

Empathy or Hostility? Syrian Refugees in Jordanian Media in the Post-Collapse of the Assad Regime

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze how Jordanian media represent Syrian refugees by examining framing, stereotypes, and the emotional tone of coverage, and to explore the media's role in socially constructing refugees' identities and their reality within the host community. The study employed quantitative content analysis on a sample of news articles published on three Jordanian news websites. The findings revealed a clear dominance of humanitarian and social frames in the coverage of the Syrian refugee issue by Jordanian media outlets. Moreover, the study found a statistically significant relationship between media framing and emotional tone, indicating that framing is linked to the discourse that accompanies the coverage and the frequency of stereotypes that emphasize the humanitarian nature of refugees. Additionally, the results indicate that Jordanian media are positively associated with public opinion by reconstructing the reality of Syrian refugees through messages that are consistent with a discourse that encourages empathy and social solidarity between society and the refugees.

Keywords: Jordanian media, framing, social construction, content analysis, Syrian refugees

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction of the Problem

The media are essential tools for shaping social reality by constructing civic discourse around social solidarity. The media also contribute to both drawing attention to and diverting it from public issues. Throughout history, the media have played a pivotal role in shaping what is called national identity, defining the boundaries of societies, and establishing them as part of a nation, while simultaneously contributing to the exclusion of other societies (Fürsich, 2010).

According to Gitlin (2003) and Hall (2003), mass media are crucial in forming and disseminating ideologies, which in turn affect the larger cultural production of knowledge (Poole, 2002). According to Van Dijk (2015), media narratives and pictures serve as symbolic tools that people employ to construct a common cultural worldview and place themselves inside it. Numerous studies demonstrate that the media reflect prevailing social norms, attitudes, and advancements; yet this frequently results in skewed or stereotypical representations of minority groups (Hall, 2006; Saha, 2012; Van Dijk, 2015).

Due to the increased economic, political, and social interconnectedness of nations brought about by the acceleration of globalization, there is an increased need for people to comprehend world affairs. The movement of people, whether through necessity or choice, is an important part of this process. Increasing numbers of business travelers, tourists, migrants, and refugees are continually on the move. Central to this phenomenon is an ongoing contest—frequently reflected in media narratives—over how these “others” are portrayed and positioned in relation to “us” (Fürsich, 2010, p. 113). Moreover, the media are inherently unable to deliver a comprehensive or fully objective account of the world. Instead, they employ selective linguistic and visual strategies through which they construct mediated representations of reality (Neary & Ringrow, 2018).

By portraying minorities and vulnerable groups in ways that aim to foster a culture of mutual understanding and coexistence, media practices can help to foster empathy, social acceptance, and peace among groups. Because media representation patterns can either promote the integration of refugees into society or, conversely, perpetuate mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization, the media is not merely a neutral provider of reality; rather, it is a social actor that can simultaneously be a part of the problem and the solution (Pandir, 2020).

1.2 Importance of the Problem

The Syrian war, which erupted in 2011, has led to one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters since World War II, forcing an estimated 10 million Syrians to flee their homes and seek refuge outside their country's borders (Sunata & Yıldız, 2018). Since the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011, Jordan has hosted approximately 1.3 million Syrian refugees, of whom 436,410 were officially registered with the UNHCR as of November 2025 (JT, 2025; Commissioner, 2025a). Following the fall of the Assad regime on December 8, 2024, approximately 100,000 Syrian refugees residing in Jordan returned to their homeland (UNHCR, 2025). Nevertheless, Jordan continues to host a large number of Syrian refugees, making it the country with the highest refugee-to-population ratio in the world (Ministry of Interior, 2025).

The significance of this study stems from its examination of the representations of Syrian refugees in Jordanian media, particularly after the Assad regime collapsed and when a sizable portion of Syrians are still living in Jordan. Additionally, the study seeks to comprehend how Syrians are portrayed in Jordanian media following the overthrow of the Assad regime and after they have been refugees in Jordan for 14 years.

This study comes at a time when the return of Syrian refugees to their homes became a politically and socially controversial option in Jordan after the regime's collapse. This potential makes the issues of Syrian refugees within public debate more salient because of the media's role in shaping the populace's opinion and societal discourse. This just underlines the need to pay attention to how this is covered by the media.

This study also takes place in Jordan's current economic environment, where social and economic factors interact with media coverage of refugees, whether it be in terms of explaining their presence, talking about their effects, or speculating about their future. In order to comprehend the relationship between the economic and social context and media representations, as well as how these representations may play a role in shaping public opinion trends and community interaction with the potential return issue, it is necessary to analyze the image of Syrian refugees in the Jordanian media during this stage.

Therefore, examining media discourse at this time is not just about describing media coverage; rather, it helps to provide an analytical reading of how the media manages sensitive issues during times of transition. This increases the study's scientific value and helps to understand how the media and society interact at a critical juncture. Consequently, examining media discourse at this phase goes beyond describing media coverage. It gives a view of how the media deals with sensitive issues where political, social, and economic parts meet. Existing literature has shared insights about how the media frames stories about refugees in calm settings. The sudden political shift that happened in Syria brings new questions. These questions have not yet been fully answered by the literature.

1.3 Syrian Refugees in the Media

The media representations of refugees can affect how people feel about them. It is important to think about how the media is talking about refugees. The media can help people understand and recognize each other when it shows things in a certain way. Media representations that do this will make people feel empathy for minorities and vulnerable groups. They will show that these people are beings too. This can lead to people getting along better and being more accepting of each other. The media is not a bystander; it is actually part of the issue and part of the solution to the problem. Media representations are very important because they can change the way people think about minorities and vulnerable groups. Their images and representations can either go hand in hand with the integration of refugees into society or contribute to the perpetuation of patterns of exclusion and marginalization of refugees (Yanagizawa-Druth, 2014).

As an example, research findings have shown that an increasing number of Turkish citizens are uncomfortable with the presence of Syrian refugees in their country and have begun expressing this discomfort as loss across multiple domains. Discomfort related to Syrian refugees is expressed, from a financial perspective, via beliefs that the presence of Syrian refugees reduces job opportunities and access to other resources for citizens of Turkey; the Turkish government is helping Syrian refugees and therefore making them privileged over other members of the Turkish population. There is also a broad negative opinion among Turks towards the presence and impact of Syrian refugees on their country or city; that is, Turks believe that Syrian refugees will cause Turkey to lose its national identity and affect various aspects of the cities of Turkey. In terms of a national view, the media in Turkey often represent Syrian refugees as a threat to the unity or security of Turkey; as it relates to urban areas, there are cultural fears associated with Arabs having an increased presence in public spaces. Media coverage of Syrian refugees in Turkey frequently reinforces the negative perceptions held by some citizens regarding Syrian refugees as those who abuse the use of public spaces and/or resources (Nielsen, 2016; Pandir, 2020; Saraçoğlu & Bélanger, 2019). Additionally, research focused on the depiction of Syrian refugees on Lebanese television news, emphasizing the investigation of hate speech targeting Syrian refugees (Sadaka, Nader, & Mikhael, 2015).

Furthermore, research shows that the influx of refugees has many social, economic, and security impacts on host countries - particularly those with weak political or economic systems. For instance, many authors have connected the Syrian

refugee crisis in Lebanon to deteriorating economic conditions, complex political conditions, increasing demographic conditions, depleting social services, and rising security concerns. Additionally, these impacts affect not only the host country but also individuals from the host country as well as the individual refugees themselves, who experience difficult social and living conditions in resource-poor environments and have difficulty integrating into the host community (Brun, Fakih, Shuayb, & Hammoud, 2016; Cherri, Arcos González, & Castro Delgado, 2016).

Humanitarian framing, sometimes known as the "victim frame," is one of the most commonly used strategies in international media reporting on refugee crises; news narratives typically depict refugees as entities worthy of compassion and assistance rather than as political agents with autonomy and significance. Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) discovered in their comparative analysis of the 2015 refugee crisis reporting across eight European nations that media narratives fluctuate between portraying individuals as "victims" and "threats. Notwithstanding their seeming opposition, both perspectives exhibit a propensity to diminish the refugee's complete human agency. However, narratives associated with heartrending humanitarian incidents (like the demise of the child Alan Kurdi) elicited a significant increase in solidarity and compassion; this portrayal was still intertwined with the obliteration of the refugee's political agency. This trend corresponds with the observations of Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017), who noted the persistent prevalence of humanitarian storylines over political ones in European media about refugee crises. These outcomes align with the current study's findings, indicating that the victim/humanitarian frame comprised a substantial segment of the prevailing framing in the sample—mirroring a trend observed in comparative European studies and implying a trait that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries in media portrayals of refugee matters.

The lack of the refugee's direct voice is a basic issue addressed in comparative studies of how the media portrays refugees, going beyond framing. To explain this tendency, the researchers suggest the idea of "symbolic bordering," in which the press uses linguistic techniques like aggregation, decontextualization, and silencing that together lead to the "misrecognition" of the refugee as a political, social, and historical agent (p. 25).

Despite the amount of research on how media portrays refugees—whether in Europe (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski 2017; Greussing & Boomgaarden 2017) or in nearby countries like Turkey and Lebanon (Pandir, 2020; Sadaqa et al. 2015)—most of these studies focus on situations where refugees are stuck in a long-term unstable condition. That is, their home country is still in crisis—like Syria. There is no real hope of going back. To our knowledge, no one has looked at how media framing of refugees might change—or not change—when the political situation in the country of origin shifts dramatically and actually makes return possible. This kind of shift is rare in refugee crises, but it is now becoming real in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024.

One big question remains: Will host country media, like in Jordan, keep using the humanitarian frames that show refugees as helpless victims needing protection? Will the new political situation in Syria push media toward frames about return, reintegration, or even the idea of refugees as temporary economic burdens? These changes—or lack of them—have consequences for Framing Theory and the theory of the Social Construction of Reality. We don't yet understand how media narratives evolve when the conditions that created the refugee crisis start to change.

This view looks at how Jordanian media talk about refugees during this turning point. By studying the language and framing used in Jordan's media, we can better understand how stories about refugees shift—or stay the same—when the situation in their home country changes. This could help us see how media framing responds to political change and how it shapes public understanding of people who have fled.

1.4 Framing Theory

This study is based on framing theory as a theoretical framework for understanding the frames presented by Jordanian media in presenting the discourse of Syrian refugees, in order to analyze and understand the potential effects on their image in Jordanian society. The study of frames and framing has produced a large body of literature that draws from many different disciplines. Because framing research is interdisciplinary, several definitions of frames and approaches have been used (Borah, 2011). Frames are a feature of the discourse itself (Pan & Kosicki, 1993); they offer an essential arranging concept (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989); they create a framework for additional components (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997); they highlight certain aspects of reality while hiding others (Entman, 1993).

Moreover, framing essentially involves selection and salience. "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality" and make them more salient in a communicating text. Frames increase the relevance of certain details about a message's topic by highlighting them, which means giving individuals a piece of information that is more noticeable, significant, or memorable. Salience increases the likelihood that the information will be perceived, interpreted, processed, and stored in the mind by the recipients (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

Conversely, framing effect research is a method of creating and analyzing news discourse (Pan & Kosicki, 1993) that looks at individual frames (Scheufele, 1999) or cognitively stored clusters (Entman, 1993). Thus, frames might refer to

the internal mental frameworks or the methods incorporated into political speech. Scholars from a variety of fields may find this dual life of framing research appealing (Kinder & Sander, 1996). Therefore, there are “two broad foundations: sociological and psychological” (Borah, 2016, p. 5).

According to McQuail and Deuze (2020), there are two insights for this view: First, media construct social formations and history itself by framing images of reality in patterned ways. Second, people interact with the symbolic constructions offered by the media and therefore construct their own view of social reality and their place in it. This approach suggests the power of media and the power of people to choose.

Frames can be seen as inherent features of discourse (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). These features function as core organizing principles shaping meanings (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). They provide an underlying structure that supports and connects other communicative elements (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), highlighting certain aspects of reality while simultaneously downplaying or excluding others (Entman, 1993). In contrast, research on framing effects focuses on the strategic construction and interpretation of news discourse (Pan & Kosicki, 1993), examining how specific frames operate at the individual level, either as distinct interpretive patterns (Scheufele, 1999) or as cognitive structures stored in memory (Entman, 1993). There have been some studies that have examined how Jordanian media framed the issue of Syrian refugees before the fall of the Assad regime. For example, Al Khatib (2019) found through textual analysis that the Jordanian newspaper *Al-Ghad* focused mainly on five similar themes in its coverage of Syrian issues in Jordan, including portraying Syrian refugees as a burden, highlighting Jordan's role in the Syrian refugee crisis, acknowledging the role of non-Arab host countries, portraying Syrian refugees as victims, and demanding more international support. According to this literature, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: Which frames were most prevalent in the Jordanian media when reporting on Syrian refugees?

RQ2: How did the Jordanian media frame Syrian refugees?

RQ3: How did emotional tones differ across the messages' frames in reporting on Syrian refugees in Jordan?

1.5 The Social Construction of Reality

There are many areas of scholarship related to the social construction of reality. After reviewing how media frames the world, it must be recognized that the foundational influence of Berger and Luckmann's work in *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) serves as the basis for almost all other research conducted in this field. They discuss communication's role in constructing reality and stress that language serves as a primary means of organizing social life. In particular, they demonstrate that language is more than a means of communication; it is one of the primary characteristics of humans. What sets humans apart from other animals is their ability to create elaborate systems of verbal and non-verbal communication (Carter, 2013).

Understanding reality construction involves the complexity and diversity of media messages, which are produced through multiple voices, formats, and communicative modes and are open to varied interpretations. Even analyses that focus on media production processes leave much of the meaning unresolved and contingent. In this context, media outputs can be seen as complex texts consisting of multiple types of media, including pictures (visual images), sounds, and/or languages (verbal text). A feature of media outputs is that they typically contain multiple meanings or layers of meaning, but some layers can become so accepted that they are viewed as natural and self-evident (for example, they are taken for granted).

As a result of this, the actual meaning of a media output (or media content in general) cannot be judged based solely on the surface-level meaning of the content; there can be underlying subtexts within the media outputs, and across collections of media outputs, there can be meta-messages that are broader and more latent than surface-level meanings. This multiplicity of meaning implies that a variety of approaches must be employed to analyze media outputs in order to uncover explicit and implicit meanings. Therefore, the framework of analysis used in the present study incorporates text and discourse analysis traditions as employed across numerous fields of study; traditional fields of text and discourse analysis focus primarily on specific subjects (for example, race relations, class relations, gender relations, public policy, and so on).

These approaches provide the conceptual tools necessary to examine how meaning is constructed, structured, and interpreted within media discourse (Adoni & Mane, 1984). According to Romano (2019), the metaphor of “flow,” for instance, is based on profound mental conceptions like power, containment, and disruption, which create an implicit connotation that presents refugees as a source of pressure or a possible threat, despite its supposedly neutral verbal form. According to the study, by rearranging social experience into symbolic pictures that affect public perception, these language constructions not only mirror reality but also actively contribute to its formation. From this angle, even in journalistic circumstances that seem more receptive to migrant issues, media discourse is viewed as a positive tool that helps create social representations of migrants.

Because of the close ties between the two cultures, Syrian refugees in Jordan are viewed by many people through social

media as partners and as contributing members of society. They also note that Syrian refugees do not have a negative stereotype attached to them based on their achievements in many fields, hard work, and ability to quickly assimilate into their new communities (Abualasal, Khasawneh, Alaawad, Ziani, & Habes, 2025). Based on this literature, the following research question was developed:

RQ4: How did Jordanian media contribute to the social construction of Syrian refugees' identity and reality in Jordan?

2. Method

To answer the research questions, quantitative content analysis was employed. Through this analysis, the coverage frames were assessed (for example, victim frame, humanitarian/rights frame, burden frame, responsibility frame), the representational pattern (for example, victim, economic burden, security threat, guest and sibling, contributor), and the visual elements (for example, tents, children/women, aid queues, crimes, integration).

2.1 Sampling

The sampling frame for this study ($N=207$) was obtained from the Jordan News Agency (Petra) ($N=82$), as the official institution expressing the official viewpoint in Jordan; Al-Ghad newspaper ($N=53$), which is privately owned and affiliated with Al-Ghad daily newspaper; and the news website of Almamlaka TV ($N=72$), which is an official news channel. The content was obtained through the three sites' search functions using the keywords (Syrians, refugees). January 1st, 2025, was selected as the start date since it is the first day of the year following the fall of the Assad regime. In order to ensure comprehensive coverage of all three sources, December 31st, 2025, was chosen as the conclusion date.

2.2 Coding Procedure

A coding manual was prepared, comprising eight variables, each with a set of predefined categories. The coding system underwent several revisions during the coder training phase to improve category clarity and enhance application accuracy, ensuring high inter-coder reliability. Two faculty members specializing in media studies participated in the coding process, having received intensive training on using the coding manual and application procedures. In cases where an article contained more than one potential frame, coders were trained to identify the dominant frame based on the largest amount of text space each frame occupied within the article.

For training purposes, a random sample of 21 newspaper articles, representing approximately 10% of the total sample, was selected to test the coders' understanding of the coding categories. Following the training phase, a separate sample of 32 articles (representing 15% of the final sample) was used to assess inter-coder reliability using Krippendorff's alpha coefficient. Both subsamples were drawn from the total sample of 207 articles. Table (1) shows the variable definitions and alpha coefficient values for each category. After confirming an acceptable reliability level for all variables, the coders proceeded with the final coding of the 207 articles.

2.3 Measures

The coding guide was developed based on the theoretical literature of media framing to ensure its suitability for the nature and objectives of the study (Berry, Garcia-Blanco, & Moore, 2016; Benson, 2013; Eberl et al., 2018; Entman, 1993; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Wallace, 2018), ensuring that it included eight main variables designed to measure the dimensions of media coverage of the Syrian refugee issue. The first variable represented the type of newspaper article, including: news story, press report, column/editorial, and investigative report. The second variable focused on the coverage topic and included the following categories: humanitarian/refugees/suffering, economic, security/crimes, political/diplomatic, educational/health, and success/integration stories. The third variable addressed the media coverage frame and included: victim frame, burden frame, humanitarian/rights frame, security frame, crisis frame, opportunity/integration frame, and responsibility frame. The fourth variable measured the tone of the coverage, classified into positive, negative, and neutral. The fifth variable focused on the sources used in the coverage and included: Jordanian government officials, international organizations, local organizations, Jordanian citizens, Syrian refugees, experts/researchers, non-Jordanian government officials, and unattributed sources.

The coding guide also included a sixth variable related to the prevailing stereotype, which included: Syrians as victims, Syrians as a burden, Syrians as a threat, Syrians as guests, Syrians as a success story/contributor, and no clear stereotype. The seventh variable focused on the linguistic indicators used in the coverage and included: burden/pressure, guest, danger/security/smuggling vocabulary, suffering/refugee/camp, integration, and no stereotypical words. The eighth variable addressed the visual elements accompanying the newspaper articles, such as: refugee, tents/camps, children/women, aid queues, crime/raid, work/education/integration images, organizational logos, officials, displacement/border crossing scenes, or no images.

3. Results

RQ1 asked which frames were most prevalent in the Jordanian media when reporting on Syrian refugees. According to

the descriptive statistics (see Table 1), there was a clear variation in the distribution of frames used in the Jordanian media coverage of the Syrian refugee issue, with a notable dominance of frames with a humanitarian and social character. The humanitarian frame ranked first with a percentage of 34.7%. It was closely followed by the opportunities/integration frame with a percentage of 32.4%. The victim frame ranked third with a percentage of 18.3%. Additionally, a Chi-square goodness of fit was employed and indicated a statistically significant difference in the distribution of coverage frames ($\chi^2(6, N=207) = 196.60, p < .001$). In contrast, other frames receded to limited levels of presence; the security frame recorded a percentage of (4.2%), the responsibility frame (3.8%), while both the crisis frame and the burden frame each had a percentage of (1.9%).

RQ2 investigated how the Jordanian media frames Syrian refugees. The descriptive analysis showed that the representation of Syrians as “victims in need of help” was the most frequent (47.3%), and as “guests and brothers” came in second (27.5%). Meanwhile, the representation of Syrians as a “success story/contributor” came third (11.6%). In contrast, the representation of Syrians as an economic burden appeared at a rate of 3.9%, while the representation of Syrians as a security threat was the least present at a rate of 1%. Vocabulary related to human suffering, such as “suffering,” “camp,” and “refugee,” appeared at 50.2%, in addition to positive terms like “guests” and terms related to integration and opportunity. Humanitarian topics related to refugees and social suffering accounted for 46.9%, followed by political/diplomatic topics with a percentage of 21.1%, and then economic topics with a percentage of 17.4%.

The Chi-square test of goodness of fit revealed a statistically significant difference in the distribution of the stereotype of Syrian refugees in the media materials under study, with a test value of ($\chi^2(6, N=207) = 259.2, p < .001$). Moreover, a test of a Chi-square goodness of fit was employed and found a statistically significant difference in coverage tone ($\chi^2(2, N=207) = 228.52, p < .001$) across the coverage of the three news sites.

Furthermore, RQ3 asked how emotional tones differed across the messages' frames in reporting on Syrian refugees in Jordan. Coverage was predominantly positive (82.6%), followed by negative (13.0%) and neutral (4.3%). A chi-square test of independence indicated a significant association between frame and tone, $\chi^2(6, N = 207) = 42.82, p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .32$. Because 41.7% of cells had expected counts below 5, significance was confirmed with a Monte Carlo exact test, $p < .001$.

Adjusted standardized residuals showed that the association was driven mainly by the other frames, which were less likely than expected to carry a positive tone (44.0%; adjusted residual = -5.43) and more likely to carry a neutral tone (24.0%; 5.14) or a negative tone (32.0%; 3.00). Opportunities/integration coverage was more likely than expected to be positive (94.2%; 3.11) and less likely to be negative (4.3%; -2.63). The humanitarian frame (86.5% positive) and the victim frame (79.5% positive) did not differ significantly from expected tone distributions.

Table 1. Operational definitions, frequencies, and intercoder reliability scores of the variables ($N=207$)

Variable	Category	Definition	Frequency (%)	NKrippendorff's alpha (α)*
Article Type	News Story	A news article that conveys a current event objectively and in an inverted pyramid structure	150 (72.5)	.93
	News Report	An in-depth newspaper article that covers an event or issue with detail, context, and background, and may include explanatory information or multiple sources.	50 (24.2)	
	Column/Editorial	An opinion piece that expresses the viewpoint of the writer or the media institution's policy, including analysis, commentary, or a clear stance on a specific issue.	7 (3.4)	
	Investigative Report	A newspaper article based on in-depth research and investigation to uncover hidden information or issues, corruption, using multiple sources, documents, and evidence.	0 (0)	
General Coverage Topic	Humanitarian/Refugees/Suffering	Materials focusing on humanitarian situations, living conditions, camp conditions, basic needs, or social aspects related to refugees.	100 (48.3)	.94
	Economic (Job Resources, Services)	Market, Materials addressing the impact of refugees on the economy, labor market, public services, resources, or economic costs.	37 (17.9)	
	Security/Crime/Border	Materials linking refugees to security issues such as crime, smuggling, borders, or security stability.	12 (5.8)	
	Political/Diplomatic	Materials covering official stances, government policies, international relations, agreements, or political statements related to the refugee file.	45 (21.7)	
	Educational/Health	Materials focusing on education or health, such as schools, universities, healthcare, or medical services for refugees.	9 (4.3)	
	Success and Integration Stories	Materials highlighting individual or collective successes, community integration, or positive contributions of refugees.	4 (1.9)	
Tone of Coverage	Positive	Supportive language, appreciation, highlighting successes or integration or positive contributions.	171 (82.6)	.88
	Negative	Language that includes threat, discrimination, criminalization, attribution of responsibility, or depiction of refugees as a burden.	9 (4.3)	
	Neutral	Conveying information and facts without judgments or emotional descriptions.	27 (13.0)	
Sources Used	Jordanian Government Officials	Any statements or information issued by ministers, official spokespersons, or employees of Jordanian government institutions.	77 (37.2)	.92
	International Organizations	Sources affiliated with international or global organizations.	78 (37.7)	
	Local Organizations	Statements or information issued by charitable associations, civil institutions, or Jordanian organizations working in humanitarian or social affairs.	8 (3.9)	
	Jordanian Citizens	Opinions, testimonies, or stances of individual Jordanians who are not officials.	3 (1.4)	
	Syrian Refugees	Personal direct statements or testimonies of Syrian refugees about their situations or experiences.	6 (2.9)	
	Experts/Researchers	Opinions of specialists, academics, or researchers in fields such as economics, sociology, politics, or media.	14 (6.8)	
	Non-Jordanian Officials	Government Statements issued by official representatives of other countries related to the refugee file.	18 (8.7)	
	Without Sources	Materials that present information without attributing it to any clear or specific source.	3 (1.4)	

Table 1 (Continued)

Variable	Category	Definition	Frequency (%)	Krippendorff's alpha (α)*
Stereotype/Dominant Description	Syrian as a Victim in Need of Help	Presenting the refugee as affected by war, poverty, or displacement, focusing on their need for support and assistance.	98 (47.3)	.96
	Syrian as an Economic Burden	Depicting the refugee as a cause of pressure on the economy, services, or job market.	8 (3.9)	
	Syrian as a Threat	Linking refugees to crime, instability, or security risks.	2 (1.0)	
	Syrian as a Guest	Presenting refugees as guests or brothers, highlighting values of solidarity and mutual support.	57 (27.5)	
	Syrian as a Success Story/Contributor	Highlighting refugees' successes, integration, or positive contributions to the community.	24 (11.6)	
	No Clear Stereotype	Absence of a defined stereotypical description or balance in presenting the image without clear bias.	18 (8.7)	
Linguistic Indicators	No Stereotypical Words	Absence of vocabulary with clear positive or negative connotations.	11 (5.3)	.82
	Burden/Pressure	Vocabulary indicating the negative impact of refugees on resources or services.	9 (4.3)	
	Guests	Vocabulary carrying positive connotations of solidarity or brotherhood.	49 (23.7)	
	Danger, Security, Smuggling	Vocabulary linking refugees to security issues or crime.	2 (1.0)	
	Suffering, Camp, Refugee	Vocabulary focusing on the humanitarian situation and difficult living conditions.	104 (50.2)	
Visual Elements	Refugees	General images of refugees.	18 (8.7)	.92
	Tents/Camps	Images of refugee camps, tents, or temporary housing.	61 (29.5)	
	Children/Women	Images exclusively focusing on refugee children or women.	57 (27.5)	
	Aid Queues	Images of aid distribution or refugees waiting to receive aid.	0 (0)	
	Crime/Raid Images	Images related to security incidents, raids, or crimes.	0 (0)	
	Work/Education/Integration	Images showing refugees at work, in schools, or engaging in community integration activities.	2 (1.0)	
	Organizations/Logos	Images of humanitarian organization logos or relief signs.	15 (7.2)	
	Officials (Jordanian/Non-Jordanian)	Images of official representatives related to the news.	31 (15.0)	
	Displacement/Border Crossing	Images showing displacement or border crossing.	23 (11.1)	

Description: Each article was classified under a single dominant frame (the frame that occupied the largest portion of the text).

* Krippendorff's alpha (α) value is devoted to the whole category.

4. Discussion

4.1 Prevailing Media Frames

According to the findings in the study, the Jordanian media portrays Syrian Refugees predominantly with humanitarian/social frames. Therefore, the media tends to look at the Syrian refugee issue from a primarily moral/social perspective rather than framing it in terms of security/economic concerns, with the primary focus being on the

humanitarian/social needs of the refugees in terms of protection and integration. From the perspective of media framing theory, the selection of these frames constructs an image of refugees as part of a humanitarian context, one that is consistent with a discourse of empathy and social responsibility.

The relative decline of frames associated with threat or burden also indicates that the media discourse does not rely on narratives of fear or intimidation, but rather focuses on the humanitarian and social aspects of the issue. This reflects the media's role as a social actor that participates in shaping the general meaning of events, where it not only conveys facts but also reorganizes them within frames that construct a particular social image of refugees.

The findings of the current study, which showed the dominance of humanitarian and social frames in covering the issue of Syrian refugees, are consistent with a general trend in previous studies that found media outlets tend to use humanitarian frames when addressing displacement and refugee issues. Several studies have indicated that media coverage of humanitarian crises is often built around narratives of suffering, protection, and social solidarity, which contributes to directing public perception towards understanding the issue within a humanitarian context rather than framing it as a threat or burden. The relative decline of security and economic frames in this study is also consistent with the results of other research that demonstrated that the social and political context of the media institution influences frame selection, where some media environments tend to emphasize humanitarian aspects more than problematic ones (Al-Hunaiti, Almajali, & Aladinati, 2018; Ali, 2018). Moreover, the findings of the current study converge with Alhayek (2016) on the role of media frames in constructing the image of Syrian refugees within public discourse. The previous study showed that media coverage may tend to adopt humanitarian frames after impactful events, but it may also slip into simplifying or reducing the refugees' human experience. Similarly, the results of the current study revealed the dominance of humanitarian and social frames in the coverage of Syrian refugees, in addition to a strong presence of the refugee image as a victim in need of assistance. Additionally, Sunata and Yıldız (2018) showed that Turkish media tends to portray refugees as victims in need of assistance, which intersects with the findings of the current study that revealed the predominance of the "refugee as victim" image and the dominance of humanitarian and social frames in coverage. This similarity indicates the existence of a recurring media pattern in addressing refugee issues, where humanitarian framing is used to highlight suffering and to invite public sympathy.

4.2 The Image of Syrian Refugees

The study's findings show that the media representation of Syrian refugees is characterized by a humanitarian and empathetic tone, where the refugee is often presented as a victim in need of support, alongside the image of a guest or social partner. This representation is consistent with the humanitarian frameworks that dominated the coverage, reflecting a discourse that focuses on the human experience of displacement rather than highlighting problematic aspects.

From these findings, it can be said that these images do not represent a neutral interpretation of reality, but have in fact been created through the symbolic construction process, contributing to how people view and think about refugees. The use of dense vocabulary associated with human suffering and social disarray enhances the social construction of these images by using language as a major factor in directing the recipient's interpretation of the subject matter being presented. Thus, the media ranks as one of the primary devices in creating social meanings that redefine refugees within the context of the host society.

This compares with Reed's (2017) study regarding the significant positive shifts associated with major humanitarian events, suggesting that major humanitarian events can affect how the media portrays refugees and/or refugee issues. The studies demonstrate a consistent trend in how the media will portray refugees as being part of some kind of humanitarian issue (for example, humanitarian assistance) and/or through some kind of humanitarian framework (for example, empathy vs. sensationalism) when reporting on issues relating to those living in refugee-like situations. The findings also support the arguments that the majority of Jordanian society views Syrian refugees through a humanitarian/religious/moral perspective, and therefore feels a humanitarian/religious obligation to assist Syrian refugees; they also contend that the common perception of refugees does not include viewing them as security threats (Athamna, Al-Momani, & Al-Radaideh, 2016). Moreover, these results correspond to European research—specifically, the prevalence of humanitarian rhetoric over the political portrayal of refugees—implying a trait that surpasses geographical and cultural boundaries in media representations of asylum matters.

4.3 Frames and Emotional Tone

The relationship between frames and emotional tone reveals a significant statistical correlation between media frames and emotional tone, indicating that the framing process is not limited to organizing information, but is also linked to the nature of the accompanying emotional discourse. Humanitarian and social frames tend to be associated with a sympathetic or positive tone, while problem-oriented frames may be accompanied by a different tone. This association between frame and tone suggests that the way the media talks about an issue is made up of a lot of different parts that all work together to make a certain picture.

Source type and tone further illustrate how source selection contributes to the construction of media discourse; that is,

there are more than just transmitters of information. They are also a significant part of how the tone of coverage is constructed and therefore is consistent with the notion of gatekeeping, and how the tone of coverage shapes media messages. Media discourse on refugees ultimately represents a combination of frames, sources, and tone that together produce an overall comprehension of the issue.

4.4 *The Social Construction of Reality*

According to the social construction of reality theory, the study's conclusions show that Jordanian media outlets help create a social meaning of Syrian refugees' identity and place in the host society rather than just disseminating information about them. This beneficial function is demonstrated by the prevalence of humanitarian and social frames, which frequently depict refugees as victims in need of aid or visitors deserving of pity. This reinforces a social perception founded on social solidarity and human suffering.

The study indicates a broader media pattern characterized by a focus on humanitarian frameworks when addressing displacement issues, particularly in the context of events that evoke public sympathy. Thus, the findings of the current study support Wallace's (2018) conclusion that the media not only reflect reality, but also contribute to reshaping refugee representations in accordance with the social and political context. Also, the results of the current study agree with Pandır (2020) that the media may contribute to influencing how refugees are perceived in the host society. According to the previous study, media discourse frequently portrays refugees in a humanitarian framework that emphasizes suffering. This might lead to an increase in social empathy, but it can also perpetuate the perception of refugees as weak parties in need of aid. Similarly, the current study's findings showed that humanitarian and social frameworks predominate, with a dominant portrayal of the refugee as a victim. This is indicative of a media trend that emphasizes the humanitarian aspect of the experience over the active roles that refugees play in the community. This tension can be understood through the concept of "symbolic bordering" introduced by Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017). This concept explains how even the most empathetic humanitarian discourse can produce "misrecognition," confining the refugee to the identity of a pity-recipient rather than an agent deserving of recognition for their autonomous will (p. 625).

This observation matches studies (Pandır, 2020; Sunata & Yıldız, 2018) that show how humanitarian framing can strengthen the idea of the refugee as someone who is weak and always in need of help. It tends to keep the image of the refugee as a person instead of showing them as someone who can take part in the daily life of the society that welcomes them. Moreover, studies from the Turkish context indicate that refugee flows may create pressures in the labor market. This illustrates how the media shapes social reality by rearranging priorities and meanings through symbolic framing rather than by directly reflecting material facts. The results of this study demonstrate that Jordanian media coverage did not exaggerate this element, but rather reframed the refugee situation within humanitarian and integrative frames (Ceritoglu, Yunculer, Torun, & Tumen, 2017).

Chouliaraki and Zaborowski's (2017) conclusions about European coverage of the refugee crisis are consistent with the current study's findings, which highlight the predominance of humanitarian and social frameworks as well as the "refugee-as-victim" image in Jordanian media coverage. Additionally, their study noted that humanitarian discourse predominated during particular coverage times (such as the aftermath of the death of the child Alan Kurdi), when feelings of empathy and solidarity sharply increased. The durability of this framing over time, however, differs fundamentally between the two studies. Although the European study revealed that the humanitarian frame was ephemeral and unstable, rapidly giving way to "threat" and securitization frames in the wake of significant events such as the Paris attacks (where solidarity rates fell from 14.7% to 7.7% and security-related concern increased from 10.7% to 18%), the current study shows that in Jordanian coverage, the humanitarian/social frame continued to be predominant and comparatively constant. There was a noticeable and persistent fall in security and economic framing, but there was no matching movement in discourse toward threats. Chouliaraki and Zaborowski's (2017) concept of "symbolic bordering" explains this disparity. According to this theory, media outlets frequently switch between depicting refugees as "threats" in need of security measures and as "victims" deserving of care.

This variation reflects the concept of "humanitarian securitization" prominent in European discourse on migration, which contains a structural contradiction between the imperatives of national security and those of humanitarian protection (p. 630). In contrast, Jordanian media discourse does not appear to be subject to this same degree of structural strain. The shared cultural, social, and religious ties between Syrian refugees and the host community, along with the stability of Jordan's official and public narrative—which defines the nation as a "host state" with a long history of welcoming successive waves of refugees (Palestinians, Iraqis, and then Syrians)—likely lessen the structural incentives to portray the refugee as a threatening "other." In contrast to the fragility of the humanitarian framework seen in the European study, which quickly veered toward a discourse of threat, media discourse is thus firmly rooted in a humanitarian-social framework that is difficult to change under the pressure of developing events. According to Wallace (2018) and Pandır (2020), media outlets actively contribute to "reshaping" reality in accordance with the local social and political context, rather than merely reflecting it neutrally. This interpretation is consistent with the social construction of reality theory, which serves as the foundation for the current study.

5. Conclusion

Given the lack of security or negative frames, this framing helps to reinforce the refugee's identity in public discourse as an actor associated with a humanitarian context rather than as a threatening element or an economic burden. According to the theory of social construction, the recurrent use of these pictures in media discourse helps to solidify particular perceptions of refugees in the public mind, integrating them into the dominant social interpretation of their reality. The close relationship between media frames and emotional tone further suggests that media discourse may construct meaning by guiding the audience's emotional reaction in addition to choosing topics. A social reality founded on empathy rather than fear is produced by the sympathetic tone that goes along with humanitarian frames, which strengthens the idea that refugees are a group that deserves assistance.

The Jordanian context—characterized by geographical and cultural proximity to the Syrian refugee crisis—has fostered a more stable social fabric inclined toward humanitarian solidarity, even in the absence of events that typically elicit sympathy. In contrast, contexts geographically and culturally distant from the refugee issue have contributed to shaping a media narrative that oscillates between empathy and a sense of threat, driven by the logic of symbolic boundaries. Thus, a comparison of the two studies reveals both a basic divergence in the stability dynamics of the dominant framing (humanitarian/victim-centered) and a resemblance in that framing. This emphasizes the need for more comparative studies of the contextual elements—geographical, cultural, and political—that influence how resilient humanitarian frames are in the face of changing events in various media environments.

6. Limitations

This study's focus is restricted to three Jordanian news websites and the news articles that were posted there over the course of a year; social media posts are not included. Given the quick changes in the media-mediated public discourse environment, where digital platforms and algorithms are reshaping mechanisms of visibility and public circulation outside the boundaries of traditional news media, this exclusion represents a significant limitation (Battista, 2024, 2025). In order to ascertain whether the patterns found in this study are repeated or differ in a more interactive and algorithm-driven digital environment, the study suggests that future research broaden to include an analysis of the representation and voices of refugees on social media platforms. Additionally, the study uses a content analysis methodology; it doesn't use any other research techniques like surveys or interviews.

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