messages given through media, the former president Obama's being black, his sympathetic personality and his rhetoric related to democracy build trust and credibility for the United States especially in the countries with a democracy problem. Underlining the fact that Trump's messages are not constructive, the participants stressed that Trump's messages about Muslims harm the United States' trust and credibility. A participant, who answered as yes, indicated that Obama's plan to close the Guantanamo Detention Camp built trust and credibility for him towards United States. Another participant said that using universal values builds trust and credibility for the United States and stated that he can work freely in United States in case he faces with any problems in his country by indicating the example that those who have problems in Turkey can work in the United States.

Some of the participants especially focused on the value that the United States gives to people. Although the participants criticize the international policies of the United States, they stated that the universal values of the United States have influenced them as individuals and the universal values have built trust and credibility for the United States. A participant who stated that the brain drain was directed towards the United States derived from the libertarian environment of the United States, stated that the quality of technology and education offered by the United States also affects the building of trust and credibility.

Participants who expressed a negative opinion stated that the United States did not give freedom to the places it visited. These participants emphasized that the United States spreads fear all over the world, that universal values are used only as rhetoric, that universal values are not used in political practices when it comes to United States interests. Some participants said that because of these reasons universal values do not build trust and credibility for the United States.

One of the participants answered this question as: "Where are the places United States liberated? Why does not the United States leave the country that it has stepped in to bring freedom? This participant who gave the answer "No" stated that that universal values do not build trust and credibility with the United States, and that the United States does not give value people when it comes to their own interests.

Some participants particularly emphasized the policies that the United States had conducted in the Middle East and stated that universal values are not included in practice when interests are concerned. A participant expressed the support given by the United States to the Terrorist Organization YPG (People's Protection Units) and said that this is a contradiction if the United States is thought to be an ally of Turkey. Another participant explained that United States presidents' messages about universal values did not have an effect on him and expressed that their implementations contradicted with the rhetoric when he assessed what was done to the black people in the United States.

8. Discussion

The data obtained from this study supports the views that values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law constitute soft power for the United States and the literature related to the positive view



towards the United States. However, the conclusion that use of universal values by the US does not build trust and credibility for the United States is also thought-provoking. This phenomenon reveals that the positive impact of universal values does not directly contribute to trust and credibility, and has not a direct relationship with trust and credibility. This study has shown that there is a relationship between the importance that United States attaches on universal values within its borders and the policies it puts into practice outside the country as for the perception of the participants on United States. According to this, most of the participants have been influenced by the United States' practices on supremacy of law and their perception towards the United States has been shaped in a positive manner. The answers given to the open-ended questions have shown that the influence of the United States' soft power also linked to the implementations of the relevant country.

This study has shown that the participants are often positively or negatively affected by the messages of the United States Presidents and the experience of racism-related problems within the United States affects the views towards the United States. The results also show that the universal values are used as a discourse by United States to influence the target group, and that the values are not included in practice when it comes to foreign policy interests. This reveals an important conclusion that Joseph Nye (2005) stated. According to this conclusion, values of a country should be compatible with its foreign policy messages (127).

An important finding in this study is related to attitudes of the participants. Participants both express their concerns about United States foreign policy, and express that they are influenced by the freedoms existing within the United States and that they can work freely and easily there.

As seen in the study, students also notice the contribution of United States presidents to the United States' trust and credibility. Participants also emphasize the fact that Trump's messages about Muslims have damaged the US's trust and credibility.

One of the important consequences of this study is that young people in Turkey are easily affected by the policies of the United States in the Middle East and they express their dissatisfaction with the United States policies. Many participants indicated that universal values cannot build trust and credibility for the United States because of the policies the United States has conducted in the Middle East. One participant said, "The United States said that they will liberate that region in the Iraqi military operation. But the people were hurt by the terrorists." Despite all these things, there is a general tendency to be influenced by universal values, and participants have the desire to live and work in the United States. The question to be asked here is why the interpretation of the United States differs when regional policies and individual needs are assessed. Further studies should be conducted on this subject and the outcomes should be determined.

Another important result of the study is that many participants do not find convincing the universal values provided by the United States. However the participants stated that they don't believe it, the general trend is that the soft power sources of the United States attract young people. One participant says 'United States brands are shaping our culture', while another participant says, "Everybody wants to go to the United States for education." In this context, the soft power sources in the literature prove that it is an ability to attract. That's to say, soft power is the ability to shape others' wishes (Nye, 2005:16-17).

An important finding of this study is that the discourses of the United States about universal values are evaluated in order to obtain results in foreign policy. With this study, immediate changes can be made in United States foreign policy. While presenting its soft power sources to a region, the United States should present its story in a systematic and consistent way, based on its own values and culture. Policies must be conducted consistently and continuous dialogue must be established so that trust and credibility can be built and achieved. There must be continuous face-to-face interactions between the United States and Turkish youth to unite the visions. Consistency of the United States foreign policy, democratic practices within the country and the democratic discourses of the United States presidents as a whole can increase the tendency of young people to perceive the United States as a reliable and creditable country.

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