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Honey and adulteration discourse in the media: A qualitative analysis from food safety and marketing communication perspectives

Fatih BİLİCİ

¹Department of Marketing and Advertising, Marketing Program, Mustafakemalpaşa Vocational School, Bursa Uludağ University, Bursa, Türkiye, E-mail: Bilici@uludag.edu.tr

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Abstract

This study examines how the issue of honey adulteration is represented in the online news and institutional texts relevant to Türkiye, combining perspectives on food safety and marketing communication. A dataset comprising 15 media texts and 1 official statement published between 2019 and 2025 was evaluated using qualitative content analysis and framing analysis. The findings show that honey adulteration is framed in the media discourse under five main frameworks: (1) scandal and crisis, (2) regulatory authority, (3) independent oversight and disclosure, (4) consumer guidance, and (5) reliability and authenticity (the reliable honey narrative). The scandal-and-crisis frame highlights risk and insecurity through expressions such as deception and blacklisting. The regulatory authority framework foregrounds institutional control and trust by emphasizing inspection capacity, laboratory testing, and state authority. Independent oversight and disclosure make themes of accountability, transparency, and social pressure visible through civil initiatives and public monitoring. The consumer guidance frame positions label reading, origin control, certification checks, and traceability as everyday signals of trust. Finally, the reliability and authenticity frame constructs a positive meaning world around local origin, certified quality schemes, and brand storytelling, implicitly positioning real honey as a premium and trustworthy category. The study reveals how media discourse establishes a risk-and-solution-based approach to brand trust, price perception, and origin image, and how transparency and trust-building are established in the honey sector.

Keywords: Honey, Adulteration, Food safety, Marketing communication, Media discourse

Medyada bal ve tağşiş söylemi: Gıda güvenliği ve pazarlama iletişimi perspektifinden nitel bir inceleme

Öz

Bu çalışma, gıda güvenliği ve pazarlama iletişimi perspektiflerini birleştirerek, balda tağşiş sorununun Türkiye ile ilgili çevrimiçi haberlerde ve kurumsal metinlerde nasıl temsil edildiğini incelemektedir. 2019-2025 yılları arasında yayınlanan 15 medya metni ve 1 resmî açıklamadan oluşan bir veri seti, nitel içerik analizi ve çerçeveleme analizi kullanılarak değerlendirilmiştir. Bulgular, balda tağşişin, medya söyleminde beş ana çerçeve altında ele alındığını göstermektedir: (1) skandal ve kriz, (2) düzenleyici otorite, (3) bağımsız denetim ve açıklama, (4) tüketici rehberliği ve (5) güvenilirlik ve orijinallik (güvenilir bal anlatısı). Skandal ve kriz çerçevesi, aldatma ve kara listeye alma gibi ifadelerle risk ve güvensizliği öne çıkarmaktadır. Düzenleyici otorite çerçevesi, denetim kapasitesi, laboratuvar testleri ve devlet otoritesini vurgulayarak kurumsal kontrol ve güveni ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Bağımsız denetim ve açıklama, sivil girişimler ve kamu izlemesi yoluyla hesap verebilirlik, şeffaflık ve sosyal baskı temalarını görünür hale getirmektedir. Tüketici rehberliği çerçevesi, etiket okuma, menşe kontrolü, sertifikasyon kontrolleri ve izlenebilirliği günlük güven sinyalleri olarak konumlandırmaktadır. Son olarak, güvenilirlik ve özgünlük çerçevesi, yerel köken, sertifikalı kalite şemaları ve marka hikâye anlatımı etrafında olumlu bir anlam dünyası oluşturarak, gerçek balı dolaylı olarak üstün ve güvenilir bir kategori olarak konumlandırmaktadır. Çalışma, medya söyleminin marka güveni, fiyat algısı ve köken imajına yönelik risk ve çözüm odaklı bir yaklaşımı nasıl oluşturduğunu ve bal sektöründe şeffaflık ve güven oluşturmanın nasıl sağlandığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bal, Tağşiş, Gıda güvenliği, Pazarlama iletişimi, Medya söylemi

INTRODUCTION

Adulteration and counterfeiting are prominent issues in food safety and marketing literature. In this type of counterfeiting, which is done for economic purposes, producers harm consumer health and safety, damage brand reputation, reduce trust in the product category, and negatively affect the country's image (Meerza and Gustafson 2020).

In this context, honey occupies a special place. Honey is often positioned as a premium product, marketed with promises of being natural, local, and healthy, price functions as a quality cue rather than a promise. The qualities of honey are also evaluated primarily by consumers' beliefs. Consumers cannot distinguish with the naked eye whether honey is natural, which flower or region it comes from, or whether it contains additives. Therefore, when evaluating honey quality, consumers consider marketing signals such as origin information, labels, certifications, brand reputation, and price (López-Galán and de-Magistris 2025).

Honey is the third-most-adulterated food, and the negative impact of this fraud on consumer confidence extends across the entire category (Zhou et al. 2018). In Türkiye, honey products frequently appear on the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's lists of counterfeit and adulterated products. According to statements by the Chamber of Food Engineers of the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB), honey is one of the most counterfeited products (Hürriyet Bigpara 2025).

Against this background, this study aims to analyse how honey adulteration is constructed in online news and institutional texts relevant to Türkiye and to discuss its implications for marketing communication and brand management. To operationalise this aim, the analysis is guided by three research questions: (RQ1) How is honey and adulteration represented in online news and institutional texts relevant to Türkiye? Through these themes, and within which discursive and marketing communication frameworks? (RQ2) How are brands, producers, retailers, and public authorities positioned in news texts, and to whom is responsibility attributed within this narrative? (RQ3) What potential marketing consequences are implied in these discourses in terms of brand trust, perceived quality, origin image, and consumer decision-making (e.g., brand switching, searching for local or organic honey, and shifts in price perception)?

Literature Review

Honey's high economic value, consumers' inability to directly verify its composition, and the complexity of global supply chains create an environment conducive to adulteration. This situation also has significant consequences for brand reputation, consumer confidence, and market sustainability. This section systematically summarises the definitional and regulatory dimensions of honey

adulteration, the representation of food safety risks in the media, marketing elements in honey consumption, and the effects of food fraud on brand trust and consumer reactions, based on the existing literature.

Honey, Adulteration, and Food Fraud

In food legislation, counterfeiting is defined as presenting one product as another. In contrast, adulteration is defined as altering the composition of a product to gain an economic benefit and mislead consumers. (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry General Directorate of Food and Control n.d.) Adulteration in honey typically occurs by mixing corn, rice, or beet-based sugar syrups into honey and failing to declare this on the label (Bose and Manchikanti 2024).

Scientific studies have demonstrated that adulteration in the honey market results in chemical quality issues, global pricing disparities, barriers to entry into export markets, and financial losses for honest producers (Zhou et al. 2018). High adulteration rates, particularly in imported honey and honey blends, have led to stricter rules on origin labelling and traceability in markets such as the EU (European Commission DG Health and Food Safety n.d.).

In Türkiye, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry publishes the names of companies, brands, product names, and batch numbers of products confirmed to be counterfeit or adulterated through laboratory analysis on its official website (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, General Directorate of Food and Control n.d.). Current lists indicate that honey is one of the most frequently exposed product groups, alongside olive oil and meat-dairy products, with some brands appearing multiple times across different years. (Hürriyet Bigpara 2025)

In its statements, the Chamber of Food Engineers of the Turkish Chamber of Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) emphasizes that counterfeiting and adulteration should not be seen merely as labelling violations, but as a structural problem in terms of food safety culture, inspection capacity, and the deterrent effect of sanctions. (TMMOB Chamber of Food Engineers 2024a)

Media Coverage, Consumer Trust, and Food Fraud

The media is the primary source of information on food safety risks for the public. Numerous studies have shown that media representations of food scandals shape consumers' trust in the food system and regulatory agencies. For example, in the horse meat scandal in the UK, media reports made food fraud widely visible, reinforcing consumers' feelings of deception and increasing general distrust of the food system. (Food Standards Agency n.d.)

Even if food fraud incidents do not pose a direct health risk, media attention can lead to a decline in

brand trust, uncertainty at the category level, and scepticism about label claims (Meerza and Gustafson 2020). From a marketing communication perspective, this situation makes crisis communication, brand protection, and trust-building integral to the food safety agenda.

Marketing Signals and Consumer Decision-Making in Honey

When evaluating honey quality, consumers consider experiential attributes (taste, smell, colour, consistency) (Bilici 2024, Bilici 2025) and belief attributes (origin, production method, organic or local certifications, brand reputation) (Bilici and Seren 2025, Sparacino et al. 2022). Recent studies have shown that local or origin labels for honey, light-colored and dark-colored honey perceptions, increase perceived quality and willingness to pay (WTP) (Bilici 2024, López-Galán and de-Magistris 2025), that quality schemes such as organic or protected designation of origin (PDO/PGI) hierarchically precede other labels in the consumer's mind (Di Vita et al. 2021), and that origin and traceability information becomes more important as concerns about counterfeiting increase (Mascarello et al. 2024).

These research findings reveal that label design, colour perception, emphasis on origin, certifications, and brand story are important marketing communication tools in honey marketing. The FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations) and similar organizations recommend that labels in honey marketing clearly indicate geographical origin, establish a region-product connection in the consumer's mind, and be designed as the first signal of trust (Bradbear 2009).

Food Fraud, Brand Trust, and Consumer Response

It is stated that food fraud incidents undermine consumer trust in specific brands and the food system as a whole, creating a sense of distrust that, in some cases, spreads to the entire category. Experimental studies show that awareness of food fraud can reduce consumers' willingness to pay and increase their tendency to view label claims with suspicion, even for products that previously enjoyed high prestige (Meerza and Gustafson 2020).

In the case of honey specifically, counterfeiting results in income loss for honest producers and disrupts the overall market price structure. Therefore, combating counterfeiting can be considered a mandatory marketing strategy for brand protection and the sustainability of the sector (Fakhlai et al. 2020). Organisations such as SGS (Société Générale de Surveillance) indicate that authenticity testing and certification against food fraud can be used as a marketing communication tool to rebuild brand trust (SGS 2020).

Conceptual Framework

Food Fraud, Information Asymmetry, and Marketing

From a marketing theory perspective, honey is among the trusted products where strong information asymmetry exists, and quality characteristics can only be understood through long-term experience or expert analysis. For such products, consumers cannot directly observe product quality and therefore rely on various indirect indicators, i.e., quality signals, when making purchasing decisions. Brand reputation, product origin, geographical indications, organic or other quality certifications, price level, and distribution channel are among the most important of these signals (López-Galán and de Magistris 2025). Honey adulteration exploits this information asymmetry, undermining consumer trust and enabling the sale of low-quality or counterfeit products at the price of genuine honey. Therefore, honey adulteration should be addressed as a comprehensive problem area with significant implications for marketing ethics, brand trust, and long-term customer relationships, in addition to being a technical issue of food safety and regulatory compliance.

Representation and Framing Theory in the Media

Framing theory posits that the media, while conveying what is happening by presenting events within specific patterns of meaning, also significantly influence what the problem is, who is considered guilty or responsible, who is placed in the position of victim, and which solutions are deemed legitimate (Entman 1993). The frames used in news stories about food fraud describe technical violations and legal processes, while also creating implicit marketing messages about brands, the industry, and public authorities. For example, statements such as "Brand X is unreliable," "local honey is safer," "the state is conducting strong and effective oversight," or "consumers must protect themselves" become frames embedded within the news discourse that shape perceptions and attitudes. Media content thus functions as a symbolic space that reconstructs risk perception and trust in specific brands and sources. Building on these theoretical lenses, the study operationalises a marketing-communication-oriented analytical framework; the operational definitions, evidence criteria, and coding logic are presented in the Materials and Methods section.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-exploratory qualitative media analysis. Using a framing-oriented and qualitative content analysis approach, publicly available online news and institutional texts relevant to Türkiye were examined to identify dominant frames and discursive themes around honey adulteration, actor positioning and responsibility

attributions (brands, producers, retailers, and public authorities), and implied marketing consequences for brand trust, perceived quality, origin image, and consumer decision-making. (Entman 1993, Hsieh and Shannon 2005)

Sample and Data Collection

The data set in this study was created using a purposive sampling approach. Although the study uses a purposive sampling logic to ensure maximum variation across actor types, the corpus was identified through a structured search-and-screening procedure to transparently document how the final texts were reached. The screening counts are reported to enhance auditability, while the final inclusion reflects qualitative richness and suitability of framing. A pool of online news and institutional texts was compiled using Google and the internal search engines of relevant websites. The corpus primarily consisted of Turkish-language content published between 2019 and 2025, but also included a limited number of selected international English-language items when they directly addressed honey adulteration, consumer guidance, or market trust issues relevant to the Turkish case and enriched frame comparison.

The keywords honey, fake honey, adulteration of honey, list of fraudulent foods, counterfeit, and adulteration were preferred in the search. News items focusing directly on honey counterfeiting and content indirectly mentioning honey within the framework of food counterfeiting were identified. The texts obtained from this initial screening were narrowed by eliminating duplicates and very short announcements, and texts that met certain qualitative criteria were included in the analysis. At this stage, the specific qualitative criteria referred to were defined as follows: the text must focus primarily on honey or honey adulteration, meaning that honey must be the main issue of the news story, rather than being mentioned as a secondary reference.

Secondly, the news text must have a certain narrative depth, containing at least a few paragraphs explaining the context of the event, the parties involved (e.g., ministry, producer, brand, consumer, expert opinion), and the possible consequences, thus distinguishing it from shortlist announcements or informational notes that do not exceed a single paragraph. Thirdly, the text must present an editorial framework, i.e., it must go beyond the bare facts of the event and include interpretive statements such as attribution of responsibility, definition of victims, proposed solutions, or warnings to consumers, providing a structure conducive to framing analysis.

Fourth, it was preferred that the source belong to a verifiable publication such as an institutional news site, agency, newspaper, or magazine, and that content from anonymous blogs, personal social media posts, or platforms that are difficult to verify be excluded from the scope of this study. Finally, in cases where the same content was reproduced

across different media with minor headline changes, the most comprehensive version, containing the most contextual information and historically the first published, was retained as the unit of analysis, thus ensuring the richness and originality of the dataset.

The inclusion criteria were briefly determined in line with the objectives of the study as follows: (i) the text directly addresses honey or treats honey as a meaningful example within the discourse of food fraud, (ii) Establishing a clear connection with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's lists of counterfeits and adulterants or indirectly discussing these lists, (iii) Providing a framework containing warnings, guidance, or commentary for consumers, and (iv) Discussing honey fraud as a technical food safety issue at the level of producers, the industry, professional organizations, or local actors. Notes that did not meet these criteria, such as short agency passes or verbatim copies of the same news item on different websites, were excluded from the dataset.

At the end of this process, a total of 15 news articles were selected to represent different perspectives. Some of these were texts published on national news sites reporting on the Ministry's lists of counterfeits and adulterants under headlines such as blacklist, food fraudsters, or scandal. Others were from healthy living and lifestyle-focused sites offering practical guidance to readers with headlines such as is your honey fake? "tests you can do at home," providing practical guidance to readers. The remaining portion consists of texts discussing honey fraud from the perspective of producers, the sector, and the local economy, found on professional organisations, sectoral portals, and local or regional news sites. This ensures the dataset is diverse, including the discourse of specialized and local media outlets alongside that of the national mainstream media.

The 15 news articles used in the study are grouped into three main categories based on content and source type. The first group comprises national news sites that report on the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's lists of counterfeit and adulterated products. In this context, the news published on SonDakika.com announcing the Ministry's current list with the phrase "food fraudsters," the text in Hürriyet Bigpara listing the brands one by one with an emphasis on the blacklist, and the content in Söylem.com.tr, which centers on two well-known honey brands and frames the scandal around the phrase "the honey was not honey," and the text by Gıda Dedektifi, which details the same list and specifically positions companies producing fake honey as actors deceiving consumers, have been included in the analysis. In addition, a news story reporting on adulteration in a product other than honey (e.g., the food coloring scandal in tea) and reproducing similar scandal/blacklist rhetoric, along with an Anadolu Agency news story focusing on analyses conducted at a facility aimed at preventing adulteration and counterfeiting in honey, offering a

more technical and institutional framework, were also evaluated with this group. This created a core cluster of seven texts showing how the Ministry's list was framed at the national level.

The second group comprises content that establishes the distinction between real honey and fake honey, primarily through consumer guidance and everyday practices. This group includes a text published on a lifestyle-focused portal that asks readers, "Is your honey fake?" through simple tests that can be performed at home (burning test, water test, etc.), as well as news articles featured in digital news outlets that highlight the theme of label literacy and explain how to check geographical indications, producer information, and content information. Additionally, this group includes a health and wellness article explaining the key points for recognizing real honey based on its physical properties (such as fluidity, smell, and crystallization), as well as an economic news article discussing honey in terms of price and warning consumers against the trap of cheap products using examples of honey sold well below market price. These five texts are significant because they illustrate how the phenomenon of honey adulteration is presented in the media through scandals and exposés, while also serving as a guide for addressing the issue and protecting oneself.

The third group comprises texts from professional organizations, industry portals, and local or regional media outlets. The press release by the Chamber of Food Engineers of the Turkish Chamber of Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) regarding the list of counterfeits and adulterants published by the Ministry and its statement emphasizing that counterfeiting and adulteration must be prevented for food safety were included in the set because they addressed fraud in the context of legislation, supervision, and sanctions, including honey samples. In addition, a commentary-news article published on a food-focused industry news site discussing honey counterfeiting through production processes, supply chains, and laboratory technologies, the reactions of honey producers to blacklist news, and the effects of the distinction between honest producers – counterfeiters on sectoral legitimacy, as well as a news article on a local news site revealing how small-scale honey producers perceive the discourse on fake honey in the national media. This enables a comprehensive analysis of how professional organizations, sectoral expertise platforms, and local actors assess honey and adulteration, in conjunction with the national mainstream news discourse.

In addition to the news texts, the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's press release titled "Fake Honey Claims in Parliament" was treated as a separate category in the study. This document facilitates comparison with news discourse by revealing the official state discourse on honey and adulteration debates and how the risk is defined.

Therefore, the analysis is designed to examine how media actors frame honey and adulteration on the one hand, while allowing us to see how the same phenomenon is reconstituted in official institutional language on the other. The study opted for text-based coding rather than event-based coding, treating texts that differ in language and framing as separate units of analysis, even if they relate to the same event.

The dataset analysed in this study comprises various types of complementary online content. First, news articles published on national news sites with attention-grabbing headlines emphasizing crisis, such as "7 more products on the blacklist! Ministry reveals them one by one," and "Ministry exposes honey brands one by one" (Hürriyet Bigpara 2025), were included. In addition, content on news portals and comment sites that addresses honey fraud in a more narrative and critical tone, such as "A sweet deception: The honey did not turn out to be honey!" (Söylem 2024), adds a layer that enriches the study's framing analysis. To reflect the consumer perspective and civil oversight dimension, analyses of adulteration lists published by civil initiatives, such as Gıda Dedektifi (Food Detective), were also included in the dataset (Gıda Dedektifi 2024).

Representing the professional and institutional expertise perspective, the Chamber of Food Engineers of TMMOB's assessments and explanations of the counterfeit and adulterated lists were also included in the analysis (Chamber of Food Engineers of TMMOB 2024b). Finally, the official lists of counterfeit or adulterated foods and the public announcements published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's Food and Control General Directorate served as the primary reference point for establishing the normative and legal context (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Food and Control General Directorate n.d.). In this screening process, an initial N = 176 records were identified through searches of online news outlets and official channels in Türkiye. After duplicate checking, N = 43 repeated records were removed.

During title and abstract screening, 112 records were excluded for failing to meet eligibility criteria. The most common reasons for exclusion were that the items were blog-style content, press-release re-publications, or general food adulteration coverage without a clear honey focus. Next, N = 21 full texts were assessed for eligibility, and N = 5 texts were excluded at this stage due to being personal opinion pieces, press-release-only texts, lacking relevance to Türkiye, or insufficient focus on honey adulteration as the core issue. Following all exclusions, the final dataset consisted of 15 news articles and one official announcement (from the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2019), which were subjected to detailed framing analysis within the scope of the study. The table containing the 16 texts used as the dataset is presented in Table 1

below. Although the dataset was constructed around Türkiye-centred media discourse, it intentionally included a small number of international items to capture how honey adulteration and authenticity

cues circulate beyond national media boundaries and to compare these with domestic framing patterns.

Table 1: News and Content Sources and Publication Dates (2019–2025)

Number	Publication Date	Source
1	18 May 2025	Anadolu Agency (2025)
2	2 December 2025	Dünya Newspaper (2025)
3	20 October 2025	Euronews (2025)
4	2 October 2024	Food Detective (Gıda Dedektifi) (2024)
5	13 November 2025	Hürriyet Bigpara (2025)
6	24 November 2023	Memurlar (2023)
7	28 January 2021	Milliyet (2021)
8	23 November 2019	Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (2019)
9	25 September 2025	Son Dakika (Breaking News) (2025)
10	14 November 2024	Söylem (2024)
11	29 October 2025	Times of India (2025)
12	3 October 2024	TMMOB Chamber of Food Engineers (2024b)
13	30 November 2024	Ungoed-Thomas (2024)
14	1 December 2025	Van Haber (2025)
15	12 February 2025	Yeni Akit (2025)
16	2 October 2024	Yeni Şafak (2024)

Analytical Framework (Marketing-Communication-Oriented Model)

This study analyses news about honey adulteration using a three-layer analytical framework. First, media discourse is examined via a framing lens along the axes of scandal and crisis, regulatory authority, independent oversight and disclosure, and consumer guidance and reliability/authenticity, enabling identification of which actors are foregrounded, how responsibility is attributed, and who is positioned as a solution provider. Second, the analysis considers the cognitive and emotional responses such reports may trigger (e.g., risk perception, perceived deception, anger, anxiety) and discusses how these responses can shape food-related decision processes. Third, the framework addresses marketing outcomes by interpreting how the discourse may influence brand-level trust, generalised trust in the honey category, segment shifts toward local/organic/geographically indicated honey, and changes in price sensitivity and willingness to pay.

Analysis Process and Marketing Communication Focused Coding

The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis and framing analysis in an iterative, transparent manner.

First, open coding was applied to each text to identify (i) risk definitions (health risk, deception, economic loss), (ii) key actors (brands, producers, regulators, civil initiatives, experts), (iii) rhetorical devices and

metaphors (e.g., blacklist, sweet deception), (iv) recommended consumer behaviours (e.g., label reading, origin checks, complaint hotlines), and (v) marketing communication cues (e.g., brand naming, origin and locality claims, certification logos, traceability references, price-quality cues). These first-order codes were consolidated into a codebook (Table 2) that specifies code definitions, inclusion–exclusion rules, and exemplary indicators.

Second, axial coding was conducted to cluster the codes into higher-level themes (e.g., scandal and crisis rhetoric, state control and regulatory trust, disclosure and reputational sanctions, consumer empowerment and guidance, local authenticity and certified quality). Third, framing analysis was performed by mapping each text onto the framing components (problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and remedy suggestion) and assigning it to one dominant frame. All coding and frame assignment were conducted by a single researcher using a structured codebook. For dominant-frame assignment, each text was evaluated against Entman's (1993) framing components (problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and remedy suggestion).

The dominant frame was defined as the frame that most comprehensively organized these four components in the text. In borderline cases where multiple frames were present, the decision rule prioritized (i) the emphasis in problem definition and remedy statements and (ii) the density of frame indicators; secondary frames were noted in analytic

memos. As a result, five main media frames were identified: (1) scandal and crisis, (2) regulatory authority, (3) independent oversight and disclosure, (4) consumer guidance, and (5) reliability and authenticity (the reliable honey narrative). The frame matrix (Table 3) reports the analytical logic of frame construction by displaying the dominant themes,

typical indicators, and the corresponding framing components for each frame. To strengthen dependability (intra-coder test–retest reliability), the full corpus was re-coded by the same researcher after a time interval, and inconsistencies were resolved by revisiting the codebook rules and analytic memos.

Table 2: Coding Scheme (Codebook) Used in Qualitative Content Analysis

Code family	Code	Operational definition (evidence criteria)	Typical indicators / example expressions	Link to marketing communication construct
Risk and scandal rhetoric	Blacklist/Exposure	Text frames honey fraud as a public scandal via naming-and-shaming lists	Blacklist, exposed brands, food fraudsters	Crisis framing, negative brand meaning transfer
Risk and scandal rhetoric	Deception/Victimhood	Emphasizes consumers being deceived / betrayed	Sweet deception, honey that is not honey, they fooled consumers	Trust erosion, perceived quality decline
Risk and scandal rhetoric	Health threat	Implies health harm or poison discourse	Not honey but poison, risk to public health	Risk communication, fear appeal
Regulatory authority	Inspection capacity	Highlights inspections, lab tests, number of analyses, legal basis	40k analyses, laboratory confirmed, Law/inspection authority	Institutional trust cue
Regulatory authority	Sanctions/Deterrence	Mentions penalties, enforcement, deterrence	Sanction, penalty, will be prosecuted	Credibility of regulation as trust signal
Independent oversight and disclosure	Civil monitoring	Civil actors interpret official lists and amplify accountability	Food Detective analysis, repeat offenders, social media pressure	Transparency discourse, reputational mechanism
Independent oversight and disclosure	Accountability pressure	Encourages boycott, public warning, reputational punishment	Don't buy, share this, name and shame	WOM/earned media, reputational risk
Consumer guidance	Label literacy	Advises label reading and information checks	Origin, producer, batch no., GI (Geographical Indications)/organic logos	Information architecture as trust cue
Consumer guidance	Traceability tools	Mentions QR, tracking, verification mechanisms	QR code, traceability, verification	Signal strengthening, proof-of-authenticity
Consumer guidance	Home tests (limited)	Mentions simple tests but notes limitations	Water test, flame test, not a substitute for lab	Consumer empowerment (bounded)
Reliability and authenticity	Local origin narrative	Constructs real honey around locality/domestic production	Local honey, domestic, beekeepers	Country/region-of-origin meaning
Reliability and authenticity	Certified quality schemes	Positions certified products as premium and trustworthy	GI, organic, certified	Quality signalling, premium positioning
Reliability and authenticity	Brand story / authenticity	Emphasizes producer story, authenticity, pure/natural identity	Authentic, pure, natural, producer story	Storytelling-based branding, authenticity framing
Price and market meaning (cross-cutting)	Price suspicion	Uses price as a cue of fraud or quality	Too cheap, below market price	Price–quality inference, WTP effects

Table 3: Frame Matrix (Framing Components, Themes, and Indicators)

Frame (dominant)	Problem definition	Causal attribution	Moral evaluation	Remedy / solution	Dominant themes and indicators	Marketing communication implication
1) Scandal and crisis	Honey is widely fake, consumers are at risk	Fraudulent firms, food scammers, unethical producers	Outrage, betrayal, fear, category-level distrust	Public warning, boycott, exposure	Blacklist, sweet deception, not honey, dramatic headlines	Rapid erosion of brand/category trust, crisis meaning spreads to honest brands
2) Regulatory authority	Fraud exists but the state controls it	Counterfeiters as rule-breakers, regulator as protector	Legitimacy of inspections, institutional competence	Inspections, lab tests, sanctions, complaint hotlines	Ministry announced, analyses, official list, legal references	Builds institutional trust cues, can stabilize category trust over time
3) Independent oversight and disclosure	Fraud must be made visible and accountable	Repeat offenders, weak deterrence, public pressure as tool	Accountability, transparency, reputational justice	Naming-and-shaming, civil monitoring, social media pressure	Civil initiative analyses, repeat on list, detailed brand/batch exposure	Reputation management becomes central, transparency becomes a competitive value
4) Consumer guidance	Consumers need tools to protect themselves	Information asymmetry, misleading labels, consumer vulnerability	Empowerment through literacy, cautious skepticism	Label reading, origin/certification checks, traceability, reporting	GI/organic logos, batch no., producer info, avoid cheap honey, limited home tests	Trust is negotiated via signals, label design and proof claims gain strategic weight
5) Reliability and authenticity (The Reliable Honey Narrative)	Real honey is identifiable via authenticity cues	Industrial blends/imported mixtures framed as suspicious, honest local producers valorized	Authenticity, purity, local labour, moral preference for 'real/local'	Preference for local/certified honey, storytelling and proof-of-origin	Local/domestic, authentic/pure, GI-organic, producer story, origin pride	Positive meaning construction, premium positioning, storytelling strengthens trust transfer

RESULTS

The findings are based on a Türkiye-centred corpus that includes predominantly domestic texts, together with a limited number of selected international items used to enrich the comparative frame. To ensure alignment with the research questions, the results are presented in two layers. First, the dominant themes and discursive frames used to represent honey adulteration are reported (RQ1). Second, actor positioning and responsibility attributions across brands, producers, retailers, and public authorities are presented (RQ2). Interpretive implications for marketing communication, brand trust, perceived quality, origin image, and consumer decision-making are addressed in the Discussion section (RQ3).

Scandal and Crisis Framework: "A Sweet Deception" and Category-Level Distrust

News stories about honey adulteration feature metaphorical and dramatic headlines such as "blacklist," "a sweet deception," and "honey that wasn't honey." News spots emphasise feelings of

shock, betrayal, and deception with statements such as "products threatening public health," "honey that isn't honey," and "two famous brands on the blacklist" (Hürriyet Bigpara 2025). Within this discourse, the naming of individual companies and brands, combined with the mention that some have appeared on similar lists before, reinforces public perceptions of repeated crime and chronic distrust (Gıda Dedektifi 2024). At the category level, this situation leads to questions such as "is honey counterfeit?" and "is honey reliable?" being brought to the fore, and cases of counterfeiting cease to be a problem limited to specific brands, becoming a general framework that opens up the reliability of the entire honey market to debate (Ungoed-Thomas 2024).

Regulatory Authority Framework: The State Monitors, Brands Are Exposed

It can be stated that the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is at the centre of honey and adulteration news on most news sites. Headlines such as "The Ministry announced one by one," "The list of counterfeits and adulterated products has been

updated," and "Honey brands have been exposed" produce a robust media discourse that positions the state as an active, supervising, and consumer-protecting authority (Hürriyet Bigpara 2025). In this context, institutional legitimacy is reinforced through the frequency of inspections, the number of samples collected, and references to official control regulations under Law No. 5996. In this way, the Ministry is portrayed as a supervisory actor with a robust legal foundation and a high level of technical expertise. Calls to report to Alo 174 and choose packaged products transform citizens from passive observers of the inspection mechanism into active components of the process (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, General Directorate of Food and Control n.d.).

Independent Monitoring and Disclosure Framework: Consumer Activism

Civil monitoring actors such as Gıda Dedektifi (Food Detective) provide detailed analysis of the adulteration lists published by the Ministry, offering information such as which brands have how many batches of products on the list, in which provinces and districts these products are concentrated, and how many times the same company has appeared on previous lists. In this way, these and similar organisations make official disclosure lists more visible and easier for the public to interpret (Gıda Dedektifi 2024).

Consumer Guidance Framework: Label Reading, Origin Control, and Search for Real Honey

Some news stories about honey fraud offer practical recommendations to empower consumers. This content emphasises the importance of choosing packaged products and well-known brands, carefully checking the information on the label, such as origin, producer name, expiration date, and batch number, and reporting suspicious products to the ALO 174 hotline (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, General Directorate of Food and Control n.d.).

International news reports mention simple home tests, such as fluidity, solubility in water, and flame tests, to determine the purity of honey. However, it is clearly stated that the validity of these methods is limited and that they cannot replace laboratory analysis (Times of India 2025).

The Reliable Honey Narrative: Local Origin, Certification, and Brand Story

Even if specific honey brands are not directly praised in a significant portion of the news, a clear reliable-honey narrative is constructed between the lines. In this discourse, emphasis is often placed on domestic and local honey, while counterfeiting is associated with imported mixtures and industrial-grade mixed products (Zhou et al. 2018). Similarly, geographically marked and organically certified honeys are mostly presented in news discourse as premium and relatively more reliable products.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that media discourse on honey adulteration does not merely communicate a food safety issue. It also reconstructs trust signals, perceived quality, the original image, and the symbolic meaning of honey as a market category. In this sense, the identified frames operate not only as representations of risk but also as mechanisms that shape brand meanings, consumer judgment, and the boundaries of trust in the honey market.

From a marketing communication perspective, the scandal-and-crisis frame indicates that trust at the category level is highly fragile. In the short term, scandal-driven language can prompt more conscious consumer practices, such as reading labels, questioning brands, and paying closer attention to product origins. In the longer term, however, the repeated discourse of "fake honey" and "exposed brands" may generate generalised distrust toward the entire honey category, including firms that comply with standards. This may weaken brand value and reduce honey's competitive strength in both domestic and export markets (Fakhlai et al. 2020).

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's published lists also serve as a strong differentiation mechanism for brands. In the short term, these lists may damage the image of listed brands while providing a relative trust advantage to brands not publicly exposed. In the longer term, however, repeated inspections and public disclosure can generate a category-level safety signal by showing that the regulatory system is operating. If consumers perceive the system as transparent and functional, trust in the honey category may not collapse entirely, although it may become more conditional and sensitive (Djekic and Smigic 2024).

The role of Gıda Dedektifi and similar civil initiatives highlights how disclosure extends beyond official communication. By detailing which brands appear on the lists, with which product batches, and how often, these actors intensify reputational pressure and transform consumers into active market participants who interpret information, share warnings, and sanction brands. This creates a deterrent effect for fraudulent firms, but it also makes proactive transparency, crisis management, and reputation-protection strategies indispensable for honest brands (SGS 2020).

Another implication concerns the strategic importance of labels, origin, and certifications. The consumer-guidance frame turns honey into a product category in which label content, origin information, and certification signals compete intensely. From a marketing perspective, this means that label design, origin emphasis, and digital traceability solutions, such as QR codes, become central to branding and trust-building. Technical regulations and traceability tools, therefore, evolve into powerful value propositions rather than

remaining only compliance mechanisms (Bradbear 2009).

News about honey counterfeiting also affects price perception, willingness to pay, and market segmentation. Such news can heighten suspicions about the price-quality relationship and encourage consumers to be more cautious about excessively cheap products. In this context, preferences for local, organic, and geographically marked honeys may strengthen premium segments and make it more difficult for low-priced counterfeit products to capture market share. At the same time, this trend may deepen the dilemma faced by low-income consumers seeking both safe and affordable honey (López-Galán and de Magistris 2025).

For honey brands and producer cooperatives, these findings indicate the need to operate with full awareness that they belong to a category with a high risk of adulteration. Authenticity tests, independent laboratory reports, emphasis on origin, and certification processes should be communicated as core messages. During crises, evidence-based communication strategies that transparently present testing protocols, supply-chain controls, and corrective actions are likely to be more credible than generic safety claims (SGS 2020).

These representations also have implications for journalists and media organisations. Although scandal-oriented coverage may attract attention in the short term, it can also undermine trust in the food system and in honest producers. A more balanced reporting practice would give greater room to laboratory methods, supply-chain controls, legislation, and enforcement mechanisms, while also highlighting solutions, best practices, and confidence-building measures (Food Standards Agency n.d.).

From the perspective of public institutions, the design and presentation format of lists of counterfeit and adulterated food also matter. Rather than publishing static PDF lists only, user-friendly interfaces that support filtering, mobile access, and batch-based inquiry tools could integrate regulatory disclosure into daily shopping routines. Stronger penalties for repeated violations and clearer public information mechanisms would also contribute to food safety and market fairness.

This study has several limitations. The analysis was conducted on a limited number of news articles and official statements and therefore does not claim to represent the entire media universe. It focused on online print media and excluded television news, social-media videos, and other audiovisual content. In addition, consumer and producer experiences were inferred from media discourse rather than from primary field data. Although the corpus was centred on texts relevant to Türkiye, it also included a small number of selected international items; therefore, the study does not claim to represent only domestic Turkish-language media output.

Future studies may track how honey-adulteration frames change over time through larger quantitative content analyses and how they respond to crisis periods or regulatory updates. Consumer surveys and experiments could test the effects of such news on brand trust, willingness to pay, and switching tendencies. Qualitative interviews with producers and retailers could also deepen understanding of how media representations influence branding, pricing, and product-positioning strategies.

Conclusion

This study examined how honey adulteration is addressed in online news and institutional texts relevant to Türkiye from the perspectives of food safety and marketing communication. The findings indicate that media discourse regarding honey adulteration is shaped around five main frameworks. These frameworks are: scandal and crisis; regulatory authority; independent inspection and disclosure; consumer guidance; and reliability and authenticity. These frameworks shape how trust, quality, origin, and authenticity are understood within the honey category. In this context, media discourse plays a dual role. While media discourse can erode trust at the category level due to the repeated emergence of adulteration cases, it can also encourage more discerning consumer behaviour and reinforce the perceived importance of certification, traceability, and corporate oversight. The study emphasises that while adulteration in honey is a food safety issue, it should also be addressed as a strategic communication and market management issue that affects brand positioning, perceived value, and the long-term sustainability of trust in the honey sector.

Artificial Intelligence Use Statement: This study did not utilise artificial intelligence tools, except for editing the bibliography and checking the language. The study complied with the ethical guidelines for the use of generative artificial intelligence in scientific research and publication activities of higher education institutions.

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Data availability: The data used and analyzed during the current study were obtained from publicly available news sources.

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