

20. A Critical Study of Street Interview Content in Syrian Media in Türkiye¹**Melis HAMAD² & Himmet HÜLÜR³**

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Abstract

Street interviews, in their various forms, have provided citizens with a platform to express their opinions, often incorporating entertaining content. These interviews gained popularity as game shows or hidden camera programs and became an integral part of television broadcasting due to their high financial returns. With the advent of satellite broadcasting and social media, street interviews transitioned to platforms like YouTube. In Türkiye, they attracted significant attention after the 2019 municipal elections, focusing on citizens' concerns, particularly regarding Syrian refugees. In response, Syrian media outlets in Türkiye, including Syria TV, launched "counter" street interviews, capturing the opinions of Arabs, Syrians, and Turkish citizens on various social and historical issues. This article aims to examine the content of the "Street Question" program on Syria TV and track the shift in its content towards Turkish society over the study's specified timeframe. According to the findings, the program initially aimed to promote familiarity and integration with Turkish society by exploring shared history and cultural traditions. However, it evolved into "defensive" content concerning Syrian refugees in Türkiye, focusing on debunking rumors associated with them. It provided Arab and Syrian audiences with a glimpse into Turkish societal perceptions without the need for direct interaction. This raises important questions about the role of recent street interviews in shaping the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of Arabic-speaking audiences, especially Syrians, towards Turkish society and how these perceptions reflect on the overall view of Türkiye.

Keywords: Street Interviews, Syrian Refugees, Syrian Media in Türkiye

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Türkiye'deki Suriye Medyasında Yer Alan Sokak Röportajı İçeriklerinin Eleştirel Bir İncelemesi⁴

Öz

Sokak röportajları, çeşitli biçimleriyle, vatandaşlara düşüncelerini ifade etme platformu sunmuş ve genellikle eğlenceli içerikler sunmaktadır. Bu röportajlar, yarışma programları veya gizli kamera şovları olarak popülerlik kazanmış ve yüksek mali getirileri nedeniyle televizyon yayıncılığının ayrılmaz bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Uydu yayıncılığının ve sosyal medyanın ortaya çıkmasıyla birlikte sokak röportajları YouTube gibi platformlara taşınmıştır. Bu röportajlar, Türkiye'de 2019 yerel seçimlerinden sonra büyük bir ilgi görmüş ve vatandaşların endişelerine, özellikle Suriyeli sığınmacılara yönelik kaygılara odaklanmıştır. Bunun sonucunda, Suriye TV dâhil Türkiye'deki Suriyeli medya kuruluşları, çeşitli sosyal ve tarihsel konularda Arap, Suriyeli ve Türk vatandaşlarının görüşlerini yakalamak amacıyla "karşı" sokak röportajları başlatmıştır. Bu makale, Suriye TV'deki "Sokak Sorusu" programının içeriğini incelemeyi ve belirlenen zaman diliminde dönüşerek Türk toplumuna yönelik bir dönüşüm bir içerik kazanmasını ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Bulgulara göre, program başlangıçta Türk toplumu ile tanışıklığı ve entegrasyonu teşvik etmeyi hedeflemiş, ortak tarih ve kültürel gelenekleri keşfetmiştir. Ancak, zamanla Türkiye'deki Suriyeli mültecilerle ilgili "savunmacı" bir içeriğe dönüşmüş ve onlarla ilgili şüpheleri gidermeye odaklanmıştır. Bu program, Arap ve Suriyeli izleyicilere Türk toplumuna dair bir bakış sunmakta ve doğrudan etkileşim olmadan Türk toplumu üzerindeki algıları yansıtmaktadır. Bu durum, sokak röportajlarının Arapça konuşan izleyicilerin Türk toplumuna yönelik algılarını şekillendirmedeki rolü ve bu algıların Türkiye hakkındaki genel görüşe yansımaları konusunda önemli sorular ortaya çıkarmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sokak Röportajları, Suriyeli Mülteciler, Türkiye'deki Suriye Medyası

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1. The origin and development of street interviews

The "interview" is recognized as a relatively old technique with social anthropological origins, aiming to identify "public opinion". The Egyptians were the first to use the interview for conducting a general population survey in 1886. In the modern era, the scope of using the interview expanded to become a main tool in psychological clinical examinations and tests at the beginning of the twentieth century. Charles Booth was the first to develop a social polls of the economic and social conditions of the residents of the British capital, London, in 1886, using the interview method, he published it in his first study, entitled "The Life and Work of the People in London 1902-1903" (Fontana and Frey, 1996, p. 647). Opinion polls were an early form of interviews. Booth's study inspired many American psychologists and sociologists and the Chicago School, as well as newspaper reporters (Fontana and Frey, 1996, p. 648). The use of the newspaper interview dates back to the Swedish newspaper "Dagens Nyheter" in the 1880s, but it developed significantly in the United States of America at the end of the nineteenth century. After interview being a unique method used on special occasions, it became a common daily journalistic routine in the editorial offices of many American newspapers (Ekström, Kroon & Nylund 2006, p. 24). During the twentieth century, the interview became a cornerstone in the development of traditional journalism as an effective communication activity for gathering information. It became a tool for reporting on everything exclusive and important to the public and a means of questioning elites and political leaders (Ekström and Londell, 2011, p. 172); It is an interactive process in which participants take turns, often by asking and answering questions, each contribution expresses specific topics, but these contributions are understood not only through their content, but also through their impact on the interactive context of the entire narrative whose course is determined by the editorial policies regulating the work of media institutions (Clayman and Heritage, 2002, p. 13).

In the 1950s, interviews became more hostile as a result of political, economic, and media changes. Clayman and Heritage (2002) believe that interviewing in a hostile manner with certain individuals or specific groups is far from transparent, as it can make some of the interviewees "out of the ordinary," exerting certain pressures that can push them to act in a way that exaggerates the drama of legitimate opinion and enhances the credibility of public discourse, and becomes a means of introducing ideological bias (Clayman and Heritage, 2002, p. 15). To evaluate any interview, Ekström and Londell suggest three interrelated foundations that must be dealt with in every interview: 1) The goal sought to be achieved from the interview, 2) The identities that are represented and negotiated, 3) The situation and context (Ekström and Londell, 2011, p. 175). As with interviews in scientific and social fields, professional rules and journalistic principles of interviewing stipulate speaking in a friendly (neutral) tone, starting with "ice-breaking" questions, neutralizing the interviewer's opinions during the conversation or engaging in expressing their opinion, taking into account the use of spoken terms to create common meanings with the audience and body language (Fontana and Frey, 1996, p. 660). In contrast, in the era of modern journalism, the interview has become more involved in creating journalistic narratives by controlling the field of the event, preparing the conversations of others and engineering their reactions, and fabricating journalistic events in a way that makes them more dramatic (Ekström, Kroon & Nylund 2006, p. 22).

The published literature agrees that the first street interviews date back to December 8, 1941, when Alan Lomax, the assistant in charge of the United States Folk Song Archive, sent field workers in 14 US states to collect the reactions of American citizens in the streets regarding the Japanese Navy's attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on December 7, and the United States' announcement of its entry into World War II. This established a new type of journalism from the street, conducted with a

person in a specific place or with a heterogeneous group of people in a heterogeneous environment with the aim of surveying a sample of public opinion and measuring the pulse of the local street (Mutlu, 2011, p. 204). This would later be known as "Man-in-the-Street Interviews" or Vox Pop, an abbreviation of the Latin phrase "vox populi," which literally means "voice of the people." Street interviews, along with field reports and documentaries filmed outside the media studio for the purpose of monitoring people's lives, were the first incubators for the birth of what is known as "reality television programs" (Hill, 2005, p. 573). These became remarkably popular in the 1980s with the development of the media industry and the competition of companies over the revenues generated from reality television programs, a guaranteed solution to the economic obstacles arising from producing programs. This popularity reached its peak during the 1990s (Hill, 2005, p. 574). Street interviews multiplied during that period, some of them became entertainment only, broadcast in the form of competitions subject to audience evaluations or generous material prizes, whose heroes are real people (Hill, 2005, p. 573). Street interviews depend on the art of the shot that embalms a moment of feelings of excitement, suspense, tension, and everything that might attract the attention of the audience. The recorded, unscripted shots are collected and edited and arranged for display according to the popular logic of the most exciting and attractive to the audience, and here begins the art of constructing the narrative.

According to Patrick Keating (2013), "the traditional narrative is absent from all types of reality television programs, including street interviews, and the functional and teleological narrative is on the rise, with the dominant narrative being based on three core values: suspense, curiosity, and surprise" (Keating, 2013, p. 56). These types of television journalism are based on curiosity and spying on the lives of others, where pleasure, fame, and wealth are found (Saye, 2004, p. 11) and they are rich in ready-made experiences and live situations that may allow the audience to develop their hypotheses and convictions, adjust their expectations, and provide them with a proactive response in the event they are exposed to similar situations. This is evident in hidden camera programs, social situation testing, or street interview programs. In this regard, Zizi Papacharissi and Ando L. Mendelson found that "perceiving reality" is an essential motive, like the motive to pass the time or relax, that motivates the audience to watch reality TV programs, especially those with an entertaining nature. Due to the appearance of spontaneity in these programs, the audience becomes more inclined to perceive them and accept them as "reality", especially among those who face difficulties in social interaction and engaging in discussions with others (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2007, p. 355), audience prefer to "spy" on others and their opinions instead of interacting with them, as alternative communication channels and ready-made experiences for viewers (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2007, p. 367). This is because many reality programs are based on quasi-social interactions where the audience might be affected by the character, the subject of the event, or some aspect of it, viewers find social and psychological similarities with the character, and these characters and their experiences become a source of information. From this perspective, choosing audience figures and problems experienced by ordinary people as examples to discuss real-life stories can evoke similar feelings in the target audience (Tatuoğlu, 2023, p. 68).

At the turn of the millennium (2000), mass society experienced a significant shift in global media tastes due to advancements in Internet broadcasting and digital multimedia technologies. Media content became more specialized and individualistic, and the base of workers in the media and communication fields expanded under the banner of "the right to produce and publish for all". This shift allowed the public the freedom to create and consume media content according to their own schedules and circumstances (Zhang, 2021, p. 103). News blogs, electronic, and news websites proliferated, emerging as a parallel force to traditional media. This development produced a discourse that diminished the prestige of traditional media, leveraging the speed of broadcasting, publishing, access, and interaction.

It also sought to emulate traditional journalism by adapting traditional journalistic forms, such as street interviews, leading to a selective, disengaged audience that engaged only partially with content relevant to them (Zhang, 2021, p. 105). An array of alternative news platforms emerged, including channels for amateurs, activists, and citizen journalists. This reinforced the notion that digital journalism represents "who does not have voice" journalism, "oppositional" journalism, and "militant" journalism, fights for the people. It grants every content producer on these social platforms the right to share information and opinions that could influence public political, social, and economic preferences and reflect their positions and behaviors, particularly evident during election campaigns and voting (Knoll, B., Pitlik, H., & Rode, M., 2023, p. 325). Thanks to the free Internet, digital platforms and channels have evolved into leading online economies (Andrejevic, 2002, p. 231), it did "not only changing the media environment but also differentiating the audience, altering information reception, and transforming the content of communication" (Zhang, 2021, p. 112).

Perhaps the most prominent social platform active in content production is the YouTube application, which is the second most popular social networking site in terms of user numbers, following Facebook (2.7 billion users) (Global Media Insight, 2024). Thanks to its free broadcasting capabilities, YouTube has managed to break the traditional media's monopoly on audience competition. It has attracted millions of users to watch and consume content, reshaping the economic landscape of network communication channels, which was previously dominated by traditional media. Network media has introduced new players into the media market. According to Storey, network content has caused a conceptual shift in "selling" through the network market, with network broadcasting focusing on selling the audience rather than the programs (Storey, 2010, p. 38). YouTube is a platform that hosts videos from ordinary users, celebrities, groups, companies, or media outlets. As its popularity grew, traditional media outlets increasingly relied on YouTube to rebroadcast videos that their correspondent networks could not capture (İsmail ve Sumaisim, 2012, p. 63). Initially, the site was branded with the slogan "Your digital video repository," which was soon replaced by "Broadcast yourself." The new slogan encouraged a diverse group of users to produce and share unlimited content on various topics (such as health, sports, art, politics, etc.), transforming the site into a "platform for participatory culture" and a venue for serious discussions on legal and ethical issues (Storey, 2010, p. 38). According to Media Insight 2024 statistics, YouTube usage rates surged in the fourth quarter of 2020 with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising from \$19.5 million to \$28.8 million, and reaching \$31.5 million in 2023. YouTube statistics indicate that the total earnings of the top ten most famous content creators worldwide in 2023 amounted to \$343.5 million, with notable channels including MrBeast, with an annual profit of \$82 million, and Rhett & Link, Ryan Kaji, and Nick DiGiovanni (İqbal, 2024).

2. Contemporary narratives of street interviews

Since their inception, social media sites and platforms have evolved from being politically neutral to becoming mediators that challenge governmental authority. They have transformed the social infrastructure of states that oppose the human right to knowledge and access to diverse opinions, resonating in a new global society that competes with the real world. Researchers have differing opinions on the impact of social media platforms on political and social movements across various countries. Notable examples of such movements include "The First Twitter Revolution" in Iran (2009), "The Near-Complete Revolution" in Russia (2011), the Black Revolution in Moldova (2009), the "Arab Spring Revolutions" in Arab countries (2011), the 2016 US elections, and the 2019 Brexit referendum (Schleffer and Miller, 2021, p. 79). Several studies agree that the Internet and social media sites play a crucial role in "mobilization," significantly enhancing voter information about candidates and elections, and

motivating political participation (Tolbert & Ramona, 2003, p. 175). They expand the circle of potential voters, including younger age groups in rural and remote areas (Ahmad, Alvi, & Ittefaq, 2019, p. 1), increase voting rates, and contribute to donations for political campaigns, thereby narrowing the gap between the government and the people and enhancing social capital (Larson, 2004, p. 28). As a result, many Western politicians have recognized the effectiveness of social media for their election campaigns, focusing on aspects of their personal lives and highlighting elements that support their rise to power. Prominent examples include former US Presidents Donald Trump and Barack Obama, among others. Social media has helped increase politicians' popularity by presenting them in unconventional and entertaining contexts, improving their public image, and creating friendly and approachable personas. It also allows politicians to reach a vast new audience and develop virtual quasi-social relationships with constituents. Through political representations, social media has shaped the mental map of potential voters and their political preferences (Wheeler, 2018, p. 4).

Despite the significant political and social impact of social media platforms in countries where organized protests have occurred, these platforms have also engendered a counter-current of censorship, tyranny, surveillance, and repression. The intensity and nature of these responses vary depending on the level of freedom of expression and democracy within each country (Schleffer and Miller, 2021, p. 81). Freedom of information and expression serves as a critical barometer for gauging political awareness and the depth of political participation among citizens; Leeson's study on media freedom and political participation across 60 countries, including those in Central and Eastern Europe, found that as government control over media and news outlets increases and media freedom declines, there is a corresponding rise in political apathy and ignorance among citizens. This indicates a stronger correlation between diminished media freedom and reduced political engagement (Leeson, 2008, p. 155). In nations with fragile democracies, social media platforms can become conduits for disinformation and the proliferation of fake news, undermining political culture and fostering extremism, particularly by anti-establishment figures. This dynamic may contribute to a shift from a fragile democratic system to an authoritarian regime. Conversely, in entrenched authoritarian states, social media platforms often function as instruments of censorship and repression (Schleffer and Miller, 2021, p. 87). The use of social media to propagate hate speech and incite violence can adversely affect political stability and social cohesion. Moreover, these platforms can create echo chambers where users are only exposed to information and viewpoints that reinforce their existing beliefs, potentially leading to increased polarization and political division. This polarization complicates efforts to achieve consensus and engage in meaningful dialogue (Al-Atawi et al., 2021; Alodat, Al-Qora'n, & Abu Hamoud, 2023, p. 4).

Unlike national media that contribute to serving the public interest, it has been observed that digital platforms on commercial social networks play a different role in shaping users' political awareness and motivating them towards political participation compared to national media. Unlike the latter, commercial social media sites have become focused on stirring up controversy and presenting superficial stories and problems with the aim of attracting more views at the expense of enhancing political awareness and motivating participation in the country's political life. They revive a sense of sarcasm instead of encouraging direct participation (Kees & Semetko, 2003, p. 759), amplifying skepticism about the government, insulting officials, and mocking them within the framework of "scandal", which can harm democracy. This results in a negative, uncivil, and abrasive discourse, based on the belief that negative news deserves coverage. The goal is profit by highlighting corruption, political disputes, and scandals rather than serving the public interest (Center for Civic Education, 1999). In this context, street interview programs broadcast on social media platforms, specifically YouTube, have also

transformed into a form of “political entertainment.” This includes a mix of political content and entertainment, referred to as “soft news”, “informational entertainment”, or “news hybrid”. These formats often feature implicit or explicit references to social and political issues, providing social and political information, commentary, or criticism. The content ranges from historical events to contemporary issues and frequently includes a moral imperative, a civic lesson, a political preference, or a desired outcome (LaMarre, 2015). Over time, this type of entertainment becomes a source of political knowledge, civic engagement, and the formation and direction of values (Riegert & Collins, 2016), and serves as an incentive that encourages the public to participate politically and increase political awareness by engaging in discussions and writing comments on social media platforms (Matthes, Heiss, & van Scharrel, 2023).

Despite the excessive realism that popular online street interviews may seem to exhibit today and their reliance on “raw reality” to produce discourse, this does not prevent the fact that they, like other journalistic genres, are narratives framed by meanings, purposes, and ideas. Each media institution is concerned with setting agendas and topics and charting the course of treatment for each of them, employing the environment and adapting communication tools to create a framed social position and a desired reaction, consistent with the political, cultural, and social structure of the media institution as a whole (Storey, 2010, p. 11). Content is framed according to three frames: 1) The Dominant Framing: This is the position in which the viewer is taught the intended meaning, which is reproduced in the media message, such as news bulletins and talk shows. 2) The Negotiating Framing: This is the position that attempts to establish the legitimacy of the opinions of all conflicting parties regarding a specific topic. 3) The Oppositional Framing: The content is framed as everything that is against the viewer’s interest (Storey, 2010, p. 13). Meanwhile, the psychological, social, and economic status of individuals remains largely concerned in interpreting media content (Storey, 2010, p. 14). This makes the public sphere formed by the media an artificial and fake environment, governed by perceptions formed by the influence of the “ghost audience” and stereotypes and clichés that can lead to wrong judgments, and shows the need to provide sufficient information that protects society from ignorance (Mutlu, 2021, p. 204).

Today, the subject of conflict and violence has become an attractive element in media content, especially in visual products and on social media. Although research and experimental studies agree that media violence can cumulatively involve the receiving audience in violent behaviors over the long term, violence based on storytelling and real-life human events remains prevalent in visual content (Tatuoğlu, 2023). Huesmann believes that the impact of violent media content exceeds the impact of other common threats to public health, placing media violence just behind the dangers of smoking cigarettes in terms of its effect on public health (Huesmann, 2007, p. 12). Despite this, entertainment mixed with conflict and violence may succeed in alleviating tension and reducing bias. Additionally, bringing conflict and violence into the open through comedy and entertainment can allow viewers to reassess their beliefs and test their own and implicit biases, potentially helping to filter and significantly reduce them (Walter & Ysfati, 2017, p. 5). However, the dominance of “irrationality” over entertainment in the post-modern era has turned content into a source of provocation, with actors often seen as “clowns” and “intruders” on the media scene who destabilize society, spread discord, and amplify grievances (Webber, Momen, Finley, et al., 2021, p. 419). Today, entertainment that condemns violence and conflict, fights injustice, and combats it can also shape and glorify conflict and violence, and even contribute to producing inequality (Webber, Momen, Finley, et al., 2021, p. 435). The effect of entertainment on people’s beliefs is similarly dual. While entertainment can lead to personal change, it can also reinforce biased and bigoted beliefs, making entertainment both a solution and a problem (Webber, Momen, Finley, et al.,

2021, p. 437).

3. Street interviews in Türkiye

The annual report titled "Global Digital Overview 2024" indicates that the number of people using social media in Türkiye reached approximately 67.4%, reflecting a 4% increase over the average use of social media in the country in 2019. The average daily use of social media in Türkiye was reported to be 2 hours and 44 minutes (Datar eportal, 2024). The year 2019 marked a turning point in the use of YouTube in Türkiye. During the municipal election campaigns across all states, local YouTube channels emerged, broadcasting programs and interviews filmed on the street to capture the opinions and expectations of Turkish citizens regarding the local election results. These channels gained significant popularity in the country. There are about 14 main YouTube channels in Türkiye, which have collectively garnered over 2 billion views in recent years. Llave TV is the leading Turkish YouTube channel, followed by Halk Ekranı, which was founded on May 29, 2018. Halk Ekranı gained prominence during the 2019 municipal elections and evolved into a significant political platform, addressing urgent and hot issues. It has become a formidable competitor to the country's traditional media (İlhan & Aydoğu, 2020, p. 441).

3.1. Street interviews and performances broadcast on YouTube

The concept of street shows and interviews broadcast on YouTube leverages the curiosity of passersby, often leading them to gather around the person being interviewed. The circle of the interview expands based on the interventions of the surrounding audience and the person being interviewed. The idea of street shows revolves around a single interview that can expand like a snowball, growing to include an unlimited number of comments and opinions from casual viewers. Recently, some street shows originating from YouTube have moved beyond typical entertainment and comedic elements. They now directly address the audience with questions about economic and living conditions, religion, and other controversial issues, often revealing the political loyalties of Turkish citizens. Studies examining the discourse of Turkish street programs have found that even minimal differences of opinion among Turkish citizens can escalate into verbal or psychological violence, or even physical violence. Some interviews are conducted with mutual respect, beginning and ending with dialogue, while others reflect an authoritarian structure that emphasizes "race" and "Turkish nationalism" (Nergiz, 2023, p. 119). This approach reveals hidden tendencies towards French secularism, which involves the exclusion and erasure of local, cultural, religious, and ethnic identities (Nergiz, 2023, p. 115), and is influenced by political and partisan preferences. This becomes evident during the evaluation of citizens' opinions on government agendas, which are interpreted in a manner that strays from rationality or public opinion. Some citizens avoid engaging in critiques of state policies and government, while others are excessively critical, potentially leading to acts of violence (Nergiz, 2023, p. 118). These tendencies can be reflected in users' comments on social media platforms, showcasing violent trends and deep divisions within the same society (Nergiz, 2023, p. 119). Research and experiments conducted within the framework of learning theory reveal that media portrayals of aggression and violence can spread violence throughout society by creating a domino effect on individuals, particularly children, through imitation. Both children and adults may bring violence into their homes, schools, and other areas of their social lives by emulating figures they view as role models (Nergiz, 2023, p. 75).

On the other hand, it is unfair to attribute the clashes and controversies that occur in street interviews between Turkish citizens solely to coincidence. It is essential to understand the intentions and goals of those involved in shaping the Turkish public space. During the production and broadcast of street

interviews, these interviews undergo a process of filtering, editing, and alteration, in which participants' statements may be excluded, and some reporters may engage in inappropriate commentary, emphasizing a specific message (Arı, 2023, p. 159). The content of these interviews is rearranged according to the producers' orientations and the reactions from the street are curated to align with their ideology, potentially increasing likes, followers, and advertisement revenue, thereby maximizing profits (Nergiz, 2023, p. 116). This manipulation affects the public's right to access the full context of conversations occurring in street interviews and frames them in a manner that negatively impacts the environment of democratic debate. It highlights the need for public oversight of media content that could create divisions in the public sphere of any society (Arı, 2023, p. 15). Akgundogdu (2023) suggests that the profits and financial revenues generated by street interview videos contribute significantly to the increase in the number and popularity of street programs in Türkiye. Data from the Social Blade website, which specializes in analyzing YouTube data, shows that the monthly revenue of the Llave TV channel reached \$18,000, while Halk Ekranı earned \$17,000 from 2021 to mid-2023 (Akgundogdu, 2023, p. 5).

Later, Syrian refugees became a prominent topic in Turkish street programs. The channel Llave TV published 12 videos featuring interviews with Turks discussing issues related to refugees, garnering over 5 million views. Similarly, Halk Ekranı conducted surveys with Turks regarding the deportation of Syrians, and other channels, such as Sade Vatandaş, monitored opinions in Gaziantep. These channels succeeded in commodifying the issue of Syrian refugees, turning it into a popular content that generates views and profits. Initially, the programs started with basic questions about daily life, such as prices, inflation, transportation crises, and employment. However, they quickly shifted focus to blame Syrian refugees and the Turkish government for the crises affecting Turkish society (Akgundogdu, 2023, p. 5). Over time, the discourse in street programs evolved into more confrontational dialogue, often involving citizens in arguments with passersby. These arguments frequently centered around the nationality of the speaker or their stance on Syrian refugees. Some Turkish opinions have defended Syrians and refuted claims against them, particularly addressing accusations of causing unemployment, inflation, and economic harm. For instance, on July 23, 2022, Kanal Dünya aired a street interview in Istanbul featuring a Turkish-Kurdish girl who complained about a Syrian man carrying an iPhone 11 while she had a phone worth 1,300 Turkish liras. This statement was countered by a Syrian girl of Kurdish origin, who provided explanations for why Syrians came to Türkiye. Her perspective was supported by some Turkish girls who refuted the initial claims. Similarly, Vatandaş TV aired an interview on July 16, 2022, with a Turkish citizen in the Bağcılar area of Istanbul. The interview featured a positive viewpoint on Syrians working for low wages while criticizing Turkish men for idling in cafes instead of working. This discussion soon escalated into verbal altercations with some citizens (Vatandaş TV, 2022).

On July 19, 2022, a video clip from a street interview on Mediali TV featured a young man shouting, "I am a human being". It was later revealed that the individual, Ahmed Kanjo, a 17-year-old Syrian, was participating in a street program in the Üsküdar district of Istanbul during the summer of 2022. This incident garnered significant attention from both Turkish and Syrian media. Many newspapers and news websites, including leftist outlets, covered the event and labeled the remarks directed at Ahmed Kanjo as racist. For example, the leftist website Halk TV reported with the headline "He had responded to racist statements by saying 'I am a human being': Syrian youth was hosted in the Complex", highlighting that Ahmed Kanjo had been forced to leave his school due to what the outlet described as "racist remarks and hateful sentiments", despite his academic excellence and lack of Turkish friends. Conversely, some street programs featured interviews with individuals posing as Syrians, who echoed common negative stereotypes about Syrian refugees. For instance, Halk Sesi TV posted a video on its

YouTube channel featuring an interview with someone identifying as "Syrian". In the video, the person remarked that Syrians are pleased in Türkiye due to the presence of the sea and hookah, which quickly sparked reactions and discussions on social media. It was later revealed that the individual was actually Turkish and had falsely claimed to be Syrian (Teyit, 2021; Maalumatfuruş, 2021).

Street programs in Türkiye have highlighted various issues faced by Syrians, encapsulating these situations and providing a snapshot of the allegations against them within Turkish society. These programs have given fluent Turkish-speaking Syrians a platform to voice their perspectives in public, allowing Turkish citizens to hear different sides of the story and scrutinize allegations directly. This real-time exposure has offered viewers an opportunity to assess the validity of these claims and observe the societal divisions among Turkish citizens regarding Syrian refugees. A notable example of this is a report aired by Kanal Türkiye on April 10, 2022. The report featured a Turkish citizen who claimed that his hunger and unemployment were caused by the presence of Syrians. The situation quickly escalated when two job offers were extended to him by other Turkish citizens. The man responded by suggesting that they "talk to the People's Democratic Party and the Good Party". This incident underscored the influence of political discourse on public attitudes towards refugees and the role of such rhetoric in fueling accusations against them. Additionally, it was observed that content related to interviews with Syrians or incidents involving them often appeared in Turkish media several days after being covered by Syrian and Arab media outlets. This raises questions about the effectiveness of media monitoring within Türkiye and the role of Syrian media in tracking and understanding Turkish media portrayals. The delay in reporting and the dissemination of such content may impact Syrians' perceptions of Turkish society and shape or reinforce their views on the allegations and narratives presented.

In response, several Syrian media outlets in Türkiye have launched "counter" street programs, hosted by Syrians fluent in Turkish. These programs address various issues faced by Syrian refugees, including employment, rising prices, increasing rents, and medical care in hospitals. Their goal is to counteract prevailing misconceptions and misinformation about Syrians in Türkiye. These counter-programs have garnered hundreds of thousands of views and have increasingly become a platform for Syrians to represent and defend themselves. Notable examples include "Street Question" on Syria TV and "Syria Pop" on Orient TV, which aired in Istanbul in 2021 before the channel ceased operations. This paper aims to analyze the discourse presented in these street programs by examining selected episodes from Orient TV and Syria TV aired between 2021 and 2023.

3.2. Street interviews by Syrian and arab media in Türkiye

Despite the restrictive environment for foreign investment in Türkiye's media sector, Syrian media outlets have managed to establish a presence in the country. This success can be attributed to Türkiye's initial "open door" policy, which mitigated the perception of Syrians as a threat and facilitated their entry into the media landscape. This policy allowed Syrian individuals and institutions to cross the Syrian-Turkish border with relative ease, bypassing many of the usual restrictions and conditions (Bayır & Aksu, 2020: 336). Consequently, many media institutions operated without formal licenses (Boztaş, 2019: 154). To navigate these regulatory challenges, many Syrian media outlets chose to register as "non-profit charitable institutions". This status provided greater flexibility, allowing these outlets to rent office space, purchase equipment, and open bank accounts for funding transfers. However, Turkish law requires that such institutions have a formal board of directors with a Turkish majority and a legal accountant to manage financial reporting to Turkish tax authorities (IMS, 2020, p. 41). This legal framework ensures compliance with Turkish regulations, which mandate that media institutions must

operate in Turkish to receive a broadcasting license.

The agenda of Syrian media in Türkiye has largely been centered on reporting developments in the Syrian conflict. Most reports and news materials from these outlets focus on military battles and the displacement of Syrians, along with international developments and regional positions on the Syrian war. While many Syrian media outlets primarily cover service-related news pertinent to Syrians in Türkiye—such as updates on temporary protection cards, required documents for renting residential or commercial properties, and health services—there has been a noticeable shift in their focus. This change was driven by evolving Turkish policies towards Syrians and significant political decisions. In response to these shifts, Syrian media outlets began to closely monitor Turkish media content concerning Syrian refugees and track statements from Turkish political parties. These outlets employed young Syrian professionals who are fluent in Turkish, both in language and writing, to translate and analyze Turkish media content (G1, 11.9.2023⁵; G3, 14.9.2023⁶).

Over time, several Syrian institutions in Türkiye that managed to survive both administratively and financially began to adopt a more defensive stance in support of Syrians. This shift involved monitoring Turkish media content to address and refute rumors about Syrian refugees, as well as tracking any media or political content that supported Syrian refugees. This included coverage by Turkish journalists, politicians, citizens, and media institutions (G2, 15.9.2023⁷). This defensive approach has reignited latent fears among Syrians about their future in Türkiye and has shed light on Turkish society's perceptions of Syrians. It has also highlighted a noticeable decline in their social acceptance, as reflected in studies on social harmony and integration in Türkiye (Erdoğan & Erdoğan, 2020).

Since 2021, several Syrian media outlets in Türkiye have stepped in to address the issues facing Syrian refugees, particularly in the absence of a cohesive political representation and the fragility of existing decisions. These outlets have established Turkish-language media platforms with the aim of correcting misinformation about Syrian refugees, engaging with Turkish society in its native language, and rebuilding Syrians' trust and presence. A notable initiative is the Enab Baladi newspaper, which launched a podcast program titled (Border Effect) on February 17, 2022. This weekly podcast addresses social, cultural, and educational issues, aiming to educate Turkish society about refugee rights, migration stories, and efforts towards integration. In October of the same year, Orient TV introduced a new Turkish-language platform called Orient Türk. This platform focuses on Turkish foreign policy towards Syria, Syrian refugees, and broader Middle Eastern issues. Despite its brief operation period, Orient Türk has managed to attract a following among Turks on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Additionally, several Syrian media outlets in Türkiye have launched street programs featuring Syrians fluent in Turkish. These programs, such as (Street Question) by Syria TV and *Syria Pop* by Orient TV (before its closure in 2021), address various topics related to Syrian refugees, including employment, rising costs, increased rents, and healthcare. These programs have accumulated hundreds of thousands of views and have become a significant voice for Syrians, defending them and countering negative narratives through direct engagement with Turkish citizens.

4. Methodology

This research paper employs a descriptive approach using content analysis to examine and analyze the

⁵ G1: Coded interview with journalist No. 1

⁶ G3: Coded interview with journalist No. 3

⁷ G2: Coded interview with journalist No. 2

street interviews produced and broadcasted by both Orient TV and Syria TV, two prominent Syrian media outlets operating in Türkiye. The focus is on episodes related to Türkiye and Turkish society to understand the frameworks and concepts represented by these episodes, which form the research sample, in shaping a general perception of Turkish society. For content analysis, the paper relies on a random sampling method to select and analyze street interviews broadcasted between 2021 and 2023 that are pertinent to the study's subject. This includes the program "Sual al-Shari" (Street Questions), which began in March 2022. This program features competitions involving Turks and Syrians in Türkiye and northern Syria, including displaced persons in border camps, offering cash prizes to winners. Additionally, the program aims to provide direct reflections of news, events, and decisions related to Syrians in Türkiye. The program covers various topics such as (Turkish opinions on Arabs - Pros and cons of the presence of Syrians in Türkiye - Preferences between migration or Turkish citizenship- Expectations regarding deportation and voluntary return - Turkish views on marriage with Syrians - Attitudes toward incidents of violence against foreigners and Syrians in Türkiye. The total sample analyzed from Syria TV comprises 17 interviews and field reports related to Turkish society and refugees.

Table 1. Distribution Map of the Content Analysis Sample of 'Al Shaar'a' Program Episodes on Syria TV in 2021 and 2022

Content Title	Content Type	Episode Date
1. If you woke up in the morning and found yourself the president of your country, what would be your first decision?	Street Question Program	12 March 2022
2. How many Arab soldiers were in the Ottoman army during World War I?	Street Question Program	19 March 2022
3. Where did the oldest alphabet and musical note known to mankind originate? Is it true that the first university in the world was in Türkiye?	Street Question Program	14 May 2022
4. Reactions of Turks who watched a video of an elderly Syrian woman being kicked in the face by a citizen.	Field Report	1 June 2022
5. When was the last time you cried? Turks and Arabs share with us touching memories and strange experiences.	Street Question Program	11 June 2022
6. When was the last time you laughed?	Street Question Program	25 June 2022
7. We asked Turks about their opinion on Arabs... and these were the answers.	Street Question Program	2 July 2022
8. His name is Arabic, but he objects to the Arabic language!" We asked Turks about LC Waikiki's "failure" regarding the Arabic language	Field Report	14 July 2022
9. We discussed with Turks some misconceptions about Syrians, and these were the responses	Street Question Program	16 July 2022
10. Syrians live like kings and came to Türkiye to enjoy themselves!" A plethora of misconceptions and rhetoric tinged with racism during our correspondent's meeting with a group of Tur	Field Report	10 August 2022
11. A group of Turks defend Syrians.	Field Report	18 August 2022
12. We asked Turks... Why did the Syrians leave their country? After watching the movie "For Sama"... these were the answers	Field Report	22 September 2022
13. A Turkish woman attacks a man who spoke with racism about Syrians. We asked Turks, do you have a Syrian friend or neighbor?	Field Report	8 October 2022

14. A Turkish woman loves "Molokhia" while a man described Syrians as "traitors"!	Field Report	21 October 2022
15. Turks attack a woman who spoke with racism about Syrians	Field Report	27 April 2023
16. Should we throw refugees into the sea... Isn't that racism?" Sama asks Turks, who will you vote for in the presidential and parliamentary elections?	Field Report	13 May 2023
17. What does the Turkish street think about the campaign to remove the Arabic language in markets and streets?	Field Report	29 July 2023

Syria TV

Syria TV is an Arab television channel affiliated with the "Fadaat" media group, which is funded by the State of Qatar. Established in 2015 and based in Istanbul, Türkiye, Syria TV began its first live broadcast in March 2018. The channel focuses on Syrian affairs, providing coverage on various aspects of political, economic, social, and cultural life, both within Syria and among the Syrian diaspora. The channel operates a network of 25 correspondents, along with numerous activists and collaborators, across Syria, Türkiye, Palestine, several European countries, Russia, and the United States. Syria TV also maintains an active presence on social media platforms, including Facebook: "Syria Light", "Syria Stream", "Syria TV", Twitter: "Syria News", "Syria TV", Instagram: "Syria Light", "Syria TV".

On March 10, 2022, Syria TV launched a program called "Street Question" presented by Syrian content creator Mehdi Kamakh. Initially, the program had an entertaining format, relying on conducting a quiz limited to asking various questions in history, art, religion, and other diverse fields to passersby of different nationalities, both Arabs and Turks, and awarding the winners special cash prizes, particularly during Ramadan. Alternatively, it involved surveying the opinions of passersby, including Syrians, about their lives in Türkiye, their work, families, concerns, and expectations regarding their future in Türkiye. The sample for the content analysis of Syria TV included 17 episodes and reports published from March 2022 to March 2023, and the episodes will be discussed according to their themes.

Based on the examination of the 17 episode titles, it is observed that the channel tended to edit the titles of "Street Question" episodes and street reports in a manner that ranged from strongly supporting Syrian refugees by showcasing Turkish citizens' willingness to get closer to Syrians, form friendships, and engage in work, study, and cooking with them, to labeling them as "traitors", "savages" and "living for free" through government-funded bank cards. Initially, the program aimed to enhance closeness and warmth in social relations between Arabs and Turks by addressing their shared wartime history. For instance, on March 19, 2022, an episode titled "How Many Arab Soldiers Were in the Ottoman Army During World War I? Here Are the Answers of Turks and Arabs in Istanbul" was broadcast, where the presenter asked Turks and Arabs in Istanbul. The participants' responses reflected a broad awareness among Turks of the Arab participation in Türkiye's War of Independence, and the nationalities of the Arab fighters and the countries they hailed from were identified. From there, the presenter asked the contestants about their opinions on what is said about Arabs and Syrians in general, attempting to foster a positive reconsideration of the military, political, and cultural history shared between Arabs and Ottomans.

In the same context, on May 14, 2022, the channel aired an episode titled "Where Did the Oldest Alphabet and Musical Notation Known to Humanity Originate? And Is It True That the First University in the World Was in Türkiye? We Asked Several Turks, and Here Were the Answers". This episode clearly

demonstrated the limited knowledge of some Turks about the history of the Middle East, particularly the Arab countries neighboring Türkiye. The aim of the episode was to introduce Turks to the historical and cultural civilizations that emerged in Syria and to highlight that Syria, Türkiye's neighboring country, is the cradle of great civilizations, just as Türkiye is. Notably, in the same episode, the program's presenter praised the knowledge of a nine-year-old Turkish child for his correct answers to historical questions about Syria and Iraq, in contrast to university students.

In the second quarter of the same year, the channel attempted to address people's pains and sorrows using a humanistic context. On June 11, 2022, the program asked Turks and Syrians about the last time they cried. Among the responses were a Turkish man recalling his family who were entirely lost in the 1999 earthquake, and another Turkish man crying over his sick son, among others. Notably, the episode received wide interaction and relatively high viewership, achieving multiple objectives that the channel seeks through the program, such as building bridges of understanding by highlighting shared experiences and emotions. This can reduce prejudices and enhance social integration, showcasing the human side by having people talk about their feelings and personal experiences, which helps break stereotypes and present a more compassionate and humanistic image between migrants and the host community. It also enables the audience to better understand the difficulties faced by both the Syrian and Turkish communities, whether social, economic, or psychological. Additionally, enhancing emotional communication encourages both sides to provide the necessary psychological support to each other and raises awareness.

In the same vein, the channel aired an episode titled "We Asked Turks: Would You Marry Your Daughter to a Syrian?" as a step towards testing the degree of harmony and adaptation between Syrians and Turks. On June 29, 2022, the episode posed this question to Turkish citizens attending the wedding of a Syrian man and a Turkish woman in Istanbul. During the program's camera tour, it was noted that most attendees, mainly women and girls, focused on the notion that marrying a foreigner is not as important as the individual's desire to marry whomever they wish. In other words, the values of "love and understanding" in marriage took precedence over the nationality of the partner, challenging the belief that Turkish society is closed off. When measuring any society's acceptance of other nationalities, it is sufficient to see how open the society is to marrying foreigners, as marriage constitutes the highest level of social acceptance. Interestingly, in this episode, when one Turkish woman was asked about her opinion of Syrians, she responded that the Turkish community has been wronged by Syrians, as they work and open businesses without paying taxes unlike the Turks. The presenter jokingly responded, "I hope the groom doesn't run away!" The woman was surprised and said, "Is the groom Syrian?" She then added that Syrians can stay in Türkiye.

With the popularity of topics raised by Turkish street programs regarding Syrian refugees, the program "Street Question" in turn focused on asking Turkish citizens more about their opinions on foreigners in general and Syrian refugees in particular. On May 7, 2022, the channel aired an episode titled "Are you in favor of the return of Syrians to their country? We asked several Turkish citizens about the pros and cons of Syrians being in Türkiye". In this episode, the host attempted to mention the number of Syrian businesses operating in Türkiye and the contribution of Syrian refugees to the country's national income. However, the responses from most of the Turkish respondents were centered around the economic crisis; Syrians were perceived as having "left no job opportunities for Turks, causing an increase in rent prices, receiving financial aid from the government which is spent on providing healthcare and education services for Syrians, and failing to fight to protect their country unlike Turkish soldiers who are fighting in Syria." In reality, the responses from most respondents echoed what is often stated by

some political parties and groups opposed to the presence of refugees in Türkiye. Moreover, some citizens pointed out that statements from the ruling party about the Turkish government spending \$40 billion on Syrian aid, without specifying the source "the European Union," indicate an issue with the prevailing media discourse in Türkiye regarding Syrian refugees. This media discourse appears to have a significant impact on the opinions of the majority of participants in the episode. Meanwhile, a small minority of Turkish participants believed that the Turkish government's policy of dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis—by keeping them in Türkiye and preventing them from moving to Europe for money, while refusing to return them to Syria amidst ongoing conflict and not enabling them to integrate and learn the Turkish language—was a cause of the current situation of Syrian refugees in Türkiye and the resentment in Turkish society towards their presence. They also suggested that the high cost of real estate and rental prices was due to homeowners, not Syrian refugees.

It is worth noting that the majority of Turkish citizens surveyed in the program expressed their belief in the accuracy of the prevailing rumors against Syrians based on what they had heard or seen on social media or Turkish digital platforms. In this regard, Della Ratta and Bunce argue that the virtual information society in highly fragmented environments, such as Syria and Türkiye, both ethnically, religiously, and politically, can undermine the prospects for dialogue and deepen existing divisions within the same society, driving it towards fragmentation and schism due to ideological partisanship (Della Ratta, 2012, p. 66; Bunce, 2016, p. 115). This raises the need to explore the side effects of popular digital content on social media platforms, especially those with political and social undertones, and their role in widening societal rifts and increasing fragmentation within a single community, rather than bridging gaps and reconciling perspectives. On the other hand, in geographically, ethnically, and politically conflicting societies and nations such as Türkiye and Syria, it has become clear that street programs, as one of the early models of reality television, play a dual role. While their producers aim to alleviate local public anger and reduce fears and tensions, they simultaneously resurrect suppressed political and social tensions, manifesting as conflicts evident in the personal traits of individuals or groups participating in reality programs. These programs perform a "nationalistic inferential" function by reevaluating the concept of citizenship (Volcic & Mark Andrejevic, 2009, p. 22).

In the context of examining perceptions, the program aired an episode on July 2, 2022, titled "We Asked Turks About Their Views on Arabs... And Here Are the Answers," in which several Turkish citizens were asked about their opinions on Arabs. Their perceptions fell into four categories: 1) Wealthy economic status, 2) Extravagant spending, 3) Religious commitment, and 4) Coming from uncivilized communities due to eating with their hands rather than using cutlery. In reality, the third and fourth perceptions related to religion and eating habits reflect a pivotal stage in Turkish society's history at the end of the Ottoman era and the beginning of the Turkish Republic. Regarding religion, it still constitutes an important link in Turkish society (SETA and POLLMARK, 2009, p. 136), but it also represents a social distance that may threaten secular national identity (Ayvazoğlu, Kunuroglu, Yağmur, 2021, p. 99). Its importance diminishes as Turkish citizens increasingly perceive foreign threats to their economic and cultural spheres, potentially leading them to overlook the shared religious commonalities (Yanbolloğlu, 2018, p. 27). Concerning eating habits, changes in dietary patterns and cooking utensils have become a form of lifestyle distinction from the Bedouin region and the Middle East in general, and a form of predicting political loyalty. Since the 18th century, Turkish cuisine has leaned more towards Western culinary practices and preferences. In the 1940s, Western influence on Turkish cuisine became evident with the shift from eating on the floor to using tables, cutlery, and the introduction of French dishes (Sali, 2023, p. 135). This shift may indicate Anatolian society's efforts after the establishment of the Turkish Republic to distance itself from all things Middle Eastern and gravitate towards Western

influences.

On July 16, 2022, the channel merged the "Street Question" program with field reporter Sima Na'na's reports to present a joint episode hosted by both presenters. The episode, titled "We Discussed Some Misconceptions About Syrians with Turks, and Here Were the Responses..." featured the host of "Street Question" acting as a "corrector" and "clarifier" of some common claims about Syrian refugees in Türkiye. This episode can be considered a pivotal moment in the channel's approach towards Turkish society. In other words, it was clear that the channel chose to adopt a defensive role in favor of Syrians and counter the rumors against refugees, such as claims about their failure to fight in their country compared to Turks, rising prices and increased rent, job opportunities, and free public transportation, with the source being the media.

In a similar context, on August 10, 2022, the channel aired an episode titled "Syrians Live Like Kings in Türkiye," which highlighted the reactions of Turkish citizens and their positions regarding the abuse or assault of Syrians or foreigners resembling them. Reactions were divided between those supporting the assault on all Syrians due to their perceived role in rising rents, reduced job opportunities, and pre-existing prejudices against Syrians in Türkiye compared to Ukrainian refugees, as well as claims of betrayal of the homeland, refusal to fight in Syria while Turkish soldiers are killed there, receiving pensions, and receiving free medical treatment in government hospitals. The host attempted to correct some prevalent claims about Syrians, such as the European Union's funding of Syrian refugees' medical rights in Turkish hospitals, countering arguments about free medical care. She also cited the news of the death of two Turkish soldiers in northeastern Syria, noting that ten other Syrian fighters were killed in the same incident but were omitted from Turkish news reports, evidenced by participants' lack of awareness of this fact. Notably, most of these interviews ended with a common complaint about "high rents" as an economic reason. It was also striking that some Turkish citizens pointed out the phenomenon of multiple Syrian families living in one house or ten people in a small home, paying a minimal amount of money. They believed this was due to Syrians seeking to live in "luxury" rather than "needing to save" money to send to their families or support their relatives either in Türkiye or Syria.

It was observed that the channel continued to focus on capturing the opinions of Turkish citizens through interviews and field reports rather than through the "Street Question" program. On October 8, 2022, the channel aired an episode titled with a positive connotation, "A Group of Turks Defends Syrians". The host began the episode by asking passersby about their views on Syrians in Türkiye and then confronted them, giving them a chance to test and verify their knowledge. The responses included claims that Syrians are "deviant, harassers, able to buy everything they want with government-provided salaries unlike Turks, and prefer working in Türkiye over returning to fight in Syria." During the episode, the host discussed the martyrs of the Çanakkale incident and Syrian involvement in it. This was met with a response from a Turkish citizen stating, "I am talking about all Arabs; none of them supported Türkiye!" This statement was countered by another Turkish citizen who accused him of making false claims against Syrians, citing an incident where a 70-year-old Syrian woman was recently kicked in the face multiple times by a Turkish citizen involved in 20 criminal offenses. This incident challenged the claim that Syrians are involved in criminal activities and reminded Turks of similar incidents in 1923 involving foreigners and the country's previous hostilities towards foreigners. In response, another man argued that Syrians and Turks share a common Ottoman heritage with cultural and social ties.

It was striking to observe the interventions of some passersby eager to participate in the discussion based on their information, observations, or experiences. They often introduced themselves by stating their

provinces or ethnic backgrounds, specifically from the southern and southeastern provinces bordering Syria. Suddenly, the "ethnicity" of the Turkish citizen became another point of division in assessing the speaker's contributions. This highlights the deep cultural, societal, and political differences within Turkish society and the significant impact of ethnicity and religion on social relations. It was common for a Turkish citizen expressing opposition to the presence of Syrians to be countered by another Turkish citizen who disagreed from a humanitarian and religious (Islamic) perspective. This situation can be interpreted as the Syrian refugee issue in Türkiye being one of the most prominent issues revealing a bipolar social fracture (political-religious) within Turkish society. In other words, the Syrian refugee issue in Türkiye may not have been the central issue but rather one that highlighted the extent of the existing social rift in Turkish society, such as the tension between national identity, Islamic identity, and ethnic identity.

It is also notable that Syria TV has consistently emphasized the reality that Turkish society rejects and combats racism. The channel highlighted that "the majority" of Turks oppose any form of "racism" or discriminatory and exclusionary rhetoric, as clearly demonstrated by the titles of some episodes of the "Street Question" program. In this context, on April 27, 2023, the channel aired an episode titled "Turks Attack a Turkish Woman Who Spoke Racistly About Syrians." The host initially questioned Turkish passersby about their opinions on the upcoming presidential elections in Türkiye and their predictions for the next president. The conversation then shifted with one woman to Syrian refugees in the Fatih district and their relocation to Başakşehir and Florya, known for their high living costs and wealthy residents. The woman was surprised by another Turkish woman's response challenging the claims, stating, "They are human beings". Another Turkish man responded that despite the earthquake affecting ten Turkish provinces, Turks still exhibit racism among themselves, let alone towards refugees in Türkiye. The first woman, in anger, called for Syrians to leave, only to be met with a Turkish man suggesting that Jews, Christians, and Armenians in Türkiye, like Syrian refugees, should also leave. The woman replied that religious minorities in Türkiye have been citizens since the Ottoman Empire's inception, reflecting further ethnic, political, and social conflicts within Turkish society. This exchange underscores that the founding of the Turkish Republic represents a decisive and distinguishing break from the Ottoman Empire's political, geographical, and cultural legacy.

At the same time, positive headlines can generally be interpreted as carrying negative connotations. It was observed during the analysis of field report episode titles that they increasingly framed anti-Syrian refugee opinions as "racist," suggesting that "racism" is an almost inherent trait in Turkish society. Despite the channel's attempts to highlight Turkish society's rejection of racism by focusing on defenders and prioritizing them in the headlines, it nonetheless labeled "racism" as a genuine attribute of a segment of Turkish society. For instance, on October 8, 2022, the channel aired a report titled "Turkish Woman Attacks a Man Who Spoke Racistly About Syrians: We Asked Turks If They Have a Syrian Friend or Neighbor, and Here Were the Responses," and another titled "A Group of Turks Defends Syrians," published on August 18, 2022. Despite the apparent positivity of the episode titles, the program's visual identifier labeled the episode with the phrase "Racists Are Not One of Us." This result aligns with Charles Wright's perspective on the dysfunctionality of media, where while the media aims to create a positive image of a community, it may simultaneously generate a parallel negative image.

5. Discussion

Street programs, in their various forms, have provided an outlet for citizens. These are comedic and entertaining programs, known as game shows or hidden camera shows, which occupy a space in media

coverage by television networks and ensure financial returns and profits for media channels. Recently, with the growth of broadcasting technologies, the internet, and the widespread use of social networks, street programs have taken on a new direction, producing a discourse that is closer to confrontation, conflict, and dispute. In Turkey, street programs became popular after the 2019 municipal elections, addressing the issues, problems, and concerns of Turkish citizens. They reflected the diversity of opinions and orientations among citizens regarding various economic, cultural, and social issues, including the issue of Syrian refugees in Turkey, which made them widely received, particularly among Syrian media circles that have been keen to monitor all content related to Syrian refugees in Turkey.

Consequently, emerging Syrian media in Turkey took the initiative to launch Syrian street programs to bridge the communication gap that had arisen due to the absence of media interaction between the Turkish and Syrian communities for years, by focusing on shared history and similar cultural customs as a step towards achieving harmony and adaptation to the Turkish social fabric and refuting any prevalent misinformation regarding Arabs and Syrians in general. Syria TV, which was established in Istanbul in 2018, was one of the Syrian media outlets operating in Turkey that initiated a program named "Street Question" in March 2022 as a social entertainment program that tests the historical, cultural, and religious knowledge of Turkish and Arab citizens related to Arab communities, specifically Syria. The program also explores the opinions of passersby, including Syrians, about their lives in Turkey, their work, families, concerns, and expectations regarding their future presence in Turkey. Analysis of the study sample consisting of fourteen reports revealed that the content of the "Street Question" program gradually transformed into a "defender" of Arabs and Syrians in Turkey and a "corrector" of the rumors circulating among Turkish citizens about them, which made the program widely popular and turned its hosts into something akin to "saviors," "advocates," and "heroes" in Arab, particularly Syrian, circles. This led the channel to revert the "Street Question" program to its original format as an entertainment quiz show while allocating individual interviews and field reports to continue exploring the opinions of the Turkish street about Syrians in the country, which varied between positive and negative regarding the Turkish community. Despite the program's importance as a necessary media experience to achieve adaptation with the host community, it was fragmented and limited in achieving its intended goal. Instead of fostering adaptation and harmony between refugees and foreigners and the host community, it became a window into the opinions of the Turkish street without direct engagement, giving the Syrian audience an opportunity to assess what Turkish citizens circulate regarding beliefs, perceptions, and rumors about them. It provided them, in one way or another, with views and stances not based on direct face-to-face interaction with the host community, which may lead viewers to retreat towards their home community instead of moving toward the host community.

The initiative of Syrian media operating in Turkey to launch programs and broadcast field reports addressing the Turkish street in its native language and taking the lead in moving towards the host community and refuting claims associated with Syrian refugees in Turkey, coupled with the public popularity that the field reports from Syrian media outlets in Turkey, including Syria TV, have enjoyed, actually reveals a multidimensional shortcoming in the political and media entities working in Turkey that are focused on Syrian issues and everything concerning Syrians in the communities hosting them, without paying attention to the nature of these communities or recognizing the need to build bridges for communication with them. Additionally, the lack of a political, media, and community structure representing Syrians as desired in Turkey, along with the delayed response from relevant Syrian political and media entities in addressing the host community in its native language, has enabled some Turkish media and political outlets to mobilize against everything "foreign," reaching a point of no return for the

Turkish community regarding Syrian refugees, leading to dissatisfaction, boredom, and ceasing attempts to listen to anything contrary. This was clearly reflected in various positions noted in the study sample, represented by the phrase "We don't want Syrians anymore!" This has made the discourse of Syrian street programs more of a "reaction".

Nevertheless, it is difficult to assert that the Syrian media system operating in Turkey has been slow to address the host Turkish community with the largest number of Syrian refugees. The vast majority of these media outlets operate as community media with a civil character, funded by international and European entities that require them to adhere to all matters related to Syrian issues and the concerns of Syrian refugees worldwide without engaging in the issues and concerns of the host communities. This has necessitated their withdrawal into focusing solely on local Syrian affairs and the issues of Syrian refugees for years, leading to the imposition of a character on the media programs broadcasted in Turkish that seems closer to being "reactive," evidenced by the gradual shift in the program's agenda from fostering proximity and harmony with the Turkish community and supporting Syrians to defending Syrians by refuting claims associated with them and framing the reactions of some citizens in negative contexts.

On the other hand, the prevalence of street programs in Syrian media operating in Turkey indicates a real media gap and reveals a weakness in media cooperation between Turkish national media and Syrian media in Turkey alike. Instead of Turkish and Syrian media separately producing popular programs that carry conflicting narratives about each other, media outlets could collaborate to create joint social programs that convey social messages reflecting the shared values of both the Turkish and Syrian communities and the communities of the region in general. This would enhance familiarity and empathy between them and encourage refugees to bridge the social and cultural gap and adapt more broadly to the host community while correcting the distorted image of Turkish society. In addition to entertainment programs, there is a need for educational media campaigns aimed at dismantling stereotypes and providing accurate information about refugees. These campaigns could utilize traditional and social digital media platforms to target a diverse audience. The experience of the media demonstrates that new media and digital platforms have become the primary venues for shaping perceptions and attitudes of communities toward each other, reflecting public perceptions directly and explicitly. Over time, they have transformed into the most media-ready formats for content aimed at inciting conflict and violence and excluding others, focusing on monitoring reactions in an increasingly mechanical and negative manner. This experience also reaffirms that street programs, despite their simplicity, require media organization, whether for journalistic or television content. It underscores the importance of media organization and its role in mitigating conflicts between communities and avoiding potential disputes or preventing their escalation. Despite all the criticisms and calls for freedom of opinion and expression, the experience of street programs, both Turkish and Syrian, confirms the reality that media organization is the cornerstone that safeguards communities from drifting into disputes and falling into conflicts to the point of alienation, undermining the security and peace of communities.

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