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**Negotiating Humanitarian Narratives: Visual Framing of the Rohingya Crisis on Reuters and Anadolu Ajansı's Instagram**

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**Abstract**

Visual journalism plays a pivotal role in shaping public understandings of humanitarian crises by constructing particular representations of suffering, responsibility, and displacement. Despite Instagram's growing importance as a platform for visual news, its role in framing humanitarian issues remains underexplored. This study employs qualitative content analysis to examine the visual framing of the Rohingya crisis on the Instagram accounts of two different international news agencies namely Reuters and Anadolu Ajansı. The analysis focuses on photographs, captions, and hashtags, examining visual codes including the category of people, camera distance, facial expressions, and demographic representation. The findings show that both news organizations predominantly frame the Rohingya crisis through a humanitarian lens, emphasizing refugees' vulnerability and experiences of forced displacement. However, they adopt different framing strategies. Anadolu Ajansı combines personalized portrayals of individual suffering with images of mass displacement and provides explicit contextualization through captions and hashtags that identify the causes of the crisis and emphasize the victims' religious identity as Rohingya Muslims. In contrast, Reuters adopts a more documentary and event-oriented approach, focusing primarily on refugees' experiences during and after displacement while providing less contextual explanation. These findings demonstrate that visual framing on Instagram is constructed through the interplay of photographs, captions, and hashtags, highlighting how different journalistic strategies shape public understandings of humanitarian crises in digital media environments.

**Keywords:** Rohingya, Reuters, Anadolu Ajansı, Instagram, Visual Framing, Digital Journalism, Digital Humanitarian Communication

## INTRODUCTION

The persecution of the Rohingya community in Myanmar has become one of the most widely documented humanitarian crises of the twenty-first century. For decades, the Rohingya have experienced systematic discrimination, political exclusion, and statelessness under successive Myanmar governments. Escalating violence in Rakhine State since 2017, including reports of mass killings, sexual violence, forced displacement, and the destruction of villages, has forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to seek refuge in neighboring countries such as Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The United Nations has described the mass displacement as one of the fastest-growing refugee crises in recent history and characterized the military campaign as bearing the hallmarks of ethnic cleansing (United Nations, 2017). Despite extensive international documentation and condemnation, the Myanmar government has consistently rejected these allegations and maintained that the Rohingya do not constitute one of the country's recognized ethnic groups, thereby denying them citizenship and legal protection.

As the humanitarian crisis unfolded, international media became one of the primary arenas through which global audiences encountered the Rohingya conflict. Media organizations not only reported events but also constructed interpretive frameworks that shaped how the crisis was understood by international audiences. Previous scholarship demonstrates that the Rohingya crisis has been framed from multiple perspectives, including humanitarian disaster, refugee crisis, ethnic conflict, citizenship dispute, religious persecution, Islamophobia, anti-Muslim racism, and geopolitical conflict (Afzal, 2016). These frames influence how responsibility is attributed, victims and perpetrators are represented, and

potential solutions are imagined. Framing theory argues that news is never a neutral reflection of reality; rather, journalists and media organizations select, emphasize, and organize particular aspects of events to promote specific interpretations (Entman, 1993). Consequently, different media outlets may produce contrasting understandings of the same humanitarian crisis through distinct framing strategies.

Visual journalism plays an equally significant role in this framing process. News photographs do more than document events; they communicate emotion, establish moral judgments, and shape public perceptions of distant suffering. Visual representations influence how audiences identify with victims, perceive political responsibility, and evaluate humanitarian interventions. As Bleiker et al. (2013) argue, images possess unique communicative power because they evoke affective responses that often exceed the persuasive capacity of written text. Previous studies have shown that media photographs frequently reinforce particular narratives about refugees and asylum seekers by portraying them as anonymous masses, vulnerable victims, or security threats (Bleiker et al., 2013; Greenwood & Smith, 2007; Wilmott, 2017). Such visual framing contributes to broader political and cultural understandings of migration, conflict, and humanitarian crises.

The rapid expansion of digital and social media has fundamentally transformed the production, circulation, and reception of visual news. Platforms such as Instagram have become important spaces for visual journalism, where photographs are accompanied by captions and immediately exposed to audience interaction through comments, likes, and sharing practices.

Against this backdrop, this study investigates how the Rohingya crisis is framed through Instagram posts published by Reuters and Anadolu Ajansı. Reuters and Anadolu Ajansı provide an informative comparison because, as leading international news agencies operating within different geopolitical and editorial contexts, they may construct distinct narratives about the same humanitarian crisis. In doing so, the study contributes to scholarship on visual journalism, media framing, and digital humanitarian communication by demonstrating how humanitarian narratives are shaped by professional news organizations through visual framing within contemporary social media environments.

## **METHOD**

This study employs qualitative content analysis to examine how the Rohingya crisis is framed on the Instagram accounts of Reuters and Anadolu Ajansı. Content analysis is a widely used research method for systematically interpreting the meanings embedded in media texts and visual content (Neuendorf, 2002). The analysis focuses on Instagram posts comprising photographs and their accompanying captions, with the aim of identifying the dominant themes through which the Rohingya crisis is represented.

The analysis of Instagram posts considers both visual and textual elements. For the photographs, visual codes, including the categories of people depicted, camera distance, facial expressions, and demographic characteristics of the subjects, are examined to identify recurring visual patterns and framing devices. These coding categories are adapted from previous studies on visual framing and photojournalism. This approach is informed by Malkki's (1996) argument that images of refugees are

frequently decontextualized, thereby shaping particular understandings of displacement and humanitarian crises. Similarly, Barthes (1977) argues that photographs should be interpreted in relation to their accompanying text, as captions play a crucial role in constructing the connotative meanings of images. Accordingly, this study analyzes photographs and captions as complementary components of a single communicative message.

Caption analysis further enhances the interpretation of visual framing by examining how textual descriptions contextualize the images. The analysis employs the 5W+1H framework (who, what, when, where, why, and how) to identify the key informational elements emphasized in each post. In addition, recurring hashtags are examined because they function as framing devices that categorize news stories, connect them to broader online conversations, and shape the visibility and circulation of content on Instagram.

Together, the analyses of photographs, captions, and hashtags enable a more comprehensive understanding of how the Rohingya crisis is framed and negotiated on digital media environment.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Media Framing and Visual News Reporting**

Framing theory has become one of the most influential perspectives for understanding how media shape public interpretations of social and political issues. Rather than presenting reality objectively, media selectively organize information by emphasizing certain aspects of an event while downplaying others. Through this process, news frames define problems, identify causes, assign moral responsibility, and suggest possible solutions

(Entman, 1993). Consequently, framing influences not only what audiences know about an issue but also how they understand its significance and evaluate competing interpretations.

The concept of framing originates from Goffman's (1974) notion of *frames* as cognitive structures through which individuals organize and interpret everyday experience. Building on this sociological perspective, communication scholars have conceptualized media framing as a journalistic practice that structures public understanding of political and social events. Entman (1993) argues that framing involves selecting certain aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in communication texts in ways that promote particular definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendations.

News framing becomes particularly significant in reporting humanitarian crises because audiences rarely experience such events directly. Instead, they rely heavily on mediated representations to understand distant conflicts and human suffering. As Chouliaraki (2006) argues, media do not merely document suffering; they construct moral relationships between distant victims and audiences by shaping emotional engagement and perceptions of responsibility. Different frames may therefore encourage empathy, indifference, fear, or political action depending on how victims, perpetrators, and broader structural conditions are represented.

Within digital journalism, visual communication has become an increasingly important component of framing. Photographs are not simply illustrations accompanying written news; they function as framing devices that communicate emotion, legitimacy, vulnerability, and political meaning (Bleiker et al., 2013). Visual framing frequently operates through recurring

representational patterns, such as portraying refugees as anonymous masses, helpless victims, or security threats (Wilmott, 2017). These visual choices influence how audiences construct meaning even before reading accompanying captions or news articles.

Instagram further amplifies the significance of visual framing because photographs constitute the primary mode of communication on the platform. Unlike conventional newspaper photography, Instagram images are immediately embedded within interactive environments where audiences can respond, interpret, and debate journalistic representations. Consequently, framing on Instagram should be understood not merely as a product of journalistic selection but as the beginning of an ongoing communicative process involving multiple actors.

## **RESULT**

### **Visual Framing of the Rohingya Crisis on Instagram**

The analysis identified 16 Instagram posts related to the Rohingya crisis published by Anadolu Ajansı and Reuters. Anadolu Ajansı published 10 posts containing a total of 43 photographs, six of which consisted of multiple-image posts and four of which contained single photographs. Although photographs within a single post may contain different visual elements, they were treated as representing one overarching thematic frame because they were presented collectively as a single news narrative. Meanwhile, Reuters published six posts, each containing one photograph, resulting in six photographs analyzed. The difference in the number of posts and photographs reflects different approaches to visual storytelling adopted by the two news organizations.

Following previous scholarship on visual framing, the analysis examines photographs as communicative texts through which news organizations construct particular understandings of humanitarian crises. Rather than treating photographs as objective records of reality, this study understands images as framing devices that emphasize certain aspects of an event while making others less visible (Entman, 1993). The analysis focuses on four major visual codes: category of people, camera distance, facial expression, and demographic representation. Together, these visual elements reveal how the Rohingya crisis is represented through humanitarian, emotional, and political narratives.

### ***Representing the Rohingya: Individual Suffering and Collective Displacement***

The first visual code examined is the category of people represented in photographs. This category is significant because the scale and composition of human subjects influence how audiences interpret humanitarian suffering. Previous studies suggest that photographs featuring individuals or small groups are more likely to generate emotional identification because they enable audiences to establish a personal connection with those represented (Bleiker et al., 2013). In contrast, images depicting large groups may emphasize the magnitude of a crisis but risk producing emotional distance by representing victims as an anonymous collective.

The analysis of Anadolu Ajansi photographs demonstrates a relatively balanced representation between individualized and collective portrayals of Rohingya refugees. Among the 43 photographs analyzed, individual subjects appeared in 25.59 percent of images, small groups in 27.90 percent, medium groups in 18.61 percent, and large groups in 27.90

percent. This distribution indicates that Anadolu Ajansı employed both personalization and collectivization strategies in representing the Rohingya crisis.

The substantial presence of individual and small-group photographs contributes to what Chouliaraki (2006) describes as the creation of an “emotional proximity” between distant audiences and suffering subjects. Many of these images depict Rohingya refugees experiencing displacement at a personal level: children, infants, adults, and elderly individuals are shown crossing borders, carrying belongings, or enduring difficult environmental conditions during their journey to Bangladesh. Through these representations, the crisis is transformed from an abstract geopolitical conflict into a human experience of vulnerability and survival. At the same time, the presence of medium- and large-group photographs introduces another dimension of representation: the scale of forced displacement. These images communicate the collective nature of the crisis by emphasizing the magnitude of refugee movement and the humanitarian emergency affecting the Rohingya population. Importantly, however, the presence of group images does not necessarily eliminate emotional engagement. Many Anadolu Ajansı posts combine photographs of individuals with photographs of larger groups within the same carousel post. Those posts combine different visual perspectives, moving between intimate portrayals of individual suffering and broader depictions of mass displacement.

This combination suggests that Anadolu Ajansı's visual framing does not rely exclusively on either personalization or collectivization. Instead, it constructs a layered humanitarian narrative that simultaneously emphasizes individual suffering and collective persecution. Such an

approach challenges the assumption that images of large groups necessarily reduce empathy. When placed alongside personalized images, collective representations may reinforce rather than weaken emotional engagement by connecting individual experiences to broader structural violence.

Reuters photographs demonstrate a different pattern. Among the six photographs analyzed, half represent large groups of Rohingya refugees, while individual, small-group, and medium-group representations each appear only once. The greater emphasis on collective representation suggests that Reuters' visual framing focuses more strongly on documenting displacement as a humanitarian event rather than emphasizing individual emotional experiences.

This difference reflects distinct journalistic approaches to humanitarian photography. While Anadolu Ajansı frequently employs personalization to construct emotional proximity, Reuters appears to prioritize documentary representation of movement, border crossing, and refugee conditions. Neither approach is inherently more effective; rather, they represent different ways of visually organizing meaning around the Rohingya crisis.

### ***Camera Distance and the Construction of Emotional Proximity***

Camera distance provides another important indicator of visual framing because it determines the degree of intimacy between viewers and photographed subjects. Previous studies demonstrate that close-up and close-range photographs tend to create stronger emotional connections by allowing audiences to observe facial expressions and individual experiences more closely (Bleiker et al., 2013; Wilmott, 2017).

The analysis reveals that Anadolu Ajansı employed a wide range of camera distances. Close-up photographs represented the largest category

(18.61 percent), followed by close shots and medium shots (each 16.27 percent), while longer distances were also used to represent the broader conditions of refugee movement. The distribution indicates that Anadolu Ajansı combined intimate and contextual forms of visual representation.

The prevalence of closer camera distances suggests an attempt to humanize Rohingya refugees by emphasizing their individual experiences. Close-range images allow audiences to observe emotions, physical conditions, and personal struggles, thereby encouraging identification with those represented. In humanitarian communication, such visual strategies are significant because they transform distant suffering into an experience that audiences can emotionally recognize.

However, the use of longer camera distances also serves an important representational function. Long shots and distant perspectives situate individuals within broader landscapes of displacement, showing refugee camps, border areas, and migration routes. These images provide contextual information by emphasizing the structural dimensions of the crisis rather than focusing exclusively on individual suffering.

Reuters photographs demonstrate a slightly different pattern. Half of the images employed close shots, while the remaining photographs used close-long and long-shot perspectives. Although the sample size is smaller, the findings indicate that Reuters similarly combined intimate and contextual representations. The use of closer shots creates emotional accessibility, while wider perspectives position the Rohingya crisis within the larger geography of forced migration.

Taken together, the camera-distance analysis demonstrates that both news organizations relied on visual strategies capable of producing emotional engagement while simultaneously documenting the broader

humanitarian situation. The combination of intimate and contextual imagery reflects the complexity of humanitarian photography, where journalists must balance individual suffering with representations of large-scale displacement.

### ***Facial Expression, Emotional Framing, and the Construction of Humanitarian Appeal***

Beyond the composition of subjects and camera distance, facial expression represents another significant visual element through which humanitarian crises are framed. Images of suffering frequently rely on emotional cues to establish relationships between distant audiences and those experiencing violence or displacement. As Bleiker et al. (2013) argue, facial expressions in photographs of suffering play an important role in shaping audience responses because they provide visible signs of vulnerability, pain, and human experience. At the same time, direct eye contact between photographed subjects and viewers can produce a stronger sense of interpersonal connection by positioning audiences as witnesses to the suffering of others (Wilmott, 2017).

The analysis identified five categories of facial expression: sad expression with direct eye contact, sad expression without direct eye contact, normal expression with direct eye contact, normal expression without direct eye contact, and unrecognizable expression. These categories were developed through preliminary observation of the visual data and were used to capture not only emotional expression but also the communicative significance of visual interaction between subjects and audiences.

The findings demonstrate that emotional expressions constitute an important component of the visual framing employed by both Anadolu

Ajansı and Reuters. Among Anadolu Ajansı photographs, sad expressions accompanied by direct eye contact represented the largest recognizable category (27.91 percent), followed by normal expressions with direct eye contact (20.93 percent) and normal expressions without direct eye contact (16.28 percent). Only a small proportion of photographs depicted sadness without direct eye contact (6.97 percent). Meanwhile, unrecognizable facial expressions accounted for 27.91 percent of the photographs, primarily because subjects were photographed from a distance, their faces were partially covered, or facial details were not visible.

The dominance of recognizable emotional expressions indicates that Anadolu Ajansı frequently employed visual strategies that emphasized the human consequences of displacement. Photographs depicting crying, exhaustion, fear, or distress construct the Rohingya crisis primarily through a humanitarian frame, positioning refugees as vulnerable individuals affected by violence and forced migration. Through these visual choices, the crisis is represented not merely as a geopolitical conflict but as a human tragedy requiring empathy and moral attention.

The presence of direct eye contact is particularly significant. When photographed subjects look directly at the camera, viewers are positioned as witnesses rather than detached observers. This visual relationship can encourage what Chouliaraki (2006) describes as an ethical encounter with distant suffering, in which audiences are invited to recognize the humanity of those experiencing hardship. Rather than presenting refugees as anonymous victims, direct gaze can create a sense of personal connection between the photographed subject and the viewer.

Reuters demonstrates an even stronger emphasis on emotional expression despite its smaller sample size. Half of the analyzed photographs

featured sad expressions accompanied by direct eye contact, while 33.34 percent depicted sadness without direct eye contact. Only one photograph represented a normal expression without direct eye contact. Unlike Anadolu Ajansi, Reuters photographs contained no unrecognizable facial expressions, suggesting a stronger emphasis on visible emotional representation.

This difference indicates that Reuters' limited number of photographs nevertheless relied heavily on emotional personalization. Although Reuters generally emphasized collective displacement through larger groups and documentary perspectives, the facial-expression analysis reveals an attempt to maintain emotional accessibility by highlighting individual experiences of suffering. In this sense, Reuters combined a documentary frame with a humanitarian frame.

The emotional dimension of these photographs is particularly relevant when considered within the concept of affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015). In digital environments such as Instagram, emotions become central mechanisms through which audiences connect with distant events. Images expressing sadness, vulnerability, and suffering provide affective resources that enable audiences to respond through empathy, solidarity, anger, or demands for political action. Thus, emotional visual framing does not end at the moment of publication; rather, it becomes a starting point for audience engagement through comments and other forms of participation.

### ***Demographic Representation and the Humanization of Refugees***

The final visual code examined is demographic representation, including age and gender categories of individuals depicted in photographs. Representation of demographic characteristics is important because

decisions regarding whose bodies are made visible influence how audiences understand humanitarian crises. Images of refugees can either reinforce generalized representations of displaced populations or emphasize their diversity and individual humanity.

Unlike previous visual codes, demographic representation was calculated based on the number of identifiable demographic categories rather than the number of photographs. This approach was adopted because several photographs contained multiple subjects representing different age and gender groups. From 43 Anadolu Ajansı photographs, 79 demographic codes were identified, while 10 demographic codes were identified from Reuters photographs.

The findings show that Anadolu Ajansı represented Rohingya refugees across different demographic categories. Female adults constituted the largest category (21.52 percent), followed by male children (18.98 percent) and male adults (16.45 percent). Infants (10.13 percent), mixed groups (12.66 percent), and elderly groups were also represented. The relatively diverse demographic representation suggests that the crisis was framed as affecting the Rohingya population broadly rather than targeting a specific social group.

This pattern contributes to a humanizing representation of refugees. By showing women, children, adults, and elderly individuals, the photographs emphasize that forced displacement affects entire communities rather than isolated individuals. The representation of children and infants is particularly significant because children often function as powerful symbols within humanitarian communication. Their presence can intensify perceptions of vulnerability and moral responsibility among audiences.

However, demographic representation also requires critical consideration. Humanitarian imagery frequently relies on representations of vulnerability, particularly through women and children, which may generate empathy but can also risk reducing refugees to passive victims requiring external assistance (Chouliaraki, 2006). In the case of Anadolu Ajansı, the presence of diverse demographic groups somewhat mitigates this risk by representing Rohingya refugees as a complex community rather than exclusively as vulnerable subjects.

Reuters demonstrated a more limited but relatively balanced demographic representation. Among the six photographs analyzed, male children, male adults, and mixed groups each represented 20 percent of demographic codes, while female children, male young persons, female adults, and male elders each represented smaller proportions. No photographs depicted infants, female young persons, or female elders. Although the smaller dataset limits comparison, the findings indicate that Reuters also avoided emphasizing a single demographic category as representative of the Rohingya crisis.

Overall, both news organizations constructed representations that emphasized the humanity of Rohingya refugees through diverse visual portrayals. Rather than presenting refugees solely as an anonymous mass, the photographs provided audiences with recognizable human subjects situated within particular experiences of displacement. These visual strategies are significant because they shape the emotional and moral dimensions of humanitarian communication.

### ***Visual Humanitarian Frames and the Politics of Representation***

Taken together, the visual analysis demonstrates that both Anadolu Ajansı and Reuters employed predominantly humanitarian frames in

representing the Rohingya crisis. Through the combination of individual representations, emotional expressions, close camera distances, and diverse demographic portrayals, the photographs emphasized suffering, vulnerability, and displacement.

However, the two organizations differed in their specific approaches. Anadolu Ajansı combined personalization with collective representation, producing a narrative that connected individual suffering with the broader scale of persecution and forced migration. Reuters placed greater emphasis on documenting refugee movement and physical conditions after displacement, producing a more observational representation of the crisis.

These differences illustrate that visual framing is not simply about whether an image generates empathy but also about how empathy is constructed. Humanitarian photographs do not automatically produce political understanding or action; rather, they provide interpretive resources through which audiences make sense of distant suffering. On Instagram, these interpretations continue beyond the news post itself as users respond, debate, and participate in meaning-making processes.

### **Caption Structures and the Construction of Rohingya Crisis Narratives**

The analysis of Instagram captions was conducted to identify how each media organization linguistically constructs the Rohingya crisis and emphasizes particular aspects of the issue. While visual codes reveal how suffering, displacement, and humanitarian conditions are represented through photographic elements, caption analysis provides insight into the narrative structure surrounding these images. To examine this structure, the 5W+H framework (who, where, when, what, why, and how) was applied

to identify recurring patterns across captions and to understand the dominant narratives constructed by Anadolu Ajansı and Reuters.

The findings demonstrate that captions from both media organizations share a common focus on the experiences of Rohingya refugees during their displacement from Myanmar to Bangladesh. However, significant differences emerge in terms of how the subjects are identified, how the causes of displacement are explained, and how responsibility for the crisis is constructed. While Reuters predominantly constructs the Rohingya crisis through a humanitarian and refugee-centered perspective, Anadolu Ajansı provides a more explicitly religious and conflict-oriented representation by consistently identifying Rohingya as “Rohingya Muslims” or “Arakanese Muslims.”

### ***The Identification of the Subject: “Rohingya Muslims” versus “Rohingya Refugees”***

The first significant difference appears in the construction of the “who” element, referring to the main subject of the stories. Nine out of ten Anadolu Ajansı captions identify the subjects as “Arakanlı Müslümanlar” (Arakanese Muslims), “Rohingya people,” or “Rohingya Muslims.” Only one post focuses on Emine Erdoğan’s visit to a Rohingya refugee camp. This linguistic choice consistently positions religious identity as an essential dimension of the crisis.

In contrast, all Reuters captions identify the subjects primarily as “Rohingya refugees” or “a Rohingya refugee.” Rather than emphasizing religious identity, Reuters employs a humanitarian category that highlights displacement and refugee status. The difference is also evident in hashtag practices. Anadolu Ajansı frequently uses hashtags such as #Muslims, #Muslim, #Arakanlı, #Budist (Buddhist), and #Violence, whereas Reuters

mainly uses broader humanitarian hashtags such as #Rohingya, #refugees, and #Bangladesh.

This difference suggests that the two media organizations construct different interpretative frameworks around the Rohingya crisis. Anadolu Ajansı's repeated emphasis on Muslim identity places the crisis within a broader narrative of religious persecution and violence against a Muslim minority. The Rohingya are not only represented as displaced populations but also as a religious community experiencing targeted suffering. Meanwhile, Reuters' representation is more aligned with conventional humanitarian journalism, where the primary identity marker is refugee status rather than religious affiliation.

Such differences illustrate that captions do not merely describe photographs but actively shape the interpretative context through which audiences understand humanitarian crises. As social media platforms increasingly function as spaces of news circulation, textual elements such as captions and hashtags become important framing devices that guide audience interpretation.

### ***Constructing Causality: The Presence and Absence of the "Why"***

A more significant difference between Anadolu Ajansı and Reuters appears in their explanation of the causes behind Rohingya displacement. The "why" dimension reveals how each media organization constructs the relationship between violence, displacement, and responsibility.

Among Anadolu Ajansı posts, nine out of ten captions explicitly mention military operations, attacks by Myanmar forces, or violence perpetrated by Buddhist nationalists as the reason behind Rohingya displacement. For example, several captions describe Rohingya Muslims as fleeing military operations in Myanmar's Rakhine State and escaping

attacks that forced them to leave their homes. Through these descriptions, the crisis is presented as the consequence of deliberate violence rather than simply a humanitarian emergency.

This narrative construction assigns a clear causal explanation for the suffering experienced by Rohingya communities. The captions establish a relationship between perpetrators (Myanmar military and Buddhist nationalist groups), victims (Rohingya Muslims), and consequences (forced migration and refugee conditions). Therefore, Anadolu Ajansi's reporting creates a stronger conflict-oriented frame by emphasizing violence, persecution, and victimization.

Conversely, Reuters captions rarely provide explanations regarding why Rohingya refugees undertake particular actions. As shown in Table 10, none of the Reuter's captions explicitly identify the political or military causes behind their displacement. Instead, the captions focus primarily on observable actions: walking toward the shore, arriving at refugee camps, protecting family members, receiving aid, or seeking shelter from rain.

This difference does not necessarily indicate that Reuters ignores the political background of the crisis; rather, it reflects a journalistic preference for describing immediate visual realities. The captions function primarily as photographic descriptions, emphasizing what can be directly observed rather than providing extended explanations of structural causes. In this sense, Reuters adopts a more documentary-oriented approach, where the refugee experience itself becomes the central narrative.

However, the absence of causal explanation also influences how audiences interpret responsibility. Without explicit references to military operations or political violence, the crisis may appear primarily as a humanitarian tragedy rather than a consequence of systematic persecution

and political conflict. Therefore, the omission of the “why” dimension represents an important difference in framing strategies between the two media organizations.

### **Hashtag Practices and the Digital Framing of the Rohingya Crisis**

Beyond the structure of captions, hashtags represent another important textual element in Instagram-based news production. Unlike traditional news articles, Instagram posts rely heavily on hashtags to increase visibility, categorize content, and connect individual posts with broader conversations circulating within the platform. Therefore, hashtags function not only as metadata but also as discursive markers that contribute to the construction of meaning.

The analysis reveals a clear difference in hashtag strategies between Anadolu Ajansı and Reuters. Anadolu Ajansı employs a considerably larger number and variety of hashtags compared with Reuters. The most frequently used hashtags across both accounts are #Myanmar, #Rohingya, and #Bangladesh, indicating a shared geographical and thematic framing of the crisis. These hashtags establish the basic context of the event by connecting Rohingya displacement with Myanmar as the origin of the crisis and Bangladesh as the destination of refuge.

However, beyond these shared categories, the two media organizations demonstrate different patterns of emphasis. Anadolu Ajansı frequently uses hashtags related to religion, ethnicity, conflict, and violence, including #Muslims, #Muslim, #Arakanlı, #Budist, #Violence, #Rakhine, and #Arakan. These hashtags construct the Rohingya crisis through multiple intersecting identities: as an ethnic minority, a Muslim community, and victims of violence. The repeated use of religious markers indicates

that religious identity is not a peripheral aspect but an essential interpretive framework in Anadolu Ajansi's representation.

In contrast, Reuters employs a narrower hashtag vocabulary. The dominant hashtags are primarily related to humanitarian conditions, such as #Rohingya, #refugees, #Bangladesh, and #Myanmar. Only one Reuters post uses the hashtag #rohingyamuslims, suggesting that religious identity is not consistently foregrounded in its digital framing. Instead, Reuters' hashtag strategy emphasizes displacement, humanitarian mobility, and refugee conditions.

This distinction reflects different approaches to meaning-making in digital journalism. Anadolu Ajansi's hashtags function as interpretive cues that encourage audiences to understand the crisis through the interconnected dimensions of religious persecution, ethnic identity, and political violence. Meanwhile, Reuters' hashtags operate primarily as classificatory tools that identify the event according to its humanitarian category.

From the perspective of digital framing, these hashtag choices are significant because Instagram algorithms rely partly on textual metadata to categorize and distribute content. Therefore, the selection of hashtags potentially influences not only how audiences interpret the issue but also how the issue circulates within platform environments. By repeatedly associating the Rohingya crisis with terms such as "Muslim," "violence," and "Arakan," Anadolu Ajansi contributes to a particular discursive network surrounding persecution and identity. Conversely, Reuters' emphasis on "refugees" situates the crisis within a broader humanitarian discourse of displacement and emergency.

The combination of visual code analysis and caption analysis reveals two dominant representational patterns in Anadolu Ajansi's Instagram coverage and one dominant pattern in Reuters' coverage. These patterns demonstrate how photographs and captions work together to construct particular narratives about the Rohingya crisis.

### **Anadolu Ajansi's Representation of Rohingya Suffering and Displacement**

In Anadolu Ajansi's posts, two major themes emerge: (1) the dangerous journey of Rohingya refugees while crossing the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, and (2) the difficult living conditions of Rohingya refugees after reaching refugee camps in Bangladesh.

The first theme emphasizes displacement as a traumatic journey. The visual representations repeatedly show Rohingya individuals crossing borders under extremely difficult circumstances. The photographs depict refugees walking through muddy areas, carrying personal belongings, crossing fences, travelling through forests, mountains, rivers, and coastal areas, and enduring harsh weather conditions. These visual elements are reinforced by captions describing their attempts to escape military operations and violence in Myanmar.

The integration of visual and textual codes constructs a narrative of forced displacement. Rohingya refugees are represented as individuals who are not voluntarily migrating but are compelled to leave their homeland due to insecurity and threats to their lives. The recurring representation of physical struggle; walking barefoot, carrying belongings, crossing dangerous environments, creates a visual discourse of vulnerability and suffering.

Importantly, however, this vulnerability is represented across different demographic groups. The photographs include men, women, children, and elderly individuals, suggesting that the crisis affects the Rohingya community collectively rather than a particular social group. The captions also rarely emphasize individual identities, instead referring broadly to “Rohingya Muslims” or “Arakanese Muslims.” Consequently, the representation operates primarily at a collective level, constructing the Rohingya as a community experiencing shared suffering.

The second theme concerns the condition of Rohingya refugees after arriving in Bangladesh. Posts depicting refugee camps emphasize temporary shelters, humanitarian assistance, and continued struggles for survival. The visual codes show refugees receiving aid, living in makeshift camps, and attempting to adapt to difficult conditions. Through these representations, the crisis extends beyond the moment of escape; suffering continues even after refugees reach a place of safety.

Therefore, Anadolu Ajansı's representation follows a narrative trajectory: *violence in Myanmar*, followed by *forced escape*, continued *with dangerous border crossing*, and ending up in *difficult refugee conditions*. This narrative structure creates a clear causal relationship between persecution and displacement.

### **Reuters' Humanitarian Visualization of Refugee Experience**

Unlike Anadolu Ajansı, Reuters' Instagram coverage demonstrates a more concentrated thematic representation. The analysis identifies one dominant theme: the experiences of Rohingya refugees during and after their arrival in Bangladesh.

Reuters photographs focus primarily on individual moments of displacement and survival. The visual representations include refugees

walking along the coastline after crossing the Bay of Bengal, carrying belongings, protecting family members, receiving assistance, and seeking shelter in refugee camps. Rather than emphasizing the broader political conflict that caused displacement, Reuters highlights everyday experiences of refugees.

This approach creates a more individualized humanitarian narrative. Several posts focus on specific actions performed by individuals, such as a refugee protecting his sister from rain or pulling a child while walking toward the shore. These images emphasize human vulnerability, family relationships, and survival strategies.

However, similar to Anadolu Ajansı, Reuters does not strongly emphasize specific gender or age categories. Although individual refugees are visually represented, captions generally identify them only as "Rohingya refugees." This creates a balance between individualization through photographic representation and collectivization through textual labeling.

The absence of explicit causal explanation in Reuters captions produces a different narrative structure. While Anadolu Ajansı constructs a conflict-to-displacement narrative, Reuters constructs a displacement-to-survival narrative. The former emphasizes the origins of suffering, while the latter emphasizes the lived experiences of refugees after displacement has already occurred.

This distinction reflects different journalistic orientations. Anadolu Ajansı's representation is closer to advocacy-oriented humanitarian reporting, where identifying causes and perpetrators is central to understanding injustice. Reuters' representation aligns more closely with

documentary photojournalism, where visual evidence of human experiences becomes the primary source of meaning.

### **Negotiating Meaning through Competing Media Frames**

The comparative findings demonstrate that the Rohingya crisis is not represented through a single universal narrative. Instead, meaning is negotiated through different journalistic choices concerning identity, causality, and humanitarian emphasis.

Both Anadolu Ajansı and Reuters represent Rohingya people primarily through conditions of displacement and suffering. Their photographs share similar visual codes: refugees crossing borders, carrying belongings, living in temporary shelters, and experiencing uncertainty. This similarity indicates a shared humanitarian framework in which Rohingya refugees are positioned as vulnerable populations requiring attention and assistance.

Nevertheless, differences emerge in how this vulnerability is interpreted. Anadolu Ajansı embeds suffering within a political and religious narrative. Through repeated references to Muslim identity, military operations, and violence, the crisis is framed as a case of persecution against a specific religious and ethnic group. In this framing, the Rohingya are represented not only as refugees but also as victims of political violence and religious discrimination.

Reuters, meanwhile, emphasizes the humanitarian consequences of displacement. The Rohingya are represented primarily as refugees experiencing hardship, family separation, and survival challenges. This framing foregrounds human experiences while maintaining a relatively neutral position regarding political responsibility.

These differences illustrate that visual journalism on social media involves processes of selection, emphasis, and omission. Images do not carry fixed meanings; rather, meanings emerge through the interaction between photographs, captions, hashtags, and broader journalistic contexts. By choosing particular identifiers, explanations, and keywords, media organizations actively participate in constructing how audiences understand humanitarian crises.

In the context of digital journalism on Instagram, where audiences encounter news primarily through fragmented visual posts rather than extended articles, these representational choices become increasingly significant. Captions and hashtags provide interpretive frameworks that guide audience engagement with images. Therefore, the representation of the Rohingya crisis on Instagram demonstrates how contemporary journalism negotiates between humanitarian storytelling, political interpretation, and platform-based visibility.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings demonstrate that the representation of the Rohingya crisis on Instagram is not merely a process of documenting humanitarian suffering but also a process of constructing meaning through selective visual, textual, and platform-specific practices. Although both Anadolu Ajansı and Reuters present the Rohingya as displaced and vulnerable populations, the two media organizations construct different interpretative frameworks through their choices of identification, causal explanation, visual emphasis, and hashtag practices.

The comparison between Anadolu Ajansı and Reuters reveals two dominant representational approaches: a conflict-oriented representation

emphasizing persecution and collective identity, and a humanitarian-oriented representation emphasizing displacement and individual experiences. These different approaches demonstrate how journalism participates in negotiating the meaning of humanitarian crises by determining not only what audiences see but also how they are encouraged to interpret what they see.

### **From Refugees to Religious Subjects: Identity Construction and the Politics of Representation**

One of the most significant findings of this study concerns the different ways in which Anadolu Ajansı and Reuters construct the identity of Rohingya people. Anadolu Ajansı predominantly refers to the subjects as “Rohingya Muslims” or “Arakanese Muslims,” whereas Reuters consistently uses the term “Rohingya refugees.” This difference indicates that identity is not a neutral descriptive element but a representational choice that influences how audiences understand the crisis.

Following Hall's (1997) theory of representation, meaning is produced through systems of language and representation rather than simply reflecting reality. The repeated association between “Rohingya” and “Muslim” in Anadolu Ajansı's captions and hashtags constructs a particular identity framework in which religious belonging becomes central to understanding the crisis. The Rohingya are represented not only as people experiencing displacement but also as members of a religious minority subjected to violence and exclusion.

This framing is significant because identity categories determine the interpretive boundaries of a humanitarian event. By emphasizing Muslim identity, Anadolu Ajansı situates the Rohingya crisis within a broader discourse of religious persecution and minority rights. The crisis is

therefore presented as a violation against a specific community whose suffering is connected to ethnic and religious marginalization.

In contrast, Reuters' repeated use of the term "Rohingya refugees" constructs a different form of subjectivity. Here, the dominant identity marker is not religion but legal and humanitarian status. The Rohingya become subjects of displacement, migration, and humanitarian intervention. This approach reflects the professional norms of international news organizations that often emphasize universal humanitarian categories rather than identity-based interpretations.

However, while the refugee category can promote a universal understanding of human suffering, it may also reduce attention to the historical and political conditions that produce displacement. By emphasizing refugee status without consistently explaining the political origins of the crisis, the representation risks presenting displacement as a humanitarian condition rather than as the outcome of structural violence.

Therefore, the difference between "Rohingya Muslims" and "Rohingya refugees" illustrates competing modes of representation. The first emphasizes identity, persecution, and collective victimhood, while the second emphasizes vulnerability, displacement, and humanitarian need.

### **Explaining Suffering: The Role of Causality in Humanitarian Journalism**

Another important difference identified in this study concerns the presence or absence of causal explanations. Anadolu Ajansı frequently explains why Rohingya people fled Myanmar by referring to military operations, violence, and attacks by Buddhist nationalist groups. Reuters, however, primarily describes refugees' immediate experiences without explicitly identifying the causes of displacement.

This difference relates to the concept of framing developed by Entman (1993), who argues that framing involves selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more salient within communication. A central component of framing is defining problems and diagnosing causes. The presence of causal explanations in Anadolu Ajansı's captions therefore creates a stronger interpretive frame by connecting refugee suffering with identifiable actors and events.

Through this framing, the Rohingya crisis is constructed as a consequence of political violence. Such a narrative assigns responsibility and emphasizes the injustice experienced by the Rohingya community. The audience is encouraged to understand displacement not simply as movement across borders but as the consequence of violence and exclusion.

Reuters adopts a different narrative structure, where the focus is placed on refugee's experiences rather than why they experience it. This approach is consistent with the tradition of documentary photography, where visual evidence of human suffering becomes the primary means of generating empathy.

Nevertheless, the absence of causal explanation has implications for public understanding. As scholars of humanitarian communication argue, representations that focus exclusively on suffering may generate emotional responses while limiting understanding of the structural forces producing that suffering. Without contextualizing the political origins of displacement, audiences may perceive refugee crises as temporary humanitarian emergencies rather than manifestations of deeper political conflicts.

Thus, the difference between Anadolu Ajansı and Reuters illustrates a broader tension within humanitarian journalism: whether to prioritize witnessing suffering or explaining the structures that produce suffering.

### **Visualizing Vulnerability: Between Humanitarian Empathy and Victimization**

The visual analysis reveals that both media organizations rely heavily on images of vulnerability. Photographs of Rohingya refugees crossing borders, carrying belongings, walking through difficult terrain, and living in temporary camps create a visual narrative of hardship and survival.

Such representations are common in humanitarian communication because images of suffering often function as powerful tools for attracting public attention and generating empathy. As Chouliaraki (2013) argues, humanitarian communication frequently depends on visual representations of distant suffering, where images create emotional connections between audiences and vulnerable subjects.

However, representations of suffering also involve ethical tensions. On the one hand, images of hardship can make invisible suffering visible and encourage humanitarian solidarity. On the other hand, repeated representations of vulnerability may reduce marginalized communities to passive victims who are defined primarily through suffering.

The findings show that both Anadolu Ajansı and Reuters largely represent Rohingya refugees through conditions of vulnerability rather than through agency. The subjects are shown escaping violence, seeking shelter, receiving assistance, and surviving difficult circumstances. Although these representations accurately reflect the humanitarian

conditions faced by refugees, they provide limited visibility of Rohingya resilience, political agency, or everyday practices of resistance.

This finding is particularly important because representation is not only about visibility but also about the type of visibility produced. A community can become highly visible within global media while simultaneously being represented through a narrow framework of victimhood.

Therefore, visual journalism creates a paradox: it increases awareness of marginalized experiences while potentially reproducing unequal representational relationships in which vulnerable groups are primarily seen as objects of humanitarian concern.

### **Instagram as a Space of Digital Framing**

The findings also demonstrate that Instagram introduces additional layers of framing through platform-specific features, particularly captions and hashtags. Unlike conventional news reports, digital journalism on Instagram requires media organizations to communicate complex humanitarian events through limited visual and textual formats. Consequently, decisions regarding image selection, caption structure, and hashtag use become central mechanisms of meaning construction.

The hashtag analysis illustrates this process clearly. Anadolu Ajansi's extensive use of hashtags related to religion, ethnicity, and violence creates a broader discursive network connecting the Rohingya crisis with themes of persecution and identity politics. Reuters' more limited hashtag strategy reinforces a humanitarian categorization centered on refugees and displacement.

These differences highlight the role of platform logic in shaping journalism. Hashtags are not merely descriptive labels; they also determine

how content becomes searchable, connected, and circulated within digital environments. Therefore, journalistic framing on Instagram involves not only editorial decisions but also negotiations with algorithmic visibility.

This suggests that contemporary journalism operates within a hybrid environment where professional norms intersect with platform affordances. Journalists must consider not only what narrative they construct but also how that narrative can gain visibility within algorithmically organized spaces.

## CONCLUSION

This study contributes to understanding how international humanitarian crises are constructed through digital journalism. The comparison between Anadolu Ajansı and Reuters demonstrates that media representation involves continuous negotiation between journalistic values, institutional perspectives, and platform conditions.

Anadolu Ajansı constructs the Rohingya crisis through a narrative of persecution and collective identity. Its representation emphasizes religious identity, political violence, and responsibility. Reuters constructs the crisis through a humanitarian narrative emphasizing displacement, survival, and individual experiences. Neither representation should be understood simply as more accurate or less accurate; rather, each reflects different journalistic approaches to making distant suffering meaningful for audiences.

The findings suggest that representations of humanitarian crises are shaped by three interconnected dimensions: (1) identity framing: how affected communities are named and categorized; (2) causal framing: how responsibility and explanations for suffering are constructed; and (3)

humanitarian framing: how vulnerability and survival are visually communicated. By examining these dimensions together, this study highlights the importance of analyzing not only what images show but also how captions, hashtags, and digital infrastructures shape the meanings attached to those images.

In the context of digital journalism, this study demonstrates that representation is an active process of negotiation. News organizations do not simply transfer reality onto digital platforms; they construct particular ways of seeing, understanding, and responding to humanitarian crises. The Rohingya case demonstrates that Instagram has become an important arena where struggles over visibility, identity, responsibility, and humanitarian recognition are continuously produced and contested.

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