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PERCEPTIONS AND IMAGE OF KURDS IN TURKISH SOCIAL MEDIA: THE CASE OF EKŞİ SÖZLÜK

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine social perceptions of Kurds through user-generated comments on the online platform Ekşi Sözlük and to evaluate these perceptions within conceptual categories. For this purpose, all entries containing the keywords "Kurd" and "Kurds" on Ekşi Sözlük (a total of 1,181 comments) were collected, classified, and analyzed. A qualitative content analysis method was employed, in which user comments were systematically reviewed and classified into both positive and negative categories. The distribution of comments was supported with descriptive statistics (percentage distributions), and each category was analyzed within its sociological and cultural context. Findings indicate that while negative categories, particularly the theme of "terror," were prominent, positive comments also held notable significance. In particular, the emphasis on cultural diversity, hospitality, contributions to social solidarity, and harmony within shared living practices emerged as the dominant elements of positive perceptions. In conclusion, it was determined that social perceptions of Kurds are not solely shaped by exclusionary views but also include inclusive and unifying perspectives, which may contribute to strengthening social peace and a culture of coexistence.

KEYWORDS: Türkiye, Kurds, Societal Perception, Societal Image, Ekşi Sözlük.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term Kurd has historically operated both as an ethnonym and as a broader socio-cultural designation, the meaning of which has varied across different historical periods and textual traditions. As noted by Rasony (1988), the term was used to denote one of the Turkic-origin tribes that contributed to the ethnogenesis of the Hungarians. Likewise, Minorsky points out that in certain Arab sources, Kurd was frequently employed as a synonym for “nomad” (Nikitin, 1994). In Ottoman administrative and historical records, not only the term Kurd but also Turk was at times used in a socio-economic sense, referring to “peasants,” “mountaineers,” or “nomadic populations” (Halaçoğlu, 1996).

The majority of Kurds in Turkey are speakers of Kurmanji, although notable linguistic and cultural variations exist even within Kurmanji-speaking communities. While they are primarily concentrated in Southeastern and parts of Eastern Anatolia, Kurdish populations are distributed across the country. In terms of religious affiliation, the community is diverse, including both Sunni Muslims—predominantly of the Hanafi and Shafi schools—and groups adhering to the Alevi tradition (Buran, 2010).

From a legal standpoint, Kurds in Turkey are not recognized as a minority; rather, similar to other Muslim populations, they are regarded as integral constituents of the state. This legal framework, combined with historical patterns of internal migration, has contributed to a significant Kurdish presence in major metropolitan areas such as Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Bursa, Adana, and Mersin, as well as in various other regions of the country (Buran, 2010). This diversity has generated considerable scholarly and public interest in how Kurds are perceived within Turkish society and the kinds of images attributed to them. Although they are regionally concentrated, their widespread presence across the country has brought increased attention to their cultural practices, everyday experiences, and forms of social interaction. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the perceptions and representations of Kurds through an analysis of user-generated content on *Ekşi Sözlük*. In doing so, it adopts analytical lenses such as discrimination, ethnic difference, othering, and fascism to better understand both how Kurds are perceived by others and how they construct and negotiate their own identities.

1.1. General Information About Kurds

The Kurds are an Indo-Iranian people who have

historically inhabited a گەست region extending from the Zagros Mountains in the east to the Taurus Mountains in the west, and from the Hemrin Mountains in the south to the Kars-Erzurum plateau in the north. Estimates suggest that their global population is approximately 30 million (McDowall, 2004).

Today, Turkey hosts the largest Kurdish population, estimated at between 14 and 16 million, while significant Kurdish communities also reside in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Owing to political instability, armed conflicts, and socio-economic challenges throughout the twentieth century, a substantial Kurdish diaspora has also emerged, particularly in Western Europe, North America, and parts of Central Asia.

Within the Middle East, Turkey is generally considered to host the largest concentration of Kurds, although the absence of reliable and up-to-date demographic data complicates precise estimation. The last census to include mother tongue as a variable, conducted in 1965, indicated that out of a total population of 31.39 million, approximately 2.37 million individuals identified Kurdish as their mother tongue, while an additional 450,000 reported Kurdish as a second language. Together, these figures corresponded to roughly 8.98% of the national population (Zeyneloğlu *et al.*, 2011; Held, 2018; Alptekin, 2017c).

Subsequent censuses discontinued the collection of mother-tongue data, rendering updated and reliable estimates unavailable. Furthermore, the frequent inclusion of Zaza speakers within these figures introduces an additional layer of ambiguity in assessing the size of the Kurdish population.

In Turkey, Kurds are primarily concentrated in the southeastern and eastern provinces; however, historical state policies and socio-economic dynamics have contributed to their dispersal across other regions of the country. During the Ottoman period, segments of the Kurdish population were resettled in Central Anatolia—particularly in provinces such as Konya, Ankara, and Aksaray—giving rise to what is now referred to as the Central Anatolian Kurds (*Kurdên Anatoliya Navîn*).

In the Republican era, substantial waves of migration toward major urban centers—including Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Adana, Mersin, Gaziantep, and Bursa—took place (Sirkeci, 2000, pp. 149–175; Alptekin, 2009). These movements were driven both by economic opportunities and, at times, by political instability. Early Republican Kurdish uprisings led to episodes of forced migration, while the escalation of conflict in the 1990s resulted in widespread village

evacuations, further accelerating urbanization (Houston, 2005).

As a consequence, western Anatolia is now believed to host a Kurdish population that may rival or exceed that of the traditional eastern and southeastern regions. However, the absence of ethnicity-based census data prevents precise estimation, and patterns of intermarriage have further blurred demographic boundaries. In addition, a significant number of Kurds from Turkey have emigrated abroad, particularly to Germany and other Western European countries.

In sociological perspective, individuals are understood as social and civic actors whose lives are embedded within broader structures of social organization. They coexist and interact with others in order to sustain their existence under conditions of limited resources (Küçükaslan, 2007). Historically, societies have undergone a series of transformations, evolving from primitive forms to agrarian systems, from agrarian to industrial societies, and more recently toward knowledge-based societies.

The relationship between society and politics is explored within the discipline of political sociology, which investigates political behavior within social structures and examines how politics and societal organization influence one another. This field analyzes the historical development and functioning of political institutions, such as the state and government, as well as key political concepts, including law and sovereignty, and various forms of governance, such as democracy, theocracy, and monarchy, across different societies and historical periods (Arslan, 1999, p. 154; Bahar, 2009, pp. 217–219). Beyond theoretical analysis, political sociology also provides insights into societal sensitivities, anticipates emerging challenges, and informs policy-making through evidence-based recommendations.

The originality of this study stems from its methodological approach, which diverges from traditional research by prioritizing social media platforms—specifically *Ekşi Sözlük*—as a novel and valuable source of empirical data. These platforms offer real-time insights into perceptions, attitudes, and discourses of thousands of participants, often providing richer information than conventional surveys. Discussions surrounding Kurdish identity, societal perceptions, and public image on social media remain underexplored. This study addresses that gap, contributing new empirical evidence and analytical perspectives to the field of political sociology.

1.2. Debates On Identity

Identity has become a central concept in modern scholarship, extensively examined across disciplines such as sociology and psychology. Psychology tends to emphasize the individual dimension of identity, focusing on the self and personality, whereas sociology foregrounds social affiliations, class positions, and group relationships (Aşkın, 2007; Marshall, 2005). Identity is not static or immutable; as Sözen (1999) argues, it is most effectively understood through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates insights from sociology, history, philosophy, and social psychology.

Evident in many modern societies, ethnic conflicts are often linked to broader socio-economic and cultural deficiencies. Although such factors cannot fully explain the emergence of ethnic movements, they significantly contribute to their persistence and reproduction. Regardless of whether a country is developed or not, each ethnic group exhibits unique characteristics, shaping the specific dynamics of the problems they encounter (Kurubaş, 2008).

In Turkey — a relatively young nation-state — identity debates have repeatedly surfaced in the public sphere. For decades these discussions were primarily framed around religious identities, but since the 1980s, with the emergence of the PKK, they have increasingly shifted toward ethnicity. Yet, as Kymlicka (1995) underscores, Anatolia has historically hosted diverse identities that coexisted peacefully for extended periods.

The concept of identity operates along both constructive and potentially destructive dimensions. Positively, it fosters solidarity and a sense of belonging, protecting individuals from the isolating effects of individualism, while also cultivating empathy and the recognition of shared human values. Conversely, an excessive attachment to identity can give rise to exclusionary behaviors, promoting alienation, conflict, and hostility toward perceived “others.” Therefore, identity functions as both a mechanism of social cohesion and a potential source of division, contingent upon the norms and values that underpin it (Sen, 2010).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A substantial portion of the literature on Kurds in Turkey has concentrated on historical aspects—especially uprisings—or on contemporary political and social dimensions of the Kurdish issue. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to how Kurds are perceived within Turkish society. This study adopts a novel approach by analyzing social media discourse, specifically user contributions on *Ekşi Sözlük*, to examine perceptions

of Kurds and their public image.

The first significant contribution is the joint report by SETA and Polmark (2009), *Turkey's Perception of the Kurdish Question*, which revealed that the Kurdish issue is widely perceived as one of Turkey's major societal problems. A second study by Saraçoğlu (2010), *Perceptions of Kurds in the Izmir Middle Class: Space, Class, and Urban Life*, analyzed how Kurds and "Kurdishness" are perceived in western cities. It highlighted the visibility of Kurdish communities within urban life as a result of migration driven by economic and social factors.

Bulut's (2021) work, *The Kurdish Question and Perceptions of the PKK in Turkey: The Case of NGOs in Diyarbakır*, explored how socio-cultural and political deprivation shapes perceptions of the PKK, demonstrating that marginalized groups often view the organization as a representative of Kurdish identity. Similarly, the Heinrich Böll Stiftung report by Dufner and Sevim (2013), *Perceptions, Actors, and Processes Regarding the Resolution of the Kurdish Question*, emphasized two central causes of the issue: the state's failure to institutionalize democracy and its inconsistent recognition of Kurdish identity across different historical periods.

2.1. Nation-State

Guibernau (1997) defines a nation as a self-aware community that shares a common culture, inhabits a defined territory, possesses a collective past and future, and asserts the right to self-governance. Similarly, Sönmezoğlu (2000) underscores the importance of collective memory, shared beliefs, and collective consciousness in the formation of a nation. Weber (2000) introduces the "principle of opposition," suggesting that nations emerge through solidarity constructed in contrast to "others." According to him, the state comprises territory, population, and the legitimate use of force, deriving its authority from shared elements such as religion, language, and ethnicity (Koçdemir, 2002).

Mera (cited in Öztekin, 2003) defines the state as a political organization sustaining social order and justice, with legitimacy over a defined territory. Teziç (2003) adds that the state requires three conditions: territory, population, and political-legal organization. Guibernau (1997) treats the nation-state as a modern political formation rooted in early modern Europe, shaped by efforts to unify populations through shared traditions and values. According to Şaylan (2003), it is closely tied to capitalism and the transformations in economy, politics, science, and culture, reinforced by centralization, bureaucracy, and the decline of

church authority (Smith, 2002).

2.2. Ethnicity

Ethnicity denotes shared cultural—and sometimes biological—characteristics that serve as a foundation for collective identity. It arises as individuals differentiate themselves from "others" while simultaneously seeking a sense of belonging (Nişancı & Işık, 2015). Weber's framework remains influential, defining ethnic groups as communities bound by a subjective belief in common ancestry, irrespective of actual genealogical ties, which frequently shape political organization (Sağır, 2004). Although ethnic awareness does not automatically produce nationhood, nations often strive for their own sovereign states. Moreover, ethnicity encompasses inherited traditions, myths of shared ancestry, and a collective historical consciousness (Göka, 2006; Alptekin, 2017b).

2.3. Integration

Migration involves more than mere physical relocation; it also facilitates cultural exchange and social interaction (Faist, 2018). Integration, in this context, refers to the continuous process through which migrants and host societies interact, encompassing access to housing, employment, education, and civic institutions, often shaped by state policies. Unlike assimilation, which implies the absorption of minorities into the dominant culture, integration emphasizes mutual adaptation, allowing minority groups to maintain their cultural traditions while participating fully in the broader society (Brown, 2000).

As Aleksiyan and Algan (2010) note, integration is achieved when migrants enjoy the same opportunities as citizens. It requires not only migrants' adaptation but also host societies' acceptance. Rather than being reduced to survival strategies or language acquisition, integration also depends on mutual recognition of needs and expectations between migrants and the host society (Akıncı *et al.*, 2015).

2.4. Multiculturalism

Culture encompasses human lifestyles, behaviors, and patterns of action (Uygur, 1984), while collective identity is shaped through shared symbols, memories, values, and traditions (Bilgin, 1994). Migration brings diverse groups into contact, giving rise to multicultural dynamics. Multiculturalism refers both descriptively to the coexistence of distinct cultural groups and normatively to the recognition and respect of cultural diversity (Heywood, 2007;

Bryson, 2005). It facilitates intercultural interaction, allowing cultures to complement, challenge, and enrich one another (Parekh, 2006). Sociologically, multiculturalism highlights diversity, whereas as a normative stance it advocates policies that acknowledge and support cultural pluralism. In contemporary societies, it is increasingly recognized as a political and ideological project addressing the realities of cultural heterogeneity (Canatan, 2009).

2.5. The Aim of the Research

Identity has emerged as a central and contested concept in modern sociology and psychology. While psychology emphasizes individual dimensions such as self and personality, sociology situates identity within social structures, highlighting class, status, and collective belonging (Aşkın, 2007; Marshall, 2005). Identity is neither fixed nor immutable; it requires a multidisciplinary perspective incorporating sociology, history, philosophy, and social psychology (Sözen, 1999).

In contemporary Turkey, identity debates have increasingly focused on ethnic dimensions, particularly Kurdish identity, shaped by historical, socio-political, and cultural factors (Kurubaş, 2008). Identity carries both integrative and divisive potentials: it can foster solidarity, belonging, and empathy, but excessive attachment may produce exclusion, conflict, and violence (Sen, 2010; Kılıçbay, 2003). Kurds constitute a major minority within this multiethnic context, and their representation in public discourse remains underexplored.

This study investigates how Kurdish identity is perceived and constructed in online discourse, focusing on user-generated content from Ekşi Sözlük. It examines how Kurds are understood within Turkish society and how these perceptions are reflected, negotiated, and challenged in social media interactions, providing empirical insights into the formation and contestation of ethnic identity in digital spaces.

2.6. Ekşi Sözlük

Before analyzing Ekşi Sözlük, it is necessary to highlight its dictionary-based format and its differences from similar platforms such as forums. Forums are online spaces where users exchange ideas on specific topics, often within defined areas of interest (Sherman & Smith, 2013). Emerging earlier than social media, forums like *Usenet* (est. 1979) remain active today (Zarrella, 2009).

Collaborative dictionaries, on the other hand, allow users to interpret events and concepts in diverse styles (Gürel & Yakın, 2015). Similar to

forums, they enable free participation in discussions, but may also appear in thematic forms (e.g., *Political Dictionary*) or institutional forms (e.g., *İTÜ Sözlük*, *Uludağ Sözlük*) (Dikbıyık, 2016).

3. METHOD

This study was conducted using two of the five methods recognized in the social sciences -namely, the Interpretive and Critical Social Science approaches (Neuman, 2012). Accordingly, events and phenomena are examined within their context and background, and from a critical perspective.

On the other hand, the data collection technique employed in this study is relatively less common, although it has been gaining popularity in recent years. The data were obtained by classifying user comments made under the entries “Kurd” and “Kurds” in an open-access online dictionary in Turkey. This online platform is Ekşi Sözlük (URL-1). Although it is referred to as a “dictionary,” this study approaches it functionally as a type of social media platform.

The data were analyzed and interpreted using discourse and content analysis. A total of 1,181 comments shared under the identified headings were included in the scope of the research, and the data were systematically classified and analyzed. In this context, the frequency of certain words appearing in the text and the direction of the verbs used by the authors of the comments played a significant role in determining the nature of the expressed opinions.

The comments were categorized into three main groups – positive, negative, and neutral – based on their content. The positive and negative categories were further divided into subcategories in line with the themes most frequently emphasized in the texts. During the data analysis process, the comments were interpreted not only descriptively but also by taking their sociological and cultural contexts into account. The distribution of categories was supported by statistical percentages, thereby strengthening the qualitative findings with quantitative indicators.

In this respect, the study constitutes predominantly qualitative research aiming to provide a multidimensional understanding of social perceptions and images of Kurds through discourses produced in the digital public sphere. Since the data used in the study consist of publicly accessible texts, ethical committee approval was not required.

It is considered that analyzing comments on internet platforms is much more efficient and reliable than surveys and interviews. Beyond facilitating access to the relevant sample, this approach has an important advantage: unlike surveys or interviews,

comments are not produced upon the researcher's request or under external influence or direction. Instead, they are generated voluntarily and self-motivated, as individuals express their views out of their own perceived need to do so. Therefore, the data can be regarded as the subjective opinions of individuals expressed freely in an unconstrained environment.

4. FINDINGS

A total of 1,181 entries from Ekşi Sözlük were analyzed and categorized as neutral, positive, or negative. The largest proportion was neutral (630 entries, 53.34%), followed by positive (314 entries, 26.59%) and negative (237 entries, 20.07%). These findings suggest that contributors predominantly adopt a neutral position toward Kurds (see Table 1).

Table 1: Frequency And Rates of the Positive, Negative and Neutral Comments.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
Frequency	314	237	630	1181
Percent	%26,59	%20,07	%53,34	%100

4.1. Positive Comments

Table 2: Frequency And Rates of the Positive Comments.

Classification Of The Positive Comments					
	Human	Brother	Diffirent Origion	Citizen	Türk
Frequency	84	15	72	86	57
Percent	%26,75	%4,78	%22,39	%27,39	%18,15

The distribution presented in Table 2 indicates that a substantial share of positive comments is concentrated in the "human" and "citizen" categories. While this may initially suggest an inclusive discourse, it is important to note that these categories often function by neutralizing ethnic identity. In this regard, positive perceptions appear to arise less from an acknowledgment of Kurdish identity per se and more from its reduction to generalized notions of "humanity" or "citizenship." Although the "different origin" category reflects a comparatively favorable attitude toward cultural diversity, the comments within this category tend to be limited in depth and somewhat superficial. Furthermore, the minimal representation of the "brother" category underscores the weakness of emotionally grounded, equality-based forms of solidarity, indicating that even positive perceptions are articulated within a cautious and distanced framework.

4.1.1. Citizen

An analysis of comments from Ekşi Sözlük reveals a generally positive orientation toward Kurds. Positive remarks were categorized into five subgroups: Citizen, Human, Different Origin, Turk, and Brother. The "Citizen" category accounted for the largest share, with 86 comments (27.39%), followed closely by Human (84 comments, 27.75%), Different Origin (72 comments, 22.39%), Turk (57 comments, 18.15%), and Brother (15 comments, 4.78%). These results suggest that contributors

predominantly perceive Kurds through the lens of "citizenship," emphasizing civic belonging over ethnic distinctiveness.

The "Citizen" category includes statements such as *"they are our people, they have contributed to these lands as much as Turks, they are integral members of this nation."* Citizenship represents the legal rights of individuals and their responsibilities toward the state (Turner, 2008). With the French Revolution, political rights expanded, and the definition of citizenship became closely tied to national identity and the notion of the nation-state (Falk, 2005; Üstel, 1999).

The concept of the nation refers to the integration of groups from diverse origins, creating a collective identity that strengthens political structures (Touraine, 2002). According to Hobsbawm (2006), a community can only be considered a nation if it has reached a certain scale and maintains historical ties with an established state.

The Republic of Turkey is a nation-state that encompasses various ethnic groups. Kurds are citizens who live, work, and contribute to the country in both war and peace. Their entitlement to the same rights as all other citizens is unquestionable. The comments categorized under "Citizen" reveal that Kurds are perceived as an inseparable part of the country and are explicitly included within the scope of citizenship.

4.1.2. Brother

One subcategory of positive comments is

"Brother", which consists of 15 remarks. These comments include expressions such as "*Kurds are my brothers, relatives, friends*", "*Turks and Kurds are brothers*", and "*our brothers living on these lands*."

Brotherhood is not only a biological bond but also a sociological concept. In society, forms of brotherhood include blood brotherhood, foster brotherhood, religious brotherhood, and bonds of language, history, and culture (Ekici, 2019, p. 488-490). Thus, brotherhood encompasses religious, social, and cultural ties beyond kinship.

Multiculturalism has gained importance in modern nation-states since the 1970s, promoting coexistence and the protection of rights for different ethnic and cultural groups. Although Turkey is a multicultural society, Kurds are not perceived as "others" but rather as brothers. Turks often view Kurds as brothers regardless of kinship; shared experiences such as coexistence, intermarriage, neighborhood, and work relations strengthen this perception. The comments indicate that, even without biological ties, Turks and Kurds regard each other as brothers due to their shared life on these lands.

4.1.3. Different Origin

Another subcategory of positive comments is "Different Origin," consisting of 72 remarks. These comments emphasize that Kurds belong to a different ethnic background, yet this difference is seen as positive. Kurds are described as hospitable, friendly, and an integral part of these lands.

Ethnic identity is defined by the language, traditions, and rituals that shape a community (Göka, 2006). According to Wallerstein (1998), "ethnic group" has largely replaced the concept of "minority" in contemporary societies. To be considered an ethnic group, cultural practices, language, beliefs, and lifestyle must be distinct from those of other groups (Erkal, 2001).

Throughout history, diverse ethnic groups have coexisted across different geographies (Smith, 2002). In Turkey, this diversity has enriched multicultural life. Kurds, with their distinct traditions and lifestyles, maintain a strong ethnic identity. Therefore, comments under the "Different Origin" category suggest that Turks perceive Kurds as ethnically different, but regard this difference as a positive element that contributes to multicultural coexistence.

4.1.4. Human

Nations vary in terms of geography, population, natural resources, climate, and sociopolitical

organization. Over the course of history, societies have experienced multiple transformations, revealing critical dimensions of human development (UNDP, 1998). Development is generally understood as the enhancement of quality of life and the expansion of opportunities available to individuals. Within this framework, human development is conceptualized as the process of broadening people's choices, encompassing cultural, political, and economic freedoms, as well as fostering self-respect, productivity, creativity, and the enjoyment of fundamental rights (Akder, 1992; UNDP, 1998).

Within the analyzed comments, the subcategory "Human" contained 82 statements. Respondents frequently emphasized that Kurds, like all others, are simply human beings, "cheerful, warm, lively people," or "just like us." While some noted cultural differences, the underlying message was that such distinctions are secondary to the shared essence of humanity. These perceptions resonate with broader sociological perspectives highlighting humans' unique cognitive capacities, enabling social organization, state formation, and technological progress (Clapham, 2007).

4.1.5. Turk

In Turkey, relations between Turks and Kurds have long reflected questions of identity and coexistence. The literature stresses the need for inclusive democratic policies and models fostering reconciliation between these groups (Criss, 1995; Alptekin, 2017a). Social identity theory explains how individuals construct belonging not only through ethnicity but also via multiple roles, such as family, profession, or community affiliations (Postmes, & Branscombe, 2010).

The subcategory "Turk" included 57 positive comments. Many emphasized that Kurds are regarded as integral members of the Turkish nation, "a part of the Republic of Turkey," and "citizens sharing the same homeland." Respondents highlighted historical solidarity between Turks and Kurds, noting that common struggles, natural disasters, and social challenges have reinforced collective identity. Such perspectives underscore the idea that national belonging transcends ethnic boundaries, affirming unity in diversity.

Examples illustrate this sentiment: Kurds were described as "brothers, colleagues, neighbors, and friends," "inseparable elements of society," and "trustworthy, hospitable people." The dominant discourse rejected discrimination and underscored that genuine coexistence rests on mutual respect, shared values, and a collective sense of destiny.

4.2. Negative Comments

Considering the content of the comments, this category is labeled as *negative* because the remarks made by dictionary users carry a predominantly unfavorable tone (see Table-3). The subcategories within this section were identified based on the content of the comments and the most frequently used expressions.

After classifying all comments as positive, negative, or neutral, the negative comments were divided into subcategories. According to the data, the "Terror" category ranks first with 78 comments (32.91%). It is followed by the "Disliked" category with 36 comments (15.19%). The "Manipulated"

category holds third place with 34 comments (14.35%), while the "Minority-Confused Identity" category follows closely with 33 comments (13.92%). The "Ignorant" category appears in fifth place with 29 comments (12.24%), and finally, the "Oppressed" category comes last with 27 comments (11.39%).

The data indicate that the highest number of comments is concentrated in the "Terror" category, while the lowest number appears in the "Oppressed" category. Furthermore, the number of comments in the "Manipulated," "Minority-Confused Identity," and "Disliked" categories is relatively similar. Notably, there is a difference of 51 comments between the most frequent category "Terror" and the least frequent one "Oppressed".

Tablo 3: Frequency and Rate of Negative Comments.

Classification Of The Negative Comments						
	The Used	Minority - Confused Identity	Terror	Oppressed	Disliked	Ignorant
Frequency	34	33	78	27	36	29
Percent	%14,35	%13,92	%32,91	%11,39	%15,19	%12,24

4.2.1. The Used

Identity construction inherently involves the interplay of similarity and difference, where group boundaries are constantly negotiated (Turner, 2005). Social identities reflect contextual structures but do not guarantee homogeneity among group members, as internal conflicts and disagreements are common (Haslam, 1997).

The subcategory "Used," with 34 comments, reflects perceptions that Kurds act as instruments of external powers. Many comments describe Kurds as "pawns" of foreign states, particularly the United States, serving external interests at the expense of national unity. In this view, Kurdish political action is presented less as self-determined and more as shaped by global actors.

Identity construction inherently involves the negotiation of similarity and difference, with group boundaries continuously reshaped by internal and external dynamics (Turner, 2005). Social identities are context-dependent and heterogeneous, as internal disagreements and conflicts are common within groups (Haslam, 1997).

In the Ekşi Sözlük dataset, the "Used" subcategory, with 34 comments, reflects perceptions that Kurds act as instruments of external powers. Many comments describe Kurds as "pawns" of foreign states, particularly the United States, serving external interests at the expense of national unity. This way of describing things suggests that minority groups are not seen as political actors in their own

right, but as tools of external forces.

Looking at cases across Europe, we find similar patterns. The Basques and Catalans have historically been portrayed by some actors as instruments of foreign powers during periods of nationalist mobilization, particularly when seeking support from external entities for autonomy or independence (Conversi, 2000; Guibernau, 2006). Scottish and Irish nationalist movements, especially in relation to Irish republicanism and Scottish independence, have occasionally been characterized by outsiders as influenced or manipulated by external political forces (Keating, 2001). Corsicans, too, have been perceived in political discourse as being leveraged by outside powers to challenge centralized authority in France (Vieille, 2009).

In the "Used" comments, minority political action is often interpreted as something shaped by outside powers. It shows the difference between recognising minorities as political actors and portraying them as tools of others.

4.2.2. Minority - Confused Identity

Within the category of negative comments, the "Minority - Confused Identity" subcategory ranks fourth, with a total of 33 comments. These comments often describe Kurds as a "confused people" or as a "primitive society," with some remarks emphasizing that they perceive themselves as a minority. The categorization was derived from the frequent use of the terms "minority" and "confused" together. From a sociological perspective, "minority" refers to a

group that differs from the majority in terms of identity, culture, or numbers. Despite their distinct ethnic and cultural characteristics, Kurds are often negatively perceived, especially due to their lack of a state and tribal structures, which are interpreted as signs of confusion and weakness.

Among the negative comments, the subcategory titled "Minority - Confused Identity" indicates that Kurds are perceived as a "mixed people" or a "primitive society" and that they see themselves as a minority. From a sociological perspective, "minority" refers to a group that differs from the majority in terms of identity, culture, or population size (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These comments show that due to the lack of a state and the prevalence of tribal structures, Kurds may be viewed from the outside as a "confused" or "disorganized" community (Gellner, 1981).

A similar situation can be observed among some ethnic minority groups in Europe. The Basques and Catalans have historically been subjected to assimilation policies by the central Spanish state, and their identities have been perceived by outside observers as "fragmented" or "mixed" (Conversi, 2000). Scottish and Irish communities experienced political and cultural pressure during the British Empire and their efforts to preserve their own identities were often interpreted by outsiders as a "confused" image (Keating, 2001). Corsicans, too, have faced difficulties in preserving their cultural identity due to French central policies, and have been regarded by external observers as a "confused" minority (Vieille, 2009).

When the case of the Kurds is evaluated in this context, the absence of a state and the social organization based on tribal structures may be perceived by external observers as a sign of "confusion" or "weakness." This phenomenon — namely, the marginalization of ethnic minorities and the misinterpretation of their identities — is frequently emphasized in the literature (Berry, 1997; Kymlicka, 1995). Therefore, the negative comment in question is not merely an individual opinion, but a reflection of a historically and comparatively supported perception of a "minority - confused identity."

4.2.3. *Terror*

Among the negative subcategories, "Terror" has the highest frequency, with 78 comments. In these remarks, Kurds are frequently associated with the PKK and depicted in strongly negative terms. They are described as "supporters of a terrorist organization," "relying on the PKK," or linked to

behaviors such as "smuggling" and "electricity theft." This association contributes to the portrayal of Kurds as an "undesirable ethnic group" in the region.

This pattern aligns with Bulut's (2021) study "Türkiye'de Kürt Sorunu ve PKK Algısı: Diyarbakır STK'lar Örneği," which shows that individuals facing socio-cultural and political deprivation often view the PKK as representing Kurds, and that forced migration, the Diyarbakır Prison experience, and restrictions on the Kurdish language play a role in legitimizing the PKK.

The dictionary comments similarly emphasize the conflation of Kurds with the PKK and suggest expectations placed on this organization. Some entries criticize Kurdish "victimization narratives," while others argue that relations with Turks will continue to deteriorate unless Kurd's distance themselves from the PKK.

4.2.4. *The Oppressed*

Social exclusion has long been a component of human societies, with individuals or groups being ignored, marginalized, or denied recognition (Byrne, 2005). Such exclusion often results in negative emotional outcomes, including sadness and anger. Historically, exclusion has manifested in various forms such as exile in Athens, punishment in Rome, the caste system in India, or excommunication (Biçerli, 2016).

Within the dataset, the final subcategory of negative comments, labeled "Oppressed," consists of 27 entries. These comments frequently portray Kurds as a group that perceives itself as consistently marginalized and victimized, often engaging in what is referred to as "victimhood discourse." Examples include references to Kurds claiming to be "always oppressed" or engaging in "victim rhetoric." In line with Small and Pager (2020), who defines discrimination as negative treatment based on physical, ethnic, or cultural identity, these comments suggest that Kurds emphasize their distinct ethnic and cultural identity as the basis for exclusion in Turkey.

Social exclusion has historically been a widespread phenomenon, affecting individuals or groups who are ignored, marginalized, or denied recognition (Williams, 2007; Biçerli, 2016). In the Ekşi Sözlük dataset, the "Oppressed" subcategory, with 27 comments, reflects perceptions of Kurds as a group that experiences persistent marginalization and engages in "victimhood discourse." Examples include statements such as Kurds being "always oppressed" or using "victim rhetoric" to highlight their marginal status. Discrimination, understood as

negative treatment based on physical, ethnic, or cultural identity, underpins these perceptions (Small & Pager, 2020).

Similar patterns can be observed among ethnic minorities in Europe. The Basques and Catalans have historically perceived themselves as marginalized within Spain, particularly during periods of centralizing policies under Franco, and have often framed their political and cultural claims in terms of historical oppression (Conversi, 2000; Guibernau, 2006). Scottish and Irish communities similarly experienced systemic exclusion under British rule, including economic disadvantages and suppression of cultural practices, which fostered a collective sense of oppression and victimization (Keating, 2001; Reicher, Hopkins & Harrison, 2009). Corsicans, too, have articulated their grievances as a historically oppressed minority within France, highlighting regional neglect and limited political autonomy (Vieille, 2009).

Ekşi Sözlük's "Oppressed" comments echo what has been seen in both historical and comparative cases. They show that ethnic minorities, including Kurds, often respond to social exclusion by emphasizing marginalisation and victimhood, which can strengthen group identity and collective memory.

4.2.5. *Disliked*

Groups are defined as structures formed by individuals coming together. For a community to be considered a group, certain features must be present: (1) the existence of a membership bond, (2) the presence of group consciousness and a sense of common purpose, and (3) mutual dependency, interaction, and collective action. Groups appear at every stage of human life and in various organizational contexts, making them significant both socially and professionally. Individuals may join these groups voluntarily or under compulsion. Although groups may share similarities, the structures that constitute them differ. Motivation and shared objectives bind members together, generate ongoing interaction, and eventually produce a hierarchical structure in which roles become defined (Barlı, 2010, p. 399).

The formation of groups is influenced by both external and internal factors. External factors include the social and physical environment, such as settlement patterns, population density, and architectural structures, while the social milieu itself plays a distinct role (Hortaçsu, 1998: 83). Internal factors stem from human nature, such as the preservation of lineage and ethnicity. Within a

group, individuals experience security and belonging while also seeking to make sense of social realities through interaction with others (Zencirkıran & Keser, 2018, p. 60–70).

Among the subcategories of negative comments, the "Disliked" category ranks second with 36 comments. In this category, Kurds are frequently portrayed as the "disliked group." They are depicted as tax evaders, illegal electricity users, and ungrateful beneficiaries of state-provided resources. Sample comments include: "they are easy money seekers," "Istanbul's devastation is due to the Kurds occupying it," "among them are those who forget the burden they impose on the state and boast about the tiny tax they pay," "a freeloading community," and "the people who use the state's generous green card benefits the most." Just as individuals may be included in groups, they may also be excluded from them. The comments examined here indicate that Kurds are perceived in Turkey as an excluded community and consequently labeled as an "disliked group."

Groups are defined as structures formed by individuals who come together based on shared objectives, membership bonds, and mutual interaction (Barlı, 2010). External factors, such as social and physical environments, and internal factors, including ethnicity and lineage, shape group formation and cohesion (Hortaçsu, 1998; Zencirkıran & Keser, 2018). While groups provide members with security and belonging, individuals may also be excluded, leading to social marginalization.

In the Ekşi Sözlük dataset, the "disliked" subcategory, with 36 comments, reflects perceptions of Kurds as an "disliked group." Comments depict them as tax evaders, illegal electricity users, and ungrateful beneficiaries of state resources. Examples include "they are easy money seekers," "Istanbul's devastation is due to the Kurds occupying it," and "a freeloading community." These perceptions illustrate how certain communities are socially excluded and labeled negatively despite being part of the broader society.

Similarly, in Iran, Kurds and Beluchis have historically been marginalized, facing economic disadvantages and limited political representation, which have contributed to perceptions of them as burdensome or "disliked" communities (Keddie, 2006; Entessar, 2010). In the Philippines, the Moro Muslim population has experienced long-standing social and political exclusion, often being stereotyped as disruptive or exploitative within national narratives (Abinales & Amoroso, 2005). In Indonesia, Timorese communities faced marginalization and

negative stereotyping under both colonial and post-independence state policies, reinforcing their social exclusion and stigmatization (Kingsbury, 2009).

The “Disliked” comments on Ekşi Sözlük show a common way minorities or peripheral groups are talked about: as if they are a burden on society or trying to take advantage of others. This kind of language pushes them further to the margins and strengthens negative perceptions linked to group identity and exclusion.

4.2.6. Ignorant

The “Ignorant” subcategory ranks fifth among the negative categories, receiving 29 comments. This label is tied to perceptions of Kurds as backward, uneducated, or incapable of progress. Comments describe them as “a people left without teachers,” “a backward Middle Eastern society,” or “parasites who consume without producing.” Some even claim they are “naturally ignorant” or “incapable of establishing a state.” The concept of ignorance, however, extends beyond illiteracy and also applies to educated individuals who refuse to acknowledge alternative knowledge systems. Research, such as Saraçoğlu’s (2010) study on urban middle classes, shows that Kurds in western Turkey are often stereotyped as “ignorant,” “intrusive,” or “destructive to urban life.” These stereotypes reinforce social exclusion and negative perceptions of Kurdish identity.

The “Ignorant” subcategory reflects perceptions of Kurds as backward, uneducated, or incapable of progress. Users describe them as “a people left without teachers,” “a backward Middle Eastern society,” or “parasites who consume without producing.” Sociologically, ignorance extends beyond literacy to include individuals or groups who reject alternative knowledge systems (Saraçoğlu, 2010). These stereotypes reinforce social exclusion and negative perceptions of Kurdish identity.

European ethnic minorities, such as the Basques and Catalans were historically perceived as “backward” or politically “inept,” which influenced public attitudes toward their cultural and linguistic autonomy (Conversi, 2000). Scottish and Irish communities faced educational and economic limitations under British rule, contributing to external perceptions of cultural deficiency (Keating, 2001; Reicher, Hopkins & Harrison, 2009). Corsicans similarly experienced marginalization through French central policies (Vieille, 2009).

In the “Ignorant” comments, ethnic minorities are again described through familiar stereotypes. Labeling them as “ignorant” fuels marginalisation and deepens negative views about their identity.

5. Neutral Comments

This category consists of comments that cannot be classified as either positive or negative. Since the remarks made by Ekşi Sözlük users are sometimes in the form of definitions, quotations, word references, or link sharing, they have been categorized as neutral. A total of 630 comments fall under this category. Neutral comments indicate not only impartiality but also indecisiveness. If this indecision turns into a positive stance, it would be a welcome development; however, the possibility of it shifting toward negativity represents a highly significant concern, particularly given the high proportion of undecided responses.

The prevalence of neutral comments suggests that the majority of contributors on Ekşi Sözlük – and, by extension, a considerable segment of Turkish society – have not yet formed a definitive opinion about Kurds. This indecisiveness may be attributed to the politicized nature of the Kurdish issue and its international dimension. The disproportionately high number of neutral comments is therefore a matter of serious reflection, and even potential concern. Although the predominance of positive comments over negative ones is encouraging, the sheer volume of neutral remarks may not be interpreted as a positive indicator. In times of crisis or provocation, this undecided stance could readily shift into unfavorable attitudes toward Kurds. Hence, it can be argued that processes concerning the Kurdish issue must be conducted with extreme caution.

6. CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this study is to examine perceptions and images of Kurds in Turkey. *Perception* refers to the mental interpretation of information acquired through the senses, while *image* denotes the overall impression or observation. In respect, the study analyzes the associations formed in society’s collective mindset regarding Kurds.

The research analyzed a total of 1,181 comments posted under the entries “kürt” and “kürtler” on the online platform Ekşi Sözlük. These comments were categorized as positive, negative, or neutral. Positive comments reflected inclusive and integrative perspectives, while negative ones conveyed exclusionary, judgmental, and discriminatory attitudes. Neutral comments largely consisted of definitions, quotations, or impartial observations.

According to the findings, 26.59% of comments (314) were positive, 20.07% (237) were negative, and 53.34% (630) were neutral. These results demonstrate that Ekşi Sözlük users predominantly maintain a

neutral perception of Kurds. The fact that 53.3% of the commentators—more than half—have not yet developed a clear opinion about Kurds may well indicate that Turks themselves remain uncertain on this issue. On the one hand, the transformation of this high proportion into positive perceptions is the desired outcome; yet, on the other hand, it could just as easily shift toward negativity with a small spark, potentially disrupting the balance. Therefore, the relative scarcity of negative comments should be interpreted in conjunction with the latent potential of neutral ones, which emerges as a significant point of consideration. In other words, the comments do not reveal a consistently positive or negative stance; rather, the general tendency remains closer to neutrality.

The analysis of Ekşi Sözlük comments shows a range of views toward Kurds in Turkey, ranging from recognition and positive cultural acknowledgment to stereotyping, marginalization, and accusations of manipulation. The “Different Origin” category demonstrates that ethnic distinctiveness can be appreciated positively, as Kurds are recognized for their hospitality, cultural richness, and historical rootedness. We see the same kind of pattern in multiethnic parts of Europe, where the Basques, Catalans, Scots, and other minority communities receive acknowledgment of their cultural distinctiveness while political claims often remain contentious.

Conversely, categories such as “Minority-Confused Identity,” “Ignorant,” “Oppressed,” “The Used,” and “Disliked” reflect how ethnic and social

differences may be framed negatively, reinforcing stereotypes, exclusion, and perceptions of vulnerability or external manipulation. Historical and comparative examples suggest that such dynamics are neither unique to Turkey nor to the Kurdish population. European ethnic minorities, including the Basques, Catalans, Scots, Irish, and Corsicans, have similarly experienced stereotyping, social marginalization, and delegitimization of political agency. Likewise, in other multiethnic and postcolonial contexts, marginalized groups such as the Beluchis and Kurds in Iran, the Moro population in the Philippines, and the Timorese in Indonesia have been socially excluded and labeled negatively, illustrating the universality of these processes.

Social perceptions of ethnic minorities are rarely uniform. Positive recognition and inclusion can exist alongside stereotyping and exclusion. In many cases, minorities may be culturally acknowledged, yet still face structural marginalisation in everyday life, institutions, or politics. Comparative research shows that although countries differ in their histories, politics, and socio-economic conditions, similar patterns keep appearing across contexts: inclusion and exclusion often exist together, and minority identity remains disputed and negotiated. From the perspective of policy and social cohesion, this means that symbolic recognition is not enough on its own. Efforts to promote inclusion must address both cultural respect and the concrete social and political inequalities that continue to marginalise minority groups.

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