Sarcasm Beyond Hate Speech:
Facebook Comments on Syrian Refugees in Turkey

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In Turkey, the widespread sharing of false information about refugees on social media is one of the main reasons behind the ever-increasing antirefugee sentiment. In this study, with a reference to critical discourse studies and by adopting a theoretical approach on indirect violence, 1,000 user comments made under the most viral false claims on Facebook about Syrian refugees during the election years of 2018–19 were analyzed. Together with comments that are classified under categories of hate speech and discriminative rhetoric, a significant number of sarcastic comments were also detected by critical discourse analysis. It is observed that sarcasm is instrumentalized to reproduce superiority over refugees as well as criticizing official policies. Such comments cannot simply be considered as "innocent jokes" and are indeed part of a vicious cycle of violence and function like hate speech and discriminatory rhetoric.

Keywords: refugees, Turkey, social media, discourse analysis, hate speech, sarcasm, disinformation

On June 29, 2019, an angry mob demolished and vandalized shops and apartments belonging to Syrian refugees in İkitelli, a working-class neighborhood of Istanbul. The false claim that mobilized them was an alleged harassment of a 12-year-old Turkish child by another child; a 12-year-old Syrian refugee. Numerous shops and houses were destroyed, and riot police dispersed the mob, breaking the glass and signboards with sticks and stones, by using water cannons and tear-gas. Some refugees who were terrorized by this night attack left the neighborhood, and 16 people were detained in the coming days. The police discovered that the unfounded harassment claim was first raised in a WhatsApp group called "Ikitelli Youth Movement," which had 58 only members. However, it was also found that the claims were later spread by other groups in different social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, with the hashtags "#Idon'tWantSyriansInMyCountry" and "#SyriansGoAway!" This was one of the first social media powered mob attacks in Turkey against the refugee population ("İkitelli'de yaşanan gerilim," 2019; "Küçükçekmece'de mültecilere saldırı," 2019; "Uluslararası mülteci hakları derneği," 2019).

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This incident was a typical example demonstrating that ordinary "prosumers"; those not only passively consuming but also producing and distributing content can cause a major information disorder, and in some cases fuel hatred against some disadvantaged groups, like refugees. The populist antirefugee rhetoric, which might increase negative emotions and negative cognitions toward immigrants (Wirz et al., 2018), like many other politically motivated topics, also relies heavily on the wide circulation of false claims about refugees (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, & Wodak, 2018). Discrimination not only comes in the shape of direct and confrontational rhetoric against the refugees but also by insults and criticisms. Such criticisms are directed also against the government and officials as well as refugees. Many of those comments can be classified as hate speech, whereas there is another important category of criticisms that can be defined as sarcasm.

Recently, computer and software engineers have developed programs for text mining and sentiment analysis for vast volumes of social media messages (Öztürk & Ayvaz, 2018, p. 136). One major challenge for such a computer-driven method is the difficulty of interpretation because of misspellings, incorrect grammar, and various abbreviations (Khokhlova, Patti, & Rosso, 2016, p. 17). Further, sarcastic comments, especially if they are not signified by any hashtags and if the contexts are not provided for the researchers, are often considered as hard to detect in automatic, computer-assisted analysis programs/software as negative statements because of the use of positive words and, in most cases, the absence of standard cues revealing the speakers' intention (Das & Clark, 2018; Joshi, Bhattacharyya, & Carman, 2017; Justo, Corcoran, Lukin, Walker, & Torres, 2014; Reyes & Rosso, 2013). This study, through inspecting comments under the 10 most viral Facebook posts based on false claims and disinformation about Syrians in Turkey, is aimed to demonstrate that sarcasm is indeed frequently used in antirefugee rhetoric.

Until the COVID-19 pandemic dominated the agenda in Turkey from the beginning of March 2020, the (Syrian) refugee debate had been one of the most controversial topics in the political arena. Turkey's opening of the border with Greece to let refugees pass to Europe dominated not only the national but also the international news agenda ("Europe Is Nicer," 2020). The refugee population in Turkey, the largest in the World by 2020, has been a hot discussion topic in the media since the first group of Syrian migrants seeking asylum crossed the border in June 2011 ("Türkiye Sınırı Kapatmıyor," 2011). According to the figures announced by the Directorate General of Migration Management of Turkey, by July 2019, the number of Syrians in Turkey was 3,622,748. Turkey has granted the status of "guest" to Syrian refugees, and at first provided them with temporary protection, mostly in camps; however, in the past couple of years, most of the camps were shut, and the refugees have mostly become part of the urban population in Turkey. By late 2019, only 0.3% of Syrian population were accommodated in temporary shelter centers, whereas their numbers in cities across Turkey were reported by the Ministry of Interior as 3,514,016 (İçişleri Bakanlığı [Ministry of Internal Affairs], 2019). The total number of Syrians in Turkey account for approximately 4.4% of the population according to the official figures. This made Turkey a host country for more than half of the Syrians displaced abroad, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2019) figures.

Since the arrival of the first group of Syrian refugees in 2011, the official discourse has been a strong emphasis on religious solidarity as well as on humanitarian values portraying Turkey (and president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan) as the protector of Sunni Muslims (Korkut, 2016; Polat, 2018). The ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party) officials selectively used religious terminology in referring to refugees, such

as "emanet" (God's entrust), "muhacir" (migrant), and "ensar" (gracious host; the latter two definitions originating from Islamic history depicting those who leave Mecca to escape persecution and those who welcomed and helped them in Medina). As Polat (2018) argues, this religious discourse is a part of a wider Islamic discourse used by AKP and its leader Erdoğan. Further, the emphasis on the self-assumed responsibility of the (Muslim) population within the "imagined" borders of Turkey that stretch far beyond the official lines with reference to Ottoman Empire past was also used as the reason for the "open border" policy. The admiration for the Ottoman Empire period was not only the rhetorical glorification of the imagined past but was also functionalized to legitimize the ambitious foreign policy moves as well as domestic policies designed to distance itself from the secular, republican ideals as the unifying principle of modern Turkey. Korkut (2016) defines the Syrian policy of the government as discursive governance (p. 2). Lacking the legal status of refugees with formal, institutionalized protection and integration scheme, the open border policy based on temporary protection, transformed into an unnamed refugee crisis. This "charitable" approach rather than a "rights-based" approach also fed the public resentment against them. The main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), a secularist party with an emphasis on Turkish nationalism rather than religion as a social cement, had been critical of the government's policies in Syria and accused it of instrumentalizing Syrians for a demographic and ideological change in Turkey (Polat, 2018, p. 510). However, it was not only the nationalist and more secular voters of this party and other (right-wing and hardline) nationalist political groups and parties that opposed such policies. Large segments of the non-Sunni Alawite community feared that the refugee influx of mainly Sunni Syrians could be used as a leverage to further transform the country in sectarian lines. Further, the government's selective attitude about Syrians; reluctance to open borders for Syrian Kurds just like Sunni Arab population and offer them a temporary protection status, fed the fear of Kurdish population about the "Arabization" of especially the Kurdish-dominated border towns (Gülmez, 2019, p. 899).

Open-border policy could also be listed as one of the least supported policies of the governing AKP among its voters. Even the early studies had already demonstrated that the feeling of "cultural proximity" (when conservative and religious groups in society are considered) had been lower than expected (Erdoğan, 2014, p. 38). The increased competition in the job market and housing meant that the discourse of fraternity was not enough to ensure also the conservative voters. As the numbers of Syrians increased and the population moved from camps to cities, negative perception increased (Erdoğan, 2014).

A study demonstrated that the percentage of people who said that they were "not pleased with" the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey was 59.8% in 2019 (Aydın, Güvenç, Hawks, Zaim, & Tığlı, 2020, p. 81). According to this research, the forthcoming reason for this "discontent" was the Syrians' "inclination to crime," which were indeed far lower than the Turkish citizens' crime rates according to official reports. Another research conducted by Istanbul Political Research Institute (2020), demonstrated the perception of Syrians by Turkish citizens in Istanbul, a city where nearly 1 million Syrians both registered and unregistered live. According to this research, 10.5% of Istanbulites defined Syrians as "the most important problem" in the city (Istanbul Political Research Institute, 2020). Seventy-eight percent of the interviewees believed that the Turkish government treated Syrian refugees better than Turkish citizens. Those who were "concerned" about the presence of Syrians topped the list with 47%. This study also demonstrated that 36% of respondents did not consider the Syrians in Turkey as victims of war (Istanbul Political Research Institute, 2020).

The media play an important role in the construction of the "Syrian refugee image" in the eyes of the general population. Various studies conducted on Turkish mainstream media's coverage of the Syrian population (Doğanay & Çoban Keneş, 2016; Narlı, Özaşçılar, & Turkan İpek, 2019 show that the Syrians are mainly portrayed as victims, the burden on the economy, or a threat to society. Erdoğan, Kavukçuer, and Çetinkaya (2017), adding to these general categories, underlines another rhetoric by the mainstream media that leads to the consolidation of this problem; the ignorance about the hardships they are facing or the absence of narratives about their routine daily lives. However, it is not only the "mainstream media" targeting to increase ratings, circulation, and the number of clicks from the negative portrayal of refugees with discriminatory rhetoric. The Internet has redefined the communication sphere in Turkey like many other parts of the world. The Internet penetration of the population has been increasing dramatically, and people have shifted to online platforms as news sources. According to a recent research conducted by the Reuters Institute (Newman, Fletcher, Schulz, Andı, & Nielsen, 2020), the urban population in Turkey access the news via TV and online sources. Online news (which includes social media) tops the list of news sources used "last week" at 85%. According to another study by Turkey-based KONDA Research and Consultancy (2018), the percentage of people who said that their news source is TV dropped from 98% to 84% between 2008 and 2018, whereas in the same period, the newspaper readers' percentage dropped from 61% to 26%. In contrast, the percentage of people who said that they use social media, rose from 38% in 2011 to 72% in 2018. The disinformation spreads at a faster pace in Turkish social media ecosystem as well as in other parts of the world in the absence of journalists as gatekeepers. In 2018, 49% of people living in urban Turkey claim that they were exposed to "made-up news last week" (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2018, p. 39).

Further, the constraints in the traditional media with the growth of more partisan opinion-based media outlets and a general decline in the quality and commitment to the values of good journalism (McIntyre, 2018) paved the way for the widespread disinformation in the society. Dahlgren (2018) points to the decline of mainstream journalism (without any other suitable alternative) as one of the causes for such a development. Similarly, Bennett and Livingston (2018) argue that the divided and disrupted public spheres as well as the breakdown of trust in democratic institutions or press and politics with the ever-increasing influence of populism opened information systems to large disinformation campaigns. In the case of Turkey, in addition to this global trend, the sharp decline in the level of press freedom, which was also reflected on Reporters Without Borders' (2020) press freedom ranking as the country ranking 154th in 180 countries, further contributed to the flight of masses from the traditional media toward new sources for news (Ertuna, 2020). Taş and Taş (2018), in their article focusing on the representation of Syrian refugees in Turkey, argue that it is not only the rapid transformation in technological and economic spheres that lead to the crisis in journalism but also the discrediting of rationality and truth by hate speech of the right wing populism. Under these conditions, the social media platforms in which the facts are blended with and sometimes shadowed by fiction become a reference point for an important part of society.

Mapping the Vicious Cycle of Violence:
Cultural Violence as a Form of Hate Speech, Discriminative Language, and Sarcasm

The anonymity and invisibility (Brown, 2017) allows Internet users to express extreme feelings and radical thoughts more comfortably. Further, it can also be considered as a catalyst for spreading hate speech. The discriminatory rhetoric not only becomes viral but also becomes casual because of the ease of fabrication/production, access and distribution for the users (Binark, 2010, p. 26). Therefore, it can be argued that social media platforms function as breeding grounds of indirect violence. Galtung (2004) theorizes different forms of violence, and indicates that "direct violence," "structural violence," and "cultural violence" compose three corners of a triangle (paras. 1–6). Galtung described "direct violence" with its visible aspects and described cultural and structural violence with their invisible aspects. He suggested that the violence triangle has built in vicious cycles. It is because cultural and structural violence cause direct violence by reinforcing indirect violence. Structural violence is systematic violence like the limited access to basic needs of humans such as education, health-care services, and legal services. Cultural violence is the form of violence that is based on understanding and beliefs that make direct and structural violence look or feel "right," or at least not wrong (Galtung, 2004; Galtung & Fischer, 2013, p. 35, 42). In this study, it is suggested that hate speech might be defined as a form of cultural violence that might cause structural changes and direct violence by seeding a perception and/or an ideology that is based on otherization (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). It negatively affects "minorities," in this research refugees, by giving them a message "there is no place for you in this society/country" (İnceoğlu & Sözeri, 2012, p. 23). Cultural violence might cause mutually violent attitudes. In the end, it can be observed that hate speech might turn into hate crime, like the example mentioned in the introduction.

Here, it can be observed that "hate speech" is a very complicated and controversial term, and it is hard to define what is hate speech, what is not (Erbaysal Filibeli, 2016). To detect hate speech, it is needed to track some cultural codes since discourse/speech is an ideology that is socially coded (İnceoğlu & Sözeri, 2012, p. 23). The most commonly used definition of hate speech is the definition of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers (1997):

> All forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin. (p. 107)

This definition clearly underlines that discourses promoting hostility against refugees can be categorized as hate speech. According to Van Dijk (1984) especially in multiethnic societies the different ethnic groups create a prominent topic to think and talk about. If the topic is hot like recent immigration, conflicts and/or socioeconomic circumstances, the majority will argue about the situation of newcomers. As a result, these dialogues cause the informal distribution of beliefs and in the end the diffusion of ethnic prejudice in society.

Van Dijk (1991) also proposes that the mainstream media in various degrees have always perpetuated stereotypes and prejudice about minority groups. In the information sphere it can be seen

that this stereotyping is not only in the dominant/mainstream media but also in social media, which are generated by individual users. In our study, it was observed that, at first, false content was created by a user or "imported" from traditional media sources, and then by sharing or writing hatred comments below these contents, those false contents were made viral and promoted prejudice and hatred actions against refugees. This process, starting with disinformation, can be considered as cultural violence and thus might lead to a vicious cycle of violence. Further, it is argued that sarcastic comments cannot be simply considered as "innocent jokes" and are important components of this (violence) cycle, which are entwined with a function like hate speech or discriminatory language.

Sarcasm and Humor as a Tool for Expressing Superiority

In the online version of the Oxford Dictionary, sarcasm is defined as "the use of irony to mock or convey contempt" ("Sarcasm," 2021). In everyday language, the terms "sarcasm" and "irony" are frequently used interchangeably. Their common feature is the absence of an explicit marker that results in the negation of the literal meaning (Khokhlova et al., 2016, p. 17). In this study, the term sarcasm is preferred over irony, which comes in different forms, such as jocularity, rhetorical questions, hyperbole, and understatement (Gibbs & Colston, 2007, p. 584). Sarcasm has been a widely studied term, not only in communication studies but also in linguistic analysis, literature, and psychology. Various studies about sarcasm concentrate on different effects of such indirect criticisms; expression of negative effects, humor, mocking, and politeness (Toplak & Katz, 2000, p. 1469). Although there have been arguments in defining sarcasm sometimes as a facilitator of affection in an interpersonal relationship, the majority of research underlined that sarcasm, viewed from the intent of speaker and reaction of the victim, enhanced the criticism rather than reducing it (Colston, 1997; Toplak & Katz, 2000). The two most distinguishing features between sarcasm and irony are the level of nastiness and the presence of a "victim" in sarcasm (Bowes & Katz, 2011, p. 219). Otherwise, a general utterance like "what a sunny day!" when it is raining without the aim of targeting someone can be considered as irony (Lee & Katz, 1998, p. 10). Attardo (2007) describes sarcasm, in relation to irony, as "an overtly aggressive type of irony, with clearer markers/cues and a clear target" (p. 137). Also, the intention of "the speaker" is an important factor in distinguishing between irony and sarcasm. Colston (1997) argues that "the speaker's guilt" is one of the factors affecting an ironic criticism's diluting or enhancing side (p. 27). If a speaker wishes to dilute a condemnation of a person because of some degree of guilt, he/she dilutes it as such. Haiman (1990), underlines the fact that sarcasm is not being "innocent" like irony (p. 187). He claims that a speaker may not be aware that "his words are false" to be ironic (Haiman, 1990). Gibbs and Colston (2007) argue that in (classic) sarcasm, "a speaker intends to criticize or wound an addressee" (p. 584). As Jorgensen (1996) states, expressing strong negative emotion toward the hearer, such as hatred and anger, softens the negative threat as well (p. 616).

Sarcasm at times is expressed in the form of humor, which the "in-group" uses to separate itself from the "out-group" (in this case, the Syrian refugees) according to superiority theory (Lynch, 2002, p. 433). Thomas Hobbes, in his theory of emotions, stated that this manifestation, resulted from the feeling of success in one's own actions beyond expectations and/or the perception of infirmities and defects in others as well as the conception of (some) absurdity (Heyd, 1982, p. 286). Hobbes, inspired by Plato's explanation of laughter in terms of superiority, associates this act with feelings of supremacy. Hence, this

reminds us of the element of "schadenfreude" (Heyd, 1982, p. 289). Malicious enjoyment of the misfortune of others is called "schadenfreude" and there is a vast literature about this term from the philosophical, psychological perspectives, usually in reference to superiority theory. When it is about the disadvantaged groups in society, schadenfreude has two basic functions: glorifying the group of those who express it and blaming the "others" for their adverse situation and perceiving them as a threat to the nation (Berndsen, Thomas, McGarty, Bliuc, & Hendres, 2017, p. 2). Similarly, Van Dijk and Ouwerkerk (2014) also list "deservingness" (p. 8)—that the suffering will often be regarded as just and deserved, as one of the most important concerns behind such an attitude. A common theme in anti-Syrian rhetoric in Turkey and has been to blame them for not fighting for their freedom/country and seeking a refugee abroad. In doing this, the "superior" position of Turks is emphasized while they are portrayed as being able to protect the unitary integrity of their country, whereas Syrians are depicted as "losers" who cannot defend their country and "deserve" to live under such conditions. In such social media comments, the humor effect is underlined by extensive use of "smiley" emojis and exclamation marks.

Tracking Cultural Violence in Social Media:
An Analysis on Users' Comments Under Fake News About Refugees on Facebook in Turkey

Ideology, structured by power, shapes the common beliefs and discourses in society. Wodak (2008) says "discourse means anything from a historical monument, a lieu de memoire, a policy, a political strategy, narratives in restricted or broad sense of the term, text, talk, a speech, topic-related conversations, to language per se" (p. 1). Within this perspective, in the digital age, any post might be defined as discourse. As stated by Fairclough (2015), language is a part of society and linguistic phenomena are (in part) social phenomena of a special, sort and social phenomena are (in part) linguistic phenomena. Additionally, how orders of discourse are structured and with which ideologies those discourses embodied are determined by the relationship of power (Fairclough, 2015). In this study, by using critical discourse analysis as a research methodology, a linguistic approach was employed that allowed the observation of common discourses on refugees that are shaped by the relationship among power, ideology, and language.

The rhetoric about Syrian refugees in Turkey has been shaped by different political actors according to their ideological and political agenda and tactics. Syrian refugees have become a hot and contested topic, especially in election campaign periods. Presidential and parliamentary elections were held on June 24, 2018, and local elections were held on March 31, 2019. Besides, on June 23, 2019, local elections were repeated for the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, and during the election campaign, the Syrian refugee issue dominated the rhetoric of the candidates, and many of the campaign messages were tailored to address to Turkish citizens' concerns about refugees. It is also in this period that much false information about Syrians in Turkey spread both in traditional and new media environments. Turkey's well-known and reputable fact-checking organization Teyit had collected valuable data on fake news about Syrian refugees in this period, and by cooperating with them, the most viral false contents were selected. These vast, open-source raw data were later classified and further analyzed to understand how people reacted to false information about Syrian refugees, and to evaluate their reaction against refugees by focusing on sarcasm.

Methodology

Teyit (2017), which demonstrates the fact-checking methodology transparently in case studies, has been fact-checking false news about Syrian refugees in Turkey and regularly updating the list of the most viral fake information about them from the very beginning of discussions of the spread of disinformation about Syrian refugees (see Figure 1). Until June 3, 2019, 28 Facebook posts about Syrian refugees that were suspected to be false[1] had been fact-checked by the group. Teyit only verifies viral and largely discussed claims. Major limitation in this study is the number of posts. Since fact-checking requires a specific set of skills, expertise, and resources devoted for this purpose, the scope of the research was limited to the data provided by Teyit. Further, it was not possible to analyze the social and economic backgrounds and actual ideological and/or political affiliations of users due to the limitations of Facebook for two reasons. First, the data of users are not shared because of data privacy policies of the platform. Secondly, it is a common practice for users to conceal their actual identity, especially when joining a heated debate about a controversial topic. To understand whether the disinformation about Syrian refugees triggers hate speech and incites hatred against Syrian refugees, the comments under the most viral fact-checked and still existing 10 false contents were analyzed by using Nvivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software. The first 100 comments under each post were selected, and since some posts needed to be coded under different topics, respectively, 1,330 reactions to false claims about Syrian refugees in Turkey were coded. Twenty-eight fact-checked contents were enumerated and classified under five categories as below:

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[1] Teyit selects the news, claims to be checked in different ways. First, its editors scan the online content and select suspicious posts to verify. Secondly, it receives messages and e-mails from "netizens" about contents claimed to be false. Finally, social media platforms such as Facebook send it suspected contents to fact-check since they cooperate as a partner third-party fact-checking organization.

Administrative and Economic Issues	Cultural or Religious Threat	Crimes Committed by Syrians	Education and Health	Other
The claim that Konya Metropolitan Municipality pays salary to Syrians	The claim about the words of Syrian Ahmed-i Şerifi about Turks and Syrians	The claim that two Syrians kidnapped and raped a woman in Bursa, a major city	The claim that 131,746 Syrians were admitted to university	The claim that the photograph shows Syrians who protests Afghans who come to Turkey
The claim on Syrians queuing outside PTT (Post Office) branches in order to get their salary	The claim that the words of Syrian named Rachid Yusuf about Turkey	The claim that Syrians in Bursa killed a horse by cutting its head	The claim that Syrians could study at a university they want without any conditions	The claim of a video that shows kidnapped children by organ traffickers in Syria
The claim on Syrians queuing in Gaziantep for citizenship	The claim that 225,000 Syrians gave birth in Turkey in the last six months	The claim that the video showed that a dog had been tortured by Syrian children in the town of Sapanca	The claim that Syrians benefit from free in vitro fertilization	The claim that photographs shows kidnapped children by organ traffickers in Syria
The claim that Syrian national, Muhammed Erdoğan is elected as a deputy from Bursa	The claim that Syrians organized a march against the lifestyle of Turkish community disregarding the religion	The claim that a Syrian Refugee attacked a doctor	The claim that Syrian refugees are considered as legal priority patients in hospitals	
The claim that Syrian refugees were given a charity card of 930 Turkish Liras	The claim that photo shows Syrians burning Turkish flag	The claim that the video shows a Syrian man attacking a statue of Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey		
The claim that 'AK Cards' providing 50% discounts have been provided for Syrians	**Analyzed False Contents**			
The allegation that people posting comments about Syrians get prison sentence up to three years	**Disinformation 1:** The claim that İŞKUR will employ 7,400 Syrians **Disinformation 2:** The claim that Syrians living in Turkey won't pay for phone calls **Disinformation 3:** The allegation that people posting comments about Syrians get prison sentence up to three years **Disinformation 4:** The claim that 225,000 Syrians gave birth in Turkey in the last six month **Disinformation 5:** The claim that Syrian refugees are considered as legal priority patients in hospitals			
The claim that a water bill shows free water usage of a Syrian refugee in Konya	**Disinformation 6:** The claim that Syrians organized a march against the lifestyle of Turkish community disregarding the religion **Disinformation 7:** The claim that 131,746 Syrians are admitted to university **Disinformation 8:** The claim on Syrians queuing outside PTT (Post Office) branches in order to get their salary			
The claim that Syrians living in Turkey won't pay for phone calls	**Disinformation 9:** The claim about the words of Ahmed-i Şerifi about Turks and Syrians **Disinformation 10:** The claim that the words of Syrian named Rachid Yusuf about Turkey			
The claim that employment agency İŞKUR will employ 7,400 Syrians				

Figure 1. The most viral false contents about Syrians living in Turkey spreading on social networks.

Teyit has been working with Facebook to combat false information since 2018. Therefore, some of the posts spreading on Facebook had been fact-checked by the organization and deleted by Facebook. For this reason, it was found that just 12 of them were still active. One of those false contents spread on Twitter while 11 spread on Facebook. For consistency, comments under the false information that spread on Facebook were analyzed. Two of those contents were on quite similar subjects, for this reason, we selected the most viral one. Further, comments under false information in the "Crimes Committed by Syrians" post could not be analyzed, since all of them had been deleted and also accounts that shared these claims had been suspended. Consequently, 10 still-active posts were selected (see Figure 4), enumerated from new to old, and since the number of comments were varying in each of these posts, a limit was set, and 100 comments for each one were analyzed.

While analyzing comments, some of them were coded more than once. For instance, in some comments, a person both criticizes the government policies and also uses discriminatory language against refugees. Hence, they were cross-referenced. Specific subcategories were created according to discourse type (hate speech or discriminatory language), sarcasm, government policies (criticizing government policies or defending government policies), Syrians as a threat (economic and administrative, cultural and/or security threat) and false information (manipulation and fake, informative about false information and/or giving reference to Teyit).

According to our findings, there are self-proclaimed "verifiers" other than Teyit editors, posting comments under these false posts. In 132 comments, people say that the related content is false and/or disinformation. However, not every "verifier" provides other users with the correct information and/or the true version of the story. Of these 132 verifications attempts, in just 10 an explanation about why the content is false is provided. Further, in just five of them, these users share Teyit's verification links. Three of them are based on explanations written by Syrians, besides five of them based on religious explanations, like "if you accuse someone wrongly, you will end up in hell." These are a clear indication about the limited reach of verification efforts (see Figure 2).
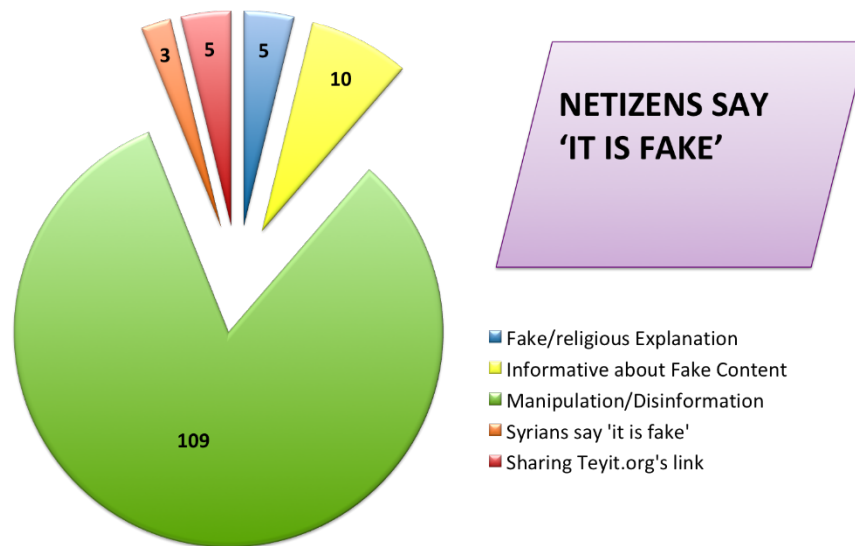
*Figure 2. Categories of users' verification attempts.*

Comments provoking people against Syrian refugees that might be considered as calls for action and/or "hate crime" were coded as "hate speech" other than discriminatory speech. Comments including slang language, othering, or insults are defined as "discriminatory language." About the "hate speech" category, various difficulties while coding some of the comments were faced. For example, many people used a proverb that means: "Hope Syrians choke to death on it!"[2] In Turkey, people frequently use this saying, and it does not always connote that specific wish. However, since it was not possible to figure out why people use this saying, for this reason, we coded all of them as "hate speech." On the other hand, comments that include slang language/swearing were not always coded as "hate speech," since sometimes users used this kind of rhetoric just for fun. Further, the comments that do not call people to act against Syrian refugees or those that are not about violation of basic human rights (like forced migration, compulsory abortion, killing asylum seeker, etc.), were coded under discriminatory language.

The most interesting finding was the frequent usage of sarcastic rhetoric while criticizing, discriminating, judging Syrian refugees, state policies, and people who support Syrians.

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[2] Zıkkım olsun!

Findings and Discussion:
From Hate Speech to Sarcasm; Detecting Negative Comments About Syrian Refugees

According to the Facebook policy, page and domain owners receive a notification when the content they shared is rated by a fact-checking partner.[3] The posts analyzed had been fact checked by Teyit and labeled by Facebook as false. One key finding of the analysis is that even if someone provided a credible falsification or Facebook warned people about the news that they read is fake, people still kept those posts online, and users tended to stick to those claims as if they were true, and mostly they posted negative comments under the fake news stories. Of 1,000 comments, 199 comments include hate speech, while 259 comments are discriminative (see Figure 3).


■ Total Number of Comments for Each Category   ■ Total Number of all Comments
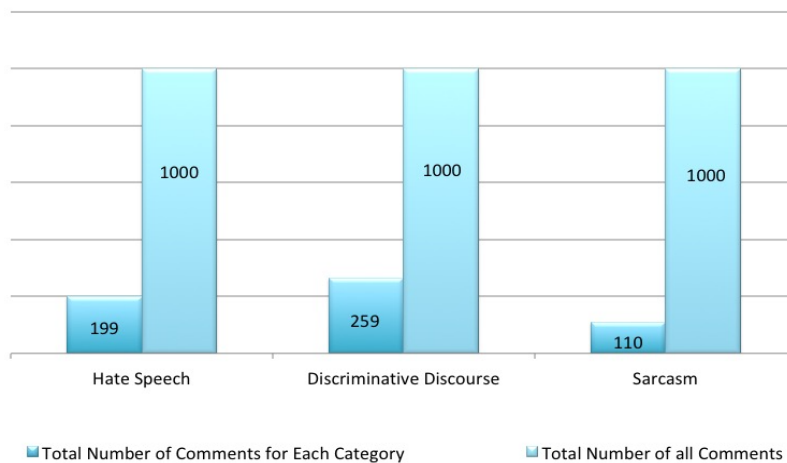
Figure 3. Total numbers of hate speech, discriminative discourses, and sarcasm.[4]

Sarcastic comments had been made under all of the posts analyzed. One hundred and ten comments sarcastically criticize or discriminate against Syrians, state policies, and/or include sarcastic as well as hate speech against Syrians, which constitute 11% of the comments analyzed. Some of those sarcastic comments had also been coded under "hate speech" or "discriminatory language."

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[3] For more information on Facebook's third-party fact-checking, please see the following link: https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/programs/third-party-fact-checking/faqs

[4] In this study, the main focus was on hate speech, discriminative discourse, and sarcastic comments about refugees. However, there were 432 more comments (37 of them coded more than once under different categories) that mostly contained anti/progovernment comments about refugee policies.
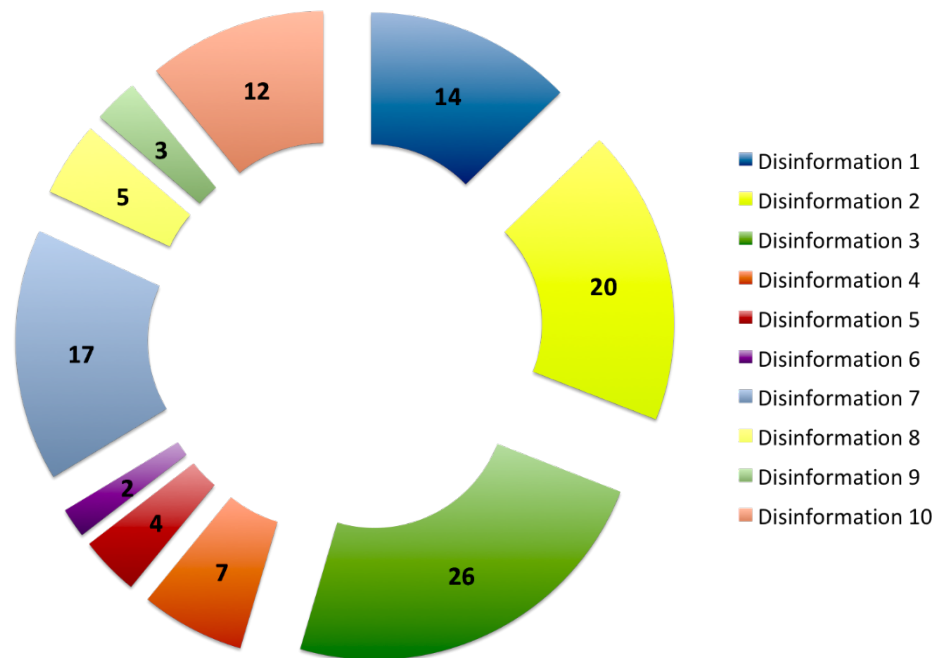
Figure 4. Number of sarcastic discourses according to fake news (see Figure 1).
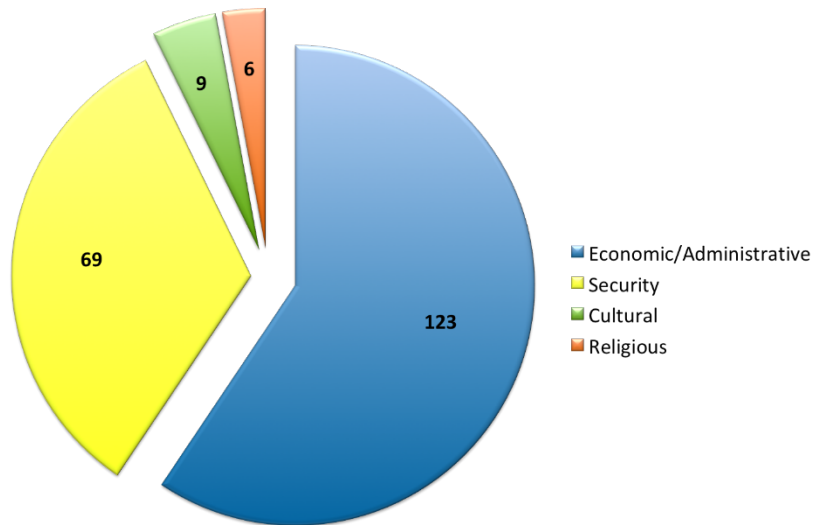
In the hate speech category, comments mostly consist of different kinds of violations of human rights. The most common comment that we saw below all disinformations that we analyzed is the call for forced migration. People who think that Syrians possess some kind of advantages that Turkish people do not have, mostly address to the government officials to send them all back to Syria, even though it is clearly mentioned that "everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum for prosecution" in Article 14(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Also, in this category, some sarcastic comments, like "brother, the border is just there!" (comment under Disinformation 6; Suriye Vatandaşlık Bürosu, 2017a), "it is obvious that you missed your country" (comment under Disinformation 10; Saklı Kalmış Sözler, 2018), "we will give you all the money, go back and live in your country…" (comment under Disinformation 10; Saklı Kalmış Sözler, 2018) were detected. With regard to the findings, sarcastic comments that aim to violate basic rights of asylum of Syrians are often hard to detect since those comments look like a joke or include a kind of humor depicting Syrians as "losers" and inferior.
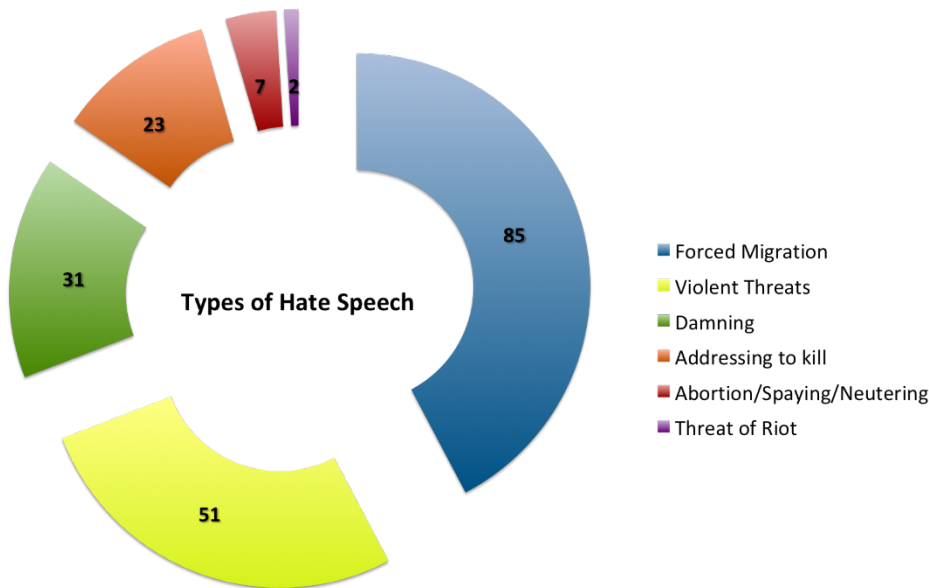
Figure 5. Number of hate speech against Syrian refugees.

In the hate speech category, it was observed that people sometimes threaten Syrians (51 comments), damn them (31 comments), and/or address to kill them (23 comments), talk about neutering them (7 comments), and call people to uprising against refugees (2). In these categories, several sarcastic discourses were also seen (see Figure 5). For example, in one comment under Disinformation 3 (Bağdat Caddesi Forumu, 2017), a user calls people to do something by asking, "Will we bury our head in the sand (like an ostrich)?" or under Disinformation 7, a user clearly threatens Syrians by inviting the extreme right-wing nationalist Grey Wolves group, linked to Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), to do something, by saying, "Howl the grey wolves, god protect Syrians!" (Suriye Vatandaşlık Bürosu, 2017b). Disinformation 9 is based on the claims of so-called Syrian Ahmed-i Sherif's words (however, this is discovered to be a troll account with no connection to a refugee). Here, two direct threats, written with slang but sarcastic language, which imply physical and sexual attacks. can be observed (Ahmed-I Şerifi, 2017). Under Disinformation 10 (so-called Syrian Rachid Yusuf's[5] provocations), there are also three similar kinds of threats (Saklı Kalmış Sözler, 2018). Sometimes just by using "triple dots" (ellipsis), users imply something covertly to threaten the refugees.

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[5] It is a troll account created by using a picture of Syrian entrepreneur Sami Al Ahmad. For detailed information and Teyit's analysis, please see the following link: https://teyit.org/rachid-yusuf-isimli-suriyeli-multecinin-turkiye-hakkinda-soyledigi-sozlere-iliskin-iddialar

Figure 6. Comments that see Syrians as threats.

In comments portraying Syrians as a threat, the most frequent stigmatization is as an economic burden (see Figure 6). It is claimed that Syrians possess advantages that Turkish citizens do not have. Sixteen sarcastic comments emphasize going to Syria, becoming Syrian citizens, and then coming back to Turkey to have so-called opportunities. In those comments, users are mostly saying "how can I be Syrian?" "I'll be Syrian and then come back to Turkey," "I feel like we are refugees," "Syrians are living better than Turkish people," "we should go to Syria, to let them work and live as they wish" (Bağdat Caddesi Forumu, 2017; HRT, 2018; Kış Güneşi, 2018; Saklı Kalmış Sözler, 2018; Suriye Vatandaşlık Bürosu, 2017b; Turan otağı, 2019 Turkish Special Forces—Türk Özel Kuvvetleri, 2019).

Sarcastic comments are concentrated mostly under posts implying economic advantages of being a refugee. Syrians are perceived to be "economic threats" more than, security, cultural, administrative, and religious "threats." For example, in the comments posted under Disinformation 1, in which it was claimed that the official employment agency (ISKUR) would admit 7,400 Syrians to new positions, the users posted following comments: "there were few backstabbers in the country, take some more," "be everything in this country other than a Turk," "guests first please," "let them not get tired because they already live on salaries," "let them fire the already employed ones (Turks) and employ all of them (Syrians)" (Turkish Special Forces—Türk Özel Kuvvetleri, 2019).

Another post claiming that Syrian refugees are admitted to universities without any exam and further provided scholarships (Disinformation 7) also attracted sarcastic comments like "Fuck Turks, Syrians are real men, we are ready to empty the country," "Syrians are king!" "our future lies in this honorable

nation, Turkey will be Syrians," "this is the justice I've been searching for. This support is even small for our brothers. The scholarship should be at least 2 thousand Turkish Liras" (Suriye Vatandaşlık Bürosu, 2017b).

Sometimes people "dehumanize" Syrians and/or liken them to animals (as cats, dogs etc.). Under Disinformation 4, which is a claim that about 225,000 Syrians gave birth in Turkey in the six-month period, comments such as, "they are like cats, they don't wait neither for March nor for July, they do," "they can compete with cats and dogs in fertility" can be seen (Karanlıktaki Aydınlık, 2018). Under Disinformation 2, one user made a comment that likens Syrians to a pet by saying, "distribute one of them (refugees) to each house, we can feed them, don't let them be a burden to the state" (HRT, 2018).

This research further demonstrates that there had been comments criticizing government's policies/stance under nine of the 10 posts. Two hundred and thirty-eight comments as such were identified, making it the second-largest cluster after comments with any kind of discriminatory rhetoric. This number also dwarfs the number of comments, which are supportive of government policies targeting the well-being of refugees (23). One of the posts (Disinformation 3), which drew criticism against the government, was that people who share videos, news, or photographs about Syrian refugees online get prison sentences up to three years. Some sarcastically criticized the president himself with posts like, "if this is true, then this is the beginning of sultanate" or "you enjoy yourself in your thousand-room palace and we bear the burdens of these dirty Syrians." Others make jokes and say, "if they look at my Facebook timeline, they will certainly give me death sentence," "it is like comedy but which we cannot laugh at," "life sentence penalty will save us," "let's take them in our bosom as well" (Bağdat Caddesi Forumu, 2017).

There have also been some heated debates under various posts between those who criticize government/officials and who support them. In a post allegedly showing the photograph of a Syrian refugee with a fancy wristwatch withdrawing his so-called salary from the post office (Disinformation 8; Turan otağı, 2019. One user criticizes the government as such: "This is not his (the refugees') but the officials' shame. If they authorized us we would go and take it. Those who set up this system should be criticized." Another user objects to these comments by saying "Don't provoke. Is the money given from your pockets? It is not only Syrians living in this country, but also traitors, rabbis, priests who also earn salaries from Turkey. The livelihood comes from Allah, everybody gets their share." However, it should also be noted that in the first 100 comments made, the number supporting government/policies is only nine, whereas those criticizing them is 47. In those comments, sarcastic comments like "they are paying less, they need to pay more" can be observed.

Detecting hatred or discriminative language is not hard, but for understanding sarcastic language, one needs to know the cultural and political background of a country and the political rhetoric there. It is important to know the clichés and the slang language that people use, especially in the light of both past and current political climate in the country. Sometimes people use some specific words that are hard to detect for a person who has no knowledge about those topics. For this reason, for communication studies, sarcastic language constitutes a challenging but productive field to better understand people's reactions against controversial and exploited topics like the refugee crisis. Overall, this analysis shows that people, comparing their lives with Syrians, mostly within an economic pretext, criticize government policies, use discriminatory

language and/or hate speech against Syrians especially in a period when a harsh direct criticism toward authorities frequently result in a legal prosecution.

Further Discussion and Conclusion

The information ecosystem contaminated with disinformation and false claims serves as a breeding ground for disadvantaged groups like refugees. In this study, it was observed that despite the efforts to verify/falsify unfounded claims, many users stuck to the initial allegations unless they were totally removed by Facebook or the user that posted it. Further, the frequent usage of sarcastic rhetoric as a tool for discriminating against refugees and criticizing officials as a tactic to avoid persecution is worth mentioning.

Initially, in the early stages of this research, a link between disinformation and (online) hate speech was expected to be observed. However, finding so many sarcastic comments, which can sometimes be falsely categorized as jokes unless analyzed in detail, was not expected. Cultural violence includes understanding and beliefs that make direct and/or structural violence look or feel "right." In this article, hate speech, discriminatory language, and, more importantly, sarcasm are defined as forms of cultural violence because the use of this language reinforces the roots of structural violence, which is systematic violence like the limited access to basic human needs, and additionally, it normalizes direct violence. As a minority group, most of the Syrians in Turkey do not possess the rights of citizenship, and there have been increasing reports about growing discontent among Syrians because of this systematic discrimination. As Galtung (2004) pointed out, there is always the threat that the use of this kind of language might turn cultural violence into structural and/or physical violence, because in comments analyzed, users mostly ask the government to change their policies on refugees, like denying the right of asylum and limiting basic opportunities provided for refugees like education and health services. Secondly, this study shows once again that, although the verification mechanisms reveal the disinformation, the number of users who tend to believe in fake news and continue to spread disinformation, is substantially high. Thirdly, research findings and observations show that users who are expected to have different ideological backgrounds and political views unite under disinformation-driven antirefugee rhetoric. Refugees got caught in a political crossfire. That is, the supporters of government or the opposition use similar hate, discriminative, and sarcastic rhetoric while sharing their ideas. Both groups strengthen xenophobia against Syrians, and hence the roots of cultural violence.

Detection of sarcasm in comments on social media platforms is considered as a tackling issue when a vast data of texts with computer programs are extracted and analyzed. This computer-based text analysis becomes even more difficult, especially when no other indicator, such as a hashtag or punctuation marks like an exclamation, etc., in the text, is provided by the user. However, in this study, they constituted an important part of data, and they were instrumentalized versions of humor for discrimination and expressing superiority. The motives of people who employ sarcastic rhetoric should further be studied to develop a better understanding about controversial and polarizing issues in different societies and between different groups. Further, important questions about the actual effects of sarcastic rhetoric in provoking antirefugee sentiments remain to be answered, and this can be an area of study for future research, especially amid increasing violence triggered by disinformation.

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