

INFLUXES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COMMUNAL ATTITUDE: AN ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COVERAGE ABOUT THE SYRIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS

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Abstract

It is known that the media has a significant effect on communal attitude and behavior. In this regard, analysis of the media coverage of the incidents that the community is interested in has an important role to understand the communal attitude about those incidents. This study is about the media coverage of the Syrian influx continuing since 2011. For this purpose, posts and news about Syrian asylum seekers on social and national media between 2011 and 2019 have been researched, and with respect to the findings, the effects of the social and national media resources on the communal attitude of the Turkish community about migration in general and about Syrian asylum seekers in particular have been analyzed.

Keywords: Syrian Asylum Seekers, Syrian Crisis, Migration, Media, Communal Attitude

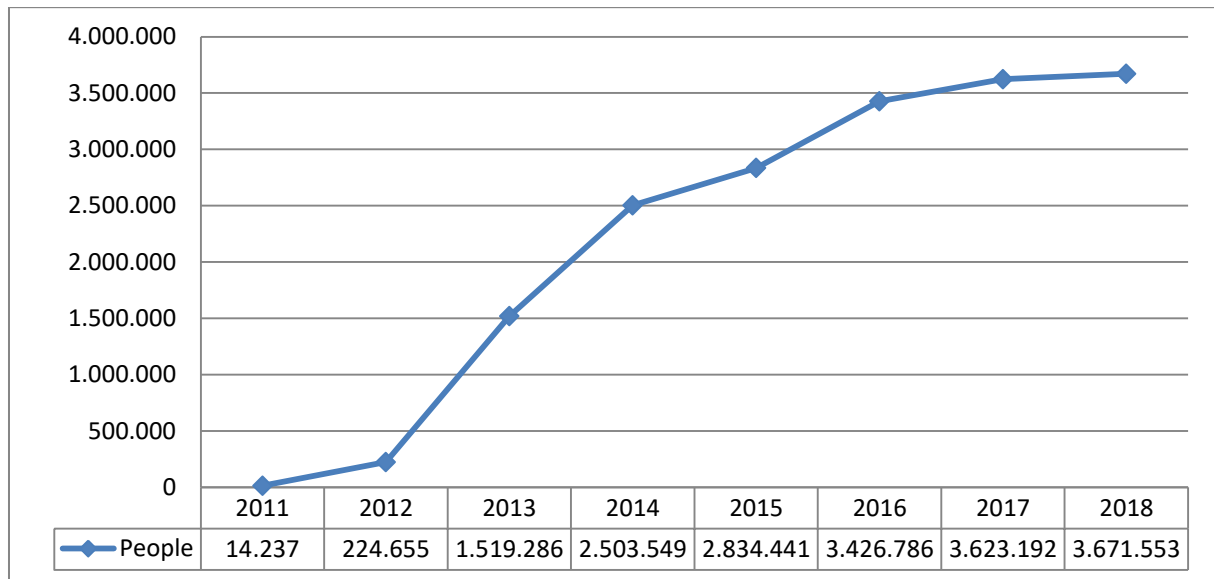
Introduction

The thoughts or ideas that are growing as a result of the perception of peripheral events communally can cause positive or negative ideas on a certain subject to be formed in the social mind. These thoughts or ideas formed in the social mind due to perceptions play a decisive role in discourses as well as in social attitudes and behaviors.

The term perception means the act of perceiving and perceiving means becoming aware of something through the senses (Collins English Dictionary, 2009, p. 585). In this context, the perception on a situation or an incident will also determine the attitude about the same situation or the incident. Accordingly, attitude defines the emotions, thoughts and behaviors formed about other people, incidents, objects, etc. (Kayaoğlu, Gökdağ, & Kirel, 2011, p. 73).

Communication, which is defined as the exchange of information, ideas or feelings (Collins English Dictionary, 2009, p. 152), is to be continued uninterruptedly in today's globalizing world with the use of every kind of media tools. Mass media tools which are designed to affect larger populations (Giddens & Sutton, 2014, p. 280) also help the affected populations to be informed by imparting the information about local and world issues (Şahan & Çınar, 2004, p. 313). Mass media tools, which are powerful tools for the society to be informed, besides the information imparted, are also playing a significant role for particular attitudes and behaviors to be developed by the society with the help of the controlling power they have on how the imparted issues should be perceived (Palabıykoğlu, 1997, p. 123).

This study is about the media coverage of the Syrian influx continuing since 2011. In other words, this study is prepared to analyze how Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey are reported in the news and what the reflections of them are in national and social media. The grassroots movements which are called the Arab Spring turned into a civil war in the North African and Middle Eastern countries and also affected Turkey's southern neighbor Syria. Millions of Syrians had to flee from their country and tried to seek asylum in other countries as a result of the government protests which started in 2010 and turned into a civil war in a short time. The most affected country from this influx is Turkey. The influx towards Turkey since April 2011 increased in the following years and Turkey is hosting over three and a half million Syrians as of October 2019 (Graphic 1).



Graphic 1: Syrians Under Temporary Protection by Years

Source: Directorate General of Migration Management (2019)

This hosting continuing for eight years since 2011 has also caused Turkish society to publicly grow social attitudes and behaviors about Syrian asylum seekers. In this regard, conventional written and visual media which help the public to be informed about the ongoing events and social media which helps the public to express themselves are both useful to monitor these social attitudes and behaviors. Within this context, the monitoring outcomes of the conventional and social media are going to play a significant role in analyzing and assessing the communal attitude about Syrian asylum seekers.

Methodology

In this study, news reports and tweets are monitored via keywords on the web sites of national media organizations and social media and the findings are analyzed by qualitative methods.

Web sites of five national media organizations have been searched by using the “in-site search” specifications of the Google search engine between the dates of 1st May 2011 – 1st June 2019; the findings have been divided into themes and the themes have also been categorized into subjects after some of the findings which are not related to this study have been cleaned. Furthermore, in order to analyze news reports more accurately;

- i. The same news reports imparted by the same source more than once on the same date were considered as one report;
- ii. The news reports about one subject imparted by the same source on different dates were considered as different news reports;
- iii. The news reports about the same subject imparted by different sources on the same date or different dates were also considered as different news reports.

Research on social media has been also conducted via keywords corresponding to the web site search of national media organizations by using the search engine of Twitter social media platform to cover June and July of the years 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and January, February and March of 2019. Research dates have been chosen with respect to the criteria below:

- i. By the end of 2012, Syrian asylum seekers had been in Turkey for over a year,

- ii. In 2014, the number of Syrian asylum seekers exceeded one million,
- iii. Because the religious holidays were in the summertime, research between 2012-2018 was limited with June and July,
- iv. January, February and March of 2019 were the last three months before the local elections in Turkey.

Findings of the research have been analyzed without dividing into themes because of the keywords used, after the cleaning of bad language, etc.

Keywords used for this research on the web sites of five national media organizations and social media both, media organizations, dates of research and numbers of news reports and tweets are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Research Data of News Reports and Social Media Search

Keywords	Dates Between	Media Organization	URL	Number of News Reports/Tweets
“syrians”	01.05.2011/ 01.06.2019	Hürriyet	www.hurriyet.com.tr	1686 News Reports
		Sabah	www.sabah.com.tr	
		Cumhuriyet	www.cumhuriyet.com.tr	
		Sözcü	www.sozcu.com.tr	
		Posta	www.posta.com.tr	
“syrians public order”	01.06.2012 /	Twitter	https://twitter.com/?lang=tr	1181 Tweets
“syrians housing”	01.08.2012			
“syrians bairam”				
“syrians education”	01.06.2014 /			
“syrians spending”	01.08.2014			
“syrians unemployment”				
“syrians healthcare”	01.06.2016 /			
“syrians travel”	01.08.2016			
“syrians crime”				
“syrians citizenship”	01.06.2018 / 01.08.2018			
	01.01.2019 / 31.03.2019			

Source: Prepared by the Author

As mentioned above, the findings of the research conducted on the web sites of five national media organizations have been divided into themes and themes have been also categorized into subjects according to the topic of news reports or how Syrian asylum seekers are reported. The themes and the subjects are shown in Table 2.

The findings of the social media research are have been categorized as “positive, negative and report” according to the posts about Syrian asylum seekers.

Table 2: Themes Used in News Reports Analysis and Subjects

Theme	Subject
Research and Reports	-
Foreign News	-
Education	Language Learning and Vocational Training, Educational Expenditures and Funds, Problems in Education, Educational Investments, Employment in Education Sector, Access to Education and Integration, Number of Students
Economy	Access to Working Life, Child Labor, Economic Effects, Economic Investments, Expenditures and Costs, Overseas Funds
Law	-
Registration, Housing and Travel	Housing, Registration, Freedom of Travel
Political Statements	Presidency, Prime Ministry, Ministry, Opposition, Local Governments and Municipalities, The Red Crescent, Committee of The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Governorship
Referendum, General and Local Elections	-
Healthcare	Healthcare Expenditures, Healthcare Projects, Healthcare Investments, Epidemics, Treatments
Number of Asylum Seekers and Distribution	-
Border Movements	Bairam Visits, Repatriation, Influxes, Border Security
Social Projects, Support and Solidarity	-
Sports, Art and Culture, Tabloid	Art and Culture, Tabloid, Sports
Crime and Forensics	Offender, Murdered, Victim, Offender and Victim, Offender and Murdered
Social Cohesion and Sociopolitical Analysis	Discrimination, Ghettoization, News and Analysis, Cohesion, Citizenship, False Information, Law Enforcement Training and Support
Lifetime	-

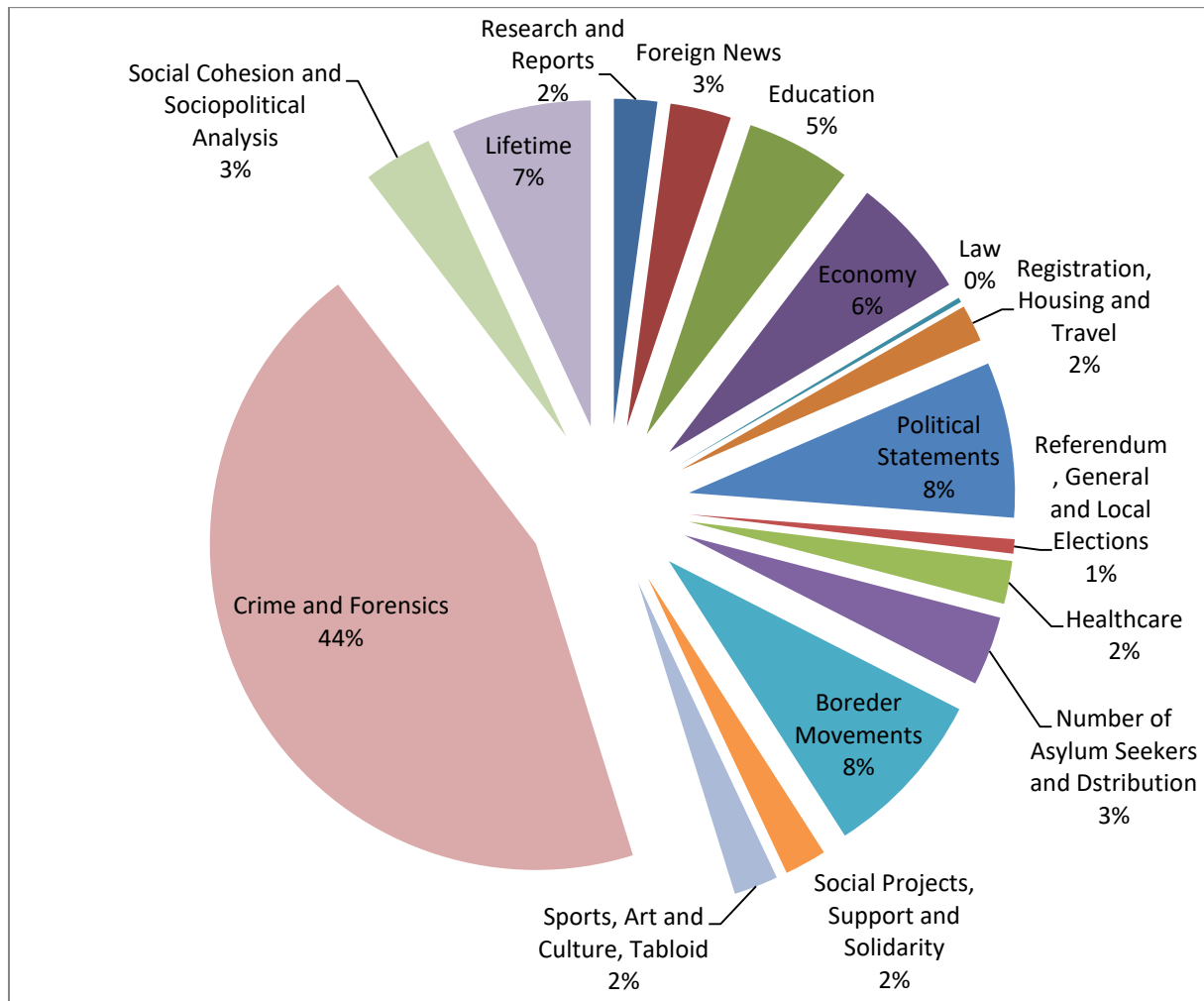
Source: Prepared by the Author

Results

Findings of the analysis of one thousand six hundred eighty-six news reports and one thousand one hundred eighty-one tweets are submitted below.

Findings of the Analysis of News Reports

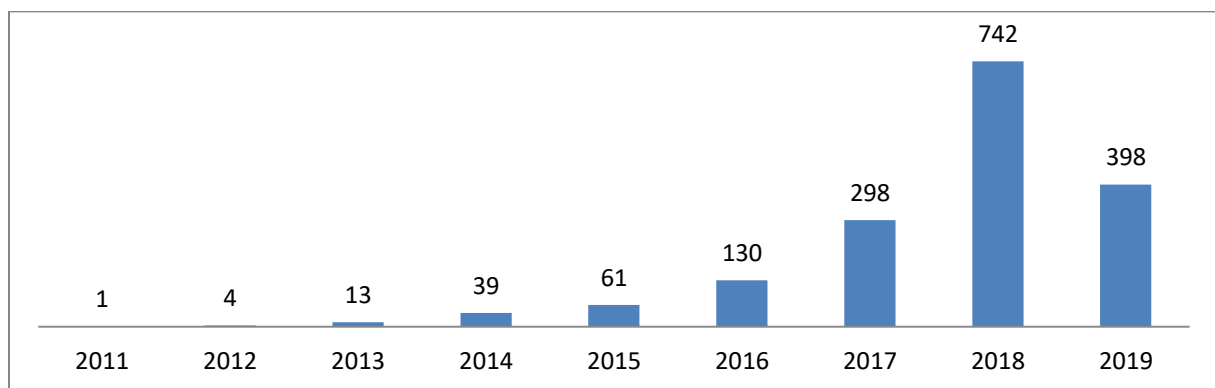
When findings of the analysis of one thousand six hundred eighty-six news reports have been classified according to themes, it was found that the news reports categorized in the crime and forensics theme are predominating with a ratio of 44% (Graphic 2).



Graphic 2: Rational Distribution of Themes (2011 – 2019)

Source: Prepared by the Author

According to the distribution of the news reports by years analyzed in Graphic 3, it could be understood that the number of news reports has increased since 2014 in relation with the rapid increase in the number of Syrian asylum seekers exceeding one million in the same year.



Graphic 3: Distribution of the News Reports by Years (Number of News Reports)

Source: Prepared by the Author

When the tendency to increase shown in Graphic 3 has been considered together with the distribution of themes according to years shown in Table 3, it is also remarkable that the news reports particularly classified in the crime and forensics theme increased three, six and four times in 2017, 2018 and 2019 compared to 2016. Besides, increase in 2019 should be further considered because the analysis of the news reports in 2019 is covering only the first five months of 2019. It should be also considered as remarkable that the news reports in themes of economy and education were clustered after 2014, the year in which the number of Syrian asylum seekers exceeded one million.

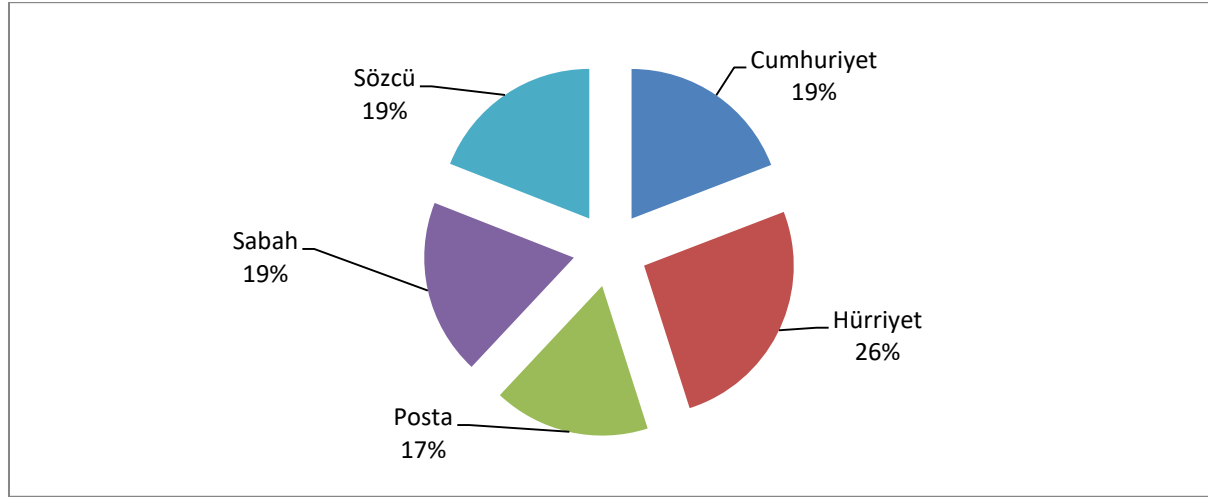
Table 3: Distribution of Themes According to Years (Number of News Reports)

Themes	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
Research and Reports	-	-	-	1	1	3	3	22	6	36
Foreign News	-	-	1	-	1	-	5	30	14	51
Education	-	-	1	2	2	10	16	33	24	88
Economy	-	2	1	4	6	22	20	36	11	102
Law	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	2	4
Registration, Housing and Travel	1	1	-	3	-	4	4	18	-	31
Political Statements	-	-	2	2	2	7	25	49	43	130
Referendum, General and Local Elections	-	-	-	-	-	1	3	3	5	12
Healthcare	-	-	-	-	-	3	6	23	4	36
Number of Asylum Seekers and Distribution	-	-	1	2	2	7	12	25	9	58
Border Movements	-	-	-	4	5		13	82	38	142
Social Projects, Support and Solidarity	-	-	1	-	1	2	2	18	11	35
Sports, Art and Culture, Tabloid	-	-	-	-	-	1	8	19	9	37
Crime and Forensics	-	1	5	16	26	50	156	299	196	749
Social Cohesion and Sociopolitical Analysis	-	-	-	1	2	8	10	29	8	58
Lifetime	-	-	1	4	12	12	15	55	18	117
Total	1	4	13	39	61	130	298	742	398	1686

Source: Prepared by the Author

The most interesting theme–date correlation in Table 3 could be made for law and healthcare. Although the legal situation of asylum seekers has been the main subject of many researches since 2011, it has been a subject of news reports only four times. Similarly, despite the risks caused by asylum seekers in healthcare that are mentioned in many researches, there are only thirty six news reports in the healthcare theme and twenty three of them are from 2018.

There is a balanced distribution of news reports into five national news sources which are representing various political views (Graphic 4).



Graphic 4. Distribution of News Reports by Newspapers (2011–2019)

Source: Prepared by the Author

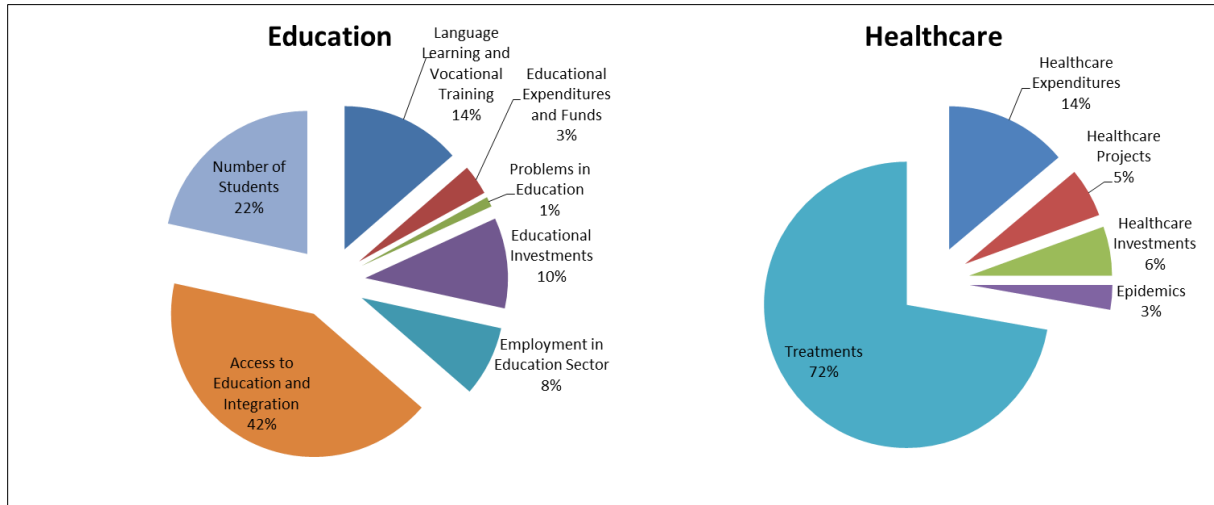
According to the distribution of news reports by locations, there are three hundred eighty seven news reports regarding Turkey in general. İstanbul is a location that most frequently becomes a subject of news reports with three hundred seven news reports (Table 4)¹.

Table 4: Distribution of News Reports by Locations (2011–2019)

Location	Number of News Reports	Location	Number of News Reports	Location	Number of News Reports
Adana	90	Hatay	72	Osmaniye	8
Adıyaman	13	Isparta	1	Sakarya	31
Afyonkarahisar	5	İstanbul	307	Samsun	4
Ağrı	2	İzmir	41	Sivas	6
Aksaray	1	Kahramanmaraş	23	Şanlıurfa	58
Amasya	1	Karabük	2	Şırnak	2
Ankara	45	Karaman	1	Tekirdağ	1
Antalya	39	Kars	2	Turkey	387
Aydın	5	Kastamonu	1	Uşak	2
Batman	3	Kayseri	17	Van	2
Bolu	8	Kilis	92		
Bursa	67	Kocaeli	7		
Çanakkale	2	Konya	42		
Çorum	4	Malatya	4		
Denizli	7	Manisa	9		
Diyarbakır	4	Mardin	14		
Edirne	6	Mersin	48		
Elazığ	7	Muğla	13		
Eskişehir	1	Nevşehir	3		
Gaziantep	106	Niğde	1		
Total				1617	

Source: Prepared by the Author

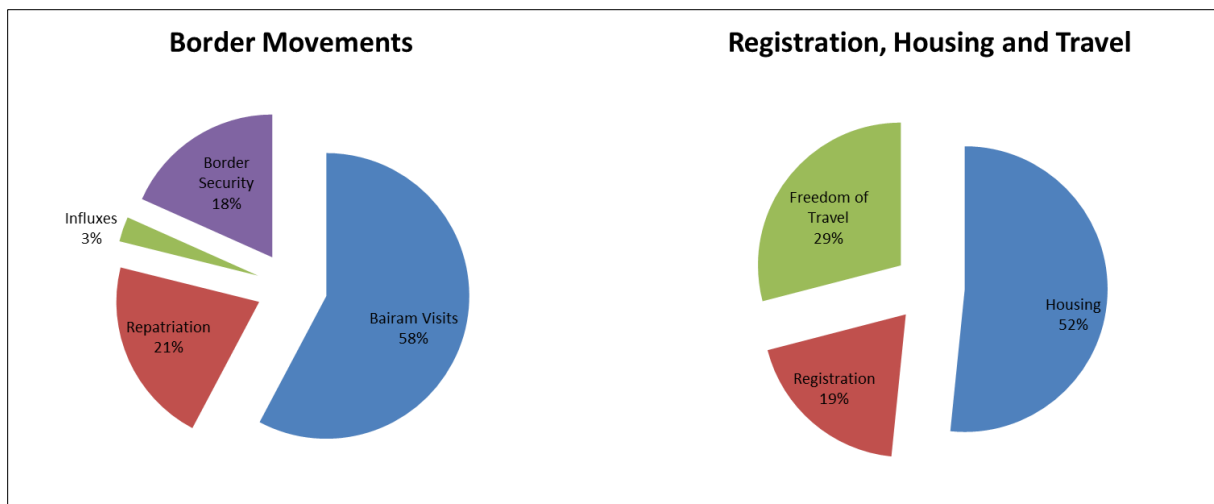
According to the analysis of the subjects of themes, it is seen that subject of access to education and integration in the education theme and subject of treatments in the healthcare theme are the majority of news reports (Graphic 5).



Graphic 5: Distribution of Subjects of News Reports According to the Education and Healthcare Themes (2011–2019)

Source: Prepared by the Author

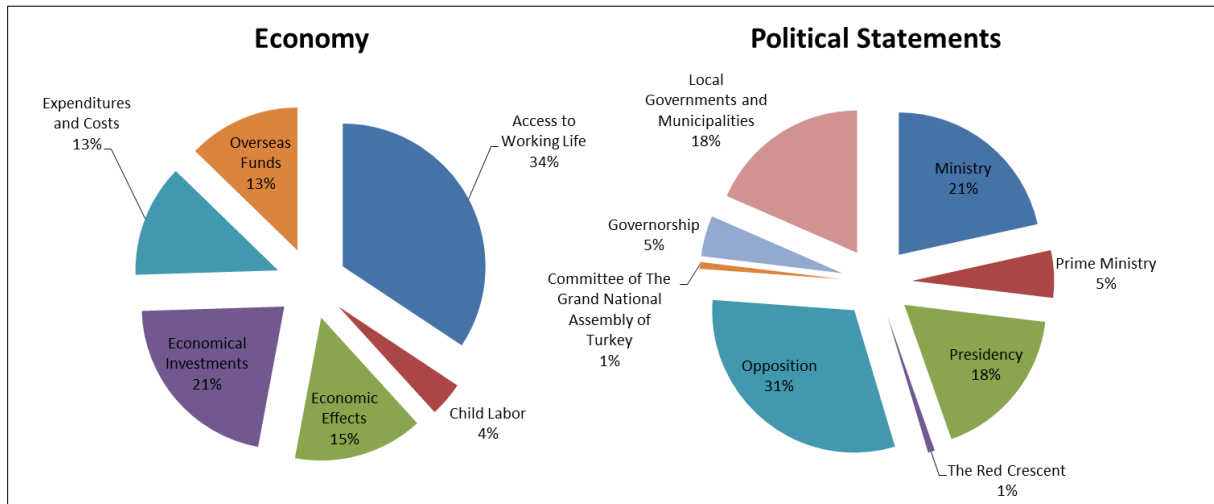
Bairam visits and housing constitute the majority of subjects of news reports in the themes of border movements and registration, housing and travel, respectively (Graphic 6).



Graphic 6: Distribution of Subjects of News Reports According to the Border Movements and Registration, Housing and Travel Themes (2011–2019)

Source: Prepared by the Author

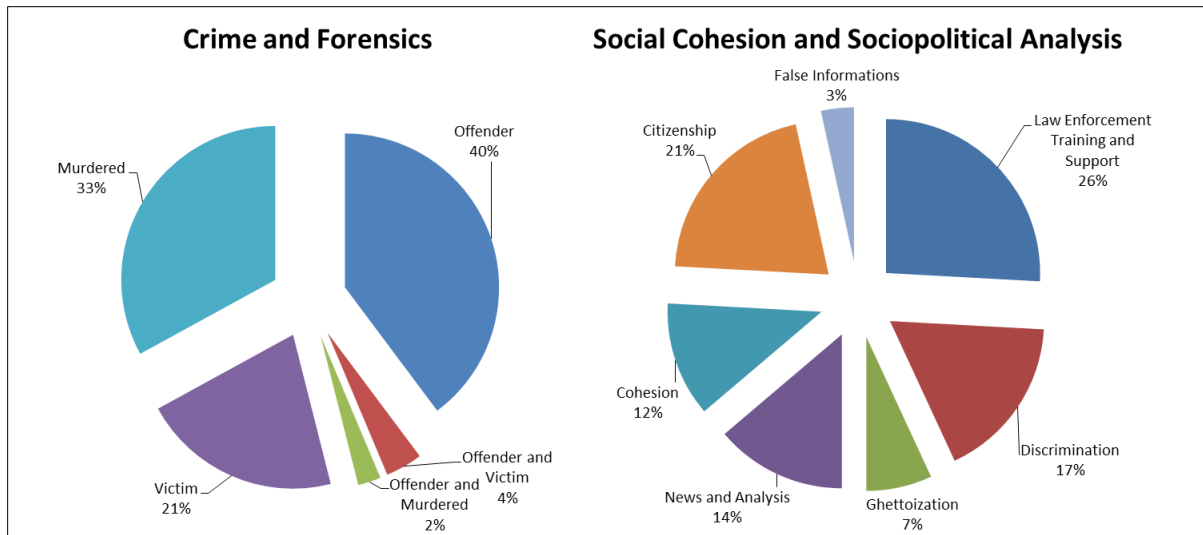
According to the analysis, access to working life constitutes the majority of subjects of news reports in the economy theme. For the political statements theme, the statements of opposition predominate in the ratio of news reports if the news reports in the political statements the analyzed separately, but when analyzed cumulatively, the statements of government constitute the majority of news reports with a percentage of 43% (Graphic 7).



Graphic 7: Distribution of Subjects of News Reports According to the Economy and Political Statements Themes (2011–2019)

Source: Prepared by the Author

Syrian asylum seekers are defined as offenders with a percentage of 40% in the news reports in the crime and forensics theme. But if the news reports in which Syrian asylum seekers are defined as murdered and victim are analyzed together, the percentage of the news reports in which Syrian asylum seekers are defined as murdered and victim increases to 54% (Graphic 8).



Graphic 8: Distribution of Subjects of News Reports According to the Crime and Forensics and Social Cohesion and Sociopolitical Analysis Themes (2011–2019)

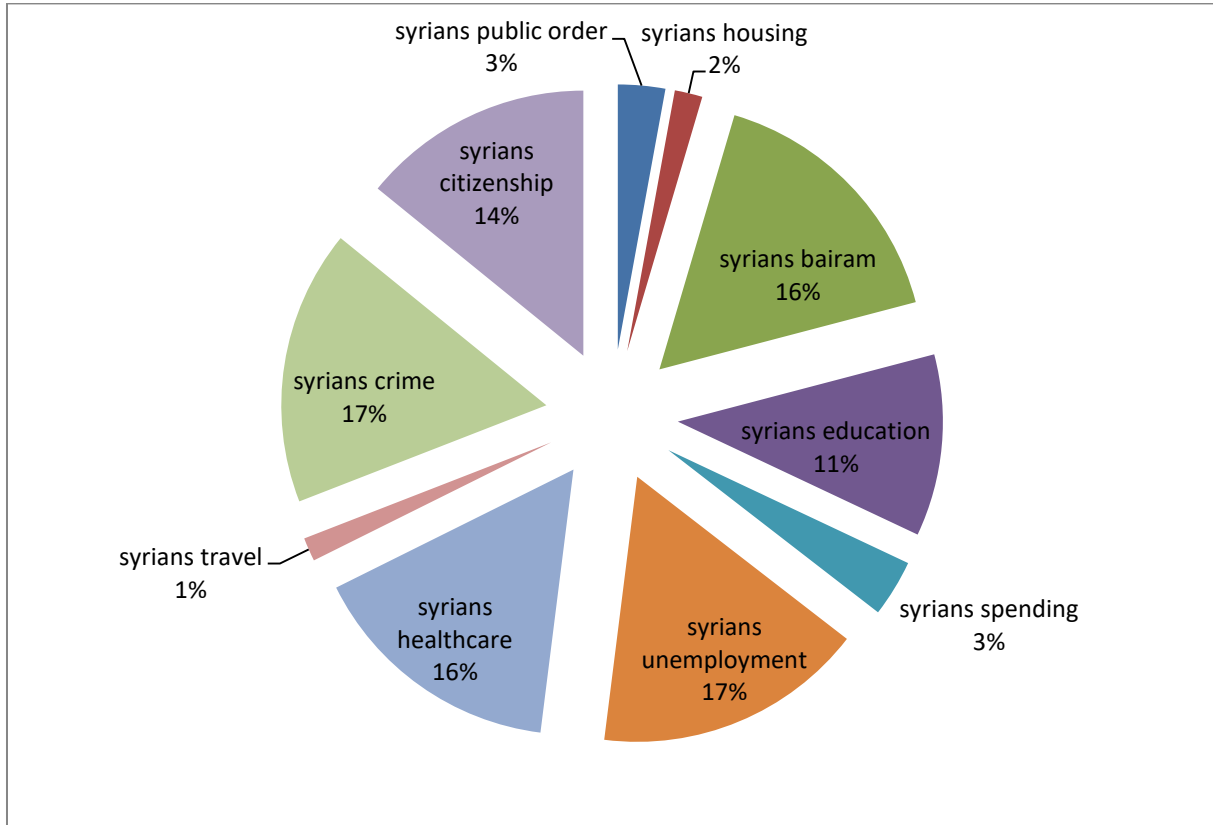
Source: Prepared by the Author

According to the analysis of the news reports in the social cohesion and sociopolitical analysis theme, the majority consists of the support of asylum seekers to transboundary operations of the Turkish Armed Forces such as applications for voluntary military service and the news reports about law enforcement training with a percentage of 26%. Within this

theme, the news reports about granting citizenship to Syrian asylum seekers, ghettoization and discrimination are less covered (Graphic 8).

Findings of the Analysis of Social Media (Tweets)

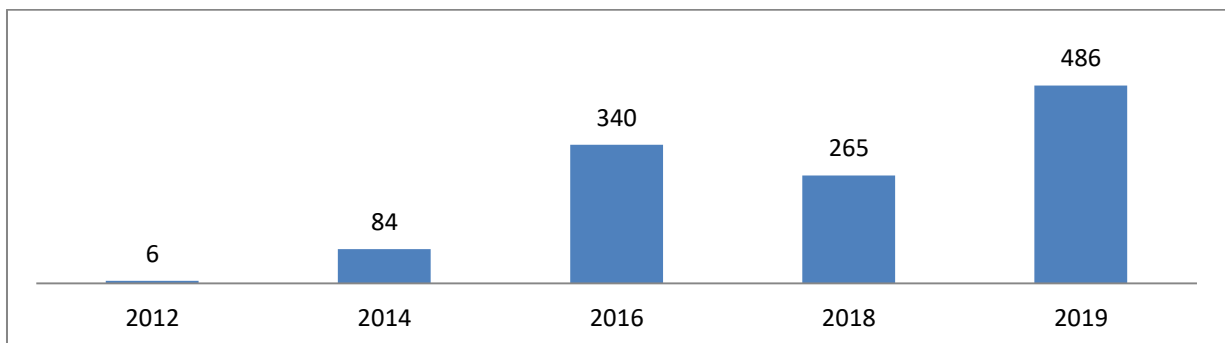
According to the distribution of one thousand one hundred eighty-one tweets by keywords, tweets about citizenship, bairam visits, crime, healthcare and unemployment constitute the majority of the total tweets and are also balanced in itself (Graphic 9).



Graphic 9: Distribution of Tweets According to Keywords

Source: Prepared by the Author

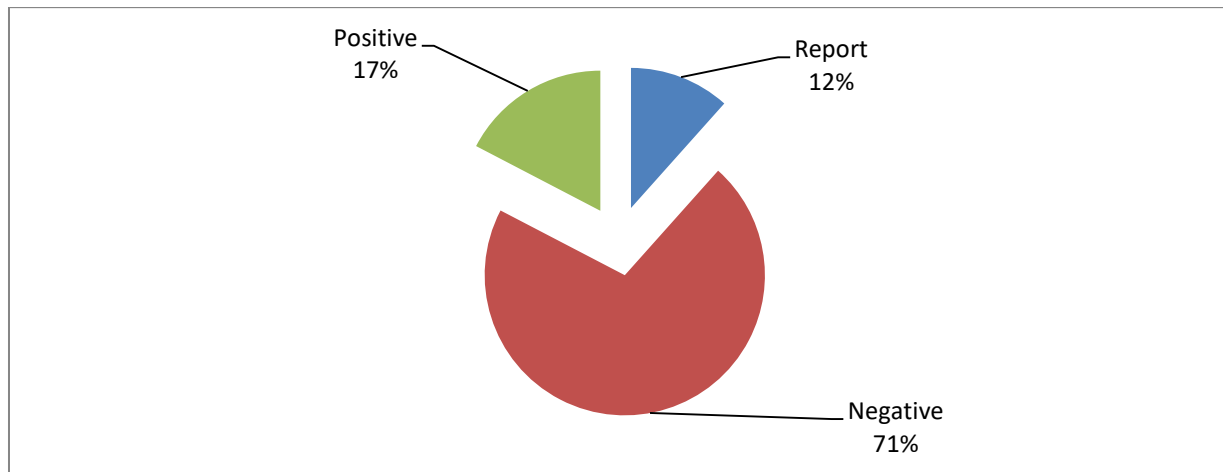
According to the distribution of tweets by years, there is a significant increase in the number of tweets in and after 2014. This increase is also in relation with the increase in the number of Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey (Graphic 10).



Graphic 10: Distribution of Tweets According to Years

Source: Prepared by the Author

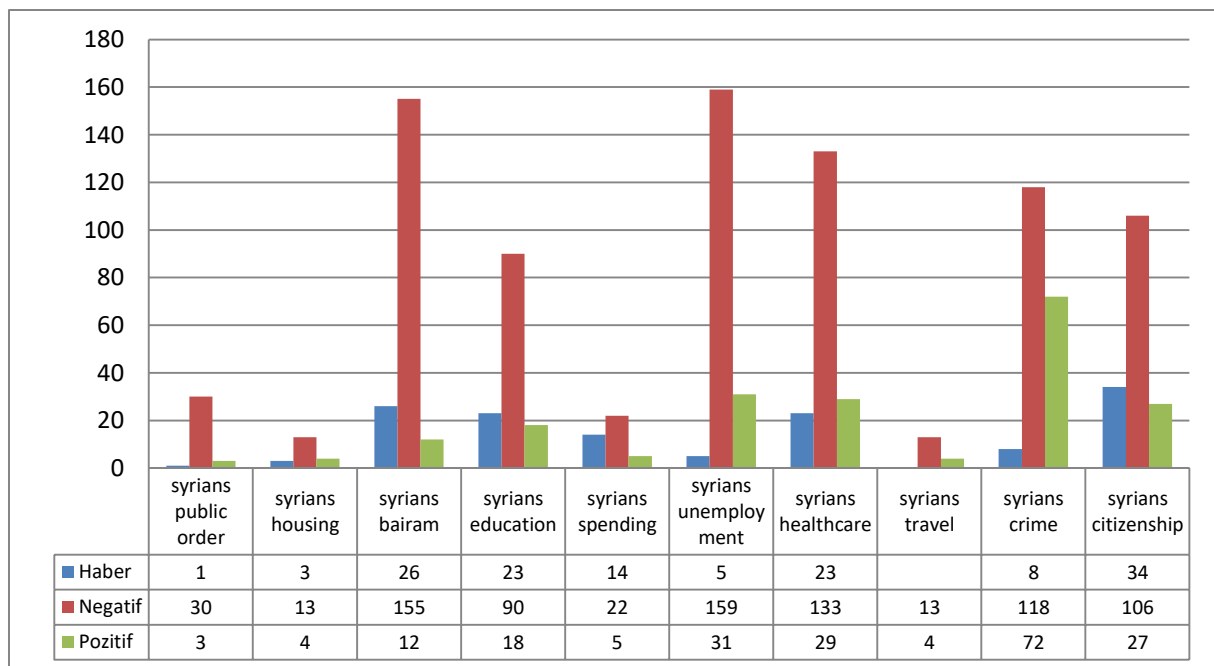
According to the distribution of subjects by tweets, the vast majority of the subjects include negative posts (Graphic 11).



Graphic 11: Distribution of Tweets According to Subjects

Source: Prepared by the Author

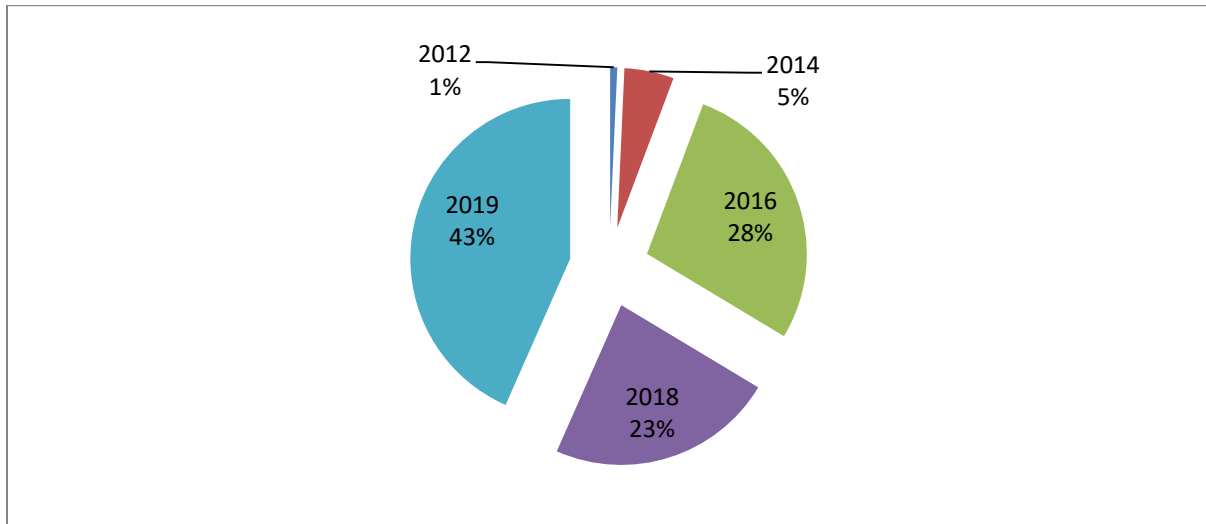
It is seen that the vast majority of the posts are negative in all of the keywords, according to the distribution of keywords by the subjects of tweets (Graphic 12).



Graphic 12: Distribution of Keywords According to the Subjects of Tweets

Source: Prepared by the Author

Although only the first four months of 2019 have been included in the analysis, it is seen in Graphic 13 that the majority of negative posts have been posted in 2019, according to the distribution of negative posts by years.



Graphic 13: Distribution of Negative Tweets According to Years

Source: Prepared by the Author

Conclusion

In general, migrants are facing strong reactions from some sections of immigrant-receiving societies as a result of migration's economic restructuring and far-reaching social change. Immigrants are often seen as the cause of insecurity and unemployment, and they are also blamed for pushing up housing prices, overloading social services, crime and diseases (Castles & Miller, 2008, p. 20).

When the assessment of Castles and Miller has been compared with the attitude of Turkish society, findings are similar. The comparative analysis of Tunç (Tunç, 2015) reveals that the attitudes of Turkish people are similar with the assessment of Castles and Miller's findings, especially towards Syrian asylum seekers. Hereunder, Turkish people also keep aloof from asylum seekers and/or refugees; concerns about demography, unemployment, revenue losses and apartment rental prices come into prominence among the people; asylum seekers and/or refugees are blamed for some kinds of diseases and crimes, and in general feelings of insecurity are rising against them (Tunç, 2015, pp. 42-43).

There are significant data about how Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey appear both in news and social media in this research which is conducted with the analysis of news reports and tweets on the web sites of five national media organizations and Twitter social media platform.

When findings of the analysis of news reports have been evaluated, it is seen that Syrian asylum seekers are mostly related with crime and forensics with a percentage of 44%. Even though Syrian asylum seekers are not the offenders in every news report, it can be claimed that the Syrian asylum seekers are highly related with crime and forensics in Turkish people's mind with respect to the rational distribution.

When the distribution of news reports by locations has been evaluated, it is seen that the number of news reports is higher in locations neighbouring or close to the Syrian border such as Adana, Gaziantep, Hatay and Kilis. This quantity in news reports is also coherent with the ratio of Syrian asylum seekers to the populations of locations where they are settled with respect to the current data of the Directorate General of Migration Management (2019). Hence, the ratio of Syrian asylum seekers to the population of Adana is 10.77%, Gaziantep is 22.24%, Hatay is 27.32% and Kilis is 81.58%.

Except the news reports about Turkey in general, the highest number of news reports is in İstanbul. Three hundred seven news reports in İstanbul are also predictable because İstanbul is a megacity with a population of fifteen million, and five hundred forty-nine thousand two hundred sixteen asylum seekers have settled in and the ratio of Syrian asylum seekers to the population is 3.64% (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2019).

When the thematic classification of news reports has been assessed together with social media findings, there are significant correlations. The incompatibility between the news reports and tweets on the crime and forensics, health, education and economy themes is very interesting because all of these are also the main concern areas of public according to many researches conducted and also Castles and Miller's findings.

For example, the ratio of news reports on the health theme to all of the news reports is only 2%, but on the contrary, the ratio of tweets on the health theme to all of the tweets is 16%. Similarly, only 5% of the news reports are about education and 6% of the news reports are about economy, but 11% and 20% of the tweets are about education, unemployment and expenses, respectively. It can also be claimed that this incompatibility is mostly covering negative posts with respect to the findings showing that 71% of the posts are negative. According to the findings of a research, there are six million seven hundred thousand tweets posted per day in Turkey (Habertürk, 2016), therefore with respect to these findings, it can be concluded that there are much more negative posts than those included in this study.

A similar news reports–posts correlation can be structured about bairam visits of asylum seekers who are returning to their country for bairam holidays and coming back at the end of the holiday. It is known that the public opinion about these visits is “They can celebrate bairam, then Syria is safe, therefore they shouldn't come back”. And the ratio of news reports on the bairam visits is more than half (56%) of news reports on the border movements theme, the ratio of which is also 8% of all of the news reports. The ratio of posts on bairam visits is 16% of all of the posts.

But, there is a negative correlation between the news reports and posts about crime and forensics. As mentioned before, asylum seekers seem to be related with crime and forensics according to the 44% of news reports, but negative social media posts about crime and forensics are fewer than the ones about bairam visits, unemployment and health. However, with respect to the findings of some surveys, 74% of people think that cities are insecure because of the asylum seekers (KONDA, 2016, p. 33) and 78.2% of people think that asylum seekers are the reason of public security problems (Aksoy Araştırma, 2019, p. 14).

Although the ratio of the research and report theme is only 2% of all of the news reports, the distribution of the news reports in this theme according to years is also significant. This theme, which is covering the researches and reports about asylum seekers, became a subject for news eight times until 2018, but the number of news reports about this theme rose to twenty two in 2018. The number of news reports in the research and report theme has reached to six in the first five months of 2019. When the main topics of the news in the research and reports theme prepared in 2018 are mostly related to participation in working life, economic investments, education and demographic structure, therefore it can be argued that it will contribute to the discussions regarding the local integration of asylum seekers. Additionally, the increase in negative social media posts in the first four months of 2019, which is also parallel with the thought of local integration of Syrian asylum seekers, should be monitored carefully.

Consequently, especially social media posts reveal that the relation of Turkish society with asylum seekers which was defined as “guesting” in 2011 developed in a negative way

after eight years. But when common results of the researches revealing that not all of the Syrians who have started a new life in Turkey will return to Syria after the civil war ends and some of the Syrians will continue to live in Turkey are taken into consideration, it will be essential to avoid statements and reactions that could have negative reflections in society.

Besides the asylum seekers shown as mostly related with crime and forensics incidents especially in conventional media, it should be significantly taken into consideration that the impartation of the news about economy, healthcare and border movements mostly related with access to working life, treatments and bairam visits respectively could create negative reactions in society such as unemployment, crowds in hospitals and the idea that “they are going on a holiday” and these negative reactions could grow with today’s interactive communication tool: Social media.

For this reason, it is important to have unifying and positive topics in the news, especially in national media. The positive approach of the media, which has the potential and also the power to affect the communal perception, will have positive reflections in society. In this regard, it is also considered that social media will not be a field of negative statements about Syrian asylum seekers anymore and will have positive impacts on personal and communal interactions.

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¹ Sixty-nine foreign news reports are excluded in Table 4.