



1 **Tracing Emotional Evolution along Named Entity Topic** 2 **Chains: A Mechanistic Study of Chinese Social Media in the** 3 **2025 Myanmar Earthquake**

4
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10 **ABSTRACT**

11 This study examines how emotional responses to transboundary disasters are structured and
 12 propagated within digital discourse, using the 2025 Myanmar earthquake as a case. Drawing on a
 13 dataset of 139,473 Chinese Weibo posts collected from March 28 to April 25, we develop an
 14 emotion-entity coupling framework that integrates large language model-based emotion
 15 annotation with named entity recognition (NER) to construct a semantic-affective network. Rather
 16 than treating sentiment as a standalone attribute, this approach models emotion as a dynamic and
 17 relational process that flows through named entities, which serve as semantic anchors and
 18 emotional conduits. The analysis reveals distinct patterns in both temporal emotion dynamics and
 19 structural emotion transmission. While emotions such as fear and surprise dominated the discourse,
 20 positive sentiments, particularly those associated with humanitarian actors, formed localized zones
 21 of empathic resonance. The coupled emotion – entity network exposed asymmetric affective
 22 pathways, with certain entities acting as hubs of amplification, bridge nodes, or buffers in the
 23 transmission of emotional meaning. Subgraph analysis further highlighted how institutional
 24 memory, geographical proximity, and media narratives shaped the stability and flow of public
 25 sentiment. By reconceptualizing emotion as structurally embedded and semantically routed, this
 26 study offers both theoretical and methodological innovations in disaster risk communication. The
 27 proposed framework advances understanding of how empathy and public engagement are
 28 generated, distributed, and sustained in the digital age, particularly in response to disasters that
 29 cross national borders.

30 *Key words:*

31 Emotion–Entity Coupling

32 Named Entity Recognition (NER)

33 Social Media Analytics

34 Emotion Diffusion

35 Transboundary Disasters

36



39 1. Introduction

40 The global proliferation of social media platforms has transformed the landscape of disaster
41 communication, enabling real-time expression, diffusion, and amplification of public sentiment in
42 the wake of crisis events (Alexander, 2014; Li et al., 2020; Erokhin and Komendantova, 2024). In
43 transboundary disasters, where the physical impacts transcend national borders or where distant
44 publics engage in empathetic reactions to catastrophes abroad, social media operates not only as
45 an information infrastructure but also as an affective interface (Tim et al., 2017; Kaufhold and
46 Reuter 2016; Samatan et al., 2020). Recent scholarship has increasingly recognized that emotional
47 responses shared online play a central role in shaping collective understanding, influencing
48 behavioral intentions, and constructing emergent forms of digital solidarity (Lüders et al., 2022;
49 Castellanos et al., 2025; Storey and O’Leary, 2024; Yin et al., 2024). Yet, the mechanisms by
50 which emotions propagate, transform, and embed themselves within evolving topic structures on
51 social media remain underexplored, particularly in contexts where the affected population and the
52 reacting public are geographically decoupled.

53 The 2025 Myanmar earthquake, one of the deadliest seismic events since the 2023
54 Turkey-Syria catastrophe and widespread regional impacts across Southeast Asia and southern
55 China, exemplifies such a transnational event. Although the epicenter was located in Myanmar’s
56 Sagaing Region, the tremors were felt across national boundaries, including in China’s Yunnan
57 Province, where infrastructural damages and injuries were reported. Beyond the physical reach of
58 seismic waves, the disaster triggered waves of emotional resonance on Chinese social media,
59 especially Weibo, where users collectively expressed grief, concern, and solidarity. The
60 temporality and structure of these expressions did not emerge arbitrarily; rather, they were
61 interwoven with specific topics, key entities (such as locations, institutions, or individuals), and
62 recurring themes. Understanding how emotions evolve within these semantic chains, and how they
63 are sustained, intensified, or redirected through interaction with named entities and emerging
64 discourse patterns. is essential for uncovering the latent cognitive infrastructures of digital disaster
65 response (Ma and Zheng, 2025; Stella, 2022).

66 Traditional sentiment analysis approaches, which classify messages based on valence
67 (positive, negative, or neutral), offer limited insight into the nuanced emotional dynamics present



68 in post-disaster discourse (Bai and Yu, 2016; Shapouri et al., 2025; Ma et al., 2024). Emotions in
69 crisis communication are rarely monolithic. Instead, they shift across phases, from shock and
70 sorrow in the immediate aftermath to calls for justice, mobilization of aid, or expressions of
71 resilience in later stages (Han and Wang, 2022; Börner, 2020). While prior work has investigated
72 emotional trajectories over time (Ma et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2020; Zhang et al.,
73 2024; Wang et al., 2024), few studies have linked emotional evolution to the semantic structure of
74 social media discourse, that is, the dynamic alignment between emotional expression and the
75 underlying topic chains composed of named entities, actions, and contextual cues.

76 To address this gap, this study adopts an integrated methodological framework that combines
77 large language model-based fine-grained emotion annotation, and named entity recognition (NER).
78 Leveraging a dataset of 139,473 Weibo posts collected between March 28 and April 25, 2025, we
79 first examine the descriptive landscape of public discourse and emotional trends following the
80 Myanmar earthquake. We then identify topic clusters using a BERT model enhanced with a large
81 language model, and annotate each post with discrete emotional categories (e.g., sadness,
82 sympathy, anger, hope) (George and Sumathy, 2023; Zhang et al., 2025a). We then employ named
83 entity recognition (NER) to extract key semantic components from each post, including references
84 to places, organizations, individuals, and disaster-related terms (Eligüz et al., 2022; Qiu et al.,
85 2023; Singh and Singh, 2023). These entities are used to construct a topic-focused linkage network,
86 in which nodes represent entities and edges represent their co-occurrence within the same textual
87 context (Misuraca et al., 2020; Khurana et al., 2023). This network constitutes a semantic backbone
88 over which emotional signals can be mapped and traced. On this entity-based topic network, we
89 model emotional dynamics by assigning each node a dominant emotional attribute and recording
90 the temporal onset of that emotion. This allows us to visualize and analyze how emotions
91 propagate along semantic chains, whether they intensify, shift, or dissipate as discourse unfolds
92 over time.

93 This paper makes three key contributions. First, it advances a novel integration of
94 LLM-based emotion classification with entity-centered semantic modeling, enabling fine-grained
95 analysis of emotional trajectories along topic networks. Second, it develops a pathway-based view
96 of emotional evolution, identifying structural features of emotional diffusion such as
97 intensification points, transition paths, and resonance sub-networks. Third, it provides empirical



98 evidence of how digital publics in China engaged affectively with a foreign disaster, revealing
99 patterns of transnational solidarity, symbolic alignment, and cognitive resonance.

100 **2. Literature review**

101 Over the past decade, research on social media and disasters has evolved from descriptive
102 accounts of platform usage toward more nuanced investigations into the affective dimensions of
103 crisis communication (Jin et al., 2011; Mirbabaie et al., 2020). Emotions expressed online during
104 disaster events are now recognized as more than psychological reactions; they constitute
105 discursive resources that shape collective interpretations, mobilize responses, and reconfigure
106 public spaces (Reuter and Kaufhold, 2018; Stieglitz et al., 2018). Within this trajectory, the study
107 of emotional dynamics, how emotions emerge, intensify, and shift across time, has become an area
108 of growing interest.

109 A substantial body of work has examined the temporal evolution of public emotions in
110 disaster settings. Typically, these studies deploy sentiment analysis tools to track aggregate
111 changes in affective valence (e.g., positive, negative, neutral) across different phases of a crisis.
112 For instance, Lee et al. analyzed Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook data during the Sewol ferry
113 disaster using machine learning methods, finding that public negative sentiment was closely
114 linked to the government's disaster response policies (Lee et al., 2020). Similarly, Zheng et al.
115 tracked the evolution of public sentiment in Wuhan, China within the first 12 weeks after the
116 discovery of COVID-19 on Sina Weibo, a Chinese microblogging platform. They found that from
117 confusion/fear to disappointment/depression, then to depression/anxiety, and finally to
118 happiness/gratitude, this progression indexed the constantly changing emotional energy of digital
119 medical citizens (Zheng et al., 2021). These approaches, while valuable, tend to treat emotional
120 expression as temporally indexed but disconnected from semantic context, that is, emotions are
121 tracked by time, but not by topic or referential structure. These approaches, while valuable, tend to
122 treat emotional expression as temporally indexed but disconnected from semantic context, that is,
123 emotions are tracked by time, but not by topic or referential structure.

124 To overcome these limitations, some scholars have introduced topic-based emotion analysis,
125 attempting to link affective expressions to particular themes or concerns. Methods such as topic
126 modeling (e.g., LDA, BERTopic) have been used to group semantically related posts, enabling



127 researchers to examine how different emotional tones map onto distinct thematic clusters (Zhang
128 et al, 2025b). However, most of these studies operate at a high level of abstraction, using
129 bag-of-words representations that neglect named entities, syntactic dependencies, or discourse
130 structures. As a result, they often fail to capture how emotions are tied to specific actors, places, or
131 events within the communicative landscape.

132 By contrast, Named Entity Recognition (NER) has been widely adopted in disaster
133 informatics for the extraction of structured information, such as locations affected, organizations
134 involved, and individuals referenced in user-generated content (Sun et al., 2022; Li and Zhang,
135 2023; Hu et al., 2023). NER enhances the granularity of information retrieval and facilitates
136 applications such as situational awareness dashboards, geospatial mapping of damage reports, and
137 automated alert systems (Wilkh et al., 2025). Yet despite its widespread use, NER is rarely
138 integrated with emotion analysis beyond simple co-occurrence statistics. There remains a notable
139 gap in understanding how named entities function as semantic anchors or transmission points for
140 emotional content, and whether certain types of entities (e.g., symbols of authority, vulnerable
141 groups, frontline actors) are systematically associated with shifts in emotional states.

142 Some recent work has begun to explore emotion propagation within social networks,
143 particularly through the lens of emotional contagion. Studies in this area model how affective
144 states spread across users via retweet patterns, follower graphs, or reply trees (Lwowski et al.,
145 2018; Venkatesan et al., 2021; Murdock et al., 2024; Chu et al., 2024). These models often draw
146 on epidemiological or diffusion frameworks, treating emotion as a transmissible unit that flows
147 through interpersonal ties. While this line of research offers important insights into inter-user
148 dynamics, it tends to overlook the semantic infrastructure of emotion transmission, that is, how the
149 content of messages, especially the entities and themes they invoke, shapes the form and direction
150 of emotional diffusion. Furthermore, although the concept of empathic communication has gained
151 traction in disaster studies, it is frequently operationalized through lexical sentiment or aggregate
152 trends, with limited attention to the structural features of discourse that enable empathy to emerge
153 and stabilize.

154 In the broader field of discourse and affect studies, increasing attention has been paid to how
155 referential structures and symbolic anchors influence the emotional dynamics of public
156 communication. Rather than treating emotions as isolated reactions, recent research has



157 highlighted how they are linked to, and often stabilized by, specific narrative forms, semantic roles,
158 and symbolic markers (Gay, 2025). In the context of disaster communication, named entities such
159 as “government agencies,” or “international aid groups” often function as discursive nodes that
160 structure how publics attribute responsibility, mobilize empathy, or express collective frustration.
161 However, existing research predominantly employs text co-occurrence methods to extract key
162 entities, a approach that tends to overlook the inherent relationships between entities within the
163 text (Dai et al., 2024). This paper builds on such perspectives by treating entity chains not just as
164 co-occurrence patterns but as emergent semantic pathways that channel and transform emotional
165 currents in post-disaster discourse.

166 This study seeks to extend this literature in two critical ways. First, it proposes a framework
167 that integrates LLM-based emotion annotation with entity-level topic chaining, allowing for the
168 modeling of emotional evolution along named entity networks. Second, it treats emotion not
169 simply as a label affixed to a post, but as a dynamic state that is shaped by and shapes the
170 semantic structure of discourse. By tracing how emotions propagate, transform, and cluster within
171 entity-based linkage graphs, the study provides a mechanism-oriented account of empathic
172 communication during transboundary disasters. Such an approach not only enriches current
173 understandings of emotion in crisis contexts but also offers methodological innovations relevant to
174 the broader field of disaster risk reduction.

175 **3. Data and Methodology**

176 ***3.1 Data Collection and Preprocessing***

177 To investigate the emotional and semantic dynamics of Chinese public response to the 2025
178 Myanmar earthquake, we constructed a large-scale social media dataset by collecting original
179 microblog posts from Sina Weibo, China’s most prominent social media platform. Data
180 acquisition was conducted using a combination of keyword filtering, platform-specific API access,
181 and automated scripts. The keyword set included “缅甸地震 (Myanmar Earthquake),” “实皆省
182 (Sagaing Region),” “中国救援 (Chinese rescue),” “红十字会 (Red Cross),” and other related
183 terms referencing the event, locations, and organizations involved.

184 The data collection window was aligned with the active discussion period following the
185 disaster, spanning from March 28 to April 25, 2025, as illustrated in Figure 1. March 28 marked



the occurrence of the earthquake, and our collection extended nearly one month to capture both the acute reaction phase and subsequent developments in public discourse. In total, 139,473 original microblog entries were retrieved and included for analysis after preprocessing.

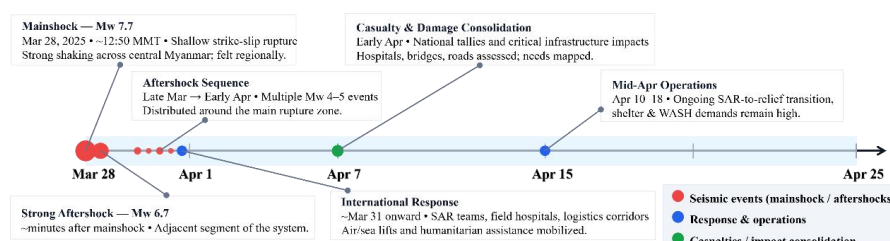


Fig. 1 Data collection timeline for Weibo posts related to the 2025 Myanmar Earthquake.

Each post record contained both textual content and structured metadata fields, allowing for a multi-dimensional analysis. The metadata included: (1) User-related features: gender, follower count, number of followees, verification type, user category (e.g., media, individual, government), and location; (2) Post engagement indicators: number of reposts, comments, likes, and an aggregated engagement score (interaction count); (3) Content features: character count, posting time, and declared publishing location.

Data preprocessing followed a standardized pipeline (George and Baskar, 2024). Posts containing advertisements, duplicated content, or irrelevant hashtags were filtered out through rule-based and semantic screening. Text normalization was applied to remove redundant characters, emojis, and formatting symbols while preserving essential linguistic and emotional cues. Simplified Chinese character standardization was enforced to ensure consistency across texts.

The dataset was subsequently anonymized and encoded in UTF-8 format for model compatibility. All user identifiers were removed to preserve privacy in compliance with ethical guidelines. The cleaned and structured corpus formed the basis for subsequent analysis in both supervised model training and unsupervised pattern detection.

This structured dataset provided a robust foundation for modeling both content-level and actor-level dynamics in the disaster response discourse. With temporal resolution, entity-rich context, and interaction features embedded, the corpus allowed for the exploration of not only what was said, but also who said it, how widely it was diffused, and how sentiment evolved over time. Importantly, the inclusion of location metadata and declared publishing addresses made it



possible to examine the spatial diffusion of affective and thematic attention, offering a window into the translocal empathy mechanisms emerging from within China in response to an external crisis.

In addition to general descriptive statistics on user and content attributes (see Section 4.1), this dataset served as the input for fine-grained annotation tasks and subsequent large-scale emotion classification and named entity recognition, detailed in Sections 3.2 and 3.3.

3.2 Experimental Design

To model the interplay between semantic structure and emotional dynamics in disaster-related discourse, we designed a multi-stage experimental workflow that integrates human-machine hybrid annotation, dual-task model fine-tuning, and full-sample automated inference. The complete experimental pipeline is illustrated in Figure 2.

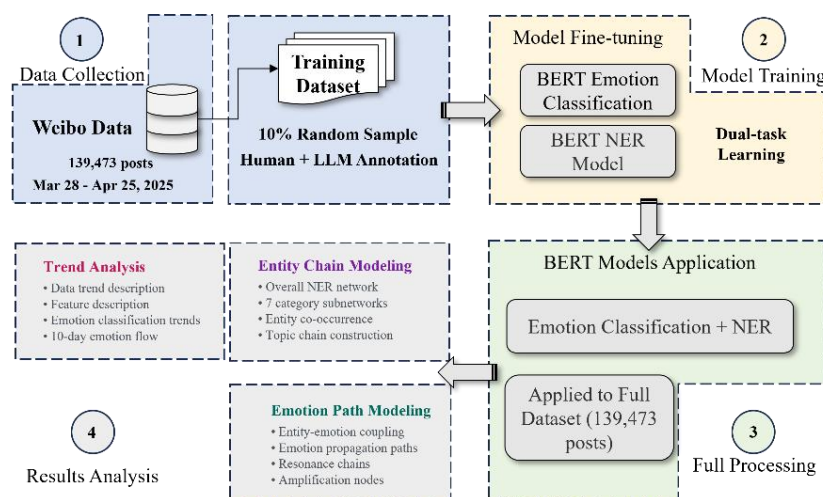


Fig. 2 Data collection timeline for Weibo posts related to the 2025 Myanmar Earthquake.

To begin, we randomly sampled 10% of the full dataset, approximately 13,947 Weibo posts, from the corpus of 139,473 entries. This sample was annotated using a hybrid strategy that combines the output of GLM-4-Flash, a large-scale Chinese generative language model, with manual refinement by trained annotators. For emotion classification, we adopted the seven-category framework from the Dalian University of Technology Chinese Emotional Ontology (DUTIR), which includes: Surprise, Sadness, Fear, Happiness, Anger, Disgust, and Good (Liu et al., 2023). Each post was assigned a single dominant emotional category based on overall tone and contextual meaning. In parallel, we manually labeled named entities using the



233 standard BIO tagging format, including locations, organizations, government bodies,
234 disaster-related terms, and individuals.

235 Based on this annotated dataset, we fine-tuned two BERT-based models using the
236 bert-base-chinese pretrained language model as backbone. The first model is a multi-class emotion
237 classifier trained using a softmax activation layer, while the second is a sequence labeling model
238 for named entity recognition (NER), using a Conditional Random Field (CRF) decoding layer.
239 These models were trained independently but applied jointly to the full dataset for automatic
240 labeling of all 139,473 posts. As a result, each post was assigned both an emotion label and a
241 corresponding set of extracted named entities.

242 We then constructed an emotion-entity coupled network by integrating the NER results with
243 the emotion classification output. In this network, each node represents a named entity extracted
244 from the corpus, and undirected edges denote entity co-occurrence within the same post. To
245 incorporate affective information, we aggregated emotion labels across all posts in which a given
246 entity appeared, and assigned each node a dominant emotion determined by frequency. When
247 multiple entities co-occurred in the same post, their emotional associations were also used to trace
248 potential emotion transitions across the entity network. If entity A frequently appeared in
249 Sadness-labeled posts and co-occurred with entity B, which was often associated with Anger, a
250 directed emotion transition from A to B was inferred. By accumulating these transition patterns
251 across the corpus, we generated an emotion-informed entity graph capable of capturing the
252 structural pathways through which emotional content spreads within semantic discourse.

253 This experimental setup enables a granular, mechanism-based understanding of emotion
254 propagation in public responses to disasters. Rather than treating emotions as isolated labels, our
255 design embeds affective information within a referential and co-occurrence structure, revealing
256 how emotional meaning is entangled with semantic anchors in the digital communication of risk.

257 ***3.3 NER Principle in Myanmar Earthquake Study***

258 To extract semantically rich references from disaster-related discourse, we implemented a
259 fine-tuned Named Entity Recognition (NER) model grounded in Chinese language structure and
260 crisis-specific vocabulary. As illustrated in Figure 3, our approach follows a multi-step sequence
261 from tokenization to network construction.

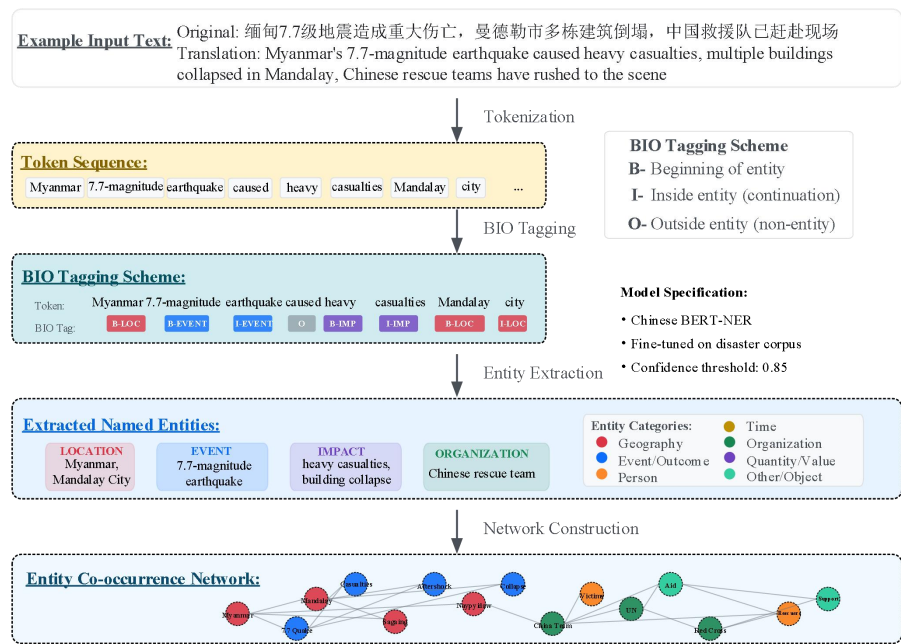


Fig. 3 Multi-step sequence of NER in Myanmar Earthquake Study.

The NER pipeline begins with text preprocessing and token segmentation of each Weibo post. Tokenized inputs are then fed into a BERT-CRF architecture fine-tuned on disaster-related corpora. The model assigns BIO-format tags, denoting entity boundaries as *Beginning*, *Inside*, or *Outside*, to each token. For example, in the sentence “缅甸 7.7 级地震造成重大伤亡”，the tokens “缅甸” and “7.7 级地震” are labeled as B-LOC and B-EVENT respectively, while subsequent tokens such as “伤亡” are tagged as B-IMP, indicating disaster impact.

We defined seven named entity categories to reflect the complex referential landscape of disaster discourse: (1) Geography: places and regions (e.g., Mandalay, Sagaing); (2) Person: individuals or groups (e.g., victims, officials); (3) Organization: institutions involved (e.g., Red Cross, military); (4) Event/Outcome: natural events and consequences (e.g., earthquake, collapse, casualties); (5) Time: temporal markers (e.g., March 28, 72 hours); (6) Quantity/Value: numbers and measurements (e.g., magnitude 7.7, 300+ houses); (7) Other/Object: material items or abstract references (e.g., tents, medical supplies).

Following entity extraction, we constructed an entity co-occurrence network in which each node represents a named entity and edges connect entities appearing in the same post. Edge weights are determined by co-occurrence frequency, enabling a structural representation of how



disaster-related concepts, actors, and outcomes are discussed in proximity. This network serves as the semantic scaffold for subsequent emotion projection: each node is assigned a dominant emotional label based on the distribution of emotions in the posts where the entity appears, and directional emotion transitions between nodes are inferred from their co-mention patterns.

By structuring unstructured microblog discourse into an interpretable semantic graph, the NER process enables mechanism-based modeling of how public attention and meaning are organized in the wake of transboundary disaster events. This also supports the construction of topic-focused emotion pathways as elaborated in Section 3.2.

4. Results

4.1 Temporal Dynamics and Post Characteristics

The temporal distribution of posts related to the 2025 Myanmar earthquake reveals a sharp, short-lived spike in public attention, followed by a rapid decay and long-tail persistence. As shown in Figure 4, the volume of Weibo posts surged immediately after the event occurred on March 28, peaking within the first 24 hours. More than 10,000 posts were published on March 29 alone, accounting for over 35% of the entire dataset. The hourly inset plot for the first week further illustrates that the peak intensity occurred within the first 6-12 hours post-event, aligning with the typical dynamics of sudden-onset disasters in social media discourse.

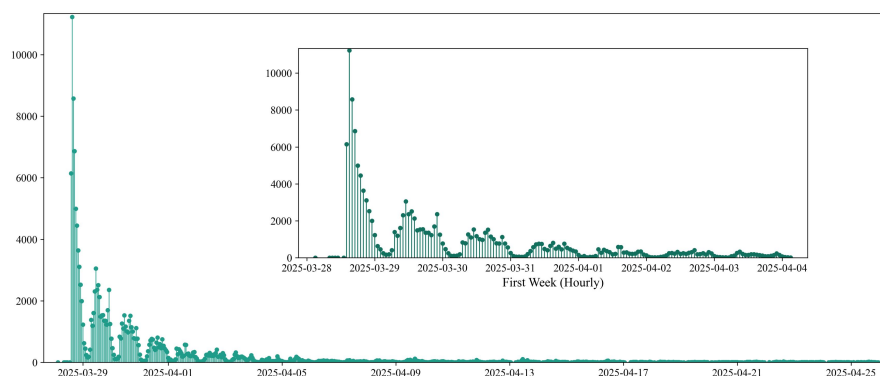


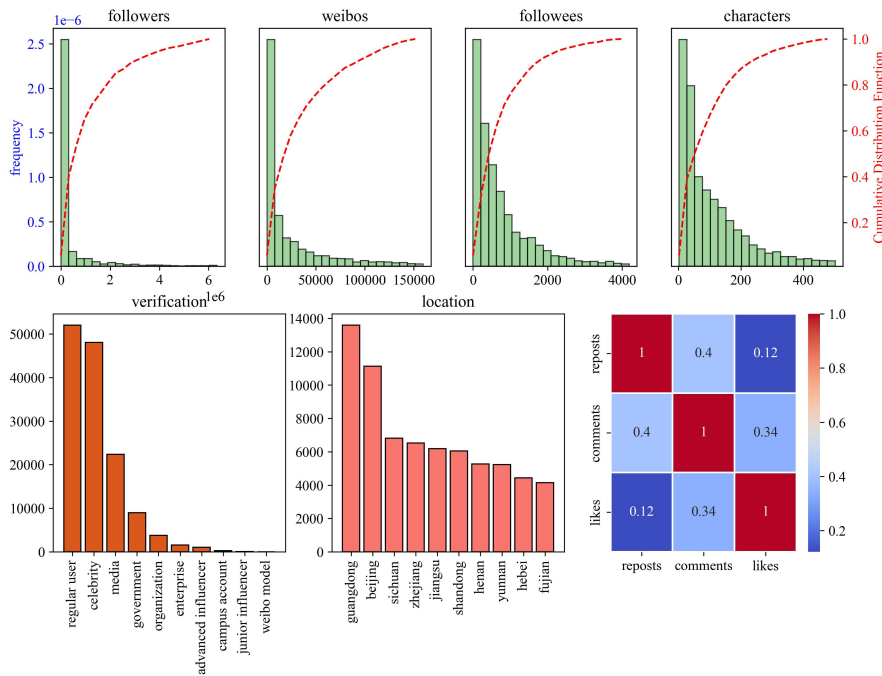
Fig. 4 Temporal distribution of Weibo posts related to the 2025 Myanmar Earthquake.

Following the initial surge, attention decreased rapidly, yet a smaller second wave appeared around March 30 – 31, likely driven by emerging reports of casualties and international rescue responses. After April 2, the volume of posts stabilized at a low level, indicating the event's



302 transition from acute response to long-term memory. This temporal profile mirrors patterns
303 observed in previous studies of transboundary disasters, where digital attention is front-loaded and
304 highly sensitive to real-time developments.

305 To complement this macro-level trend analysis, we further examined the structural and
306 behavioral characteristics of the posts and their authors, as visualized in Figure 5. The upper row
307 shows the distribution of four continuous variables: number of followers, number of followees,
308 total posts by user (weibos), and post character count. All exhibit heavy-tailed distributions,
309 suggesting that a small group of highly active or influential users contribute disproportionately to
310 content production. The cumulative distribution functions (red dashed lines) indicate that over
311 80% of posts come from users with fewer than 500 followers, underscoring the grassroots nature
312 of much of the discourse.



313
314 Fig. 5 Descriptive statistics of post features, user types, geographical distribution, and interaction
315 correlations.

316 The bottom-left bar charts show the distribution of user verification types and geographical
317 origins. Most posts originated from regular users and celebrities, with relatively smaller
318 contributions from government and media accounts. Geographically, the top contributing



provinces were Guangdong, Beijing, Sichuan, and Yunnan, regions with high population density or geographical proximity to Myanmar. This suggests both demographic and spatial factors influenced participation in disaster discourse. And the correlation heatmap in the bottom-right corner displays the relationships among reposts, comments, and likes. While reposts and comments show a moderate correlation ($r=0.40$), their associations with likes are notably weaker, indicating that engagement forms are partially decoupled and may reflect different motivations, such as amplification versus emotional expression. Together, these descriptive results provide a comprehensive overview of the who, when, and where of public engagement with the Myanmar earthquake on Chinese social media.

4.2 Emotion Evolution and Flow Patterns

Public emotional response to the 2025 Myanmar earthquake exhibited marked heterogeneity in both intensity and trajectory across seven classified emotions. As shown in Figure 6, the dominant emotional category throughout the observation window was Surprise, which remained consistently high from the onset of the event to the end of April. This is consistent with prior findings that transboundary disasters, particularly those perceived as sudden and foreign, tend to evoke shock-oriented reactions in early discourse phases.

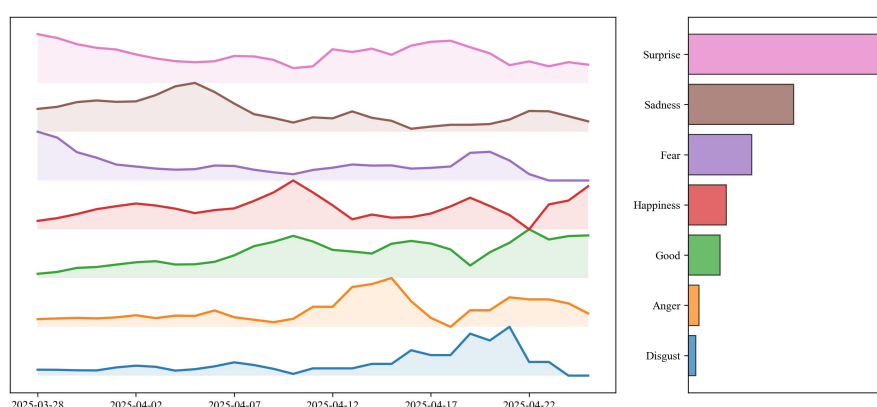


Fig. 6 Temporal evolution of all seven classified emotions (Surprise, Sadness, Fear, Happiness, Good, Anger, Disgust) over the 30-day observation period.

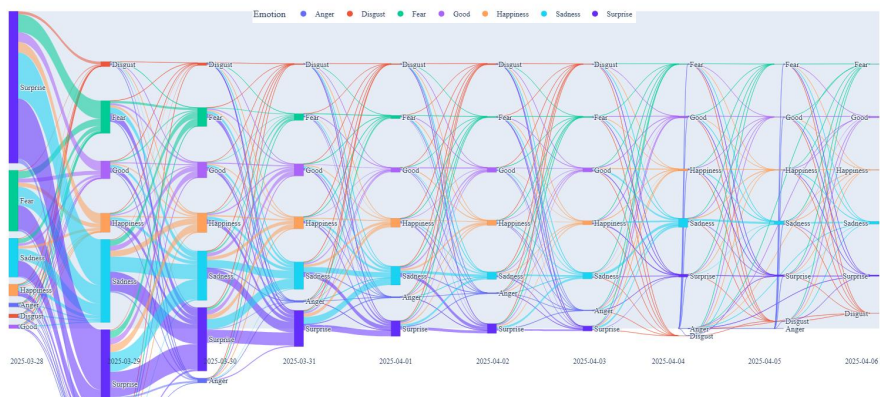
Sadness ranked second in frequency, maintaining a stable presence with minor peaks around April 7 and April 21, potentially reflecting reports of increased casualties or stories of humanitarian loss. Fear, though initially declining, experienced a moderate resurgence mid-month,



341 suggesting a secondary wave of anxiety likely tied to aftershock speculation or cross-border
342 concerns.

343 Notably, Happiness and Good, two positively valenced emotions, were also present, albeit at
344 lower levels. Their increases in the second half of the period may correspond to hopeful
345 developments such as successful rescues or international aid interventions. In contrast, Anger and
346 Disgust remained marginal throughout the entire period, surfacing only intermittently. This
347 distribution pattern reinforces the interpretation that Chinese public sentiment toward the
348 Myanmar earthquake was largely characterized by empathetic rather than confrontational
349 emotional framing.

350 To better capture the transitions among emotional states, we constructed a Sankey diagram
351 based on daily emotion dominance during the first 10 days following the earthquake (see Figure 7).
352 The restriction to this 10-day window reflects the front-loaded structure of online attention, during
353 which emotional volatility was most pronounced.



354
355 Fig. 7 Emotion transition flows over the first 10 days following the Myanmar earthquake,
356 represented as a Sankey diagram.

357 The Sankey flows illustrate how emotions shifted across days and into one another. Early
358 transitions from Surprise to Sadness, and Fear to Sadness, suggest a cognitive-emotional
359 reorientation from immediate shock toward grief and concern. A moderate number of flows also
360 move from Sadness to Good or Happiness, particularly between April 2 and April 4, likely
361 signaling public acknowledgment of effective response efforts. Emotional recycling is also visible,
362 for example, loops from Sadness back to Fear, or from Surprise to Surprise, indicate that some



emotions are self-sustaining within public discourse.

Importantly, even less frequent emotions such as Disgust and Anger are captured as peripheral threads in the diagram, highlighting their low but non-zero rhetorical roles. Overall, the pattern of affective flow reveals a temporally structured and emotionally layered public response, shaped not only by factual developments but also by semantic framing, moral attribution, and transnational empathy.

4.3 Semantic Structure of Entity Co-occurrence

To explore the semantic scaffolding of public discourse, we constructed a large-scale entity co-occurrence network based on named entities extracted from the Weibo corpus. As shown in Figure 8, each node represents a unique named entity, and edges connect entities that co-occurred in at least one post. The network comprises seven categories of entities: Event/Outcome, Geography, Organization, Person, Time, Quantity/Value, and Other/Object, each visualized in a distinct color.

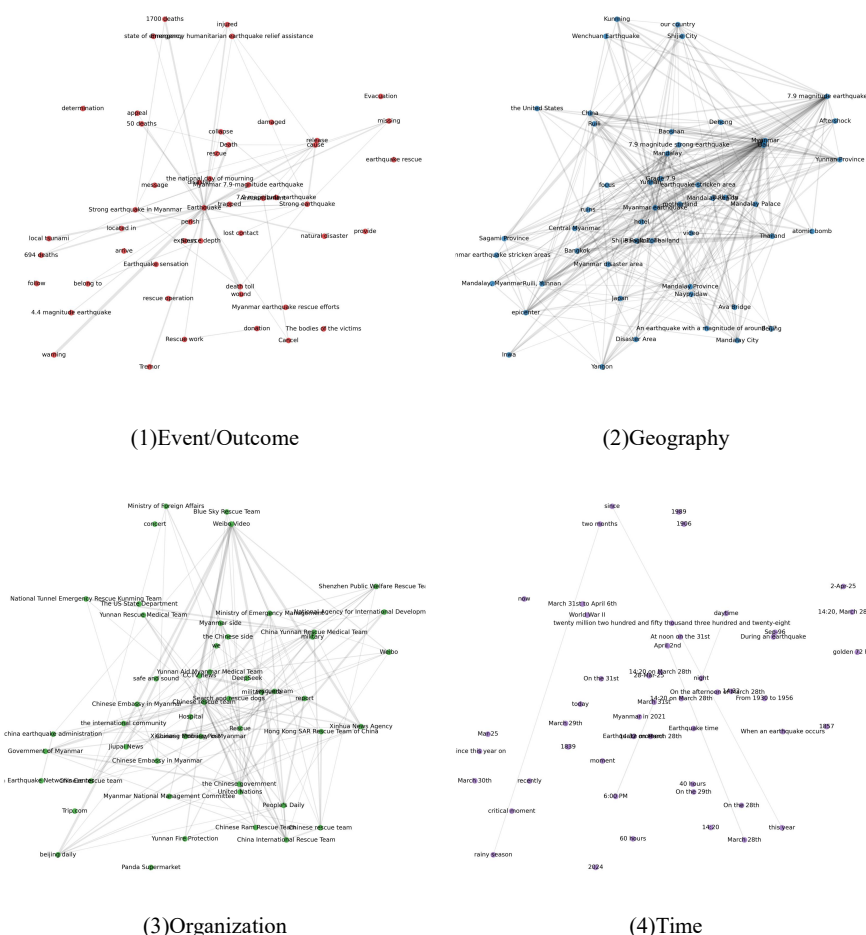


Fig. 8 Overall entity co-occurrence network colored by entity category (Event/Outcome, Geography, Organization, Person, Time, Quantity/Value, Other/Object).

The resulting network displays clear high-density clustering, particularly in the center, suggesting a concentrated set of entities that serve as semantic anchors throughout the discussion.



381 Notably, Event/Outcome and Geography entities form the densest cores, indicating that both the
 382 disaster itself and its spatial referents are key organizing axes of public attention. Peripheral
 383 clusters, often composed of Organization and Time entities, are linked through these central
 384 domains, implying a radial semantic architecture where institutional actors and temporal markers
 385 gain salience through their proximity to core events and locations.
 386 To further examine category-specific patterns, we visualized four representative subnetworks
 387 in Figure 9, corresponding to Event/Outcome, Geography, Organization, and Time.



388 Fig. 9 Subnetworks for four representative entity categories.
 389 The Event/Outcome network is centered on high-frequency nodes such as “ earthquake,”
 390 “collapse,” and “casualties.” These nodes exhibit high weighted degree and serve as bridges to



391 both institutional and geographic references, indicating their role as the narrative backbone of risk
392 discourse.

393 In the Geography subnetwork, prominent nodes include both domestic provinces (e.g.,
394 Yunnan, Sichuan) and foreign regions (e.g., Sagaing Region, Mandalay City). The presence of
395 cross-border geographic references reflects the transnational nature of the disaster and the spatial
396 extension of empathetic concern.

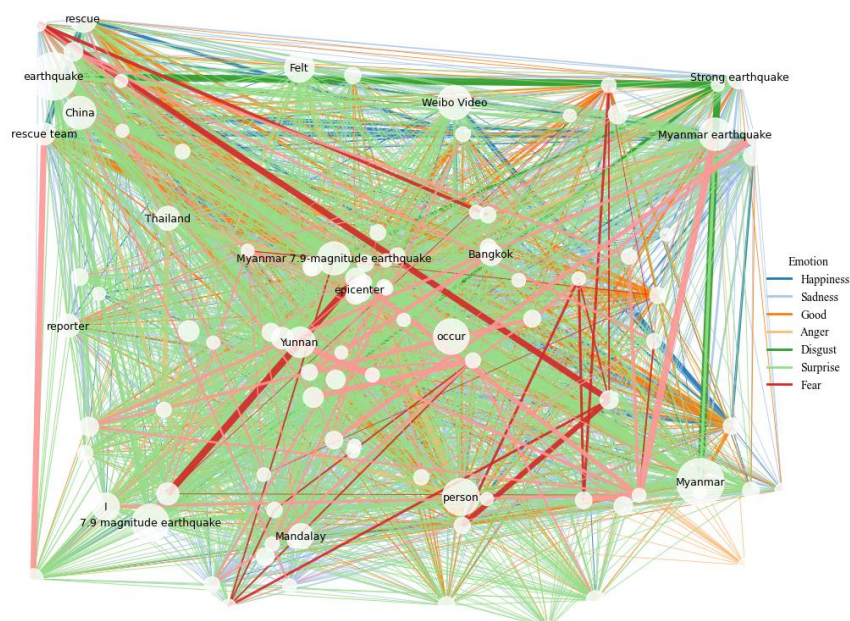
397 The Organization subnetwork is densely connected around rescue-related institutions and
398 agencies, including national emergency bureaus, humanitarian organizations, and medical teams.
399 These entities are tightly interlinked and often co-occur with Event/Outcome terms, underscoring
400 a discourse of operational response and cross-agency mobilization.

401 In the Time subnetwork, temporal anchors such as “March 28,” “48 hours,” and “April 1st”
402 organize discourse sequences and associate specific emotional tones with event chronology. The
403 prevalence of time-stamped expressions reveals the public's effort to construct temporal coherence
404 in understanding the event's progression.

405 Overall, these entity networks demonstrate how meaning is structurally embedded in
406 co-reference patterns. They form the semantic substrate upon which emotional signals are
407 projected and propagated, setting the stage for the emotion–entity coupling analysis in the next
408 section.

409 ***4.4 Emotion Projection onto Entity Networks***

410 To move beyond conventional sentiment trendlines and capture the relational dynamics of
411 emotion transmission, we constructed an emotion–entity coupled network by projecting classified
412 emotional states onto the previously generated named entity co-occurrence structure. As shown in
413 Figure 10, the resulting graph retains the topological backbone of entity interactions while
414 encoding the dominant emotion associated with each entity pair in the form of color-coded and
415 weighted edges. Edge color indicates the prevailing emotional tone, such as Surprise, Sadness, or
416 Fear, while edge thickness corresponds to the frequency of emotional co-occurrence, thereby
417 highlighting not just whether but how strongly specific emotions flow along semantic connections.

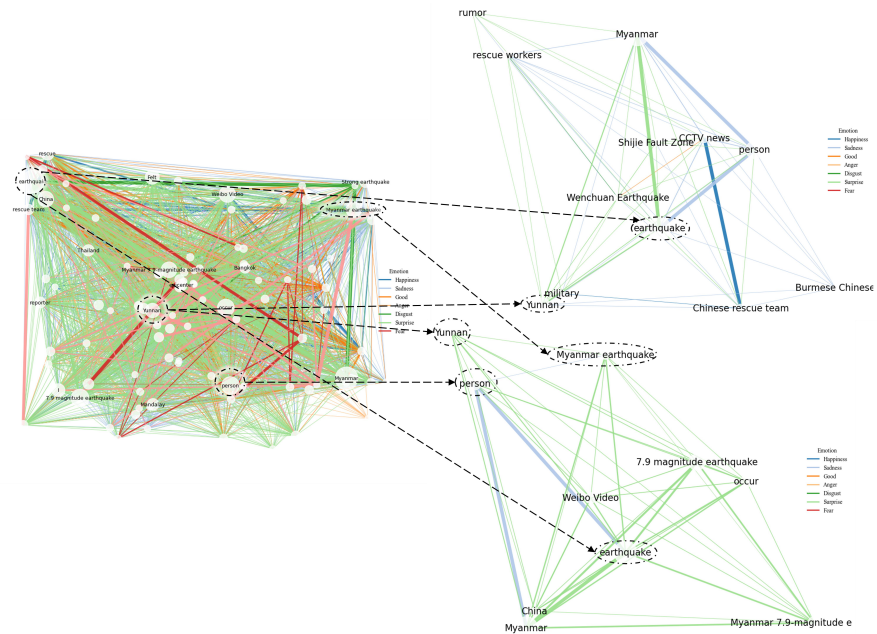


418
 419 Fig. 10 Emotion–entity coupled network, where edge color indicates dominant emotion and
 420 edge width reflects emotional co-occurrence frequency between named entities.
 421 Several key features emerge from this enriched semantic–affective topology. First, Fear and
 422 Surprise dominate the overall network, often radiating from core disaster-related nodes such as
 423 “Myanmar earthquake,” “epicenter,” “rescue,” and “Yunnan.” These entities serve as emotionally
 424 resonant hubs, anchoring the interpretive and affective architecture of the network. The
 425 pervasiveness of Fear is particularly notable in connections involving geopolitical references (e.g.,
 426 “Thailand,” “Bangkok”), suggesting heightened concern for regional spillover effects or secondary
 427 threats. Surprise, in contrast, often binds structural terms (e.g., “occur,” “strong earthquake”) to
 428 actor-based entities like “reporter” or “Weibo Video,” reflecting the narrative rhythm of breaking
 429 news and real-time witnessing.
 430 Second, positive emotions, though less frequent, are not absent. Edges labeled with Good and
 431 Happiness cluster around terms like “Chinese rescue team,” “CCTV news,” and “aid,” forming
 432 localized zones of hopeful discourse. These nodes not only reflect perceived effectiveness of



433 institutional response but also serve as affective counterweights to dominant negative emotion
434 clusters, enabling moments of empathy, trust, and even pride to emerge amid the broader disaster
435 narrative.

436 However, due to the high density of the full graph, interpretive clarity necessitates localized
437 magnification. To this end, we extracted two semantically distinct subgraphs, displayed in Figure
438 11, to illustrate contrasting emotional patterns.



439
440 Fig. 11 Two zoomed-in subgraphs from the emotion–entity network highlighting (lower) an
441 early-phase news-surprise cluster, and (upper) an institutional empathy cluster involving historical
442 reference and humanitarian actors.

443 The first subgraph focuses on the cluster around “Myanmar earthquake,” “Yunnan,” and
444 “Weibo Video.” This region is characterized by a predominance of Surprise and Sadness, with
445 frequent ties to reporting-related entities. The visual density of green and light blue edges reflects
446 the rapid information flow and emotional ambivalence of the early response phase, where
447 knowledge and uncertainty coexist.

448 The second subgraph captures a different dynamic: emotion pathways anchored in
449 institutional and historical memory. Terms such as “Chinese rescue team,” “Wenchuan Earthquake,”
450 and “CCTV news” are bound together through Happiness, Good, and Sadness, indicating not only



451 the intertextual linkage of past disasters but also the emotional anchoring of national response
452 efforts. The strong edge between “Chinese rescue team” and “person” (colored in dark blue)
453 exemplifies how organizational trust and human empathy are co-constructed within affective
454 discourse.

455 These findings support a conceptual shift from viewing emotion as an aggregate metric to
456 treating it as a distributed, structurally situated phenomenon. Emotions in disaster discourse are
457 not merely reactions but are routed through, shaped by, and reinforced within semantic linkages.
458 By tracing these paths, we capture how empathy is stabilized, how fear is amplified, and how
459 institutional narratives modulate affective response in transboundary risk scenarios.

460 **5. Discussion**

461 The findings of this study offer a critical departure from conventional sentiment analysis
462 paradigms in disaster communication by revealing how emotional meaning is constructed,
463 transmitted, and stabilized through the underlying semantic structure of discourse. Rather than
464 treating emotion as a static or disembodied category affixed to posts, we approached it as a
465 structurally embedded phenomenon, dynamically routed through named entity interactions and
466 co-reference patterns. This reorientation from aggregate sentiment statistics to relational emotion
467 modeling allows for a more nuanced understanding of how public responses to transboundary
468 disasters are affectively organized and semantically sustained.

469 At the center of this reconceptualization is the construction of a coupled emotion – entity
470 network, which bridges two previously parallel lines of research: affective computing and disaster
471 informatics. While prior studies have separately examined sentiment dynamics or entity
472 recognition, they have rarely asked how these two dimensions interact (Yang et al., 2024; Xi et al.,
473 2024). Our approach shows that emotions do not merely accompany messages, they are channeled
474 through specific semantic infrastructures, with certain entities functioning as emotional hubs,
475 others as amplifiers or buffers, and still others as neutral scaffolds. In particular, entities related to
476 geographic proximity (e.g., “Yunnan,” “Bangkok”), institutional actors (e.g., “Chinese rescue
477 team,” “CCTV News”), and historical referents (e.g., “Wenchuan Earthquake”) emerged as
478 key junctions through which both negative and positive emotions circulated. This structural
479 positioning reveals the mechanisms by which empathic identification with a foreign disaster is



480 socially constructed in digital space.

481 What distinguishes this study is its attention to the differentiated affective topology of
482 disaster discourse. The results demonstrate that emotions such as fear, surprise, and sadness do not
483 distribute uniformly across entities, nor do they follow simple temporal decay or escalation curves.
484 Instead, they cluster around particular semantic motifs and evolve along discrete narrative arcs.
485 For example, fear dominates connections between event descriptors and international locations,
486 while positive emotions such as good and happiness concentrate in networks involving
487 institutional response and humanitarian relief. These affective asymmetries underscore the
488 interpretive labor embedded in disaster sensemaking: the public does not respond to “the disaster”
489 in the abstract, but to situated frames populated by identifiable agents, places, and outcomes. The
490 emergence of empathic zones, localized clusters where emotional coherence is stabilized,
491 illustrates how affect is both semantically patterned and socially negotiated.

492 Furthermore, our analysis reveals that emotion in crisis discourse is neither spontaneous nor
493 arbitrary, but structured by recognizable mechanisms of resonance, proximity, and anchoring. The
494 identification of dominant emotional pathways across the entity network makes visible how
495 sentiments shift, intensify, or diffuse in relation to evolving public narratives (Zhong et al., 2025;
496 Li, 2025). In this view, emotion is not merely a response but also a relational outcome, a product
497 of how meaning circulates through inter-entity connections, and how the salience of particular
498 nodes shapes collective emotional trajectories. This stands in contrast to models that treat emotion
499 as a discrete, user-generated signal and opens a new methodological space for mechanism-oriented
500 disaster research.

501 Our findings also contribute to the emerging literature on transboundary disaster empathy,
502 particularly in the context of digital nationalism and regional geopolitics. The 2025 Myanmar
503 earthquake did not occur on Chinese soil, yet it provoked intense emotional engagement across
504 Chinese social media. This suggests that national boundaries do not limit affective publics, but
505 rather serve as a terrain for constructing digital proximity and moral relevance. In this sense,
506 emotional responses are not merely reflexive but are embedded within broader geopolitical,
507 cultural, and historical matrices. Entities such as “Myanmar,” “Chinese rescue team,” and “Red
508 Cross” do not simply name referents, they mobilize frames of responsibility, solidarity, and risk
509 anticipation.



510 The interplay between semantic structure and emotional projection thus offers an analytical
511 lens through which to assess not just what the public feels, but how feeling itself is organized and
512 made possible through discourse. It also underscores the importance of considering the semantic
513 architecture of social media narratives in evaluating public sentiment, particularly when dealing
514 with low-visibility, high-impact disasters that cross national boundaries. Our emotion – entity
515 coupling framework provides a flexible and generalizable method for capturing these dynamics,
516 with potential applications in real-time disaster monitoring, humanitarian communication design,
517 and digital diplomacy.

518 Finally, by foregrounding emotion as a networked and meaning-dependent phenomenon, this
519 study contributes to a broader theoretical shift in disaster research: one that moves away from
520 measuring affect as an input or outcome variable, and toward understanding it as an integral
521 relational process. Emotions here are not noise to be filtered out of communication but signal-rich
522 elements of how publics interpret, evaluate, and act upon crises.

523 6. Conclusion

524 This study has introduced a novel framework for analyzing emotional responses to
525 transboundary disasters by coupling sentiment classification with named entity recognition on
526 large-scale social media data. Using the 2025 Myanmar earthquake as a case, we demonstrated
527 how public emotion on Chinese Weibo evolved not only temporally but also structurally, flowing
528 through a dense web of named entities that functioned as semantic and affective anchors. Moving
529 beyond traditional sentiment trendlines, our emotion – entity coupling approach allowed us to
530 model emotional propagation as a networked phenomenon, revealing the co-dependence of
531 meaning and feeling in digital disaster discourse.

532 Our findings underscore three core contributions. (1) We offer a methodological innovation
533 by aligning emotion analysis with entity-level semantic structure. This shift enables a more
534 granular and mechanistic understanding of how emotion is situated within discourse, rather than
535 abstracted from it. (2) We show that emotional responses are topologically organized: certain
536 entities, especially those tied to location, institutional actors, and temporal markers, serve as key
537 conduits for emotional diffusion. Rather than functioning in isolation, these nodes interact within
538 affective circuits that reflect public meaning-making in the face of uncertainty and risk. (3) Our



539 study highlights the dynamics of digital empathy in cross-border contexts. The emotional salience
540 attributed to a foreign disaster is shaped by interlinked references to national memory,
541 humanitarian response, and spatial proximity, which are suggested that transnational affective
542 publics emerge through the strategic convergence of language, history, and trust.

543 The practical implications of our research are equally significant. Emotion – entity mapping
544 can inform real-time crisis monitoring systems by identifying not only which sentiments dominate,
545 but how they are structured and to whom they are attached. This has value for both governmental
546 agencies and humanitarian organizations seeking to understand and respond to public sentiment
547 during crises. Moreover, our findings provide insight into how empathy can be amplified, trust
548 reinforced, or misinformation countered, through the targeted engagement of emotionally resonant
549 entities within disaster narratives.

550 While our study offers new pathways for analyzing emotion in digital disaster discourse,
551 several limitations remain. The current framework does not yet account for user interaction
552 dynamics such as retweets, mentions, or comment threads, which may influence how emotion
553 circulates socially. In addition, while we employed a dual-channel annotation strategy combining
554 LLM and human review, future research could further improve model precision through
555 multimodal sentiment detection and deeper context modeling.

556

557 **Declaration of Competing Interests**

558 The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal
559 relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

560

561 **Authorship contributions**

562 **CD:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Visualization, Writing –
563 original draft, Writing – review & editing. **KZ:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology,
564 Supervision. **JL:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Visualization, Writing – review
565 & editing, Project administration, Supervision.

566



567 **Funding**

568 This research was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant No.
 569 72504070; 72374056).

570

571 **Data availability**

572 Data will be made available on request.

573

574 **References**

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