

Research Article

**Syrian Refugees' Perceptions About the Representations of Syria and Syrians on Turkish News Media\***

**Abstract**

Engin DAĞDEVİREN\*\*

Syria has become the biggest refugee producer since a civil war broke out in 2011 and the majority, over three million, of these refugees are hosted in Turkey. This huge number inevitably causes refugees to be included in public and news media agenda daily. In this regard, this paper aims to present the Syrian refugees' perceptions of the portrayals of Syria and Syrians on Turkish news media through a qualitative study. 22 Syrian immigrants living in Turkey have been interviewed. To make sure that they have been living long enough to comprehend Turkish and follow the media, the samples were chosen among the participants who had been living in Turkey more than three years. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and qualitative analysis was applied.\*\*\* The findings show that most of the Syrian refugees percept their countries' and their own image as negative. Participants strictly claim that media show them as people they are actually not. They say that they are often reflected as being troublemakers. Furthermore, they think that the portrayal of them by the media is deliberately created to shape a powerful negative public opinion against Syria and Syrians, and to achieve this; the news, images and stories are carefully selected among the most extremes. They assert this public opinion is best observed through social media and it is disturbing. Most of the participants say they quit using social media and following the mainstream media not to be offended after some point.

**Key words:** Syrians, Media Representation, Perceptions, Refugees, Turkey.

\*Sakarya University,  
PhD candidate,  
Institute for Social Sciences,  
Department of Communication  
E-mail:engdagdeviren@gmail.com,  
ORCID: 0000-0003-4750-2334

\*The interview questions for this article were approved with the E-78187535-640-162523- 2022/251 Ethics Committee Permission received at the meeting number 5 of Düzce University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee held on 28/04/2022.

Araştırma Makalesi

**Suriyeli Mültecilerin, Suriye ve Suriyelilerin Türk Haber Medyasındaki Temsillerine İlişkin Algıları\***

**Özet**

Engin DAĞDEVİREN\*\*

Suriye, 2011’de başlamış olan iç savaştan bu yana en büyük mülteci üreticisi haline gelmiş ve bu mültecilerin üç milyondan fazlasını Türkiye misafir etmektedir. Bu sayı, kaçınılmaz olarak mültecilerin her gün kamuoyunun ve haber medyasının gündemine girmesine neden olmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu makale, nitel bir çalışma yoluyla Suriyeli mültecilerin Suriye ve Suriyelilerin Türk haber medyasındaki tasvirlerine ilişkin algılarını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Türkiye’de yaşayan 22 Suriyeli göçmenle görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Türkçeyi anlayabilecek ve medyayı takip edebilecek kadar iyi Türkçe bildiklerinden emin olmak için örneklem Türkiye’de üç yıldan fazla bir süredir yaşıyor olan katılımcılar arasından seçilmiştir. Veriler yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve nitel olarak analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, Suriyeli mültecilerin çoğunun Türk haber medyasında ülkelerinin ve kendi imajlarının olumsuz olarak yansıtıldığını düşündüklerini göstermektedir. Katılımcılar, medyanın onları gerçekte olmadıkları gibi gösterdiğini ve genellikle kendilerini sorun yaratıcı insanlar olarak yansıttığını ifade etmişlerdir. Ayrıca, katılımcılar medya tasvirlerinin kasıtlı olarak Suriye ve Suriyelilere karşı güçlü bir olumsuz kamuoyu oluşturmak için oluşturulduğunu ve bu amaca ulaşmak için haber, görüntü ve hikayelerin en uçlardan özenle seçildiğini düşündüklerini söylemişlerdir. Bu kamuoyu görüşünü en iyi sosyal medya aracılığıyla gözlemlediklerini ve bunun rahatsız edici olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Katılımcıların çoğu bir noktadan sonra daha fazla rahatsız olmamak için sosyal medyayı kullanmayı ve ana akım medyayı takip etmeyi bıraktıklarını ifade etmişlerdir.

\*\* Sakarya Üniversitesi,  
Doktora Öğrencisi,  
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü,  
İletişim Bilimleri ABD,  
E-mail:engdagdeviren@gmail.com,  
ORCID: 0000-0003-4750-2334

\*Bu makalenin görüşme soruları,  
Düzce Üniversitesi Bilimsel Araştırma  
ve Yayın Etik 28/04/2022 tarihinde  
yapılan 5 nolu toplantısında alınan  
E-78187535-640-162523- 2022/251  
sayılı Etik Kurul İzni ile onaylanmıştır.

Geliş Tarihi: 13.04.2022  
Kabul Tarihi: 18.06.2022

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Suriyeliler, Medya Temsili, Algı, Mülteciler, Türkiye.

## Introduction

Starting in 2011 with a demand to put an end to President Bashar Assad's regime, Syrian civil war is undoubtedly the most violent civil war ongoing in the world. The consequences are the concerns of especially the neighboring countries like Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and all refugee-welcoming countries such as Germany, Sweden and Canada. Five years after the conflict began, more than 450,000 Syrians have been killed in the fighting, more than a million injured and over 12 million Syrians - half the country's pre-war population - have been displaced from their homes. (AlJazeera, 2017) The Syria crisis has displaced 4.81 million Syrian refugees into the Republic of Turkey, the Lebanese Republic, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Republic of Iraq and the Arab Republic of Egypt, and there are an estimated 6.1 million internally displaced people within Syria (UNCHR, 2016).

Despite the ongoing conflict inside Syria which continues to generate further displacements, large-scale new arrivals to the refugee hosting countries are not anticipated during 2022, considering admission policies being pursued increasingly strictly. The refugee planning figure of 4.7 million Syrian refugees in the region by the end of 2017 reflects: limited new arrivals as well as new registrations; births and marriages; and changes occurring as a result of departures from host states including resettlement and other forms of admission to third countries (3RP Regional Refugee % Resilience Plan 2017-2018 in Response to Syria Crisis, 2016).

Migration is a subject that gives rise to controversial debates, polarizes society, and constantly places the capacity of governance in doubt. Policy coherence is very difficult to attain because it depends on a wide array of factors: security, economic interests, demography, public opinion, and regional and global governance. (Ureta, 2011).

"Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people and it is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture and it involves the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things." (Hall, 1997, p. 15). Media are important agents in the public process of constructing, contesting or maintaining the civic discourse on social cohesion, integration, tolerance and international understanding, and also, the media's power to steer attention to and from public issues often determines which problems will be tackled or ignored by society (Fürsich, 2010).

According to Glossary on Migration, the term 'refugee' means "a person, who, owing to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country"; whereas the term 'asylum seekers' means "persons seeking to be admitted into a country as refugees and awaiting decision on their application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments. In case of a negative decision, they must leave the country and may be expelled, as may any alien in an irregular situation, unless permission to stay is provided on humanitarian or other related grounds." (IOM, 2004). All the participants interviewed in this study are refugees, they have all the rights that a refugee can in terms of security, health care, shelter, education,

economic etc. However, all these opportunities aren't reasons for a fully peaceful life. The refugees all around world have a barrier to overcome opinions of the host country's citizens which are almost all the time shaped by media. In his famous book *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Howard S. Becker remarks that deviance is a social habit used by certain groups to leave out and criminalize others (Becker, 1991). Becker's labelling theory helps us understand broader types of interaction between mainstream and deviant cultures but, in its original formulation, it had little to say about the social role of media in labelling processes. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to find examples of how media partake in the social creation of labels that classify certain individuals or groups as deviant, such as asylum seekers and single-parent families (Laughey, 2007).

In our time, media institutions produce and disseminate stories which they label as important to the mediated and consumption-oriented society (Brooks & Hébert, 2006). As it is not possible for us to meet everyone, to witness every event, to travel every corner of the world, in short, to experience every kind of activity at first hand, we rely on the media institutions to reflect all kinds of experiences that we cannot get involved in personally. Thus, slowly, and gradually, by following the stories, symbols, and images, which are called media representations, created by media like radio, television, films, music and others, our opinions are shaped towards the things that are beyond our personal experience.

Media represent a variety of things such as ideas, gender, race, politics, cultures. News media are among the most powerful tools to create public opinion through newspaper, television, radio and the Internet in modern times. News presents itself as neutral, impartial and fact. However, this may not always be true. When evaluated in terms of general actors, it is clear that the media does not constitute a single party on refugees and asylum seekers. But the media has a widespread and impressive power with its different channels like the internet, television, newspaper, advertisements. Thus, media can influence public opinion as both reflective and supportive, also it can provide resistance against falsehoods woven with prejudice and myths. Moreover, this symbiotic relationship between the media and the public is effective in determining the decisions of the government and the public on the issue (Kolukırcık, 2009).

Beginning from March 15, 2011, the crisis that broke out in Syria created one of the world's biggest population movements and refugee crises and reduced the number of people close to five million to the status of asylum seekers. With the extension of the process, refugees have begun to create various influences on the political, economic, social and security fields in the countries to which they have migrated. The reflections of most of these events find place for themselves on news media.

Representation of refugees on Turkish media has been a topic of interest in academic circles since the refugees started to settle in Turkey. However, as summarized below, this topic has been studied by either using content analysis (Efe, 2015; Yolçu, 2019) or discourse analysis (Boztepe, 2017; Çağlar & Özkır, 2014), or Turkish citizens' perceptions about Syrian refugees have been the topic of study (Tekin Önür & Onur, 2021). This study is significant as it is the first study that focuses on the perceptions of refugees living in Turkey about the news on Syria and Syrians on Turkish news media.

This study aims to find out how Syrian refugees in Turkey perceive the news on Syrian and Syrians on Turkish news media through qualitative research. A semi-structured interview was designed to collect the data from the participants. The collected data was analyzed through content analysis and the results are categorized and reported under different headings in the findings section.

### 1- Literature Review

Media is considered to have the power to shape people's ideas by creating different contents. However, it is not the contents that shape our ideas, it is the discourse and the language by which these contents are presented. People have an infinite number of different perceptions about the things around them, but media has the power to make them think similarly by creating contents that can be interpreted similarly. This is called 'system of representation', and 'it consists not of individual concepts, but of different ways of organizing, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, and of establishing complex relations between them.' (Hall, 2020, p.4).

News media is one of the categories of media by which meanings are created and disseminated to masses through certain channels such as newspapers, television, radio or the Internet. The news media decide which events to report, what to say about these events and people, and which news sources to refer to. The content of the news, its title, fiction, the words used in the news, that is, the news itself produces the discourse. Views of the audience about the outside world are mostly shaped by the representations of the news media, which are claimed to be impartial (Yolçu, 2019).

Yolçu (2019) conducted a study in which she applied a comparative analysis of local news about Syrian refugees in the city of Kocaeli and Turkish readers' comments under the news. It was found out that the Syrian refugees were represented in a positive and unbiased manner in the news. However, the reader comments expressed negative, racist and hostile manner towards the refugees. The Turkish readers mainly expressed that they felt themselves as 'disadvantaged', 'others', 'victims', and 'people who, indeed, need help'. Also, it was found that the Turkish readers criticized the foreign policy of the government in their comments.

In the study conducted by Tekin Önür and Onur (2021), a survey was applied to the people living in a province of the city of Manisa to find out the attitudes and perceptions of them towards Syrian refugees. It was highlighted in the paper that Turkish people are hospitable and respect people from other cultures especially those with the same religion. They also pointed out that at the beginning of the migration process, Turkish people considered themselves as hosts and Syrian refugees as guests, but this situation has changed over time as the refugees began to settle permanently. The study found out that most of the participants of the study no longer consider Syrian refugees as 'war victims'. They also believe that it is time for Syrian refugees to return to their countries as they harm the cultural integrity of Turkey, expose a threat to Turkey in terms of foreign policy, and cause Turkish citizens to have economic and social problems.

Boztepe (2017) studied the representations of Syrian refugees using critical discourse analysis method. He aimed to find out how Syrian refugees are represented on television

news. He selected four different television channels which were Kanal 7, Show TV, Kanal D and Halk TV as samples. He selected these television channels because they, he states, have different ideologies (new liberal, new conservative and social democrat). In the study, it was found out that how Syrian refugees are represented on news differs according to the ideology, relationship of the television owners with the capital owner and the relationship of the television owners with the government. While presenting the refugees, the conservative ideology focuses on religious points, the social democrat ideology criticizes the government for its policies on refugees, the new liberal ideology (the television channels that are owned by big capital owners) repeat the general discourse parallel to the common public opinion, and they neither criticize nor praise the topic.

Another study that applied critical discourse analysis to the news contents about Syrian refugees was conducted by Çağlar and Özkır (2014). They analyzed columns (published between July and October 2014) on Syrian refugees on two of the biggest mainstream newspapers (Sabah and Hürriyet) published in Turkey using critical discourse analysis. They found out that the columnists expressed an anti-government point of view while presenting their columns about Syrian refugees. Also, the authors highlighted that nationalism, to some extent, played a role for columnists and a more hostile language was used by them while they expressed their opinions about refugees in their columns.

## 2- Method

The interview questions for this article were approved with the E-78187535-640-162523-2022/251 Ethics Committee Permission received at the meeting number 5 of Düzce University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee held on 28/04/2022. To reach the participants' thoughts, perceptions, and feelings about media representations of Syria and Syrians, a qualitative approach of collecting data was chosen as it suits best for our aim. A semi-structured interview was applied because there were few questions to be asked, yet flexible answers and immediate further questions were needed during the interviews.

The core topics were decided on, and the questions were prepared to cover these topics. The questions were designed to gather information from the participants on the following topics: examples of news stories about Syria and Syrians, main news sources they follow, how they think the Turkish news media portray them, if they think their profile is drawn appropriately, if they think the news tell the truth about them, if the news affect the Turkish citizen's opinions about them, what they do when they think a piece of news is made up, if they think there are differences in different sources of news and if so why they think these differences occur.

While selecting the samples, some criteria were included as follows; participants had to live in Turkey for or more than 3 years to comprehend Turkish, the ages of the participants should vary to generate a fairer and fuller representation of the interviewees' perspectives. (Mason, 2002) Furthermore, to access a variety of perspectives, the participants living in different cities of Turkey were chosen. The cities include Hatay, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, İstanbul, Ankara, Düzce, İzmir, and Adana.

Among the interviewees were 17 university students and 25 adults aging from 18 to 55. No women participants could be reached as it is a cultural and religious restraint for a male to contact and interview a female.

Of the 42 Syrians contacted, 25 agreed to participate in the study. 12 were undergraduate students aging between 18-25, 6 were between 25-35, 2 were between 35-45, 3 were between 45-55, and 2 were above 55. After the interviews during the analysis process, 3 of the university students demanded to be excluded from the research as they claim they somehow feel insecure. After the exclusion of the 3 interviewees, a total of 22 Syrian refugees was interviewed. The number of samples was considered enough because the responses to the questions started to resemble each other. This phenomenon is called data saturation and data saturation is reached when the information is enough to duplicate the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Walker, 2012), when new information can no longer be obtained (Guest et al., 2006), and when new coding cannot be created (Guest et al., 2006). To be able to generalize the results of this study, new and confirmatory cases must be studies with different samples from different parts of Turkey.

Before starting the interviews, the interviewees were informed of the aim and confidentiality. Permission was obtained from the participants to record the conversations, which took 20 minutes each on average. All the interviews took place in comfortable settings like cafes, restaurants, or interviewers' offices. To obtain the real feelings, opinions, and the perceptions; and to ensure the comprehension of the interviewees of the participants, the interviews were conducted in a sincere manner using the simplest Turkish avoiding the academic terminology.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves 6 steps: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. (Braun & Clarke, 2006) All the interviews were transcribed first, and then read repeatedly to familiarize and find repeating patterns. The transcripts were, then, coded manually; by highlighting and coding the sentences and phrases into groups that were familiar with one another. After grouping the similar sets of codes, bigger categories were generated, and all the codes were sorted under each category (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mason, 2002).

### 3- Findings

In this section, the data collected is presented under different headings. It is thought that it will be more compact and easier to understand if the findings are categorized and presented under 6 headings which are as follows:

- News Access and Consumption
- Profile of Syrians on the News Media
- News Reflections on Native People
- News Stories are Correct but 'to Some Extent'
- The most Disturbing News
- Comments on Future

### 3.1. News Access and Consumption

All the participants stated that while in Turkey, they follow the news mostly on the Internet, then on TV, and only one participant stated that he follows the news in the newspapers along with the Internet and TV. Each one of the participants stated that they follow the news on social media pages of news institutions and read the comments of the ordinary people under the news about Syria and Syrians. However, it was found out that no one follows the news on the radio. The participants stated that they follow the news from Turkey, and Arabic countries. Al-Jazeera is the common news source they follow as they claim it is the most effective, extensive, and impartial news source that covers all the Arabic countries. Also, only a couple of them said that they follow the international sources like BBC, and CNN. Without exception, all the participants stated that they never follow news from Syrian media as the news is always false because the media institutions there are not impartial but are under the control of the Assad regime.

### 3.2. Profile of Syrians on the News Media

Participants were asked how they are portrayed on news media, and it was found out that the profile of them changes according to which source presents the news. All the participants gave more or less the same response.

- “Most of the time, Syrians are shown as beggars, poor and ignorant people, people selling bottles of water at the traffic lights, and troublemakers that fight local people everywhere. This is what I almost always see. However, on some channels, or Internet pages, they show us in a merciful, and understanding manner. This is up to the source.”

When asked what the possible reasons underlying this phenomenon are, the responses vary as shown below:

- “The number of us in Turkey is a lot. Some people don’t like us, and they do it so that we leave the country.”
- “Let’s say that the pro-government media is good on us. Sometimes they portray us correctly, sometimes they do not. Generally, they are reflecting the government’s point of view.

However, as for the anti-government media, they come and record news whenever Syrians do something wrong to be able to prove that we are problematic.”

- “Pro-government media are in favor of us. They show us in a humanistic way.”
- “The anti-government side wants Turkish and Syrian people not to live in a brotherly way.”

According to the participants some news sources represent Syrian refugees in a negative way to express their criticism of the government and act as if looking forward to a bad action of Syrians to report on their news stories. However, some news sources portray Syrians in a positive way to evoke merciful emotions in Turkish citizens. These responses coincide with the findings of the studies in the literature where Boztepe



(2017) found out that the conservative ideology focuses on religious points, the social democrat ideology criticizes the government for its policies on refugees, the new liberal ideology (the television channels that are owned by big capital owners) repeat the general discourse parallel to the common public opinion, and they neither criticize nor praise the topic. In the study of Çağlar and Özkır (2014), they found out that the columnists used their columns as an expression of anti-government point of view while they presented their opinions on Syrian refugees. Also, nationalism has an effect for hostile language against Syrian refugees.

### 3.4. News Reflections on Native People

When asked if media have any effect on people, the answer from all the participants was 'Yes.'. However, all of them claimed that educated people are not easily affected by the news. According to the participants most of the Turkish people believe what is presented as news without hesitation. Furthermore, they think that some people's attitudes are shaped by following the news. Some conversation samples are below:

- “Whenever there is a news story about us, Turkish people believe it right away. I think it is wrong. Maybe they are lying, it is not certain. Turkish people believe everything because they have a heart of gold.”
- “I think it is about being conscious. Conscious people don't believe everything until it is proven so. They check different sources to make sure.”
- “Whenever there is news on media, it is directly reflected to us. Recently, there was a Turkish singer, I can't remember his name, but he is a very prominent one, he talked very sympathetically about Syria on a TV channel. He even cried for Aleppo. It was very sentimental for us, too. We are happy to see such things; after all, we are the sons of similar cultures.”
- “Some people see the news and they don't believe. They say: ‘This can't be true.'. However, the others believe whatever media present them. They don't use their logic. They think like: ‘If the TV channel says something, it must be true.’”

Four of the participants reported stories from their daily lives on how people treated them:

- “When the word ‘Syrian’ is mentioned, they think of us as poor, and bad people; as if they are superior, and we are inferior. In truth, I am sometimes ashamed of being a Syrian. But what can I do? Allah created me like this. Why are you treating us like that? If there was a war here, maybe you would be the same.”
- “Some time ago, I went to bazaar, and bought some fruit. I took money out of my pocket, and it was 200 Turkish Liras. The stallholder told me: ‘Mashallah, you have a lot of money. You are very rich, even richer than us.'. I accept I'm not poor. I came here not because I was poor, but to escape a war.”
- “Once, we were having a picnic with my Syrian friends. A Turkish man came to us and shouted: ‘Yesterday, our Turkish soldiers became martyrs

while protecting Syria and Syrians, and that ought to be your duty to protect it. However, you are eating, drinking, and having fun here. Are you happy?’ We are sorry about that, and we were offended but we couldn’t respond because we are foreigners in a neighboring country.”

- “Recently, in Kayseri, a Syrian refugee killed a Turkish citizen, and the news was reported everywhere. The next day, I was getting on a bus in İstanbul, and a man came to me and asked: ‘Are you Syrian’, and I confirmed. He said to me ‘Go home. Get on a bus that goes to Syria and return to your country.’ He was no doubt affected by that news.”

### 3.5. News Stories are Correct but ‘to Some Extent’

Only two participants believe that all the news stories from Turkish news institutions on TV and the Internet about Syria and Syrians are reliable. However, the rest of the participants think that most of the news from Turkish news institutions on TV channels and the Internet are reliable; yet they pronounced some problems about a small proportion of news stories in terms of reliability:

- “There are some Internet news pages, I sometimes read their news and I understand immediately that the news is not true. They make exaggerated news to make money, to get clicks. Their purpose is to attract people’s attention.”
- “In Turkey, there are about three million Syrians. Two million five hundred thousand of them are women and children. Only five hundred thousand are men. However, Turkish people believe that Syrians in Turkey are above eighteen and men because news doesn’t tell anything about that.”
- “They present us as ignorant, poor, beggars, troublemakers. However, they never inform people about how Syria was before the war. We had a republic, and we were living in prosperity, even richer and more comfortable than you. Yes, we were superior to Turkey in some respects.”
- “Syria and Syrians are told to Turkish people very little. For example, a few years ago, 2006 or 2007, I am not sure, Lebanon and Israel had a war. We welcomed more than one million Lebanese refugees. In 2003, the war of Iraq broke out, and again, we welcomed about four million Iraqi refugees. There were no refugee camps, we hosted them in our homes, and showed our hospitality. For example, now, about one and a half million Palestinian refugees are living in Syria. They came in about 1960s, and still live, get married, and buy houses in Syria. They are not Syrian citizens but, I swear, they are not treated differently than an ordinary citizen. Media never mention such things about us in this regard.”
- “There is no impartial and independent media in Turkey as far as I observed. Politics is everywhere. Some media institutions belong to somewhere, the others belong to the others. A channel calls us ‘Syrians’, another calls us ‘our guests’. This use of language is very important.”
- “Some channels juxtapose us with ISIL (Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant); some only report theft, or robbery news, and show the thieves. We also don’t like

those kinds of people. However, they only show bad examples. Some channels, we appreciate them, show Turkish hospitality. We are thankful to Turkish people for everything they have done so far. I have been here for almost four years, and I have never had a problem with any of my Turkish friends and acquaintances. We are brothers, we are happy together, or we face the problems together.”

- “On the news, for example, they say that Turkish army is in Syria for the good of Syria and Syrians. However, they are in Syria on behalf of themselves. They are there to prevent the establishment of the Kurdistan state.”
- “They report the news in such a manner that people think there is only Turkish army in Syria protecting the people and fighting with the enemy. There is Free Syrian Army also, but they never talk about that. Our people are also fighting with the enemy.”
- “They never report all the news. Some of them report only bad things. Of course, we know that not all the Syrians are good people. As all the nations, we have some bad people. However, on the news, we see only bad examples.”

A few of the participants stated that Turkish news media never make bad news on Aleppo, Mosul, Kirkuk, and the Turkmens living in especially these areas. Their explanations can be combined as follows:

- “There is one thing more to say: the importance of Aleppo. In the past, it was counted as the capital city of Ottoman Empire. Now, it is the economical capital of Syria. Aleppo is significant for Turkey, and it is never portrayed in a bad manner. There is a special care for Aleppo. Of course, Mosul is also important, and Kirkuk, too because mostly Turkmens are living there, and they belonged to their ancestors. However, the most important is Aleppo because it is culturally, historically, and economically the most important one. Lastly, Latakia is shown very often on news media, and the portrayal of it is always heroic. As you know, Latakia belongs to Turkmen people and the war there is quite fierce. There is some nationalism in the media.”

Apart from ‘what’ is being communicated, the effort of ‘how’ it is communicated to create a purposed outcome is called framing (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2012). As can be understood from the responses, the participants think that the news in Turkish news sources and institutions are generally reliable; however, they claim that some news is exaggerated so that the Internet page can get more clicks. Also, they claim that in some news, only a part of the truth is reported but the other part is missing so that they can manipulate the society just in the excerpt of telling the number of Syrian men living in Turkey but not mentioning the numbers of children and women, which are far bigger than the former. Finally, it can be inferred from the quotes that some of the participants complain about the news which always present negative news about the Syrian refugees and create an image like all the Syrian refugees are bad people, in other words, they believe that some news sources frame Syrian refugees to stereotype them as bad people.

### 3.6. The most Disturbing News

During the interviews, some of the participants reported news that they had been disturbed by the most:

- “Once there was news on TV channels. They reported that Syrians opened shops without licenses, and they never pay taxes because they are backed up by the government. This news is totally wrong because when we want to open a business, we do all the official requirements just like a Turkish citizen. However, people were so affected by this news that some Turkish people had arguments with the shop owners. However, we didn’t see this news on media.”
- “I’m a student here and all my friends think that I, along with all the Syrian students in Turkey, get scholarship of 1.200 Turkish Liras from the government. This is due to the news on everywhere. I try to explain that only a very small proportion of students get this scholarship, and they are in complete misery, but they don’t believe me, of course.”
- “When Syrians first came to Gaziantep, there appeared news on media saying that Syrians came, and prices of rental houses became higher than ever. It was so disturbing. It is not our fault. If the house lords here are self-seekers, what can we do? They try to lay every bad thing on us.”
- “I saw some news on the Internet page of a newspaper, and it asserted that being a Syrian is much more advantageous since they pay no taxes, pay no house rent as the government give them houses, get minimum wage even if they do nothing. This is a lie because we are living in this country with our own money. We don’t get any money from anyone. It was also showing photographs of some Arabic people smoking water pipes in a cafe, but it was not certain if they were Syrians or not. Maybe they are from other Arab countries, we are not sure, but people believe that they are Syrians, and they are more comfortable than them. We are shown on the media as if we were on holiday.”

Some of the participants; however, reported that they sometimes acknowledge Turkish people to be right:

- “To some extent, I can understand Turkish people. They are right. For example, if I open a grocery store and earn more than a Turkish grocer, he has the right to complain. After all, he is the citizen.”
- “Syrians did something wrong, and it is that they have gathered in border cities intensely because it is near Syria, and they can go to Syria and come back easily. This gathering has attracted attention and created some friction between the sides. They should go to some other cities where our population is low so that they don’t offend anyone’s eye.”

### 3.7. Comments on Future

At the end of the interviews, participants were asked how they see the future of Syria and Syrians under the light of the news they follow. All of them hope for the best for Syria and Syrians, and while most of them were pessimistic about the future of the

refugees and their country, only a few of them were optimistic.

- “If we talk about Syria, nothing seems good in the future because I guess it will be divided. However, if we talk about refugees living in Turkey, I believe everything will be much better. We thank Turkish people and the government for everything they have done so far.”
- “I think everything will be fine. I have hopes, but everything is political.”
- “Because we are living in a more democratic country than Syria, we think that future will be better for us. Here in Turkey, everybody is equal under law, but in Syria it was not like this. A police officer could do everything he wanted to you, and you could do nothing but obey.”
- “I think everything will be fine. However, whenever I follow the news, I feel desperate. Thus, I try not to follow the news so often because it drives me to desperation.”
- “I think Syria will be divided into at least three countries.”
- “I hope the war finishes soon. When it finishes, I will return to my country.”
- “We don't want to be disintegrated, but it seems that we have to. We will forget the name of Syria.”

### Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, the perceptions of Syrian refugees living in Turkey on the news on Syria and Syrians on Turkish news media were examined through qualitative research. The results show that the participants follow the news on mostly the internet and television. They do not follow the news on radio and newspaper. They also follow Arabic news sources along with Turkish media, and they trust Al-Jazeera the most. None of them follow Syrian media as they think it is untrusted and biased. When asked about the general perception of them on the news in Turkish news media, they stated that the source of news is very important. Pro-government news sources portray them in a good way. However, they think they are portrayed in a negative way in general. They believe that news media have the power to affect people's ideas, and they think their portrayal on news media is very important on Turkish citizens' perception of them. However, all of them claimed that educated people do not change their mind when they see news on any media because they do not believe any source straight away. Most of the participants believe that the news on Turkish news media is true but there are some exaggerations, framing and stereotyping in some of the news and news sources. They think that how the news is presented is as important as the accuracy of the news for the portrayal of them to the public opinion. They stated that the most disturbing news contain false information, exaggeration, framing and stereotyping. Most of the participants have pessimistic expectations about the future of Syria and they start to create new roadmaps for their future which do not contain their home country.

**Note:** The interview questions for this article were approved with the E-78187535-640-162523- 2022/251 Ethics Committee Permission received at the meeting number 5 of Düzce University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee held on 28/04/2022.

## References

- AlJazeera. (2017). Syria's civil war explained. *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/syria-civil-war-explained-160505084119966.html>
- Becker, H. S. (1991). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance*. New York: Free Press.
- Boztepe, V. (2017). Televizyon haberlerinde Suriyeli mültecilerin temsili. *Ankara Üniversitesi İlefl Dergisi*, 4(1), 91-122.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Brooks, D. E., & Hébert, L. P. (2006). Gender, race, and media representation. *Handbook of Gender and Communication*, 16, 297-317.
- Çağlar, İ., & Özkır, Y. (2014). Suriyeli mültecilerin Türkiye basınında temsili. *Ortadoğu Yıllığı*, 485-501. Retrieved from [https://ormer.sakarya.edu.tr/18,5,,8,ortadoğu\\_yilligi\\_2014.html](https://ormer.sakarya.edu.tr/18,5,,8,ortadoğu_yilligi_2014.html)
- Efe, İ. (2015). *Türk basınında Suriyeli sığınmacılar*. İstanbul: SETA Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı.
- Fürsich, E. (2010). Media and the representation of others. *International Social Science Journal*, 61(199), 113-130.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82.
- Hall, S., Evans, J., & Nixon S. (Eds.). (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. London: Thousand Oaks
- Hall, S. (2020). The work of representation. Prentki, T. & Abraham, N. (Eds.). *The applied theatre reader* (pp. 74-76). London: Routledge.
- International Organization for Migration - IOM. (2004). *Glossary on migration*. Retrieved from: [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml\\_34\\_glossary.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf)
- Kolukırcık, S. (2009). Mülteci ve sığınmacı olgusunun medyadaki görünümü: Medya politikası üzerine bir değerlendirme. *Gaziantep Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 8(1), 1-20.
- Laughey, D. (2007). *Key themes in media theory*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching* (2nd ed.). Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Sage Publications.
- O'Reilly, M., & Parker, N. (2012). Unsatisfactory saturation: A critical exploration of the notion of saturated sample sizes in qualitative research. *Qualitative*

*Research Journal*, 13(2), 190-197. doi:10.1177/1468794112446106

- Scheufele, D. A., & Iyengar, S. (2012). The state of framing research: A call for new directions. Kenski K., Jamieson, K. H. (Eds.). *The Oxford handbook of political communication theories*, (pp. 1-26). New York: Oxford University Press
- Tekin Önür, H. & Onur, S. (2021). Türk halkının gözünden Suriyeli sığınmacılar: Şehzadeler ilçesi (Manisa) örneği. *Al Farabi Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 6(4),46-70.
- UNCHR. (2016). *3RP Regional refugee resilience plan 2017-2018 in response to Syria crisis*. <https://www.unhcr.org/partners/donors/589497237/2017-2018-regional-refugee-resilience-plan-response-syria-crisis-12-december.html>.
- Ureta, I. (2011). *Media, migration and public opinion: Myths, prejudices and the challenge of attaining mutual understanding between Europe and North Africa* (1st edition). Bern: Peter Lang AG.
- Walker, J. L. (2012). The use of saturation in qualitative research. *Canadian Journal of Cardiovascular Nursing*, 22(2), 37-46.
- Yolçu, N. (2019). Yerel basında Suriyeli sığınmacıların haber ve okur yorumlarındaki temsillerinin karşılaştırılmalı analizi. *Selçuk İletişim*, 12(2) ,846-878. DOI: 10.18094/josc.596316