

Reproduction of Anti-Immigrant Discourse Through Cartoons in the New Media: The Case of Platform X

Yeni Medyada Karikatürler Aracılığıyla Göçmen Karşıtı Söylemin Yeniden Üretimi: X Platformu Örneği

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Abstract

Social media, built upon contemporary Web 2.0 technologies, has assumed many functions of traditional media and enables users to produce content at a professional level. Platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and Facebook embody core characteristics of new media — hypertextuality, dissemination, virtuality, and interactivity — generating significant societal influence. These platforms also facilitate the expression of hate speech through text, images, videos, poems, and cartoons, contributing to its normalization and spread. Cartoons, combining visual and verbal elements with satire, can reach wide audiences while delivering critical commentary. However, they may reproduce discriminatory, racist, sexist, or exclusionary narratives. The rapid circulation of such content amplifies hate speech, reinforcing social prejudices and marginalizing targeted groups under the guise of humor. Anti-immigrant discourse, in particular, is reproduced through various strategies on digital platforms. This study analyzes anti-immigrant hate speech in cartoons shared on X between January 1, 2015, and April 1, 2025, using keywords such as “immigrant,” “cartoon,” “Turkey,” and “Syria.” The cartoons were examined using Roland Barthes’s semiotic framework to explore how visual and linguistic codes construct anti-immigrant narratives. According to the findings that humor is frequently employed to legitimize othering, criminalization, and cultural discrimination. And also hate speech targeting migrants is concentrated around several dominant themes. Notably, narratives portraying migrants as an economic burden, a cultural threat, or a security risk frequently appear in the analyzed caricatures. These themes are often conveyed through humor, which facilitates the broader public’s acceptance and normalization of such content. The study emphasizes the need for enhanced media literacy and robust monitoring mechanisms on social media, aiming to contribute to both academic scholarship and societal awareness while addressing the boundaries between digital media ethics and freedom of expression.

Keywords: Migrant, hate speech, caricature, social media, X

Öz

Sosyal medya, güncel Web 2.0 teknolojileri üzerine inşa edilmiş, geleneksel medyanın birçok işlevini üstlenmiş ve kullanıcıların profesyonel düzeyde içerik üretmelerine imkân tanıyan bir mecradır. X (eski adıyla Twitter), Instagram ve Facebook gibi platformlar, hipermetinsellik, yayılım, sanallık ve etkileşimsellik gibi yeni medyanın temel özelliklerini barındırarak toplumsal düzeyde önemli etkiler yaratmaktadır. Ancak, bu platformlar aynı zamanda metin, görsel, video, şiir ve karikatür aracılığıyla nefret söyleminin ifade edilmesine olanak sağlayarak, bu tür ifadelerin normalleşmesine ve yayılmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Karikatürler, görsel ve sözel öğeleri hicivli bir biçimde birleştirerek geniş kitlelere ulaşabilen güçlü iletişim araçlarıdır. Bununla birlikte, ayrımcı, ırkçı, cinsiyetçi veya dışlayıcı söylemleri yeniden üretebilirler. Bu içeriklerin hızlı dolaşımı, nefret söylemini güçlendirerek toplumsal önyargıları pekiştirir ve hedef grupları marjinalleştirir. Göçmen karşıtı söylemler, özellikle dijital platformlarda farklı stratejiler aracılığıyla yeniden üretilmektedir. Bu çalışmada, 1 Ocak 2015 – 1 Nisan 2025 tarihleri arasında X platformunda paylaşılan göçmen temalı karikatürler, “göçmen,” “karikatür,” “Türkiye” ve “Suriye” gibi Anahtar Kelimelerler kullanılarak incelenmiştir. Karikatürler, Roland Barthes’ın göstergebilimsel yaklaşımı ile analiz edilerek görsel ve dilsel kodlarla göçmen karşıtı söylemin nasıl üretildiği araştırılmıştır. Bulgulara göre, mizah; ötekileştirme, kriminalizasyon ve kültürel ayrımcılığı meşrulaştırmak amacıyla sıklıkla kullanılmaktadır. Ayrıca, göçmenlere yönelik nefret söyleminin belirli baskın temalar etrafında yoğunlaştığı görülmektedir. İncelenen karikatürlerde göçmenlerin ekonomik bir yük, kültürel bir tehdit ya da güvenlik riski olarak tasvir edildiği anlatılar dikkat çekmektedir. Bu temalar çoğunlukla mizah yoluyla sunulmakta ve bu durum, söz konusu ayrımcı söylemlerin daha geniş kitleler tarafından kabul edilmesini ve normalleştirilmesini kolaylaştırmaktadır. Çalışma, sosyal medyada nefret söylemiyle mücadelede medya okuryazarlığının artırılması ve etkin denetim mekanizmalarının geliştirilmesi gerekliliğini vurgulamakta ve dijital medya etiği ile ifade özgürlüğü arasındaki sınırların tartışılmasına katkı sunmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göçmen, nefret ifadesi, karikatür, sosyal medya, X

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Introduction

Hate speech can be defined as negative attitudes and expressions that emerge as a result of negative emotions and prejudices directed toward individuals or specific groups. This negative discourse is often shaped by historical hostilities, prejudices, and social fears, and is expressed through adherence to a particular ideological structure (Yardım & Dalkılıç, 2018, p. 90). Similar to traditional media, the concept of hate is also widely encountered in digital media. The language of hatred, which is used in daily life to negatively characterize individuals, manifests itself similarly on social media platforms. According to Awan, hate speech includes expressions targeting “racial and ethnic origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and people with disabilities” (Awan, 2014, p. 135). Since the 2000s, rapidly developing technology has brought about significant changes in the field of communication. The widespread use of the internet has affected many aspects of individuals’ lives and introduced new forms of communication. This period is referred to as the “internet age” and has created a global transformation. Mass communication tools have gradually become digitalized, and new media technologies have come to the forefront. With the help of technological devices such as smartphones, computers, and tablets, individuals can easily access social media platforms and communicate. Although the influence of traditional media continued for some time, the rapid development of digital technologies has led to the widespread use of social media. With the development of Web 2.0 technologies, the number of users on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (Twitter) has steadily increased. Social media has become a significant medium for shaping society and is defined as a virtual space where individuals can access all kinds of information.

Today, hate speech brings about social problems such as unhappiness, discrimination, and marginalization, and has become an important issue that must be addressed in the context of hate crimes. In particular, the role of traditional and digital media in reinforcing societal prejudices plays a critical part in the spread of hate speech. In this context, the study includes a literature review on social media and hate speech, followed by a content analysis of hate speech directed at migrants through caricatures shared on the social media platform X.

This study aims to distinguish itself from previous research by examining hate speech directed at migrants through caricatures and employing a semiotic analytical framework. While much of the existing literature discusses hate speech through discourse analysis, content analysis of media texts, examinations of political discourse, and news framing studies, this research differs by using caricatures shared on the X platform as primary data. Through visual metaphors, humor, and the denotation–connotation relationship, the study decodes hate speech based on semiotic codes and reveals the ways in which humor indirectly legitimizes discriminatory discourse. In this respect, the study occupies a unique position in the literature as one of the few investigations to analyze how hate speech is produced through visual and humorous forms.

The selection of Türkiye as the sample can be justified by several factors. Türkiye has been at the center of migration flows between 2015 and 2025, serving as one of the countries receiving the highest number of migrants. During this period, public debates surrounding Syrian and Afghan migrants intensified significantly. Moreover, a substantial portion of the caricatures related to Türkiye on the X platform include hate speech, particularly in relation to Türkiye’s refugee policies, migration agreements with the European Union, and border management practices. Additionally, political actors’ (Türkiye and EU member states) migration policies are frequently represented in international caricatures. For this reason, the study positions Türkiye as a strategic case, given its central role in migration flows and its frequent depiction—and often targeting—in global caricature production.

This study contributes to the literature on three levels. First, it offers a unique framework that focuses on visual hate speech. While the majority of research analyzes hate speech through textual materials, this study examines hate speech produced through visual and humorous forms such as caricatures, thereby addressing a gap in the literature. Second, by applying semiotic analysis, the study deconstructs hate speech through Roland Barthes’ semiotic approach, analyzing the production of signs in terms of denotative and connotative meanings and explaining how humor functions to normalize hate speech. This provides insight not only into hate speech as content but also into the processes through which meaning is produced. Third, the study highlights the role of social media caricatures in disseminating hate speech, demonstrating that

caricatures legitimize discriminatory narratives through humor, facilitate their normalization among mass audiences, and are often produced by politically and ideologically motivated accounts. In this regard, the research offers a comprehensive analysis that brings together the visual, political, and cultural dimensions of hate speech.

Literature Review

According to the definition provided in the Turkish Language Association (TDK) dictionary, the word “hate” is described as a feeling directed towards wishing harm upon someone (1), and as disgust or repulsion (2) (TDK, 2022). As a term, hate carries negative connotations and evokes adverse emotions. These negative emotions can lead to consequences ranging from hurtful or aggressive expressions to risks of physical, emotional, and symbolic violence (Yaşa & Öksüz, 2020, p.1346).

To define hate speech within a conceptual framework, reference is often made to the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. According to this frequently cited definition, hate speech encompasses “all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin, as well as forms of religious intolerance” (Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation No.R(97)20, 1997).

This definition emphasizes that hate goes beyond mere dissatisfaction or dislike, encompassing sentiments aimed at harming or destroying others (Badamchi, 2015, p.56; Kalaman & Batu, 2021, p.128). The exclusion of certain individuals from social cohesion due to gender, religion, language, race, or disability, and the expression of such exclusion, give rise to hate speech—an expression that disregards human rights. Such discourse is regarded as a significant threat to the culture of unity and solidarity in modern democratic societies and as a serious disruption to public order (Aydos & Aydos, 2019, p.30; Öztekin, 2015, p.925).

Hate speech may manifest in various forms depending on the characteristics of the targeted individuals or groups. Examples include discrimination based on race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and gender. Individuals or groups with these characteristics are often marginalized and subjected not only to hostile verbal expressions but also to criminal acts. This indicates that hate speech is a severe social issue with the potential for violence and crime (Yardım & Dalkılıç, 2018, pp.92–93).

When hate crimes are committed with prejudice and hateful intent, they entail legal sanctions. However, hate speech is often evaluated within the scope of freedom of expression, giving rise to ongoing debates about the limits of this freedom (Ataman, 2012, p.59).

Categories of Hate Speech

In general, hate speech can be examined under six main categories:

Political Hate Speech: Refers to negative and exclusionary discourse directed at political ideologies, movements, or individuals who support such views.

Hate Speech Against Women: Aims to reduce women to a secondary status in society through sexist rhetoric and discourse.

Anti-Immigrant and Xenophobic Hate Speech: Includes rhetoric that seeks to marginalize migrants and foreigners, often portraying them as objects of fear, based on racist foundations.

Hate Speech Targeting Sexual Identity: Refers to expressions that exclude and target LGBTQ+ individuals.

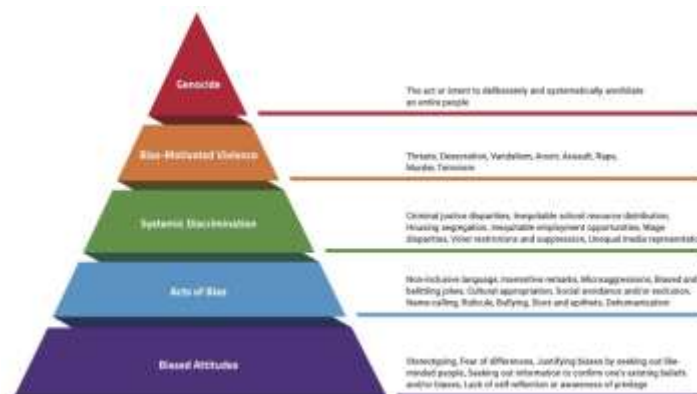
Hate Speech Based on Belief: Targets members of minority religions or sects through discriminatory and intolerant expressions.

Hate Speech Against Persons with Disabilities and Illnesses: Encompasses discourse that marginalizes or degrades individuals with physical or mental disabilities, as well as those suffering from illnesses (Binark & Çomu, 2003, p.208).

In addition to the types of hate speech, it is equally important to understand the stages through which hate develops and to recognize the potential consequences of hate speech. In this context, the “**Pyramid of Hate**” defined by the **Anti-Defamation League (ADL)** demonstrates that hate progresses through various stages.

At this point, it is important to emphasize that hate speech is not merely a linguistic form of expression, but a culturally produced ideology that is continuously reproduced through visual signs. Roland Barthes’s semiotic theory provides a robust theoretical framework for explaining how hate speech circulates through “myths” that render discriminatory meanings natural, self-evident, and seemingly inevitable.

The Pyramid of Hate



https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pyramid-of-hate-web-english_1.pdf

These stages include biased attitudes, discrimination, bias-motivated violence, and ultimately, genocide. While hate is defined by fear and anger towards the unknown or the different, hate speech represents the verbal expression of these prejudices (Karadeniz, 2012, p.1).

Table 1. **Pyramid of Hate**

The steps of the Pyramid of Hate are structured as follows:

Genocide: The systematic extermination of an entire people or group.

Bias-Motivated Violence: Includes threats, desecration of sacred symbols, lynching, arson, assault, and rape.

Structural Discrimination: Inequalities in domains such as justice, education, housing, and employment.

Biased Attitudes: Manifest as microaggressions, exclusionary language, and demeaning expressions.

Discriminatory Attitudes: Encompass stereotyping and the selective use of information that reinforces existing biases.

Hate Speech in Digital Environments

The Spread of Hate Speech via Social Media

In the digital age, hate speech has become particularly widespread through the internet and social media. Social media platforms play an influential role in shaping individuals’ thoughts and behaviors and contribute significantly to the rapid dissemination of hate-filled discourse (Karaman & Işıklı, 2016, p.3). Hate speech shared on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X poses a threat to social order (Yıldız, 2018, p.772).

Technologies that are inexpensive and easily accessible—such as online games, social networks, e-books, and video-sharing websites—contribute to the faster dissemination of messages containing hate speech (Brennan, 2009, p.123). Today, social media environments hold a significant position in influencing social

behavior and perception and also play a crucial role in shaping individual conduct (Kirschenbaum, 2004, pp.99-102).

As online platforms that enable individuals to communicate and interact with one another at any time and place, social media sites allow the production and sharing of content on personal pages. However, alongside positive content, these platforms also facilitate the circulation of hate speech—content that threatens social harmony and disrupts the atmosphere of peace. Hate speech circulating in social media typically revolves around religion, language, race, nationality, and gender, and leads to negative behaviors such as exclusion and insults toward certain individuals and groups based on existing prejudices. Hate speech, which can restrict rights and freedoms, contributes to the spread of violence in society, unjust practices, and the erosion of social trust (Büyüktanır et al., 2025, p.687). On asynchronous and anonymity-supporting platforms like X, users are more likely to adopt aggressive attitudes that they would not normally exhibit in real-life social settings (Avşar & Varış, 2022, p.356).

Direct and Indirect Forms of Hate Speech

Hate speech on social media can occur both directly and indirectly. It may appear in a news article, a video, or be embedded within a caricature using elements of humor. Humor, as an artistic form of expression, is shaped by the political, economic, and social context and nourished by the unique dynamics of each culture, offering a light-hearted yet reflective perspective on life. The primary function of humorous works goes beyond entertainment, as they aim to provoke thought. Anecdotes, written and visual texts, speeches, and caricatures fall within this category of expressive media.

Although humor's primary subject is the human being and it is shaped by the cultural codes of a given society, it also possesses universal functions. Through this universal quality, humor can transcend identity differences such as language, religion, age, and gender, and can help create a shared space for communication among individuals (Öğüt Eker, 2014, p.235).

Humor and Caricatures as Vehicles of Social Commentary

Historical and Cultural Role of Humor

In this context, humorous elements such as caricatures serve as significant tools for analyzing modes of social communication and contribute to their development.

When the historical development is examined, it is evident that social themes have prominently featured in Turkish humor. While oral narrative forms were initially dominant, over time humor evolved into theatrical performances, written texts, visual representations, and caricatures (Akto & Biçer, 2021, p.110). The Karagöz-Hacivat plays, Keloğlan tales, and their eventual caricaturization, which held an important place in Ottoman culture, exemplify this progression. Humor has not only served as a means of entertainment but also as an intellectual reflection of social events and a coping mechanism for threats or fears. Examples such as Nasreddin Hodja's anecdotes, the verbal exchanges in Karagöz-Hacivat, and the dialogues of Kavuklu and Pişekar have enabled the humorous portrayal of societal realities (Sipahioğlu, 1999, p.222). Today, this function continues as social events are conveyed to the public through humorous content in digital environments.

As a form of humor, the caricature is considered both a cultural reflection and a unique mode of communication. What distinguishes the caricature from other forms of communication is its use of symbolic meanings to provoke thought in the viewer. In this regard, the caricature transcends the limitations of a mere image, functioning as a potent communication tool rich in information (Enserov & Şentürk Kara, 2020, p.2503).

The caricature is not only an artistic phenomenon that combines lines, irony, and thought, but also a visual communication form that encapsulates various narratives of humor (Özkanlı, 2006, p.8; Özer, 2007, p.29). Through this medium, events and phenomena that would normally require lengthy explanations can be conveyed effectively and concisely. Etymologically, the word "caricature" is derived from the Italian verb *caricare* (to charge/attack) (Balçioğlu, 1973, p.7). In this context, although it is often regarded as a subversive art form, caricatures typically criticize, exaggerate, and sometimes distort the subjects they

address. Thus, the caricature is a distinctive mode of communication that relies on graphic expression and contains an inherent sense of humor (Arik, 1998, p.48).

The caricaturist not only depicts a particular event but also makes implicit references to the socio-economic conditions of the era in which the event occurred (Tuncer, 2020, p.48). With the advancement of digital technologies, transformations have occurred in both the content and form of humor. Parallel to the rapid changes in public agenda, humor is intensely used in websites, digital media, and social networks to comment on social, economic, and political matters (Shifman, 2007, p.188).

Caricature as a Visual Communication Medium

On social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and YouTube, individuals act both as producers and consumers of humorous content, sharing their thoughts with others (Demirel, 2016, p.194). Although caricatures are now produced in digital environments thanks to 21st-century internet technologies, the critical tone of traditional humor, the symbolic narratives of caricature characters, and their exaggerated modes of presentation continue to be reflected in contemporary caricatures (Firat, 2020, p.245).

However, the asynchronous and anonymous nature of social media often facilitates the use of crude and aggressive language (Enarsson & Lindgren, 2019, p.4). The coexistence of users with varying ages, genders, and education levels in the same digital space not only fosters positive discourse but also enables the production of negative, exclusionary, and harmful expressions. This situation leads to psychological harassment targeting individuals or groups in digital environments.

The Role of Social Media Caricatures in Producing Hate Speech

Particularly on the X platform, hate-filled messages, images, and caricatures have become widespread, making it a medium where marginalized individuals or groups are frequently targeted with exclusionary content (Uçar, 2021, pp.3111–3112).

On X and similar digital platforms, hate speech circulates via offensive visual elements, videos, and infographics, with the aim of transforming public perception. These hate-based visual contents can cause psychological disorders among the targeted groups, making individuals feel worthless and leading them into depression. Hate speech, which undermines social solidarity and trust, especially exacerbates polarization and poses a threat to social peace on social media platforms (Alp & Güzel, 2025, p.63).

Methodology

Aim and Research Questions

This study examines migrant-directed hate speech through caricatures shared on the X platform. The research will assess the role of caricatures in the dissemination of hate speech, how the boundaries between humor and criticism are defined, and how such content shapes societal perceptions. In line with the aim of the study, the following research questions are addressed:

RQ1. How are migrants represented in the caricatures?

RQ2. Are migrants subjected to hate speech in these caricatures?

Research Method, Population, and Sample

In line with the aim of the study, the caricatures under examination were analyzed using one of the qualitative research methods: semiotic analysis. The population of the research consists of caricatures related to migrants that were shared on the X platform between the years 2015 and 2025, while the sample includes 10 caricatures that contain hate speech.

In this study, the selection of the ten caricatures was carried out through purposeful sampling. Rather than relying on metrics such as popularity, user engagement, or random selection, the sample was determined based on predefined criteria aligned with the research objectives. Accordingly, caricatures were identified through keyword searches on the X platform using terms such as “Türkiye,” “Syria,” “caricature,” “cartoon,” and “immigrant.” From the visuals retrieved, only those shared between 2015 and 2025 and containing explicit or implicit forms of hate speech toward migrants were included in the sample. Thus, the

dataset consists of caricatures that meet the thematic and temporal requirements of the study and that demonstrably feature hate speech, making them analytically suitable for semiotic examination.

The most fundamental element and starting point of semiotics is the sign. A sign refers to other elements, whether concrete or abstract, and can be perceived through various senses (Fiske, 2003, pp. 62–63). Saussure defines a sign as comprising two components: the signifier and the signified. The signified refers to the abstract concept formed in the mind, while the signifier is the concrete form through which this abstract concept is represented (Civelek & Türkay, 2020, p. 776). The process of meaning-making within the sign stems from the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Upon perceiving the signifier, the associated meaning—the signified—emerges in the mind. According to Barthes, meaning involves two levels: denotation and connotation (Çağlar, 2012, p. 26). The first level, denotation, refers to the literal relationship between the signifier and the signified, as well as the link between the sign and its referent in external reality. The second level of meaning, connotation, involves the interaction of signs with users' cultural values. In both processes, the most striking element is the sign itself (Fiske, 2003, pp. 115-116). Accordingly, in this study, the sign—considered the cornerstone of meaning according to Saussure—is analyzed through its signifier (the concrete form) and signified (the meaning to which it refers).

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, caricatures shared on the X platform between 2015 and 2025 that depict immigration themes were included in the population. The search was conducted using keywords such as "*Türkiye*", "*Syria*", "*caricature*", "*cartoon*", and "*immigrant*" in the X platform's search bar. The collected caricatures were then analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method.

Findings and Interpretation

Within the scope of the study, a total of 10 caricatures were analyzed using the semiotic analysis method.



Image 1

Source: Published On The X Social Media Platform On October 19, 2015.

Illustrator: Slovak Caricaturist *Marian Kamensky*.

Signifier	Signified	Sign
Person 1	The President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan represented as an animal	The government eagerly waiting for money
Person 2	Chancellor Angela Merkel carrying euros in a wheelbarrow	A leader trying to get rid of refugees by bringing large amounts of money

Object	Wheelbarrow and money	European financial aid
Setting	A deserted rural area	Representation of poverty/lack
People	People lining up	Desperation

Denotative Meaning

The President is depicted as a wild and hungry animal waiting to be fed.

Myth – Ideological Meaning

This caricature constructs a myth that portrays Türkiye as a submissive and dependent state that complies with Europe’s demands in exchange for money. By depicting President Erdoğan as an obedient animal awaiting financial reward, the visual reinforces an orientalist narrative that characterizes non-Western nations—especially Türkiye—as primitive, needy, and easily controlled. Angela Merkel’s wheelbarrow of money symbolizes European superiority and moral authority, suggesting that Europe “manages” the refugee crisis by financially manipulating Türkiye. The myth thus legitimizes a hierarchical relationship in which Europe is depicted as the rational actor providing aid, while Türkiye is framed as opportunistic, powerless, and morally compromised.

Connotative Meaning

The unhappiness of refugees due to a metaphorical dog not removing the obstacle before being fed.

In the later stages of the Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, Syrians fleeing the harsh living conditions created by the conflict initially sought refuge in neighboring countries, and later aimed to seek asylum in Europe. While Turkey tried to host its Muslim neighbors far beyond its means, Western countries did not demonstrate the same level of sensitivity. Instead, they offered financial support in exchange for Turkey’s commitment to keep the refugees within its borders. Within this framework, €6 billion was pledged, of which €2.4 billion was allocated to cover the refugees’ basic needs such as education, healthcare, and protection. Through projects implemented in Turkey, refugees were provided with livelihood support and assistance with their education. Additionally, schools and hospitals were built for refugees in compliance with the requirements of the financial support provided. However, in the caricature under analysis—identified as containing hate elements—a perception is created that this financial support is being used by Turkey as a means of blackmail. In the caricature, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is depicted in a negative light, illustrated as a submissive figure who obeys his “master” in exchange for money (Image 1).



Image 2.

Source: Published On Social Media Platform X On February 2, 2022.
Illustrator: Moroccan Caricaturist Naoufal Lahlali.

Signifier	Signified	Sign
People	People crammed into seats on a Ferris wheel	While trying to seek refuge in the West, people are met with missile attacks
Object 1	Ferris wheel	The West’s dual stance: offering help to some, while aiming to destroy others
Object 2	Missiles and missile launchers	Symbol of Western hypocrisy
Setting	Map of Western countries, Turkey, the Middle East, and North Africa	Affected and influencing regions

Denotative Meaning

People are boarding the Ferris wheel in hope of salvation.

Myth - Ideological Meaning

This caricature constructs a myth that frames the West as a duplicitous and morally inconsistent power whose humanitarian discourse conceals violent geopolitical interests. The Ferris wheel—typically associated with entertainment and safety—symbolizes the illusion of refuge, suggesting that migrants are deceptively drawn into a system that ultimately leads to destruction. The juxtaposition of a fairground ride with missiles implies that Western aid is superficial and primarily strategic, masking the fact that the same actors offering “help” also fuel the conflicts from which migrants flee. This myth reinforces a broader ideological narrative: the West sustains its global dominance by selectively determining who deserves protection while systematically perpetuating instability in non-Western regions. Through this framing, the caricature positions migrants as victims trapped within the contradictory moral economy of Western power.

Connotative Meaning

People disappointed by the West’s hypocrisy and double standards.

The **Ferris wheel** figure in the caricature critiques the West’s seemingly mocking attitude towards refugees. It conveys that the West selectively accepts the refugees who serve its interests while abandoning the rest to face their fate. Additionally, the caricature strongly criticizes Western countries by highlighting the paradox that, as more people flee their homelands, an equivalent amount of ammunition is sent to those same regions—suggesting that what destroys the people left behind is directly supplied by the West (Image 2).



Image 3.

Source: Published On Social Media Platform X On July 31, 2021.
Illustrator: Turkish Caricaturist *Sefer Selvi*.

Signifier	Signified	Sign
Person	Afghan soldier with a rifle on his shoulder	Sarcastic expression
Object	Rifle	Threat
Text	“There is no need for Turkey to come to Afghanistan. Afghanistan is already coming to Turkey. Just like in Syria!”	The presence of Afghans in Turkey

Denotative Meaning

People are boarding the Ferris wheel in hope of salvation.

Myth - Ideological Meaning

This caricature constructs a myth that positions Afghan migrants as a looming security threat to Türkiye. By depicting an Afghan soldier rather than a civilian refugee, the image blurs the line between “migrant” and “combatant,” thereby embedding the idea that those arriving in Türkiye are inherently dangerous, militarized, and ideologically foreign. The rifle, stern facial expression, and sarcastic tone collectively reinforce a narrative that migration from Afghanistan is not a humanitarian movement but an invasion. This myth legitimizes anti-immigrant sentiment by implying that accepting Afghan refugees is equivalent to importing conflict, violence, and instability. It also reflects a broader ideological discourse that frames Muslim-majority refugee groups—particularly Afghans and Syrians—as culturally incompatible and security risks, thereby normalizing xenophobia under the guise of national protection.

Connotative Meaning

People disappointed by the West’s hypocrisy and double standards.

In this caricature, Turkey is criticized in a hostile tone for offering humanitarian aid and opening its borders to populations in distress. The Afghan soldier—depicted as a threatening figure with a weapon—is portrayed with a mocking gaze and a repulsive, frightening facial expression, reinforcing a message of hate. Furthermore, the soldier’s attire, which reflects Islamic elements, is another detail that supports this rhetoric of hostility (Image 3).



Image 4.

Source: Published On Social Media Platform X On May 26, 2023.
Illustrator: Turkish Caricaturist *Hasan Karaca*

Signifier	Signified	Sign
Person 1	The Little Prince fairy tale character on a planet	Asking a question with astonishment
People	Refugees	People so desperate that they escape even into space
Setting	Space and planets	A peaceful place to live
Text	“How did you get here so quickly?”	Surprise

Denotative Meaning

The Little Prince character asks the refugees, “How did you get here so quickly?” with astonishment.

Connotative Meaning

Desperate migration of people searching for a place to live in peace.

Myth - Ideological Meaning

This caricature constructs a myth that frames refugees as borderless, ever-advancing figures whose presence extends even to spaces imagined as pure, distant, and untouched. By placing refugees in outer space—a symbol of ultimate escape or sanctuary—the image implies that no place is immune to the perceived “refugee influx.” The astonishment of the Little Prince suggests an underlying belief that refugees appear everywhere, unexpectedly and intrusively, reinforcing the stereotype of migrants as relentless outsiders who transcend boundaries and disrupt idealized spaces. This myth not only trivializes the structural causes of forced migration but also embeds the ideological notion that refugees are an overwhelming, inescapable presence. In doing so, it implicitly normalizes exclusionary attitudes by suggesting that even the most peaceful and remote realms are threatened by the arrival of the ‘Other.’

In this caricature, the *Little Prince*, a fairy tale character known for his travels to various planets, is shown in conversation, expressing shock at how far refugees have reached—even populating outer space. The question, “How did you even get here?” carries an ironic tone of hate speech, implying that the presence of refugees is unwelcome even in space. While the Little Prince is illustrated in a charming astronaut outfit, the refugees are depicted with beards and loose green clothing, reinforcing a stereotypical Muslim image and deliberately generating a negative impression through visual coding (Image 4).



Image 5.

Source: Published On Social Media Platform X On November 29, 2021.
Illustrator: Jordanian Caricaturist *Emad Hajjaj*.

Signifier	Signified	Sign
Person 1	A drowning person's hand	A final hopeful attempt to survive
People	Drowned individuals on the water's surface	People whose dreams have ended
Object 1	Two ships with British and French flags, symbolizing the UK and the EU	Countries shifting responsibility for rescuing refugees
Object 2	Lifebuoy with French and UK flags and names	Rescue tool rendered ineffective
Setting	The English Channel between France and the UK	Floating corpses and a refugee's hand sinking into the water

Denotative Meaning

Connotative Meaning

The countries' inability to agree and their attempts to pass responsibility to one another.

The end of refugees' struggle for survival.

Myth (Mit) – Ideological Meaning

This caricature constructs a myth that exposes Europe's humanitarian self-image as a facade. The drowning refugees symbolize the fatal consequences of Europe's political calculations, while the lifebuoys marked with national flags represent the illusion of aid that never materializes. By visually placing the UK and France as passive spectators of death, the image challenges the myth of Europe as a moral protector and instead frames it as an actor complicit in tragedy through deliberate inaction. This reinforces an ideological critique that Western nations, despite advocating human rights and humanitarian principles, prioritize border control and diplomatic rivalry over human life. Thus, the caricature exposes the structural hypocrisy of European migration governance: the rhetoric of compassion masks systems of exclusion that lead to preventable deaths.

This caricature addresses the migrant tragedy in the English Channel on November 24, 2021, where a boat carrying refugees from France to the UK capsized, resulting in the death of 27 individuals. The caricature places blame on both France and the UK for this incident. Naval commanders representing these two countries are shown on ships, and lifebuoys bearing their flags and names are used as visual symbols to emphasize the failure and complicity of these nations, reinforcing a tone of condemnation (Image 5).



Image 6.

Source: Published On Social Media Platform X On July 6, 2023.
Illustrator: Austrian Caricaturist *Thomas Wizany*.

Signifier	Signified	Sign
Animal	A watchdog in its kennel	Payment received for keeping refugees away
Text 1	Dog’s growl	Turkey's stance of blocking migrants after being compensated
Text 2	Sign saying “Refugees keep away!”	The rejection of refugees
Object 1	Warning sign	A notice to migrants
Object 2	Watchdog kennel in Turkish flag colors	Turkey protecting Europe by preventing refugee movement
Object 3	Bone marked “3 billion euros”	Payment to Turkey for halting migrant flow
Object 4	Fez on the watchdog’s head	A Western symbol of Turkish identity
Setting	Neighborhood with homes and gardens	Representation of the European Union

Denotative Meaning

The watchdog, having received its reward, protects its owner’s home.

Connotative Meaning

Turkey’s prevention of refugee access to Europe in return for financial aid.

Myth - Ideological Meaning

This caricature constructs a myth that frames Türkiye as a subordinate guardian of Europe—obedient, controllable, and motivated primarily by monetary gain. By depicting Türkiye as a

watchdog wearing a fez, the image reproduces long-standing orientalist stereotypes that portray the country as primitive, animalistic, and servile to Western authority. The “3 billion euros” bone reinforces an ideological narrative in which Türkiye is not a sovereign actor managing a humanitarian crisis, but a paid enforcer acting on Europe’s behalf to keep perceived “undesirable” populations out. The European neighborhood in the background symbolizes a protected, civilized space that must remain untouched, while Türkiye is assigned the role of the gatekeeper positioned at the margins of “European civilization.” The myth thus legitimizes a hierarchical East–West divide: Europe embodies order and purity, while Türkiye embodies a compliant, semi-civilized buffer zone whose value is reduced to its utility in controlling migration flows.

This caricature portrays Türkiye in a derogatory manner for accepting €3 billion in return for halting the influx of asylum seekers into Europe. Depicting Turkey as a watchdog wearing a fez—symbolizing a stereotypical Turkish identity—attempts to degrade the country. However, in reality, the European Union allocated these funds to support health care, education, social protection, skill development, and employment opportunities for Syrian refugees in Türkiye. Despite this, the caricature suggests that Turkey misuses these funds for its own benefit without supporting the refugees, thereby promoting a misleading and critical narrative (Image 6).



Image 7.

Source: Published On The Social Media Platform X On March 2, 2020.

Illustrator: Greek Caricaturist *Periklis Koulifetis*.

Signifier	Signified	Sign
Hand 1	Gesture of blocking	Turkey preventing migrants at its border
Hand 2	Gesture of blocking	EU countries preventing migrants at their borders
Setting	People trapped between two hands	Refugees suffering due to obstructions by both Turkey and the EU
Object 1	Sleeve in Turkish flag colors	Turkey’s barrier against migrants
Object 2	Sleeve in EU flag colors	EU’s resistance to migrant entry

Denotative Meaning

Injured or dying people squeezed between two hands.

Connotative Meaning

Turkey’s prevention of refugee access to Europe in return for financial aid.

Myth - Ideological Meaning

This caricature constructs a myth that frames Türkiye and the European Union as equally oppressive actors whose border regimes collectively produce refugee suffering. By visualizing the two hands closing in on vulnerable bodies, the image conveys an ideological narrative in which geopolitical power is exercised through physical and symbolic violence against migrants. The Turkish and EU flag-colored sleeves imply that national and supranational identities are weaponized to justify exclusion, turning borders into tools of coercion rather than protection. The myth also reinforces a broader political discourse that portrays states as prioritizing territorial sovereignty above humanitarian responsibility. Refugees are depicted as crushed between competing political agendas, suggesting that neither Türkiye nor the EU genuinely values their lives. This framing exposes a deeper critique: migration governance is not a failure of coordination but a deliberate system that preserves European stability by externalizing humanitarian burdens onto Türkiye while simultaneously portraying Türkiye as complicit. Thus, the cartoon perpetuates the ideological belief that both actors sustain an unequal global order in which refugees exist only as bodies controlled, marginalized, or sacrificed for political convenience.

Although Turkey, unlike the European Union, opened its borders to allow refugees who wished to return to their home countries, the caricature portrays Turkey in alignment with the EU's border-closing policy. It depicts Turkey as a blood-stained murderer, reinforcing a message of hate speech. Despite Turkey’s efforts to provide adequate living conditions for refugees within its borders, these efforts are disregarded, and the country is criticized on par with the EU’s rigid policies (Image 7).



Image 8.

Source: Published On The Social Media Platform X On December 5, 2024.

Illustrator: Yemeni Caricaturist *Kamal Sharaf*.

Signifier	Signified	Sign
Person 1	Elderly man offering goods	Turkey’s ongoing trade with Israel

Person 2	Elderly man dispatching a Turkish soldier	Turkey sending military forces to Syria
Person 3	Turkish soldier with ISIS armband, holding a severed head	Portrayal of Turkish military involvement in Syria with a terrorist image
Object 1	Israeli flag	The State of Israel
Object 2	Oil and humanitarian supplies in a ship	Products traded by Turkey to Israel
Object 3	Syrian flag	The State of Syria

Denotative Meaning

Commercial goods to Israel and military deployment to Syria.

Myth - Ideological Meaning

This caricature constructs a myth that portrays Türkiye as a duplicitous regional actor that simultaneously collaborates with opposing sides for its own benefit. By depicting Türkiye as an elderly man conducting trade with Israel while dispatching a violent, ISIS-affiliated soldier to Syria, the image embeds a narrative of moral corruption and geopolitical opportunism. The fez-wearing elderly figure reinforces an orientalist stereotype, presenting Türkiye as backward yet manipulative, acting through covert alliances and hidden agendas. At the mythic level, the caricature suggests that Türkiye is not a neutral or humanitarian actor in regional conflicts, but a destabilizing force that profits from war, supports extremist violence, and maintains pragmatic relations with Israel despite public political rhetoric. This framing feeds an ideological narrative that positions Türkiye as deceptive, untrustworthy, and complicit in atrocities. Additionally, by associating Turkish military forces with ISIS imagery, the myth delegitimizes Türkiye’s security policies and recasts the nation as aligned with terrorism—an extreme representation that amplifies hate speech and reinforces anti-Türkiye sentiment on international platforms.

Connotative Meaning

Turkey maintaining favorable trade with Israel while allegedly supporting violence in Syria.

In this caricature, Turkey is portrayed as an old and indifferent man wearing a fez resembling the Turkish flag, depicting a negative image of the country. Turkey is shown as engaging with Israel and Syria solely for self-interest, and hate speech is prominently featured. The products used in trade with Israel are illustrated in red, evoking the color of blood, while a soldier sent to Syria is portrayed with visual elements suggesting support for ISIS. The soldier is shown with details such as ISIS-branded armbands and a beard, holding a severed human head—aiming to imply complicity in massacres. However, in reality, Turkey halted all imports and exports with Israel as of May 2, 2024, covering all products. Despite this, the caricature published on December 5, 2024 distorts the facts to reinforce hate speech (Image 8).



Image 9.

Source: Published On The Social Media Platform X On March 11, 2025.

Illustrator: Turkish Caricaturist *Hasan Kaçan*.

Signifier	Signified	Sign
Person 1	Israeli soldier wearing a kippah	Representation of an Israeli perpetrator of massacre
Person 2	Israeli caricaturist wearing a kippah	Supporter of the Israeli soldier's actions
Setting	War-torn city, ruins, smoke, blood pools	Consequences of Israeli bombings and massacres
Object 1	Jar of blood in soldier's hand	Depiction of Israeli military atrocities
Object 2	Blood-stained pen, paper, and desk of caricaturist	Media support of Israel's violent actions
Object 3	Empty, blood-filled jars	State-sponsored support to media from Israel
Text	"If you need more blood to draw, we'll bring it."	State endorsement of massacres through media

Denotative Meaning

Israeli soldier supplying blood to the caricaturist.

Myth - Ideological Meaning

This caricature constructs a myth portraying Israel as a state that systematically produces, endorses, and circulates violence through both military power and media propaganda. The Israeli soldier carrying a jar of blood symbolizes the normalization of brutality, suggesting that violence is not an unwanted consequence but a deliberate and continual practice. The presence of the caricaturist wearing a kippah, calmly drawing with a blood-stained pen, reinforces the myth that Israeli media willingly collaborates with state violence, functioning as an ideological apparatus that sanitizes, distorts, or conceals atrocities. The statement "If you need more blood to

Connotative Meaning

Israeli state supporting media in legitimizing violent acts.

draw, we’ll bring it” implies an institutional synergy between the military and the media, where violent acts are converted into narrative tools. This myth draws upon a broader ideological critique: that state power, military aggression, and propaganda function in a unified system, producing a self-sustaining cycle of dehumanization. It depicts Israel not merely as a geopolitical actor but as a symbolic machine of violence, using media to legitimize cruelty and suppress moral accountability.

It is known that caricaturist published through the official X account of Israel’s Ministry of Defense have been used as propaganda tools to spread hate speech and defame Hamas via social media and caricaturists. In response, this caricature by Hasan Kaçan depicts an Israeli soldier armed and dressed in camouflage, holding a jar full of blood with a face full of rage and brutality. The soldier, apparently just returned from a massacre and seemingly ready to continue, speaks with the caricaturist. Meanwhile, the Israeli caricaturist remains silently at work, continuing to produce hate-filled caricatures targeting Hamas, thereby aiding in the concealment of Israel's atrocities (Image 9).



Image 10.

Source: Published On The Social Media Platform X On January 17, 2024.

Signifier	Signified	Sign
Person 1	Scandinavian female warrior	European expulsion of Muslims
Person 2	Muslim refugee depicted as a pig	Dehumanization and deportation of Muslim refugees
Object 1	Spear and shield	Use of coercive power
Object 2	Qur'an	Islam and its marginalization in Europe
Setting	Map showing Western Europe, Turkey, and Turkic republics	Representations of Islamic geography
Denotative Meaning		Connotative Meaning
A female warrior kicking a Muslim refugee out of the West.		Europe’s desire to distance itself from Islamic identity and culture.
Myth - Ideological Meaning		
This caricature constructs a myth that portrays Europe as a culturally pure, mythic homeland reclaiming itself from an “Islamic other.” The Scandinavian warrior symbolizes the revival of Europe’s imagined pre-modern ethnic identity rooted in homogeneity and heroic ancestry. Depicting the Muslim figure as a pig—a deeply degrading symbol in Islamic tradition—amplifies an ideological narrative of Muslims as impure, uncivilized, and		

incompatible with European civilization. The myth also reinforces an exclusionary narrative of *civilizational clash*: Europe is imagined as a fortress defending itself from an invading culture considered inferior and contaminating. The rejection of the Qur'an symbolizes not just anti-Muslim sentiment but the erasure of Islam's place in European history. Thus, the image legitimizes cultural cleansing by appealing to mythic notions of European purity, identity, and ancestral heritage.

This caricature openly expresses hate speech against Muslims by reflecting Europeans' longing for their warrior past and a homogenous, non-Muslim population structure. Using a warrior woman figure from Scandinavian culture and mythology, it emphasizes Europe's desire to return to its past. The figure is depicted kicking away a Muslim character with a hateful glare. The Muslim figure, dressed in Islamic attire, is further humiliated by being illustrated in the form of a pig—an animal considered impure (*najis*) in Islam. Additionally, the act of throwing away the holy book of Islam implies not only hostility toward Muslims, but also a broader antagonism toward Islam as a whole (Image 10).

Discussion and Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that hate speech targeting migrants on the X platform is constructed through recurring visual and discursive patterns—most notably economic burden, cultural threat, and security risk narratives. These patterns align closely with existing scholarship showing that humor-based visual content serves as a powerful medium for circulating xenophobic attitudes. Shifman's (2014) work on the memetic logic of networked humor helps illuminate how caricatures examined in this study function as “spreadable” ideological units: their humorous framing reduces the perceived severity of discriminatory messages and increases users' willingness to share, like, and normalize such content. In this regard, humor operates not merely as an aesthetic choice but as a strategic rhetorical tool that embeds hate speech within seemingly harmless playfulness.

The present study also supports Enarsson and Lindgren's (2019) conceptualization of *xenophobic visibility*, which emphasizes how visual forms of communication simplify, essentialize, and racialize marginalized groups. Caricatures portraying migrants as invaders, criminals, or culturally incompatible subjects contribute to what they describe as a “visual grammar of exclusion.” In the sample analyzed here, migrants are repeatedly depicted as foreign bodies threatening the social, cultural, and territorial integrity of destination countries—echoing earlier findings that digital imagery often amplifies social distance and reinforces processes of othering.

Moreover, the study contributes to discussions on the political instrumentalization of online visuals. As demonstrated in literature on digital nationalism and polarized online publics, visual satire frequently reflects and reproduces ideological cleavages. The caricatures analyzed here support this argument: most images were produced by accounts with explicit political orientations, reinforcing the view that hate-laden visuals serve as ideological weapons within ongoing political debates. This correlates with research showing that satirical online content increasingly functions as a form of participatory propaganda, allowing ordinary users to take part in the reproduction of nationalist, exclusionary, or anti-immigrant narratives. The role of platforms also emerges as a critical dimension. Digital media scholarship has emphasized how algorithmic visibility—driven by engagement metrics—privileges emotionally charged, provocative, or entertaining content. The entertaining and ironic tone of caricatures examined here aligns with this dynamic. Humor makes discriminatory depictions more acceptable, while the platform's engagement-driven architecture increases their spreadability. In line with Shifman's argument that humor enhances circulation, the present findings indicate that humorous hate speech travels farther and faster than explicit hostility, thereby shaping public perception more subtly but more effectively.

According to the study findings, the semiotic and discursive strategies through which hate speech targeting migrants is produced in the analyzed caricatures are presented under three main thematic axes: (1) Political Manipulation, (2) Cultural Stereotyping, and (3) Religious Exclusion and Dehumanization. This thematic structure not only describes the findings but also aims to analytically compare how different caricatures generate converging or diverging ideological meaning structures.

Political Manipulation

Caricatures within this theme frame migration as a matter of geopolitical interest, international bargaining, and inter-state power relations, positioning migrants as strategic instruments used by political actors. Consistent with the Council of Europe's definitions of hate speech, these visuals portray states and leaders as actors who either instrumentalize migrants to deflect threats or treat them as bargaining chips in exchange for cooperation. In many of the caricatures, Türkiye is depicted alternately as Europe's border guard or as a weak actor motivated by financial gain. The semiotic elements employed in this theme present both Türkiye's and Europe's migration policies as internally contradictory, manipulative, and detached from humanitarian concerns. In doing so, hate speech becomes indirectly legitimized through the political context that the caricatures construct.

Cultural Stereotyping

This theme encompasses caricatures that symbolically mark migrants through notions of cultural incompatibility, backwardness, primitiveness, or "foreignness." Common representational strategies observed in the sample include ethnic markers (beards, clothing, body posture), traditional imagery, and spatial oppositions such as West → order/civilization versus East → chaos/backwardness. Migrants are frequently depicted as threats to social cohesion, sources of cultural conflict, or unwanted elements in public space. By assigning negative cultural codes to difference, these caricatures reproduce hate speech beneath a humorous veneer and reinforce existing social prejudices.

Religious Exclusion and Dehumanization

Caricatures in this thematic axis generate overt hate speech through religious symbols and religious identity markers. Common representational strategies include the animalization of Muslim figures, the use of religious symbols in degrading contexts, and visual cues implying violence, exclusion, or hostility toward "other" religious groups. This thematic area directly corresponds to the Council of Europe's definition of hate speech, which emphasizes discrimination, denigration, and incitement to hostility based on religion.

In these caricatures, religion is mobilized as a tool to legitimize cultural hierarchies and symbolic domination, making visible the discursive strategies through which migrants are dehumanized. This thematic analysis reveals the multilayered interaction among humor, ideology, and digital communication. Caricatures do not merely reflect social attitudes; they function as powerful visual texts through which discriminatory discourses, ideological biases, and cultural or political conflicts are reproduced. The "innocent" appearance of humor allows hate speech to be presented in an implicit form, fostering broader acceptance, higher engagement, and faster circulation among users. In this way, digital platforms become ecosystems conducive to the proliferation of hate speech. Within this framework, the study offers a critical perspective on both the dynamics of online hate speech and the political role of visual culture in the digital public sphere.

Conclusion

Finally, this study reinforces the argument that digital hate speech cannot be understood solely as textual discourse; it must also be examined through visual culture. Visuals compress complex ideological messages into instantly recognizable symbols—Islamic attire, national flags, weapons, animals, or mythical figures—each activating culturally embedded associations. This confirms previous scholarship showing that visual hate speech relies heavily on symbolic condensation, where a single image communicates narratives of threat, fear, and exclusion without overt verbal hostility. In sum, by situating its findings within broader scholarly debates, this study demonstrates that the hate-laden caricatures circulating on the X platform reflect and reinforce wider ideological currents. They operationalize humor as a vehicle for discrimination, mobilize recognizable symbolic codes to construct migrants as threats, and exploit platform dynamics to ensure widespread dissemination. These results highlight the importance of developing visual-literacy-based approaches to combating online hate speech, moving beyond text-centered policies and recognizing the increasingly multimodal nature of digital hostility. This study analyzes how hate speech against migrants is constructed and disseminated through caricatures shared on social media platforms. Based on the case of

the X platform (formerly Twitter), the research reveals how hate speech is shaped, either explicitly or implicitly, via visual satire. The main findings of the study indicate that hate speech targeting migrants tends to concentrate around certain dominant themes. Notably, narratives such as economic burden, cultural threat, and security risk frequently appear in the analyzed caricatures. These themes are often presented through humor, making them more readily accepted by broader audiences. The semiotic analysis employed in the examination of the caricatures provided valuable insights into the role of humor and visual elements in the spread of hate speech. Migrants are frequently depicted as “foreign” and as “threatening figures” in these visuals, thereby reinforcing existing social prejudices. The study also found that such content is predominantly produced and circulated by accounts with specific political and ideological orientations.

The research highlights that social media platforms possess significant potential to amplify hate speech. The entertaining and ironic nature of caricatures can render hate speech more implicit, which in turn facilitates greater sharing and interaction among users. Therefore, the study underscores the necessity of implementing more effective monitoring and regulatory mechanisms on social media to combat hate speech. In conclusion, caricatures containing hate speech against migrants do not merely reflect individual prejudices but function as powerful tools that shape broader public perceptions. To prevent the proliferation of such discourse, it is essential to strengthen social media policies, promote media literacy, and expand public awareness initiatives.

Contributions, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research

Contributions: This study makes several significant contributions to the literature on digital hate speech, migration discourse, and visual culture. First, by analyzing hate speech through caricatures circulated on the X platform, the research expands existing scholarship that has traditionally focused on textual forms of hostility. The study demonstrates how humor, visual symbolism, and semiotic strategies collectively function as powerful mechanisms for normalizing xenophobic narratives. Second, the thematic classification developed in this study—Political Manipulation, Cultural Stereotyping, and Religious Exclusion and Dehumanization—offers an analytical framework that can be employed in future examinations of multimodal hate speech. Finally, by situating its findings within international legal standards on hate speech, particularly those of the Council of Europe, the study underscores the importance of distinguishing between legitimate satire and discriminatory visual communication that perpetuates hostility.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The sample consists of only ten caricatures, which, although selected through purposeful sampling, cannot fully represent the vast and diverse visual ecosystem of the X platform. Additionally, the analysis focuses exclusively on publicly shared caricatures and does not account for algorithmic amplification dynamics, private networks, or platform-specific visibility patterns that may influence the spread of hate speech. The study also centers primarily on migration-related visuals targeting Muslim-majority groups, and thus its findings may not be generalizable to other marginalized populations.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could broaden the scope by incorporating larger datasets and employing computational visual analysis methods to identify patterns across thousands of images. Comparative studies across different platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Facebook) could further illuminate how platform architecture shapes the circulation and reception of visual hate speech. Moreover, user-centered approaches—such as interviews or surveys—could help explore how audiences interpret, internalize, or resist such caricatures. Finally, cross-national analyses examining how different political contexts influence the production and meaning of hate-laden visuals would provide a deeper understanding of the global dynamics of digital hostility.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Amaç

Sosyal medya platformları, demokratik katılımı ve çoğulcu söylemlerin dolaşımını teşvik etme potansiyeline sahip olmakla birlikte, aynı zamanda dezenformasyonun, kutuplaşmanın ve özellikle nefret söyleminin yayılması için de uygun bir zemin sunmaktadır. Sosyal medyanın bu ikili doğası, dijital iletişim araçlarının hem ifade özgürlüğünü destekleyen demokratik işlevini hem de ayrımcı ve dışlayıcı ideolojilerin normalleşmesine katkıda bulunan işlevini sorgulamayı zorunlu kılmaktadır. Bu durum, dijital mecraların toplumsal etkilerini eleştirel bir perspektiften analiz etmeyi gerektirmektedir.

Bu çalışma, sosyal medya platformu X üzerinde karikatürler aracılığıyla anti-göçmen nefret söyleminin nasıl inşa edildiğini, yayıldığını ve meşrulaştırıldığını incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Araştırma, 1 Ocak 2015 ile 1 Nisan 2025 tarihleri arasında kapsayan bir zaman dilimini ele almakta ve "göçmen," "karikatür," "Türkiye," "Suriye," "caricature," "cartoon" ve "immigrant" gibi anahtar kelimelerle tespit edilen göçmen temalı karikatürlere odaklanmaktadır. Veri seti, özellikle Türkiye'nin sosyo-politik bağlamında Suriyeli mülteciler olmak üzere, göçmen toplulukları görsel ve dilsel olarak hedef alan karikatürleri içermektedir. Araştırma, karikatürlerin nefret söyleminin yayılmasındaki rolünü, mizah ile eleştiri arasındaki sınırların nasıl belirlendiğini ve bu tür içeriklerin toplumsal algıları nasıl şekillendirdiğini değerlendirecektir. Çalışmanın amacı doğrultusunda aşağıdaki araştırma soruları ele alınmaktadır: Karikatürlerde göçmenler nasıl temsil edilmektedir? Bu karikatürlerde göçmenler nefret söylemine maruz bırakılmakta mıdır?

Yöntem

Bu çalışmada, 2015–2025 yılları arasında X platformunda göç temalarını konu edinen karikatürler araştırmanın evrenine dâhil edilmiştir. X platformunun arama çubuğunda “Türkiye”, “Suriye”, “karikatür”, “cartoon” ve “göçmen” gibi anahtar kelimeler kullanılarak bir tarama gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Araştırmanın evrenini, 2015–2025 yılları arasında X platformunda göçmenlerle ilgili paylaşılan karikatürler oluşturmaktadır. Örneklem ise, nefret söylemi içeren 10 karikatürden oluşmaktadır. Bu karikatürler, görsel metinlerdeki açık (denotatif) ve örtük (konotatif) anlamların eleştirel biçimde okunmasına olanak tanıyan Roland Barthes’ın göstergebilimsel analiz yöntemi kullanılarak incelenmiştir.

Göstergebilimin en temel unsuru ve çıkış noktası “gösterge”dir. Gösterge, somut ya da soyut diğer öğelere gönderme yapan ve çeşitli duyular aracılığıyla algılanabilen bir unsurdur (Fiske, 2003, s. 62–63). Saussure, göstergeyi iki bileşenden oluşan bir yapı olarak tanımlar: gösteren ve gösterilen. Gösterilen, zihinde oluşan soyut kavramı; gösteren ise bu soyut kavramın somut biçimde temsil edildiği unsuru ifade eder (Civelek & Türkay, 2020, s. 776). Göstergedeki anlamlandırma süreci, gösteren ile gösterilen arasındaki ilişkiden doğar. Gösteren algılandığında, ona bağlı olan anlam—yani gösterilen—zihinde belirir.

Barthes’e göre anlam iki düzeyde gerçekleşir: gösterme (denotation) ve yan anlam (connotation) (Çağlar, 2012, s. 26). Birinci düzey olan gösterme, gösteren ile gösterilen arasındaki doğrudan ilişkiyi ve göstergenin dış dünyadaki göndergesiyle kurduğu bağı ifade eder. İkinci düzey olan yan anlam ise, göstergelerin kullanıcıların kültürel değerleriyle etkileşime girdiği anlam düzeyidir. Her iki süreçte de en dikkat çekici unsur göstergenin kendisidir (Fiske, 2003, s. 115–116). Bu doğrultuda, bu çalışmada Saussure’ün anlamın temel taşı olarak gördüğü gösterge; gösteren (somut biçim) ve gösterilen (atfedilen anlam) boyutlarıyla incelenmiştir.

Roland Barthes’ın göstergebilimsel çerçevesi, görsel temsil biçimlerinin ardında yatan örtük ideolojik yapıları açığa çıkarmada özellikle işlevseldir. Bu kuramsal bakış açısıyla çalışma, görsel göstergelerin, simgesel kodların ve anlatı stratejilerinin nasıl seferber edilerek ilk bakışta sıradan izleyici tarafından fark edilmeyen, ancak kamusal algıların şekillenmesinde etkili olan anlamlar ürettiğini incelemektedir. Örneğin, karikatürlerde tekrarlanan hayvansı tasvirler, kriminal ikonografi ya da abartılmış etnik özellikler gibi unsurlar, göçmenlerin insanlık dışı bırakılmasına ve oryantalist stereotiplerin pekiştirilmesine hizmet etmektedir. Aynı zamanda mizahi çerçeveleme, bu nefret söylemi biçimlerini söylemsel olarak meşrulaştıran ve belirli dijital topluluklar içerisinde toplumsal olarak kabul edilebilir, hatta eğlenceli hale getiren bir kalkan işlevi görmektedir.

Bulgular

Çalışmanın bulgularını daha da sağlamlaştırmak amacıyla, Avrupa Konseyi'nin nefret söylemini tanımlamak ve tespit etmek için geliştirdiği uluslararası hukuki çerçeveye başvurulmuştur. Bu normatif yaklaşım, izin verilebilir hiciv ile belirli gruplara yönelik nefret, ayrımcılık veya şiddet çağrısı içeren içerikler arasındaki sınırın daha net bir şekilde çizilmesini sağlamaktadır. Yapılan analiz, incelenen karikatürlerin önemli bir bölümünün; göçmenleri ulusal kimliğe, kamu güvenliğine ve toplumsal uyuma yönelik bir tehdit olarak sunmak için suçluluk, kültürel uyumsuzluk ve ekonomik yük temsillerine dayandığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Araştırmanın bulguları, mizah, ideoloji ve dijital iletişim arasındaki karmaşık etkileşimi gözler önüne sermektedir. Karikatürler, yalnızca toplumsal tutumların yansımaları değil, aynı zamanda ayrımcı dünya görüşlerinin inşasında ve pekiştirilmesinde etkin rol oynayan araçlar olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu görsel metinler, nefret söylemini görünüşte zararsız olan mizah ve hiciv alanı içine yerleştirerek kamuoyunu etkileyen duygulanımsal araçlar işlevi görmektedir. Söz konusu karikatürlerde kullanılan göstergebilimsel ve söylemsel stratejilerin çözülmesi yoluyla çalışma, çevrim içi nefret söyleminin dinamiklerine ve dijital kamusal alanda görsel kültürün oynadığı role dair eleştirel bir perspektif sunmaktadır.

Araştırmanın temel bulguları, göçmenlere yönelik nefret söyleminin belirli baskın temalar etrafında yoğunlaştığını göstermektedir. Özellikle ekonomik yük, kültürel tehdit ve güvenlik riski gibi anlatıların, incelenen karikatürlerde sıkça yer aldığı görülmektedir. Bu temalar çoğunlukla mizah yoluyla sunulmakta, bu da söz konusu içeriklerin daha geniş kitleler tarafından daha kolay kabul edilmesini sağlamaktadır.

Karikatürlerin incelenmesinde kullanılan göstergebilimsel analiz, nefret söyleminin yayılmasında mizahın ve görsel unsurların rolüne ilişkin önemli bulgular ortaya koymuştur. Göçmenler bu görsellerde sıklıkla “yabancı” ve “tehdit unsuru” olarak tasvir edilmekte, bu da mevcut toplumsal önyargıların pekişmesine neden olmaktadır. Ayrıca, çalışmada bu tür içeriklerin çoğunlukla belirli politik ve ideolojik yönelime sahip hesaplar tarafından üretildiği ve dolaşıma sokulduğu saptanmıştır.

Araştırma, sosyal medya platformlarının nefret söylemini güçlendirme potansiyelinin yüksek olduğunu da ortaya koymaktadır. Karikatürlerin eğlendirici ve ironik yapısı, nefret söyleminin örtük bir biçimde sunulmasına yol açmakta; bu durum ise kullanıcılar arasında daha fazla paylaşım ve etkileşime zemin hazırlamaktadır. Bu nedenle çalışma, dijital platformlarda nefret söylemini önlemeye yönelik daha etkili denetim ve düzenleme mekanizmalarının uygulanması gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır.

Bu bölümde, incelenen karikatürlerde göçmenlere yönelik nefret söyleminin hangi göstergebilimsel ve söylemsel stratejiler üzerinden üretildiği üç ana tematik eksen altında sunulmaktadır: (1) Siyasal Manipülasyon, (2) Kültürel Stereotipleştirme, ve (3) Dinsel Dışlama ve İnsanlıktan Çıkarma. Bu tematik yapı, bulguların yalnızca betimlenmesini değil, farklı karikatürlerin ideolojik açıdan nasıl ortak ya da ayrışan anlam dünyaları ürettiğini analitik bir karşılaştırmayla ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Siyasal Manipülasyon: Bu temada yer alan karikatürler, göç olgusunu jeopolitik çıkar, uluslararası pazarlık ve devletlerarası güç ilişkileri bağlamında ele almakta; göçmenleri siyasal aktörler tarafından kullanılan stratejik araçlar olarak konumlandırırmaktadır. Avrupa Konseyi'nin nefret söylemi tanımlarına uygun olarak, bu görsellerde devletler ve liderler, ya tehditleri savuşturmak amacıyla göçmenleri araçsallaştıran ya da işbirliği karşılığında pazarlık unsuru hâline getiren aktörler olarak resmedilmektedir.

Karikatürlerde Türkiye, kimi zaman Avrupa'nın sınır bekçisi, kimi zaman da maddi çıkar karşılığında hareket eden zayıf bir aktör şeklinde çerçevelenmiştir. Bu temada kullanılan göstergeler, hem Türkiye'nin hem Avrupa'nın göçmen politikalarını içsel çelişkilerle dolu, manipülatif ve insani kaygılardan uzak yapılar olarak sunmakta; böylece nefret söylemi siyasal bağlam üzerinden dolaylı biçimde meşrulaştırılmaktadır.

Kültürel Stereotipleştirme: Bu tema, göçmenlerin kültürel uyumsuzluk, arkaiklik, geri kalmışlık veya “yabancılık” üzerinden sembolik olarak işaretlendiği karikatürleri kapsamaktadır. İncelenen örneklerde sıkça görülen temsil stratejileri arasında; etnik kodlar (sakallar, kıyafetler, beden dili), geleneksel imgeler, mekânsal karşıtlıklar (Batı → düzen/medeniyet; Doğu → kaos/geri kalmışlık) yer almaktadır. Bu karikatürlerde göçmenler, çoğunlukla toplumsal uyuma tehdit, kültürel

çatışmanın kaynağı veya kamusal alanda istenmeyen unsurlar şeklinde sunulmaktadır. Bu temsil biçimi, kültürel farklılıkları olumsuz kodlayarak nefret söylemini mizahi bir kabuk altında yeniden üretmekte ve toplumsal önyargıları pekiştirmektedir.

Dinsel Dışlama ve İnsanlıktan Çıkarma: Bu tematik ekseninde yer alan karikatürler, dini semboller ve dini kimlikler üzerinden doğrudan nefret söylemi üretmektedir. Bu görsellerde; müslüman figürlerin hayvanlaştırılması, dini sembollerini aşağılayıcı bağlamlarda kullanılması, “öteki dinler”e yönelik şiddet ve dışlama çağrışımları yaygın olarak görülmektedir. Bu tematik alan, Avrupa Konseyi’nin nefret söylemi tanımında vurgulanan din temelli ayrımcılık, aşağılama ve düşmanlığa teşvik unsurlarıyla tam uyumludur. Karikatürlerde din, kültürel üstünlük/altlık ilişkisini meşrulaştıran bir araç olarak kullanılmakta; göçmenlerin insanlıktan çıkarıldığı söylemsel stratejiler açıkça görünür hâle gelmektedir. Bu tematik çözümleme, mizah-ideoloji-dijital iletişim arasındaki etkileşimin çok katmanlı yapısını ortaya koymaktadır. Karikatürler yalnızca toplumsal tutumların yansıması değil, aynı zamanda; ayrımcı söylemlerin, ideolojik önyargıların, kültürel ve siyasal çatışmaların yeniden üretildiği güçlü görsel metinler olarak işlev görmektedir. Mizahın “masum” görünümü altında sunulan bu içerikler, nefret söylemini örtük hâle getirerek kullanıcılar arasında daha geniş kabul, daha fazla etkileşim ve daha hızlı dolaşım yaratmaktadır. Böylece dijital platformlar, nefret söyleminin çoğalmasına elverişli bir ekosistem hâline gelmektedir. Bu çerçevede çalışma, hem çevrim içi nefret söyleminin dinamiklerini hem de dijital kamusal alanda görsel kültürün politik etkisini eleştirel bir perspektifle ortaya koymaktadır.

Sınırlılıklar

Bu çalışma önemli katkılar sunmakla birlikte çeşitli sınırlılıklara da sahiptir. Öncelikle, örneklem yalnızca amaçlı örnekleme yoluyla seçilen on karikatürden oluşmaktadır; bu durum, X platformunun geniş ve çeşitlilik içeren görsel ekosistemini bütünüyle temsil etmeye imkân vermemektedir. Ayrıca analiz, yalnızca platformda kamuya açık biçimde paylaşılan karikatürlere odaklanmakta; nefret söyleminin yayılımını etkileyebilecek algoritmik yükseltme dinamikleri, özel ağlar ve platforma özgü görünürlük kalıpları değerlendirme dışı bırakılmaktadır. Çalışmanın bir diğer sınırlılığı ise, ağırlıklı olarak Müslüman çoğunluklu grupları hedef alan göç temalı görseller üzerine yoğunlaşmasıdır. Bu nedenle elde edilen bulguların diğer dezavantajlı veya dışlanmış toplumsal gruplara genellenebilirliği sınırlıdır. Öte yandan belli tarihler arasında seçilen anahtar kelimeler yoluyla ulaşılabilen karikatürler kapsamında analiz yapılması bir sınırlılık olarak kabul edilebilir.

Öneriler

Bu araştırma özellikle içerik düzenlemelerinde ifade özgürlüğü ile toplumsal zarar arasındaki dengeyi gözetken daha incelikli politika ve denetim mekanizmalarına ihtiyaç duyulduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca dijital medya okuryazarlığının artırılması, kullanıcıların eleştirel görsel okuma becerilerinin geliştirilmesi ve disiplinlerarası iş birliklerinin teşvik edilmesi, nefret söyleminin önlenmesine yönelik sürdürülebilir çözümler geliştirilmesi açısından büyük önem taşımaktadır.

Özgün Değer

Bu araştırma dijital ortamlarda göçmen karşıtı retoriğin nasıl üretildiği, dolaşıma sokulduğu ve tüketildiğine ilişkin dinamikleri derinlemesine analiz ederek, bu alandaki literatüre önemli bir katkı sunmaktadır. Karikatürler gibi çok kipli (multimodal) görsel anlatıların, yalnızca toplumsal önyargıları yansıtmakla kalmayıp aynı zamanda bu önyargıların yeniden üretilmesinde ve meşrulaştırılmasında aktif rol oynadığı gösterilmiştir. Bu bağlamda çalışma, dijital platformlarda giderek daha karmaşık hale gelen nefret söylemi biçimlerine karşı daha bütüncül ve çok boyutlu yaklaşımların gerekliliğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Ayrıca bu çalışma, söz konusu içeriklerin nasıl viral hâle geldiğine ilişkin mekanizmaları da incelemektedir. X platformunda karikatür biçimindeki nefret söylemi yalnızca bireysel kullanıcılar tarafından değil, aynı zamanda anonim trol hesaplar, botlar ve ideolojik yönelimli gruplar gibi koordineli ağlar tarafından da yaygınlaştırılmaktadır. Bu aktörler, nefret içerikli paylaşımların geniş kitlelere ulaşmasını sağlamak amacıyla stratejik olarak etiketler (hashtag), kullanıcı etiketleme (tagging) ve algoritmik manipülasyon gibi yöntemleri kullanmaktadır. Bu sistematik dolaşıma sokma süreci, göçmen karşıtı söylemlerin

görünürlüğünü ve toplumsal etkisini artırarak, düşmanlığın normalleşmesine ve kültürel sınırların daha da keskinleşmesine katkı sunmaktadır. Çalışmada bu konuya odaklanması toplumda gelişmesi gereken farkındalığı arttırmaya yardımcı olması bakımından önem arz etmektedir.