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The indebted consumer: a microsociological analysis of the non-performing loan market

El consumidor endeudado: un análisis microsociológico del mercado de préstamos morosos

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ABSTRACT

Despite efforts, default remains a reality of credit relations, leading to the emergence of non-performing loan (NPL) markets. In these markets, specialized firms purchase bad loans at discounted rates, aiming to collect debts or resell them. With unsecured consumer credits comprising a significant portion of NPL purchases, the exponential growth of the consumer credit market in Türkiye has exacerbated NPL issues. Following the 2001 banking crisis, the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund facilitated the sale of NPLs to asset management companies (AMCs), a practice later adopted by private banks. Defaulted borrowers lack control over the sale of their debts, often experiencing persistent contact from AMCs offering assistance. However, complaints regarding the quality and language of AMC services persist, underscoring issues of stigmatization and harassment. Drawing on netnographical research and discourse analysis, this study examines Goffman's frames through which AMCs restructure (in)formal default patterns in personal debt relations during NPL restructuring.

Keywords: default, non-performing loans, credit restructuring, frame analysis, netnography.

RESUMEN

El impago en las relaciones crediticias ha impulsado la creación de mercados de préstamos morosos, donde empresas especializadas compran préstamos dudosos a tipos de interés reducidos para cobrarlos o revenderlos. En Turquía, el crecimiento del mercado de crédito al consumo ha agravado los problemas de préstamos morosos. Tras la crisis bancaria de 2001, se permitió la venta de estos préstamos a empresas de gestión de activos (AMC). Los prestatarios morosos no controlan la venta de sus deudas y a menudo son contactados insistentemente por las AMC para garantizar la devolución de los préstamos. Persisten quejas sobre la calidad y el trato de las AMC, debido a prácticas de estigmatización y acoso. Este artículo, basado en investigación etnográfica y análisis del discurso, examina cómo las

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AMC reestructuran los patrones de incumplimiento de las deudas personales durante la reestructuración de préstamos dudosos mediante marcos de Goffman.

Palabras clave: moroso, préstamos morosos, reestructuración crediticia, análisis de marco, netnografía.

INTRODUCTION

The extensive literature on credit often views default as a deviant aspect of credit relations. Lenders use various strategies to manage risk and avoid or minimize defaults. Borrowers are encouraged to budget carefully to avoid being labeled as bad consumers. Legal, cultural, and religious factors all stigmatize default. Yet, default persists and isn't a dead end for debt relationships. Historically, responses to default include debt slavery, imprisonment, harassment, marginalization, debt collection, foreclosure, debt forgiveness, and credit restructuring.

While much scholarly attention has focused on default patterns, credit restructuring and debt collection are less studied. Although there are works dealing with those default patterns of personal debts from a sociological and anthropological point of view, these works revolve around the dynamic and complex relationship between debtors and creditors, emphasizing how debt restructuring and communication strategies shape this interaction (Bauman, 2010; Deville, 2013, 2015a, 2015b; Hochschild, 2012; Langley, 2008; Manning, 2000; Marron, 2009; Taylor, 2002; Trumbull, 2014; Yudin & Pavlyutkin, 2015; Mertens & Metz, 2022; Rao & McDonald, 2023).

The overall idea behind those works challenges the simplistic view of debt as purely exploitative, highlighting the bargaining power debtors possess through credit restructuring and the nuanced tactics creditors employ to ensure repayment. These strategies include extending credit to maintain customer loyalty, using social stigma, and employing polite but firm communication to encourage repayment. However, these works that are discussed briefly below are merely pointing either a macro or micro aspects of default patterns. A Goffmanesque frame analysis enables us to find a “loose coupling” that relates micro aspects of credit restructuring to the macro (power) structures of social life (Goffman, 1983, p. 11).

Debtors in Haiti, despite often being seen as exploited, hold significant bargaining power through credit restructuring, as merchants extend credit to creditworthy customers to maintain business relationships (Belshaw, 1965). This dynamic reveals that debt relationships combine both exploitation and strategic accommodation, as evidenced by the Mauritian Indian “rolling/roulement” system (Benedict, 1964) and the working-class families in Newcastle managing debts through partial payments and balance rollovers (Taylor, 2002), as well as farmers with seasonal incomes, whose extended credit periods can lead to higher prices and sometimes usury. Communication plays a key role, as creditors assess debtor behavior –whether reckless, unfortunate, or professional (Rock, 1968)– to decide on the course of action, and in small communities, face-to-face interactions allow for subtle yet effective pressure on defaulters (Yudin & Pavlyutkin, 2015). In the U.S., creditors exhibit more tolerance for delayed payments, assuming good intentions (Marron, 2009), while sellers factor in a certain default rate when setting prices (Caplowitz, 1967). Credit card systems show how revolving credit fosters a continuous debt cycle, benefiting banks through perpetual profits (Manning, 2000; Trumbull, 2014; Langley, 2008), though Bauman criticizes this for exploiting low-income individuals (Bauman, 2010). Meanwhile, non-performing loan (NPL) markets have emerged, where specialized companies buy bad loans at low prices, often using emotional tactics to pressure repayment, despite complaints about their services (Deville, 2013, 2015a, 2015b). Ultimately, debt collection mixes stigmatization, harassment, negotiation,

and compromise, illustrating the complex interplay between creditors, debtors, and broader social dynamics (Mertens & Metz, 2022).

In summary, while debt restructuring allows creditors to maintain customer relationships, it also grants debtors significant leverage. Effective communication and strategic use of social and emotional pressures are vital in managing and collecting debts. The works discussed briefly here points out all these micro aspects together with the macro, mostly political economical aspects. However, the link between these micro aspects and macro (power) structures is missing in these works. Relying on the data derived from ethnographical research employed in a debt collection training workshop for the AMC employees and a discourse analysis of the complaints of AMC customers posted to *Şikayetvar*, a customer complaint platform in Türkiye, this study aims at analyzing the Goffmanesque frames within which AMCs *restructure* both the (in)formal default patterns of personal debt relations while they restructure the non-performing loans. Goffman's frame analysis links interactional practices with social structures, collapsing them into broader categories (Goffman, 1983; Preda, 2017; MacKenzie, 2019). This linkage requires describing the structural aspects of credit restructuring.

Hence, this study employs a mixed-methods qualitative approach, combining a netnographic study of a debt collector training workshop with discourse analysis of debtor complaints on *Şikayetvar*, a Turkish consumer complaint platform. By analyzing both industry perspectives and debtor narratives, this research uncovers the discrepancies between the official discourse of AMCs and the lived experiences of defaulted borrowers.

The research aims to answer the following questions:

How do AMCs structure debtor interactions through communication strategies and financial incentives?

What tactics do AMCs employ to enforce repayment, and how do these practices align with or diverge from their public narratives?

How do debtors respond to AMC strategies, and what does this reveal about power dynamics in debt collection?

In what follows, the paper first presents the theoretical framework, drawing on Goffman. It then provides an overview of Türkiye's financial system and the role of AMCs in debt restructuring. The methodology section details the research design, followed by an analysis of findings from the workshop and debtor complaints. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for an understanding of consumer debt restructuring.

CONTEXT

Chaining yourself to the debtor's door: road to restructuring process

In the section of his book *Economy and Society* where he discusses the concept of "development of freedom of contract", Max Weber states that the debt is essentially a kind of interest-free emergency aid between brothers. The debt relationship, which is not between brothers, i.e., members of a kinship group or a guild, or as between patron and client, cannot be sued even though it is not subject to the prohibition of interest. Accordingly, if the debtor loses his loyalty to his debt, the only thing a creditor can do is to hope the help of magic. In China, the creditor would commit suicide and threaten that his soul would follow the debtor after his death. In India, the creditor would chain himself to the debtor's door and go on a death fast and force his children to take revenge if the debtor did not give up before he died (Weber, 1978, pp. 677-678). Anthropological studies

suggest that even the exorbitant interest rates of moneylenders were not considered strange in India, and it was believed that debtors who were crushed under these interest rates and could not pay their debts would become slaves or even horses or oxens of their creditors when they were reborn (Graeber, 2011, p. 12). In addition to anthropological and archaeological studies pointing to examples of slavery arising from debt in Mesopotamia, Africa, Far Asia, Americas and Europe (Chirichigno, 1993; Hudson, 2018; Rosenthal, 2018), the existence of debtors' prisons is also known during the emergence of the modern state. Although the practice of imprisoning the debtor and restricting his freedom has disappeared in many countries and in most cases, practices such as seizing the debtor's assets, enforcement and seizure still continue to exist. On the other hand, considering that interpersonal indebtedness is mostly verbal and organized through ties such as blood ties, neighbors, and colleagues, in such cases, mechanisms such as magical procedures and social exclusion and stigmatization mentioned above are in effect as a coercive force for the collection of unpaid debts.

Therefore, default resulted not only in legal mechanisms such as enforcement and seizure, but also in being faced with a deterioration of the debt payment record, exclusion from the credit market, or exorbitant interest rates applied by usurers or banks. This situation became a kind of financial expropriation, with a greater portion of people's disposable income going to interest payments, making the debtor's repayment capacity to become increasingly difficult with the exorbitant interest burdens he assumed. As a result of this cycle, which leads to a spiral of more debt and more exorbitant interest, credit records turned into credit scores and became a kind of "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Merton, 1968, p. 475 ff.). Within this vicious cycle, credit restructuring has been claimed to provide a way out. Apart from administrative and legal proceedings, another method followed for credits in default is restructuring. Restructuring involves financial and legal measures taken by both parties to get out of the current default situation with the least damage. While debtors avoid situations such as enforcement, foreclosure, and additional negative impacts on the credit score, the creditors seek ways to save at least the principal amount of the credit.

After the 2001 banking crisis in Türkiye, as a result of the real sector falling into trouble and increasing defaults, a restructuring program, inspired by the "London Approach"¹, called the "Istanbul Approach", was designed. The restructuring program was implemented with the approval of the "Financial Restructuring Framework Agreement" on June 4, 2002. Although it initially targeted commercial credits rather than consumers, over time, the Istanbul Approach guided similar restructuring efforts in consumer credits. The first and most well-known of these efforts was the Halkbank Debt Restructuring Program, which was launched in 2009 with the slogan "Take a Breath". Hüseyin Aydın, the then Halkbank General Manager, stated that the debts restructured for longer periods and based on current interest instead of default interest. This was "the debt restructuring program with the most favorable conditions to date". According to the program, additional interest discounts were offered to people who wanted to pay their debt in one lump sum within three months at the latest (Halkbank, 2009). In addition to such mass restructuring programs, there were also debts restructured according to individual demands. However, here the debtor must have met the essential conditions and applied, and the creditor bank must have approved this request. When restructuring is out of the question and due to the operational costs of overdue receivables, banks transfer the collection of these debts to various legal consultancy offices or remove these items from their balance sheets by selling the receivables altogether. The bidders for these overdue receivables in the secondary debt market are financial institutions known as Asset Management Companies (AMCs).

¹ The name given to the set of principles that was put into effect by the Bank of England in the 1970s and provides guidance with their recommendations –hence not legally binding– in the restructuring of the debts of companies that have fallen into financial difficulties.

“Setting the customers free”: how do AMCs define their service?

The Turkish financial system provides a compelling case for this analysis due to its unique historical and political context. The 2001 banking crisis led to widespread credit restructuring efforts, and the Global Financial Crisis further exacerbated household indebtedness. More recently, high inflation and economic instability under Erdoğan's administration have reshaped NPL markets, making Türkiye an important site for examining consumer debt restructuring².

In the NPL market, buyers are specialized companies purchasing bad-loans of banks and other financial firms for pennies-on-the-dollar. These bad-loan buyer firms either attempt to collect the debts or package these assets and sell to another bad-loan buyer firm. AMCs help banks free their balance sheets of NPLs so that banks can lend more to households and businesses, thereby improving their profitability and inducing economic growth by facilitating funding mechanisms.

AMC was established in accordance with the “Regulation on the Establishment and Operating Principles of Asset Management Companies” published by the Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BRSA) in the *Resmi Gazete* [Official Gazette] dated October 1, 2002 and numbered 24893, within the scope of the Law No. 4743 on the Restructuring of Debts to the Financial Sector. Turkish AMCs are licensed financial institutions subject to the regulations of the BRSA, the regulatory authority of the Turkish banking industry. By definition, they are joint stock companies incorporated to purchase, collect, restructure, and sell the NPLs of all financial institutions, including the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (SDIF). While there are no entry barriers, AMCs must obtain permission from the BRSA to initiate these core activities. The regulations also allow AMCs to issue securities (equities or bonds) with the sole objective of financing their core activities. If the AMC, which purchases at a price well below the Unpaid Principal Balance (UPB) value in the balance sheets of banks, cannot convince the debtor to restructure the NPL, it either collects the debt through legal means or sells these NPLs by securitizing them.

At this point it is very interesting to see how these AMCs define themselves. To gain an understanding of these self-definitions, the self-definitions of the two biggest AMCs can be cited here. Gelecek Varlık is the biggest AMC in the Turkish financial sector with its 25.6% share within cumulative UPB as of June 2023. The main shareholder of Gelecek Varlık is Fiba Group, which also established a commercial bank, Finansbank, in Türkiye in the early 2000s and sold it with a record sale to National Bank of Greece (NBG) in 2006³. Gelecek Varlık defines its mission as follows:

“Our mission is to *unchain* our customers from their debt burdens and help them reach *financial freedom*. Our vision is to contribute as much as possible to the economy by *reintegrating* debtors with innovative approaches. Our fundamental values are trust, effective communication, innovation, professionalism, and compromise” (Gelecek Varlık, 2024, emphases added).

The second biggest AMC in the sector, which has Vector Holding and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) among its main shareholders, is Dünya Varlık. Dünya Varlık with its 24% share of the cumulative UPB also defines its aim:

² While Islamic finance plays a role in Türkiye's financial sector, its impact on debt restructuring remains limited. Nonetheless, engaging briefly with this aspect in future researches may allow for a broader contextual understanding.

³ However, as the crisis hit Greece few years later, NBG sold it to Qatar National Bank (QNB).

“Our aim is to *set our customers free* and help them *achieve peace*. By using technology to provide a *unique customer experience* and adopting a customer-centered approach, Dünya Varlık distinguishes itself from other AMCs. Dünya Varlık leads its sector in transaction volume, number of employees and its investors such as EBRD and Vector Holdings” (Dünya Varlık, 2024, emphases added).

Based on such aims and missions AMCs dominate the NPL market and restructure, collect, and/or package the debts. Defaulted borrowers, who are marginalized and even excluded from financial system, are resuscitated by AMCs and re-integrated into the financial system. So goes the story.

Resuscitating the defaulted borrower: NPL market in Türkiye

The first sale of bad loans held by SDIF took place in November 2006, and in 2008, the sale of private banks' NPLs to AMCs was approved. So much so that the NPL sales market has grown steadily since 2006, and the NPL purchased by AMCs from banks reached TRY 8.6 billion in 2017. NPL sales, which started with TRY 1.7 billion in 2008, reached TRY 6.1 billion in 2014 after 22 banks, including İş Bankası, Yapı Kredi Bank, Akbank, Garanti Bank BBVA, QNB Finansbank, Denizbank and TEB-Paribas, put their NPLs up for sale by auction. Therefore, the loan package purchased by AMCs since private banks were allowed to sell NPLs in 2008 totaled approximately TRY 62.6 billion as of 2020, with year-on-year growth of 21.5% between 2008 and 2019. The market, which showed a steady upward trend after 2011, decreased only in 2015 because the price expected by the banks was much higher than the price offered by AMCs. According to data after 2008, the share of consumer credits in the total NPL sales volume until 2018 was 58% on average⁴.

In 2008, the price offered by AMCs in NPL sales was 19.7% of the UPB value. This high rate was due to the predominance of secured loans in the NPLs sold this year. As a matter of fact, in 2009, the price realized in NPL sales decreased to 10.2% of the UPB value. The reason for the increasing pricing rate after 2009 until 2013 was the intensified competition parallel to the increase in the number of AMCs. At the beginning of this period, the competition between the two major players of the market, Dünya and Gelecek Varlık, was decisive. However, with the establishment of Final Varlık and Efes Varlık in 2011, the competition and pricing rate increased. However, increasing AMC funding costs after 2013 and some organizations leaving the market, and acquisition and merger moves between some organizations have brought down the level of competition and pricing rate. In addition to increasing funding costs and decreasing competition, Tarmur and Cığızoğlu point out that the NPLs sold by banks consist of increasingly poor quality and difficult-to-collect credits. For all these reasons, the NPL pricing rate, which had a downward trend after 2013, reached 6.5% of the UPB value as of 2017 (Tarmur & Cığızoğlu, 2018, p. 14). As of March 2025, according to BRSA the number of registered and active AMCs has reached twenty-seven.

Over the years, banks started selling their NPLs on a regular basis (except for 2020), contributing to the increasing NPL sales volume. Although NPL sales have been increasing steadily between 2008 and 2019, and the largest NPL sales volume in terms of unpaid principal balance was in 2019 totaling TRY 15 billion, a decrease was experienced in 2020. This decrease was mostly due to: i) COVID-19-induced uncertainty (which prevented banks from initiating auctions); ii) stable NPL volume with the support of forbearance measures introduced by BRSA. NPL sales volume in 2021 and 2022 was TRY 5.7 billion and

⁴ However, BRSA's press release in September 2019 and its recommendation that approximately TRY 46 billion of loans given to the construction and energy sector should be converted into non-performing loans and removed from the balance sheets in a short time caused the rate of consumer credits in NPL sales to decrease.

TRY 12 billion, respectively. Total NPL sales exceeded TRY 85 billion as of June 2023. CEO of Gelecek Varlık, Sezin Ünlüdoğan, estimated that the total NPL sales would have been around TRY 16-20 billion for 2023 and the sector was expecting a dramatic increase in NPL sales in 2024-2025 (Dünya, 27 March 2023). In particular, EBRD's investment of TRY 100 billion in Dünya Varlık, the increasing non-performing loan rates in Türkiye, the increase in the share of non-bank financial institutions in the financial markets envisaged in the State's Medium Term Plan, close monitoring and the completion of legislative changes regarding the securitization of debts in the non-performing receivable group show signs that the NPL sales market will develop further. Yet this success story has missed a significant party within credit relationship, i.e. defaulted borrowers.

Defaulted borrowers have no say in whether and to whom their debts are sold. They just receive phone calls, letters, and e-mails from an AMC that offers a hand to save them from an ongoing default. Although the promotions of AMCs underline their well-mannered staff kindly helping borrowers in getting rid of the burden and stigma of defaulted debts, there are many complaints about the quality and the language of the services of AMCs. A netnographical research employed in a debt collector training workshop for the AMC employees revealed how an idealized and so-called craft of debt collection process has to be. Such an idealized description of debt collection and practical realities witnessed on debtors' complaints together assemble consumer credit restructuring as a social relationality.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Erving Goffman introduces the concept of "frame" as a cognitive structure influencing how individuals interpret social interactions. Frames consist of expectations, beliefs, or cultural norms guiding people's perceptions and interpretations. Goffman argues that individuals constantly engage in "frame analysis," actively reinterpreting situations based on their frames to understand complex social interactions and guide behavior (Goffman, 1986).

A "primary frame" is fundamental in Goffman's theory. It provides a basic interpretation of events, helping individuals understand "what is going on" and setting the context for appropriate behavior. Social frames, built on social conventions, roles, and norms, are used to interpret human interactions (Goffman, 1986, pp. 22-23). In credit restructuring, the primary frame might be "setting a debtor free from debt," guiding roles, actions, and expected behaviors such as politeness and cooperation. The social reality of occasions, however, might be a little bit more complex. To be able to explain such complexity, Goffman argues that individuals employ keyings, designs and fabrications, anchors and out of frame activities, and breaking frames.

Keying, borrowed from musicology, involves transforming an activity from its primary framework into something else perceived by participants (Goffman, 1986, p. 44). Examples include make-believe (pretending a different reality), contests (competitive contexts), ceremonials (symbolic gestures), technical redosings (practice or rehearsal), and regroundings (e.g., a wealthy matron working as a salesperson for charity). These methods transform primary frameworks into varied social interactions.

Sometimes, not keying but certain "design" and/or "fabrication" is employed by one party to influence or manipulate others' perceptions. Designs are planned actions or strategies to control impressions, while fabrications are intentional falsehoods aimed at misleading. "Whereas a keying intendedly leads all participants to have the same view of what is going on, a fabrication requires differences" (Goffman, 1986, p. 84). Understanding designs and fabrications is crucial as they show how social interactions are managed and controlled, whether through honest impression management or deceit.

Goffman also discusses “structural issues in fabrications,” referring to their transformations. “Just as keyings can be transformed into fabrications, so fabrications can be transformed into other fabrications; in brief, containment can be recontained” (Goffman, 1986, p. 162). One example is the Big Cons, where “the dupes are innocents misled by avarice into aiding a financial conspiracy, while the operators are criminals using elaborate props” (Goffman, 1986, p. 165).

“Out of frame activities” are actions that don’t align with the primary frame, disrupting or challenging the situation’s definition. These activities reveal the fluidity of social interactions and how individuals manage their performances. They also highlight power dynamics, social norms, and the processes maintaining or challenging social order (Goffman, 1986, pp. 202 ff.).

Still, there is so-called “anchoring” for all frames, whether it is natural or social framework. Since, according to Goffman, frameworks are “not just a matter of mind but correspond in some sense to the way in which an aspect of the activity itself is organized”. Hence, cognition does not create or generate certain organizational premises but it somehow arrives at such organizational premises. Goffman discusses that “anchoring” refers to the processes and elements that stabilize and define the frame within which activities occur, ensuring that participants understand and interpret their actions in a consistent and socially coherent manner (Goffman, 1986, p. 247).

Though Goffman’s conceptualization of individuals within frame analysis is seeing them either acting accurately according to frames or deceived and deluded, the individual also takes action, both verbal and physical based on the perceptions s/he has within framing s/he possesses. Since, frame organizes not only the meaning but also involvement. “During any spate of activity, participants will ordinarily not only obtain a sense of what is going on but will also (in some degree) become spontaneously engrossed, caught up, enthralled”. Given the fact that “involvement is an interlocking obligation”, a participant’s fail to maintain prescribed attention would trigger other participants’ awakenings (Goffman, 1986, pp. 345-346). In case of unmanageable occurs in which the frame cannot be applied. Goffman defines such cases as “breaking frames”. When a frame is broken, the shared understanding of the situation collapses, leading to confusion, disorientation, and often the need for redefinition of the situation. He asserts that although all social activities seem vulnerable to flooding outs and breakings, scripted dramatic presentations as will be seen in the case of debt collection and credit restructuring process are especially vulnerable owing to the complex frame structure they have (Goffman, 1986, p. 369). However, this complex structure is not the only reason behind the breaking frames. Individual might also break from the appropriate behavior a primary framework suggests because of becoming interactionally disorganized. Goffman sees such incidences when “a very hungry person suddenly exhibits naked voraciousness in his approach to food, when stimulated sexual interest turns to rape, when uneasy walking to an exit turns to a panicky race, when polite exchange of insults turns to all-out verbal attack, ... a downkeying in which the appearance of reserve discredited” (Goffman, 1986, p. 375).

“The manufacture of negative experience” refers to the ways in which negative experiences are deliberately created, structured, and presented within social interactions. This concept explores how certain interactions or situations are constructed to produce discomfort, embarrassment, or other negative feelings for the individuals involved. When an individual finds himself in a framed situation s/he tends to maintain some restraint on his/her direct, impulsive participation. Apart from affective reserve, there most probably will be a degree of cognitive reserve, a hint of uncertainty about the framework and changes, along with a slight willingness to consider the need to reframe the situation. Expecting to assume a role within a well-defined frame, s/he discovers that no specific framework is immediately suitable, or the framework s/he believed to be relevant no longer seems applicable, or s/he is unable to conform to the framework that does appear to fit. S/He loses control over creating an effective response and struggles. So what s/he

is experiencing turns out a “negative experience” in the sense that its essential nature is defined by what it is not (Goffman, 1986, pp. 378-379).

Goffman gives the example of stressful persuasion situations like police interrogation, which also resembles somehow a debt collection and/or credit restructuring process. Such types of negative experiences rely upon causing a participant to flood out. The debtor in our case here will be lose the control of the situation and become a subject of self-exposure and new relationship formations (Goffman, 1986, p. 385). Although the manufacture of negative experience often involves power dynamics, where those in positions of authority or dominance create situations that result in negative experiences for those with less power, for Goffman, there is also a room for what he calls “social sabotage”. Here, the frame breaks come from below. The discomforting and discrediting of an adversary by breaking the rules of the interaction frame a situationally (or maybe structurally as in the case of debtor) subordinate participant is supposed to maintain. These actions reveal more about the vulnerabilities of framed experiences than the organizational role of frame breaks (Goffman, 1986, pp. 425-426).

“The vulnerabilities of experience” pertains to the inherent uncertainties and risks involved in frameworks. Since any sequence of (inter)actions is tied to the frame of the experience and that this framing process has inherent weaknesses, the vulnerabilities of framing will also render the participant individual’s understanding of what is it that is going on is vulnerable as well. In many instances, only a minor shift in focus is needed to bring the vulnerabilities of framing into question. Here, instead of questioning “when to doubt a claimant and what can be done about checking up on claims”, Goffman examines the way we perceive the coherence of our world (Goffman, 1986, pp. 439-440). It is evident that a particular action or appearance can carry different interpretations on different occasions. For instance, someone cleaning off his/her dinner plate could be perceived as famished, courteous, indulgent, or thrifty, depending on the context. In a debt restructuring process a hand to save debtor from his/her burden can also be interpreted as a hand to strangle his/her neck to collect the maximum amount of money.

It is clear that everyone encounters ambiguities about frames and doubts about their role within those frames from time to time. Additionally, individuals can anticipate misframing events on occasion. Similarly, they may fall prey to deception and illusion, only later realizing these distortions of reality have occurred. As Goffman puts it:

...in everyday life people engage in a multitude of minor doctorings of the world –as when, for example, they arrange to turn up ‘accidentally’ at a place where they are likely to run into someone they secretly want to see; or provide a tactful lead into a question they want someone else to raise; or ask a question as part of a ‘natural’ series of questions so that it will appear that their interest is in the series, and hence general, and that they have no special and thus revealing interest in the particular question motivating the whole display (Goffman, 1986, pp. 444-445).

Such a minor doctoring can also be found in the credit restructuring process as the debt collectors’ training workshops reveal.

Overall, *Frame Analysis* provides a rich theoretical framework for understanding how individuals construct meaning, interpret social interactions, and navigate complex social environments through the use of cognitive frames, keyings, designs, fabrications and so on. Goffman’s insights provide a better understanding of “what is it that’s going on here” (1986, p. 8) in credit restructuring process by linking a micro/interactional aspects of the situation to macro/structural aspects of broader socio-political context.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This paper relies on a qualitative netnographic approach consisting of a participant observation at an online debt collector training workshop and a discourse analysis of 183 debtor complaints on *Şikayetvar*. Challenges in access limited direct engagement with AMC employees, making netnographic observation and consumer discourse analysis the most viable methods. As prior studies (Deville, 2015b; Rao & McDonald, 2023) have demonstrated, analyzing debtor complaints provides valuable insight into financial governance and consumer resistance.

As I was digging for the data of AMCs and NPL market in Türkiye, I saw an advertisement promoting the hints for an effective debt collection and persuasion process. I signed up for the event, paid the registration fee and got ready before the screen when the time came for the workshop sessions. The workshop was kind of a “101” to the debt collection craft as the trainer put it and seemed to me a demo for further training sessions that are supposed to attract the professionals. The workshop I attended online involved three sessions and took one day. The workshop was closed to the questions and any kind of interactions during the sessions. Yet, at the end the trainer welcomed questions regarding the hints he provided. My intention in attending this workshop was to get a sense of understanding of how debt collectors see their profession, how they define the process, and how they describe the debtors. Indeed, the workshop provided me an ideal typical picture of debt collection and credit restructuring process from the point of view of the collectors.

On the other hand, this paper also relies on a brief survey and discourse analysis I conducted on the customer complaints posted to a customer complaint platform, *Şikayetvar* starting from 5th of April 2022 to 25th of December 2023. Although lacking an official sanction on the service providers, *Şikayetvar* plays a significant role in customer protection, as the companies tend to reach out the customers complaining about their service immediately. Between mentioned dates there are around 7,000 complaints regarding AMCs. I employed a random selection method based on the dates of complaints and drew 183 complaints posted by different individual debtors. Then, I conducted a discourse analysis of those 183 complaints and let the relevant themes emerged out of them. To ensure methodological rigor, I employed a systematic coding process. Data were analyzed using MaxQDA software to facilitate thematic categorization. 183 randomly selected complaint entries uploaded to the software to be able to derive the initial codings. “Harsh interest rates”, “misconduct and violation of basic courtesy rules”, “violation of GDPR”, “harassment and psychological pressure”, and “retardation in reporting the debt clearance to the Credit Record Bureau” were the initial codings emerged out of the discourse analysis of 183 complaints. Based on these initial codings, themes emerged inductively, focusing on communication tactics, debtor resistance, and legal/ethical concerns. As the retardation in reporting the debt clearance to the Credit Recording Bureau implies a non-debtor participant I decided to exclude it. After clustering the remaining complaints regarding the themes they were pointing at, I selected few most representing complaints to conduct further frame analysis here in this paper.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

My goal in attending online debt collector training workshop was to gain insight into how debt collectors perceive their profession, how they conceptualize the process, and how they characterize debtors. The workshop offered me a comprehensive understanding of debt collection and credit restructuring processes from the collectors’ perspective. This idealized approach, which places a strong emphasis on basic courtesy rules, holds the promise of significantly increasing turnover ratios for AMCs. Moreover, this idealized debt collection practice aligns with the missions and objectives outlined

by the two largest AMCs mentioned earlier. Phrases such as “unchaining the customer”, “financial freedom”, “reintegrating debtors into the economy”, “setting customers free”, and “achieving peace” all underscore the empathy highlighted in the workshop. However, AMCs face numerous complaints, particularly regarding their use of tactics such as contacting debtors’ relatives, threatening imprisonment, closely monitoring borrowers, and causing distress with excessively high interest rates. A Goffmanesque frame analysis of all these data derived from the digital field suggests that interactions within the debt collection process continue to carry elements of stigma, marginalization, harassment, violation of GDPR, and lack of basic courtesy. Therefore, it can be said that AMCs are *restructuring* both the formal and the informal default patterns of personal debt relations while restructuring the non-performing loans.

The craft of debt collection: a nethnographic research on debt collector training workshop

Thanks to cookies and pixels that revealed my scholarly interest to the relevant companies, I happened to see a debt collector training workshop advertisement while randomly surfing the internet. I checked the details and decided to attend the online workshop. As the time for online meeting arrived, I signed in to my zoom account and went to the meeting link that was sent the day before. After a few minutes of waiting for the host to start the meeting, a middle-aged man appeared on the screen and greeted all the attendees with a more or less studious –and maybe an unnatural– polite way of courtesy. The rest of the first session was a good application of etiquette manuals to the debt collection process.

In the first session, the trainer mentioned that the professionalism of an institution is demonstrated by the speech of a collector makes. Hence, it is very important to start talking with a smiling tone when a collector calls the borrower. He said using words such as “hello” and “sir” in the opening is among the forbidden words. A collector should also pay attention to the tone of voice that should not be threatening or weary: “Good afternoon, I’m ***** from ***** AMC. How are you?” The second important issue, according to the trainer, was to learn the other party’s name and address him/her by his/her name. After learning the name, a collector needs to avoid addressing him/her as “sir” or “ma’am”. If the number the collector is calling is a mobile phone, after introducing himself/herself, the collector should definitely ask if the other party is available to talk. If the collector catches him/her in an inappropriate place or time, the time spent on collection would be wasted. Thus, the collector should immediately ask the person on the line, “what should be the right time to call you?” In some cases, borrowers would use this justification to get around the collector. But the collector has to believe it. If the borrower doesn’t pick up when given the time to call back, then the collector may consider calling him/her from another number. The third courtesy rule the trainer insisted on was correct pronunciation of the names.

The second session focused more on the collection process yet still had the taste of etiquette manuals’ courtesy rules. The trainer drew attention to effective listening. Since listening effectively when speaking on the phone means that you listen well and understand what the other party is saying:

Collector: You are in a meeting right now. Did I get right?

Borrower: ...

C: When did you say you would be available?

B: ...

C: Do you want me to call you from this number at this time tomorrow?

“The right answers are always given to the right questions”, the trainer explained. That’s why a collector needs to prepare his/her questions in advance to ask questions. It is also very important to take notes in the phone conversation and to inform the other party that the collector is taking notes. For example, to a person who says “call me at this number”, saying “Can you repeat the number so I write it down?” would be appropriate both to give correct feedback and to indicate that the collector cares about what the other party says. When the conversation is over, the collector should thank him/her for his/her time or close it by apologizing for calling at an inappropriate time/place: “Sorry to interrupt your meeting”. For the trainer, turning off the phone is also very important. It allows the collector to call that person again even if the collector does not reach his/her goal. “Even in the most controversial conversations, it is necessary to keep the doors open to meeting again at the end of the conversation”, the trainer concluded. For this, the collector needs to continue to show courtesy and respect even if the other party uses rude and unkind words.

The third, and the final session of the workshop was dedicated to the so-called craft of debt collection. A collector, according to the trainer, should become an interrogator. However, one should not think of police interrogation but this is more like a doctor’s interrogation to discover and diagnose the malaise. What, where, how, why, who and when? The most accurate conclusion is reached by answering these questions. Why didn’t the customer pay? No money? Does s/he pay what he has to others? Is s/he delaying payments to meet his/her cash needs? Instead of asking “Why didn’t you pay?” the collector should say “There must have been a very important reason why you did not pay. I hope you want to get rid of this debt as soon as possible.” Instead of “Why didn’t you read the contract details?” the collector should say “I think you missed the contract details. If you want, let me read you the relevant article of the contract you signed.” Or instead of directing a question such as “why are you talking angrily?” the collector should tell “This unpaid debt must be bothering you a lot, right?” According to the trainer, questions should be open-ended: “When can you pay?” “How much can you pay monthly?” “How much can you pay in advance?”

It is very important to listen to borrower if there is a problem about why s/he cannot usually pay or pay in advance. If there is no objection to the debts, the debt amount and the addressee, then the problem is that the income is insufficient. The purpose of the collector is making borrower to pay at least a reasonable amount of existing debt. The collector, who reads the speech without a soul, for the trainer, cannot perform his/her persuasiveness well and the collections would decrease. The collector thinks that s/he hung up the phone by reading his/her speech s/he is doing his/her job, but the result may not end up with the collection. The trainer emphasized once again that being polite is a prerequisite for the craft of debt collection. Since offensive conversations and arguments activate the automatic defense mechanism. Even those who have the intention to pay may start fighting the collector for not paying a single penny. According to the workshop trainer, an empathy following the basic courtesy would bring about the solution as well:

“I understand you, very well. But you do understand that we want to help you solve this problem. You and we can both make a little more sacrifice in this period to find a solution to this problem, right?”

Thus ended a short introductory workshop to the craft of debt collection. This idealized practice that is insisting very much on the basic courtesy rules promises a significant increase turnover ratio for AMCs. This idealized debt collection craft also complies with the missions and aims defined by the biggest two AMCs cited above. Unchaining the customer, financial freedom, reintegrating as much as debtors to the economy, setting the customers free, achieving peace are all phrases referring to the empathy underlined

in the workshop. However, neither self-definitions posted on the AMCs' websites, nor the idealized debt collection courtesy, reverberate on the complex relationality of the real life.

“Switching off the air conditioner”: a discourse analysis of the complaints on AMCs

AMCs are the subject of many complaints, especially on the grounds that they use methods such as calling the relatives of the debtors, intimidating prison sentences, following the borrowers like a sleuth, and annoyed the debtors with astronomical interest rates. The films⁵ that are based on the stories of the AMCs also depict these negative aspects of the debt collection process. One of the most significant examples involves switching off the air conditioner in the summer when a defaulted borrower comes for negotiating on the terms of credit restructuring. Thus, the debt collectors try to employ an emotional pressure on the borrower by putting him/her in an unbearable situation, thus make him/her end the negotiation and agree with the harsher terms. This cinematographic *mise-en-scene* may sound too exaggerated. An analysis of the complaints of AMC customers posted to *Şikayetvar*, a customer complaint platform in Türkiye gives some idea of its veracity. Out of those ongoing debates about the AMCs' misconducts with their customers, political figures also targeted AMCs. For instance, the opposition front's presidency candidate, and the former chairman of Republican People's Party (RPP) Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu addressed public on this issue and told that:

“Banks are selling the defaulted debts of citizens to AMCs. Because of these debts, lawyers will call you. They will threaten you. These are usurers. These are the mafia. These are vipers and centipedes. These are the ones who have their eyes on your bread. Don't pay, I'll talk to them after the elections.”

Another political figure, an Istanbul MP again from the RPP, Gürsel Tekin criticized AMCs for using “unimagined methods to collect those debts by harassing the debtors and boring the pants off those debtors.” According to Tekin AMCs cause incurable wounds (*Gazete Kritik*, 25 February 2022).

Between April 5, 2022, and December 25, 2023, approximately 7,000 complaints concerning AMCs were posted to *Şikayetvar* (www.sikayetvar.com), a customer complaint platform in Türkiye. Using a random selection method based on complaint dates, I analyzed 183 complaints submitted by individual debtors. One of the most frequent complaints about AMCs involves their harsh interest rates on the credits. Muhittin, a defaulted borrower complains about that and tells **** Varlık⁶ initially asked him to pay TRY 5,800 and now they were asking him to pay TRY 9,000 although he told them he was ready to pay TRY 7,000. Now he says he doesn't want to pay any amount any more. Similar case also added by Halil, who is urging fellow customers not to call **** Varlık to pay their debts. Halil says, “If you call them, they want three times what you owe.” He says he feels regretful. The final example among the varieties of similar complaints put by Mehmet. He complains:

“**** Varlık took over the debt for my principal debt of TRY 15,000. They demand TRY 37,000 from me. They state that the representative, who previously made an offer of TRY 22,000 when an agreement was reached, left their company and now the closing amount of the current debt is TRY 37,000.”

5 For example the movie, *İnsanlar İkiye Ayrılır* (People Are Divided into Two), written and directed by Tunç Şahin, narrates a story of Duygu and Bahadır who are employed by an AMC, and their role is to apply psychological pressure on debtors to maximize the amount of money collected.

6 The names of the AMCs exactly indicated on the platform however here I prefer not to disclose the company names and put asterisk instead.

The second subject of the majority of the complaints is misconduct and violation of the basic courtesy rules that are idealized in the debt collection training workshops. Mesut, İsmail, Muhammet and Zeynep complain about AMC debt collectors hanging up on them, mocking at them, and talking to them in a threatening tone. Gülçin's complain summarizes such misconduct and emotional pressure well:

"Although Denizbank sold my debt without any written notice, **** Varlık asks me to pay TRY 658. A guy there is mocking at me and hangs up on me. I am pregnant and victimized. I wanna solve the problem by paying the principal."

Violation of basic courtesy rules and ruining the idealized image of the craft of debt collection is also widely expressed in complaints on the platform. Gizem complains about an AMC is calling her again and again and communicating with her in a "threatening and disturbing tone". Av. complains a collector from an AMC is "insulting the customers with her rude manners". An interesting complaint put by Aytekin reveals that:

"Instead of the initial TRY 35,000 credit I am ready to pay TRY 80,000. Though the man from **** Varlık told me with bunch of word plays that that was the amount for last month. Also he uses such phrases like 'that is none of your business' etc."

The third most widely expressed and significant subject of complaints involves AMCs' violation of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). These complaints are also got to court and widely discussed on the newspapers. News on *Yenişafak* by Ayşe Mine Alioğlu narrates one of the cases and tells AMCs which took over the debts of telecommunication companies, began to harass family members of the debtors with SMS and calls when they could not collect. Although the penalty for these searches, which are against the data protection regulation within the scope of GDPR, is TRY 50,000, complaint platforms and law offices are flooded with aggrieved citizens:

"When one of the victims, A.K., did not pay his TRY 800 fee to a GSM company, he started receiving SMS from the GSM company. After a certain period of time, GSM company transferred A.K.'s debt to an AMC. This time, endless calls and SMS started to be sent. After A.K. blocked the company's number, his wife, father and brother were informed via SMS that the debtor's debt to the GSM company would expire and enforcement proceedings would begin if it were not paid" (Alioğlu, 2022).

A complaint put by Peri is another striking example of the violation of GDPR. She says **** Varlık is calling her on her personal mobile number for her mother's debt. When she warned them that this was illegal they told her that that was the contact number for her mother. She repeats her warning on the complaint platform: "Delete my number or I will sue you on violating the GDPR."

The last but not the least widely expressed subject of the complaints put forth by AMC customers is harassment and psychological pressure. Erdal says he has no job and he is unemployed. Even after he told the collector from AMC bothering him with sometimes four calls in a single day, the collector told him that once he pays the debt, they would stop calling. Ali points at a similar harassment, disrespect, and rudeness. He says the collector told him that if they don't put pressure on him, how would they make him pay the debt. Hakan's complaints summarizes the level of harassment by AMCs:

“**** Varlık bored the pants off me. They call me everyday. Though I told them I cannot pay at the moment because of financial difficulties I am facing now. They keep calling and harassing me. I even think about committing suicide.”

All in all, the interactions within the debt collection process still have the mixed taste of stigmatization, marginalization, harassment, violation of GDPR and basic courtesy rules, and so on.

“What is it that’s going on here?”: frame analysis of credit restructuring

The primary frame for borrowers like Muhittin, Halil, and Mehmet revolves around their financial obligations and the negotiations with AMCs. They perceive the situation through the lens of debt repayment and fairness in financial transactions. Halil’s warning to other borrowers not to engage with **** Varlık due to their perceived demands (“three times what you owe”) breaks the expected frame of reasonable debt negotiation. This violation of trust leads to regret and negative perceptions of the debt collection process. Mehmet’s case exemplifies the negative experience where **** Varlık’s changing terms (from TRY 22,000 to TRY 37,000) after a verbal agreement illustrates a breach of trust and fairness. Such actions by the AMC can disrupt the established frame of negotiation and fairness.

The primary frame for individuals like Mesut, İsmail, Muhammet, Zeynep, and Gülçin centers on their interactions with debt collectors from AMCs. They expect professionalism, respect, and adherence to basic courtesy norms during debt collection processes. Goffman’s concept of designs and fabrications can be applied here. Debt collectors mocking or using a threatening tone constitute fabrications where the expected social norms of respectful communication are violated intentionally or unintentionally. Such behaviors create negative impressions and undermine trust in the debt collection process. Gülçin’s complaint about being mocked and hung up on breaks the expected frame of professional and respectful communication. This breach can lead to emotional pressure and distress, especially considering her vulnerable state as a pregnant woman. Goffman’s notion of negative experiences caused by frame breaks is evident here. Gülçin’s feeling of victimization due to the debt collector’s behavior highlights how such interactions can manufacture negative emotional experiences, influencing her perception of the debt collection process. In conclusion, these complaints underscore how Goffman’s frame analysis can illuminate the dynamics of debt collection interactions. Misconduct, such as mocking, hanging up on debtors, or using a threatening tone, violates expected social norms and can lead to negative emotional experiences and perceptions. However, Gülçin’s complaint may be interpreted as a fabrication in which she employs a role where she is a victim of mocking and misconduct as a pregnant woman and fabricate an image of a brutal AMC. Since such image fabrications are the ones almost all companies avoid and seek for a way to collaborate and settle the dispute with the customers.

Complaints like Av.’s about a collector insulting customers underscore the importance of anchoring interactions in social norms that uphold dignity and fairness. Aytekin’s complaint about a debt collector using phrases like “that is none of your business” breaks the frame of expected professional and courteous behavior. Such breaches can create confusion and frustration for the debtor, undermining trust in the debt collection process. Goffman argues that such deviations can disrupt social interactions and lead to negative perceptions and reactions from debtors. Goffman’s concept of negative experiences resulting from frame breaks is relevant here. Aytekin feeling misled or insulted by the debt collector’s behavior highlights how violations of courtesy norms can manufacture negative emotional responses and shape perceptions of debt collection practices.

The complaint regarding AMCs' violation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), describes how AMCs, upon failing to collect debts directly from debtors, resorted to contacting their family members (wife, father, brother) via SMS after the debtor blocked their number. This action breaks the frame of lawful debt collection practices and violates GDPR by disclosing personal information to unauthorized third parties. For example, Peri asserts that **** Varlık is contacting her on her personal mobile number regarding her mother's debt. This action breaks the frame of lawful debt collection as it involves using personal data (Peri's mobile number) for a purpose (collecting her mother's debt) without explicit consent or authorization. According to Goffman, such breaches of privacy can manufacture negative experiences for debtors and their families. The intrusion into personal lives through unsolicited messages and calls creates emotional distress and undermines trust in the debt collection process. The SMS notifications to family members can be seen as fabrications where the debt collector manipulates the frame by extending the reach of debt collection efforts beyond the debtor to family members, using their personal information without consent to trigger the emotional pressures. However, Goffman's concept of social sabotage applies here as well. By posting such a complaint on AMCs' violation of GDPR debtors might trigger a public shame for the AMC and force them to step back. For example, Peri's warning about potential legal action may indicate the emotional distress and frustration she may be experiencing due to the unauthorized use of her personal information.

According to Goffman, psychological pressure occurs when debt collectors exceed the boundaries of professional communication. This includes persistent calling, insensitive remarks, and threats that cause emotional distress to debtors. In debt collection, the primary frame revolves around the lawful recovery of debts owed. Collectors are expected to communicate with debtors professionally and respectfully, adhering to ethical guidelines and legal requirements. Debtors like Erdal, Ali, and Hakan describe experiences where AMC collectors create negative emotional states through harassment. Erdal's case of receiving multiple calls despite his unemployment status, Ali's encounter with pressure tactics, and Hakan's extreme emotional distress leading to thoughts of suicide illustrate the impact of such behaviors. Goffman's notion of frame breaking is evident when debt collectors push debtors beyond their coping mechanisms, as seen in Hakan's case where he contemplates suicide due to the overwhelming pressure. Such extreme reactions indicate a complete breakdown of the expected frame of debt collection. Harassment and psychological pressure violate ethical standards of conduct in debt collection. Collectors have a duty to treat debtors with dignity and compassion, regardless of their financial situation. However, Hakan's case might be a fabrication where he complains about the harassment by AMC to force credit restructuring process settle in dearer terms for him.

LIMITATIONS

While this study intends to provide novel insights to the credit restructuring process, several limitations should be acknowledged. The reliance on netnographic methods restricts direct interaction with AMCs and debtors, potentially limiting a deeper understanding of their perspectives. Additionally, the subjective nature of discourse analysis may influence interpretations, introducing potential bias in framing debtor-AMC interactions. Furthermore, the absence of longitudinal data prevents an analysis of how these dynamics evolve over time. Last but not least, in order to strengthen the theoretical framework and catch the power dynamics within the microstructures of debt relations, Foucault's notions of power and resistance (1978, 2001, 2009) could also be employed. Such a fortification of Goffmanesque frame analysis with Foucault's conceptual tools could enable an analysis of how AMCs reinforce financial hierarchies and shape debtor subjectivities. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating interviews with debtors and AMC employees, as well as expanding the dataset to include

legal case studies of debt disputes, offering a more comprehensive and temporally informed perspective.

CONCLUSION: RESTRUCTURING THE (IN)FORMAL DEFAULT PATTERNS WHILE RESTRUCTURING THE CONSUMER CREDIT

Scholars like [Belshaw \(1965\)](#), [Benedict \(1964\)](#), and [Taylor \(2002\)](#) illustrate how debtors wield bargaining power through credit restructuring, challenging simplistic views of debt as purely exploitative. Creditors use social stigma to pressure debtors, impacting future interactions, while effective communication is crucial for managing repayment. However, historical and anthropological evidence, including Weber's insights, shows how debt practices vary culturally and historically, from extreme enforcement measures in China and India to debt-induced slavery in various societies ([Chirichigno, 1993](#); [Hudson, 2018](#); [Rosenthal, 2018](#)). Here, credit restructuring emerges and it aims to mitigate damage for both debtors and creditors, preserving financial stability while recovering debts.

After the 2001 banking crisis in Türkiye, the "Istanbul Approach" credit restructuring program was launched in 2002 to address rising defaults, initially targeting commercial credits. It later expanded to include consumer credit restructuring. AMCs were pivotal, buying and restructuring NPLs from financial institutions to clear their balance sheets and stimulate lending. These AMCs define their goals and missions based on freeing defaulted borrowers from the burden of past debts. They present the debt collection process as a respectable craft, emphasizing courtesy. Terms such as "unchaining the customer," "financial freedom", and "setting the customers free" reflect the empathy promoted by this approach.

This paper combines netnographic research from an online debt collector training workshop with a discourse analysis of customer complaints about AMCs in Türkiye. The workshop, I attended, provided insights into debt collectors' perspectives on their profession, the debt collection process, and their characterization of debtors. It acted as an introductory session aimed at attracting professionals, offering a structured overview but limiting participant interaction. This netnographical study in a debt collector training workshop highlighted the idealized vs. practical realities of debt collection, revealing the social relationality embedded in consumer credit restructuring.

Additionally, I analyzed 183 complaints from *Şikayetvar*, a customer complaint platform, focusing on themes like harsh interest rates, misconduct, GDPR violations, harassment, and delays in reporting debt clearance. These themes emerged through discourse analysis, with selected complaints further analyzed using frame analysis techniques. In this regard, Goffman's Frame Analysis provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals construct meaning and interpret social interactions through cognitive frames, keyings, designs, and fabrications. This dual approach aims to understand both the idealized portrayal of debt collection from the collectors' viewpoint and the lived experiences and grievances of debtors, highlighting significant discrepancies between these perspectives.

The customer complaints analyzed from *Şikayetvar*, debtors' perspectives on interactions with AMCs reveal concerns about high interest rates, misconduct, GDPR violations, harassment, and delays in debt reporting. These complaints illustrate instances where debtors felt their expectations of professionalism, respect, and basic courtesy were all disregarded. Complaints about debt collectors mocking or using threatening tones underscore perceptions of manipulative interactions aimed at benefiting collectors rather than upholding respectful communication norms. Individual cases, such as those involving Muhittin, Halil, Mehmet, Mesut, İsmail, Muhammet, Zeynep, and Gülçin, further emphasize the importance of maintaining dignity and fairness in debt collection. Violations of social norms, such as insults or dismissive behavior from collectors, are

identified as breaches that evoke negative emotional responses from debtors. Goffman's frame analysis helps understand how deviations from expected behaviors during debt collection can cause emotional distress and shape debtor perceptions of the process. Additionally, instances where AMCs breached GDPR regulations by contacting family members or using personal information without consent illustrate how such actions extend beyond the debtor, creating emotional pressures and eroding trust. This aspect aligns with Goffman's concept of social sabotage, highlighting how complaints can publicly shame AMCs and potentially influence their practices.

All in all, these complaints highlight issues such as contacting debtors' relatives, threatening imprisonment, persistent pursuit of debtors, and imposing high interest rates. Overall, interactions within the debt collection process continue to carry elements of stigma, marginalization, harassment, violation of GDPR, and lack of basic courtesy. Therefore, it can be said that AMCs are restructuring both the formal and the informal default patterns of personal debt relations while restructuring the non-performing loans.

AI USAGE DECLARATION

In this article, I used an AI tool, ChatGPT GPT-4 as a proofreader to revise my grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors in English.

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