

**ANALYZING THE REACTIONS OF SAUDI ARABIA
AND TÜRKİYE TO THE TURKISH SUPER CUP
FINAL IN THE LIGHT OF HATE SPEECH**

SUUDİ ARABİSTAN VE TÜRKİYE'NİN TÜRKİYE
SÜPER KUPASI FİNALİ TEPKİLERİNİN
NEFRET SÖYLEMİ İŞİĞİNDA ANALİZİ

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Keywords:

Hate Speech
Football
Saudi Arabia,
Super Cup
Türkiye

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Nefret Söylemi,
Futbol
Süper Kupa
Suudi Arabistan
Türkiye

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Alıntılanmak için/Cite as: Duyal M. (2025) Analyzing The Reactions Of Saudi Arabia And Türkiye To The Turkish Super Cup Final In The Light Of Hate Speech, Çukurova Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 34 (2), 1748-1761

ABSTRACT

It was planned that the Al-Awwal Park Stadium in Riyadh would host the Super Cup final, scheduled to be played on December 29, 2023, between Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe, two of Turkey's leading football clubs.. However, due to disagreements between Saudi and Turkish authorities on the day of the match, the match was cancelled and the Turkish teams returned to their home country. Following this development, the stakeholders of the organization—Riyadh Season, the Turkish Football Federation, Fenerbahçe Sports Club, and Galatasaray Sports Club—issued press releases on social media. This study examines hate speech in the comments made by Turkish, Saudi and other citizens under these press releases. Of the stakeholders, only the press release shared by Riyadh Season on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) was included in the analysis because it was open to comments. A total of 305 tweets and replies were evaluated under four main hate speech categories within the scope of the study: Exaggeration/Attribution/Distortion, Insult/Insult/Degradation, Hostility/War Rhetoric, and Symbolization. The findings show that both groups used hate speech most frequently in the Insult/Profanity/Degradation category. Although some tweets expressed support for sports diplomacy, it was determined that the number of comments without hate speech remained relatively limited.

ÖZ

Riyad'daki Al-Awwal Park Stadyumu'nun, 29 Aralık 2023 tarihinde Türkiye'nin önde gelen futbol kulüpleri Galatasaray ve Fenerbahçe arasında oynanması planlanan Süper Kupa maçına ev sahipliği yapması planlanmıştır. Ancak, maç günü Suudi ve Türk yetkililer arasında yaşanan anlaşmazlık nedeniyle müsabaka iptal edilmiş ve Türk takımları ülkelerine dönmüştür. Bu gelişmenin ardından organizasyonun paydaşları—Riyadh Season, Türkiye Futbol Federasyonu, Fenerbahçe Spor Kulübü ve Galatasaray Spor Kulübü—sosyal medya üzerinden basın bültenleri yayımlamıştır. Bu çalışma, söz konusu basın bültenleri altına Türk, Suudi ve diğer ülke vatandaşları tarafından yapılan yorumlarda yer alan nefret söylemini incelemektedir. Paydaşlardan yalnızca Riyadh Season tarafından sosyal medya platformu X'te (eski adıyla Twitter) paylaşılan basın bülteni yorumlara açık olduğu için analiz kapsamına alınmıştır. Çalışma kapsamında toplam 305 tweet ve yanıt, dört temel nefret söylemi kategorisi altında değerlendirilmiştir: Abartma/Atıf/Çarpıtma, Hakaret/Küfür/Aşağılama, Düşmanlık/Savaş Retoriği ve Simgeleştirme. Elde edilen bulgular, her iki grubun da en sık Hakaret/Küfür/Aşağılama kategorisinde nefret söylemi kullandığını ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, bazı tweetlerin spor diplomasisini desteklediği görülmekle birlikte, nefret içermeyen yorumların sayısının görece düşük kaldığı tespit edilmiştir.

INTRODUCTION

Prejudices, racism, xenophobia or antagonism, partiality, discrimination, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of hate speech lie at the root of it. Hate speech is influenced by cultural identities and group traits. Rising nationalism and intolerance of differences lead to increased usage of hate speech (Alğan & Şensever, 2010, s. 15). Hate speech is a form of communication that expresses intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination toward individuals or groups. Social media platforms, through perceived anonymity and freedom of expression, have amplified the visibility and intensity of hate speech (Demir & Talimciler, 2014). In particular, events involving mass participation, such as football matches, have become prominent arenas for the dissemination of hate speech (Özsoy & Yıldız, 2013; Erdem, 2018; Sönmez, 2025). According to Evren (2022), discourse among football fans on Twitter often includes not only expressions of opinion but also elements of polarization and discrimination.

While a considerable body of literature addresses hate speech on social media, most studies focus on political contexts or general social platforms (Sellars, 2016; ElSherief et al., 2018; Del Vigna et al., 2017). Research focusing on hate speech in sports remains relatively limited, though it is growing steadily. Miranda et al. (2024), for instance, analyzed hate speech posted by Portuguese football fans on Facebook. Vujičić Stanković and Mladenović (2023) proposed an automated classification model for detecting hate speech in the sports domain on social media. Kearns et al. (2023), in their scoping review, highlighted the fragmented nature of existing research on online hate in sport and emphasized the need for more systematic approaches.

In the Turkish context, case studies on digital hate speech related to football have recently begun to emerge. Yüçetürk and Akyol (2019) analyzed hate speech surrounding the Mesut Özil case, while Sönmez (2025) explored Twitter-based hate speech targeting the Beşiktaş football club. Ishac, Javani, and Youssef (2024) explored sentiment dynamics around the 2022 FIFA World Cup in the Arab world, while Kearns et al. (2022) emphasized the need for more systematic research on online hate in the context

of sports. This study contributes to both international and national literature by addressing a highly visible sports conflict through the lens of hate speech.

The uniqueness of this research lies in its analysis of reciprocal hate speech expressed by Turkish, Saudi and other citizens on social media, following the cancellation of the Turkish Super Cup Final that was scheduled to take place in Saudi Arabia. The study aims to show how football—a sport with universal potential to unite—can be transformed into a site of divisive and discriminatory discourse. Furthermore, it explores how such expressions of hate speech on social media may affect public perception and digital diplomacy between nations.

This study examines hate speech in statements made by Turkish and Saudi nationals under the press release on the official X (formerly Twitter) page of the Riyadh Season in the context of four hate speech categories (Exaggeration/ Attribution/Distortion, Insult/Profanity/Degradation, Hostility/War Rhetoric, Symbolization) created within the scope of the ‘Monitoring Hate Speech in the Media’ project, which the International Hrant Dink Foundation has been carrying out since 2009.

HATE SPEECH

Hatred is aimed at a person or a group. It is the hatred of an individual or group that you consider to be wicked. These individuals are those you believe pose a threat to you or your community. Hate speech or advocacy against a protected group, individual, or organization is defined as “any content that advocates violence, directly assaults, or issues threats against individuals, according to their sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, age, handicap, race, ethnicity, country of origin, caste, religion, or serious illness” on Twitter (X).

Hate speech is defined as any expression that transmits, incites, supports, or legitimizes racist hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, or any other kind of intolerance-based hatred, according to Recommendation No. R (97) 20 of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers. Although the Court has not provided a specific explanation, this term appears throughout European case law. Furthermore, the European Parliament, in particular, in its resolution

on freedom of expression and the right to respect for religious beliefs adopted on February 16, 2006, emphasizes the following: “Freedom of expression must always be exercised within the limits of the law and subject to liability and human rights, regardless of whether it is Islam, Christianity, Judaism, or any other religion. It should coexist with respect for religious ideas and beliefs, regardless of how they are related.” General Comment No. 10, adopted by the Human Rights Committee on June 29, 1983, Article 19 (4) in the 3rd paragraph, it is stated that the exercise of the right to freedom of expression carries with it special duties and responsibilities, and therefore the protection of other people or a whole group of people. It clearly highlights that the right in question may be subject to specific constraints in circumstances involving the interests of society. According to Article 20 of the Convention, it is illegal to use war propaganda or to support hatred toward any country, race, or religion that encourages prejudice, animosity, or violence. As per the Committee's assessment, the proposed restrictions align perfectly with Article 19's guarantee of freedom of expression, which entails certain obligations and liabilities when utilized. Paragraph 1 prohibits all types of propaganda that threaten aggression, result in aggression, or violate the terms of peace in violation of the United Nations Charter, whilst paragraph 2 prohibits all forms of national, racist, encouraging discrimination, enmity, or violence. It is aimed at advocating religious hatred; it makes no difference whether the propaganda or advocacy serves internal or exterior interests for the relevant state (Weber, 2009).

As per the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, hate speech is defined as any form of communication, whether it be verbal, written, or behavioral, that targets or employs derogatory or prejudiced language against an individual or a group based on their identity, such as their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender, or any other factor that contributes to their identity. However, international human rights law does not yet have a consensus definition of hate speech. The idea is still being debated, particularly in light of equality, nondiscrimination, and freedom of speech. Three key characteristics of hate speech make it illegal under

international human rights law: (1) Hate speech can be spread both offline and online and can take many different forms, such as pictures, cartoons, memes, objects, gestures, and symbols. (2) Hate speech can be classified as either ‘pejorative’ or ‘discriminatory’, meaning it denigrates or is biased toward a certain person or group. (3) Hate speech targets actual or perceived ‘identity factors’ of a person or a group, such as language, economic or social origin, disability, health status, or sexual orientation, among many other traits. These ‘identity factors’ can include “religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender,” among others. The United Nations further emphasizes that hate speech may only be directed at individuals or groups of people. It specifies that it does not cover communications concerning states and their authority, their symbols, public figures, religious leaders, or fundamentals of faith, however this is not a clear-cut declaration (United Nations).

Sellers (2016) does not intend to construct a theory for what hate speech does to a society; rather, he attempts to build out a framework within which the concept of hate speech. According to Richard Delgado's definition in his seminal article “Words that Wound” (1982) hate speech is any racist remark that is meant to denigrate people because of their race. In particular, Delgado (1982)'s proposed tort for racist speech requires the plaintiff to demonstrate three things: (1) that the defendant addressed them in a way that was intended to denigrate them based on their race; (2) that the plaintiff understood the speech to be derogatory due to its reference to race; and (3) that a reasonable person would regard the speech as offensive to their race. Speech meant to disparage someone based on their race is what Richard Delgado (1982) describes it as, emphasizing objective perception, impact, and intention. Mari J. Matsuda (1989) goes further with this, highlighting the prosecutorial and demeaning aspects of the speech as well as messages of racial inferiority aimed at historically marginalized populations. Calvin Massey (1990) treats all forms of racist speech similarly, concentrating on the negative effects of hate speech, such as social subordination and loss of self-worth. It can include covert and coded discourse that is meant to incite hatred against marginalized people, according to Mayo Moran (1994)'s definition. Kenneth Ward (1990) highlights speech that has no redeeming

qualities by combining aspects of outright vilification and incitement to hatred. Susan Benesch (2016) identifies “dangerous speech” that incites mass violence, focusing on contextual factors like the influence of the speaker and the receptiveness of the audience (2016, p. 15-18). According to ElSherief et al. (2018), hate speech intended towards a specific individual or object is referred to as directed hate; hate speech directed towards a large group of persons who share a protected characteristic, such as sexual orientation or ethnicity, is referred to as generalized hate.

According to Yong (2011), hate speech can be divided into four main categories: (1) targeted vilification; (2) diffuse vilification; (3) organized political advocacy for policies that exclude or marginalize specific racial or religious groups; and (4) other factual or value-based statements that are seen as disparaging an identifiable racial or religious group. Vilification is a type of hate speech that primarily aims to hurt, offend, or threaten the listener and is driven by animosity or disdain for the listener's race or religion. Targeted vilification is when someone or a small group of people is the target of vilifying remarks. Therefore, this category includes both in-person interactions and instances where there is no direct physical contact but where derogatory speech is nonetheless directed precisely and narrowly, such when someone's front door is spray-painted with racist epithets. The main distinction between diffuse and targeted vilification is that the former is aimed at a broad and ambiguous audience, while the latter is partially directed at a select few or particular members of the public. Similar to intentional defamation, the main goal of this type of speech is to harm, humiliate, or threaten somebody because of their race or religion; but, in this case, the people being harmed might not even be in the direct line of sight but rather could be bystanders. Exclusionary policies are those that deprive specific identified racial or religious groups of their civil and political rights, or subject them to other forms of systemic, state-sanctioned discrimination, so preventing them from achieving full and equal citizenship. The goal of eliminationist policies is to drive out particular racial or religious groups from society by violent ethnic cleansing or forced repatriation. Factual claims and evaluative statements are typically considered protected speech. Factual claims are covered by the arguments

from truth discovery, democracy, and audience autonomy, whereas all free speech defenses address evaluative opinions. As a result, even in cases when statements of fact and value amount to negative assessments and attacks on certain ethnic or religious groups, the free speech interests and rights involved will typically be significant.

Throughout history, hate speech has been a social concern, and its expression has changed dramatically. Hate speech was mostly spread through print media, public events, and traditional media channels prior to the emergence of online social media (Rawat et al., 2024). The rapid growth of social media platforms like Twitter has allowed users to express themselves freely and anonymously, which has led to the spread of hate speech. Users have the ability to express their ideas on a wide range of subjects using these venues. But some people abuse this freedom by using offensive language, inciting violence, and spreading hate (Jahan & Oussalah, 2021; Mullah & Zainon, 2021). Twitter, a social network platform based on volunteerism, prioritizing identity sharing and freedom of expression, low cost, and open to interaction and dialogue, has gained acceptance as a new media product with a large number of producers (Bilgili and Şener, 2013, p. 6). Given that sporting events are among the most popular topics on Twitter, it is apparent that Twitter is a platform for fans to communicate their thoughts (Highfield, 2016, p. 339).

Although there are several ways to define hate speech, one commonality is the use of words that incite or target violence toward particular groups who have particular characteristics (Mansur et al., 2023). Homophobic, transphobic, heterosexist, sexist, xenophobic, racist, ethnic nationalist, and discriminatory hate speech, which is produced in discursive practices in daily life in the new media environment and circulated in traditional media texts, is caused by new media features such as digitality, interactivity, hypertextuality, diffusion and virtuality, and multimedia formality. It spreads much more quickly and enters circulation after becoming commonplace (Binark, 2010, p. 11-26; Demir and Talimciler, 2014, p. 257).

Social media and the internet provide people a sense of independence, but this freedom can also create a space where people can freely express their hate, rage,

and racist ideas toward other people and groups—what we call ‘others’ in an uncontrolled manner (Demir and Talimciler, 2014, p. 257). Hate speech is always discussed in conjunction with freedom of expression, which is one of several human rights. As a result, all efforts addressing hate speech must be closely evaluated to see whether and to what extent they may influence someone's freedom of speech, and whether this is justifiable in particular cases in order to protect someone else's dignity and freedom from damage (Talalaev, Hate Speech – SALTO, participationpool.eu). The demands of free speech must be weighed against other moral commitments, such as the security, dignity, or social equality of historically underprivileged persons (Howard, 2019).

Academics have pointed out that ambiguous speech policies on digital platforms might have a lot of negative effects (Sellars, 2016). In the age of the internet's ever-increasing volume and complexity, millions of users have uncontrolled access to large volumes of content, allowing for privileges previously imagined, such as instant access to knowledge bases or the most recent news. However, due to the internet's non-restrictive nature and, in some countries, legal protection of free speech, which includes hate speech, some users abuse the medium to promote offensive and hateful language, degrading the experience of regular users, affecting the business of online companies, and potentially having serious real-life consequences. Numerous corporations, such as Yahoo, Facebook, and YouTube, have taken steps to lessen the negative impact of hate speech on their platforms. They have also implemented algorithmic solutions to identify hateful content on their websites. Unfortunately, the process is difficult due to its size and complexity, and hate speech is still an issue in online user comments (Djuric, et al., 2015). Edwin (2008) argues that hate speech, which new legislation aim to ban, contributes to racist or genocidal practices. Supporting the restriction's effectiveness in dealing with particularly relevant racist comments will be significantly more difficult than demonstrating correlation or causality. Alternatively, the account could be compelling in another way, such as demonstrating that the symbolism implied in the speech prohibitions is successful in eliminating racism, which is a tough assertion to establish with certainty. Many of the

countries that have seen the most racist violence have had such bans in place, yet they have failed to prevent racist or genocidal acts.

Hate Speech in Football

Critcher (quoted in Bennett, Evren, 2022) claims that football, which was formerly the game of the people, was gradually taken away from the people and transformed into an entertainment product that was made available to the public through the media during the time when the internet was not a thing. The media still has a significant influence on people's opinions nowadays on football.

One of the most essential qualities of societies is their ability to pass down its historical and cultural heritage from generation to generation, as well as transfer some prejudices and hostility from the past to a new audience, both in everyday life and in school textbooks. Social memory can be passed down from generation to generation through the usage of symbols and metaphors that have been embedded in the language. Metaphors can inadvertently shape our beliefs about that field, our worldview, or our perceptions of certain people, nations, or faiths. Under the effect of the problem at hand and the current scenario, thought patterns and coded language are pulled from the warehouse and modified to the event (Talimciler, 2015). Blain and Boyle write in their writings that sports have evolved into a source of knowledge regarding cultural habits, thoughts, and beliefs. The feeling of belonging to a common and national identity (the sense of we) and being aware of the existence of countries underpins the entire belief system (Talimciler, 2015). “The contribution of football media to the building of national identities is indisputable. The media repeatedly shapes and instills national culture. According to David Rowe, every nation must develop a semiotically effective national culture. The international sports media complex is the most powerful cultural force that can bring a nation's image together. Identity is re-formed by cultural activities in everyday life, such as sports. Language is the major factor here. Man creates and rediscovers his own universe via language. Social identities are expressed, enacted, and negotiated.” (Crolley & Hand, 2002, s. 8–15). Sports/football not only generates a consumer base, but it also allows people

to form communities and engage with one another. He accomplishes this through the language and discourse he employs in his work. While the media serves as a medium for spreading passion for football, it also implicitly imparts ideological components to the populace through the language it uses. Sports appear to be a domain susceptible to nationalist manipulations by the media worldwide, as they offer an appropriate setting for the formation of national identities (Talimciler, 2015).

The most significant influence of football, with its vast number of viewers, is that it has the potential to create a global public debate area. As a result, football has evolved more of a social phenomenon than a sport or game. The audience for this entertainment product also backs it by taking sides. As a result of this fandom, hate speech is frequently directed at the opponent and their supporters. Being a fan inevitably fosters the phenomenon of us versus others in the social realm. While the discourse may be produced by club managers, football players, and technical staff, the media and fans are also involved. With increased internet access, fans have expedited the production and spread of football-related hate speech on social media. Furthermore, these terms, utilized on the internet with traditional media information, shape the user's mental meaning maps for football. These contents and expressions help to develop existing football schemes in the thoughts of supporters, as well as to establish new ones. Furthermore, it contributes to a rise in social tensions, particularly in football, by framing our side and the opposing team as binary opposites (Talimciler, 2014). Football is an expression of nationalism around the world. Football matches clearly represent the nationalist 'us and them' divide. Anthems, banners, flags that exalt one's own team and disparage the other team, and customs that embody nationalism on a regular basis can all be found in fan culture (Bora, 2001, p. 559).

The language and discourse used by the mass media to convey sports and football to the masses contain similar word structures, stereotypes, metaphors, nationalist elements (and, on occasion, fascist elements) required by ideological transfer, and a number of rituals, symbolizations, and myths that emphasize social unity. Football pages in newspapers, football programs on

television, comments on social media, and internet broadcasting expressions all contribute to the mental meaning of our newspaper maps (Clarke & Clarke, 1985, s. 65).

In incidents of violence on sports fields, traditional and new media have an intensifying influence on the tension between the parties or a reproductive effect by repeating the violence that occurred. Words involving ethnic or sexual insults can be found in reader comments on news websites. Aside from that, it is a known fact that hate speech-related messages are spread among the younger generation via social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, particularly through comments on postings. Sports media has a crucial obligation to ensure that children do not develop bad attitudes toward sports, which are really about camaraderie and harmony. Newspaper editors and authors, television pundits, and website editors should use calm terms while communicating sports-related developments to readers (Özsoy & Yılmaz, 2013).

Those with the authority to use and manage fan reactions can sometimes use it to control or steer political power. For a sports club that hosts millions of people, this mass represents pure fans, whereas for a political party, the same mass represents a voter base. The approach to reach this audience is through club management, who have the ability to influence fans. Thus, football power and political power can collaborate in the setting of shared interests. For example, Türkiye has many municipal football clubs. Municipalities and sponsors provide financial support to these clubs. On match days, spectators are given free public transportation to the stadium, and merchandise such as food, shirts, and footballs are distributed in the stands. However, given that football has evolved into an enterprise rather than a sport, financial aid and tax exemptions from political power are critical for both club survival and the maintenance of club managers' influence. Furthermore, both clubs and the capital provide food for fan group leaders who assist club managers. At this point, we must state that who has the authority to manage and direct the fans, but this authority is frequently exercised by club managers. Few fans have a personal stake in the illusion-based connection between fan organization leaders, clubs, and sponsors. In the context of football, it is usually the rest

of the system, rather than the supporters, who generate, and conduct hate speech and crimes. Fans receive, embrace, and share it. What matters is that the supporters accept this. The fans are the socializers of this habitual setting, whereas the others are a minority group. As a result, hate speech becomes a social issue among its followers (Evren, 2022).

In the digital era, this complex network of influence between clubs, sponsors, and political authorities gained awareness and amplification via social media platforms. Fan speech is no longer limited to stadiums or local communities; it now spans the globe, with hashtags, memes, and emotionally charged tweets reinforcing ideological statements. Platforms like X (previously Twitter), YouTube, and Instagram have become battlegrounds for disseminating organized narratives, often merging football identities with political rhetoric and nationalist undertones (Vujičić Stanković & Mladenović, 2023; Miranda et al., 2024). Social media allows for both top-down manipulation—in which political actors or club managers implant narratives—and bottom-up mobilization, in which supporters distribute these messages organically within echo chambers. According to Kearns et al. (2023), the rising link between online hate and sport necessitates further investigation, especially when hate speech that was formerly limited to the stands now reaches millions with a single tweet.

METHODOLOGY

On 29 December, 2023, a Super Cup match between Türkiye's two rival Istanbul teams, Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe, was scheduled to take place Al-Afreewwal Park Stadium in Riyadh. On the day of the game, there was a disagreement that resulted to the cancellation of this match, and the Turkish teams went back to their own countries. The disagreement developed when players sought to wear t-shirts featuring the image of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Türkiye, and the teams also expressed their intention to display a banner featuring Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's iconic slogan, "Peace at Home, Peace in the World" (Özel, 2024, p. 292). This slogan, a hallmark of Turkey's emphasis on diplomacy and peace, has often been showcased in national match commemorating the Republic of Türkiye's 100th

anniversary. Saudi officials did not vote on the T-shirts worn during the game or the banner hoisted in support of it. Saudi officials claimed they had not been alerted of the situation and that it was not included in the agreement. Football club representatives reacted to the limits on Atatürk, a revered icon in Türkiye. The stadium crowd reacted as well. The viewers who were waiting for the match to begin on their TVs also shared their thoughts on social media. The organization's stakeholders, Riyadh Season and the Turkish Football Federation, Fenerbahçe Sports Club, and Galatasaray Sports Club, then issued press releases via their official social media pages. This study examines the remarks made by Saudi, Turkish and other citizens under the press release in terms of hate speech. Since the Turkish Football Federation, Fenerbahçe Sports Club, and Galatasaray Sports Club's joint press release was shared with closed comments, the remarks on the Riyadh Season's official Twitter (X) page were studied (Image 1).

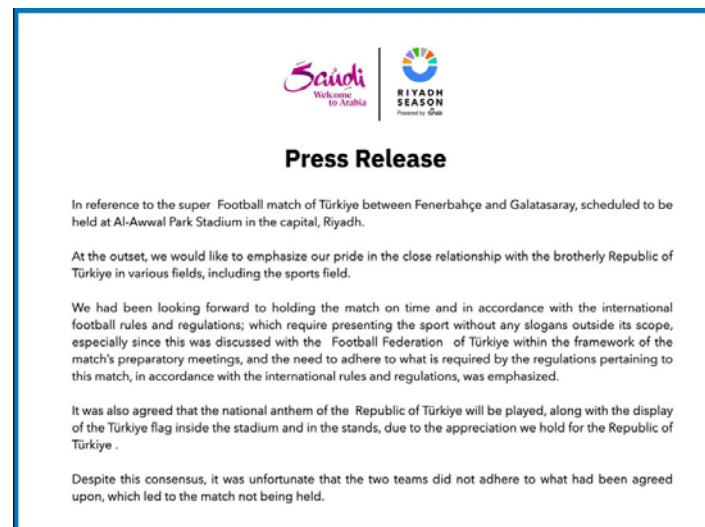


Image 1. Press Release on the Turkish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia's Capital Riyadh (Source: Riyadh Season X Page)

The primary methodological approach for this study was qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic, rule-based process for identifying, classifying, and interpreting patterns and meanings in textual data (Krippendorff, 2004). In this context, tweets and tweet responses were analyzed to reveal the underlying structure of hate speech entrenched in the digital discourse surrounding the Turkish Super Cup final. Each item was coded using a set of predetermined categories derived from

the Hrant Dink Foundation's Media Watch on Hate Speech Project. These categories were adapted to the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the Turkish and Arab context, providing a flexible but conceptually grounded analytical framework.

Research Design

This study is based on a qualitative research design, utilizing content analysis to examine user comments on social media. The main objective is to identify patterns of hate speech in Turkish, Saudi and other citizens' reactions following the cancellation of the Turkish Super Cup Final.

Data Collection Process

The Super Cup Final, originally scheduled for December 29, 2023, in Riyadh between Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe, was canceled due to a diplomatic disagreement on the match day. After the cancellation, stakeholders—Riyadh Season, the Turkish Football Federation, Fenerbahçe, and Galatasaray—issued press releases on social media. However, only the post shared by Riyadh Season on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) allowed public comments and was therefore included in this analysis.

The dataset consists of tweets and replies collected from Riyadh Season's official X account on February 27, 2024. A total of 548 posts were examined, of which 305 were identified as containing hate speech and included in the analysis.

Scope and Coding Criteria

Each post was evaluated based on four hate speech categories developed by the Hrant Dink Foundation in its “Media Watch on Hate Speech” Project.

Table 1 lists the four general categories of hate speech utilized in the analysis:

Table 1. Four general categories of hate speech (Hrant Dink Foundation, 2010)

Category	Description of category
Exaggeration/ Attribution/Distortion	Statements that contain negative generalizations, distortions, exaggerations, or negative attributions towards a community based on an individual or an event (e.g., ‘Syrians are unbearable’).
Insult/Profanity/ Degradation	Statements that directly include insults, degradation, or profanity about a community (e.g., terms like ‘traitor’, ‘treacherous’, ‘immoral’).
Hostility/War Rhetoric	Statements that include hostile or warlike expressions about a community (e.g., ‘Greek barbarism’).
Symbolization	Statements where a natural identity element is used as a symbol of hatred or degradation (e.g., in a negative sense, ‘Are we going to be represented by a Jew in Eurovision?’).

Definitions of hate speech were derived from international institutions such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, as well as scholarly works (Yong, 2011; Delgado, 1982; Benesch, 2016). Tweets were analyzed regardless of language (Turkish, Arabic, English) and translated using Google Translate without interpretive alterations.

Exclusion Criteria

Only tweets containing hate speech were included in the analysis. Neutral or positive tweets were excluded as the study specifically focuses on identifying patterns of hate speech. Nevertheless, selected examples of positive discourse are discussed in the conclusion for contextual contrast.

FINDINGS

A total of 548 user comments and replies were retrieved from the official X account of Riyadh Season. Out of these, 305 posts were identified as containing hate speech and were included in the analysis. Of the 305 posts, 157 were made by Saudi supporters, and 148 by Turkish supporters.

Table 2: Tweet analysis on Riyadh Season official Twitter (X) page (@RiyadhSeason)

Tweet	Press Release on the Turkish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh
Reply	243
Retweet	305
Like	690
Saved	57
Views	237.7K

Date of Access: 27.02.2024

Distribution of Hate Speech

Table 3: Hate Speech in Saudi Accounts and other Foreign Accounts

Category	Number of Posts	Percentage (%)
Exaggeration/Attribution/ Distortion	31	19,7
Insult/Profanity/Degradation	52	33,1
Hostility/War Rhetoric	56	35,7
Symbolization	18	11,5
Total	157	100

Table 4: Hate speech in Turkish Accounts

Category	Number of Posts	Percentage (%)
Exaggeration/ Attribution/Distortion	42	28,4
Insult/Profanity/ Degradation	92	62,1
Hostility/War Rhetoric	6	4,0
Symbolization	10	6,7
Total	148	100

Category-Based Commentary

1. Insult / Profanity / Degradation

This was the most dominant category among both groups. Examples include:

“Atatürk is a filthy garbage bag” (Saudi user)

“Desert rats drinking camel urine” (Turkish user)

Such expressions reflect deeply rooted hostilities and foster animosity.

2. Hostility / War Rhetoric

This category was particularly evident among Saudi users, targeting Turkish historical figures and national identity with warlike rhetoric.

For example: “Turks are barbaric and should never have been invited.”

Turkish examples were fewer but still included:

“One day we will destroy all Arabs.”

3. Exaggeration / Attribution / Distortion

Comments in this category often involved generalizations or historical misinformation:

“Atatürk was a Western puppet who lost every war.”

“Arabs always betrayed Turks in history.”

These comments distort facts and perpetuate prejudice.

4. Symbolization

Symbolic hate included derogatory references to Atatürk, the Ottoman Empire, or Arab cultural symbols (e.g., camel, desert).

These are often subtle but culturally offensive expressions.

Positive and Constructive Discourse

Although excluded from the main data set, several positive comments stood out, emphasizing the unifying potential of sports.

“Sport has always been a powerful tool for building bridges between nations. It is through such events that we can create lasting friendships.”

These examples remind us of the constructive role digital platforms can play when used responsibly.

CONCLUSION

Football is used all across the world to represent national identity. Football matches exemplify the nationalist 'we and them' division. Fan culture includes anthems, banners, and flags that exalt one's own team while disparaging the opposing team, as well as practices that embody nationalism on a regular basis (Bora, 2001, s. 559). Sports appear to be a domain susceptible to nationalist manipulations by the media worldwide, as they offer an appropriate setting for the formation of national identities. Following the cancelation of the Super Cup match in Riyadh, there was a clear separation between Saudi, Turkish and other citizens.

This study looked at how Turkish and Saudi individuals used social media to spread hate speech in response to the canceled Turkish Super Cup final. Hate speech was found to be frequent in both groups, with the Insult/Profanity/Degradation category leading the way. While Saudi users were more likely to use aggressive and war-related vocabulary, Turkish users used racialized and derogatory language more frequently.

The total number of tweets and comments by Saudi accounts and other national accounts analyzed is 157. The breakdown shows that Hostility/War Rhetoric is the most significant issue, followed by Insult/Profanity/Degradation, Exaggeration/Attribution/Distortion, and Symbolization. The findings reveals a highly charged and often hostile environment within the analyzed content, with significant levels of both direct and indirect hate speech. The total number of tweets and comments by Turkish accounts analyzed is 148. Given the breakdown, it is clear that Insult/Profanity/Degradation dominates the discourse, followed by Exaggeration/Attribution/Distortion. The findings provides insights into the nature of the conversation, highlighting a significant issue with the quality of dialogue, primarily due to the high level of insults and degrading language.

The results show that a wide range of Insult/Profanity/Degradation category of hate speech used by both nationals was found in the majority of the tweets and comments, including four categories identified by Hrant Dink Foundation. Following the cancellation of this international

organization, people from both nations have been observed emphasizing nationalism and war-mongering on Twitter by using hyperbolic rhetoric. Although there were also some really encouraging and helpful tweets and tweet replies that captured the essence of the goal of sport diplomacy, which is to bridge national gaps, such as "Sport has always been a powerful tool for building bridges between nations, transcending cultural and geographical boundaries. It is through events like these that we can celebrate the universal language of football and create lasting friendships between our sporting communities.", the number of tweets and tweet replies is incredibly low. Positive and constructive tweets, though in the minority, provide an important contrast to the overwhelming hostility. They demonstrate how sports may act as a cultural bridge, transcending geographical and political divides. These words can help to de-escalate tensions by demonstrating a sense of respect and friendship. Furthermore, they emphasize the necessity of boosting constructive perspectives and cultivating sports diplomacy, implying that platforms and stakeholders may do more to promote such narratives in order to constructively affect the digital sphere.

One of the most essential qualities of societies is their ability to pass down its historical and cultural heritage from generation to generation, as well as transfer some prejudices and hostility from the past to a new audience, both in everyday life and in school textbooks. Social memory can be passed down from generation to generation through the usage of symbols and metaphors that have been embedded in the language. Metaphors can inadvertently shape our beliefs about that field, our worldview, or our perceptions of certain people, nations, or faiths. Under the effect of the problem at hand and the current scenario, thought patterns and coded language are pulled from the warehouse and modified to the event (Talimciler, 2015).

These findings highlight how, instead of promoting unity, football can serve as a tool for division and polarization when mediated through social media platforms. Similar results were found in Yüçetürk and Akyol's (2019) study of hate speech in the Mesut Özil case, where national identity, football, and digital discourse intersected. Likewise, Ishac et al. (2024) documented emotionally charged discourse

across the Arab world during the 2022 FIFA World Cup, reinforcing the notion of regional digital nationalism.

The use of symbols such as Atatürk, the Ottoman legacy, or Arab cultural elements as tools of hate speech aligns with Yong's (2011) definition of "targeted vilification." These symbolic attacks show how hate speech often relies on cultural identity markers to intensify hostility.

Despite the dominance of hate speech, a few positive and constructive comments emphasized the unifying potential of sports diplomacy. These examples demonstrate how sports can foster peace and dialogue when framed responsibly. Media outlets, sports institutions, and social platforms thus bear significant responsibility in amplifying such voices.

Recommendations

- Sports institutions should establish digital media teams to monitor social media during crisis events.
- Social media platforms must implement AI-based hate speech detection systems tailored to sports-related discourse.
- Football clubs and federations should actively promote sports diplomacy through positive messaging and awareness campaigns.
- Future academic studies must ensure intercoder reliability in content analysis and provide transparent coding protocols.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature at the intersection of sports, diplomacy, and digital media, offering insights for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners alike.

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