REPRODUCTION OF HATE CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE CONTEXT OF FOOTBALL FANATICISM*

FUTBOL FANATİZMİ BAĞLAMINDA SOSYAL MEDYADA NEFRET İÇERİĞİNİN YENİDEN ÜRETİMİ

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Abstract

This study scrutinizes hate content through the way it manifests in football. Social media platforms serve as prominent spaces for exchanging opinions about football. The research focuses on how hate content in the context of football is produced on Twitter through fan pages. In this context, posts containing elements of hate content from fan pages of the three football clubs in Turkey with the largest fan populations were analysed. It was found that the core elements of hate content, such as stigmatization, stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and othering, were directed at the rival club's material, moral, and historical values, as well as individuals in their management teams or footballers, media figures, and referees. The hate content in the posts by the fan groups was found to be constructed through the use of figurative language, slang expressions, profane content, and a threatening tone. This research contributes to understanding the role of social media in the production and dissemination of hate content, as well as identifying the role of fan pages in the emergence of hate content in football.

Keywords: Digital Media, Football Fanaticism, Hate Content, Communication Studies, Social Media.

Öz

Bu araştırmada nefret içeriği futbolda kendini gösterme şekilleriyle ele alınmaktadır. Sosyal medya platformları, futbol konusundaki fikir alışverişinin gerçekleştiği alanlardan biri olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Araştırmada futbol ekseninde nefret içeriği üretiminin taraftar sayfaları aracılığıyla Twitter'da nasıl gerçekleştiğine odaklanılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Türkiye'nin en fazla taraftar popülasyonuna sahip üç kulübünün taraftar sayfalarının nefret unsuru taşıyan gönderileri analiz edilmiştir. Nefret içeriğinin temel unsurları olan damgalamanın, stereotiplerin, önyargıların, ayrımcılık ve ötekileştirmenin rakip kulübün maddi, manevi, tarihsel değerleri, yönetici kadrosunda bulunan şahıslar veya futbolcular, medya mensupları ve hakemler hedef alınarak gerçekleştirildiği saptanmıştır. Üç büyük taraftar grubunun paylaşmış olduğu gönderilerde nefret içeriğinin mecazi dil kullanımı, argo ifadeler ve küfürlü içerikler ile tehditkar bir üslup ile üretildiği tespit edilmiştir. Bu araştırma, nefret içeriğinin üretiminde ve yayılmasında sosyal medyanın rolünün ortaya konulmasına ve futbolda nefret içeriğinin ortaya çıkışında taraftar sayfalarının rolünün saptanmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Medya, Futbol Fanatizmi, Nefret İçeriği, İletişim Çalışmaları, Sosyal Medya

INTRODUCTION

Today, hate speech in football has become a source of global concern that harms fans, players, coaches, and media figures. Findings from a study conducted by the English Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) in 2021 revealed that 44% of football players faced harassment and abuse on Twitter, resulting in the volume of hate speech nearly doubling within months. (https://www.thepfa.com/news/2021/8/4/online-abuse-ai-research-study-season-2020-21). Social media platforms enable fans to interact with players and clubs, which stands out as one of the positive outcomes of the digital media era; however, it is also crucial to ensure that such platforms are not turned into spaces for producing hate speech. This is essential for preserving football's unifying power and promoting healthy communication among audiences (Arimoro & Elgujja, 2019, p. 3). Considering that social media has become one of the most effective spaces for supporting football clubs, teams, players, and coaches, its potential to be used as a tool for expressing hate is also noteworthy.

The most influential factors triggering the spread of hate speech in football on digital media platforms are particularly media organizations, as well as official club accounts and highly influential fan pages. The provocative language used before matches between clubs with a high impact on public opinion with large number of fans plays an important role in the emergence of fanaticism and hooliganism. In addition to news organizations, clubs also contribute to the production and distribution of hate speech through their own social media accounts. By choosing themes based on their historical ties and past high-tension events, clubs engage in a virtual discourse war with each other through their posts, pushing the competition off the field and fostering divisive rhetoric among fans. The posts cause fans to adopt a more aggressive attitude toward fans of opposing teams, leading to the production of hate speech. On digital media platforms, fan groups seem to be in competition with each other in terms of stigmatizing, creating stereotypes, and using biased and otherising language addressing at rivals, media members, and referees.

The primary research problem of this study is how hate content in football is produced through fan pages. The study examines how hate content in football is produced and spread in digital media, focusing on the content shared by the fan groups of Turkey's three football clubs with the largest fan populations. In this context, the Twitter (When this study was carried out, the platform X was called Twitter) posts of the fan groups included in the study have been analysed as Twitter holds a significant position in terms of enabling public opinion formation and fostering interactivity on social media. This research contributes to revealing the role of social media in the production and spread of hate content and identifying the role of fan pages in the emergence of hate content in football. By moving beyond the well-known understanding of hate content based on political, cultural, and gender themes, this study is significant as it offers a different perspective by examining hate content in the context of football, which is a significant area of interest in today's world and in Turkey.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT
Hate Content and the Elements of Hate Content

Hate speech is defined in the decision of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (1997) as "all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance" (https://rm.coe.int/1680505d5b). This definition points to intolerance toward differences and specifies the characteristics of expressions that fall under the scope of hate speech. It outlines the boundaries of hate content and emphasizes that supporting, defending, justifying, or legitimizing discriminatory ideas against those who are different is included within this scope. Moreover, it refers to the incitement of negative thoughts and emotions toward those who are different and the dissemination of such negative opinions to wider audiences. The various forms of expression mentioned in the definition refer to the verbal, visual, or auditory elements that reproduce hate content. Another definition describes hate speech as a term that encompasses the entire spectrum of negative discourse – ranging from hate and incitement to hatred, to harassment, slander, insults, and aggressive words, nicknames, and possibly examples of extreme prejudice and bias, including words that express degradation, denigration, and insult (McGonagle, 2001; Jacobs & Potter, 1998). This definition highlights elements that are significant in the reproduction of hate content and specifies the characteristics an expression must carry to be considered within the scope of hate content. In this context,

it refers to the addresses and discrediting expressions directed at those perceived as different or those who are differentiated. By listing these elements, the definition underlines how hate content is reproduced and emphasizes how language is used in this reproduction process. Definitions of hate speech emphasize that it involves an approach that encourages discrimination against those perceived as different, and that individuals or groups considered different are marginalized and othered.

Hate speech is an expression of intolerance and lack of tolerance that paves the way for hate crimes (İnceoğlu & Sözeri, 2012, p. 24). Through hate speech, an individual is targeted based on their affiliation with a particular group, and in this process, significance is attributed to the group producing the hate speech (İnceoğlu & Çoban, 2014, p. 73). In order to analyse hate content, it is important to identify the components that constitute it. The most commonly used among these are stigma, stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and othering. Stigma, refers to the process of reducing someone to a position of diminished value, hindering social acceptance, and discrediting them (Goffman, 1963). Goffman (1963) states that the term stigma was originally designed by the Greeks to expose individuals who were considered to possess unusual and morally inferior qualities. Stigmatization is defined as "an attribution that diminishes a person's dignity by other members of society due to being considered outside the norms deemed 'normal' by that society" (Soygür & Özalp, 2005, p. 74). In the process of stigmatization, individuals are judged based on behaviours that are deemed acceptable or unacceptable by society, and those who display behaviours considered unacceptable are separated and labelled.

Stereotypes play a significant role in the reproduction of hate content. According to Walter Lippmann (1922), who first introduced the concept, stereotypes describe a person or group, refer to attributions related to them, and help us make judgments about them more easily. As this definition suggests, people express their opinions about a group through stereotypes. The concept of stereotype refers to statements that often include negative evaluations toward a group. In other words, stereotypes typically involve the negative conceptualization of a group. It is possible to consider stereotypes concerning a particular group as the seeds or foundations of hate content. Another component that constitutes hate content is prejudice. Prejudice is defined as a hostile attitude directed toward an individual solely because they belong to a particular group (Allport, 1958, p. 8). Intense negative emotions directed at those perceived as different contribute to the formation of hatred and its transformation into hate content.

Categorizing individuals or groups leads to the separation of these individuals or groups and the othering of those perceived as oppositional. In this regard, discrimination is defined as prejudice-based negative behaviour directed by an individual toward persons or groups perceived as different from themselves (Öztürk, 2017, p. 6). Discrimination is defined by the United Nations Human Rights Committee (1989) as "any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by all persons, on an equal footing, of all rights and freedoms." This definition highlights the separation of individuals and groups perceived as oppositional, the prevention of their ability to exercise their rights, and the treatment of these individuals as unaccepted. In the reproduction of hate content, in addition to discriminatory practices, othering also plays a significant role. Othering involves the use of prejudiced and exclusionary expressions by an individual toward someone who is not like them. In the process of othering, the individual interprets their own actions as good and correct, while attributing what is bad and wrong to those who are different (Taşyürek, 2019, p. 41). Dependent on the existence of opposing groups and built on the dialectics of phenomena, othering is fundamentally based on the polarization of us versus them (Şeker & Şimşek, 2011, p. 484). The "others" are viewed as flawed, disruptive, or problematic elements of society, and the rights of these othered groups are often restricted (Kılıç, 2011, p. 148). In this process, the group defined as us is praised and idealized, while the individuals labelled as others are associated with negative traits, and their perceived lack of social acceptability is emphasized.

In summary, a discourse network consisting of stigmatization, stereotypes, prejudices, divisive ideas, and othering emerges as the fundamental building blocks of hate content. In the formation and reproduction of hate content, it is not only negative opinions or beliefs about the othered individuals or groups that matter, but also the intense negative emotions directed toward them. These negative opinions

and emotions can be considered as triggering elements in the widespread dissemination of hate content.

Digital Media and Hate Content
Mass media is what makes hate speech visible (Akgül, 2020, p. 60). For instance, news reports may incite prejudice against the "other" by portraying marginalized groups as sources of risk through the use of negative, sarcastic expressions, profanity, insults, and derogatory language (İnceoğlu & Sözeri, 2012, p. 24). Elements of hate content can be observed not only in news reporting, but also in opinion columns, television series, films, entertainment shows, and sports programs.

Hate speech, shaped through a range of historical, social, political, and cognitive processes, is continually reproduced and circulated by the media, and the boundary between freedom of expression and hate speech is becoming increasingly blurred on digital platforms (Öztekin, 2015, p. 935). Digital media plays a particularly important role in the reproduction and widespread dissemination of hate content. The leading characteristics of digital media are interactivity, asynchrony (being asynchronous), network structure, modularity, and numerical representation (Gane & Beer, 2008; Rogers, 1986; Castells, 1996; Manovich, 2003). Hate speech on digital platforms emerges through user-generated content, which is made possible by features such as digitality, interactivity, hypertextuality, diffusion, virtuality, and multimedia forms; this content is often produced and circulated through practices such as stigma, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination (Çomu & Binark, 2013, p. 209). The unique characteristics of digital media make it possible for expressions that fall under the scope of hate content to quickly enter public circulation. Content shared on digital media can be rapidly shared by users, reaching a large audience in a short time. This process leads to the circulation of messages related to hate content on both national and international scales. Digital media can contribute to increasing the impact of content within the scope of hate content. By allowing users to comment on posts, digital media makes visible the support for messages related to hate content. A message within the scope of hate content can encourage other users who share the same viewpoint to create similar new messages. The interactive nature of digital media, especially in the field of football facilitates and spreads the reproduction of hate content. The asynchronous nature of digital media allows users to access messages related to hate content at different times.

Social media, as one of the most actively used digital platforms, allows users to easily express their opinions. The freedom environment provided on digital media platforms turns into a space where users can express their thoughts and emotions toward other individuals and groups in an unchecked manner (Özcan, 2019, p. 101). The large number of followers on social media platforms enables messages within the scope of hate content to reach a wider audience in a short time. Social media enables users who share similar views to come together and form online communities. Fan groups, an example of online communities, actively use social media platforms both to defend their own teams against rival teams and to criticize referees, media professionals, or opposing teams. Social media platforms facilitate the exchange of ideas, making it easier for fan groups to engage in internal interactions within their communities. These platforms allow users to create and share written, visual, and auditory content. Fan groups that actively use social media platforms can make more cautious and careful posts when providing their personal information accurately, but when group identity is emphasized, they may find it easier to share statements that encourage and reproduce hate content, such as insults and degradation.

On social media platforms, users can express their opinions without revealing their identities. It has been proven that individuals tend to exhibit more aggressive behaviour when they feel anonymous (Akgül, 2020, p. 60). The ability of digital media to allow users to make statements while concealing their identities can lead to an increase in the level of hatred expressed toward rival teams, media professionals, and referees. Individuals may feel the need to express their belonging to a group and, fearing exclusion, may marginalize another person or group, with expressions of hate being viewed as natural and acceptable by the individual (Vardal, 2015, p. 141). Since hate messages can be interpreted by users, they multiply and continue, creating a snowball effect (Akgül, 2020, p. 61). Fan groups may find it easier to share statements that encourage and reproduce hate content when not providing their personal information accurately.

Social media platforms may feature messages whose accuracy has not been verified. Especially in sports, where competition is high, different fan groups may share content with disinformation on social media platforms to discredit rival teams, referees, and media professionals. Content with disinformation contributes to the promotion and reproduction of hate content.

METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS
Qualitative Content Analysis
In order to reveal the main characteristics of the data obtained in the study, a qualitative content analysis was conducted. Qualitative content analysis is defined as "the systematic reduction of content, analysed with special attention to the context in which it was created, to identify themes and extract meaningful interpretations of the data" (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 232). This definition refers to the classification of content under investigation according to themes. Qualitative content analysis is also defined as the identification of "patterns, themes, and categories important to a social reality" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 322). In qualitative content analysis, the aim is to identify prominent motifs and significant patterns in the research findings obtained through data collection techniques used to explain social phenomena. In this study, which aims to identify how the hate content network created by users emerges on the Twitter platform, the data obtained has been used to examine which elements of hate content are involved and how language is used in the production of hate content in the content from the fan pages, which contributes to the production and dissemination of hate content. The content from the fan pages included in the analysis, which contributes to the production and dissemination of hate content, was examined in detail.

Universe and Sample
Posts shared on Twitter by the fan groups were examined. Twitter was chosen because it allows for interactive communication through written and visual posts, live broadcasting, and poll creation, making it one of the most influential mediums for generating public opinion. The study was limited to the fan accounts of the three major football clubs that have the highest number of followers and the highest interaction rates on Twitter. Tweets shared between the years 2018 and 2021 were analysed in the research.

The universe of this study consists of fan group accounts on Twitter. In order to analyse how hate content is produced and disseminated within large audiences in football, the sample includes the three most influential Twitter fan accounts of Turkey's most long-established football clubs with the largest number of fans. The first account is @ultrAslan, the official Twitter account of Ultraslan Independent Fan Group of Galatasaray. The account was created in November 2010 and currently has 3,504,696 followers. The second account is @gencfborg, belonging to Genç Fenerbahçeliler, the number one fan group of Fenerbahçe. The account was opened in October 2010 and currently has 769,000 followers. The third and final account analysed is @forzabesiktas, the official Twitter account of Çarşı, the most well-known fan group of Beşiktaş Gymnastics Club. This account was created in December 2009 and currently has 3,261,588 followers. All the accounts examined are verified by Twitter, as indicated by the blue verification check mark. In other words, all the accounts selected for the sample are officially recognized fan accounts. The number of tweets analysed in the study is 30.

Themes
The data obtained from the tweets on the fan pages were analysed under two main themes: the reproduction of hate content elements and the use of language in the production of hate content. The findings under the theme titled reproduction of hate content elements are presented under three sub-themes: stigma; stereotypes and prejudice; and discrimination and othering. The findings under the theme titled use of language in the production of hate content are presented under three sub-themes as well: use of metaphorical language/rhetorical tropes; use of slang and profanity; and use of threatening language.

Analysis of Hate Content in Football on The Twitter Platform
This part presents the analysis of the data obtained regarding how hate content in football is manifested on Twitter through fan pages. The findings in this part are presented under two main themes: findings related to the elements of hate content and findings related to the use of language in the production of hate content.

Findings Related to the Elements Hate Content
It has been determined that the elements of hate content are directed toward rival sports teams, media members, and referees. The hate expressions found on fan pages primarily target the rival club's material, moral, and historical values, individuals in the managerial staff, football players, and technical teams. Additionally, football commentators and journalists in the media occasionally become targets of fan groups due to their critical remarks. When fans come across criticism that they believe is excessive or unfair regarding their team and its internal elements, they direct hate content toward the media members and the institutions they represent. Another focal point of hate content is referees. In this part, the findings are presented under three sub-themes: stigma, stereotypes/prejudice, and discrimination/othering.

Stigma
It is observed that stigmatization is a prominent element in the hate expressions produced by fan accounts targeting rival clubs. The tweet with the hashtag "#YenidenOmurgasızlık!" [SpinelessnessAgain] shared by the UltrAslan account was posted during the period when Galatasaray was in negotiations with Alanyaspor to sign footballer Emre Akbaba, and archrival Fenerbahçe intervened in the process. In this two-word tweet, the word "spinelessness" is the main trigger for hate content. Used in a slang context, deviating from its literal meaning, the word implies that Fenerbahçe, by interfering in their rival's transfer negotiations, acted hypocritically and inconsistently. In the visual, Fenerbahçe's management is explicitly described as "shameless" and "spineless" for intervening in the transfer process. To increase the impact, words such as "Galatasaray fan," "without shame," "again," and "spinelessness" are written in all caps and underlined. This tweet clearly falls within the scope of hate content directed at a rival club.

It has been identified that personalization comes to the forefront during the stigmatization process within the scope of hate content. In social media posts within this context, particularly discrediting remarks directed at the rival club's president have been observed. The tweet with the hashtag "#KazYolmaGünü" [PluckingDay] from the UltrAslan account was posted in response to a speech made by Fenerbahçe president Ali Koç during the club's general assembly. The phrase *yalı çocuğu* [kid from the seaside mansion] used in the tweet is a slang term, implying Koç is a spoiled child of a rich family, living a life of privilege in seaside mansions. Another tweet from the UltrAslan account places key figures of the Fenerbahçe club under scrutiny. In the tweet, current Fenerbahçe president Ali Koç is referred to with the nickname *Çakma Küçük Aziz* [Fake Little Aziz]. This nickname draws a comparison between Koç and former club president Aziz Yıldırım, suggesting that Koç mimics Yıldırım's style. The phrase *Şikeci Aziz* [Match-Fixer Aziz] refers to a controversial statement made by Aziz Yıldırım at a club congress, where he reportedly said, "If I fixed matches, I did it for Fenerbahçe." This statement has since been widely circulated and criticized by the media and fans of rival clubs as a *confession to match-fixing*, and it is invoked here to reignite those accusations. These tweets contain elements of hate content directed at rival club managerial staff.

It is observed that personalization plays a significant role in the process of stigmatization during the production of hate content not only in the UltrAslan account but also in the Gencfborg and Forzabesiktas accounts. In a tweet from the Gencfborg account, the GFB group targets Fatih Terim by referring to his past involvement in violent incidents, calling him a *çakma kabadayı* [fake tough guy]. At the end of the tweet, the phrase *Kimse yemiyor* [Nobody's buying it] written in capital letters emphasizes that Galatasaray and Fatih Terim are attempting to create a false sense of victimhood to draw public attention. Additionally, in the tweet with the hashtag "#ŞinanayYavrumŞinanay" from the Forzabesiktas account, in the title of the video shared by the Çarşı group, the term "haramzadeler" (meaning those who consume illicit gains) is used to associate the Galatasaray club with people consuming illicit gains, implying that

their achievements were obtained through unjust means. Similarly, the word "harami," which translates to thief or bandit, is employed to reinforce the idea that the rival club has gained success dishonestly. In the tweet from the Forzabesiktas account with the hashtag "#HakemlerSarılarıKolluyor" [RefereesAreProtectingtheYellows], the phrase *dümenci ikizler* is used, which in slang implies deceivers or schemers. The Beşiktaş fan group claims that their archrivals, Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe, are creating an unfair competitive environment through referee support and that, as club presidents, they engage in all kinds of rule-breaking behaviour.

In the social media posts of fan groups, the focus is not solely on rival teams. At times, football commentators featured in the media also become targets of these fan groups in the posts. In a tweet from the UltrAslan account, the targeted individual is Rasim Ozan Kütahyalı, a commentator on Beyaz TV. The Galatasaray fan group uses derogatory language, referring to people working at Beyaz TV as *jesters*, thus employing a demeaning tone. Additionally, UltrAslan highlights Kütahyalı's name in all caps and labels him a *FETÖ leftover*. In another tweet from the UltrAslan account, the fan group expressed criticism toward the program titled Beyaz Futbol. They referred to Ahmet Çakar as a *bootlicker* and Ertem Şener as a *plasterer*. The group accuses Çakar of using an excessively subjective tone. Additionally, they metaphorically label Ertem Şener, the moderator of the show, as a *plasterer* to imply that he moves beyond the principle of objectivity by showing a supportive attitude without offering any criticism or intervention concerning Çakar's comments. Furthermore, the group used offensive and derogatory language, such as *scoundrel*, *dishonoured*, and *disreputable*, to describe those who continue to follow and watch these individuals and media channels. The use of slang directed at media figures within the tweet is considered an element of hate content.

When fans believe they have faced injustices due to referee errors, they occasionally show strong reactions. In a tweet from the UltrAslan account, the fan group accused Hüseyin Göçek, the referee of the Galatasaray-Konyaspor match, of being biased against Galatasaray, using words such as *immorally*, *dishonourably*, and *disreputably*. In the tweet, Ultraslan also mocked the Turkish Football Federation (TFF), using the word *dirty*, implying that it had lost its innocence and impartiality. The entire post was written in capital letters and with exclamation marks, creating the impression of an intense and aggressive reaction. Besides the offensive language used, the tweet falls under the scope of hate content targeting referees and the governing authority in football.

Stereotypes and Prejudice

It is observed that in fan groups' posts, stereotypes about rival teams and a prejudiced approach toward opponents are prominent. In a tweet with the hashtag "#FenerOl" [Be the Light for Fenerbahçe], Galatasaray's fan group accuses the Fenerbahçe team of supporting a terrorist organization. The group accuses Ali Koç, Fenerbahçe's president, of financially exploiting Fenerbahçe fans in the process. In another tweet from the UltrAslan account, attention is drawn to the fact that Koç Holding, partly owned by Ali Koç, was a sponsor of the Turkish Olympiads in 2013, which were supported by Fethullah Gülen, the leader of the FETÖ terrorist organization. The tweet refers to Ali Koç as "FETÖnün platin sponsoru yalı çocuğu" [FETÖ's platinum sponsor rich boy from the mansion]. The term *yalı çocuğu* is a slang phrase implying a spoiled rich kid. Additionally, the group targets Nihat Özdemir, the then-president of the TFF and a former vice president of Fenerbahçe, referring to him as "futbolun FETÖ imamı Nihat abileri" [football's FETÖ imam, their brother Nihat]. The phrase *Nihat abileri* is used to emphasize the closeness between the two figures and imply a brother-like connection, and at the same time, claiming that both are linked to terrorist organizations. This tweet accuses both a rival club's executive and a high-ranking federation official of being indirectly connected to a terrorist organization, representing a strong example of hate content.

Fenerbahçe and Beşiktaş fan groups accuse the Galatasaray team of supporting a terrorist organization, and in the tweets, it is alleged that the rival team is linked to such an organization. In a tweet from the Gencfborg account, Galatasaray is described as the *dog* of Fethullah Gülen, the leader of FETÖ, using slang that implies they are his servant. The GFB group provides no data, information, images, or documents that would serve as evidence to support their claims. Therefore, such baseless accusations

directed at a rival community serve to incite hatred between parties and are categorized as hate content targeting the values of the rival club. In the tweet titled "Mazi kalbinde yara, unuttukça geçmişini hatırla" [The past is a wound in your heart, remember your past as you forget it] from the Gencfborg account, the GFB group implicitly, rather than openly, linked Galatasaray to the FETÖ terrorist organization, thus provoking hate content directed toward the rival club's values. The GFB group's response to the Ultraslan group mirrored the latter's posts in tone: aggressive and accusatory. In the tweet from the Forzabesiktas account with the hashtag "#ŞinanayYavrumŞinanay," the Çarşı group refers to Galatasaray's players who are allegedly associated with a terrorist organization by asking, "Adına gurur dediğiniz fotoğrafları bir gün kesmeden, kırpmadan yayınlayabilecek misiniz?" [Will you ever be able to publish the photos you call a source of pride without cutting or cropping them?]. Through this question, they imply a connection between those individuals and a terrorist organization, thereby associating the Galatasaray community as a whole with the terrorist organization.

Fan groups accuse each other of match-fixing and incentive bonuses in their social media posts using statements that have no legal basis or legitimacy, or by disregarding their legal validity. In a tweet from the Gencfborg account, the GFB group directly targets their rival club Galatasaray and its coach Fatih Terim with derogatory remarks. By using the phrase "Şikenin Türkiye'deki temsili" [The representation of match-fixing in Turkey], the group implies that Galatasaray's historical achievements were gained through unfair and illegal means. In the tweet from the Forzabesiktas account with the hashtag "#AlgıyıBırakOynunaBak" [Drop the Perception, Focus on the Game], the group accuses the targeted club, Galatasaray, of expecting favouritism and special treatment, metaphorically labelling Galatasaray and its fans as *whiny*. The use of the hashtag serves to reinforce the accusation and attempts to create public opinion suggesting that Galatasaray is manipulating public perception. In the text included in the image, the Çarşı group uses insulting terms such as *impudent* and *shameless* addressing at the Galatasaray community. Through both the written text and the accompanying image, the Çarşı group reproduces hate content using expressions addressed at the Galatasaray community such as scheming, backroom games, perception management, impudence, and shamelessness. In the tweet with the hashtag "#KupaSahadaDeğilBakkalda" [The cup is not on the field, Bakkal has it] from the Forzabesiktas account, it is alleged that Galatasaray's achievements were not earned on the field, but rather gained unfairly through off-field methods such as offering incentive bonuses to former coach Mesut Bakkal along with other footballers. In the visual supporting the tweet, the words *incentive* and *match-fixing* are placed to the left of Mesut Bakkal's photo, while *doping* and *confession* are placed on the right. The check marks next to the words *incentive* and *match-fixing* are coloured yellow and red, which is a clear reference to Galatasaray, whose team colours are yellow and red. Disregarding legal legitimacy, the tweet implies that Galatasaray's entire history of success is rooted in illegal practices. In addition to the incentive accusations, Galatasaray is also accused of match-fixing.

In their social media posts, fan groups direct accusations not only at rival teams but also at members of the media and referees. In the tweet with the hashtag "#HakemlerSarılarıKolluyor" from the Forzabesiktas account, the Çarşı group claims that their archrivals Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe create an unfair competitive environment with the support of referees, and that the presidents of these clubs engage in all kinds of rule-breaking behaviour. In another tweet from the same account, using the hashtag #çArşı, the Beşiktaş fan group expresses their frustration over the points lost by their team due to poor refereeing decisions. The main target of this tweet is the Turkish Football Federation (TFF). This is emphasized by including the TFF logo in the shared content. They accuse the TFF of stealing labour, and running an unfair and biased system. They describe the TFF's actions with degrading terms such as *shamelessness*, *bootlicking*, and *partisanship*. These claims are made without any concrete evidence and are directed toward a legal entity affiliated with the Republic of Turkey. Therefore, the language used may be considered a form of hate content. The hashtag #çArşı at the end of the tweet represents the name of the fan group. The capital *A* in *çArşı* is a symbolic reference to anarchism. This symbolism implies that the group does not recognize or respect the TFF's governance model.

Encouraging Discrimination and Othering
Fan groups make comparisons between their own teams and rival teams in social media posts, and in this process, they include statements that encourage discrimination. In this context, while praising their own team, fan groups marginalize the opposing teams. In a tweet from the UltrAslan account, an aggressive stance is taken by highlighting the past connections of the Koç family, to which Ali Koç belongs, with the FETÖ terrorist organization. By writing the word "ADAM" [MAN] in all capital letters, the tweet emphasizes that Fatih Terim is, in slang terms, an honourable, dignified, and respectable person, while the Koç family is othered and excluded from this definition; and with the phrase *supports scoundrels*, they are accused of having ties with a terrorist organization. In a tweet titled "Öfkemiz Büyüyor" [Our Anger Is Growing] from the Forzabesiktas account, there is an image depicting an incident in which a member of the Konyaspor technical staff allegedly attacked a young Beşiktaş player. The phrase *football terrorists* in the image is associated with hate content. The Çarşı group, while describing the incident as terrorism, makes a generalization by labelling the entire Konyaspor community as terrorists. The group further emphasizes the impact of their statement by writing the following expressions using the colour red: *football terrorists*, *country officials*, *not cleaned in time*, and *we are here*.

Fan groups can also marginalize media organizations and media personnel in their social media posts. In a tweet titled "#BeyaztvASporBoykot" [BoycottBeyaztvASpor] from the UltrAslan account, the fan group initiates a boycott against football commentators Ahmet Çakar, Turgay Demir, and Emre Bol, who have been in the spotlight for their harsh language and accusatory remarks against Galatasaray, as well as the media outlets they work for, Beyaz TV and A Spor channels. The image features the logos of the targeted channels crossed out, symbolizing the group's call for a boycott. In a tweet from the Gencfborg account, the fan group describes Erman Toroğlu, a commentator on A Spor, as *malicious*, *foul-mouthed*, and *ill-intentioned* and accuses him of supporting Galatasaray, referred to as the *that club*, and its coach Fatih Terim, who is described as *fake tough guy*. Sports commentator Toroğlu, at this point, is accused of his partisan attitude supporting Galatasaray and Fatih Terim in a biased manner. The tweet triggers hate content by using insulting language towards multiple individuals and the rival team.

Findings on Use of Language in the Production of Hate Content
This part presents the findings under three sub-headings: use of metaphorical language/rhetorical tropes; use of slang and profanity; and use of threatening language.

The Use of Metaphorical Language/Rhetorical Tropes
Fan groups, when producing hate content against rival teams in their social media posts, use figures of speech (such as metaphors, metonymy, etc.) to make the meaning more impactful. Aiming for a more persuasive expression, fan groups use figures of speech in their social media posts when producing hate content. In the image shared with the tweet with the hashtag "#sağdıç #gücenme" [best man don't be offended] from the Forzabesiktas account, the eagle flying around the Beşiktaş stadium portrayed among the mountains symbolically represents Beşiktaş. The phrase "kartallar diyarında gücenmiş bir kedi" [a hurt cat in the land of eagles] is a mocking reference to the rival team, Galatasaray. The lion, the symbol of Galatasaray, is transformed into a smaller and weaker animal, a cat, from the same family. The Çarşı group is giving the message that Galatasaray is powerless against Beşiktaş. The tweet produces hate content by symbolically belittling and discrediting Galatasaray, suggesting that they sought help from referees.

In the process of expressing negative views about rival teams, metaphors are prominently used. In the tweet with the hashtag "#FenerOl" from the UltrAslan account, the phrase "yolduğu kaz sürüsü" [a flock of geese plucked by him] is used to draw a similarity between Fenerbahçe fans and a plucked goose. Their loyalty to President Koç is mockingly criticized as he was the main person responsible for the failure despite their financial and emotional investment in the club. Similarly, the hashtag "#KazYolmaGünü" [PluckingDay] on the UltrAslan account is a mocking expression directed towards Fenerbahçe fans. Fenerbahçe fans are likened to the *plucked geese*, portrayed as a foolish and naive crowd that has fallen for this illusion. Additionally, in a tweet from the UltrAslan account, Tuzlaspor's technical director Gökhan Çıra, being a player who came through the Galatasaray youth setup, is accused

of *biting the hand that feeds him* and thus, compared to an animal. In the idiomatic sense, he is portrayed as a traitor and an ingrate. In a tweet from the Gencfborg account, the GFB group claims that Çilingiroğlu's comments about Ersun Yanal were made with someone's permission, and they liken Çilingiroğlu to a dog on a leash, suggesting that the loosened leash gives him the freedom to speak. Fan groups also use metaphors in the process of reproducing hate content towards referees. In a tweet from the Forzabesiktas account with the "#sağdıç" [best man] hashtag, following Beşiktaş's victory over Galatasaray, the fan group uses provocative expressions directed at Cüneyt Çakır, the referee of the match and Galatasaray. Attempting to claim the result was in their favour despite Cüneyt Çakır's biased officiating, the Çarşı group addresses the referee as *best man*. This term is used by the group to associate the referee with subjective officiating, implying that Çakır was acting as an assistant to Galatasaray.

Fan groups also use metonymy to make the meaning more impactful while producing hate content in their social media posts. In the tweet from the Forzabesiktas account with the hashtag "#HakemlerSarılarıKolluyor" [Referees Protect the Yellows], the Beşiktaş fan group makes several accusations against their archrivals Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe. The term *the yellows* refers to both clubs due to their shared association with the colour yellow. Here, the group emphasizes that these two teams are staying in the championship race with the help of referees. The image accompanying the tweet shows two hands holding each other, symbolically representing the referees and the two targeted clubs.

Idioms are also used in the reproduction of hate content in football. In the tweet from the UltrAslan account with the hashtag "#VasatYalıÇocuğu" [AverageKidFromTheMansion], the idiom "kuyruk acısı" (literally "tail pain") is used to imply that the targeted individual acts out of resentment and a desire for revenge against the Galatasaray community. Similarly, the Beşiktaş fan group combines the surname of Galatasaray president Mustafa Cengiz with the name of Fenerbahçe president Ali Koç to form the expression "#AliCengiz," a reference to the Turkish idiom *Ali Cengiz oyunu*, which means *to act cunningly and deceitfully*. Through this expression, the Çarşı group suggests that the presidents of their rival clubs are in alliance against them. The hashtag "#sarıVar" [There is yellow] is also used to accuse the TFF (Turkish Football Federation) of manipulating the VAR (Video Assistant Referee) system in favour of Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe. By using derogatory language aimed at the club presidents and the presidential offices, the Çarşı group, in this instance, reproduces hate content directed at rival club executives.

Use of Slang and Profanity

Fan groups use slang expressions as well in their social media posts to express their negative opinions and emotions while producing hate content. Slang is defined as "words that are degrading and belittling to individuals" (Çiçek & Yağbasan, 2019, p. 15). In a tweet from the UltrAslan account, the fan group targets Kütahyalı with the phrase "yalayarak kendini yorumculuğa getirten" [got himself a commentator position by sucking up], implying – regardless of his career background or knowledge – that he obtained his job through sycophancy, using a derogatory slang term to emphasize this. Another tweet from the UltrAslan account includes harsh and degrading remarks targeting Tuzlaspor's technical director Gökhan Çıra, even extending to his personal life. It draws attention to the fact that he married his army friend, who is a transgender person. Here, the individual's personal life choices are explicitly mocked in a derogatory tone based on gender identity. This is a clear example of how non-football-related aspects, such as sexual orientation and gender identity, are being weaponized through insult. Similar to the UltrAslan account, posts containing slang expressions can also be found on the Gencfborg and Forzabesiktas accounts. For instance, in a tweet from the Gencfborg account featuring a banner that reads "Cimboma koymaya az kaldı" – [Not long until we 'put it' to Cimbom] (Cimbom being a nickname for Galatasaray), the GFB group did not explicitly include hate content in written form. However, the photo attached to the tweet plays a provoking role. The word *koymak* (literally put) in Turkish slang is a vulgar term often used to imply dominance in a sexual context, typically referring to the active party in a sexual act. Used here in a sports rivalry context, the expression significantly escalates tension between the supporters of the two teams. Thus, although the tweet itself contains no overt hate content, the image of the banner – clearly using the slang meaning of the word – functions as a verbal attack on the rival team, making it evident that the visual content plays a triggering role in inciting hate content. In the tweet from the Forzabeşiktaş account with the hashtag

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"#AlgıyıBırakOynunaBak" [Drop the Perception, Focus on the Game], the slang term *tezgah* is used, which colloquially means *a setup* or *a scheme*. In this tweet, the Çarşı group criticizes Galatasaray fans and the club, suggesting that instead of trying to manipulate public perception or outcomes off the field, they should focus on performing and competing properly on the field.

Fan groups also use swear words in addition to slang to express their negative opinions and emotions. Swearing is defined as "insulting someone by using harsh language that targets their honour, personality, and chastity" (Çiçek & Yağbasan, 2019, p. 15). In a tweet by the Galatasaray fan group, trolls allegedly funded by Koç are referred to as "gayri meşru çocuklar" [illegitimate children]. This phrase, which literally means *children born out of wedlock*, is used to imply that these trolls are illegitimate or unlawful. Additionally, in a tweet from the Ultraslan account using the hashtag "futbol fahişesi", the fan group referred to Emre Belözoğlu, a player from the rival team, as a *football prostitute*. The fact that this offensive phrase is written in all caps is intended to emphasize the severity of the insult.

Use of Threatening Language
It has been identified that a threatening tone stands out in the production of hate content in the social media posts of fan groups. In the tweet with the hashtag "#AlgıyıBırakOynunaBak" [Drop the Perception, Focus on the Game] from the Forzabesiktas account, the fan group described the statements made by Galatasaray and the Ultraslan group as a *comedy theatre* and concluded the post with a threatening tone by stating, "sabrımız taşarsa o tiyatro sahnesini başlarına yıkacağımızı önemle hatırlatırız" [we firmly remind you that if our patience runs out, we will bring that theatre stage down on your heads]. Similarly, in a tweet from the UltrAslan account, the Galatasaray fan group claims that legally recognizing Fenerbahçe's past championships would have no legal validity and that such a situation could lead to chaos in society. The phrase "CHAOS IN SOCIETY" is written in all caps in the tweet to emphasize that the situation should be taken seriously. These tweets fall under the category of using a threatening tone in the process of generating hate content in football.

A threatening tone is not only used against rival teams; fans often target the members of the media and the media organizations. In this context, it is also observed that a threatening tone is used toward the TFF and members of the media. In a tweet shared by the Ultraslan account, the fan group used a threatening tone to deliver a message to the media in general through a program aired on Beyaz TV, stating "herkes aklını başına alsın!" [everyone better come to their senses]. Additionally, in a tweet titled "gözünüz var, şerefiniz, haysiyetiniz yok" [you have eyes, but no honour or dignity] from the Gencfborg account, the fan group reacted harshly to the TFF due to the increasing point losses their team experienced as a result of referee mistakes. Using offensive language, the group accused the federation of lacking moral values such as *honour* and *dignity*. In a tweet from the Gencfborg account, the federation and referees were called upon to adopt a fair officiating model in a threatening tone. The tweet includes three images from a protest march to the federation building. Alongside a group procession photo, there are images showing police protection and barricades. When interpreted together with the message "sabrımızı taşırmayın, altında kalırsınız" [don't test our patience, you'll be crushed under it], these visuals suggest that the GFB group has the potential to react aggressively in the face of perceived injustice. The threatening approach in the tweets goes beyond mere words and can even escalate into calls for boycott. The tweet with the hashtag "#BeyaztvASporBoykot" [BoycottBeyaztvASpor] from the UltrAslan account reached the number one spot on Turkey's trending list just one hour after it was posted. This indicates that the Ultraslan group has a strong influence in shaping public opinion among its followers. Consequently, the hate content expressed from this account had a significant and intense impact on social media.

CONCLUSION
This study focuses on the reproduction of hate content within the context of football on digital media platforms in Turkey. Posts from the fan groups of Turkey's three major sports clubs – Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe, and Beşiktaş – on Twitter were examined. It was found that all of the fan groups analysed resorted to hate content from time to time, either to serve their own interests or to provoke rival team fans.

Although the Ultraslan group at times engages in the production of hate content to defend against negative comments targeting individuals within the club or the historical values of the club itself, it has generally been observed that the group adopts an aggressive tone and turns individuals and institutions into direct targets of hate content. The group's posts often include slang expressions that verge on profanity. In contrast, the Gençfenerbahçeliler fan group appears to use hate content more as a defensive mechanism in response to negative opinions or comments directed at any part of the Fenerbahçe community, rather than as an offensive tool. However, it has been noted that they do so with a far more aggressive tone compared to other fan groups. Notably, they have escalated their use of hate content by associating rival teams with terrorist organizations. This indicates how aggressive their position is in the production of hate content. The primary target of hate content by the fan group named Çarşı is predominantly rival clubs. An analysis of the posts that lead to hate content by the Çarşı group shows that, in terms of language, they adopt a comparatively softer approach than the other two fan groups. It has been observed that Çarşı reproduces hate content as part of a defensive mechanism in response to the negative incidents their team experiences on the field throughout the season. However, it has also been found that, although less frequently, they do construct elements of hate content that could be considered harsh. In particular, due to tensions with the Galatasaray club, the Çarşı group has at times accused the rival community of match-fixing and bribery, and even of being associated with terrorist organizations. It has been determined that hate content in the posts shared by the three major fan groups is reproduced through the use of metaphorical language, slang expressions, profane content, and a threatening tone.

In order to prevent hate content in football, it is important to establish a merit-based management system within the sport and to ensure that innovative systems brought by technological advancements are used fairly. Although it is not entirely possible to eliminate the production of hate content on social media in today's internet environment, increasing cybersecurity measures and implementing deterrent penalties can contribute to the process. Furthermore, provocative content spread by anonymous, unidentified accounts under the guise of freedom of expression is one of the key issues that fuels hate content in football. While ensuring freedom of expression in the healthiest way possible is important, increasing monitoring of anonymous accounts on social media platforms would be beneficial in maintaining social harmony and fostering a peaceful competitive environment in football. Alongside legal regulations and the establishment of effective monitoring mechanisms, emphasizing media literacy efforts and raising awareness among individuals regarding responsible media use will also contribute to the prevention of hate content.

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