Like much of Internet studies, the volume displays a Western bias, specifically towards the Anglosphere (with the exception of Veronika Tsankova’s chapter on sexualities in Turkey and Susanna Paasonen’s on online debates that proceed in Finnish). There is a need for a heightened global consciousness in Internet studies literature; for scholarly volumes that discuss networked life via a bias towards the Anglosphere to articulate some awareness of the limitations that bias sets on a holistic understanding of the historical continuities and ruptures suggested by various kinds of digitally equipped everyday life in all corners of the planet.

Nevertheless, I came to this volume as a novice, with zero knowledge of affect theory, so my reading practice was less suggestive of a knowing and critical expert, and more of an inquisitive child visiting a new friend’s toy-filled bedroom. Jodi Dean’s essay, for example, is remarkable for her ability to evoke the shapes and rhythms of networks. After several readings, the image of networks as many-to-many grids began to ebb from my mind. In its place, a series of high velocity sushi trains appeared, laid out wonkily on uneven surfaces, and messily hemmed by unruly crowds who variously cooked, plated up, swapped, shifted, and ate at breakneck speed the contents of these trains. “It’s not like cinema, where people only have to show up,” she writes. “For communication networks to function at all... people have to use them, play with them, add to them, and extend them. Our participation does not subvert communicative capitalism. It drives it.” (p. 94).

I surmise that for other novice students of the dynamics of agency and domination in everyday social networking, this volume could also be useful for inspiring new paths of thought, when other available scholarship feels either too steeped in broadcast logics, not attentive enough to the novelties of the digital everyday, or too celebratory of participatory culture to enable a critical analysis of the role social networks play in enabling/disrupting established patterns of capital accumulation. The volume would be well suited to graduate courses, and is a must-read for scholars who approach new media from a socio-logical or cultural studies perspective.


Reviewed by: Amber L. Ferris, The University of Akron Wayne College, USA

Affective publics: Sentiment, technology, and politics examines the role of Twitter in our political, cultural, and social environment. The main argument of this work is that affect is a key component to consider when examining and evaluating social media content. Chapter 1 provides an in-depth conceptualization of affect and how it relates to political expression. Papacharissi expands our understanding of affect as being more than just feeling or emotion, but as an intense and active (or inactive) process.

The following three chapters focus on specific case studies that apply affect in three political contexts: The Arab Spring movement, the Occupy Wall Street movement, and the Twitter trending phenomenon. Perhaps the greatest contribution of this volume is the detailed, empirical analysis of these contexts. Papacharissi uses multiple methodologies, including content analysis, network analysis, and textual analysis in her investigation.
In Chapter 2, an examination of 1.5 million Tweets related to the Egyptian social movement was undertaken. The results show how Twitter users connected on both informational and emotional levels, producing a common political narrative. News frames found in the posts were also presented. Chapter 3 analyzed nearly 300,000 tweets on the Occupy Wall Street movement. These results show a more fractured and inconsistent narrative. Those supporting the movement tended to lack a consistent call-to-action, and many dissenting viewpoints served to disrupt the cohesiveness of the movement. However, the connection that was displayed in drawing attention to the movement was seen as a strength. Lastly, Chapter 4 explored personal expression behavior via trending feed analysis. Content analysis of nearly 3,000 tweets related to trending hashtags showed that users construct their personal narratives in the form of play, often contravening societal norms of language use and self-disclosure rules. Users were likely to violate grammar rules, use profanity, and disclose highly personal information via Twitter in response to hashtag prompts.

The main strengths lie in the conclusions of this book. In Chapter 5, Papacharissi outlines five propositions for interpreting this work with respect to affective publics, most notably the distinction between collective and connective action. These case studies illuminate the role of Twitter in bringing people together for a common cause, as well as differing results with respect to narrative cohesiveness and collective action.

One weakness of the volume is with respect to Chapter 4. While it is illuminating to view three very different aspects of Twitter use, the personal narrative component seemed slightly discordant with the other two chapters. Although the argument is clearly made for developing personal narratives and representations of the self with respect to the political, the role of trending tweets vis-à-vis civic engagement (or dissent) is less convincing. Certainly Twitter offers a realm of self-expression that may go against social norms; however, it is not clear how social media norms may impact posting behavior. It may not be an act of civil disobedience to use foul language or disclose very personal information via social media insofar as those behaviors are part of the social norms that are common on social media. Despite this critique, the results are clearly presented and provide interesting implications with respect to personal Twitter use.

Overall, this book offers a unique, rigorous, and well-rationaled argument for analyzing affect and microblogging. The case studies are methodologically innovative and provide a wealth of interesting results with respect to social movements, civic participation, and social media use. Certainly this book has the ability to spark future research for scholars across multiple disciplines.


Reviewed by: Crystal Abidin, University of Western Australia, Australia

Driven by a plethora of case studies drawn from diverse arenas including art, literature, television, and popular culture, Seeing Ourselves Through Technology maintains that despite the increasing ways we audience and are audied by machines and technology,