

# Sentiment analysis of Ekşi Sözlük entries on the August 10, 2025 Balıkesir earthquake

10 Ağustos 2025 Balıkesir depremine yönelik Ekşi Sözlük entry'lerinin duygu analizi

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## Abstract

This study examines how digital crisis communication was shaped in the context of the earthquake that occurred in Balıkesir on August 10, 2025. The dataset consists of 1,143 entries shared on the Ekşi Sözlük platform within the first week, with 1,125 entries produced predominantly in the first 24 hours. The data were analyzed using a combination of content and emotion analysis methods. Each entry was coded based on its emotional orientation as positive, negative, or neutral, and further classified into seven categories: surprise/panic, fear/anxiety, anger/disappointment, sadness/grief, disgust/irony, happiness/gratitude, and neutral. The coding process was grounded in Ekman's basic emotions framework and supported by crisis communication literature. Findings show that fear/anxiety, neutral information sharing, and disgust/irony were the dominant themes. While fear, anxiety, and surprise were prominent in the early phase, anger, sadness, and irony increased over time. The high proportion of neutral content indicates that digital platforms function not only as spaces for emotional expression but also as key arenas for information exchange during crises. Overall, the study highlights the temporal evolution of emotions in post-disaster digital environments and contributes to crisis communication research.

**Keywords:** Communication research, sentiment analysis, digital platforms, disaster psychology, strategic communication

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## Öz

Bu çalışma, 10 Ağustos 2025 tarihinde Balıkesir'de meydana gelen deprem bağlamında dijital kriz iletişiminin nasıl biçimlendiğini incelemiştir. Araştırmanın veri setini, Ekşi Sözlük platformunda depremle ilgili ilk bir hafta süresince paylaşılan ve baskın kısmı ilk 24 saat içinde üretilmiş 1125 entry olmak üzere toplam 1143 entry oluşturmuştur. Veriler, içerik analizi ve duygu analizi yöntemleri birlikte kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Her bir entry, duygusal yönelimine göre olumlu, olumsuz ve nötr polariteler kapsamında kodlanmış; şaşkınlık/panik, korku/endişe, öfke/hayal kırıklığı, üzüntü/yas, iğrenme/ironi, mutluluk/memnuniyet ve nötr olmak üzere yedi duygu kategorisi altında sınıflandırılmıştır. Duygu kodlama süreci, Ekman'ın temel duygular yaklaşımı ile afet ve kriz literatüründeki kuramsal çalışmalar temel alınarak yapılandırılmıştır. Bulgular, veri setinde baskın temaların korku/endişe, nötr/bilgi paylaşımı ve iğrenme/ironi olduğunu göstermiştir. Depremin ilk evresinde korku, endişe ve şaşkınlık temelli ifadeler öne çıkarken, zaman ilerledikçe öfke, üzüntü ve ironik söylemlerin belirgin biçimde arttığı tespit edilmiştir. Nötr içeriklerin yüksek oranı, dijital platformların kriz anlarında yalnızca duygusal tepki alanı değil, aynı zamanda bilgi paylaşımı ve kamusal iletişim mecrası olarak işlev gördüğünü ortaya koymuştur. Çalışma, afet sonrası dijital ortamlarda duyguların zamansal olarak dönüşen yapısını ortaya koyarak kriz iletişimi ve afet yönetimi çalışmalarına ampirik katkı sağlamıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İletişim araştırmaları, duygu analizi, dijital platformlar, afet psikolojisi, stratejik iletişim

## Introduction

In recent years, digital platforms have played a critical role in disaster and crisis situations by enabling both information sharing and the expression of collective emotions. Sudden events such as earthquakes increase the demand for rapid information while making emotional responses more visible online. Recent disasters in Türkiye have further highlighted the importance of these platforms, positioning social media and user-generated content as key data sources in crisis communication research.

Despite growing interest in digital crisis communication, the emotional dimensions of user-generated content remain insufficiently examined. Existing studies largely focus on information dissemination and institutional messaging, while the ways collective emotions are expressed and circulated in digital environments are still underexplored. This creates a gap in understanding how emotional expressions shape public discourse during crises.

Emotions in digital environments can be systematically analyzed through theoretical frameworks. One widely used approach is Ekman's theory of basic emotions, which identifies universal emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, happiness, surprise, and disgust (Ekman, 1992). Ekman (1999) later expanded this framework by including contempt, often reflected in sarcastic or dismissive expressions. Based on this framework, the present study examines emotional expressions in Ekşi Sözlük entries related to the Balıkesir earthquake.

Accordingly, the study aims to identify dominant emotions and social tendencies by analyzing these entries, contributing to a better understanding of collective emotional responses and supporting more effective digital crisis communication strategies.

## Review of Literature on Emotions

Emotions are complex phenomena that cannot be explained through a single theoretical framework. While universalist approaches emphasize their bi-

ological foundations, dimensional and constructivist perspectives highlight variability in intensity and the role of cultural contexts. Accordingly, emotions are better understood through complementary theoretical approaches rather than fixed categorizations.

Cross-cultural research shows that basic emotions such as fear, anger, and happiness can be universally recognized through facial expressions (Ekman, 1992). In contrast, social emotions like shame, pride, and jealousy are largely shaped through cultural learning. These findings indicate that emotions have biological roots but are structured and interpreted within specific social contexts.

Recent neuroscientific and psychological approaches have shifted from identifying a fixed set of emotions to examining how emotions function and acquire meaning. From this perspective, emotions are dynamic processes emerging from the interaction between biological predispositions and environmental experiences (Barrett, 2017). Consequently, contemporary research focuses less on defining the number of emotions and more on understanding how they emerge and operate within social contexts.

The emotion theories summarized in the table indicate that emotions are multi-layered phenomena. Early theories such as the James–Lange Theory (1884–1885; 1922) and the Cannon–Bard Theory (1927) focused on physiological processes, differing in how they linked bodily responses to subjective experience. Dimensional approaches, particularly Russell's Circumplex Model (1980), conceptualized emotions along valence and arousal dimensions, emphasizing their continuity. Similarly, Plutchik's psycho-evolutionary theory (1980) framed emotions as adaptive and structured in opposing pairs, while Ekman's Basic Emotions Theory (1992) highlighted universal, biologically grounded emotions. In contrast, Barrett's Constructed Emotion Theory (2017) conceptualized emotions as dynamic processes shaped by interactions between biological and cultural–cognitive factors.

**Table 1. Key theories of emotion**

Theory	Proponent /s	Definition	Dimensions	Notes
James-Lange Theory (1884-1885)	William James & Carl Lange	Emotions are the perception of physiological changes in the body.	Physiological → Emotional response	Highlights the bodily basis of emotion.
Cannon-Bard Theory (1927)	Walter Cannon & Philip Bard	Emotions and physiological responses occur simultaneously, not sequentially.	Central nervous system processing	Critique of James-Lange; emphasizes brain mechanisms.
Circumplex Model of Effect (1980)	James A. Russell	Emotions can be represented in a two-dimensional circular space.	Valence (pleasure-displeasure), Arousal (activation-deactivation)	Explains similarities/ differences among emotions.
Psycho-evolutionary Theory (1980)	Robert Plutchik	Emotions are adaptive responses shaped by evolution.	Eight primary emotions in oppositional pairs	Illustrated in Plutchik's "Wheel of Emotions."
Basic Emotions Theory (1992)	Paul Ekman	Certain basic emotions are universal and biologically hardwired.	Six core emotions (anger, fear, disgust, sadness, happiness, surprise)	Supported by cross-cultural studies on facial expressions.
Constructed Emotion Theory (2017)	Lisa Feldman Barrett	Emotions are constructed by the brain from core affect and conceptual knowledge.	Valence, arousal, and social/ cultural context	Emphasizes cultural and cognitive construction of emotions.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that emotions cannot be reduced solely to biology or culture, but must be understood through their interaction. Accordingly, this study approaches emotions as multidimensional and context-sensitive processes, examining digital emotional expressions in disaster contexts from an integrative perspective.

### Review of Literature on Crisis Communication

The Balıkesir earthquake occurred on August 10, 2025, at 19:53, with its epicenter in Alakır-Sındırgı. According to the Kandilli Observatory and Earthquake Research Institute, its magnitude was recorded as 6.1 (KRDAE, 2025).

In the context of the August 10, 2025 Balıkesir earthquake, the importance of effective disaster communication became particularly evident. Such crises, characterized by uncertainty, fear, and rapidly changing conditions, require a well-coordinated flow of information to support both immediate response and subsequent recovery processes (Nazlı, 2024). Digital platforms, including user-generated content sites such as Ekşi Sözlük, function as critical channels connecting authorities, responders, and the public, enabling information sharing, coordination, and public reassurance during crises.

Social media platforms play a central role in disaster communication, as individuals actively seek information from official institutions and civil society organizations. Tarakcı (2023), examining Twitter use following the February 6, 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, found that the platform was primarily used for informational purposes, with institutional communication largely framed in rational terms and emotional expressions remaining limited. Similarly, Yazar (2025) demonstrated that while disaster experiences increase risk awareness, this does not necessarily lead to sustained behavioral change, emphasizing the need to align communication strategies with the media consumption habits of different social groups.

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has further transformed crisis communication by enabling continuous interaction between institutions and stakeholders, even under restrictive conditions. In this regard, Köksoy (2021) showed that digital and social media platforms were positioned at the center of organizational communication strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Crisis communication is thus understood as a multidimensional process involving institutional actors, media channels, technological infrastructures, and interorganizational networks (Koçyiğit, 2023a). Effective coordination and the strategic use of digital tools are essential for managing complex disaster situations.

Institutional communication practices during disasters tend to prioritize informational updates and operational coordination. For example, Yıldırım (2024) found that press releases following the February 6, 2023 earthquakes relied primarily on official data and statistical information, while emotional and relational elements remained limited. At the same time, digital platforms introduce challenges, particularly through the rapid circulation of misinformation. Koçyiğit (2023b) demonstrated that institutions actively engaged in verifying misleading content, while computational approaches using deep learning models such as LSTM and CNN have shown high accuracy in detecting false information in large-scale datasets (Hark, 2022; Hark et al., 2023).

In addition to information flows, social media interactions shape public perceptions and emotional responses during crises. Atkan and Çevik Ergin (2024) found that timely and empathetic communication generated more positive public reactions, whereas delayed responses led to negative perceptions. Similarly, Çakmak (2023) emphasized that organizations rely primarily on informational strategies but also employ response strategies such as apology and denial. From an emotional perspective, Uzun (2023) demonstrated that users actively express their emotional experiences through social media and that these expressions evolve over time, highlighting the dynamic nature of digital emotional discourse.

Despite this growing body of literature, existing research has largely focused on institutional communication strategies or platforms such as X (Twitter) and Instagram. Relatively fewer studies have examined user-generated content platforms characterized by community-based interaction and collective meaning-making practices. In this respect, Ekşi Sözlük provides a unique environment where users not only share information but also collectively interpret crisis events and express emotional responses.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the emotional structure of user-generated discourse related to the August 10, 2025 Balıkesir earthquake

by analyzing entries shared on Ekşi Sözlük. By focusing on both emotional polarity and emotion categories within a community-driven platform, the study seeks to contribute to the literature on digital crisis communication and disaster-related emotional discourse.

## Methodology

This study was designed within a qualitative research framework and aimed to examine digital crisis communication in the context of the earthquake that occurred in Balıkesir on August 10, 2025. The study employed content analysis to analyze Ekşi Sözlük entries related to the earthquake. Although the research was primarily designed as a qualitative study, it also incorporated a limited quantification strategy, allowing the calculation of frequency distributions of emotion categories in order to support the interpretive analysis. In this sense, numerical distributions were used not for statistical generalization but to strengthen the analytical interpretation of emotional patterns observed in the dataset. The research process consisted of data collection, data preprocessing, emotion coding, and analysis stages.

## Research Questions

In order to systematically examine the emotional structure of digital crisis discourse surrounding the Balıkesir earthquake, the study was guided by the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What are the dominant emotion categories expressed in Ekşi Sözlük entries related to the August 10, 2025 Balıkesir earthquake?

**RQ2:** What is the overall emotional polarity (positive, negative, neutral) of the entries shared during the disaster?

**RQ3:** What functional roles (emotional expression vs. information sharing) do Ekşi Sözlük entries perform in digital crisis communication?

**RQ4:** How do emotional expressions change between the early phase and the later phase of the disaster discourse?

## Representativeness and Limitations of the Sample

The sample of this study consists of entries shared on Ekşi Sözlük under the thread titled “10 Ağustos 2025 Balıkesir Depremi.” The earthquake occurred on August 10, 2025, at 19:53, and the thread was opened at 19:54, enabling users to immediately express their reactions. This timing reflects the rapid transfer of initial emotional responses into the digital environment.

The thread included 115 pages and a total of 1,143 entries, of which 1,125 were posted within the first 24 hours. This indicates that the dataset predominantly captures crisis-time and immediate post-crisis reactions characterized by high emotional intensity. The first entry, “iyi salladı” (“that was a strong shake”), exemplifies an immediate and reflexive response. The final entry analyzed was posted on August 15, 2025, at 00:59. Data collection was completed on August 17, 2025, at 19:54, ensuring the inclusion of both initial reactions and subsequent evaluations. All 1,143 entries were included in the analysis. Additionally, as of December 2025, approximately 12.5% of these entries had been removed from the platform.

Ekşi Sözlük, which constitutes the sample of this study, is one of the most established and influential user-generated digital public spaces in Türkiye (Binark, 2007; Gürel & Yakın, 2007; Saka, 2020). Its anonymous participation structure and dictionary-based format create a space where individual experiences, emotional reactions, and critical evaluations become highly visible. For this reason, the platform provides a valuable data source for examining instant reactions, collective emotions, and public debates during disasters and crises (Porsuk & Cerit, 2021).

**Table 2. Summary of analysis data**

Feature	Information
Earthquake Date and Time	August 10, 2025, 19:53
Ekşi Sözlük Thread Opening Time	August 10, 2025, 19:54
Thread Title	“10 Ağustos 2025 Balıkesir Depremi” (August 10, 2025 Balıkesir Earthquake)

First Entry	“iyi salladı” (“that was a strong shake”)
Total Pages	115
Total Entries	1143
Entries in the First 24 Hours	1125
Last Entry Date Until Data Collection	August 15, 2025, 00:59
Data Collection Date	August 17, 2025, 19:54

In addition, Ekşi Sözlük offers a suitable framework for analyzing users’ emotional expressions toward specific events and social issues (Alp, 2016; Akgül, 2020; Akova & Kantar, 2020; Bilgin Ülken & Yüce, 2020; Söğüt, 2020; Tunçer, 2020). Its anonymous structure enables users to express their emotions more directly and openly.

However, the platform’s user profile—composed largely of digitally literate individuals engaged with current affairs—limits the representativeness of the sample. Therefore, the findings do not reflect all social groups in Türkiye but rather users actively participating in digital public discourse. Moreover, focusing on a single platform excludes platform-specific dynamics observed in other social media such as X, Instagram, and Facebook (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Despite these limitations, the concentration of entries within the first 24 hours constitutes a key strength, as it captures immediate and high-intensity emotional responses. Thus, Ekşi Sözlük provides a limited yet analytically meaningful context for examining emotional discourse in digital public spaces during disasters.

## Coding Process and Data Reliability

In this study, Ekşi Sözlük entries related to the Balıkesir earthquake were coded using content analysis. Previously developed Turkish emotion lexicons, SentiTurkNet (Dehkharghani et al., 2015) and TREMO (Toçoğlu & Alpkoçak, 2018), were used as reference resources. SentiTurkNet guided the classification of polarity (positive, negative, neutral), while TREMO informed the identification of specific emotion categories such as fear, anger, sadness, and hope.

Coding was conducted manually, considering both the contextual meaning of expressions and

the overall emotional tone of each entry, rather than relying solely on automated scoring. During preprocessing, entries containing hyperlinks, references (e.g., “bkz”), or purely informational content were evaluated based on their textual context. Informal language elements common in Ekşi Sözlük—such as slang, swear words, emojis, and sarcasm—were also interpreted contextually.

When multiple emotions appeared within a single entry, the dominant emotion was determined based on semantic tone and communicative intention. In cases of irony or sarcasm, meanings were interpreted contextually rather than literally. Entries where sarcasm or irony constituted the primary intent were coded under the “disgust/irony” category. This approach allowed for a more accurate analysis of platform-specific and discursive features of emotional expression.

Although, content analysis was used as the primary analytical method, allowing both the systematic categorization of emotional expressions and the calculation of their frequencies within the dataset; thematic analysis was employed as an interpretive analytical approach in order to identify recurring patterns and meanings within the discourse. While the frequency-based distribution of emotion categories was obtained through content analysis, the interpretation of emotional narratives, ironic discourse, and responsibility attributions was evaluated through thematic analysis.

Given the limitations associated with coding reliability in qualitative studies, several strategies were employed to enhance methodological rigor. First, external auditing procedures were implemented to ensure transparency and credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2002; Uzun et al., 2021). An audit trail was systematically maintained, documenting data collection, preprocessing steps, emotion coding decisions, and analytical procedures. A comprehensive coding scheme was developed based on the literature, and all coding processes using SentiTurkNet and TREMO (Toçoğlu & Alpoçak, 2018) were recorded and archived, enabling traceability and re-examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tisdell et al., 2016; Uzun et al., 2021).

Second, external expert review was conducted to strengthen coding consistency. An independent qualitative research expert reviewed the coding protocol and sample entries, and consensus was reached on disputed cases, reducing potential coder bias (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2002; Uzun et al., 2021). These procedures enhanced transparency, consistency, and trustworthiness.

The data were obtained from Ekşi Sözlük, a publicly accessible digital platform. However, ethical considerations were prioritized, recognizing that public availability does not eliminate the need for ethical sensitivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Accordingly, usernames were not disclosed, and all quotations were anonymized. Since the chronological order of entries may change over time, quotations were not numbered but labeled according to emotion category and temporal phase (e.g., Fear/Anxiety, early phase; Disgust/Irony, later phase).

This approach ensured participant privacy, prevented direct identification, and supported contextual interpretation. As the study relied solely on publicly available data without direct interaction or personal data collection, ethical approval was not required. The research adhered to established ethical standards in qualitative research.

### ***Emotion Coding Framework for Disaster Discourse***

The emotion coding framework of this study is primarily grounded in Ekman’s theory of universal emotions. The six basic emotions identified by Ekman (1992)—happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, and surprise—correspond to emotional responses commonly observed in disaster contexts. In addition, Ekman’s later inclusion of contempt (1999) provides a theoretical basis for interpreting ironic, sarcastic, and dismissive expressions frequently encountered in crisis-related discourse. Accordingly, the framework was expanded to incorporate both basic emotions and the dimension of contempt.

The coding scheme was further informed by the disaster and crisis communication literature, ensuring that each category reflects context-specific emotional expressions. In this regard, the happiness/gratitude category was constructed based on Ekman's concept of happiness while also encompassing sub-emotions such as relief and gratitude. Situations such as the absence of casualties or the ability to reach loved ones form the basis of these positive responses. As Norris et al. (2002) suggest, post-disaster emotional experiences include not only negative reactions but also emotions associated with resilience and gratitude.

**Table 3. Emotional Coding Scheme**

Emotion Codes Developed in This Study	Ekman's Basic Emotions (1992/1999)	Disaster and Crisis Literature Support
Happiness / Gratitude	Happiness	Norris et al. (2002) "60,000 disaster victims: relief & gratitude responses".
Sadness / Grief	Sadness	Bonanno (2004) "Loss, trauma, resilience"; Raphael (1986).
Anger / Disappointment	Anger	Drury (2011) "Collective anger in disasters"; Tierney (2007).
Disgust / Irony	Contempt	Ekman (1999) "contempt as 7th basic emotion"; Lazarus (1991) irony & contempt in stress appraisal.
Fear / Anxiety	Fear	Pfefferbaum et al. (2014) disaster mental health: "fear vs anxiety"; Norris (2002).
Surprise / Panic	Suprise	Quarantelli (2001) "Panic behavior in disaster"; Fischer (1998) panic studies.

The sadness/grief category was grounded in Ekman's concept of sadness and linked to experiences of loss and trauma in disaster contexts. Bonanno (2004) emphasizes the interplay between grief and resilience, while Raphael (1986) highlights its collective dimension. Accordingly, this category includes both actual and anticipated losses.

The anger/disappointment category, based on Ekman's anger emotion, captures institutional criticism, structural concerns, and reactions to crisis management. As noted by Drury (2011), collective anger reflects demands for social justice, while Tierney (2007) links it to critical evaluations of institutional shortcomings. Thus, this category represents both emotional and socio-political responses.

The disgust/irony category integrates Ekman's disgust emotion with the contempt dimension (Ekman, 1999), encompassing sarcastic, ironic, and dismissive expressions. Lazarus (1991) suggests that such expressions function as coping mechanisms in stressful contexts, particularly in critiques of institutional failures.

The fear/anxiety category combines immediate threat (fear) and uncertainty about future risks (anxiety), which often co-occur in disaster contexts (Pfefferbaum et al., 2014). Accordingly, both were treated as a single category reflecting responses to present and anticipated danger.

Finally, the surprise/panic category reflects Ekman's surprise emotion, capturing immediate reactions of shock and disorientation. Although panic is often overstated, disaster research highlights the prevalence of uncertainty-driven responses in early phases (Quarantelli, 2001; Fischer, 1998).

Overall, the framework conceptualizes emotions as dynamic, context-dependent processes shaped by discursive and temporal conditions in digital crisis environments.

## Findings

In this study, a total of 1,143 entries shared on Ekşi Sözlük in the context of the August 10, 2025 Balıkesir earthquake were systematically analyzed. During the analysis process, the emotional polarity of each entry was first identified, and expressions were classified under three main polarity categories: positive, negative, and neutral. Subsequently, entries were coded according to their dominant emotional orientation into seven emotion categories: happiness/gratitude, sadness/grief, anger/disappointment, disgust/irony, fear/anxiety, surprise/panic, and neutral. This classification process was grounded in Ekman's basic emotions framework, and a literature-based emotion coding scheme was employed in order to more accurately capture emotional expressions specific to disaster contexts.

Beyond the frequency-based findings obtained through content analysis, thematic analysis revealed several recurring patterns in the discourse,

particularly related to institutional criticism, technological trust, and collective emotional responses. These themes were employed to deepen the interpretation of the data and to discuss the findings in relation to the relevant disaster communication and crisis communication literature.

**Table 4. The Main Findings**

Emotion Category	Positive (+)	Negative (-)	Neutral (0)	Total
Happiness / Gratitude	36	-	-	36
Sadness / Grief	-	69	-	69
Anger / Disappointment	-	126	-	126
Disgust / Irony	-	186	-	186
Fear / Anxiety	-	280	-	280
Surprise / Panic	-	70	49	119
Neutral (Information-sharing)	-	-	327	327
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>731</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>1143</b>

The findings indicate that digital crisis discourse is predominantly characterized by a negative emotional tone. Most entries clustered around fear/anxiety (280), disgust/irony (186), and anger/disappointment (126), while sadness/grief appeared in 69 entries and happiness/gratitude in a limited number (36).

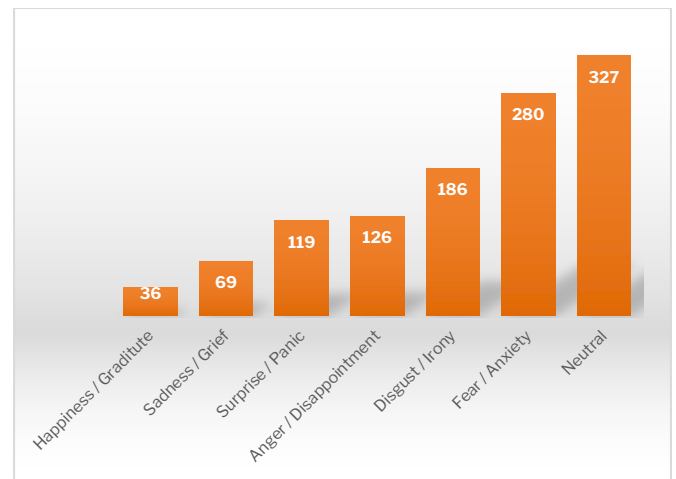
The surprise/panic category was observed in both negative (70) and neutral (49) contexts, reflecting initial shock and efforts to make sense of the situation. Additionally, 327 entries were coded as neutral, consisting mainly of information sharing and content without explicit emotional expression. These results provide an overview of the general distribution of emotional categories. Detailed analyses of emotional polarity and categories are presented in the tables and figures below, allowing for a more nuanced interpretation of temporal and thematic patterns in digital crisis discourse.

### Findings on Emotion Categories

The findings presented in this section address Research Question 1, which aims to identify the dominant emotion categories expressed in Ekşi Sözlük entries related to the Balıkesir earthquake. The

findings presented in Figure 1 indicate that the discourse produced on Ekşi Sözlük in the context of the Balıkesir earthquake predominantly clustered around fear/anxiety, neutral information-sharing, and disgust/irony. The most frequent emotion category, fear/anxiety, aligns with fundamental psychological responses triggered by the sudden and unpredictable nature of disasters.

The disaster psychology literature demonstrates that in events involving abrupt and potentially life-threatening risks, such as earthquakes, individuals primarily develop fear-based emotional responses shaped by concerns related to survival, safety, and uncertainty (Norris et al., 2002; Pfefferbaum et al., 2014). This finding suggests that fear expressed in digital environments reflects not merely an individual emotional reaction but rather the manifestation of a collective perception of risk.



**Figure 1. Overall Distribution of Entries by Emotion Category**

The high proportion of neutral content indicates that digital platforms during crises function not only as spaces for emotional expression but also as arenas for information sharing, reporting, and public awareness. Notifications about earthquake perception in different cities, links to official statements, and news-like posts suggest that users utilized the platform for real-time information verification and dissemination. This aligns with studies highlighting the “secondary media” role of digital platforms and users’ search for cognitive balance

under uncertainty (Houston et al., 2014; Palen & Anderson, 2016).

Another notable finding is the prominence of the disgust/irony category, reflecting the emergence of critical, sarcastic, and contemptuous discourse following the initial shock. Such expressions are often associated with distrust and disappointment toward institutional actors and crisis management processes (Lazarus, 1991; Tierney, 2007). The anonymous structure of digital platforms further amplifies these expressions.

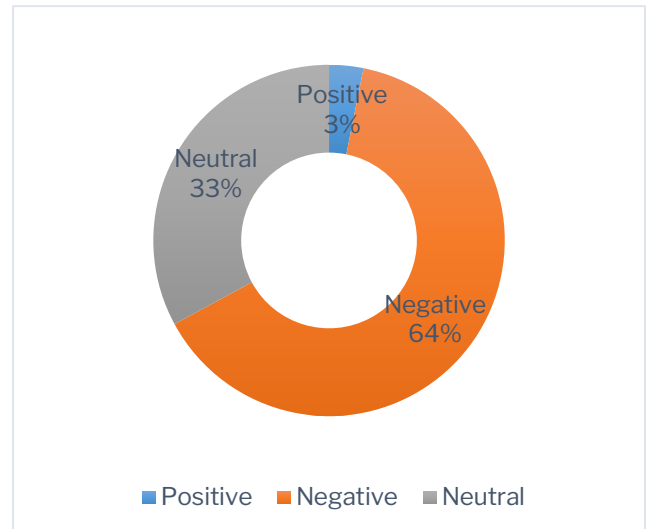
Although anger/disappointment and sadness/grief are less dominant than fear/anxiety, they indicate a transition toward evaluation and meaning-making. Anger is directed at responsibility and structural deficiencies, while sadness reflects awareness of loss. This pattern suggests that post-disaster discourse becomes more diversified over time (Bonanno, 2004; Drury, 2011).

Finally, the presence of happiness/gratitude demonstrates that disaster discourse is not solely negative. Expressions of relief and gratitude, particularly in the absence of casualties, align with findings on resilience and positive reappraisal (Norris et al., 2002; Bonanno, 2004).

Overall, digital crisis discourse encompasses both emotional (fear, anger, irony) and cognitive (information sharing) dimensions, indicating that crisis communication strategies should address both emotional regulation and timely information provision (Tierney, 2007; Nazlı, 2024).

### Findings on Emotional Polarity

The following findings respond to Research Question 2, which examines the overall emotional polarity of the entries shared during the disaster.



**Figure 2. Overall Distribution by Emotional Polarity**

The polarity distribution presented in Figure 2 indicates that the overall tone of the digital crisis discourse surrounding the Balıkesir earthquake was distinctly negative. Of the 1,143 entries analyzed, 63.95% were coded as negative (731 entries), 32.90% as neutral (376 entries), and only 3.15% as positive (36 entries).

This finding demonstrates that emotional expression on digital platforms during disaster situations is predominantly shaped by fear, anxiety, and critical evaluations. The disaster psychology literature associates this pattern with perceptions of sudden threat, uncertainty, and loss of control, emphasizing that in unpredictable events such as earthquakes, the predominance of fear- and anxiety-related expressions in digital discourse constitutes an expected response (Norris et al., 2002; Pfefferbaum et al., 2014).

The limited number of entries coded as positive largely clustered around expressions of satisfaction and gratitude toward the functioning of earthquake early warning systems. Statements such as “*long live Android*” (*happiness/gratitude, early phase*) and “*in Çanakkale, Android warned about 7–8 seconds earlier, giving enough time to open the door and go out into the garden—well done. Get well soon everyone, I hope no one was hurt.*” (*happiness/gratitude, early phase*) indicate that technology provided individuals with time, reassurance, and a sense of safety during the disaster.

Similarly, expressions such as *“I was informed almost a minute earlier. Knowing something this much in advance is extremely comforting. Technology, you are such a great thing”* (happiness/gratitude, early phase) and *“I was at my computer and didn’t feel any shaking at all, thankfully”* (happiness/gratitude, early phase) demonstrate that both early warnings and the absence of direct physical impact played a key role in generating positive emotional responses.

These narratives align with technopositivist perspectives in the disaster communication literature, which attribute a protective, stabilizing, and confidence-enhancing role to technological systems. In this context, technology functions not merely as a technical instrument but also serves as a soft power and as a psychological resource that mitigates fear and uncertainty by offering anticipatory knowledge and a sense of control (Nye, 2006; Morozov, 2013).

Entries coded as neutral demonstrate that Ekşi Sözlük functioned not only as a space for emotional expression during the crisis but also as a platform for information sharing and collective sense-making. Statements such as *“the earthquake warning system sent a message, it’s shaking”* (neutral, early phase), *“it lasted more than half a minute. Pendik”* (neutral, early phase), and *“this is an earthquake centered in Balıkesir”* (neutral, early phase) are primarily based on brief, descriptive transmissions of information.

In the later phase, more explanatory and comparative forms of discourse become prominent. Examples include *“the straight-line distance between Balıkesir and Istanbul Fatih is 175 km— is it normal to feel a magnitude 6 earthquake from that far away? Yes.”* (neutral, later phase) and *“it is normal for the earthquake to be felt in every city within a 170–180 km radius of Balıkesir, get well soon.”* (neutral, later phase).

Such entries point to what the crisis communication literature defines as sense-making, namely individuals’ efforts to interpret and contextualize an unfolding event through scientific, spatial, and experiential information (Palen & Anderson, 2016; Houston et al., 2014). Furthermore, the coding of

references such as *“bkz”* (see also), edits, news links, and visually oriented posts as neutral reinforces the platform’s function as a communication and verification space during crises.

The dominance of negative polarity is primarily shaped by the themes of fear/anxiety and anger/disappointment. Fear and anxiety are most frequently articulated through references to seismic data and the possibility of aftershocks. For example, the statement *“friends, when looking at the latest earthquake records from the Kandilli Observatory, intense seismic activity in Balıkesir Sındırgı has been noticeable since August 7. Honestly, I got scared by the table. I hope the earth is not preparing for an earthquake larger than 6.”* (fear/anxiety, later phase) illustrates how uncertainty does not necessarily diminish over time but instead deepens at a more cognitive level, transforming into ongoing risk assessment (Pfefferbaum et al., 2014).

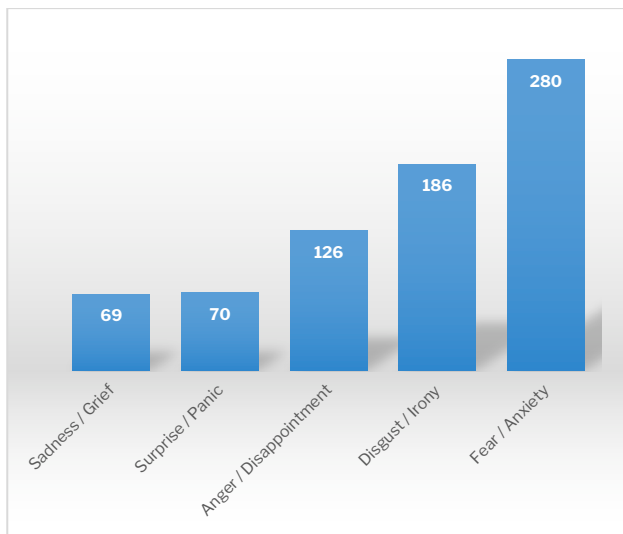
The theme of anger/disappointment emerges mainly around disaster management and collective memory. The expression *“another earthquake, and the country’s agenda will talk about it for two days and then forget it again”* (anger/disappointment, later phase) reflects not merely an individual emotional response but a critical discourse directed at institutional and societal structures. The disaster literature emphasizes that such expressions of collective anger are closely linked to demands for responsibility and accountability (Drury, 2011; Tierney, 2007).

The theme of sadness/grief becomes visible through empathy- and solidarity-oriented expressions. For instance, *“it shook forcefully for about 15 seconds in central Balıkesir. A multi-story building collapsed in Sındırgı, the epicenter. I hope there is no loss of life. Wishing a speedy recovery to the injured.”* (sadness/grief, later phase) demonstrates that alongside fear and anger, collective sensitivity and shared mourning also occupy an important place in disaster discourse (Bonanno, 2004; Raphael, 1986).

Overall, the findings based on Figure 2 reveal that digital crisis discourse is characterized by a predominantly negative emotional tone, while sim-

ultaneously encompassing multiple layers of interaction, including information sharing, experiential exchange, and technology-based reassurance. The coexistence of positive, neutral, and negative polarities indicates that digital platforms function during disasters not merely as spaces for emotional release, but as multidimensional public arenas that support cognitive processing, social interaction, and strategic communication practices (Nazlı, 2024).

### Overall Tone of Crisis Discourse



**Figure 3. Distribution of Negative Emotions**

The distribution presented in Figure 3 indicates that negative emotions are not homogeneous; rather, they cluster around distinct sub-emotions that carry different functions and orientations. The findings reveal that fear/anxiety constitutes the primary source of negativity in digital crisis discourse, followed respectively by disgust/irony, anger/disappointment, surprise/panic, and sadness/grief. This ordering closely corresponds to the stages proposed in disaster psychology, namely the progression from initial threat perception to cognitive appraisal and subsequently to collective meaning-making processes (Norris et al., 2002; Pfefferbaum et al., 2014).

Fear and anxiety, as the most dominant components of negative discourse, are primarily articulated around concerns related to aftershocks, spending the night at home, and perceived physical safety. Expressions such as *“three earthquakes*

*within 20 minutes. no sleep again tonight”* (fear/anxiety, later phase), *“it caused me to run down from the 11th floor in Mavişehir in 15 seconds—may we be protected from worse”* (fear/anxiety, later phase), and *“I hope there is no loss of life”* (fear/anxiety, early phase) illustrate that fear is directed not only toward the earthquake itself but also toward potential scenarios and future uncertainty.

The disaster psychology literature links such expressions to individuals’ risk assessment processes and self-protective reflexes, emphasizing that vulnerability-enhancing factors—such as nighttime conditions, aftershocks, and uncertainty regarding shelter—significantly intensify anxiety (Pfefferbaum et al., 2014). Moreover, disasters constitute complex global phenomena that negatively affect not only the physical safety of individuals and communities but also their mental health and overall well-being. Beyond their socioeconomic and cognitive consequences, the mental health impacts of disasters on affected populations represent a critical yet often neglected domain (Özkan, 2025).

Following fear/anxiety, the theme of disgust/irony indicates a shift in discourse from a primarily emotional register to a more critical and evaluative mode. Statements such as *“people from Istanbul have reached the point of ‘claiming’ an earthquake even if it happens in California, [expletive]”* (disgust/irony, later phase) and *“okay, you opened the thread the fastest—big applause to all of you!”* (disgust/irony, early phase) generate irony directed not only at the disaster itself but also at social reactions, intra-platform hierarchies, and symbolic competition within the platform.

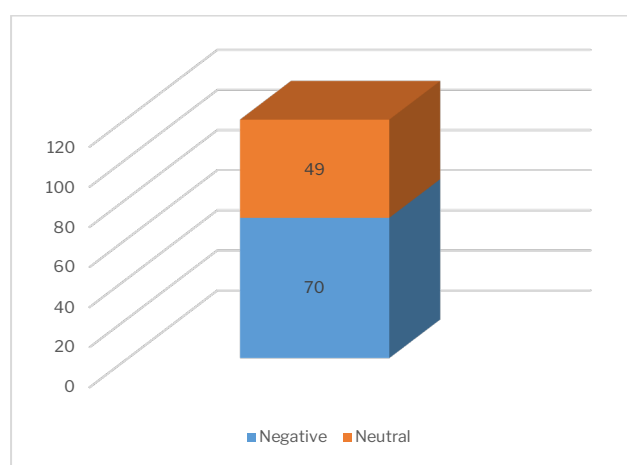
This pattern suggests that as Ekşi Sözlük temporarily adopts a forum-like structure during crises, irony becomes oriented both toward institutional actors and platform-internal actors. In line with McLuhan’s notion that *“the medium is the message,”* irony emerges here not merely as an emotional response but as a mode of expression shaped by the platform’s linguistic and cultural codes. According to Lazarus’s (1991) cognitive ap-

praisal theory, irony and sarcasm function as indirect coping strategies that allow individuals to establish psychological distance in stressful situations. Disaster literature similarly interprets irony as a symbolic indicator of distrust toward institutional neglect and structural failures (Tierney, 2007).

The theme of anger and disappointment generates a discourse that more directly attributes responsibility. Statements such as *“an [expletive] infrastructure where even a minor earthquake slows down the internet”* (anger/disappointment, later phase) and *“why do neither the opposition nor the government bring this issue to the agenda? this disaster is clearly coming, yet there is absolutely no planning or precaution”* (anger/disappointment, later phase) demonstrate that anger is concentrated around specific actors. In this discourse, politicians, local administrations, contractors, infrastructure systems, and the media emerge as the primary targets of criticism. Disaster literature conceptualizes such expressions of anger not merely as individual emotional reactions but as collective demands for justice and accountability (Nazlı, 2024).

The theme of sadness and grief, by contrast, becomes visible through expressions intertwined with empathy, solidarity, and cultural codes. Statements such as *“unfortunately, it has been a fatal earthquake. my condolences”* (sadness/grief, later phase) and *“the Balıkesir-centered earthquake was felt in İzmit, Afyon, Ankara, and Istanbul. I send my ‘get well soon’ wishes to my spiritual hometown; it was very frightening :( ”* (sadness/grief, later phase) illustrate how culturally significant consolation expressions such as “get well soon” and “wishing a speedy recovery” are transferred into the digital sphere. This finding indicates that even within digital platforms, traditional emotional expression patterns persist, and that Ekşi Sözlük functions as a carrier of everyday language. Bonanno (2004) and Raphael (1986) emphasize that such expressions of grief and empathy play a crucial role in strengthening community-level resilience.

Finally, the theme of surprise and panic displays a dual structure, intertwined with both fear and cognitive orientation-seeking. This emotion category was coded as either negative or neutral depending on contextual cues. While panic was consistently coded as negative, surprise could, in certain contexts, be coded as neutral. For example, *“Ayvalık was shaken severely—not lightly at all. I was genuinely surprised. We were thrown back and forth. I did not expect such a strong earthquake”* ([-] surprise, later phase) reflects surprise embedded within a negative experiential frame.



**Figure 4. The Dual Nature of Surprise and Panic**

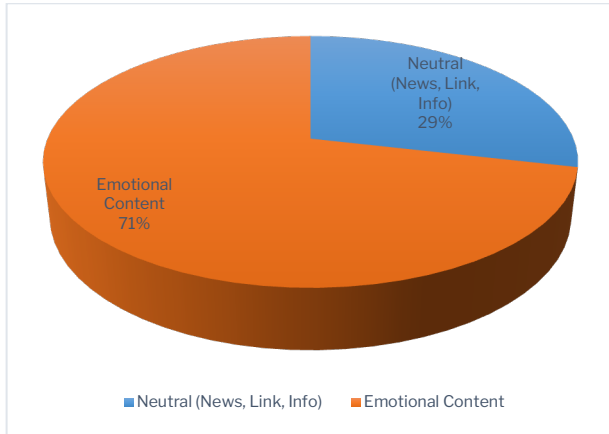
Another example foregrounds panic as a distinctly negative polarity: *“an earthquake warning arrived and I tried to stay calm, but during the earthquake panic really takes over... I felt it for about ten seconds, maybe less, but it felt longer. It didn’t even shake that badly, yet panic is the biggest danger. We really need to educate ourselves about this :/ get well soon to everyone”* ([-] panic, early phase).

Overall, these findings demonstrate that negative emotions in disaster discourse do not produce a one-dimensional form of “negativity.” Rather, emotions such as fear, irony, anger, and grief perform multiple functions, including information processing, attribution of responsibility, critique, and the construction of collective memory. This indicates that digital crisis communication operates not merely as a space for emotional release, but

also as a site of public debate and social accountability.

### **Polarity of Emotional and Functional Content**

These findings contribute to answering Research Question 3, which investigates the functional roles of Ekşi Sözlük entries in digital crisis communication.



**Figure 5. The Function of Neutral Content in Crisis Communication**

When the polarity of emotional and functional content is examined, two primary dimensions emerge: neutral and emotional content. Based on the distribution by content type, neutral entries—comprising informational posts, links, and news-related content—account for 327 entries, corresponding to 28.61% of the dataset. Emotional content, by contrast, consists of 816 entries and represents 71.39% of all analyzed posts. This finding indicates that Ekşi Sözlük fulfills both emotional expression and information-sharing functions during crisis situations; however, it also demonstrates that the platform predominantly operates as a space for emotional response and experiential expression in times of disaster.

Although Ekşi Sözlük has a forum-based structure, the circulation of information, the sharing of expertise, and the exchange of lived experiences constitute a significant part of its core communicative function. A comparable pattern can be observed on Reddit, a globally prominent platform with a similar forum-like structure that is widely

used for information acquisition and dissemination. In their systematic review, Proferes et al. (2021) analyzed 727 academic studies conducted between 2010 and 2020 that utilized Reddit as a data source, demonstrating that researchers have increasingly turned to Reddit as a repository of experiential knowledge and user-generated information over time.

In a similar vein, Ekşi Sözlük functions not only as a space for discussion but also as a source of curated user-generated knowledge. Since 2016, the launch of the Ekşi Şeyler website has enabled the thematic organization of user-produced content, presenting it in a multi-author, comment-disabled bulletin/blog format. This development has facilitated a more reader-friendly interface for non-writer audiences while expanding the platform's informational reach. At the same time, changes introduced through revisions to the user agreement in February 2016 triggered significant user backlash. As part of protest actions directed at Ekşi Şeyler and broader platform policies (Kaymas, 2016), approximately one million entries were gradually deleted within a period of less than one month (February–March 2016). This episode illustrates that Ekşi Sözlük operates not merely as a digital publishing platform but as a contested public sphere—one that is continuously negotiated, reshaped, and, at times, resisted by its users.

### **Effect of Temporal Phases on Categorical Distribution**

The analysis presented in this section addresses Research Question 4, focusing on how emotional expressions changed between the early and later phases of the disaster discourse.

In the data analysis, the dataset was divided into two temporal segments—early phase and later phase—in order to examine transformations in information-seeking behavior, tolerance of uncertainty, cognitive dissonance, and panic-shock responses during crisis situations. Disaster literature conceptualizes psychological shock as a multi-stage process encompassing immediate reaction, awareness, and recovery phases. During the initial

shock phase, individuals may exhibit physiological responses, difficulties in concentration, forgetfulness, perceptual distortions, or behavioral freezing (Kukuoğlu, 2018). In this study, the data were analyzed within this framework to capture the rapid transformation of users' immediate reactions within minutes of the earthquake.

A comparative analysis of the first and second halves of the dataset reveals a marked shift in dominant emotional themes. Fear/anxiety emerged more intensely in the early phase, reflecting heightened uncertainty and perceived risk immediately following the earthquake, and showed a noticeable decline in the later phase. A similar pattern was observed for the surprise/panic category, which was highly prevalent in the initial phase but decreased substantially over time. This trend suggests that reflexive, shock-driven reactions characteristic of the immediate aftermath gradually gave way to more structured, interpretive, and evaluative forms of discourse.

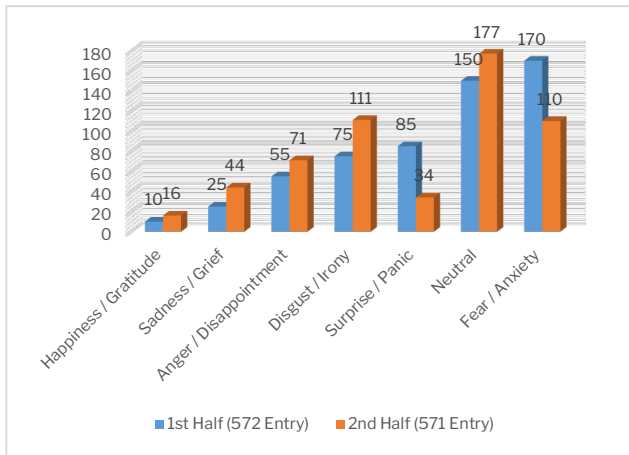
In contrast, anger/disappointment and disgust/irony followed a different trajectory. Entries coded under anger/disappointment showed a relative increase in the later phase, while irony and sarcasm exhibited an even more pronounced rise. This shift indicates that as the initial shock subsided, users increasingly engaged in critical reflection, directing their attention toward institutional responsibility, structural deficiencies, and past negligence.

Notably, a significant portion of later-phase irony/disgust targeted media narratives centered on Istanbul, particularly the repetitive framing of earthquakes through Istanbul-focused disaster scenarios. One illustrative entry states: *"after every earthquake it's the same talk: breaking news earthquake in Istanbul, earthquake centered in Balıkesir, Sungurlu 6.1, professor: we should talk about buildings, not earthquakes; infrastructure is not ready, society is not educated, phone operators fail. Moderator: you're right, professor. End."* (disgust/irony, later phase). Such expressions reflect growing frustration with media sensationalism and agenda-setting practices in disaster coverage.

Neutral content, by contrast, maintained a relatively stable presence across both phases. One contributing factor is that the earthquake was felt in multiple cities, prompting users to continue reporting their locations and experiences throughout the timeline. For example: *"it was felt in Sancaktepe; the building literally moved under my feet for about two seconds"* (surprise/panic, early phase). This consistency underscores Ekşi Sözlük's role not only as a space for emotional expression but also as a sustained information-sharing and situational reporting platform during crises.

Finally, happiness/gratitude and sadness/grief displayed a notable increase in the later phase. Expressions of relief and gratitude—often tied to the absence of casualties—as well as references to damage, loss, and memories of previous disasters became more visible as time progressed. An illustrative example reads: *"I felt it while sitting on the balcony in Istanbul; I thought it was just me, but as I went inside it got stronger and I said 'oh no, there must be a big earthquake somewhere...' because shaking that slow and long wasn't normal. It turned out to be in Balıkesir... I hope no one was harmed; may God spare this nation from such suffering again."* (sadness/grief, later phase). This finding demonstrates that emotional trajectories in disaster discourse do not follow a simple linear pattern of escalation or decline; rather, they diversify and reorganize over time as users reinterpret the event, integrate new information, and engage in collective meaning-making.

As a final finding of the study, and as noted in the methodology section, an examination of the temporal trajectory of the thread reveals that approximately 12.5% of the 1,143 entries analyzed were deleted from the platform by December 2025. This observation was considered analytically relevant and therefore discussed under a separate subsection. Although all entries were accessible and included during the data collection and analysis phase, the subsequent deletion of a portion of the content highlights the dynamic and mutable nature of digital crisis discourse over time.



**Figure 6. Temporal Distribution of Themes (Early vs. Later Phase)**

Entry deletions observed on digital platforms—particularly in the context of disaster and crisis-related threads—may be associated with several factors, including users retracting emotionally intense content, platform-level moderation practices, or the gradual normalization and reframing of discourse as the immediate crisis subsides. The fact that the deleted entries had already been incorporated into the analytical dataset allowed their emotional content to be reflected in the overall findings.

Beyond its methodological implications, the deletion rate itself constitutes a meaningful contextual indicator. It suggests that digital crisis discourse is not limited to the moment of production but is also subject to retrospective editing, softening, and reconfiguration within the digital public sphere. In this sense, entry deletions can be interpreted as a secondary yet significant signal of how emotional intensity, norms of acceptability, and discursive boundaries are renegotiated in post-disaster digital communication environments.

## Discussion

The intensity and diversity of emotional responses that emerge after disasters vary depending on in-

dividual differences, the type of disaster, and contextual conditions. Psychological reactions are, in most cases, temporally dynamic and transient in nature. Individuals exposed to disasters typically pass through different emotional stages such as fear, anger, helplessness, and hopelessness (Özkan, 2025). Although many individuals are able to return to their pre-disaster level of functioning over time, in some cases long-term psychological problems and persistent behavioral changes may also be observed (Neria et al., 2008). For this reason, the systematic examination of emotions in post-disaster contexts is of critical importance not only for understanding individual well-being but also for grasping the dynamics of collective recovery.

The largely unpredictable nature of natural disasters often places affected individuals in a state of acute shock and may trigger defense mechanisms such as denial of reality. Prolonged denial, in turn, can render individuals more vulnerable to stress, anxiety, and other maladaptive reactions (Bulut, 2023). The findings of this study align with this theoretical framework, revealing that fear/anxiety, surprise/panic, and neutral information-sharing categories were dominant in the early phase of digital crisis discourse, whereas emotions such as anger/disappointment, disgust/irony, and sadness/grief—more closely associated with evaluation and meaning-making—became increasingly visible over time. This transformation demonstrates that post-disaster emotions do not follow a unidirectional trajectory but rather diversify and reorganize temporally.

The five essential principles proposed by Hobfoll et al. (2007) to guide early and mid-term post-disaster interventions—promoting a sense of safety, calming, enhancing self- and collective efficacy, fostering connectedness, and instilling hope—provide an important framework for evaluating the role of digital platforms in disaster contexts. The findings of this study indicate that forum-based digital spaces such as Ekşi Sözlük function not merely as arenas for emotional release but also as environments that support connectedness, experiential sharing, and collective sense-making.

The digital culture literature emphasizes that such platforms, through their decentralized structures, democratize public communication and enable users to establish alternative networks of information and solidarity during crises (Morley, 2009; Castells, 2012).

Nevertheless, as suggested by the notion that “the medium is the message,” the language and cultural codes of the platform directly shape the form of discourse. The normalization of ironic, sarcastic, and at times harsh linguistic styles in Ekşi Sözlük and similar forums constitutes an important contextual factor explaining the high representation of the disgust/irony category. This underscores the necessity of evaluating digital crisis communication not solely through content analysis but also through the cultural and discursive structures specific to the platform itself.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study analyzed the emotional dynamics of user-generated digital discourse following the August 10, 2025 Balıkesir earthquake by examining Ekşi Sözlük entries shared during the immediate post-disaster period. The findings reveal that digital platforms function not only as spaces where individuals express emotional reactions but also as environments where collective interpretations of crisis events are produced and circulated. The analysis demonstrates that emotional expressions in digital crisis discourse evolve over time. While fear, anxiety, and surprise dominate the early phase of disaster-related discussions, emotions such as anger, irony, and sadness become more visible as users begin to evaluate institutional responses and the broader social implications of the disaster.

Another important finding of the study is the co-existence of emotional expression and information sharing within digital platforms. Although emotional reactions constitute a significant part of the discourse, a considerable proportion of entries also function as informational messages, indicating that users actively participate in the circulation and interpretation of crisis-related information. This

suggests that user-generated platforms such as Ekşi Sözlük serve both emotional and functional communication roles during disasters.

The findings further demonstrate that platform-specific communication cultures shape the form and tone of crisis discourse. The frequent use of irony and sarcastic language observed in the dataset reflects the distinctive discursive culture of Ekşi Sözlük and indicates that emotional expressions in digital environments are mediated by platform norms and interaction styles. Therefore, digital crisis communication should be evaluated not only through the informational content of messages but also through the cultural characteristics of the platforms where these messages are produced.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. The analysis focuses on a single digital platform and does not include demographic information about users. Additionally, the dynamic nature of digital discourse—where posts may be edited or deleted over time—poses challenges for the long-term reproducibility of the dataset.

Future research may expand this line of inquiry by conducting comparative analyses across different digital platforms such as Reddit, X, or Instagram, as well as by combining content-based analyses with interviews or survey methods in order to better understand the relationship between online emotional expressions and offline disaster experiences.

Overall, the study demonstrates that digital crisis discourse reflects a complex interplay of emotional reactions, information sharing, and collective meaning-making, highlighting the importance of considering both emotional dynamics and platform cultures in the development of effective disaster communication strategies.

### Declarations

**Funding:** The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this study.

**Ethical Approval:** The author declares that this study does not require ethics committee approval, as it is based on the analysis of publicly available data (entries) from the social media platform Ekşi Sözlük. The data were collected and analyzed in accordance with the platform's terms of service and scientific ethical principles, ensuring that no personal identification of users was conducted.

**Data Availability:** The dataset analyzed during the current study consists of 1,143 entries shared on the Ekşi Sözlük platform regarding the August 10, 2025 Balıkesir earthquake. The raw data are publicly accessible on the Ekşi Sözlük website within the relevant topic headings.

**AI Disclosure:** No artificial intelligence (AI)-based tools or applications were used in the preparation of this study. The entire content of the study was produced by the author(s) in accordance with scientific research methods and academic ethical principles.

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