

Carey Jewitt, Sara Price, Kerstin Leder Mackley, Nikoleta Yiannoutsou, Douglas Atkinson, **Interdisciplinary Insights For Digital Touch Communication**, Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020, 143 pp., \$ 20.99 (paperback).

Reviewed by

Wei Zhang

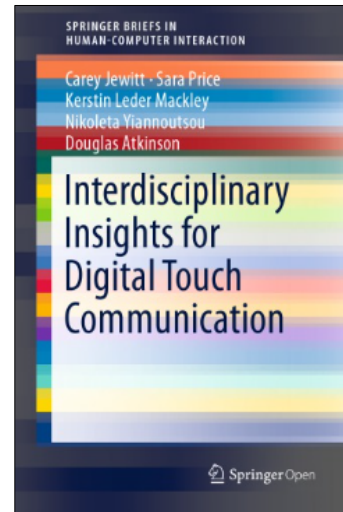
Huazhong University of Science and Technology, China

As the boundaries of technological possibilities extend, there is a significant gap opening between technological advancements and social science methodologies and understanding of digital touch communication (Jewitt & Leder Mackley, 2019, p. 92). Much effort has focused on digital touch communication; however, there seems to be no comprehensive systematic investigation for digital touch communication. For this connection, **Interdisciplinary Insights for Digital Touch Communication** is very relevant and timely. This book represents a joint effort by the authors to move toward productive interdisciplinary dialogues on digital touch communication.

The body of the book is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 first introduces the importance of touch and the development of digital touch. It then discusses how to situate this book within a social revaluing of the sensory and multimodal. The third section of this chapter gives a detailed description about the authors' project on InTouch Digital Touch Communication. Later, this chapter not only provides the readers with the overview of the book but also helps them understand the social themes therein. The last section deals with six InTouch case studies, investigating digital touch from different contexts.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to interdisciplinary explorations of digital touch, serving as a stepping stone to the following chapters. The chapter begins with a brief review of multimodality and sensory ethnography, which will be combined to "understand the changing social landscape of touch and help gain insight on socially orientated understanding of digital touch" (p. 25). The chapter proceeds with an introduction to the authors' interdisciplinary conversations and collaborations of digital touch communication for investigating its potentials. Finally, the authors suggest that prototyping can serve as a point of connection, a bridge, across disciplinary differences to support interdisciplinary research in the emergent and provisional area of digital touch (p. 29), and thus discusses prototyping, which is used to explore touch and digital touch communication.

Chapter 3 focuses on the terrain of digital touch communication. It begins with a landscape sketching in digital touch technologies, paying special attention to haptic technologies, biosensing technologies, robotics, and skin-like technologies. It then goes on to deal with the different communicative relationships, including human-human digitally mediated touch communication, human-robot and robot-human touch, and human-object touch communication, which identify some social issues raised by digital touch communication. Through this chapter, we may not only understand some key or advanced developments of digital touch capacity but also see some great opportunities and new challenges facing digital touch communication.



The social norms of touch are central to chapter 4. A reflection on technology and changing social norms is made, and the authors go on to examine four interconnected aspects of touch (touching the body, types of touch, the materiality of touch, and digital touching) to highlight the role of social norms in the research and design of digital touch. Accordingly, the authors claim that "touch norms are significant in that they provide insights into the shared usage of touch for making culturally shared meaning of touch, and expectations of touch, which supports the imagination and design of digital touch communication" (p. 69).

Touch presence, absence, and connection are central issues in chapter 5, which first deals with the social presence in mediated communication through reviewing the related literature. As "touch has a special role in relation to human connectedness, and increasingly so as mediated social-sensorial experience" (p. 76), this chapter also examines connecting through touch with the InTouch case study on the *Tactile Emoticon*. Attention is also paid to the remote contact with a focus on the *Art of Remote Contact* case study. The last section discussed is centered on touch connection as a bodily way of knowing with a case study of *InTouch with Baby*. Through three InTouch case studies, this chapter helps its readers better understand the significance of connection.

Chapter 6 concentrates entirely on sociotechnical imaginaries of digital touch. This chapter gives a brief discussion on the sociotechnical imaginary as a design resource and as a methodological resource. As a design resource, the sociotechnical imaginary may explore how people make sense of their visions and practices with communication systems (p. 91), and as a methodological resource, it may examine past, present, and future experiences, desires, and fears of touch and remote communication that may shape the evolving digital landscape of touch (p. 91). Later, this chapter devotes much space to exploring and making legible emergent sociotechnical imaginaries of digital touch through illustrating the themes of the body, time, and place involving participants' sociotechnical imaginations of digital touch. Also, this chapter describes some methods to access participants' sociotechnical imaginaries of digital touch communication, with a particular focus on three case studies, to generate new methodological routes to imagine digital touch futures.

Digital touch ethics and values is the topic of chapter 7. This chapter starts with a definition of ethical touch and an introduction to the difficulty of defining ethical touch and devising set guidelines. It then discusses the relationship between digital touch and the human body to highlight the role of the human body in digital touch communication, followed by a discussion about three interrelated concepts (consent, trust, and control). Finally, this chapter presents an analysis of study ethics.

The final chapter presents the significance of a social take on digital touch. Some insights for digital touch communication are provided from the perspectives of social norms, touch connections, sociotechnical imaginaries, and touch ethics. The methodologies, emergent research, and design framework for digital touch communication are finally discussed. This chapter, in fact, calls for attention to the development of digital touch communication.

The authors have made full use of their ongoing work on the InTouch project to look at digital touch communication from an interdisciplinary scope. And it explores, with some InTouch case studies, most of the important issues necessary for digital touch communication research and design in a comprehensive manner. Therefore, this book is well organized and written in a way that provides target readers a better understanding

of digital touch communication. However, it fails to include an elaborate index on related terms that would tell readers the page number where the topic is discussed. Also, a list of abbreviations and appendices, which become useful extras to make the book easier to read, might be added.

All in all, this book succeeds to a large extent in expanding and deepening our understanding of digital touch communication from an interdisciplinary perspective. It will not only solve our problems and difficulties in this field but also indicate future directions and developments. Therefore, reading this book will definitely be of great help.

Reference

Jewitt, C., & Leder Mackley, K. (2019). Methodological dialogues across multimodality and sensory ethnography: Digital touch communication. *Qualitative Research, 19*(1), 90–110.