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DISCOVERING INSTAGRAM MOMS THROUGH A PARTICIPANT-BASED ONLINE PLATFORM

KATILIMCI TEMELLİ ÇEVİRİMİÇİ BİR PLATFORM ARACILIĞIYLA INSTAGRAM ANNELERİNİ KEŞFETMEK

Esra ERGİN*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine posts related to “Instagram moms” on Ekşi Sözlük, a participant-based online dictionary-style social media platform in Türkiye. The research was designed around a qualitative approach that focuses on describing individuals’ views, actions, and even lifestyles. Content analysis of users’ posts on a social media platform in an online dictionary format was conducted to explore the observational and exploratory processes of public perceptions regarding the phenomenon of “Instagram moms”. The findings show that these posts mostly contain negative emotions. The most intense emotions were anger and disgust, followed by sadness. In the thematic analysis, the most dominant theme was “motherhood as a tool of consumer culture and marketing”, while “violation of children’s privacy” ranked second. In the temporal analysis of the sentiment analysis, disgust was prominent in the 2016–2017 period, while a marked increase in anger and sadness was observed with the 2020 pandemic, and interest has almost completely faded in the 2023–2025 period. According to the results of the thematic temporal analysis, posts in 2016 largely centered around the themes of “motherhood as a tool of consumer culture and marketing” and “violation of children’s privacy”. However, starting in 2021, there was a significant decline across all themes; data for 2023 and 2025 has fallen to nearly zero levels. As a result, a strong relationship was found between emotions and themes; it was determined that the themes of consumer culture and privacy violation were closely linked to negative emotions.

Keywords: *Instagram Moms, Sentiment Analysis, Social Platform, Thematic Analysis*

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ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Türkiye’de katılımcı tabanlı bir çevrimiçi sözlük tarzı sosyal medya platformu olan Ekşi Sözlük’te “Instagram anneleri” ile ilgili gönderileri incelemek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Araştırma, bireylerin görüşlerini, eylemlerini ve hatta yaşam tarzlarını tanımlamaya odaklanan nitel bir yaklaşım etrafında tasarlanmıştır. “Instagram anneleri” fenomenine ilişkin kamuoyunun algılarının gözlemsel ve keşifsel süreçlerini araştırmak için, çevrimiçi sözlük formatındaki bir sosyal medya platformunda kullanıcıların gönderilerinin içerik analizi yapılmıştır. Bulgular, bu gönderilerin çoğunlukla olumsuz duygular içerdiğini göstermektedir. En yoğun duygular öfke ve tiksinti olup, bunları üzüntü izlemektedir. Tematik analizde en baskın tema “tüketim kültürü ve pazarlamanın bir aracı olarak annelik” olurken, “çocukların mahremiyetinin ihlali” ikinci sırada yer almıştır. Duygu analizinin zamansal analizinde, 2016-2017 döneminde tiksinti öne çıkarken, 2020 pandemisiyle birlikte öfke ve üzüntüde belirgin bir artış gözlemlenmiş ve 2023-2025 döneminde ilgi neredeyse tamamen azalmıştır. Tematik zamansal analiz sonuçlarına göre, 2016 yılındaki gönderilerin büyük ölçüde “tüketim kültürü ve pazarlamanın bir aracı olarak annelik” ile “çocukların mahremiyetinin ihlali” temaları etrafında yoğunlaştığı görülmektedir. Ancak 2021 yılından itibaren tüm temalarda belirgin bir düşüş yaşanmış; 2023 ve 2025 yıllarına ait veriler ise neredeyse sıfır düzeyine gerilemiştir. Sonuç olarak, duygular ve temalar arasında güçlü bir ilişki olduğu ortaya çıkmış; tüketim kültürü ve mahremiyet ihlali temalarının olumsuz duygularla yakından bağlantılı olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Instagram Anneleri, Duygu Analizi, Sosyal Platform, Tematik Analiz*

Introduction

Children born at the beginning of the 21st century were born into a digital age where social media has become an integral part of daily life for many families. This generation, known as the digital natives, is growing up in an era where their parents have begun documenting and sharing their personal experiences, memories, and even intimate moments on online platforms (Nottingham, 2019). Social networks have enabled individuals to reach audiences quickly and at low cost and to engage in interactive communication (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016), leading to the emergence of new professions and concepts. The most common concept to enter the literature with the emergence of these new professions is Instamom or, in other words, Socialmom (Köktener & Akgün, 2020).

Abidin (2015), building on Senft’s (2013) concept of “micro-celebrity,” developed the term “micro-micro-celebrity” to describe the process by which online celebrity parents turn their own children into celebrities; sharing their children’s behavior and images creates role models for ordinary parents and contributes to the normalization of this practice (Leaver, 2017). This situation leads to children’s digital identities beginning to form without their consent and their “digital footprints” being shaped by their parents (Leaver, 2015). Therefore, these children are growing up as a generation that exists not only within the family but also in public and commercial digital spaces, which makes them visible and exposes them to risks such as data surveillance, privacy violations, and digital commodification.

Digital platforms serve a dual and often contradictory function in shaping the contemporary motherhood experience. Academic research reveals that these platforms provide a social infrastructure that enables community building for mothers through mutual recognition, emotional support, and collective knowledge production (Ergin et al., 2025; Van Cleef, 2020). Motherhood blogs, in particular, serve as an important space for legitimacy and solidarity in coping with the “seemingly incompatible identity expectations” (Orton-Johnson, 2017) imposed by gender roles and hegemonic motherhood ideology. These virtual spaces enable mothers to share their subjective experiences, creating a shared framework for meaning and developing an alternative repertoire of knowledge. However, on the other hand, the same platforms can reproduce dominant and idealized discourses of motherhood, creating new types of normative pressures. Although practices on mommy blogs are fundamentally aimed at maintaining a subjective “good motherhood” performance and reinforcing the feeling that things are “going well” (Abetz & Moore, 2018), the incompatibility of these idealized narratives with personal experiences can fuel feelings of guilt and inadequacy. In an increasingly individualized and commodified social context, online mothers may begin to experience motherhood as a competitive and challenging performance arena. These constructed narratives, which do not correspond to their own realities, can be perceived as a threat to individual maternal competence and a symbolic challenge (Abetz & Moore, 2018; Kirkpatrick & Lee, 2024).

Shaping motherhood in the age of Instagram

Motherhood represents a transitional process in which individuals undergo a significant transformation of their identity (Hwang et al., 2022). Many factors influence this transformation, such as the mother’s harmony with her partner and her position within the family (Yulizawati et al., 2021). During this process, new parents feel the need to understand and validate the motherhood identity they have constructed for themselves due to the different meanings associated with this identity. With the widespread use of social networking sites (SNS) such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook today, many new mothers share their experiences by consulting with other mothers about their maternal identities through their own pages on these platforms (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017).

Capdevilla et al. (2022) emphasize that motherhood and family roles are gendered on social media and that gender norms are promoted on social media in a neoliberal context. Furthermore, new mothers share idealized motherhood experiences on SNS platforms such as Instagram, leading to increased social comparison with other mothers like themselves (McDaniel et al., 2012). At this point, regardless of whether the mother sharing is an influencer or a general user, posts reflecting the ideal mother can cause situations that can negatively affect mothers’ mental health, such as jealousy, anxiety, and inadequacy (Venkatraman, 2017). On this topic, Djafarova and Trofimenko (2017) determined that mothers of preschool-aged children are a group that regularly uses social media, and that

these mothers use social media to strengthen their self-esteem and receive support from an online community.

Geographic and digital mobility, which are among the benefits of modern life, have distanced individuals from traditional information networks and made the internet the primary source of information (Rothbaum et al., 2008). Parallel to this change, famous mothers, who are portrayed by the media as successful in both their motherhood identities and their careers, and who are said to exemplify contemporary motherhood that began in the late 20th century, state that motherhood is the most fulfilling experience in their lives (Press, 2006). Today, the discourse on famous mothers in the media and increased access to online parenting information have contributed to the spread of idealized motherhood. Young mothers between the ages of 20 and 30 have been particularly affected by this situation and have used websites to strengthen their parenting skills. These mothers, referred to as “alpha mothers,” are educated, skilled in the use of technological tools, have type A personalities, and share the common goal of being perfect mothers (Chae, 2015). However, the ideology of “intensive mothering” continues in societies, and today mothers are expected not only to continue their primary caregiving role but also to achieve career success (Douglas & Michaels, 2005). All these arguments have broadened the established definitions of motherhood and led to the emergence of a mother figure intertwined with social media.

Today, there is a global increase in the rise of bloggers who cater to mothers. Some of these bloggers have turned social media into a source of income through collaborations with brands and have become social media phenomena (Leaver et al., 2020). These bloggers, referred to as “mumpreneurs,” have involved their children in the content creation process to generate more sponsorship and marketing activities. This increasingly common term is used to describe women who run a business while raising children (Ekinsmyth, 2014). The main purpose of this idea is to identify with other mothers who follow them and to secure capital. At the same time, influencer moms, who also influence the social media posts of “non-influencer mothers” who have their own accounts, ensure that their children are more visible on social media (Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2025). While there are positive aspects to mumpreneur mothers earning income from content creation, the inclusion of children in content raises serious ethical concerns and paradoxical tensions, negatively impacting children’s well-being in terms of privacy, potential exploitation risks, and mental health (Masterson, 2020). Yap and Lim (2023) emphasize the importance of stakeholders who control or influence children’s digital well-being and motherhood content being aware of this paradoxical mindset, stressing the necessity of developing protective and creative solutions for children. In this context, the current study investigates the representation of Instagram moms in terms of variables such as child well-being, gender norms, and maternal identity through a participant-based online dictionary format social media platform (Ekşi Sözlük) in Türkiye.

Children's online welfare in the context of social media

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world, having been ratified by all UN member states except the United States. States parties to this treaty have committed to respecting children's rights and ensuring their protection (Cohen, 1989, Article 2). Some fundamental principles of the UNCRC are of particular importance in the context of the present study. First, the principle of the best interests of the child (Cohen, 1989, Article 3) emphasizes that the interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all policies, decisions, and practices concerning children. In the online context, this principle points to the need to protect children, support their well-being, and minimize the ethical risks that may arise in digital environments. Secondly, the principle of hearing the child's views (Cohen, 1989, Article 12) guarantees children's right to express their views on matters that directly affect them. In this context, it is crucial to seek children's views on issues such as their online privacy, digital visibility, and the use of their personal data. Finally, the right to protection of private life (Cohen, 1989, Article 16) provides for the protection of children in the processing of their personal data, its sharing with third parties, and its transfer on social media or online platforms.

Research has determined that mothers share content related to their children on social media platforms (Baxter & Czarnecka, 2025). Briazu et al. (2021) found that when mothers' risk awareness regarding sharing content about their children on social media increased, they reduced the frequency of their posts but still continued to share sensitive content. Additionally, these research findings indicate that mothers do not focus on the long-term risks of situations that could have negative effects on children, such as identity theft and digital privacy. Another study examined the dilemmas experienced by expectant mothers in sharing on a forum created for pregnancy-related topics, finding that they questioned the right to self-representation and the culture of surveillance during this process (Cino & Formenti, 2021). Based on this information, practices and perceptions related to the concept of "good parenting" today are increasingly shaped by the media. This situation, subject to data-driven operations referred to as surveillance capitalism, carries with it the risk of violating both interpersonal and commercial privacy (Siibak & Mascheroni, 2021). Indeed, when evaluated from the perspective of childhood in the century we live in, children open their eyes to a world where all aspects of life, both online and offline, are monitored, analyzed, and converted into data (Barassi, 2020). The digital surveillance processes of children, who are turned into data even before they are born, continue in the following years through home, school, and peer networks. This situation has made childhood a 'critical area of datafication and digital surveillance' (Mascheroni, 2018). However, the conversion of children's bodies, characteristics, and behaviors into digital data places them in the position of a 'data subject' with little or no control over themselves (Mascheroni & Siibak, 2022). The work of Garmendia et al. (2021) presents striking findings regarding parents' behavior in sharing their children on online media

platforms. The research reveals that approximately one-fifth of children are shared by their parents, that the frequency of sharing increases with age, and that girls are shared more commonly. However, it was determined that parents who regularly monitor and guide their children's online activities are more cautious about sharing information about their children (Garmendia et al., 2021). These findings show that parental awareness and monitoring strategies play a critical role in ensuring children's online well-being and privacy.

Current study

Sentiment analysis (Cambria et al., 2017) is the data-driven examination of people's opinions, feelings, emotions, and attitudes (Liu, 2015; Mäntylä et al., 2018). In other words, sentiment analysis is considered a Natural Language Processing (NLP) task aimed at revealing opinions about a target or evaluated element. The target here refers to the person, product, event, phenomenon, or any object being evaluated. However, at this point, the ambiguity between the concepts of "opinion", "feeling", and "emotion" is noteworthy. This conceptual ambiguity has been resolved by definitions stating that feelings or emotions reflect a person's internal feelings and emotional state, while opinions express an attitude towards a target or situation (Tsytsarau & Palpanas, 2012). The reason for the rapid increase in studies on sentiment analysis in recent years can be attributed to the increase in the volume of opinions on discussion groups such as social media platforms, forums, blogs, and microblogs (Liu, 2015). In this context, sentiment analysis is used to determine the polarization of opinions obtained from different sources and the degree of this polarization (El-Diraby et al., 2019).

In recent years, studies on whether a concept is positive or negative have been increasing day by day (Mohammad et al., 2009; Nanli et al., 2012; Turney & Littman, 2003; Wankhade et al., 2022). However, these studies address the complex aspects of emotions with different emotional tones (Balshetwar et al., 2019; Boukes et al., 2020, Cui et al., 2019; Teneketzi, 2022). In these studies, the eight basic and prototypical emotions defined by Plutchik (1980)—joy, sadness, anger, fear, trust, disgust, surprise, and anticipation—are frequently used as a reference in emotion analysis (Mondal & Gokhale 2020). Emotion Detection (ED), based on these emotions, is a task that can be evaluated within the scope of Sentiment Analysis (SA). In this context, while SA focuses primarily on identifying positive or negative opinions, ED refers to the detection of various emotions in texts. Different analysis techniques developed with the advancement of technology are considered important in detecting emotions in texts at this point; however, the effectiveness of these analysis methods is limited in short sentences (O'Leary, 2011). As a sentiment analysis task, ED can be implemented using machine learning (ML) or a dictionary-based approach; however, dictionary-based approaches are more frequently preferred in applications (Medhat et al., 2014). On the other hand, as reported in the literature (e.g., Medhat et al., 2014), among sentiment analysis techniques, deep learning

methods have higher accuracy and generalizability compared to dictionary-based approaches. Nevertheless, ML, especially deep learning, yields better results than dictionary-based learning but still falls short of human performance (manual) (Van Atteveldt et al., 2021).

Data-driven analysis methods for sentiment analysis are considered more effective in solving problems such as scalability (the ability to work effectively even as the amount of data increases) and repeatability (the ability to produce similar results when applied to the same data again) compared to manual coding (Van Atteveldt et al., 2019; Welbers et al., 2017). Although these methods are quite advantageous in terms of cost, they involve certain risks (Hilbert et al., 2019; Wilkerson & Casas, 2017). Furthermore, ready-made sentiment dictionaries covering classifications such as positive, negative, or neutral are mostly designed to test a specific viewpoint, which may cause a decrease in validity as they may not work with the same effectiveness in different tasks or topics. In this regard, Young and Soroka (2012) determined that the emotion measurements of different emotion dictionaries show very little similarity to each other and that these results do not align with manual measurements. Another reason for this divergence is that, in the social sciences, ready-made sentiment dictionaries produce misleading results because algorithms also learn random patterns (González-Bailón & Paltoglou, 2015; Soroka et al., 2015). Furthermore, the results produced by these dictionaries in languages other than English also limit comparisons between data (Haselmayer & Jenny, 2017). At this point, although emotion is a widely used concept, it is not easy to measure. Emotions are difficult to analyze because they are ambiguous, can be positive or negative, are polarized, can be expressed in different tones, and are subjective, requiring creative language to express them. In emotion analyses conducted in the social sciences, emotion analyses using ready-made dictionaries are limited because researchers still do not have a common understanding of what emotion is and how it should be measured (Kleinnijenhuis, 2008; Lengauer et al., 2012). For this reason, manual coding is still the most widely used method for coding emotions in research. Furthermore, sentiment analysis conducted by individuals trained as experts on the subject or through crowd coding, which involves gathering opinions from different individuals, still maintains its reliability (Van Atteveldt et al., 2021). In light of all this information, Instagram motherhood, which is a particularly important phenomenon in our era, is examined in this study through Ekşi Sözlük a participant-based online dictionary in Türkiye. To this end, the sub-objectives of this study are listed below:

1. How are the sentiment analyses (positive, negative, neutral) of posts related to Instagram moms on Ekşi Sözlük distributed?
2. What are the most frequently encountered emotional tones (joy, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, expectation, trust, disgust) in posts about Instagram moms?
3. What is the distribution of themes identified in posts about Instagram moms (performance and perfection pressure, violation of children's privacy, motherhood

- as a tool of consumer culture and marketing, distortion of reality perception, reinforcement of gender roles)?
4. How do sentiment analyses related to Instagram moms change over time (according to the date variable)?
 5. How do themes related to Instagram moms change over time (according to the date variable)?
 6. Is there a meaningful relationship between sentiment analyses and themes in posts?

Method

Research design and procedure

The research was designed around a qualitative approach that focuses on describing individuals' views, actions, and even lifestyles. Content analysis of users' posts on a social media platform in an online dictionary format was conducted to explore the observational and exploratory processes of public perceptions regarding the phenomenon of "Instagram moms". Nowadays, when motherhood is perceived as more than just an individual experience, posts on various social media platforms have increasingly become a means of making the mother's performance visible, constructing the identity of motherhood through social media, and encouraging consumer culture. In this sense, the phenomenon and actions related to it have become a topic of discussion both in our daily lives and on various social media platforms. In the study, posts related to the phenomenon of "Instagram moms" on a social media platform in the Ekşi Sözlük were determined through purposeful sampling. While conducting the screening related to the research process, an evaluation was made systematically through publicly accessible entries on the social media platform in the form of an online dictionary.

All data evaluated within the scope of the study are publicly accessible, online content that can be accessed without any membership/registration/account creation requirements. Additionally, platform users use pseudonyms instead of their real names. This directly prevents the disclosure of identity information. Furthermore, to ensure ethical principles were followed during the research, only the content was evaluated, and users' pseudonyms were not reported. The data analysis was conducted solely for scientific purposes and did not include any elements/situations that could reveal the identity of third parties. The criteria for including and excluding data in the study were determined by the researcher. The criteria for including data were: being from 2016-2025, containing the relevant phenomenon, being publicly accessible and available online, being in Türkiye, and being at least one sentence long. The exclusion criteria were: advertisements, bot content, emojis, meaningless content, messages of a private nature, links, inaccessible content, and repetitive and out-of-context posts. Posts were sorted according to the specified characteristics and checked individually by the researcher. To ensure reliability, the researcher performed a second check to verify compliance with the specified criteria across different time intervals. As a result of two separate reviews conducted at independent time

intervals, six of the 115 posts were found to be non-compliant with the inclusion criteria and were therefore excluded. It was decided to proceed with the study using 109 posts. The data were manually transferred to Microsoft Excel. The shared information of the transferred inputs was anonymized and identified with IDs (K1, K2, ...). The date of the posts, the sentiment orientation extracted from the posts (positive, negative, neutral), the themes to which the posts belonged, and the data for the eight basic emotion tones (joy, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, anticipation, trust, disgust) determined according to Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions were added individually by the researcher. The parameters obtained were used in the sentiment tone, sentiment analysis, and thematic analysis processes.

Sentiment analysis enables the systematic identification of users' emotional expressions, opinion tendencies, and attitudes within texts. Therefore, in this study, when thematically examining a social phenomenon such as motherhood on Instagram, it was considered important to use sentiment analysis to understand which emotions stand out in users' posts, their positive/negative attitudes, and how certain themes (e.g., pressure to perform and be perfect, violation of children's privacy) are expressed. Furthermore, thematically examining comments related to Instagram moms alongside sentiment analysis is also considered valuable in terms of supporting the reliability of the research results. Because thematic and sentiment analysis are used together in this research, it not only reveals themes such as "motherhood being used as a tool of consumer culture and marketing", but also shows whether this theme is generally expressed with a negative emotional tone or a supportive tone, based on the emotional tones of the users. This allows for a deeper understanding of social behaviors and user experiences.

Analysis

Microsoft Excel was used to analyze the parameters evaluated in the study and to visualize the results. The posts were coded line by line using open coding methods with unique IDs, and all variables were analyzed for content. Descriptive statistics and visuals related to other variables were visualized using Excel tools. Quotations were presented in an anonymized form.

During the content analysis process, the data was evaluated systematically step by step. The first step was to transfer the 109 posts included in the study to Excel and anonymize them. The second step involved a detailed reading of each post, and meaningful statements were classified using open coding. Codes that were similar in meaning and content were converted into themes by checking the common characteristics of the categories. Then, the texts were manually evaluated in terms of meaning coherence, and sentiment analysis and sentiment tone determination were performed. To increase data reliability for all evaluations, the researcher conducted reviews at different time intervals. Additionally, to reduce the subjectivity of the study, a second evaluator, an analyst specializing in

qualitative research and analysis techniques, performed all checks and assessed the consistency of the findings.

Results

According to the distribution of sentiment analysis (positive, negative, and neutral) of posts about the phenomenon of “Instagram moms” on Ekşi Sözlük, posts about the phenomenon of “Instagram moms” on the Ekşi Sözlük contain predominantly negative sentiment. It was determined that 90% of the posts were negative, 5% were positive, and 5% were neutral. This distribution clearly demonstrates that posts on this platform generally approach the phenomenon of “Instagram mothers” from a negative and critical perspective. This result is “Instagram motherhood” as well as the platform’s unique dynamics. According to the data on the most frequently encountered emotional tones in posts about the phenomenon of “Instagram moms” on the Ekşi Sözlük, the most dominant emotional tone in posts about the phenomenon of “Instagram moms” on Ekşi Sözlük is anger (f=68). Anger is followed by disgust (f=47), sadness (f=29), surprise (f=11), and anticipation (f=10), respectively. Fear (f=6) and joy and trust (f=5) are the least frequent emotional tones. Fear (f=6) and joy and trust (f=5) are the least frequently encountered emotional tones. These findings indicate that the distribution of emotional tones in these posts largely focuses on negative perceptions/thoughts. It clearly demonstrates that the emotional tones of anger and disgust, in particular, play a decisive role in the discourse of posts on the platform. The most frequently encountered themes in posts regarding the phenomenon of “Instagram moms” on Ekşi Sözlük are; the imposition of performance and perfectionism, the violation of children’s privacy, the use of consumer culture and motherhood as a marketing tool, the distortion of the perception of reality, and the reinforcement of gender roles. According to thematic analysis findings, the most frequently emphasized theme in posts regarding the phenomenon of “Instagram moms” on the social media platform in the Ekşi Sözlük is “consumer culture and the use of motherhood as a marketing tool” (f=66). This theme is followed by “violation of children’s privacy” (f=52) and “pressure for performance and perfection” (f=24). “Distortion of the perception of reality” (f=22) and “reinforcement of gender roles” (f=12) were identified as less prominent themes. Six of the analyzed posts were found to not overlap with any of the identified themes. The distribution shows that critical discourse is particularly concentrated around the commodification of motherhood and violations of children’s rights.

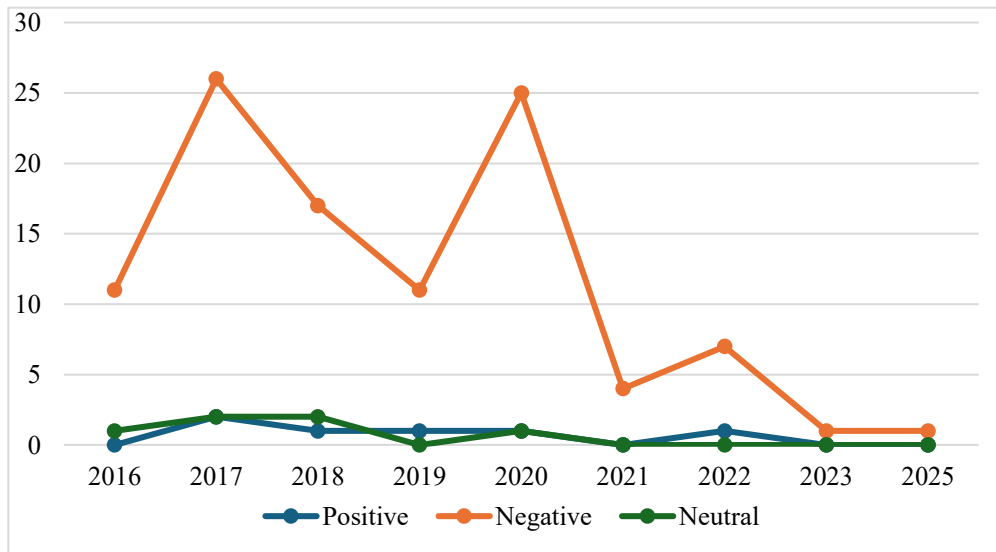


Figure 1. Changes over time in sentiment analysis of posts related to Instagram moms

Figure 1 shows how sentiment analysis (positive, negative, and neutral) of posts related to the phenomenon of “Instagram moms” on the online dictionary-style social media platform (Ekşi Sözlük) changed over time (2016-2025). As seen in Figure 1, posts related to “Instagram moms” predominantly carried negative sentiment intensity throughout all years, with negative trends notably intensifying in 2017 and 2020. However, it is noteworthy that positive and neutral sentiments remained limited during the specified periods. As of 2022, the negative sentiment trend has declined to a negligible level in the 2023-2025 period.

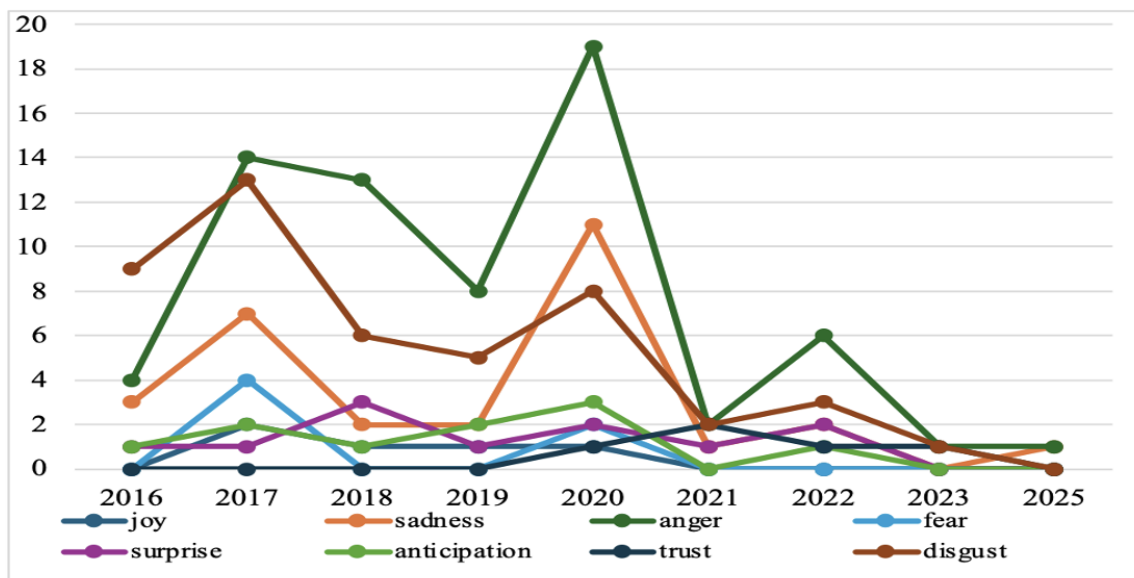


Figure 2. Changes over time in the sentiment analysis of posts related to Instagram moms

Figure 2 shows how the emotional tones (joy, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, expectation, trust, disgust) of posts related to the phenomenon of “Instagram moms” on the social media platform Ekşi Sözlük, which is in an online dictionary format, changed over time. The sentiment analysis of posts related to Instagram moms on Ekşi Sözlük between 2016 and 2025 reveals that the dominant emotional response within the community was distinctly negative and showed significant change over time. While “disgust” was the most dominant emotion in 2016, this emotion peaked in 2017 and, together with “anger,” formed the main axis of social reaction. Although there was a slight decrease in the intensity of negative emotions in 2018 and 2019, there was a sharp increase in both “anger” and “sadness” in 2020. This is thought to reflect a reaction to increased digital sharing and social media use during the pandemic. Starting in 2021, a striking and steady decline was observed in all negative emotion tones (disgust, anger, sadness), and when data from 2023-2025 is examined, it is observed that almost all emotion tones have dropped to minimal levels. In contrast, it is noteworthy that positive emotions (joy, trust, expectation, surprise) remained quite limited in posts and stayed at low levels throughout the entire period. Therefore, in light of the results obtained, it is possible to say that the issue in question is discussed more in terms of critical and negative sentiments at the societal level. In addition, the data reveals that interest and interaction have decreased over time.

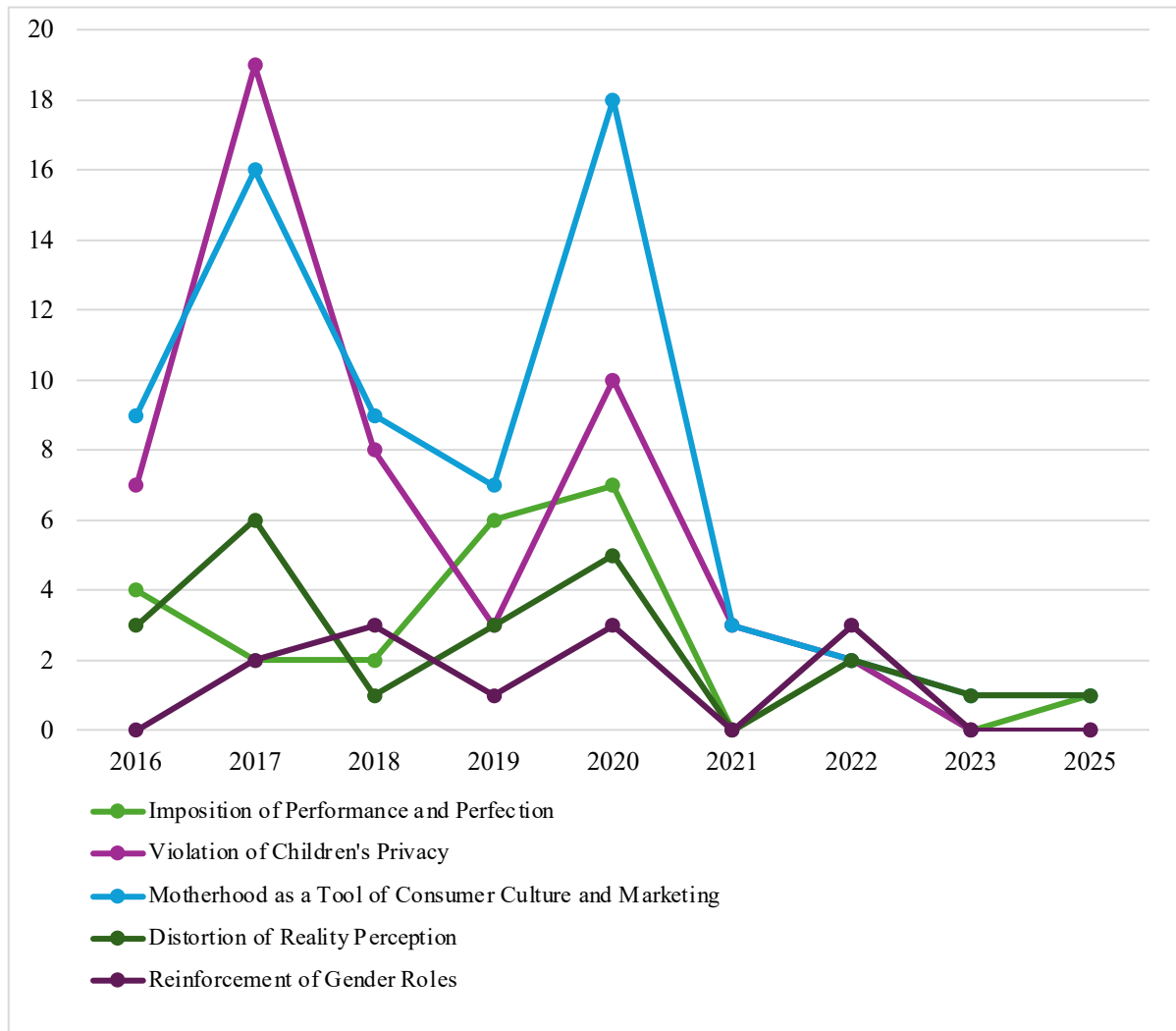


Figure 3. Changes over time in the thematic analysis of posts related to Instagram moms

Figure 3 shows that posts related to the phenomenon of “Instagram moms” on the social media platform Ekşi Sözlük, which is in an online dictionary format, exhibit a fluctuating trend over time in terms of theme. In general, it was determined that all themes gained intensity between 2017 and 2020 and showed a significant decline after 2021. In other words, the thematic analysis between 2016 and 2025 shows that social interest in the subject and critical discourse changed significantly over time. In 2016, posts were mostly concentrated around the themes of “motherhood as a tool of consumer culture and marketing” and “violation of children’s privacy.” In 2017, however, a sudden and sharp rise was observed in these two themes. In contrast, while a general decline in the themes of “performance and perfectionism” and “distortion of reality perception” was observed in 2018-2019, a positive acceleration was determined again in all themes in 2020. From 2022 onwards, a clear and steady decline was recorded in all themes, and when the data for 2023-2025 was examined, it was observed that the values had fallen to near zero. It was seen that the theme of “reinforcement of social gender roles” was less prominent compared to other themes.

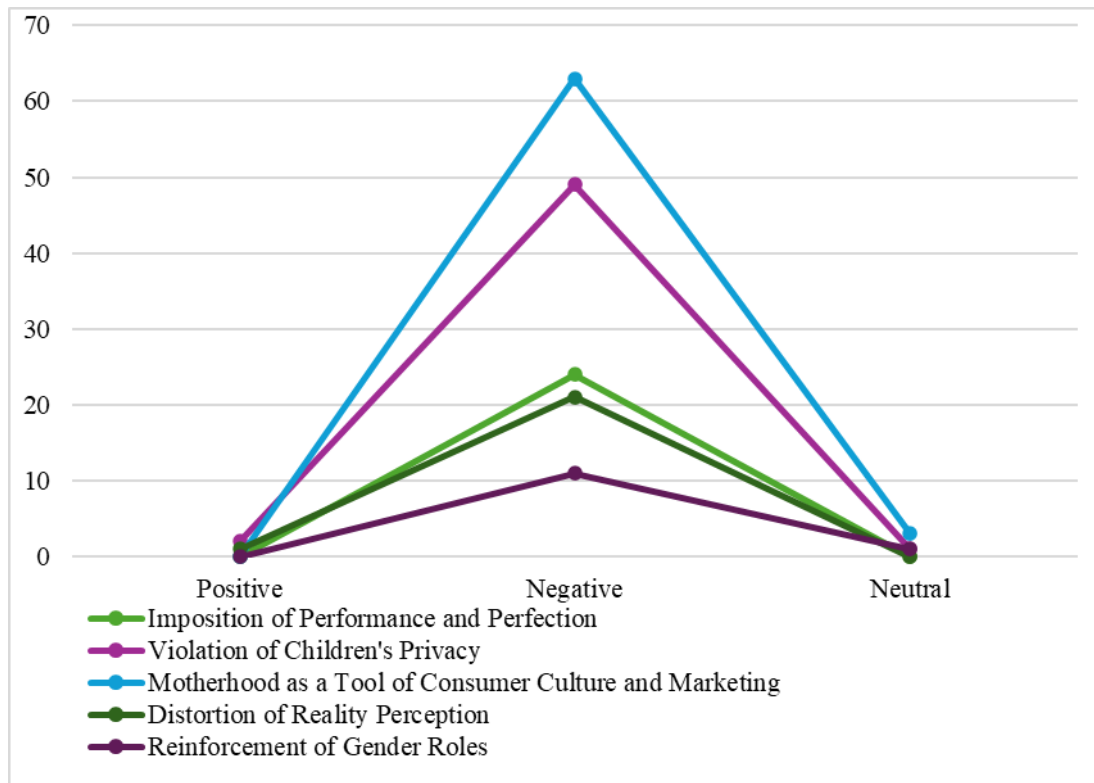


Figure 4. Visual representation of the relationship between sentiment analysis in posts and themes

There is a clear and meaningful relationship between the themes of posts and their emotional tones. Posts related to “motherhood as a tool of consumer culture and marketing” and “violation of children’s privacy” are strongly associated with negative emotions, reflecting the high intensity of negative sentiment and thematic focus identified in earlier findings. While other themes—such as “imposition of performance and perfection pressure”, “reinforcement of gender roles”, and “distortion of reality perception”—also predominantly evoke negative emotions, the association of “performance and perfection pressure” with some positive emotions suggests that certain users may perceive these posts as encouraging or instructive. Overall, positive and neutral emotions remain limited across all themes, highlighting the largely critical and negative discourse surrounding the phenomenon (Figure 4).

Discussion

This study aims to identify the dominant emotional tones, recurring themes, and their changes over time by analyzing the posts on Ekşi Sözlük about “Instagram moms” in Türkiye. Additionally, the study aims to examine the relationship between emotional expressions and thematic patterns in the posts. The sentiment analysis conducted on Ekşi Sözlük regarding the phenomenon of “Instagram moms” shows that the posts largely reflect a negative approach. This is consistent with academic criticism of digital mothering practices and Ekşi Sözlük’s unique, often questioning and critical style. Indeed, the

literature emphasizes that representations of mothers on Instagram are mostly idealized, fictionalized, and presented in a manner that is far from reality (Germic et al., 2021; Gibson, 2019). This situation reproduces the perception of the “ideal mother” and, within the framework of Festinger’s (1954) Social Comparison Theory, can lead to negative feelings such as anxiety, inadequacy, and guilt in mothers who cannot meet this standard (Abidin, 2017; Egmoose et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be said that the negative emotions observed in the posts stem from an effort to reject these perfectionist standards and decipher the psychological pressures they cause. Research indicates that “influencer mothers” commodify their emotional labor and maternal identities (Abidin, 2017; Duffy et al., 2022). In this context, one reason for the prevalence of negative emotions in our study may be that these mothers are associated with “opportunism” or “marketing their children”. Furthermore, the ethical and privacy dimensions of parents sharing their children’s images and information on online platforms are also debated (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Brosch, 2016). Accordingly, it is thought that the concern and anger about the potential risk of abuse arising from children being turned into content objects plays a role in users’ negative reactions. As a result, the prevalence of negative sentiment in posts about Instagram moms stems from criticism regarding the representation of motherhood, child privacy, the artificial nature of social media, and the potential negative effects of consumer culture on family dynamics.

When examining the most frequently encountered emotional tones in posts about the “Instagram moms” phenomenon on the Ekşi Sözlük, it is evident that negative emotions are distinctly dominant. In particular, it is understood that anger and disgust tone the discourse, while emotions such as sadness, surprise, and expectation also manifest themselves at various levels. The findings of the study reveal that the prevalence of anger and disgust indicates that some practices of Instagram moms are perceived as morally wrong or inappropriate and are criticized. In the context of social intuition theory, these emotions can be interpreted not only as individual dissatisfaction but also as an expression of intuitive judgments regarding moral violations (Graham et al., 2013; Haidt, 2003).

The theoretical foundations of Plutchik’s wheel of emotions are consistent with Plutchik’s psycho-evolutionary model (2003), in which emotions such as anger and disgust serve to maintain social order and trigger behaviors necessary for survival (Gazzillo et al., 2020). In this context, it can be said that individuals who share content related to Instagram motherhood reflect behaviors such as violating child privacy, exploiting maternal feelings, and misleading viewers, and that they consider such behaviors to be morally problematic. These reactions reflect a deep anger towards influencers deliberately commodifying authenticity and sincerity in order to appear closer, more “real,” and more genuine to their viewers, in the context of Abidin’s (2017) concept of “calibrated amateurism”. The fact that sadness ranks third is another noteworthy finding in the study. In the literature, this emotion is thought to be related to the loss of the “real”, “authentic” or “organic” motherhood experience in the digital age (Wang, 2021) and the disappointment felt at

motherhood becoming part of consumer culture (Prieto et al., 2023). At the same time, the prominence of this sentiment in the research can also be interpreted as indicative of parents' concerns about privacy violations caused by their children's digital footprints and potential autobiographical problems in the future (Leaver et al., 2020).

In posts on Ekşi Sözlük regarding the phenomenon of "Instagram moms", the most prominent theme is the transformation of motherhood into a marketing tool within consumer culture. This is followed by criticism regarding the violation of children's privacy and the pressure to perform and achieve perfection. The themes of distorted perception of reality and reinforcement of gender roles are less prominent. Overall, the discourse seems to focus on the commodification of motherhood and ethical issues in the context of children's rights. According to the thematic distribution in the research, the most dominant theme, "consumption culture and motherhood as a marketing tool", points to a phenomenon that is frequently emphasized in the literature. Crystal Abidin (2017) explains this situation with the concept of "commodified intimacy", criticizing influencers for turning their personal lives and emotional labor into a marketable product. Similarly, Krzyżanowska (2020) criticizes the way famous mothers on social media reflect their content as a commercial commodity, turning motherhood into a consumption-oriented, commodified identity associated with middle-class privileges. The findings of our study clearly show that Ekşi Sözlük writers explicitly recognize this commodification and react against the reduction of a deep emotional and social experience such as motherhood to a marketing strategy. The second most frequent theme, "violation of children's privacy", constitutes the most concrete cause of moral outrage and disgust. This finding aligns with the ethical debates surrounding the concept of sharenting discussed by Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2017), showing that Ekşi Sözlük writers view the use of children as "content material" as a serious violation that threatens their future autonomy and security. Similarly, in the literature, "bad mother" blogs challenge mainstream narratives of good motherhood, and the criticism of these mothers for raising their children in problematic, undesirable, or unethical ways (Orton-Johnson, 2017) parallels the findings of this study.

Other themes identified in the study emerge as elements that support and contextualize the two main themes. Among these, the theme of "performance and perfectionism" demonstrates that Instagram motherhood is idealized and detached from reality, and that this performance creates a visual and semantic ground for commodification and privacy violations (Baxter & Czarnecka, 2025). The theme of "distorted perception of reality" emphasizes the perception distortion and psychological distress that followers may experience when they compare their own lives to this fabricated perfection, mistaking it for reality (Gerbner et al., 1986). Indeed, this situation is explained by Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1998), which argues that viewers develop beliefs and perceptions that align with media content over time as a result of constant exposure to media programs or characters. Finally, the theme of "reinforcing gender roles" shows that Instagram motherhood

perpetuates traditional motherhood roles, thereby sustaining gender inequality, and that this criticism can be linked to the digital feminism literature (Liu, 2023).

The study examined the change in feelings towards “Instagram moms” on Ekşi Sözlük over the years and showed that users’ feelings were predominantly negative. Disgust and anger were prominent in the early years, while negative feelings increased again during the pandemic. In this context, when the results of the analysis are discussed taking into account the periods of significant variability, the first period (2016-2017) represents a phase in which disgust emerged as the dominant emotion. During this period, as Instagram motherhood was just beginning to become widespread, the reactions of Ekşi Sözlük writers mostly contained moral discomfort and alienation. Within the framework of Haidt’s (2003) moral psychology, disgust generally arises in situations where moral boundaries are violated. Accordingly, the study observed shock and disgust reactions to the commercialization of values considered sacred, such as motherhood and child privacy. The research results show a sharp increase in feelings of anger and sadness during the 2020 pandemic period. Staying at home and increased social media use have raised the visibility of Instagram moms’ content; viewers have become more aware of the gap between their own chaotic and uncertain experiences and the constructed perfection (Montag & Hegelich, 2020). Furthermore, the general state of exhaustion defined in the literature as “pandemic fatigue” (Jørgensen et al., 2022) may have increased the intensity of criticism and feelings of anger. Finally, the decline observed in the 2021-2025 period indicates a decrease in reactions to Instagram motherhood. This situation can be explained by the habituation effect resulting from Instagram motherhood no longer being new or shocking, and the burnout caused by constantly producing criticism (Rome, 2020).

The results of our thematic temporal analysis reveal that posts related to Instagram moms on Ekşi Sözlük have undergone a transformation over time. The prominence of the themes “motherhood as a tool of consumer culture and marketing” and “violation of children’s privacy” in the 2016-2017 period indicates that the community’s criticism in the early days of Instagram motherhood focused more on ethical issues. The sudden rise in 2017 can be explained by the increase in posts on the platform as a result of the spread of Instagram motherhood. At this point, the spread of Web 2.0 in information societies has accelerated the formation of virtual communities and provided opportunities for social capital and new ritualistic practices. These phenomena, which can be examined from cultural and anthropological perspectives, show that consumption rituals and their dissemination on social media serve to legitimize modern motherhood and support the evolving identity of mothers (Finchum, 2020). In particular, sharing has become a common practice among mothers who produce content, gain followers, establish collaborations with brands, and promote their own digital brands by using the various opportunities offered by social media (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). All these processes have increased the impact of social media (Instagram, Facebook, X, YouTube, etc.) on individuals’ daily lives and routines (Thoumrunroje, 2014). Due to the pandemic in 2020, criticism of Instagram

motherhood has resurfaced. Indeed, Er et al. (2021) found that mothers shared more on Instagram during the pandemic and that their children's faces frequently appeared in these posts. Therefore, the study emphasizes the importance of raising awareness among parents to protect their children's well-being and privacy. The significant decline observed in all themes after 2021 can be explained by the community's reduced reactions due to saturation and habituation. The findings of Arora and Mehta (2023) also support this process; as the researchers concluded that social media has become an integral part of individual life, and even political processes have been influenced by social media, with an increase observed in studies conducted since 2010, particularly in the context of adolescents, women, and adults, and this trend accelerating with the pandemic in 2020.

The study reveals a meaningful relationship between emotions and themes in the posts. The themes of "motherhood being used as a tool of consumer culture and marketing" and "violation of children's privacy" are particularly strongly associated with negative emotions; this concretizes previous findings regarding high negative emotion intensity and thematic focus. On the other hand, the theme of "performance and perfection pressure" is partially associated with positive emotions because some users perceive it as encouraging or guiding. The prominent representation of the "bad mother" in digital platforms, while seemingly challenging neoliberal "perfect motherhood" norms, often becomes a strategy that reproduces these norms (Ehrstein et al., 2019). Littler's (2019) analyses of cinema and television and Lehto's (2020) work on blog posts show that these representations express anger and disappointment at the unequal burden of labor, but also enable mothers to maintain their status as "good enough mothers". This situation is consistent with the "emotional regime" created by neoliberal culture; potentially transformative emotions such as anger and disappointment are drawn into the system and controlled through humor, confession, or consumption practices (Ehrstein et al., 2019). Ultimately, the digital intimate public sphere reinforces rather than questions motherhood and family norms, while the emotional intensity of user posts reveals how sincere reactions to these norms are managed within the neoliberal framework.

Conclusion

In the current study, users' posts about Instagram moms on Ekşi Sözlük, a participant-based online dictionary format social media platform in Türkiye, were analyzed. The findings of the study show that these posts predominantly contain negative emotions. This result is supported by studies suggesting that idealized representations of motherhood are associated with anxiety and feelings of inadequacy linked to social comparison, the commodification of motherhood identity, and concerns about child privacy. The study determined that anger and disgust were the most intense emotions in terms of emotional tone, followed by sadness. The predominance of anger and disgust in the study is thought to stem from perceptions of moral violations, such as children being turned into content objects and motherhood being reduced to a marketing strategy, while sadness is thought to

stem from the loss of authentic motherhood experiences and concerns about children's digital future. According to the thematic analysis, the most dominant theme was "motherhood as a tool of consumer culture and marketing," while "violation of children's privacy" ranked second. The imposition of performance and perfection, the distortion of the perception of reality, and the reinforcement of gender roles were other important themes that emerged in the study. According to the sentiment analysis by time variable, disgust was dominant in the 2016–2017 period, while anger and sadness increased significantly during the 2020 pandemic period. After 2021, a significant decrease in sentiment intensity and thematic emphasis was observed. This situation can be explained by the fact that Instagram motherhood has lost its novelty and shock value over time, leading to habituation and saturation within the community. When thematic analysis is examined according to the time variable, the findings from 2016 to 2025 show that themes such as motherhood as a tool of consumption culture and marketing, and violation of child privacy were particularly prominent in the early years, peaking in 2017. and a renewed increase was determined in 2020, thought to be due to the impact of the pandemic. However, after 2021, there was a steady decline in all themes, and interest almost completely faded in the 2023–2025 period. In conclusion, a strong relationship was found between emotions and themes; in particular, themes of consumer culture and privacy violations were found to be strongly associated with negative emotions.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Despite the impressive results achieved in this study, it also has some limitations. The dataset chosen for this study may have produced limited results in terms of scope and size, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, using a broader participant base and more diversified datasets in future studies is considered important to strengthen the findings. Another limitation relates to the contextual nature of the data used. The fact that the comments analyzed in the current study reflect cultural values may limit their ability to capture sentiment patterns. Therefore, future research is recommended to include diverse cultures for a comprehensive analysis. Finally, expanding analyses with hybrid methods by combining machine learning and manual methods for sentiment analysis in the social sciences will help fill the gap in literature.

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