

Beyond information-seeking: behabitive speech acts in social media news comments

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Abstract

Social media platforms have become one of the primary arenas in which public reactions to current political and social developments are made visible. While existing literature suggests that user comments under news posts rarely function as spaces of verification, clarification, or reciprocal deliberation, less attention has been paid to the pragmatic mechanisms through which information-like claims circulate in these comments. Highly contested issues such as refugee policies make these pragmatic mechanisms particularly visible. Drawing on Austin's speech act theory, this study adopts a pragmatic discourse analysis guided by Austin's illocutionary taxonomy to examine the speech act patterns that stand out in Instagram news comments and to analyze through which illocutionary functions information-like content enters circulation. An analysis of 56 comments appearing under refugee-related Instagram posts shared by Fox News and TRT News on 9 May 2022 reveals that user discourse is largely shaped by emotional evaluations, sarcastic remarks, and inferential claims. The majority of statements formulated as questions do not function as genuine information requests. The analysis shows that the most dominant type of act in the comments consists of attitude-expressing utterances (behabitives). Explanatory or claim-based utterances (expositives and commissives) mostly function as unverified, speculative inferences. The study demonstrates that, rather than the verification of information, information-like claims produced alongside emotional attitudes gain visibility in social media news comments.

Keywords: Austin, speech act theory, online news comments, refugee discourse in Türkiye, Instagram, performative utterances

1. Introduction

Today, social media platforms have become one of the main spaces in which individuals express their views on public issues. Widely used in Türkiye, Instagram provides an environment in which discourses on current topics gain visibility through comments, expressive symbols, likes, and sharing features. On this platform, news content does not merely serve an information-transmission function; it also constitutes a context in which users articulate their evaluations, emotional reactions, and various claims. While Instagram enables news to reach large audiences rapidly, it can also create conditions in which unverified claims and misleading content become visible. For this reason, examining the discursive characteristics of user comments posted under news concerning current events and social issues is important for understanding how information is represented and interpreted on social media.

Several studies have demonstrated the relevance of Austin's speech act theory for analyzing user comments on social media. Hidayati et al. (2021), for instance, examine hate speech on Facebook and conclude that hostile comments can be classified through Austin's illocutionary categories, particularly as verdictive, behabitive, and expositive acts. Their study shows that hate speech on social media functions not only as offensive content but also as a set of insulting, degrading, inciting, and provoking utterances. Labinaz and Sbisà (2021) investigate knowledge dissemination in Facebook discussions on vaccination and argue that although users display an implicit "folk epistemology," genuine knowledge exchange is limited by unsupported assertions, confirmation bias, appeals to epistemic authority, verbal aggressiveness, and affiliative relations. Building on these studies, the present article

shifts the focus to Instagram news comments on refugee-related political debates in Türkiye and examines how information-like claims circulate through illocutionary functions, particularly behabitive and expositive acts.

Austin's speech act theory makes it possible to reveal the structural and performative dimensions of everyday language use (Scannell, 2020, p. 200). Austin's central insight is that utterances do not merely describe or report states of affairs; they can also perform actions under specific contextual and conventional conditions (Austin, 2007, p. 14). According to Austin (2007, pp. 157–158), the truth or falsity of a statement depends not only on the meanings of words but also on the circumstances in which the speech act is performed, the issue it addresses, and the purpose for which it is uttered. From this perspective, Austin's theory provides a useful framework for analyzing how ideas, judgments, and information-like claims are accepted, rejected, or reformulated in social media comments.

While previous studies have examined Facebook hate speech through Austinian illocutionary categories (Hidayati et al., 2021), knowledge dissemination in vaccination-related Facebook discussions (Labinaz & Sbisà, 2021), and hostile emotions in Facebook news comments (Humprecht et al., 2020), studies that bring these strands together by analyzing how information-like claims circulate with affective evaluations through illocutionary functions in Instagram news comments remain comparatively limited. By examining the speech-act configurations through which claims, attitudes, and inferences gain visibility in the comment sections of news content, the present study aims to contribute to this emerging line of research.

Given the growing impact of online communication, it is important to examine how information-like claims are disseminated, negotiated, and transformed in social media interactions. This study examines how debates on social media platforms, particularly on Instagram, contribute to the circulation of information-like claims through Austin's speech act theory. To this end, the study focuses on Instagram, one of the most prevalent social media platforms in Türkiye. The study analyzes comments under two posts concerning the ongoing refugee issue in Türkiye. The selected posts were shared on the respective Instagram accounts of Fox News¹ (Fox Haber in Turkish; @foxhaber) and TRT News (TRT Haber in Turkish; @trthaber), which represent different editorial and political positions. The account information was checked through the public Instagram profiles of the respective news outlets (Fox Haber, n.d.; TRT Haber, n.d.). The diversity of the comments provided an opportunity to assess the nature of comments made by Instagram users in relation to allegations, claims, and rejections.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Multi-Layered Structure: Online Communication and Instagram

Instagram constitutes a specific discursive environment in which news content becomes visible, circulated, and responded to through platform-specific practices such as commenting, liking, tagging, sharing, emoji use, and algorithmic ordering. Unlike traditional forms of news reception, Instagram allows users to respond immediately and publicly to news posts, while also making these responses visible to other users within the same communicative space. In this sense, comments posted under news content should not be understood merely as

¹ The posts analyzed in this study were collected from the Instagram account (@foxhaber) of the news channel that was broadcasting under the name Fox News during the data collection period. Although the channel was renamed NOW News on 12 February 2024, the name Fox News is used in this study to ensure consistency with the analyzed period (NOW, 2024).

secondary reactions to information. They function as short public utterances through which users express attitudes, evaluations, emotions, assumptions, and claims in relation to current political and social issues. The comment section is particularly important because it creates a layered communicative structure. A news organization first frames an issue through a headline, image, caption, or video; users then respond to this framing through brief written comments; and other users may further reinforce, challenge, or amplify these responses through likes, tagging, replies, emoji, or repeated expressions. Therefore, Instagram comments do not simply reflect individual opinions in isolation. They form a platform-mediated discursive environment in which certain claims and attitudes become visible, repeatable, and affectively intensified. This is especially relevant for contested political issues such as refugee policies, where comments often combine evaluative judgment, emotional reaction, and speculative inference. In the context of Türkiye, Instagram is also a significant platform for examining online responses to current political and social debates. According to Kemp's 2022 report, social media use in Türkiye is widespread, and Instagram is among the most frequently used platforms among internet users aged 16–64 (Kemp, 2022, pp. 16, 22, 53). News organizations' Instagram accounts therefore provide a relevant environment for observing visible user responses to political statements and socially contested issues. However, this study does not treat Instagram comments as statistically representative of public opinion. Rather, it approaches them as visible and platform-mediated utterances that reveal how users articulate affective, evaluative, and inferential positions in response to news content. The communicative structure of Instagram also shapes the pragmatic force of user comments. Since computer-mediated communication lacks many non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, intonation, and gestures, users often rely on textual and visual markers to express emphasis, affect, or stance. As summarized by Bai et al. (2019, p. 1), capital letters, repeated punctuation, and emoji may intensify the tone of a comment, signal sarcasm or anger, and strengthen the illocutionary force of an utterance. Emoji are widely used to convey emotional and semantic meanings in online communication (Bai et al., 2019), while Pavalanathan and Eisenstein (2016) show that emoji compete with earlier text-based paralinguistic markers. In this study, emoji, capitalization, and repeated punctuation are therefore considered pragmatic cues that may intensify the illocutionary force of Instagram comments, rather than independent objects of visual analysis. Written expressions in public social media discussions can perform various speech acts, including stating, predicting, explaining, asking, evaluating, criticizing, objecting, challenging, and insulting (Labinaz & Sbisà, 2021, p. 68). Although Austin's speech act theory was originally developed in relation to spoken language, it is useful for analyzing online comments because speech acts are not limited to linguistic form or speaker intention; they also involve contextual force, uptake, and interpersonal positioning (Labinaz & Sbisà, 2021, p. 69). From this perspective, Instagram comments can be analyzed as short but pragmatically complex utterances. They may appear to convey information, ask questions, or provide explanations, yet their dominant illocutionary force may lie in expressing blame, distrust, sarcasm, moral judgment, or political positioning.

For this reason, Instagram is approached in this study not simply as a social media platform, but as a discursive environment in which information-like claims circulate together with affective and evaluative responses. The platform's comment structure enables users to make claims visible without necessarily subjecting them to verification, correction, or sustained deliberation. Its platform-specific affordances are therefore relevant not only technically, but also analytically, because they shape how comments become visible, intensified, and relationally positioned under news content. This is why the present study focuses on comments as short, context-dependent utterances rather than as isolated opinions or statistically representative indicators of public opinion. In this respect, Instagram is especially relevant for examining how public reactions to refugee-related news are articulated through overlapping speech-act forms, and how information-like content gains visibility through attitude-expressing, inferential, and evaluative utterances.

2.2. Descriptive and Performative Use of Language: Austin's Speech Act Theory

Language is a tool that shapes social cohesion and contributes to the construction of individual identity (Coward & Ellis, 1977/1985, p. 10). The process of meaning-making through language is intricate, involving both tangible and intangible elements in the world around us. Meaning extends beyond explicit expressions, writings, or behaviors; it can manifest subtly beneath, above, or beside what is explicitly stated (Rifat, 1996, p. 9). The significance of language in societal life is undeniable. Various theories, such as Austin's speech act theory, have been developed to understand language and its functions.

Austin's speech act theory, distinguishing between constative and performative utterances, delves into both the descriptive and performative uses of language (Scannell, 2020, p. 201). Everyday language, according to Austin, involves expressions beyond factual descriptions, and making statements is just one of its many uses (Austin, 2007, p. 14). Performative speech acts, exemplified by utterances like "I apologize" or "I promise," go beyond stating facts; they enact actions (Scannell, 2020, p. 201). In such acts, the construction of facts or sentences becomes an action in itself, emphasizing the unity of action and language in speech acts.

As noted in the introduction of *How to Do Things with Words* (Austin, 2007, p. 16), Austin focuses on the distinctions made in everyday language. Language, with its extensive history, serves people in various capacities, primarily in making distinctions within the realm of everyday language. These distinctions not only pertain to linguistic differences but also extend to differentiating entities in the world around people (Austin, 2007, pp. 16–17). To elucidate the differences in performative speech acts, Austin introduces a triple distinction based on locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts.

A locutionary act is the realization of a meaningful utterance. The locutionary act consists of three sub-acts within the framework of articulation, enunciation, and understanding (Austin, 2007, pp. 118, 138). Articulation is defined as the act of making certain sounds, while enunciation is the act of producing certain types of sounds in a specific vocabulary because of possessing a certain linguistic competence. The rhetic act involves using words with a certain sense and reference (Austin, 2007, p. 118).

An illocutionary act, distinct from a locutionary act, refers to what is done in saying something; that is, the communicative force an utterance acquires in a particular context (Austin, 2007, pp. 129, 138). It can be exemplified by acts such as explaining with a certain force, giving orders, making suggestions, or promising. In this sense, communication depends not merely on producing meaningful words, but also on the recognition of the utterance as performing a particular social or communicative act.

A perlocutionary act involves achieving certain effects by saying something (Austin, 2007, p. 138). Thus, acts performed by saying something and achieving effects such as convincing, persuading, dissuading, or deceiving are included (Austin, 2007, p. 129). According to Austin, five classes of speech acts are defined based on illocutionary forces (Austin, 2007, p. 162): verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives.

Verdictives involve making official or unofficial decisions based on facts or values, supported by evidence or reasons. This category includes actions such as evaluating, describing, judging, finding guilty, making predictions, making assessments, diagnosing, appraising, ranking, and comparing (Austin, 2007, p. 164). Exercitives involve the use of power or rights. They represent a decision on how something is done, different from a judgment that it is so (Austin, 2007, p. 166). Examples of exercitives include appointing, firing, wishing, insisting, preferring, recommending, voting, declaring, nominating, resigning, and granting rights. Commissives assign responsibility

for a course of action to the speaker. Examples of commissives include promising, committing, accepting, objecting, declaring an intention, expressing consent, taking sides, planning, and guaranteeing (Austin, 2007, p. 168). Reacting to someone's actions or experiences and forming attitudes in response to someone's past behavior and conveying those attitudes are characteristics of behabitives. While there is a close relationship between describing and reporting emotions and expressing emotions outwardly, behabitives are different in that they involve both reporting/describing and expressing. Behabitives have the possibility of inaccuracy and a specific insincerity in their structure. Examples of behabitives include apologizing, thanking, congratulating, offering condolences, expressing regret, criticizing, taking offence, blaming, rejecting, and challenging. On the other hand, expositives are used in expositive actions, such as explaining opinions and making justifications. Examples of expositives during speech include confirming, responding, deducing, denying, and narrating (Austin, 2007, pp. 170–172).

Performative speech acts, as mentioned earlier, play a role in information dissemination (Labinaz & Sbisà, 2021, p. 69). In the context of shared social media posts, encoding information into sentences within comments is crucial for spreading information. Certain conditions shape how thoughts and information are expressed, and these conditions significantly affect the conveyance of information. It is assumed that commenters have the authority to make judgments, but the reliability of claims may vary, even for those recognized as knowledgeable authorities (Labinaz & Sbisà, 2021, pp. 70–71). This study examines how information spreads through comments on Instagram posts, using Austin's classification of illocutionary acts to classify speech acts.

3. Methodology

3.1. Contextual Background: Refugee Debates in Türkiye

The issue of Syrian refugees has long been a subject of debate in the Republic of Türkiye. According to the data announced by the Directorate General of Migration Management of the Ministry of Interior on 26 May 2022, the number of Syrian refugees under temporary protection in Türkiye was 3,763,652. Official data for 2022 indicate that in the first part of the year, the number of Syrians living in Türkiye increased by 26,283 people (Mülteciler Derneği, 2022).

Türkiye's total population was announced as 85,664,944 in 2025 (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2025), while the number of Syrians under temporary protection decreased to 2,506,740 in August 2025 (Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı, 2025). These later figures are used only as contextual background to indicate the continuing public relevance of refugee-related debates in Türkiye; they are not treated as evidence for the 2022 Instagram comment dataset analyzed in this study. Although the number of Syrians under temporary protection has decreased in recent years, the issue continues to occupy a central place in public debate, particularly in relation to return policies and migration governance. News related to refugees living in Türkiye is closely followed by the public, and developments on this issue are widely discussed, particularly on digital platforms.

In this respect, although the analyzed dataset dates from 2022, the discursive patterns examined in this study relate to a policy debate that has continued in subsequent years, particularly in relation to ongoing discussions on return policies and migration governance. For this reason, the dataset is considered analytically relevant for examining how refugee-related claims and attitudes circulate in online public discourse beyond the specific moment of data collection.

The shift from traditional television journalism toward social media platforms constitutes an important indicator of the transformation in news consumption practices. Today, a significant portion of individuals prefer social media platforms such as Instagram for following the news (Newman et al., 2022, p.109). Posts shared on the Instagram accounts of television news channels stand out as spaces where users publicly express their attitudes toward current political and social issues. User comments under these posts enable the visibility of evaluations, emotional stances, and inferential claims related to news content. In this context, social media environments can be considered discursive spaces in which attitudes and evaluations accompanying news are publicly articulated rather than arenas primarily oriented toward information verification.

3.2. Objective of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine which types of discursive and speech-act practices become prominent in user comments posted under current news content on social media platforms, and how these practices are associated with the circulation of information-like content accompanied by emotional stances rather than with the production of verified information.

The research questions of the study can be formulated as follows:

1. Which dominant discursive and speech-act functions emerge in user comments posted under current news content on social media platforms?
2. How are emotional stances, evaluations, and explanatory claims articulated together in user comments?
3. How do these discursive practices in user comments indicate the formation of a discursive space in which information, claims, and inferences enter circulation?

3.3. Research Design, Data Selection, and Analytical Procedure

This study adopts a qualitative pragmatic discourse analysis guided by Austin's illocutionary taxonomy to examine Instagram comments in terms of their illocutionary and discursive functions.

In line with the stated objective, two posts shared on 9 May 2022 on the Instagram pages of TRT News (Türkiye's official public broadcaster) and Fox News (a Türkiye-based news channel critical of the government), concerning the current situation of refugees in Türkiye and a refugee-related statement by President Erdoğan, were examined (Fox Haber, 2022; TRT Haber, 2022).

The 56 comments included in the analysis were selected from a total of 779 comments under the relevant Fox News post and 64 comments under the TRT News post. The final sample of 56 comments was not predetermined as a statistically representative sample size, nor was it determined through theoretical saturation. Rather, it resulted from criterion-based purposive sampling after all comments under the two selected posts had been reviewed.

During the sampling process, comments considered to be spam-like or bot-generated, repetitive entries, or comments consisting solely of emojis², single words, or user tagging were excluded from the analysis. The remaining comments were included only if they contained a linguistically complete, meaning-bearing utterance, made a direct reference to the refugee-related news content, and could be interpreted in relation to at least one

² A detailed analysis of emojis was excluded due to the study's theoretical and methodological focus being limited to Austin's speech act framework.

of Austin's illocutionary categories. Within this framework, the criterion of a meaning-bearing comment was defined as the presence of speech-act structures that convey a specific attitude, evaluation, or judgment.

Since the original comments were written in Turkish, translation constituted an important part of the analytical process. The speech-act analysis was conducted primarily with reference to the original Turkish comments, while the English translations were prepared for presentation in the article. The translations were carried out by the researcher using an analytical translation approach rather than a word-for-word transfer. This approach aimed to preserve the illocutionary force, pragmatic function, and contextual meaning of the original expressions. Particular attention was paid to sarcasm, irony, idiomatic expressions, curses, derogatory language, and politically charged formulations, since these elements are central to the identification of speech-act functions. Throughout the analysis, the English translations were checked against the original Turkish comments in order to minimize shifts in meaning. Where necessary, back-translation was also used as a verification procedure to assess whether the pragmatic force of the original expression had been preserved. Where a literal translation would obscure the original meaning, priority was given to conveying the pragmatic effect and illocutionary orientation of the utterance. This procedure was used to ensure that the translated examples remained analytically consistent with the original Turkish data.

The analyzed comments were interpreted within the specific discursive context of refugee-related political debates in Türkiye at the time of data collection (9 May 2022), particularly in relation to ongoing public discussions on return policies and migration governance. In addition, the analysis takes into account the platform-specific visibility conditions of Instagram comment sections, where comments are displayed according to algorithmic ordering and potential moderation practices of the respective news accounts. Accordingly, the selected comments are treated as visible user responses circulating within this platform-mediated discursive environment rather than as a statistically representative sample.

While the Instagram account of Fox News (@foxhaber) has 1.5 million followers, the Instagram account of TRT News (@trthaber) has 2 million followers. According to the 2022 Digital News Report, Fox News had a weekly reach of 58% among TV, radio, and print news brands in Türkiye and a brand trust score of 67%, while TRT News had a lower trust score of 43% (Newman et al., 2022, p. 109). Fox News' Instagram post presents the refugee-related statement in video format, whereas TRT News' post appears as a headline within the daily news roundup. The news states that Syrian refugees can return voluntarily, and Türkiye will not force them to leave. Both accounts have a substantial number of followers and provide a relevant context for examining visible user responses to current political issues.

Austin's speech act theory, which aims to analyze the pragmatic dimensions of everyday language use, is employed in this study as an analytical framework to examine online comments in terms of their illocutionary functions rather than their content. Austin classifies speech acts into five categories according to their illocutionary force: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives (Austin, 2007, p. 162). Accordingly, utterances were classified according to Austin's illocutionary classes; emojis, the use of capital letters, and similar pragmatic markers were briefly discussed as elements that intensify the pragmatic force of discourse.

In operationalizing Austin's categories for Instagram comments, the primary criterion was the dominant illocutionary force of each utterance in its local discursive context. The distinction between behabitives and exercitives was made according to whether the utterance primarily expressed an attitude or attempted to direct a course of action. In ambiguous cases, the analysis followed a dominant-function procedure: the category that best captured the main illocutionary force of the comment was treated as primary, while other possible functions

were discussed as secondary. Behabitives were identified when a comment primarily expressed an attitude, reaction, emotion, evaluation, blame, complaint, condemnation, sarcasm, or moral positioning toward refugees, political actors, or the news content. Exercitives were identified when a comment attempted to direct, demand, recommend, authorize, reject, or call for a course of action, such as urging political actors to send refugees back, asking authorities to prioritize citizens, or declaring a voting-related demand. Verdictives were identified when a comment issued a judgment, assessment, prediction, or evaluative finding concerning a situation, actor, or possible consequence. Expositives were identified when a comment explained, interpreted, inferred, justified, or connected claims within a line of reasoning. Commissives were identified only when the commenter expressed a commitment, intention, future-oriented stance, or declared alignment, such as withdrawing electoral support or taking a political side. For example, a single-line comment such as “Take care of your own people first” was classified as primarily exercitive because it functions as a directive call, whereas a comment such as “Shame on someone who does not care about their people” was classified as primarily behabitive because its main force is moral condemnation. Similarly, question-formatted comments were not automatically treated as information-seeking expositives; when they functioned rhetorically to express distrust, sarcasm, or accusation, they were classified as behabitive acts.

Since the study was designed as a qualitative pragmatic discourse analysis rather than a quantitative coding procedure, no statistical intercoder reliability measurement was applied. The purpose of the classification was not to produce frequency-based coding categories, but to interpret the dominant illocutionary force of each utterance within its local discursive context. In addition, Austin’s categories are not treated here as mutually exclusive classification labels, since several comments display overlapping illocutionary functions. To ensure analytical consistency, the study followed an explicit dominant-function procedure: when a comment appeared to straddle more than one category, the category that best captured its main illocutionary force was treated as primary, while other possible functions were discussed as secondary or complementary. The operational criteria used to distinguish behabitives, exercitives, verdictives, commissives, and expositives are therefore made explicit in the methodology section and illustrated through examples in the analysis. This procedure was used to enhance transparency and consistency in the interpretation of short, context-dependent Instagram comments.

For ethical reasons, the usernames in the analyzed comments were partially anonymized and represented only by their first two and last two letters. This approach both respects research ethics and does not affect the contextual analysis of the comments.

4. Results

User comments shaped around President Erdoğan’s refugee-related statement on Syrians predominantly produce critical and skeptical interpretations concerning the possible reasons behind the decision. The announcement that Syrians would not be sent back created a discursive space in which existing dissatisfaction and distrust were expressed, rather than generating a genuine demand for information.

The statement “We will not throw Syrians into the arms of murderers” can be read as a binding declaration of decision articulated from a position of political authority. This utterance carries exercitive qualities insofar as it implies the use of decision-making power, and commissive qualities insofar as it entails the assumption of future responsibility. This emphasis on the protection of Syrians is interpreted by commenters not primarily as an explanatory justification; rather, it becomes the target of evaluations marked by criticism and sarcasm.

In this context, the comments responding to this statement do not generate reciprocal exchanges of views or attempts at verification; rather, they emerge as discursive reactions that reproduce existing distrust and dissatisfaction toward the political decision. The claims and assumptions articulated in the comments function less as objects of interactional scrutiny than as means through which shared negative attitudes gain visibility.

In the following analysis, the comments are not treated as belonging mechanically to a single speech-act category. Rather, in line with the dominant-function procedure explained in the Methodology section, each comment is examined according to its primary illocutionary force, while secondary or complementary functions are also noted where relevant. This is particularly important for short Instagram comments, where evaluation, accusation, explanation, prediction, and directive calls often appear within the same utterance.

4.1. Evaluative and Blaming Discourses in User Comments

An examination of the comments presented in Table 1 shows that users predominantly employ expressions serving evaluative and accusatory functions. Rather than questioning the rationale behind the decision, these comments function as manifestations of attitudes marked by anger, disappointment, and condemnation toward the decision.

In the first comment presented in Table 1, it is stated that the government collects taxes from citizens while refugees sustain their lives through these resources, and responsibility for this situation is then attributed to the political authority. This comment contains an explicit accusation and a negative evaluation directed at the political authority.

In the second comment, the political authority is portrayed as neglecting its own people, and a moral condemnation is expressed through phrases such as "Shame on someone who doesn't care about their people." In addition, the expression "we will send you away with the Syrians" functions as a directive and threatening call and can be read as an exercitive in speech-act terms. This utterance indicates that, following the announcement of the decision, the individual repositions their voting behavior.

Table 1: Explicit expression of behabitives

#	Comment	News channel
1	kil...di Shame on you. May my rights and the taxes taken from me be cursed. Hopefully, my rights will be forbidden in both worlds.	@foxhaber
2	di...94 I hope you lose the election, and we will send you away with the Syrians. Shame on someone who doesn't care about their people.	@foxhaber
3	el...el The public is unemployed and hungry, and we are taking care of refugees with my money. May every penny of mine be cursed as forbidden.	@foxhaber
4	mu...az Leader, Syrians are leering at our wives and daughters, harassing the people. You have lost, Tayyip Erdoğan, no votes for you. Priority is the Turkish nation. What a pity and sin, what has happened to this nation and country. !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!	@trthaber
5	to...en He granted amnesty to the guy; he's saying to come back. I don't understand why you're still holding him. Married people should stay in their homes, villagers in their villages. Enough is enough; they should leave, this much hospitality is sufficient.	@trthaber
6	to...ti We are fed up and tired; we can't walk on the streets anymore. It's not just Syrians; it seems like every unskilled person from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and wherever is in our country. Would you let a stranger who is homeless and penniless into your home? So why are you letting them into our country?	@trthaber

Source: Author's own analysis of publicly available Instagram comments posted under the @foxhaber and @trthaber posts shared on 9 May 2022

In the third comment, it is claimed that refugees exploit economic resources, and this situation is expressed through a curse such as "May every penny of mine be cursed as forbidden." This utterance functions as an evaluative and condemnatory statement with a high degree of emotional intensity and, on the speech-act level, displays behabitive characteristics.

In the fourth comment, Türkiye's current situation is described through expressions such as "what a pity" and "a sin," while it is emphasized that Syrian refugees have failed to achieve social integration. In this context, it is argued that the political authority should prioritize the Turkish nation, and a directive call is articulated, urging that no vote should be cast in the elections.

In another comment, information is provided about the situation in the countries from which the refugees have come, and it is suggested that they could return through a possible amnesty. The expression "enough is enough" stands out as an evaluation conveying impatience and frustration toward the decision.

In the sixth comment, it is stated that the refugee issue is not limited to Syrians alone, and that people coming from countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan are also present in Türkiye. The expression "We are fed up and tired; we can't walk on the streets anymore" conveys an intense emotional reaction and condemnation.

As a result, the comments presented in Table 1 show a strong presence of behabitives, which Austin defines as speech acts involving the adoption of attitudes (Austin, 2007, p. 173). Expressions of complaint, sadness, and condemnation are dominant in these comments. Through these discourses, evaluations are articulated regarding past actions (paying taxes), the current social situation (poverty, unemployment), and future-oriented attitudes (voting behavior).

In terms of the operational criteria established in the Methodology section, these comments are classified primarily as behabitives because their dominant illocutionary force lies in the expression of complaint, blame, condemnation, and moral judgment. However, several comments also contain secondary exercitive or commissive dimensions. For example, statements such as “we will send you away with the Syrians,” “no votes for you,” and “they should leave” do not merely express emotion; they also direct political action or declare a future-oriented stance. Nevertheless, these directive and commitment-oriented elements remain embedded within a broader affective structure. For this reason, the comments are treated as primarily behabitive, with exercitive or commissive functions operating as secondary layers.

Table 2: Claim-based statements about past and present situations

#	Comment	News channel
7	do...ga Take care of your own people first. Instead of building houses for them, build them for your own people. I leave you all to God; may it be haram and bitter for you. They are living off what they take from us 😡	@foxhaber
8	se...em We became refugees, it's a shame for these lands. Our ancestors shed blood, their bones ache 😞😞😞	@foxhaber
9	at...ca Enough, the future of this country is important. Your responsibility to this nation is more important. This nation shed blood, worked in the morning, and stood guard in the evening. The traps set for this nation are enough. #WeWantReferendum #IDontWantRefugeesInMyCountry	@trthaber

Source: Author's own analysis of publicly available Instagram comments posted under the @foxhaber and @trthaber posts shared on 9 May 2022

In the seventh comment, expressions of complaint and curse such as “I leave you all to God” and “may it be haram and bitter for you” are present. During the expression of this attitude, it is also conveyed that the Turkish people are not supported, and information is provided that houses have even been built for refugees.

In the eighth and ninth comments, the founding of the Republic of Türkiye under difficult conditions is emphasized, and the country's current situation is evaluated through comparisons with historical sacrifices. In the eighth comment, the statement “We became refugees, it's a shame for these lands” foregrounds feelings of loss and humiliation, while references to ancestors who “shed blood” activate collective memory. In the ninth comment, the expression “Enough” underscores responsibility toward the nation and its future, and the present situation is criticized through the claim that the country has been “trapped.” In both comments, narratives of past labor, sacrifice, and endurance occupy a central place, while the emotional intensity of the discourse is reinforced through crying emojis and hashtags related to referendums and deportation.

Analytically, the comments in Table 2 show how claim-based statements are absorbed into behabitive force. Although these comments refer to economic resources, national history, sacrifice, and responsibility, their dominant illocutionary function is not explanatory but evaluative. The references to taxes, houses, ancestors, and national future provide an inferential ground for complaint and moral condemnation. In this respect, expositive elements appear as secondary layers that support the primary behabitive function of blaming, lamenting, and expressing collective grievance.

4.2. Indirect Attitudinal Expressions and Pragmatic Intensification

In the comments posted under the news posts, alongside explicitly attitude-expressing words such as “what a shame,” “damn it,” and “enough,” there are also discourses in which attitudes are conveyed indirectly and sarcastically. In such comments, the intended message is often communicated through expressions constructed in opposition to their literal meaning.

Table 3: Indirect expression of attitudes through behavior utterances

#	Comment	News channel
10	fk_kaberdeys First of all, they did not take refuge in this country 😬 with your help, they invaded our country 😬 You will not throw Syrians into the arms of murderers, but you will sacrifice our young soldiers under the guise of operations 😬 and those cowardly Syrians will sit here smoking hookah, take photos of women under the pretext of taking selfies, get into fights... let's see you protect those you protect; they will be your end... you did not see it, you cannot see it. What a shame...	@trthaber
11	mi...iz He didn't support us as much as he did them, honestly, hats off to him 🙌	@foxhaber
12	bi...an God, you know the matter 🙏	@foxhaber
13	al...nr It's not about that, we provide homes and even build houses for so many immigrants, yet we can't even build shelters for our stray animals. Now, how can you not get upset about that? 🙄	@foxhaber
14	bu...en You don't even take care of us anyway	@foxhaber
15	yu...rr When we go out in Alanya, we are now considered foreigners. House rents are absurdly high, like 12,000 to 14,000. You can be proud of your work.	@foxhaber
16	om...72 Keep going like this. In 2023, our situation is difficult; our president should have prioritized our own people first. I regret the vote I gave.	@trthaber

Source: Author's own analysis of publicly available Instagram comments posted under the @foxhaber and @trthaber posts shared on 9 May 2022

The tenth comment is one of the most complex examples in the dataset because it combines several illocutionary layers within a single utterance. Its dominant force is behavior, since the comment primarily expresses anger, blame, moral condemnation, and sarcastic opposition toward both refugees and the political authority. This is visible in expressions such as “they invaded our country,” “those cowardly Syrians,” and “what a shame,” which do not merely describe a situation but perform an evaluative and accusatory stance. At the same time, the comment also contains expositive elements, because it constructs an interpretive explanation of the decision by linking the government's refugee policy to military sacrifice, social disorder, and the alleged failure to protect citizens. The contrastive structure, “You will not throw Syrians into the arms of murderers, but you will sacrifice our young soldiers,” works as an explanatory and argumentative move, even though it is framed through sarcasm and accusation. In addition, the utterance displays verdictive features insofar as it assesses the political consequences of the decision through the prediction “they will be your end.” The phrase “let's see you protect those you protect” further functions as a challenging and directive expression, giving the comment a secondary exercitive dimension. Therefore, the tenth comment was classified primarily as a behavior because its main illocutionary force lies in affective condemnation and moral positioning; however, it also demonstrates how

expositive, verdictive, and exercitive functions may be embedded within a single Instagram comment. This example shows that the comments are not always reducible to one fixed category, but often operate as hybrid speech acts in which information-like claims circulate through affective and evaluative force.

In the eleventh comment, the political authority is portrayed as showing greater concern for refugees than for Turkish citizens; this is followed by the expression “honestly, hats off to him,” which conveys an ironic and sarcastic evaluation. Although this expression is commonly used in everyday language to signal appreciation, here it functions as a discourse that indirectly communicates anger and opposition; in speech-act terms, it displays behabitive characteristics. As Austin notes, behabitives may also involve a potential for insincerity in their structure (Austin, 2007, p. 171). This usage demonstrates that the attitude is expressed not directly, but through a reversal of meaning.

In another comment, the expression “God, you know the matter” stands out as an indirect evaluation conveying helplessness and reproach. Through this expression, an expectation regarding the refugees’ return to their countries is articulated, while the negativity of the current situation for the Turkish people is implicitly suggested.

In the thirteenth comment, an emotional reaction is expressed through the phrase “Now, how can you not get upset about that? 🙄”, which is further reinforced by the use of an emoji. In the same comment, a comparison-based evaluation is presented by noting that Türkiye hosts a large number of migrants, while shelters for stray animals are lacking.

In the following comment, the political authority is portrayed as taking care of everyone except Turkish citizens. Although the sentence is structured negatively, this statement conveys an evaluative discourse that indirectly constructs the perception that the Turkish people are being neglected.

In the fifteenth comment, the statement “You can be proud of your work” is not used in its literal sense; rather, through a sarcastic reversal, it suggests that the Turkish nation has been pushed into the position of a stranger in its own country. In the same comment, information is also conveyed regarding the increase in housing rents due to refugees.

In the sixteenth comment, the expression “Keep going like this” also carries an ironic evaluative tone. In the sentences that follow, Syrians are portrayed as being valued more than Turkish citizens, and the comment expresses regret over past electoral support for the political authority. Therefore, the eleventh, fifteenth, and sixteenth comments contain explicitly sarcastic evaluations.

Taken together, the comments in Table 3 show that indirect and sarcastic expressions do not function merely as stylistic devices. In several cases, they shape the illocutionary force of the comments by turning explanatory or inferential content into attitude-expressing acts. Information-like claims about refugees, political responsibility, social disorder, or economic pressure become visible through irony, blame, complaint, and moral positioning. This supports the study’s broader finding that behabitives operate as the dominant category, while other speech-act functions are often subordinated to affective and evaluative force.

Table 4: Claims conveyed indirectly through expressive speech acts

#	Comment	News channel
17	hl...cu They give child benefit to the children of Syrians, but there is nothing for our own people.	@trthaber
18	ta...an Also, be with your people, man 🙄	@foxhaber
19	de...iz If only he would also stand by his own people 🙄 🙄 🙄 🙄 🙄	@foxhaber

Source: Author's own analysis of publicly available Instagram comments posted under the @foxhaber and @trthaber posts shared on 9 May 2022

In the eighteenth and nineteenth comments presented in Table 4, emotional expressions are reinforced using emojis, thereby intensifying the impact of the discourse. In these comments, it is emphasized that, in contrast to the aid provided to Syrian children, no support is offered to the Turkish public. Rather than directly stating that "the money given to Syrians should also be given to the Turkish people," an expectation of assistance is conveyed indirectly through expressions such as "... there is nothing for our own people."

Expressions such as "... be with your people, man" and "If only he would also stand by his own people" construct the political authority as insufficiently supportive of its own citizens. These statements function as directive calls that convey expectations and attribute responsibility for protecting the Turkish public to the political authority as an actor with decision-making and implementation power. In this respect, the expressions display exercitive and commissive characteristics in speech-act terms.

Overall, the comments in Table 4 show how directive and expectation-laden utterances can operate within an affective frame. Expressions such as "be with your people" or "stand by your own people" are classified as exercitive insofar as they call on a political actor to follow a particular course of action. However, their pragmatic force is not limited to directing action; they also express disappointment, reproach, and moral accusation. For this reason, these comments illustrate the overlap between exercitive and behabitive functions. The directive form gives the utterance an action-oriented surface, while the dominant emotional force keeps it closely tied to attitude expression.

4.3. Speculative and Evaluative Discourses on Political Motives

The following consolidated table brings together the four previously separate tables by identifying the recurring sub-pattern through which each comment participates in the broader behabitive structure of speculative and evaluative discourse.

Table 5: Behabitive sub-patterns in speculative and evaluative comments

#	Comment	News channel	Sub-pattern
20	mu...tr He was talking differently yesterday, today it's probably because money came from Europe. se...gn @mu...tr 🙌🙌 at...ml @mu...tr SELLS everything for money, Georgian	@foxhaber	Financial motive and European funding claims
21	ca...66 3.5 million euros came, I guess.	@foxhaber	Financial motive and European funding claims
22	tu...06 He receives 13 million votes from Syrians. Will he send them away? It doesn't matter if they are Turkish, Kurdish, Laz, or Circassian, as long as the votes come from them.	@foxhaber	Refugee voting and electoral strategy claims
23	ye...er Germany must have definitely sent 5 billion euros, that's why he loves them, not because he cares about them	@foxhaber	Financial motive and European funding claims
24	sa...en Spend another 40 billion dollars, it's not your father's money anyway 🙌	@foxhaber	Financial motive and public spending accusation
25	gu...rr It's obvious that Mr. Erdogan has received good money 🙌🙌	@foxhaber	Financial motive and European funding claims
26	al...mo Did money come from Europe into the pocket?	@foxhaber	Rhetorical questioning of financial motive
27	ma...in Erdogan's only concern is to protect the migrants, which equals votes, but you've come to the end of the road with your migrants.	@foxhaber	Refugee voting and electoral strategy claims
28	mu...44 Strategy to gain votes from the ignorant.	@foxhaber	Refugee voting and electoral strategy claims
29	fe...34 <i>Migrants equal votes?</i>	@foxhaber	Rhetorical questioning of refugee voting
30	ah...64 They will vote or the EU has sent money	@foxhaber	Refugee voting / European funding claims
31	ga...an <i>They take care of anyone with voting potential, but when it comes to the unemployed, they impose hefty price increases. There is no justice, only the development party</i> 🙄	@foxhaber	Refugee voting and public neglect claims
32	mu...05 A plan to win the election by creating voters with fake identities. The people should never allow Syrians to get close to the ballot box. They cannot determine Türkiye's fate, period.	@foxhaber	Refugee voting and electoral strategy claims
33	ka...an He will take the vote from them, of course. What other choice does he have? He has ruined the country, sold everything. With BOT projects, you have given away the future of our children and grandchildren for 50 years. Then you went out and boasted, as if you built the roads and hospitals from your own pocket. You built houses for the cowardly dogs from Syria. You couldn't solve the	@trthaber	Refugee voting and broader evaluative accusation

#	Comment	News channel	Sub-pattern
	housing problem in the country. You gave 2500 TL to retirees, without thinking about how they will make ends meet. Everything has an end, and this time it is the end		
34	uu...ss He will not lose votes as long as there are Syrians and Iraqis. While foreigners become Turkish citizens, he does not invest in Turks anyway. His speeches are directed towards them.	@trthaber	Refugee voting and citizenship-related claims
35	ma...m.x He has embraced the ownership again. Yet, last week, he was preparing a project.	@foxhaber	Perceived inconsistency in refugee-policy statements
36	sa...00 I am not surprised at all. Morning is different, noon is different, evening is different.	@foxhaber	Evaluative reaction to perceived inconsistency
37	se...il Today like this, tomorrow like that lay lay 😊😊	@foxhaber	Sarcastic reaction to perceived inconsistency
38	bi...in We are living in a madhouse.	@foxhaber	Evaluative reaction to perceived inconsistency
39	gu...ci They are in a different mood every day, whatever they eat or drink, let's have the same.	@foxhaber	Sarcastic reaction to perceived inconsistency
40	nu...08 Boss, make up your mind. One day you say he will leave, the other day you say you won't send him. Or is it just for the opposition? 😊😊😊😊 It's getting confusing	@foxhaber	Rhetorical questioning of perceived inconsistency
41	su...in I'm really fed up with this guy, I don't trust him at all with his inconsistent speeches. Trust me Erdogan, you've lost a lot of votes with your inconsistent talk	@foxhaber	Distrust and loss of electoral support
42	ay...gd As the public, we demand a 'sound mind' report! This situation is unbelievable because it doesn't make sense! 🗣️🇹🇷	@foxhaber	Evaluative reaction to perceived inconsistency
43	ya...82 He said we would be local and national, but the country is filled with imported people now.	@trthaber	Evaluative reaction to policy inconsistency
44	mh...27 My leader, didn't you say just last week that we would send back 1 million Syrian refugees? Now you're saying this? How can we believe you now? Are you making these decisions on your own or speaking on behalf of others? You're misleading me and the people who believe in you, my leader. Please do what you need to do as soon as possible and listen to your people...	@trthaber	Rhetorical questioning of perceived inconsistency
45	ku...ma Offggggg, offfff, you're shooting yourself in the foot; it's up to you now. You've been defending, two days ago something else, now something else, Mr. President. The people don't want to hear this; it's up to you to decide	@trthaber	Evaluative reaction to perceived inconsistency
46	se...og Erdoğan's unfortunate statement for the election, a wrong decision for Türkiye 🗣️ ak...34 @se...og he doesn't care anymore, this time the	@trthaber	Broader evaluative attitudes toward political authority

#	Comment	News channel	Sub-pattern
	people won't vote for him for the first time		
47	go...an He is preparing his own end, what a pity 😞	@trthaber	Broader evaluative attitudes toward political authority
48	ms...10 President is wasting himself. What the opposition couldn't do to the President, the refugees will do. Making such a statement so close to the election will cause great damage	@trthaber	Electoral consequence and political evaluation
49	ka...09 I trust my president, surely he knows something. Let's hope for the best, and if we don't support, should we support traitors? Let's contribute to the well-being of our country, turn back to the golden age, and see if it works out for the best.	@trthaber	Supportive evaluation of political authority
50	al...42 He does not think about his people at all; surely, everything has an end 🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄	@foxhaber	Broader evaluative attitudes toward political authority
51	me...35 I have never seen a president of this state who harbors so much hatred and resentment towards his people; he does not care about his nation at all	@foxhaber	Broader evaluative attitudes toward political authority
	en...an @me...35 Because the man is not Turkish; it's a project to destroy us	@foxhaber	Public neglect and political responsibility
52	dd...13 Those who govern a country should prioritize protecting their own nation, both economically and spiritually. Everyone is experiencing their own economic struggle to the core 😞😞😞	@foxhaber	Public neglect and political responsibility
53	ma...in @dd...13 If Erdogan's concern was for his own people, he wouldn't have supported those dirty refugees. Erdogan's only goal is to do whatever it takes for votes.	@foxhaber	Refugee voting and broader evaluative accusation
54	fe...34 Erdogan, you only think about yourself and your cronies. Your concern is for votes and personal gain, don't tell tales about brotherhood and religion	@foxhaber	Refugee voting and broader evaluative accusation
55	gu...an First, take care of your own citizens.	@foxhaber	Directive call / public neglect
56	ay...03 HE IS AFRAID OF HIS NATION	@foxhaber	Accusatory evaluation of political authority

Source: Author's own analysis of publicly available Instagram comments posted under the @foxhaber and @trthaber posts shared on 9 May 2022

The first sub-pattern in the consolidated Table 5 consists of claims and predictions about European funding. In the twentieth comment, the statement "He was talking differently yesterday, today it's probably because money came from Europe" contains an interpretive inference that attributes the change in decision to a hypothetical cause. In Austin's terms, such expressions contain expositive elements insofar as they explain and interpret a situation. At the same time, because the proposed explanation takes the form of a claim, the utterance also carries a commissive dimension by placing the speaker under the responsibility of that claim. However, the dominant force of the comment is not informational. Rather, it is shaped by suspicion, accusation, and cynical evaluation.

This becomes clearer in the same comment thread, where the expression “SELLS everything for money” frames political authority through a sarcastic and accusatory evaluation rather than offering a neutral explanatory inference. Reinforced through capital letters and emojis, this utterance foregrounds the speaker’s stance and emotional judgment; in this respect, a behabitive function becomes dominant. Around the twentieth comment, a brief response sequence also emerges through tagging. Yet these replies do not produce deliberation, verification, or questioning of the initial claim. Instead, they reinforce the original stance through sarcastic and evaluative reactions.

The expressions “3.5 million euros,” “5 billion euros,” and “good money,” articulated in the twenty-first, twenty-third, and twenty-fifth comments, similarly indicate that monetary claims lacking any specific source circulate with an emphasis on certainty. Although these statements provide an ostensibly explanatory frame, they primarily function as inferential claims that reinforce an already existing negative opinion. Within Austin’s classification, such utterances are situated between expositives and commissives; however, since they do not involve requests for verification or correction, they do not generate an interactional process of information negotiation.

The second sub-pattern links the decision to electoral calculations and the presumed voting potential of refugees. In the twenty-second comment, the decision is associated with the voting potential of refugees and presented as part of a generalized political inference. Expressions such as “Migrants equal votes?” similarly illustrate the construction of a narrative in which refugee policy is interpreted through electoral strategy. These comments contain expositive and commissive dimensions insofar as they explain a political situation and commit the speaker to a specific interpretation. Yet their explanatory form remains subordinated to behabitive force. They do not seek evidence about voting rights, citizenship, or electoral procedures; rather, they use the language of explanation to express distrust, anger, and blame.

The expression “it’s not your father’s money anyway,” used in the twenty-fourth comment, further demonstrates how claims about public spending are articulated through sarcastic accusation. Although it refers to financial resources, the comment does not function as a factual discussion of public expenditure. It performs a behabitive act by expressing indignation, accusation, and moral judgment. In this sense, claims about money and claims about votes operate through the same discursive logic: political motives are inferred speculatively and circulated through affective evaluation.

The third sub-pattern concerns rhetorical questioning and perceived inconsistency in the political authority’s refugee-policy statements. The twenty-sixth comment, “Did money come from Europe into the pocket?”, appears on the surface to signal a request for information. However, when considered in context, it does not indicate a genuine search for clarification. Rather, this question functions as a rhetorical expression that reinforces the monetary claims established in earlier comments and conveys distrust and accusation. The absence of any response, correction, or opposing view further indicates that this utterance operates not as a questioning expositive, but as an attitude-expressing behabitive act.

The comments grouped under this sub-pattern also indicate that negative inferences regarding the background of the political authority’s refugee policy are produced in close connection with a perceived inconsistency. Here, the focus shifts away from the decision itself toward evaluations of why such a decision was made. Users interpret the decision not through inquiries grounded in verifiable information, but through inferential narratives structured around assumptions of vote-seeking, electoral strategy, and material interests. Such discourses display expositive characteristics insofar as they explain and interpret a situation in speech-act terms. However, these explanations are not supported by demands for verifiable information or by opposing views. Rather, they circulate as inferential

claims that reinforce existing distrust and negative evaluations. For this reason, perceived inconsistency functions not as an object of clarification, but as a discursive trigger for attitudes grounded in distrust, blame, and sarcasm.

The fourth sub-pattern consists of broader evaluative attitudes toward political authority. In these comments, the perceived inconsistency is further transformed into more general judgments about political responsibility, public neglect, electoral consequences, and the political authority's relation to citizens. In the comments under the posts shared by TRT News, the view that the political authority's statements may be detrimental in electoral terms is often expressed through sadness and disappointment. In some comments, however, trust in political authority appears to persist; this indicates that attitudes are not entirely uniform. Nevertheless, the discussion continues to be shaped primarily around emotional evaluations rather than verification-oriented exchange.

In contrast, the comments under Fox News posts display a markedly harsher tone of criticism. Anger, accusation, and exclusionary discourse become dominant in these comments. Expressions such as "First, take care of your own citizens" function as directive and expectation-laden calls, carrying an exercitive function, while also attributing responsibility to the political authority and therefore exhibiting commissive features as well. Statements written in capital letters, such as "HE IS AFRAID OF HIS NATION," offer a sarcastic and accusatory characterization, thereby performing a strong behabitive function. The use of capital letters, emojis, and exaggerated expressions intensifies the emotional charge of these evaluations and reinforces the attitudinal, rather than informational, nature of the discourse.

Comments forty-six and fifty-three further illustrate how evaluative reactions to the perceived inconsistency in refugee-policy statements are reinforced through tagging practices. In comment forty-six, the relevant statement is framed as a wrong decision in the context of the upcoming election; the tagged reply expands this evaluation by circulating the claim that the political authority no longer cares about the public and is likely to lose votes. Similarly, in comment fifty-three, support for refugees is linked to electoral calculations, and this claim is endorsed and intensified through tagging by another user in a more accusatory and hostile tone. In both cases, tagging does not generate a space for counterarguments or factual clarification. Instead, it functions to collectively reproduce and amplify negative attitudes toward the perceived inconsistency. The comments do not articulate a demand for verifiable information; rather, they enable the visibility of evaluations marked by distrust, anger, and blame.

Overall, the sub-patterns presented in the consolidated Table 5 demonstrate that a shared narrative regarding the reasons behind the decision on refugees is constructed not through a search for verifiable information, but through claims and inferences produced alongside sarcastic, cynical, and accusatory evaluations. Austin's speech act theory, in this context, serves less to rigidly assign comments to fixed categories than to make visible the illocutionary functions through which these utterances enter circulation. The circulation of information-like content occurs predominantly through behabitives, while expositives, commissives, verdictives, and exercitives assume secondary illocutionary roles that support and reinforce these attitudinal expressions. The consolidated table therefore makes the central pattern of the analysis more visible: attitudes, rather than information, occupy the central position in these comments, and evaluative and affective discourses prevail over any sustained pursuit of clarification or understanding.

4.4. Rhetorical Questions and Behabitive Force

A significant finding of the analysis concerns the illocutionary force of question-formatted utterances. Although some comments are formally structured as questions, their dominant function is not to request information,

clarification, or verification. In terms of the operational criteria established in the Methodology section, such utterances are not classified as expositives when they do not open an inquiry, invite an answer, or initiate an interactional search for knowledge. Rather, when they express distrust, sarcasm, accusation, or moral judgment, they are classified primarily as behabitives. In this respect, the analysis distinguishes between grammatical form and illocutionary force: the presence of a question mark does not necessarily indicate an information-seeking act.

As shown in the consolidated Table 5, reactions to perceived inconsistency are frequently articulated through rhetorical questioning and evaluative discourse. Following recent announcements suggesting that refugees would be sent back, the later statement that Syrians would not be sent back triggered comments that focused less on the substance of the decision than on the inconsistency between successive statements. In this context, users tend not to engage in a systematic inquiry aimed at clarifying the reasons behind the decision; rather, they dramatize the perception of inconsistency through emotionally charged and evaluative utterances.

This distinction is visible in comments such as “Did money come from Europe into the pocket?”, “Migrants equal votes?”, and “How can we believe you now?” On the surface, these utterances resemble information-seeking questions. However, in their local discursive context, they do not function as requests for factual clarification. Instead, they presuppose suspicion, dramatize inconsistency, and intensify accusatory positioning. The absence of responses, corrections, or verification-oriented exchanges further supports this interpretation. These questions do not produce a dialogic process through which claims are tested; rather, they make distrust publicly visible and reinforce an already established evaluative stance.

Expressions such as “I am not surprised at all,” “I’m really fed up with this guy,” and “One day you say he will leave, the other day you say you won’t send him” indicate that the perceived inconsistency is understood as an expected and normalized condition. Discourses constructed through irony and repetition directly articulate the speaker’s evaluation of the situation, along with feelings of fatigue and distrust. When assessed within the framework of Austin’s speech act theory, such expressions primarily function as behabitives, as they convey the speaker’s emotional stance and evaluative judgment. The comments also include predictions that this inconsistency will undermine electoral support and public trust in the political authority; however, these projections do not generate a discursive space aimed at producing verifiable knowledge. Instead, they function as rhetorical and evaluative devices that reinforce pre-existing negative evaluations.

The rhetorical question therefore becomes an important hybrid illocutionary form in the dataset. Grammatically, it appears as an interrogative; pragmatically, it operates as an attitude-expressing act. Its hybrid character lies in the fact that it borrows the form of inquiry while performing the force of accusation, sarcasm, or moral condemnation. This finding strengthens the central argument of the study by showing that information-like forms may circulate in online news comments without functioning as genuine information requests. In such cases, the question form does not contribute to deliberation, clarification, or verification; instead, it intensifies the behabitive force of the utterance by transforming suspicion, blame, and political distrust into a publicly visible stance.

This finding is theoretically important because it shows how the boundary between information-seeking and attitude expression becomes unstable in Instagram comment sections. A comment may formally resemble a request for knowledge while pragmatically functioning as a performance of affective and moral positioning. Therefore, the analysis of question-formatted utterances demonstrates that the circulation of information-like content in social media comments cannot be understood only through what users appear to ask, but must also be examined through what their utterances do in context. In this sense, rhetorical questions constitute one of the clearest examples of how behabitive force can dominate over expositive form in online public discourse.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

With the expansion of internet technologies, the impact of online communication on individuals and societies has become increasingly visible. The comment sections of news posts shared on the Instagram accounts of news organizations function as discursive spaces in which users publicly express their attitudes toward current political and social issues. Within this context, the present study examined 56 comments posted under two refugee-related news posts shared by Fox News and TRT News on Instagram to analyze how users respond to such news content and through which speech-act forms these responses are articulated.

The findings show that a large proportion of the comments consist of utterances expressing anger, complaint, sadness, disappointment, sarcasm, distrust, and condemnation. These comments display a marked emotional intensity that is often articulated through evaluative and accusatory discourse. When assessed within the framework of Austin's speech act theory, such utterances predominantly fall into the category of behabitives, since they primarily express attitudes, reactions, and evaluations rather than initiate genuine information exchange.

The analysis also shows that different speech-act types operate in combination. Some comments include explanations concerning the perceived social, political, and economic problems associated with refugees, while others articulate predictions about the possible consequences of not sending refugees back from Türkiye. These explanatory and inferential utterances may display expositive or verdictive dimensions; however, they often function less as verifiable knowledge claims than as speculative frameworks that reinforce existing negative attitudes. In this respect, the findings indicate that emotional evaluations, sarcastic remarks, and inferential claims are closely intertwined in the comment sections analyzed.

Question-formatted utterances are especially significant in this regard. Although such utterances may initially appear to seek clarification or information, the analyzed examples show that they largely do not function as genuine information requests. Rather, they operate as sarcastic, cynical, or accusatory evaluations in contexts where opposing views, corrections, or verification requests are largely absent. Therefore, these question forms are better understood not as interrogative expositives but as attitude-expressing behabitives that intensify distrust and emotional positioning.

Taken together, these findings answer the study's research questions by showing that Instagram news comments do not primarily operate as spaces of verification, clarification, or knowledge negotiation. Rather, they constitute discursive spaces in which claims, inferences, predictions, and emotional attitudes circulate together through overlapping illocutionary forms. Behabitives emerge as the dominant speech-act category, while expositives, verdictives, commissives, and exercitives assume secondary yet complementary functions. This speech-act configuration highlights the circulation potential of information-like content by intensifying attitudes and rendering claims visible, rather than by enabling the interactional testing of knowledge through verification, objection, or repair.

These findings have broader implications for theories of online public discourse. Rather than functioning primarily as deliberative spaces in which users exchange reasons, verify claims, or seek clarification, the Instagram comment sections examined in this study operate largely as spaces of performative stance-taking. Users do not simply respond to news content by transmitting information; they position themselves

affectively and morally toward refugees, political actors, and imagined publics. This finding complicates deliberative understandings of online public discourse by showing that comment sections may operate less as arenas of rational-critical exchange than as affective spaces of public positioning. In this respect, the study supports previous arguments that social media discussions have limited capacity for genuine knowledge exchange, while also shifting the emphasis from verdictive judgments to behavioristic reactions. Whereas Labinaz and Sbisà (2021) focus on the limits of knowledge dissemination in Facebook discussions through the dynamics of verdictives, the present study shows that, in refugee-related Instagram news comments, information-like claims gain visibility primarily through attitude-expressing acts, sarcastic evaluations, and speculative inferences.

The original contribution of this study lies in its examination of the circulation of information-like content not as verified knowledge production, but as an illocutionary process shaped by affective and evaluative forms of public response. The findings suggest that what circulates in these comment spaces is not verified knowledge, but claims, inferences, and predictions that gain visibility through repetition, emotional intensity, sarcasm, and accusation. This indicates that the circulation of information-like content in online news comments is inseparable from the affective dimension of public discourse. Affect functions not merely as an accompanying element but as a structuring force that conditions how claims become visible, repeatable, and socially resonant.

At the same time, the dataset contains claims with degrading, exclusionary, and potentially xenophobic characteristics. This shows that content circulating in online environments should be evaluated not only in terms of information flow, but also in relation to its potential to reproduce misinformation, stereotypes, prejudice, and exclusionary public attitudes. The dominance of behavioristic acts is therefore not only a linguistic finding; it also points to the ways in which online public discourse can transform political issues into emotionally charged performances of blame, resentment, and distrust.

This study has several limitations. It is based on a limited dataset drawn from two Instagram posts shared on a specific date and within a specific political context. In addition, user-to-user interaction in the analyzed comment sections remains relatively low, as most comments consist of single responses to the initial posts shared by the news organizations. Limited forms of interaction through tagging are observed in a small number of cases, most notably around comment number twenty and in comments forty-six and fifty-three. However, these exchanges tend to reinforce existing evaluative stances through sarcastic or accusatory extensions rather than produce verification, objection, clarification, or repair. For this reason, the study focuses on the illocutionary functions of individual utterances rather than sustained commenter-to-commenter interaction.

Future research may expand this analysis by using larger and comparative datasets across different social media platforms, news organizations, political topics, and national contexts. Such studies could examine whether the dominance of behavioristic acts varies according to platform affordances, moderation practices, algorithmic visibility, and the intensity of user-to-user interaction.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Ethical statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of scientific research and did not require additional ethics committee approval.

Declaration of AI usage

No generative AI tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

Data availability

The data analyzed in this study consist of publicly available Instagram comments under the posts cited in the references. Anonymized excerpts are presented in the article.

Author contributions

The author is solely responsible for the conception, research, writing, and revision of this manuscript.

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