

Robin L. Nabi and Jessica Gall Myrick (Eds.), **Emotions in the Digital World: Exploring Affective Experience and Expression in Online Interactions**, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023, 486 pp., \$95.00 (hardcover).

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Written amid the COVID-19 pandemic and published in 2023, Robin L. Nabi and Jessica Gall Myrick's edited volume, *Emotions in the Digital World: Exploring Affective Experience and Expression in Online Interactions*, is a timely piece given the proliferation of AI technologies and their utilization in the mass generation and rapid distribution of content. This work, therefore, offers a multifaceted perspective on how the "current media environment shapes our emotional experiences" (p. 1), delving into topics ranging from the neuropsychological systems that underlie information processing to the affective methods driving information dissemination in online spaces. Positioned at the intersection of communication studies, psychology, and media research, the text reflects both the urgency and complexity of understanding emotion in an increasingly digitized social world.



The volume contains 22 contributions grouped by subject matter into five distinct themes—the Foundations of Emotional and Digital Media Psychology; Experiencing Emotions in Digital Contexts; Online Well-Being: Challenges and Opportunities; Socioemotional Dynamics of Online Interactions; and Engagement with Online Information. While the plurality of voices provides a comprehensive segue into the relationship between emotional states and digital technologies, it also leads to the consistent repetition of previously stated information, creating both a sense of cohesion and a lack of progression. Despite this, these texts ultimately argue that digital environments can amplify, redirect, or reconfigure emotional experiences for both personal and societal benefit or harm. Accordingly, the objectives are twofold: first, to synthesize the extant literature on contemporary technological experiences through the lens of emotion, and second, to move toward developing an agenda for future research capable of addressing the inquiries brought forth by this rapidly evolving domain.

Part One introduces the current theoretical frameworks used in studying emotions (chapter 1; Skurka & Nabi) before delving into why and how such a lens can be applied to the study of communication technology (chapter 2; Cohen & Myrick). These chapters provide a strong conceptual grounding for readers who are new to affective science by clearly outlining the extant approaches to emotion (i.e., basic, dimensional, appraisal based, constructivist) and demonstrating how these traditions have been incorporated into communication research. By further situating emotion theory within the affordances of

digital media, the authors effectively bridge foundational psychological perspectives with contemporary questions about platform mechanisms.

Part Two (chapters 3–7) shifts toward the physiological dimensions of emotion and how their conceptualizations have been examined empirically. Collectively, these chapters highlight the expanding theoretical and methodological tool kits available to researchers interested in studying emotions within digital contexts. However, this part also foregrounds the significant challenges inherent in exploring emotional experiences, such as the ever-shifting connotations for terms used in digital expressions of emotion (chapter 6; Ophir & Walter) and defining the concept of emotion consistently within a given field (chapter 7; Markowitz & Bailenson).

Part Three (chapters 8–12) addresses a publicly contested question: How does digital media influence psychological well-being? Topics such as mental health disorders (chapter 9; Rains & Tokunaga) and hostilities (chapter 10; Fox) are juxtaposed with concepts such as eudaimonic well-being (chapter 11; Meier & Reinecke) and inspiration (chapter 12; Oliver & Raney) roused through online engagement. These chapters are thus effective in emphasizing the conditional effects of social media. Rather than advancing accounts of harm, each contributor instead demonstrates how outcomes may be mediated by factors such as user characteristics, platform affordances, and patterns of engagement.

Part Four (chapters 13–17) illustrates how emotions function relationally within digital spaces, and the authors underscore the ways in which technological affordances (e.g., anonymity, public visibility, accessibility) both facilitate connection and intensify conflict. Emotional expressions within online contexts are embedded within feedback systems (e.g., likes, comments), and they, in turn, reinforce and recalibrate affective displays. In this way, digital environments transmit and curate user emotions—they shape identity performances, social comparisons, and other behaviors (e.g., providing support, sending threats).

Part Five (chapters 18–22) focuses on the role of emotion in information engagement as well as radicalization and polarization. Here, affect is positioned as a central mechanism in the dissemination of information, misinformation, and disinformation within contemporary digital environments, thereby impacting both visibility and virality. The authors within this part reveal how the digital architecture of social media capitalizes on emotionally evocative material. Negative emotions (e.g., anger, anxiety), in particular, influence what users attend to, how they interpret content, and what they ultimately share with others.

Thus, this book not only serves as an entry point for the affect-curious scholar, but it also introduces methodological and conceptual frameworks that enable readers to examine emotion as a phenomenon that both shapes and is shaped by digital media use. Moreover, there is a clear emphasis throughout the volume on theory building, and this is apparent through the systematic identification of empirical gaps and potential avenues for interdisciplinary research. Drawing from the realms of communication, social psychology, and neuroscience, each author consistently emphasizes the need for theoretically grounded research as digital platforms become increasingly ubiquitous and capable of shaping both public perceptions and discourse.

At the same time, the volume's occasional grouping of emotions into discrete categories (e.g., approach emotions) complicates the understanding of emotional experience. While such classifications are

helpful and empirically supported within specific theoretical traditions, they risk oversimplifying the dynamic and context-dependent nature of affective states. The act of ascribing an emotion to a singular category implies a structural opposition—if one emotion is categorized as approach oriented (appetitive), it presumes the existence of a contrasting avoidance-oriented (aversive) state. This appetitive/approach versus aversive/avoidance dichotomy—explicitly evoked within chapters 1 and 3—may suggest to the reader that emotional experiences align neatly within these models. Furthermore, much of the empirical literature cited in support of these distinctions centers disproportionately on the emotional state of anger: an approach-oriented negative emotion (see Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009). Consequently, other emotions that do not map as cleanly onto these motivational binaries receive comparatively less nuance.

This limitation is particularly evident in the extant discussions surrounding anxiety: an emotional state that is negative in valence but high in arousal, similar to anger. The volume notes that anxiety may increase information seeking, monitoring behaviors, and engagement as individuals attempt to reduce uncertainty (e.g., Charpentier et al., 2022) or discomfort (Coglianese et al., 2020). Accordingly, this emotion is positioned as one aligned with approach motivations. However, anxiety is typically conceptualized as an avoidance emotion (see Lench et al., 2011) because of its association with behavioral inhibition and withdrawal-related motivations (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009), a point stated within chapter 22 (p. 455; Aday). As such, the approach-avoidance categorization that is invoked throughout the text may confuse those who are less familiar with the affective sciences. Because of the variance in response tendencies, future work must bear in mind the multifaceted nature of this distinction (see Elliot et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, this edited volume ultimately succeeds as a comprehensive synthesis of emotion research in digital contexts. While its breadth of both content and authors occasionally comes at the expense of cohesion, its interdisciplinary scope, methodological awareness, and future-oriented perspective make it a valuable contribution to the growing literature on affect and digital media. It is thus an essential reference point for scholars seeking to understand how emotions shape—and are shaped by—the digital world.

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