Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

The Construction of Social Discourse Towards Syrians on Social Media During Crisis Situations: A Study on the 2024 Kayseri Events

Kriz Durumlarında Suriyelilere Yönelik Toplumsal Söylemin Sosyal Medyada İnşası : 2024 Kayseri Olayları Üzerine Bir Araştırma

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Kayseri events, which began on June 30, 2024, following the public dissemination of allegations that a child had been abused by a person claimed to be Syrian. These allegations triggered reactions from the local population against Syrians, escalating into violent acts and ultimately leading to a societal crisis. The study aims to analyze how and in what context social discourse towards Syrians is shaped on social media platforms during crises.

Accordingly, a total of 1,568 entries under five different topics on one of the prominent online social media platforms, Ekşi Sözlük, were examined using content analysis methods, including word cloud analysis, thematic analysis, and sentiment analysis. Following the sentiment analysis, the Hate Speech Intensity Scale was applied to entries classified as negative. Findings from the word cloud analysis indicate that discussions primarily revolved around the themes of "identity, security, and politics." Thematic analysis results reveal that the most frequently observed themes were anti-immigrant sentiment (30.7%), criticisms of current migration policies (27.2%), and racism (16.4%). Moreover 82.5% of the analyzed entries were classified as negative and supportive of attacks against Syrians. These entries prominently fell under "Level 4: Demonizing and Dehumanizing (28.4%)" and "Level 5: Violence (21.3%)" categories within the Hate Speech Intensity Scale. These findings demonstrate that, during crises, social discourse towards Syrians on social media is shaped by racism, xenophobia, and hate speech.

Keywords: Migration and crisis communication, social media, Syrians, social discourse, June 30 Kayseri Events

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, 30 Haziran 2024'te, bir çocuğun Suriyeli olduğu iddia edilen bir kişi tarafından istismar edildiğine dair iddiaların kamuoyunda yayılmasıyla başlayan ve yerel halkın Suriyelilere yönelik tepkilerinin şiddet eylemlerine dönüşerek toplumsal bir krize yol açtığı Kayseri olaylarını ele almaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı, kriz durumlarında Suriyelilere yönelik toplumsal söylemin sosyal medya platformlarında nasıl ve hangi bağlamda şekillendiğini incelemektir. Bu doğrultuda, çevrimiçi sosyal medya platformlarından biri olan Ekşi Sözlük'te, beş farklı başlık altında yer alan toplam 1,568 entry kelime bulutu analizi, tematik analiz ve duygu analizi teknikleri kullanılarak içerik analizi yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Duygu analizi sonucunda, olumsuz sınıflandırılan entry'lere Nefret Söylemi Yoğunluk Ölçeği uygulanmıştır. Kelime bulutu analizinden elde edilen bulgular, olayların "kimlik, güvenlik ve siyaset" ekseninde yoğunlaştığını ortaya koymaktadır. Tematik analiz sonuçlarına göre, en sık gözlemlenen temalar göçmen karşıtlığı (%30,7), mevcut göç politikalarına yönelik eleştiriler (%27,2) ve ırkçılık (%16,4) olarak belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca, Suriyelilere yönelik saldırıları destekleyen ve olumsuz olarak sınıflandırılan ifadelerin yoğunlukta olduğu (%82,5) ve bu tür söylemlerin Nefret Söylemi Yoğunluk Ölçeği kapsamında "4. Seviye: Şeytanlaştırma ve İnsandışılaştırma (%28,4)" ile "5. Seviye: Şiddet (%21,3)" kategorilerinde belirgin biçimde yer aldığı tespit edilmiştir. Bu bulgular, kriz durumlarında Suriyelilere yönelik toplumsal söylemin sosyal medyada ırkçılık, zenofobi ve nefret söylemi çerçevesinde şekillendiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göç ve kriz iletişimi, sosyal medya, Suriyeli, toplumsal söylem, 30 Haziran Kayseri Olayları

Introduction

Migration has emerged as a critical phenomenon at both national and international levels, generating profound social, economic, and political impacts while shaping state policies. According to the World Economic Forum's (WEF, 2024, p. 254) report, crises, conflicts, natural disasters, and other events triggering cross-border movements are expected to persist soon. Estimates from the United Nations indicate that approximately 281 million migrants exist worldwide today, constituting 3.6% of the global population. As of 2022, 117 million people had been displaced globally, with 71.2 million forced to migrate within their own countries. The number of asylum seekers increased significantly, rising from 4.1 million in 2020 to 5.4 million in 2022, marking a surge of over 30% (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024, p. xii). Due to these ongoing mobility patterns, states continuously shape and reconstruct their migration policies.

Türkiye has faced a massive influx of migrants, particularly since April 28, 2011, due to the Syrian civil war (Birleşmiş Milletler Mülteciler Yüksek Komiserliği [BMMYK], n.d.). According to data released by the Directorate General of Migration Management on December 31, 2024, the number of Syrians under temporary protection[1] in Türkiye has reached 2,901,478 (Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı [GİB], n.d.). This large-scale migration has sparked extensive debates in Turkish society across social, economic, and political domains. These debates have at times escalated into deep crises between local communities and Syrians, with the latter often being portrayed as the primary cause of these crises. This perception reinforces the framing of Syrians as "criminals" and "enemies," further strengthening their position as the "other" in society.

In times of crisis, the role of social media has become increasingly critical. These platforms not only accelerate the flow of information but also facilitate the rapid dissemination of disinformation and hate speech (Ipsos & UNESCO, 2023). A study conducted by Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) at the MIT Media Lab demonstrated that false news spreads six times faster and reaches a broader audience than accurate news on social media platforms (p. 3). Similarly, the Digital News Report by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2024) indicates that users are increasingly exposed to unverified and misleading content (p. 12). Such content enables the reproduction of racist and discriminatory discourse in online environments, particularly targeting vulnerable groups such as migrants (İşçi & Uludağ, 2019; Kardeş et al., 2017; Yanık, 2017; Aldemir, 2020; Öztekin, 2015). These discourses, which directly target ethnic and cultural differences, contribute to the strengthening of xenophobia within society.

This study examines the Kayseri events, which began on June 30, 2024, following the public dissemination of allegations that a child had been abused by

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[1] In Türkiye, Syrians are not legally classified as refugees or asylum seekers but fall under temporary protection status. Temporary protection is defined in the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, which was adopted on April 4, 2013, and published in the Official Gazette on April 11, 2013, as follows: "Procedures and measures concerning foreigners, international protection to be provided at borders, border gates, or within Türkiye upon individual protection requests of foreigners, and urgent temporary protection for foreigners who arrive in Türkiye en masse and cannot return to their country of origin due to forced displacement." (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti [T.C.], 2013).

a person claimed to be Syrian. These allegations triggered reactions from the local population against Syrians, escalating into violent acts and ultimately leading to a societal crisis. The primary objective of this study is to analyze how and in what context social discourse towards Syrians is shaped on social media platforms during crises. To achieve this, a total of 1,568 entries under five different threads on Ekşi Sözlük, an online social media platform,were examined using content analysis methods, including word cloud analysis, thematic analysis, and sentiment analysis. Following the sentiment analysis, the Hate Speech Intensity Scale was applied to entries classified as negative. .

The research reveals that an effective crisis communication strategy was not followed from the outset of the events in Kayseri on June 30, 2024, and that statements made by official institutions and actors regarding the incident further fueled social tensions rather than calming them. On the Ekşi Sözlük platform, exclusionary statements targeting the identity and cultural values of Syrians and other minority groups were used; these groups were criminalized through political and security-oriented discourse. This discourse led to Syrians being represented as a burden living with state support but not contributing economically, culturally, or socially. This situation has paved the way for the legitimization of growing anger and exclusionary attitudes in the public sphere, leading to the shaping of social discourse toward Syrians on social media platforms within the framework of racism, xenophobia, and hate speech during times of crisis.

Migration and Crisis Communication

In the modern era, migration—especially during times of crisis—elicits diverse and complex societal responses, making the role of communication and communication strategies crucial (de Haas et al., 2022; Dekker et al., 2018). To effectively manage such crises and minimize their impact, a well-structured migration communication policy and crisis communication strategy are essential.

Crises, by their very nature, are unexpected events that disrupt the functioning and reputation of institutions and organizations (Peltekoğlu, 2018; Hermann, 1963; Veil et al., 2011). Given the varying causes of crises, people primarily seek to understand what is happening when a crisis occurs (Coombs, 2007), and in many cases, crises stem from a lack of information (Parsons,1996). Thus, crisis management is a process that encompasses all activities aimed at making the best decisions during a crisis (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993), preventing damage and threats caused by the crisis (Coombs, 2007), and ensuring the effective handling of the crisis process (Pearson and Clair, 1998; Mitroff et al., 987).

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for crisis response (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024a, p. 12). Therefore, different intervention strategies should be developed based on the type, scale, and potential impact of the crisis. When a crisis occurs, ensuring public safety is the primary priority (Coombs, 2007;

Coombs et al., 2010). In the subsequent stages, crisis communication plays a crucial role in managing financial losses and protecting the reputation and public image of organizations (Mitroff et al., 987).

Crisis communication encompasses the strategies and tactics employed during a crisis (Peltekoğlu, 2018). For crisis communication to be effective, information must be conveyed accurately, consistently, and in a timely manner (Coombs, 2007; Parsons, 1996; Steelman & McCaffrey, 2013), while also taking psychological factors related to migration into account (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993; Pearson & Clair, 1998). Therefore, every statement made by the authorities during a crisis must consider the sensitivities and interests of all parties involved.

During crisis periods, merely ensuring effective crisis communication is not sufficient; it is equally crucial to adopt a sustainable migration communication policy that encompasses migration processes. Consequently, for relevant actors and institutions, the primary objective should be the effective implementation of such a policy. Migration communication is a broad concept that includes all communication processes, strategies, and tools used among actors and structures[2] involved in migration.

Migration communication plays a crucial role in weakening the negative effects of public, political, and social media discourses related to migrants (including refugees), minimizing the harm caused by hate-driven and discriminatory political rhetoric (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024), and ensuring that migrants' voices are heard (IOM, 2024a, p. 27). The necessity of developing migration communication policies and diversifying the tools used in this process was also highlighted during the International Dialogue on Migration (IDM) held in New York in 2024. The discussions emphasized the importance of establishing effective communication with communities and local authorities (IOM, 2023), as well as creating sustainable communication channels among key actors in transnational events and enhancing the institutional structures involved in these processes (IOM, 2024b).

Therefore, in crisis situations, the effective management of relations between migrants and local communities requires the integration and simultaneous implementation of both crisis communication and migration communication strategies.

Crisis Communication on Social Media

Web 2.0-based social media platforms are digital environments that enable users to create, share, and interact with content in either real-time or asynchronously (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Carr & Hayes, 2015; Lewis, 2010). Social media encompasses various formats, including blogs, content communities, and social

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[2] The actors and structures outlined in the Global Compact on Refugees include: "United Nations Member States; entities that are part of or affiliated with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; international organizations both within and outside the United Nations system; other humanitarian and development actors; international and regional financial institutions; regional organizations; local authorities; civil society, including faith-based organizations; academics and other experts; the private sector; the media; members of host communities; refugees themselves (United Nations [UN], 2018, p. 2)", as well as other actors involved in the migration process who are not explicitly mentioned in this framework.

networking sites (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube exemplify these categories (Khosravinik, 2017; Kara, 2013).

Social media not only facilitates the dissemination of information but also plays a role in the rapid spread of disinformation during times of crisis (Tandoc et al., 2017; Starbird et al., 2019). In this context, social media has become a driving force in crisis communication (Coombs, 2014, p. 2). More specifically, it plays an increasingly prominent role in the social construction and deconstruction of crises (Schultz et al., 2011). Consequently, media usage is one of the key elements in crisis communication (Coombs, 2007; Parsons, 1996). On new media platforms, crises are amplified and reverberate (Ferra & Nguyen, 2017), while false rumors and misleading commentary can spread rapidly (Wang & Dong, 2017). Therefore, swift intervention is essential in crisis situations. Effectively using social media to engage with the public during a crisis is crucial for crisis response and management.

To conduct effective crisis communication on social media, it is essential to leverage the interactive features of these platforms while ensuring the accuracy of the message, the credibility of the source, and the timeliness of the response (Veil et al., 2011; Eriksson and Olsson, 2016). Additionally, pre-crisis preparations, understanding the logic and dynamics of social media, and adopting the right strategies for crisis management are key elements for effective crisis communication (Eriksson, 2018, p. 526).

The Construction of Social Discourse on Social Media

Discourse is neither neutral nor independent of power relations. According to Foucault, power and knowledge intersect within discourse and discourse itself activates power. Language and knowledge are articulated within discourse, transmitting the ideologies of power to individuals and society. In this context, language serves as a tool that facilitates the analysis of thought and these ideologies (Foucault, 2015; Foucault, 2014). It determines the modes and relations of production while encompassing class conflicts and contradictions. The linguistic and non-linguistic domains of social culture reflect the discourse of society and its way of making sense of the world (Oskay, 2015; Çoban & Özarslan, 2015). Therefore, discourse is an ideological act shaped by society and culture, reflecting power relations (Fairclough et al., 1997; van Dijk, 2015).

Actors or groups that control discourse also control minds and actions. Discourse extends beyond language to include social structures and interactions, forming a multidimensional and ideological domain where power and domination are reproduced (van Dijk, 2015, 1998). Ideology, on the other hand, manifests through material and concrete practices, which emerge through the ideological apparatuses of the state. While institutions such as the government, military, administration, police, courts, and prisons form the repressive state apparatus, ideological state apparatuses include religion, education, family, law, politics, trade

unions, media, and culture. The fundamental difference between these apparatuses lies in their operation: while repressive state apparatuses rely on coercion, ideological state apparatuses function through ideology (Althusser, 2015).

The media -particularly social media platforms, as one of the ideological state apparatuses- have become central spaces where public discourse is produced, maintained, and circulated around public events (Kou et al., 2017). At the same time, these platforms serve as arenas for political discourse and identity formation (van Dijck, 2013; Papacharissi, 2015). The way representations and interpretations are shaped, the selection of words, and the formulation of arguments on these platforms are based on societal norms and values (Kou et al., 2017). When representations in social media align with those in traditional media, they exert an even stronger polarizing effect on public discourse (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016). Therefore, regardless of the underlying reason, a shift towards extreme and racist nationalism in social discourse contributes to the rise of populist, exclusionary, and authoritarian rhetoric (Khosravinik & Zia, 2014, p. 777).

Studies on discourse contribute to understanding how migration discourse is constructed, opening the underlying cognitive models, attitudes, and ideologies embedded within these narratives, and examining their social and political functions in society (van Dijk, 2018, p. 231).

The Construction of Social Discourse on Migrants in Social Media

The discourse on migration takes various forms. These include media discourse, which consists of traditional and new media reports, interviews, cartoons, and letters to the editor; political discourse, encompassing parliamentary debates, legislative bills, party programs, policy documents, and politicians' speeches; legal discourse, including laws, legal drafts, international agreements, and treaties; police discourse, reflected in crime reports, interrogations, and trials; educational discourse, which covers lectures, textbooks, and classroom interactions; administrative discourse, seen in interactions with officials, forms, and applications; social movement discourse, manifested in official statements, protests, slogans, and interactions among members; internet discourse, which includes websites, blogs, and online discussions; artistic discourse, expressed through novels, poetry, theater, TV shows, and films; and personal discourse, which comprises face-to-face conversations, letters, emails, and online participation (van Dijk, 2018, p. 231).

Media coverage that focuses on the negative actions of migrants or minorities tends to frame migration as a foreign invasion in headlines (van Dijk, 2015). The reinforcement of this tendency and the prejudiced attitude toward migrants is driven by media actors and those in power who shape public opinion (Goldin et al., 2022). Consequently, the framing of migrants as "illegal" or "undocumented" in political discourse can significantly influence public perceptions of migration and migrants (van Dijk, 2015).

Both traditional and new media frequently focus on the negative aspects of migration (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024, p. 6). These media discourses negatively impact public, political, and social media narratives about migrants (including refugees) and, ultimately, influence social values and democratic systems (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024, p. 144). Social media messages tend to have a negative tone and are often constructed within an anti-immigration discourse (Yantseva, 2020). On Twitter, one of these platforms, refugee and migrant discourse is frequently associated with crime and terrorism (Farjam et al., 2024). Studies on Facebook posts indicate that anti-immigration rhetoric is a significant part of political communication, not only among right-wing parties but also among left-wing parties when deemed necessary (Heidenreich et al., 2020; Alonso & Fonseca, 2012). On this platform, anti-immigration actors use engagement strategies to spread anti-migrant discourse, racism, and xenophobia (Ekman, 2019).

Research conducted in Türkiye highlights the widespread presence of negative content and news about Syrians on internet and social media platforms (Küçük & Koçak, 2020; Kardeş et al., 2017). Studies further suggest that Syrians are positioned as the "other" (Polat & Kaya, 2017; Şan & Abdulhakimoğulları, 2021), that public perceptions of Syrians tend to be negative (Parlak et al., 2022), and that news articles frequently frame them as a threat or an economic burden (Doğanay & Keneş, 2016). This framing and discourse reinforce the marginalization of Syrians and strengthen hate speech against them (İşçi & Uludağ, 2019).

Kayseri Events

On June 30, 2024, in the Danişmentgazi neighborhood of Kayseri, allegations that a child had been abused by a person claimed to be Syrian led to attacks on homes and businesses belonging to Syrians across the city (İnsan Hakları Derneği [iHD], 2024). In the Danişmentgazi, Osmanlı, and Selçuklu neighborhoods, groups of gathered crowds carried out attacks on vehicles and businesses owned by foreign nationals (Independent Türkçe, 2024).

The wave of violence that followed these events led to heightened tensions along the Türkiye-Syria border. The circulation of social media footage allegedly showing some Syrian groups removing Turkish flags and attacking security forces triggered protests against Syrians in various cities across Türkiye (Independent Türkçe, 2024). According to a statement from the Ministry of Interior, a total of 1,065 individuals were detained nationwide in connection with the incidents. Among them, 28 were arrested, and 187 were placed under judicial control (BBC Türkçe, 2024a). For additional media reports on the incident, see BBC Türkçe (2024b), and Euronews Türkçe (2024).

Research Methodology

This study examines the Kayseri events, which began on June 30, 2024, following the widespread circulation of allegations that a child had been abused

by a person claimed to be Syrian. These allegations led to violent reactions from the local population against Syrians, escalating into a societal crisis. The study aims to analyze how and in what context social discourse towards Syrians is shaped on social media platforms during crises. To achieve this, data was collected from Ekşi Sözlük, one of the widely used online social media platforms in Türkiye. A total of 1,568 entries under five different topics on one of the prominent online social media platforms, Ekşi Sözlük[3], were examined using content analysis methods, including word cloud analysis, thematic analysis, and sentiment analysis. Following the sentiment analysis, the Hate Speech Intensity Scale was applied to entries classified as negative.

Word clouds are a method used to visualize frequently occurring words within a text (Heimerl et al., 2014; Lohmann et al., 2015). The more frequently a word appears in the text, the more prominently it is displayed in the word cloud (Atenstaedt, 2012). In other words, in word clouds, importance values are represented by font size (Cui et al., 2010, p. 124). Linguistic elements and less frequently used words are excluded, allowing the representation to highlight the most significant words (McNaught & Lam, 2010). These words contribute to identifying the contexts, focal points, and discussion areas within the analyzed text.

Thematic analysis is a flexible and widely used method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning in qualitative data (Guest et al., 2012; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2024). It helps to explore participants' experiences, thoughts, and emotions through coding, categorization, and both inductive and deductive approaches (Alhojailan, 2012).

Sentiment analysis classifies text into positive, negative, or neutral categories using natural language processing and text mining (Wankhade et al., 2022; Mejova, 2009; Medhat et al., 2014). It can be performed at document, sentence, or aspect level. Document-level analysis evaluates the overall sentiment of a text; sentence-level analysis focuses on subjective sentences; and aspect-level analysis examines sentiments toward specific attributes (Pawar et al., 2015; Şeker, 2016). These processes help identify opinions, attitudes, and emotions (Mejova, 2009).

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[3] Ekşi Sözlük was chosen for this study because it provides anonymity to its contributors within the framework of freedom of expression, allowing them to freely share their thoughts. Additionally, the platform permits user-generated content to be published without prior moderation or review (Ekşi Sözlük, 2025). The open and unrestricted discussion environment of Ekşi Sözlük, which is not limited to specific topics or areas, fosters a diversity of opinions, distinguishing it from other interactive dictionary platforms (Gürel & Yakın, 2007). Moreover, according to 2024 user distribution statistics, Ekşi Sözlük users are predominantly concentrated in major metropolitan areas such as Istanbul (41.01%), Ankara (19.09%), and Izmir (11.07%). This distribution suggests that the discourse produced on this platform largely reflects national-level perspectives (Ekşi Sözlük, 2024). Given these characteristics, the selection of Ekşi Sözlük in this research serves as an important indicator in analyzing both the Kayseri events and the national discourse on Syrians.

The Hate Speech Intensity Scale[4] was introduced by Bahador (2020) in their study Classifying and Identifying the Intensity of Hate Speech to understand, classify, and determine the intensity of hate speech. This scale, presented in Table 1, categorizes different levels of hate speech and examines its impact on democratic processes, social cohesion, and conflict prevention.

Table 1: Hate Speech Intensity Scale

Color	Title	Description	Examples
⬛	6. Death	Rhetoric includes literal killing by group. Responses include the literal death/elimination of a group.	Killed, annihilate, destroy
🟥	5. Violence	Rhetoric includes infliction of physical harm or metaphoric/ aspirational physical harm or death. Responses include calls for literal violence or metaphoric/aspirational physical harm or death.	Punched, raped, starved, torturing, mugging
🟧	4. Demonizing and Dehumanizing	Rhetoric includes subhuman and superhuman characteristics. There are no responses for #4.	Rat, monkey, Nazi, demon, cancer, monster
🟧	3. Negative Character	Rhetoric includes nonviolent characterizations and insults. There are no responses for #3.	Stupid, thief, aggressor, fake, crazy
🟨	2. Negative Actions	Rhetoric includes negative nonviolent actions associated with the group. Responses include nonviolent actions including metaphors.	Threatened, stole, outrageous act, poor treatment, alienate
🟩	1. Disagreement	Rhetoric includes disagreeing at the idea/belief level. Responses include challenging claims, ideas, beliefs, or trying to change their view.	False, incorrect, wrong, challenge, persuade, change minds

In this study, two independent coders and the researcher coded the data to assess reliability, which depends on the level of agreement among coder (Krippendorff, 1995; Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007; Kripependorff, 2011a).This agreement was measured using Krippendorff's Alpha Coefficient, a widely used reliability statistic for evaluating coder consistency (Kripependorff, 2011b, Bilgen & Doğan, 2017). The coefficient is calculated based on the ratio of observed and expected disagreement, where α = 1 indicates perfect agreement and α = 0 indicates no agreement. Values below 0.67 reflect low reliability, values between 0.67 and 0.80 moderate reliability, and values above 0.80 high reliability (Krippendorff, 1995; p.52-54). In this study, multiple themes were coded at different levels, while sentiment and hate

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[4] This scale distinguishes between rhetoric and response. Rhetoric comprises negative language, including words or phrases associated with the targeted outgroup, which may reference their past, present, or future actions or character. Response, on the other hand, encompasses proposed actions that the ingroup should undertake either in reaction to the outgroup's actions or independently of them. The earliest warning category, Disagreement, involves opposition to the ideas or beliefs of a particular group, thereby constructing an us-versus-them framework. The second early warning typology consists of rhetoric that highlights nonviolent negative actions attributed to the outgroup. The third typology includes negative characterizations and insults directed at the outgroup. The fourth category, which also belongs to the second typology, represents a more extreme form of negative characterization, involving dehumanizing and/or demonizing. The fifth and sixth categories constitute the third and most severe typology, which pertains to violence and death. The fifth category encompasses references to past, present, or future nonlethal acts of violence against outgroups, as well as figurative or intentional violence, whether lethal or nonlethal. The sixth category includes rhetorical framings that depict the outgroup as "killers" (past, present, or future), alongside responses that advocate for the elimination of the outgroup by the ingroup (Bahador, 2020).

intensity were coded at a single level. The resulting Krippendorff's Alpha was 0.936, indicating a high level of agreement among coders.

Research Limitations

This study aims to explain how social discourse toward Syrians was constructed on social media in the context of the June 30, 2024, Kayseri events through a multidisciplinary approach. However, like any research, this study has certain limitations.

First, as a cross-sectional analysis focused on a specific crisis moment, it does not capture how attitudes evolve over time. Longitudinal research could better illuminate how crises unfold and how public sentiment changes. Second, the study draws data from a single platform, which may introduce sample bias. Since platforms like X, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram host different user profiles and discursive styles, future studies should examine multiple sources for broader insights. Additionally, the prominence of negative emotions in social media discourse may skew the sentiment analysis, as users expressing anger or hate are often more vocal than those expressing positive or neutral feelings (Milli et al., 2025; Tsugawa & Ohsaki, 2015). This could lead to an overrepresentation of negative content.

Lastly, while qualitative methods allowed for in-depth analysis, the study would benefit from being complemented by large-scale surveys and experimental designs. Such mixed-method approaches would deepen understanding of discourse dynamics and support the development of more effective migration and crisis communication strategies.

Research Findings

A total of 1,568 entries[5] under five different discussion threads on Ekşi Sözlük[6], one of the online social media platforms, were analyzed using word cloud analysis, thematic analysis, and sentiment analysis. Additionally, for negative entries identified through sentiment analysis, the Hate Speech Intensity Scale was applied. The discussion threads on Ekşi Sözlük related to the June 30, 2024, Kayseri events that were analyzed in this study are as follows:

1. Allegations of a Syrian Man Raping a Young Child
2. June 30, 2024, Kayseri Events
3. Erdoğan's Statement on the Kayseri Events
4. Erdoğan's Kayseri Statement on July 1, 2024
5. Syrians Beginning to Leave Kayseri

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[5] The entries analyzed in this study were accessed on July 10, 2024

[6] Ekşi Sözlük, as one of the digital participatory dictionaries, is an interactive social networking site that allows users to share their views and opinions on various topics. It was founded in 1999 by Sedat Kapanoğlu as part of the "sourtimes.org" website, under the slogan "Sacred Knowledge" (Ekşi Sözlük, 2019).

Word Cloud Analysis and Findings

In the first stage of the study, a word cloud was generated from 1,568 entries under five different discussion threads using the MAXQDA software. This word cloud is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Word Cloud Related to the Kayseri Events

According to the word cloud analysis, the most frequently repeated terms in social media posts concerning the Kayseri incidents include "Kayseri", "Syrian", "Turkish", "AKP", "refugee", "country", "reaction", and "state". Additionally, expressions such as "vote", "election", "us-them", "crime", and "lynching" are also commonly used. These keywords indicate that users framed the events around themes of security, identity, and politics.

In the context of security, the prominence of terms such as "state", "reaction", "crime", "police", "rape", "abuse", and "lynching" suggests that users perceived the incidents as a security threat. This perception and discourse contribute to the securitization of migration and the portrayal of migrants as potential criminals. As Giddens (2022) argues, one of the core concerns of modernity is security, which is increasingly constructed through the figure of the migrant or foreigner. Migrants, in this context, are often coded as criminals, threats, or potential terrorists—thereby reinforcing societal fear and prejudice (de Haas et al., 2022; Maley, 2022; Bauman, 2021).

In terms of identity, the recurrence of terms such as "Syrian", "Turkish", "Arabic","Afghan", "us", "them", "ours", and "religion" demonstrates a clear dichotomy constructed between "us" and "them." This indicates that ethnic and cultural identities are being used as bases for opposition. Migrants and ethnic minorities are not perceived as integral parts of society, but rather as temporary, foreign, and threatening to the community's identity. Such a perception enables dominant cultural groups to frame migrants and minorities as inferior in ethnic and cultural terms (Kymlicka, 2020, p. 329). These groups are often depicted as morally lacking, poorly educated, and uncivilized, thereby further reinforcing feelings of fear and prejudice.

In the political dimension, the frequent mention of political actors and processes—such as "AKP", "MHP", "CHP", "election", "vote", "government", and "opposition"—demonstrates that migration and refugee issues are being discussed within a political framework. These findings reveal the instrumentalization of migrants within political discourse (Erbaş, 2019). Politicization is defined as the process through which a social issue gains political salience and becomes the subject of explicit political debate (de Haas et al., 2022). Accordingly, the status of migrants and refugees is instrumentalized through political structures and rhetoric. Public attitudes toward these groups, often shaped by negative sentiments, influence political discourse. In democratic systems, public opinion and government rhetoric frequently overlap, and exclusionary public attitudes are often reflected in government policies and official narratives (Maley, 2022, p. 36).

In conclusion, the social media discourse surrounding the Kayseri incidents reflects not merely individual anger or spontaneous reactions, but rather the digital reproduction of deeper processes related to security anxieties, identity threats, and political instrumentalization. The use of migrants and minority groups as political tools by those in power, accompanied by narratives portraying them as threats to the local community's identity, contributes to dehumanizing and demonizing portrayals. These discourses, constructed around the "us versus them" dichotomy, further exacerbate social hatred and deepen crises. Such negative rhetoric can lead to the marginalization and exclusion of these groups from society.

Thematic Analysis and Findings

In the second stage of the study, thematic analysis was conducted on 1,568 entries across five different discussion threads. As a result of this analysis, 13 themes were identified: The findings from the thematic analysis are presented in Table 2 and Figure 2.

Table 2: Thematic Distribution of the Kayseri Events on Ekşi Sözlük

Reference Distribution of Themes in Entries	N	%
Definition of the Incident	69	1.7
Criticism of the Local Community	366	9
Criticism of the General Society	180	4.4
Criticism of Current Migration Policies	1105	27.2
Criticism of Alternative Migration Policies	58	1.4
Criticism of the Legal System	35	0.9
Economic Issues	73	1.8
Criticism of the Media	39	1
Anti-Migrant Sentiment	1248	30.7
Racism	668	16.4
Opposition to Political Islam	123	3
Criticism of International Actors	47	1.2
Other	52	1.3
	Total Theme Distribution: 4063	
	Number of Entries: 1568	

Figure 2: Thematic Distrubion of the Kayseri Events on Ekşi Sözlük
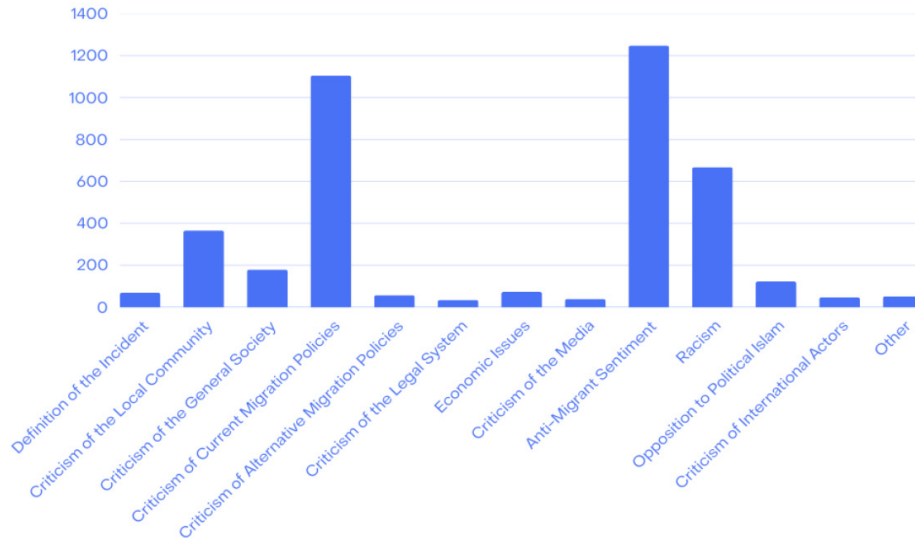
According to these findings, the most prominent themes are "anti-migrant sentiment," "criticism of current migration policies," and "racism." These themes serve as strong indicators of societal attitudes and perceptions toward Syrians and migrants, while also highlighting criticisms of migration policies.

Themes such as criticism of the local community (9%), criticism of the general society (4.4%), opposition to political Islam (3%), economic issues (1.8%), criticism of alternative migration policies (1.4%), criticism of international actors (1.2%), criticism of the media (1%), and criticism of the legal system (0.9%) demonstrate that negative views toward Syrians and migrants are becoming more diverse and that social and economic concerns related to migration are increasing.

The most dominant discourse is "anti-migrant sentiment", which constitutes 30.7% of the analyzed entries. This percentage indicates the widespread negative perception and attitude toward Syrians in Türkiye. It also suggests that Syrians face significant barriers to social integration and are at an increasing risk of exclusion and discrimination. Anti-migrant rhetoric often carries xenophobic and racist undertones (Goldin et al., 2022, p. 68). The second most frequent theme is "criticism of current migration policies" at 27.2%. This high percentage reflects strong dissatisfaction with existing migration policies and their implementation. Criticism directed toward policymakers and key actors involved in migration governance suggests a growing demand for more effective, active, and inclusive migration policies. The third most prominent theme, "racism", appears in 16.4% of the analyzed entries, indicating that the Kayseri events have triggered ethnic-based tensions and debates. The strong presence of discrimination and prejudice in public discourse, along with racist rhetoric directly targeting Syrians' ethnic and cultural differences, contributes to the widespread rise of xenophobia in society.

In conclusion, the findings indicating the dominance of themes such as anti-migrant sentiment, criticism of current migration policies, and racism suggest that existing migration policies are inadequate, and that negative perceptions of Syrians and migrants are widespread in society. The significant presence of anti-migrant sentiment and racism in the analyzed data demonstrates that, during crises, social discourse toward Syrians and migrants on social media platforms is shaped around negative emotions and discriminatory rhetoric.

Sentiment Analysis and Finding

In the third stage of the study, sentiment analysis was conducted on 1,568 entries across five different discussion threads. The sentiment analysis categorized the entries into three groups: positive, negative, and neutral. Entries that approved and supported the attacks on Syrians in Kayseri were classified as "negative." Entries that opposed, condemned, or disapproved of these attacks were classified as "positive." Entries that neither supported nor opposed the attacks were categorized as "neutral." The findings from the sentiment analysis are presented in Table 3 and Figure 3.

Table 3: Sentiment Distribution of the Kayseri Events on Ekşi Sözlük

Distribution of Sentiment in Entries	N	%
Positive	148	9.4
Negative	1293	82.5
Neutral	127	8.1
		Number of Entries: 1568

Figure 3: Sentiment Distribution of the Kayseri Events on Ekşi Sözlük
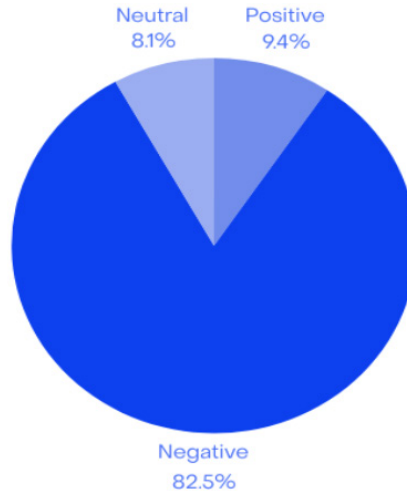

Examining the data presented in Table 3 and Figure 3, it is observed that 1,293 entries (82.5%) fall into the "negative" category, 148 entries (9.4%) into the "positive" category, and 127 entries (8.1%) into the "neutral" category.

These findings indicate that a significant portion of society supported the attacks on Syrian migrants in Kayseri. Furthermore, the results suggest that social discourse toward Syrians and migrants on social media is constructed on a foundation of racism, contributing to the spread of xenophobia.

Hate Speech Intensity Scale Analysis and Findings

In the fourth stage of the study, the Hate Speech Intensity Scale was applied to 1,293 entries classified as "negative" based on sentiment analysis. Given the predictability of strong negative reactions toward Syrians, measuring the levels of hate speech in these entries is crucial for understanding the extent to which social tensions escalate into violent rhetoric. The distribution of hate speech intensity in negative entries related to the Kayseri events is presented in Table 4 and Figure 4.

Table 4: Distribution of Hate Speech Related to the Kayseri Events on Ekşi Sözlük

Distribution of Hate Speech in Negative Entries	N	%
6. Death	3	0.2
5. Violence	275	21.3
4. Demonizing and Dehumanizing	367	28.4
3. Negative Character	161	12.5
2. Negative Actions	203	15.7
1. Disagreement	284	22
		Number of Entries: 1293

Figure 4: Distribution of Hate Speech Related to the Kayseri Events on Ekşi Sözlük
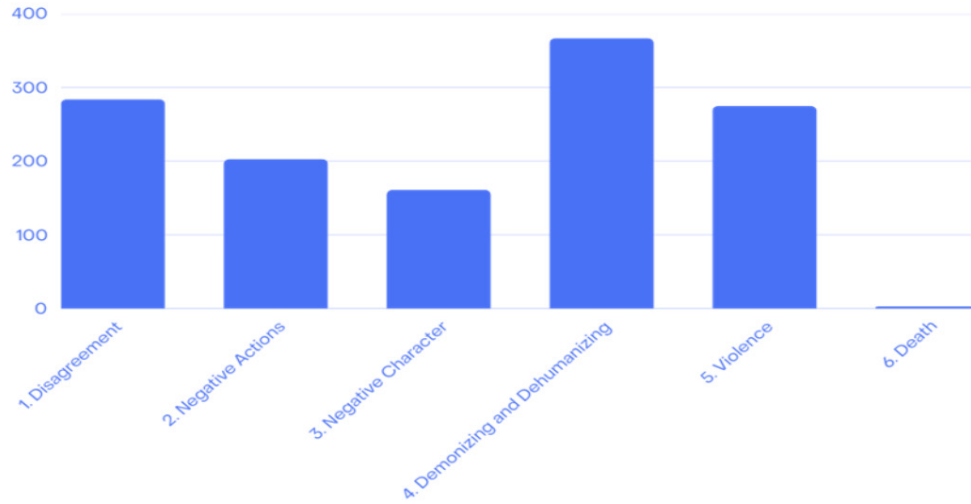
According to these findings, the most prominent categories on the Hate Speech Intensity Scale are "Level 4: Demonizing and Dehumanizing" (28.4%) and "Level 5: Violence" (21.3%). The other levels are distributed as follows: "Level 1: Disagreement" (22%), "Level 2: Negative Actions" (15.7%), "Level 3: Negative Character" (12.5%), and "Level 6: Death" (0.2%). These results indicate that a significant portion of negative entries falls within high-intensity hate speech categories (Levels 4 and 5). Additionally, the data suggest that lower levels of hate speech also constitute a meaningful proportion of the discourse.

These findings reveal that public discourse toward Syrians on social media is largely shaped around demonizing, dehumanizing, and violence. Demonizing and dehumanizing refer to the tendency to perceive certain individuals or groups as inferior or less than human. This inclination represents an extreme form of racism that denies the humanity of others or seeks to depict them as "less human" (Arendt, 1951, as cited in de Haas et al., 2022).

Indeed, the analyzed entries frequently included derogatory and dehumanizing terms used to describe Syrians, such as "Suri," "Arab," "illegal," "invader," "savage," "killer," "stray dogs," "thugs," "unknown figures," "thief," "rapist," "murderer," "filth," "toxic," "harmful," "oxygen-wasting creatures," "occupiers," "Bedouins," "waste offspring," "parasites," and "herd of sheep." The prevalence of such cultural,

physical, and psychological degradation narratives contributes to growing social anger and intolerance toward Syrians and migrant groups.

In conclusion, these discourses, which devalue, immoralize, marginalize, and criminalize Syrians, represent the most extreme and explicit forms of racism. Demonizing, dehumanizing, and violence-inciting rhetoric contribute to the deepening of hatred toward Syrians and migrant groups across broad segments of society, leading to increased support for anti-migrant policies. As long as such narratives persist, the recurrence of violent actions against these groups remains inevitable.

Discussion and Conclusion

Crisis communication is a process that involves various strategies aimed at calming social unrest and providing accurate public information. However, in the context of the June 30 Kayseri events, it appears that the crisis communication process was not effectively managed by relevant actors and institutions. The events began with the rapid dissemination of allegations that a child had been abused by a person claimed to be Syrian. Although these allegations had not yet been officially confirmed by authorities, their widespread circulation on social media fueled negative societal reactions toward Syrians and other migrant groups.

During this process, statements made by crisis management actors and institutions did not reduce societal tension but instead exacerbated the crisis. In particular, the explicit disclosure of both the alleged perpetrator's and victim's identities led to Syrians and other migrant groups becoming primary targets. The failure to consider the social values and sensitivities of both the local community and migrant groups in official discourse, along with the use of polarizing and exclusionary language, further deepened marginalization. This situation reinforced prejudices against Syrians and other migrant groups, paving the way for increased societal anger and the spread of discrimination.

The research revealed that Syrians cultural values, identities, and beliefs were often addressed sarcastically, portraying them as inferior and as a homogeneous group. Their individual differences were ignored, and they were framed as criminals or threats within political and security discourses. These narratives reinforced the perception that Syrians worsen societal problems and unfairly benefit from state support, fueling public anger, anti-migrant rhetoric, and prejudice.

Hate speech produced on social media often draws upon pre-existing societal inequalities and discriminatory structures (Esses et al., 2013). In this context, digital platforms not only reflect these issues but also actively contribute to their reproduction. Both digital and traditional media play a crucial role in shaping negative public perceptions of migrants (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Cottle, 2000). Although smartphones and social media tools facilitate the migration process,

they simultaneously intensify surveillance and accelerate the spread of disinformation (Moran, 2023; Emmer et al., 2016; Dekker et al., 2018; Gillespie et al., 2016).

These platforms can become spaces where xenophobic discourses are generated, leading to the stigmatization of migrants, exposing them to threats, and associating them with criminality (Mahoney et al., 2022; Leudar et al., 2008; Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2022). In traditional media as well, Syrians and other disadvantaged groups are often represented through exclusionary, stereotypical, and negative discourses. Such modes of representation pave the way for the institutionalization of societal prejudices and the legitimization of discriminatory attitudes towards these groups (Gezik, 2022; Gölcü & Dağlı, 2017; Sunata & Yıldız, 2018).

These media representations and discourses shape social criticism of both migrants and migration policies and the actors implementing these policies. In this context, this research revealed that Syrians cultural values, identities, and beliefs were often addressed sarcastically, portraying them as inferior and as a homogeneous group. Their individual differences were ignored, and they were framed as criminals or threats within political and security discourses. These narratives reinforced the perception that Syrians worsen societal problems and unfairly benefit from state support, fueling public anger, anti-migrant rhetoric, and prejudice. A significant portion of the criticism focuses on the perception that political actors and decision-makers have neglected the migrant issue and remained indifferent to societal demands. It is particularly emphasized that uncontrolled migration policies and the economic and political decisions related to migration have been implemented without considering their impact on society. The local population in Kayseri also became a target of criticism, with these critiques often revolving around election results and political preferences. Political inconsistencies were highlighted, and direct criticisms were directed at the perceived double standards of the local community. Additionally, current migration policies and the groups that support these policies were held directly responsible for the situation.

Additionally, criticism of the government has been prominent, particularly regarding state expenditures on Syrians and asylum policies. Syrians have been framed as a political tool, with claims that the current government uses them as a voter base. Although the primary target of criticism is the government's migration policies, Syrians have been held responsible and blamed by society as a consequence of these policies. Migrants have been depicted as a group that threatens social cohesion and values, as well as an "economic burden" that is "worthless" to society. In other words, they have been positioned as a population that consumes social resources without making any contribution to the local community. As noted by Goldin et al., (2022) economic downturns, unemployment, and increasing social insecurity further reinforce anti-migrant prejudices. In societies where such insecurity intensifies, migrants face a heightened risk of violence, xenophobia, and discrimination from the host community.

In conclusion, these discourses contribute to the deterioration of social cohesion, social exclusion, and the legitimization of discrimination. Such expressions can directly or indirectly encourage and normalize violence. Therefore, the way these events are framed on social media not only fails to promote social harmony and mutual understanding but also deepens polarization and discrimination. These findings indicate that during crises, social discourse toward Syrians on social media is shaped within the frameworks of racism, xenophobia, and hate speech.

Migration and crisis communication failures are key factors driving negative discourses on social media. To prevent racism, xenophobia, and hate speech against migrants during crises, effective communication strategies are needed. Such strategies should address public concerns and promote social acceptance (Erdoğan, 2021). According to the United Nations (2018), combating misinformation and improving migration policies are essential. In this regard, one of the effective ways to prevent the spread of disinformation and hate speech is to implement practices aimed at developing critical media literacy (UNESCO, 2022). Campaigns should aim to transform public attitudes and increase awareness. Strengthening mutual understanding and using both traditional and digital media are also vital in addressing racism and discrimination (European Commission, 2020; Dennison et al., 2024).

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