# Media Representation of Afghan and Ukrainian Refugees in Türkiye: A Comparative Analysis of Sabah and Sözcü Newspapers

*Türkiye'de Afgan ve Ukraynalı Mültecilerin Medyada Temsili: Sabah ve Sözcü Gazetelerinin Karşılaştırmalı Analizi*

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## ABSTRACT

Recent geopolitical events have precipitated a refugee crisis affecting Türkiye, among other countries. The Taliban's seizure of control in Afghanistan and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have led to significant influxes of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, respectively, into Türkiye. This study examines the media representation of these two refugee groups in Turkish media, focusing on the country's two most-read online newspapers, Sabah and Sözcü, as they represent divergent political stances. The study examines the impact of the political leanings of the two newspapers on their representations. Employing Mollard's (2001) classification model and thematic analysis, this research investigates how these newspapers depict each refugee group, aiming to understand the role of political orientation in refugee-related news coverage. The findings reveal that both newspapers, despite their political differences, generally portrayed Ukrainian refugees positively and Afghan refugees negatively. However, nuanced differences emerged in their reporting styles. Sabah emphasized the hospitality of Turkish people and the government towards Ukrainian refugees, while Sözcü adopted a more moderate stance, reporting both tragic stories and instances of illegal activities among Ukrainian refugees. Notably, while Ukrainian refugees (including stories about Ukrainian women) were prominently featured in Sözcü, regardless of positive or negative representation, Afghan women were conspicuously absent from both newspapers' coverage. This omission indicates a neglect of Afghan women's specific challenges and effectively renders them invisible in the media narrative. This study contributes to the understanding of media representation of diverse refugee groups and highlights the complex interplay between political orientation and refugee portrayal in media discourse.

**Keywords:** Afghan refugees, Ukrainian refugees, media representation, political orientation, Turkish online newspapers

## ÖZ

Son dönemdeki jeopolitik olaylar Türkiye de dahil olmak üzere bir çok ülkeyi etkileyen bir mülteci krizine yol açmıştır. Taliban'ın Afganistan'da kontrolü ele geçirmesi ve Rusya'nın Ukrayna'yı işgali, Afgan ve Ukraynalı mültecilerin Türkiye'ye önemli ölçüde akın etmesine neden olmuştur. Bu çalışma, Türk medyasında bu iki mülteci grubunun temsillerini, ülkenin en çok okunan ve farklı siyasi duruşları temsil eden iki çevrimiçi gazetesi Sabah ve Sözcü'ye odaklanarak, Türkiye'deki farklı siyasi eğilimlerin temsiller üzerindeki etkisini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Mollard'ın (2001) sınıflandırma modelini ve tematik analizi kullanan bu araştırma, gazetelerin her bir mülteci grubunu nasıl tasvir ettiğini inceleyerek, siyasi yönelimlerin mültecilerle ilgili haberleri nasıl etkilediğini incelemektedir.Bulgular, siyasi farklılıklarına rağmen her iki gazetenin de genel olarak Ukraynalı mültecileri olumlu, Afgan mültecileri ise olumsuz bir şekilde tasvir ettiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bununla birlikte, habercilik tarzlarında ince farklılıklar ortaya çıkmıştır. Sabah, Türk halkının ve hükümet Ukraynalı mültecilere karşı misafirperverliğini vurgularken, Sözcü daha ılımlı bir tutum benimseyerek Ukraynalı mültecilerin hem trajik hikayelerini hem de yasadışı faaliyetlerini bildirmiştir. Dikkat değer bir nokta da, Ukraynalı mülteciler (Ukraynalı kadınlarla ilgili hikayeler de dahil) Sözcü'de olumlu veya olumsuz tasvir edilmelerine bakılmaksızın ön planda yer alırken, Afgan kadınlara her iki gazetenin de haberlerinde hiçbir şekilde yer verilmemiştir. Bu ihmal, Afgan kadınlara özel zorluklarının göz ardı edildiğini ve medya anlatısında onları görünmez kıldığını göstermektedir. Bu çalışma, farklı mülteci gruplarının medya

temsillerini anlamaya önemli bir katkı sağlamaktadır. Ayrıca siyasi yönelim ile medya söylemindeki mülteci tasviri arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Afgan mülteciler, Ukraynalı mülteciler, medya temsili, siyasi eğilim, Türk çevrimiçi gazeteleri

## Genişletilmiş Özet

Geçtiğimiz yıllarda Türkiye, önemli jeopolitik olayların sonucu olarak iki büyük mülteci kriziyle karşı karşıya kaldı. İlk kriz, 2021'de Taliban'ın Afganistan'ı ele geçirmesinden kaynaklandı ve çok sayıda mültecinin Türkiye'ye sığınmasına yol açtı. İkinci kriz, 2022'de Rusya'nın Ukrayna'yı işgal etmesiyle tetiklendi ve ülkeye gelen mülteci sayısında artış oldu. Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu ve Avrupa'daki stratejik konumu ve mültecilere ev sahipliği yapan bir ülke olarak oynadığı önemli rol nedeniyle, bu büyük olaylar derin sosyal ve politik etkilere yol açtı.

Türk medyası, ülkedeki mülteci grupları hakkındaki kamuoyunun fikrini şekillendirmede kayda değer bir rol oynamaktadır. Mevcut çalışma, Türkiye'nin en çok okunan çevrimiçi gazetelerinden ikisi olan Sabah ve Sözcü'nün Afgan ve Ukraynalı mültecileri nasıl tasvir ettiğini inceleyerek bu gazetelerin siyasi hizalanmalarının haberlerini nasıl etkilediğini araştıracaktır. Başka bir deyişle, asıl konu, siyasi duruşlardan etkilenen medyanın Türkiye'deki mültecilere ilişkin kamuoyu algısını nasıl şekillendirdiğini anlamaktır. Sabah (hükümet yanlısı) ve Sözcü (hükümet karşıtı) gazetelerinin zıt siyasi yönelimleri, mülteciler hakkında farklı anlatılar yaratmakta ve bu da mevcut siyasi ve toplumsal önyargıları güçlendirerek kamu söylemini ve mülteci politikalarını etkileyebilmekte. Bu amaçla, Mollards'ın sınıflandırma modeli (2001), bu iki mülteci grubunun Türk medyasında tasvirindeki farklılıkları ve benzerlikleri anlamak için kullanılmıştır. Sabah ve Sözcü'nün de basılı gazeteler olduğunu belirtmek önemlidir; ancak bu çalışma, erişilebilirlik ve analiz kolaylığı nedeniyle yalnızca çevrimiçi versiyona odaklanmaktadır.

Bu çalışma için seçilen gazeteler, hem ülkedeki en çok satan yayınlar olma durumlarına hem de farklı siyasi hizalanmalarına göre seçilmiştir. Türkiye'de önde gelen bir gazete olan Sabah, Türk hükümeti ve iktidardaki Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) ile yakın bir ilişki içindedir. Muhafazakar ve dindar duruşuyla bilinen AKP, Sabah'ta güçlü bir ses bulmaktadır ve bu ses genellikle hükümetin bakış açılarını ve politikalarını yansıtmaktadır. Bu uyum, Sabah'ı hükümet yanlısı anlatıların Türkiye'deki Afgan ve Ukraynalı mültecilerle ilgili konuları nasıl çerçevelediğini anlamak için önemli bir kaynak haline getiriyor. Öte yandan, Sözcü, hükümete karşı eleştirel bir bakış açısı için önde gelen bir platform sunan belirgin bir siyasi yönelime sahip. Gazete, milliyetçi ve Kemalist bir bakış açısını savunuyor ve laiklik, demokrasi ve milliyetçilik ilkelerini vurgulayarak Mustafa Kemal Atatürk'ün ideallerini savunan okuyucular arasında özel bir etkiye sahip. Önemli bir okuyucu kitlesine sahip olan Sözcü, hükümet yanlısı anlatıya karşı bir denge görevi görerek hükümet karşıtı ve laik-milliyetçi bakış açılarının Türkiye'deki mülteciler sorununu nasıl ele aldığına dair değerli içgörüler sağlıyor.

Çalışmanın temel amacı, Türkiye'deki iki mülteci grubunun medya tasvirlerindeki farklılıkları sunarak bu tasvirlerin mevcut siyasi ve toplumsal önyargıları nasıl yansıtabileceğini veya güçlendirebileceğini incelemek olduğundan, bu çalışmanın araştırma soruları şunlardır:

1. Sabah ve Sözcü gazeteleri, Afgan ve Ukraynalı mültecileri çevrimiçi haber içeriklerinde nasıl temsil etmektedir?

2. Sabah ve Sözcü'nün çevrimiçi haber içeriklerinde Afgan ve Ukraynalı mülteci gruplarıyla ilişkilendirilen temel temalar ve anlatılar nelerdir?

3. Afgan ve Ukraynalı mültecilerin Sabah ve Sözcü gazetelerindeki temsilleri, mevcut siyasi ve toplumsal önyargıları nasıl yansıtmakta veya pekiştirmektedir?

## Introduction

Refugees and asylum seekers have been receiving much attention from the media leading to an increasing number of academic research on the ways they are represented (Sulaiman-Hill et al., 2011). Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2021 the, global attention has turned to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Similarly, the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, caused by the Taliban took-over in 2021, has been a significant incident that attracted the attention of the world. These two incidents forced thousands of people to flee their home country.

In the Middle East, Türkiye has been one of the destinations for refugees from both countries. Considering the significant role of the media in representing and building the identities of refugees to the public (Lawlor & Tolley, 2017), the present study will compare the ways Afghan and Ukrainian refugees have been presented in two popular Turkish online newspapers, namely Sabah and Sözcü through content analysis. As there is no significant time gap between the occurrence of the two refugee crises, studies on the way each group is represented in the media would provide an in-depth understanding of how race, nationality or religion affect their media representation and would reveal how media discourse shapes public opinion.

The importance of studying media representation of refugees lies in its potential to influence public opinion and policy decisions. From a Foucauldian perspective, media texts are "sites of struggle over power relations" (Orgad, 2012, p. 28). Drawing on Foucault's theory of power and discourse, this study examines how Turkish media outlets construct and perpetuate specific narratives about different refugee groups, potentially influencing public opinion and policy decisions. As Foucault argues, discourse is not merely a reflection of reality but a tool through which power relations are established and maintained (Foucault, 1980). In the context of media representation of refugees, this theoretical framework helps us understand how media discourse can create, reinforce, or challenge existing power structures and social hierarchies.

The link between power relations, public opinion, and media is bilateral, with all sources mutually affecting and being affected by each other (Robinson, 1999).

As Van Gorp (2005, p. 504) asserts, "the media play an important role in generating public support for or condemnation of the immigration and asylum policy." Furthermore, media not only sets the agenda for public discussion but also strongly influences how people think about and discuss issues related to refugees and migrants (Van Dijk, 2015).

Van Dijk's (2015) theory of ideological square, analyzing how media emphasizes positive aspects of "us", emphasizes negative aspects of "them", de-emphasizes negative aspects of "us", and  de-emphasizes positive aspects of "them",

This study is particularly significant in the Turkish context, where the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception of refugees. By comparing the representation of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, we can gain insights into potential biases and disparities in media coverage based on the refugees' country of origin. This analysis is essential for understanding how media discourse may influence public attitudes, policy decisions, and the overall treatment of different refugee groups in Türkiye.

Ever since the revolution of mass media in the 1960s, the effect of mass media on culture, politics, communication and the dynamics of society has become more evident (Harvey, 1990). Castells (2003) asserts that communication via mass media in society creates a network society based on which the realities of the society are shaped. He explains that being outstanding and attractive is a dominant feature of the network society, which is realized by the focus of media on impressive news often portrayed by victimization, crime and violence. For this reason, victimization is a significant focus of attention in the media. It is important to specify that this victimization is not equal for all groups; that is, the media represents a hierarchy of victimization in which ideal victims are placed on top, and the fewer deserving victims are placed at the bottom (Davies et al., 2007). Van Gorp (2005) and Gale (2004) emphasized the ambivalence in the representation of refugees in media as either innocent victims who deserve help and protection or unwanted foreigners that threaten the host nation.

There are a number of studies on the media representation of refugees in the literature. The result of these studies supports the biased victimization of refugee groups in media by reporting that refugees are either portrayed as 'others' and threats to a nation or simply as 'victims.' Most of these studies have analyzed Western media, specifically European and Australian media. Lea and Lynn (2003), for example, scrutinized the discursive construction of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK media by analyzing letters from members of the public written on the asylum debates. They concluded that refugees were portrayed in a mostly negative way within these discourses. This negative discourse was achieved by repositioning asylum seekers in society in a way that they were regarded as groups outside society. Some studies have revealed the common metaphors used for representing refugees and asylum seekers. Gale (2004) analyzed representations of forced migrants in Australian newspapers before the 2001 election. Through the use of critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis, he identified three themes

which highlighted the 'national' identity and the 'Other' identity. The first theme was the 'human face' metaphor which portrayed Australia as a compassionate country. The second one was the 'border protection' metaphor that portrayed Australia as a country which is trying to protect its borders. And the last theme found in commentaries rather than in news stories concerns the rights of the refugees.

In another study, Parker (2015) compared the representation of refugees and asylum seekers in British and Australian print media. It was revealed that both the UK and Australian print media had utilized a number of interpretative repertoires for portraying refugees and asylum seekers. The main category found was the 'unwanted invader,' which was achieved through the use of metaphors of 'criminals' and 'water' (that is, using words such as 'flood' and 'overflowed' to create an account of large numbers of refugees trying to enter the country.)
Nevertheless, these metaphors were used differently in both media. While protection of the borders and keeping refugees out of the country was the focus of the Australian media, in the UK, the metaphors were used to induce the readers to believe that these people must be removed from the country.
Another study done by Pickering (2001) looked into the representation of refugees in the Australian press to question definitions of deviance from what media impose as right/wrong, Good/evil. She unveiled three themes by which the refugees were portrayed in deviant terms. These categories included 'racialized' deviants, 'diseased' deviants and 'invading' deviants, with different degrees of interdependency among them. Similar stereotypes can be found in literature representing refugees as criminals, illegal invaders, and threats to the economy and national identity (Haynes, 2004).

This negative trend toward the representation of refugees also exists in other European media. Specifically, the notion of 'otherness' has been more evident in these studies. Vezovnik (2017) investigated the representation of refugees in Slovenian tabloid newspapers. By adhering to critical discourse analysis, the author looked into the ways refugees were portrayed as 'cultural threats,' 'security threats,' and 'genuine refugees'. It was concluded that the media discourse mainly employed binary dichotomies between 'us,' as victims, heroes, and heroic victims, and 'them' as a threat to the culture and security of the nation. Moreover, the notion of refugees as an 'economic burden' is evident in the Finnish (Järvinen, 2015), Austrian (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017), and Hungarian press (Vicsek et al., 2008).

As the previous literature review indicates, refugee representation has been predominantly negative across different cultures and political systems. However, there are a number of studies that indicate exceptions to this trend. Sulaiman-Hill et al. (2011) observed that New Zealand newspapers held a strong humanitarian tone towards refugees between 1998 and 2008. Berry et al. (2016) looked into the coverage of refugees in five European countries in 2014 and 2015 and reported that although the most positive depiction occurred in Swedish newspapers, there existed some variations of positive depiction across German and British press. More recently, in their comparative analysis of Irish and UK press, O'Regan and Riordan

(2018) revealed that the Irish media tended to focus on the need to remove failed asylum seekers, while the UK press considered them as victims.

By looking at this brief review of the literature, it can be concluded that although most of the studies on refugee representation reflect a negative attitude of the media towards them, there are a number of studies indicating the opposite. These studies are limited, and further research is expected to be conducted to shed more light on the matter. Secondly, the literature has been mostly focused on Western media, and other host countries have not been the major focus of the analysis. This calls for more analysis in non-western host countries to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of media representation of refugee groups. Thus, to fill in the gap, the current study has focused on the representation of two distinct refugee groups (Afghans and Ukrainian refugees) in the context of the Turkish media.

## Türkiye and Refugees

Due to the political crisis in the past years, Türkiye has become the destination of numerous refugees in the middle east hosting around four million refugees. Refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq make up the largest refugee population in the country, respectively. This huge number of refugees has made these groups to be the focus of attention in Turkish media.

Recent incidents regarding the refugee crisis turned the attention of Turkish news media to this specific topic again. Earlier, on 15 August 2021 Taliban took over Afghanistan, resulting in more Afghan refugees taking refuge in Türkiye. On the other, Türkiye became one of the destinations for Ukrainian refugees after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The entrance of a new group of Afghan refugees and another refugee group from a European country attracted the attention of the Turkish media. Media coverage of the entrance of the two refugee groups in Turkish news media established a firm ground for investigating the representation of the two distinctive refugee groups (one from a European country and the other from a Muslim Middle Eastern country). This is mainly because, on the global level, these two refugee groups were regarded and represented differently by the Western media. As Ukrainians fled their country, news media represented them as the 'right' kind of refugees. Charlie D'Agata from CBS News, for instance, stated that Ukraine's capital Kyiv is 'relatively civilized, relatively European' compared to cities in Afghanistan and Iraq (Fayn, 2022).

Most of the literature on refugee representation in Turkish newspapers consists of studies that focus on the representation of Syrian refugees (Akgül Gök & Gökçearslan Çifci, 2016; Efe, 2015; Kavaklı, 2016; Memişoğlu & Başol, 2016; Yavcan et al., 2017).

Sozen and Basturk (2024) examine how social media platforms influence and perpetuate Orientalist representations of Syrian refugees in Türkiye. Their research reveals that social media often reinforces existing stereotypes and preju-

dices, creating what they term "digital Orientalism." The authors argue that social media platforms serve as spaces where traditional Orientalist narratives are reproduced and amplified, affecting public perception of Syrian refugees. This digital dimension adds a contemporary layer to Said's classical concept of Orientalism, showing how new media technologies can perpetuate historical forms of othering. In their analysis of border spectacles, Aslı, İkizoğlu, and Erensü (2023) introduce the concept of "ordered visibility" in the Turkish context. They demonstrate how media coverage of refugees at Türkiye's borders creates a particular kind of spectacle that simultaneously makes refugees visible and invisible in specific ways. This selective visibility serves political purposes and shapes public understanding of refugee issues. The authors argue that this "appearing to disappear" phenomenon is a crucial mechanism through which media representation influences refugee politics in Türkiye.

Rui-Li and Yu (2023) provide a linguistic analysis of how Turkish online media represents refugees and migrants. Their study reveals several dominant discursive patterns in online media coverage:

- The use of metaphorical language that often dehumanizes refugees
- The prevalence of security-focused narratives
- The tendency to represent refugees as either victims or threats Their findings suggest that online media discourse plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion about refugees through specific linguistic choices and framing strategies.

Feray and Artar (2023) focus specifically on the class-based representation of Syrian refugees in Turkish media. Their research reveals how media coverage often intersects with class distinctions, creating hierarchical representations of refugees based on their socioeconomic status. The authors argue that this class-based framing influences public perception and policy responses to refugee issues. Their work highlights how media representation of refugees is not uniform but rather stratified along socioeconomic lines.

Aydın and Yeşilyurt (2023) offer a comparative analysis of how Syrian and Ukrainian refugees are represented in Turkish media. Their critical discourse analysis reveals significant disparities in how different refugee groups are portrayed: Ukrainian refugees are often represented more positively and coverage of Syrian refugees tends to focus more on problems and challenges

Different narrative frames are employed based on the refugees' origin This comparative approach highlights how media representation can vary significantly based on the refugees' nationality and perceived cultural proximity to the host society.

In line with the previous findings on the representation of refugees in Western media, the findings of these studies also point out the duality of the representation of refugees as 'victims' vs. 'others.' For example, in a study, Onay-Coker (2019)

explored the discursive practices of Turkish newspapers (Sabah, Hurriyet and Haberturk) after the Turkish army's invasion of Syria, which resulted to a vast number of Syrian refugees entering the country. After analyzing the news articles, the researcher notified three emerging themes, namely, "National Self Glorification, Burden, and Negative Model" (Onay-Coker, 2019, p.5) and concluded that the discourse utilized on the news articles imposed a sense of otherness to the Syrian refugees. In another study conducted by Sunata and Yildiz (2018) on media representation of Syrian refugees, it was revealed that Turkish media portrayed them as refugee groups trying to survive.

Following Syrians, Afghans are the second largest population of refugees in the country. Afghan refugees enter the country from Afghanistan and the small existing communities in Iran and Pakistan. Since the withdrawal of the Western forces from Afghanistan and the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021, more and more Afghan refugees have been migrating to Türkiye, creating a hot topic for Turkish media coverage. In the literature, studies on Afghan refugees are either on their experiences of coming or living in Türkiye (Biehl, 2015; Jarahzadeh, 2013; Maqul et al., 2020) or their journey as a refugee to Türkiye (Kaytaz, 2016; Kuschminder, 2017).

As the discussed body of the literature on Western and Turkish media representation of refugees reveals, there are a number of studies on the ways different online newspapers have represented refugee groups. Most of them have focused on portraying a single group of refugees, and most focus on Western media. The study results indicate that refugees are either 'deserving victims' or 'others' with potential dangers to society and the economy. The proximity of the most recent two refugee crises (the Afghan refugee crises after the Taliban takeover and the Ukrainian refugee crisis), their representation in the media of a country that accepts both refugee groups (Türkiye) and the lack of studies in the literature on the representation of both groups in this context, have called for further investigation of the attitude of Turkish media towards both groups. Analyzing media representation of refugees is crucial as it significantly impacts public opinion, policy decisions, and the integration of refugee populations. By comparing the representation of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, this study aims to reveal potential disparities in representation based on factors such as ethnicity, religion, and geopolitical considerations. This research fills a gap in the literature by focusing on the Turkish context and comparing two distinct refugee groups within a short timeframe, providing insights into how media discourse shapes societal attitudes towards different refugee populations. For this reason, the central issue this study addresses is understanding how media, influenced by political stances, shapes public perception of refugees in Türkiye. Specifically, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do Sabah and Sözcü represent Afghan and Ukrainian refugees in their online news coverage?
2. What are the key themes and narratives associated with Afghan and

Ukrainian refugee groups in online coverage of Sabah and Sözcü?

3. How do representations of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees in Sabah and Sözcü reflect or reinforce existing political and social biases?

By answering these questions, this research will contribute to the existing literature on media representation of refugees in several ways: first, it will provide insights into how non-Western media, specifically Turkish media, represent different refugee groups. Secondly, it will explore how political orientations of newspapers may influence their portrayal of refugees. Moreover, it will examine potential disparities in the representation of refugees based on their country of origin, which may reveal underlying biases in media coverage. Lastly it will contribute to the broader understanding of how media discourse shapes public opinion and potentially influences policy decisions regarding refugees in Türkiye.

## Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining content analysis and thematic analysis to investigate the representation of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees in two Turkish online newspapers, Sabah and Sözcü. The choice of these methods is grounded in the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis, which posits that media representations are not neutral reflections of reality but are shaped by and contribute to power relations in society (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1993).

Content analysis was carried out to investigate the culled articles' stances towards the immigrants. Articles were coded as negative, neutral, or positive, based on Mollard's classification model (2001). This model was chosen for its comprehensive approach to analyzing media representations of refugees and its ability to capture nuanced attitudes beyond simple positive/negative dichotomies.

The analysis was carried out to investigate the culled articles' stances towards the immigrants. In particular, the articles were coded as negative, neutral or positive, depending on the way each article represented the immigrants. For this purpose, Mollards's classification model (2001) was used. Links between refugees and illegality (Gale, 2004), disease spreading (Esses, et al., 2013; Pickering, 2001) were coded as cues for a negative representation, along with "openly hostile views" on refugees (Mollard, 2001, p.6). Articles were coded as 'positive' when they openly took supportive stances towards refugees using positive key words such as "Friendly, Welcome, Compassionate, Respect, and Support" (Mollard, 2001, p. 6). Moreover, articles were also coded as positive if they included positive personal views and experiences of refugees themselves (Mollard, 2001). Also, articles were marked as positive if they represented refugees as victims by reflecting on their hardships. On the other hand, articles were considered neutral if they took neither an openly hostile nor positive stance towards the immigrants. All the data were meticulously analyzed and coded to find the recurrent and emerging themes.

Moreover, the analysis involved going beyond the surface meaning of the themes trying to reveal the meanings behind them in a broader discursive context (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Following the content analysis, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and patterns in the representation of refugees. This approach, based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process, allows for a deeper exploration of the underlying discourses and ideologies present in the media coverage. The analysis involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report. The process aimed to go beyond surface-level meanings to reveal broader discursive contexts and ideological underpinnings of the refugee representations.

As for the sampling, two Turkish online newspapers, namely Sabah and Sözcü, were selected. Besides being the country's top-selling newspapers, the newspapers' selection for the present study is reinforced by considering their political alignment. In particular, politically, Sabah is aligned with the Turkish government and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which is a conservative and religious party. However, Sözcü is considered a leading newspaper taking an anti-government stance and holding a more nationalist and Kemalist political orientation. It has the largest readership among people who follow Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's ideals of a modern and democratic Turkish Republic. In this way, it is hoped that the result of the study could reveal each political alignment's stance on Afghan and Ukrainian refugees taking refuge in Türkiye. As the research focuses on news items on Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, non-random purposeful sampling has been used for data collection. This purposeful sampling strategy allows for a comparative analysis of how political orientation influences refugee representation, contributing to our understanding of the interplay between media, politics, and public discourse on refugees.

All the news articles covering issues related to Afghan refugees published from July 2021 were the subject of scrutiny. The reason for choosing this specific date is that one month before the full dominance of the Taliban, the attention of the media to Afghan refugees gradually increased, and more people left their homeland. As many Ukrainians started taking refuge in other countries right after the Russian invasion, news items on Ukrainian refugees published from 24 February 2022 will be the focus of the study. For this purpose, Afghan refugees and Ukrainian refugees were searched in online newspapers, and the relevant news articles were retrieved and scrutinized. The specific timeframes were chosen to capture the media discourse surrounding key events: the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This approach allows for a comparative analysis of media responses to two distinct refugee crises occurring in close temporal proximity.

Besides the higher accessibility and readership of online newspapers, they were chosen to be analyzed in the study mainly sampling the data by providing the

opportunity to search for keywords on newspapers' search engines and obtain the related news articles. because online newspapers offer a more convenient method for sampling the data by providing the opportunity to search for keywords on news papers' search engine and obtain the related news articles.

## Results

As stated in the previous section, news articles from both newspapers on Ukrainian and Afghan refugees were first scrutinized to find the overall tone of each newspaper. Articles were labelled as positive, negative and neutral based on the criteria illustrated in the design section. Next, news articles went through further analysis to find the recurring themes. The news articles were collected online by searching 'Ukrainian refugees' or 'Afghan refugees' as the key phrases on online papers' search engines. The results were further narrowed down by the date speci-fied in the previous section. Moreover, results were further narrowed down by ana-lyzing articles in which refugees were the main topic of the news items (that is, refugees and their issues were the concentration of news articles). Specifications on the tone of news articles and the identified emerging themes are presented as follows.

**Sabah**

*Ukrainian Refugees*

Narrowing down the results based on the date specified in the previous sec-tion, 53 articles made up the primary dataset of the study. Figure No. 1 illustrates the point. Out of these 53 articles, 20 articles were directly related to Ukrainian and were thus scrutinized. As the figure indicated, following Mollard's criteria (2001), 15 news articles (75 percent) were explicitly positive, five (25 percent) were identified as neutral, and no negative representation was identified.

Figure 1. Representation of Ukrainian Refugees on Sabah.
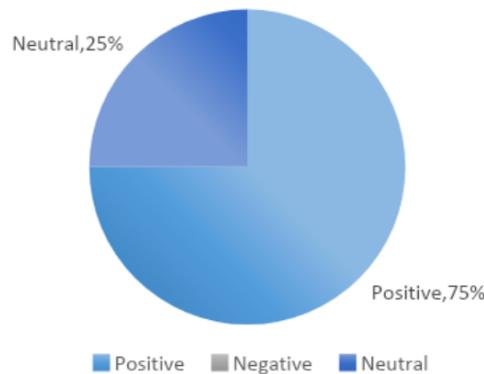
The following themes emerged in the process of analyzing the articles identified as 'positive' in representation of Ukrainian refugees on Sabah:

**Theme 1:** Generous and Life-Saving Turkish People and Prime Minister. One of the most prominent and recurring themes was found to be the generosity of Turkish people and the ways they had saved the lives of many Ukrainian people. Moreover, numerous quotes from Ukrainian refugees were stated on the heroic actions of the Turkish prime minister and his wife that saved their lives from war. In short, the immigrants are represented as vulnerable victims that have been saved by Turkish people. This theme was identified in 12 news articles out of the investigated 20 articles. Specifically, four of the articles were focused on the way Ukrainian refugee children have been saved or treated well by different organizations. Recurrent keywords were 'saving' (eight times), 'home' (three times), 'helping' (two times), and 'taking refuge' (two times). The following five excerpts refer to this theme:

- "Türkiye, Rusişgali altındaki Ukrayna'da vatanlarını terk etmek zorunda kalan sivillere yardım için yine herkesten önce kolları sıvadı." (Türkiye rolled up its sleeves before anyone else to help the civilians who had to leave their homeland in Ukraine under Russian Occupation.) 1 March 2022.
- "Savaş mağduru aileye evini açtı." (He opened his home to the war victim family.) 15 March 2022.
- "Lila Kareşenko: 'Emine Hanım'ı çok seviyoruz. O bizi savaştan kurtardı.'" (Lila Kareşenko: We love Emine Hanım very much. She saved us from war.) May 21, 2022.
- "Nasita Huşenko: 'Ukrayna'dan geldik. Emine Erdoğan getirdi. Türk misafirperverliği çok iyi, dostluklar, arkadaşlıklar kurduk. Türkler sıcak insanlar.'" (Nasita Hushenko: We came from Ukraine. Emine Erdogan brought us here. Turkish people are very hospitable, we established beautiful friendships. Turks are warm people.') 21 May 2022.
- "'Hem Türkiye'ye hem Türk hükümetine bu yardım için çok teşekkür ediyoruz. Bir ay boyunca hep sığınaktaydılar. Türkiye'de güvende ve mutlular.'" (We thank both Türkiye and the Turkish government for this help. For a month they were always in the bunker. They [Ukrainian refugees] are safe and happy in Türkiye.) 28 March 2022.

**Theme 2:** Appreciative Victims. Most articles included direct quotations from Ukrainian refugees stating how thankful they are to the Turkish government and the people. This theme appeared in seven news articles with 'thank you' as the recurring keyword, repeated ten times in the articles. The following excerpts are examples of the point:

- "Dünyaca ünlü sanatçı Jamala, yaptığı basın açıklamasında, Cumhurbaşkanı

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'a ve Türk Halkına karşılıksız destekleri için teşekkür etti." (The world-famous artist Jamala thanked President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Turkish people for their unconditional support in her press statement.) 1 March 2022.

- "'Ya burada öleceğiz, ya da Türkiye'ye sığınacağız dedik. Türkiye'den tahliye otobüsleri geldiğini öğrendik. Otobüslere bindik. Allah Türkiye'den razı olsun' ifadelerini kullandı." ('We said either we will die here, or we will seek refuge in Türkiye. We learned that evacuation buses are coming from Türkiye. We got on the buses. God bless Türkiye.') 4 March 2022.

*Afghan Refugees*

After searching the keyword 'Afghan refugee' on the search engine, only 11 articles were identified as reporting and commenting on Afghan refugees. Upon analyzing all of the articles, one was identified as positive, five as negative and five as neutral in tone. In other words, (9 percent) were positive, (45.45 percent) were negative, and (45.45 percent) were neutral (Figure No. 2 represents the findings). Neutral articles merely reported events and decisions regarding Afghan refugees; therefore, no prominent theme was discovered. However, due to the dominance of a negative tone in the articles, the following negative theme was identified:

Figure 2. Representation of Afghan Refugees on Sabah.
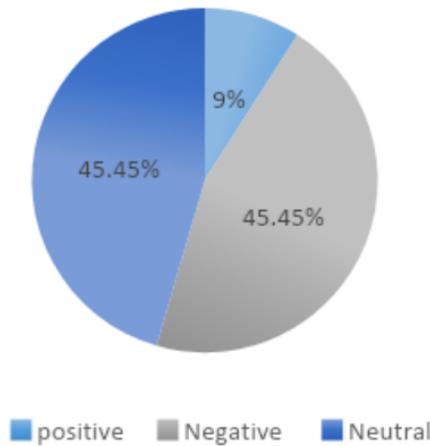


**Theme 1:** Illegality and Crime. News articles on illegal entries of Afghan people had the most recurring keywords among the news articles. These keywords were 'irregular migrant' (6 times) and 'crime' (2 times). The following excerpts are examples of the point:

- "Van Göçmen Kaçakçılığı ile Mücadele Şube ekipleri son bir ayda şehir merkezindeki şok evlerine düzenledikleri baskınlarda 5 bine yakın düzensiz göçmen

yakaladı." (Van Anti-Immigrant Smuggling Branch teams caught nearly 5000 irregular migrants on their raids against 'shock houses' in the city center in the last month.) 20 August 2021.

- "Yasadışı yollardan Türkiye'ye giriş yapan Afganlara yönelik operasyonlar aralıksız devam ediyor. Yakalanan düzensiz göçmenler Van'daki Ön Kabul Merkezi'ne götürülüyor." (Operations against Afghans who entered Türkiye illegally continue uninterrupted. Arrested irregular migrants are taken to the Pre-Reception Center in Van.) 23 August 2021.

The findings indicate that the number of published articles about Ukrainian refugees (N=53) is considerably more than articles on Afghan refugees (N=12). Moreover, while there is no negative representation of Ukrainian refugees, Afghan refugees have been mainly portrayed negatively by news articles. Table 1 summarizes the findings of the analysis of newspaper articles on Ukrainian and Afghan refugees published in Sabah.

**Table 1**

*Representation of Ukrainian and Afghan Refugees on Sabah*

| Refugee Group | N | n | Tone | | | | Theme |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Positive | Negative | Neutral | | |
| Ukrainian | 53 | 20 | 15 | 0 | 5 | - <br> - | Generous and life-saving Turkish people and Prime Minister. <br> Appreciative victims. |
| Afghan | 12 | 12 | 1 | 5 | 5 | - | Illegality and crime. |

**Sözcü**

*Ukrainian Refugees*

The primary sample of the news consisted of 72 articles (figure No. 3). Twenty-nine articles were investigated out of a total of 72 articles. Interestingly, most of the articles focused on the way European countries reacted to Ukrainian Refugees and out of 29 articles, only five focused on Afghan refugees in Türkiye. As Figure 3 indicates, five (17.24 percent) articles were identified as positive, two (6.9 percent) as negative and 22 (75.86 percent) as neutral. After an in-depth analysis, the following themes were retrieved from the news articles:
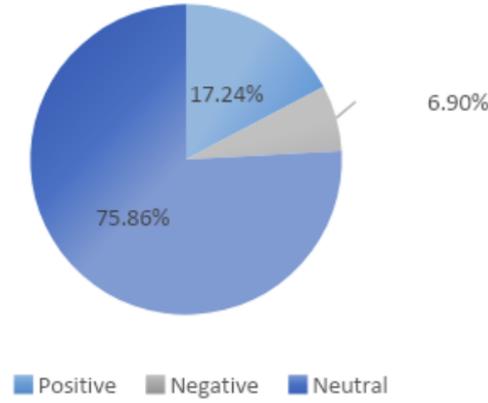
Theme 1: Ukrainian Women. There were seven articles that reported issues regarding Ukrainian women refugees. Out of seven news articles, six of them reflected women as victims of 'rape' (two times), 'racist views' (two times), and human trafficking (two times). Moreover, among these seven articles, one portrayed a negative representation of a Ukrainian refugee woman by addressing her as a 'homewrecker'. Following are the examples of the specified theme extracted from the articles:

- "Brezilyalı politikacının Ukraynalı mülteciler hakkındaki cinsiyetçi sözleri tepki çekti." (Brazilian politician's sexist remarks about Ukrainian refugees sparked reactions.) 7 March 2022.
- "Ukrayna'daki savaştan kaçtı, Almanya'da toplu tecavüze uğradı." (She fled the war in Ukraine, was gang-raped in Germany.) 16 March 2022.
- "Ukraynalı mülteciyi evine aldı, yuvası yıkıldı". (She took the Ukrainian refugee women home, she wrecked her home.) 22 May 2022.

Theme 2: Europeans at Help. During the analysis, it was identified that five articles reported how European countries, actors, and people had been helping Ukrainian refugees. Keywords for this theme consist of the name of famous people and words such as 'home' (two times), 'help' (two times), and 'residence permit' (one time). Excerpts below are examples of the theme:
"Rus işgalinden kaçan, ancak İngiltere'de aile bağları olmayan on binlerce kişinin bir yıl kalmasına izin verilecek ve İngiliz halkından…on binlerce Ukraynalıya ev vermeleri istenecek." (Tens of thousands of people fleeing the Russian occupation without family ties in the UK will be allowed to stay for a year, and the British public will be asked to give homes to the tens of thousands of Ukrainians fleeing the Russian occupation, with plans to be announced this weekend.) 11 March 2022.
"Benedict Cumberbatch, Ukraynalı bir aileyi evinde ağırlayacak." (Benedict Cumberbatch will host a Ukrainian family.) 29 April 2022.

Theme 3: Racism. Out of the 29 investigated articles, five reported stories of

refugees from other countries that have been treated differently from Ukrainian refugees on the borders or by the politicians. Specifically, these news articles high-lighted the issue of racism. Keywords for this theme were 'racism' (two times), 'different treatment (two times), and 'comparison' (one time). The following excerpts represent the identified theme:

"Avrupa ülkelerinin Orta Doğu ve Afrika'dan gelenlerin girişini engelleme çabalarıyla karşılaştırıldığında Ukraynalı mültecilerin coşkuyla karşılanması, Albagir gibi birçok kişide ırkçılıkla karşı karşıya oldukları inancını güçlendiriyor". (The enthusiastic reception of Ukrainian refugees, compared to the efforts of European countries to block the entry of those from the Middle East and Africa, reinforces the belief in many, like Albagir, that they face racism.) 15 March 2022.

"Bölgeden gelen görüntüler, soğuk havada yaşanan çaresizliği ortaya koyarken, bölgede Afrikalı öğrencilere ırkçılık yapıldığı iddiaları ortalığı karıştırdı." (While the images from the region revealed the desperation experienced in the cold weather, the allegations that racism was committed against African students in the region stirred up the situation.) 1 March 2022.

*Afghan Refugees*

From 50 articles that were published on Sözcü on Afghan refugees, 22 of them were taken for further analysis. It was identified that five (22.73 per cent) had a positive tone, 14 (63.64 per cent) negative, and three (13.64 per cent) had a neutral tone. Figure No. 4 illustrates the point. After detailed analysis of the dataset, the following themes were identified:

**Theme 1:** Illegality and Crime. Out of 22 articles, 12 reported illegal entrance and criminal activities of Afghan refugees in Türkiye. The terms 'illegal immigrants' (6 times), 'murder' (three times), 'crime' (one time), 'rape' (one time), 'terrorism' (one time), and 'drugs' (one time). The following excerpts are examples of the cases:

- "Kaçak göçmenler elini kolunu sallayarak ülkemize giriyor. Bunlar ciddi bir güvenlik sorunu. Bunların içerisinde terör örgütü üyeleri ya da uyuşturucu tacirleri de olabilir." (Illegal immigrants are easily entering our country. These are serious security issues. These may include members of a terrorist organization or drug dealers.) 17 July 2021. "Afgan uyruklu şahıs, konuşma isteğini reddeden kadını öldürdü." (An Afghan national killed woman who refused his request to speak) 22 August 2021.

Positive    Negative    Neutral
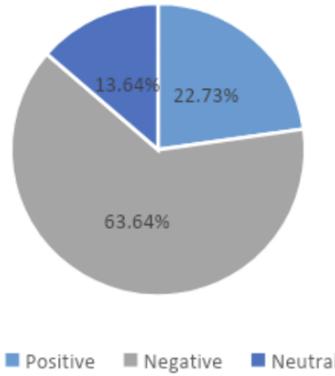
**Theme 2:** Coming in Flows. Among the analyzed articles, there were reports which discussed Afghan refugees coming to Türkiye in huge numbers. These news articles used the keywords 'huge flows' (six times) and 'immigrant traffic' (once) to refer to the bulk of refugees entering the borders. Examples of such representation can be found below:

- "Afganistan'da Taliban zulmünden kaçan göçmenler kaçak yollarla akın Türki-ye'ye gelmeye devam ediyor." (Immigrants fleeing the persecution of the Taliban in Afghanistan continue to come to Türkiye in huge flows illegally.) 20 July 2021.

As illustrated in (Table 2), The analysis of the news articles on Afghan and Ukrainian refugees published in Sözcü reveals a difference not only in the number of the published articles, but in the tone news articles adopted for referring to each group.

The analysis of the news articles on Afghan and Ukrainian refugees published in Sözcü reveals a difference not only in the number of the published articles, but in the tone news articles adopted for referring to each group. More news items were published on Ukrainian refugees (N=72 versus 50), and unlike Afghans which were mostly portrayed negatively, generally, the newspaper had a neutral stance towards Ukrainian refugees. In the next section, an in-depth analysis and discussion of the findings will be presented.

**Table 2**

*Representation of Ukrainian and Afghan Refugees on Sözcü.*

| Refugee  Group | N | n | Tone | | | | Theme |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Positive | Negative | Neutral | | |
| Ukrainian | 72 | 29 | 5 | 2 | 22 | - | Ukrainian women. |
| | | | | | | - | Europeans at help. |
| Afghan | 50 | 22 | 5 | 14 | 3 | - | Illegality and crime. |
| | | | | | | - | Coming in flows. |

## Discussion and Conclusion

The present study focuses on the ways Ukrainian and Afghan refugees have been represented by two major Turkish online newspapers, namely Sabah and Sözcü. Based on the classification put forward by Mallards, an initial content analysis was conducted. Next, a thematic analysis was carried out, and the recurring themes were identified for each refugee group. The results indicated that although Sözcü had paid more attention to Afghan refugees by publishing more news than Sabah, overall, Ukrainian refugees were considered more newsworthy, thus, having more news items allocated to them by both online newspapers. Also, in contrast to Ukrainian refugees, Afghan refugees have been mainly portrayed negatively in Sabah and Sözcü (Figures 5 and 6).

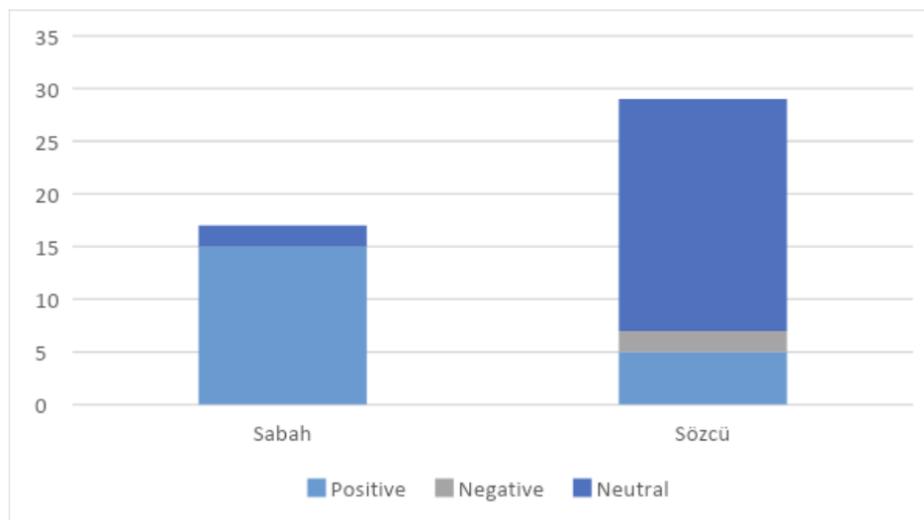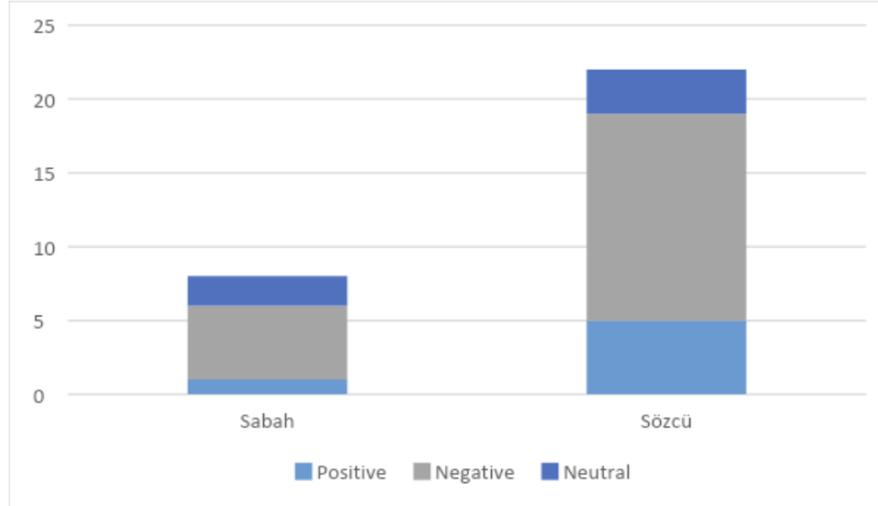Figure 5. Representation of Ukrainian refugees by paper.

Figure 6. Representation of Afghan refugees by paper.



As for Ukrainian refugees, there were four distinguishing differences between Sözcü and Sabah. First, unlike Sabah, which covered more news regarding the state of Ukrainian refugees in Türkiye, Sözcü mostly reported policies and incidents concerning European countries with respect to Ukrainian refugees. In this regard, Sözcü was full of news on the events organized by Turkish organizations for helping Ukrainian people, while Sabah signified a perception that Ukrainian refugees are not a matter to be discussed in the Turkish context and therefore covers the ways Europeans had been taking actions with respect to their issues.

Second, Sözcü took a more moderate stance towards the refugees by reporting tragic stories of Ukrainian refugees as well as instances of their illegal and dangerous actions. However, Sabah mainly published articles only in favor of Ukrainian refugees. In fact, in Sözcü, the articles were identified as positive because they reported the tragic experiences of Ukrainian refugees. Nevertheless, the representation of Ukrainian refugees in Sabah was identified as positive because they glorified the heroic deeds of the Turkish people and its government. Ukrainian refugees were portrayed as 'victims' in despair, and Turkish people were heroes who reached out to them and rescued them. In other words, although both newspapers reported tragic stories of Ukrainian refugees in Sabah, those events were not the main focus of the news articles, and the heroic actions of the Turkish people and its government for saving victims of the war were the intended message behind the news items.

Another significant difference between the two online newspapers was found to be the issue of racism. Sözcü emphasized the existing racism between Ukrainian refugees and refugees from other countries by reporting that African and Middle-Eastern refugees were discriminated on the borders of European countries. There were no instances of such news articles in Sabah.
Lastly, coverage of incidents related to Ukrainian women refugees was found to be another major difference between the two online newspapers. Although Sabah

also mentioned women and children as the victims of the war, they were not the focus of the news items as they were mentioned to reinforce the idea that they were saved by the Turkish people. However, in Sözcü, the issue of Ukrainian women refugees was one of the focal points, as evident by being topicalized in newspaper headlines as well. Lack of any news items regarding Afghan women in either of the newspapers indicates that both media ignore to address the problems these women face in the country. Their absence is the indication of ignoring their needs making them unseen and nonexistent. However, Ukrainian women, regardless of their positive or negative representation, indicate that Ukrainian women were seen worthy of taking up space and becoming visible.

As for the representation of Afghan refugees in Sabah and Sözcü, one major difference and two similarities were identified. The main difference was the news-worthiness of Afghan refugees in both online newspapers. For Sabah, the issue of Afghan refugees was not newsworthy; it only published 12 news items on the refugees after the Taliban invasion. On the other hand, for Sözcü, this crisis was significant, and thus, it covered the issue by publishing 50 news items on Afghan refugees.

When a specific group of refugees is given a voice through publishing news articles on the difficulties and sufferings they experienced, that refugee group is, in fact, notified as a human being, being a victim of war. In other words, sharing individual stories of refugees gives them a face while representing them as 'flows' and 'dehumanized' (Marfleet, 2006), portraits them as faceless masses. In this sense, by not reporting Afghan refugees' tragic stories, Sabah has failed to make them heard by the public, and by considering them as 'flows' rather than individuals, Sözcü has failed to consider them as human beings suffering a war. In fact, the emergence of the theme 'coming in flows' in this study is in line with the findings of another study conducted by Khosravinik (2009) in which the representation of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in British newspapers was analyzed and referred to as 'flux,' 'flow' and 'tide.'

Moreover, as illustrated in Figure 6, both online newspapers mainly considered Afghan refugees as illegal refugees and included reports about their illegal entrance and criminal offences. The emergence of the theme 'illegality and crime' for representing refugee groups is not new in the literature. In fact, Parker (2015), in his study on the representation of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK and Australian print media, identified metaphors of criminality in the newspapers communicated through terms like 'detainees' and 'attack.' Similarly, Rasinger (2010) analyzed the representation of migrants from Eastern Europe in regional print media in Cambridge shire, England and reported that migrants and minority groups were prejudicially depicted by the media in the UK and were associated with rising crime levels.

When comparing the representation of Ukrainian and Afghan refugees in Sabah, it can be stated that first, Afghan refugees were not considered as important as Ukrainian refugees due to the lack of news items allocated to their situation.

Secondly, unlike news articles about Ukrainian refugees in which the benevolence of Turkish people and government was glorified and reported multiple times, there was no single news item reporting on how Turkish people helped Afghan refugees. Moreover, news items focusing on the hardships they went through were very limited. Both refugee groups were running from a war in their homeland; nevertheless, while Ukrainians were welcomed, Afghan refugees were considered 'illegal' immigrants.

A comparison of the representation of Ukrainian and Afghan refugees in Sözcü revealed that for this online newspaper, Ukrainian refugees were slightly more newsworthy than Afghan refugees. But the difference in the number of published news items was found to be less significant than in Sözcü. Unlike Ukrainian refugees, who were represented neutrally by Sözcü, the tone used for Afghan refugees was mainly negative. Moreover, the concern over women refugees, raised for Ukrainian refugees, was totally missing in reporting the issues of Afghan refugees. The question investigated in the present study was more on 'How' rather than 'why' refugees were represented in a specific way. Therefore, issues regarding the possible reason(s) behind the positive representation of a specific refugee group and a negative representation of another can be a topic for further investigation. Moreover, the analysis of visuals used to represent Afghan and Ukrainian refugees is another issue that could be explored in the future. In addition, the present study found that there is a bias against Afghan women refugees in comparison with Ukrainian women refugees. These findings need further analysis to see to what extend and in which ways this bias representation is practiced by the Turkish media in a larger sample. In general, tapping into the perceptions of refugee policy makers, media reporters, and those who are, in one way or another, involved in the refugee crisis would shed further light on the issue.

It is also hoped that further research on the refugee crisis would make the media, in general, take a 'humanistic approach' in presenting the refugees worldwide, wiping out the race, religion and nationality of the refugees who need to be treated as human beings.

The findings of the present paper cannot be generalized due to the limitations of the study. Although the employed methodology provides a robust framework for analyzing refugee representations, it's important to acknowledge potential limitations. First, the focus on online newspapers may not capture the full spectrum of media representations across all platforms. Secondly, the time frame of the study, while capturing immediate responses to the refugee crises, may not reflect longer-term shifts in media discourse, and finally the political orientations of theselected newspapers, while providing a comparative perspective, may not represent the full range of media attitudes in Türkiye..
Despite these limitations, this methodological approach offers valuable insights into how media representations of refugees are shaped by political orientations and contribute to broader societal discourses on migration and national identity in Türkiye.

Furthermore, this study was conducted as an unfunded initiative to focus on how two online Turkish newspapers portrayed Ukrainian and Afghan refugees, with the knowledge that studies in the Turkish context with reference to these refugee groups were limited. Authors acknowledge the reductive nature of positive-negative-neutral categorization; nevertheless, the study aimed at exploring the initial trends. Thus, further testing of identified trends by a longitudinal focus or on other regional online newspapers is suggested to investigate the reasons for taking biased stances towards refugee representation in media.

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