



**BOOK REVIEW OF AFFECTIVE POLITICS OF DIGITAL MEDIA:
PROPAGANDA BY OTHER MEANS, MEGAN BOLER AND ELIZABETH DAVIS, 2021,
NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE**

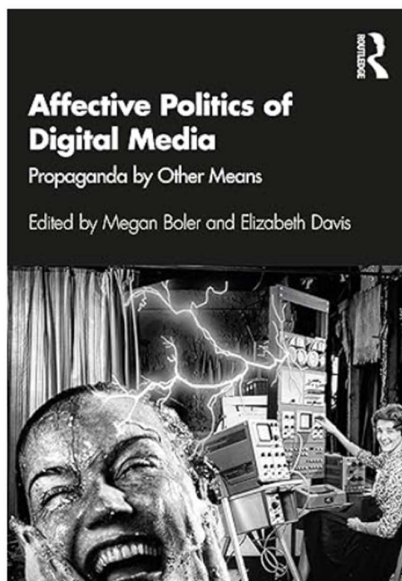
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Abstract

This interdisciplinary collection of essays explores how digital media and technologies exploit and capitalize on emotions, particularly through social media, to exacerbate social conflicts surrounding issues such as racism, misogyny, and nationalism. The book examines the affective information economies and how emotions are being weaponized within mediatized political landscapes. The chapters cover a wide range of topics, including how clickbait, “fake news,” and right-wing actors deploy and weaponize emotion; new theoretical directions for understanding affect, algorithms, and public spheres; and how the wedding of big data and behavioural science enables new frontiers of propaganda, as seen in the Cambridge Analytica and Facebook scandal. The book features contributions from established and emerging scholars of communications, media studies, affect theory, journalism, policy studies, gender studies, and critical race studies to address questions of concern to scholars, journalists, and students in these fields and beyond.

Keywords: Digital Media, Social Media, Affective Politics, Emotions, Manipulations, Propaganda, Politics

Introduction

The book “Affective Politics of Digital Media: Propaganda by Other Means” by Megan Boler and Elizabeth Davis, published in 2021 by Routledge, explores how digital media and technologies exploit and capitalize on emotions, particularly through social media, to exacerbate social conflicts surrounding issues such as racism, misogyny, and nationalism. The book examines the affective information economies and how emotions are being weaponized within mediatized political landscapes. The chapters cover a wide range of topics, including how clickbait, “fake news,” and right-wing actors deploy and weaponize emotion; new theoretical directions for understanding affect, algorithms, and public spheres; and how the wedding of big data and behavioural science enables new frontiers of propaganda, as seen in the Cambridge Analytica and Facebook scandal. The book features contributions from established and emerging scholars of communications, media studies, affect theory, journalism, policy studies, gender studies, and critical race studies to address questions of concern to scholars, journalists, and students in these fields and beyond.

This book with its collections, provides a significant framework and starting point for exploring how digital and social media platforms manipulate and influence people's emotions. The central idea of the book is that new forms of media, particularly social media, serve as sites where a wide range of human



data is operationalized and exploited through its affective ecosystems of ideological, cultural, political, and social, as well as avenues for making profits. The book encompasses collections that explore the conceptual underpinning that characterizes affect and media, how affect is approached and weaponized within digital and social media platforms, as well as the ways through which emotions are exploited and makes recommendations on how users of social media can protect themselves from affective manipulations that come as propaganda and safeguard the emotional information and data that they put on the social media platforms.

Discussion

This book makes an important argument by pointing out that even though affect may be explained in terms of feeling or mood as well as intensity, it is necessary to consider its meaning as a potential towards a feeling characterized by ambiguity (p. 53-54). That is, it looks at a consideration of the exploitative and propagandist mechanism of social media sites on affection with a concern on both the ways through which affect can be manipulated through linguistic captures online as well as how it can as well act towards resisting the linguistic captures. Hence, this state of abstractness and ambiguous frame rendered by the social media spaces and its wide connective of linguistic structures over time and space encounters a sort of circulation through unexpected ways. This facilitates a form of mediating and modulating experiences, providing paths of action and behaviors for users that become infinite to an extent.

The book, particularly the second chapter, makes a significant point on how social media- with its content features acts as a reverberation in impressing itself with a real feeling and, in so doing, influences the emotions of its users. Reverberation tends to trap how social media and other digital network sites are positioned to influence the emotions of its users that come close to a supposed reality. Thus, digital media sites, through their content creation, messaging, and interaction with many different users across time and space, inform the emotions of users and impact their behaviors on social, economic, and political feelings through the reechoing and resounding of contents, information, and messages that emerge online over time and space.

In addition, the book emphasizes how the discourse within facts and feelings could be weaponized through conservative experts on digital media channels. This may be used in undermining opponents of a political group, making it overly emotional to an extent (p. 94). An important example from the book points to how a discourse that is alienated with a “dispassionate reason” depends on the affective retort of the users. Thus, reliant on measures of affection in creating content and messages and capturing users who come to be shaped and pledged within an affective solidarity.

The book further examines how affect tends to render users toward certain political trajectories or away from them through propaganda that is manifested through digital media. With this, it points out how digital media, with its content and messaging characteristics, has a propagandized capacity to obscure ambiguities. An important example the book provides is "how blockchain technology relies on trust generated through affection, by pointing out how the complexity of human decision-making is concealed by truth assertions drawn from large amounts of data". (p. 101). This masks the uncertainty and ambiguity that is inherent in human decision-making.

From this, it is imperative to consider the point that even though a triad toward affect has the potential to kindle possibilities that are endless and the ambiguities within the actions and behaviors of humans, the erudition and propagandism of behaviors online into data largely affect how we view,



comprehend, and conceive uncertainties and ambiguities, rather than phrasing it with regards to probabilities that can be controlled and predicted. Hence, the book draws our attention to a need to reconsider our approach toward media and propaganda analysis, emphasizing the importance of looking into the other ways propaganda can manifest. Thus, it is essential to incorporate strategies and methods that consider affective approaches as much more elucidative.

Another important aspect of the book is its exploration of how affect is rambed online. With this, it highlights how online communities are bonded online, creating affective interpretations and comprehension of current socio-political happenings. An example of the affective mechanism that characterizes conservative media spaces within the United States is demonstrated considering the ways right-wing media engages in a kind of narrative style that is affective in reverberating the target audiences. Through this, the manifested dynamics of affection could engender an "algorithmic precinct", which circulates propaganda and its amplification.

It further examines how the affective enclaves provided by digital media serve as avenues of propaganda. With this, it points out the example of the discourse encompassing the "Quebec grand mosque shooting in 2017". It also highlights how discourses of affection come with its online and digital media operationalization. An instance of this regarding the right wing is the issue of how the right-wing "Nationalists Hindu" utilized affective propaganda and its discourse concerning the "love jihad" online campaign. Through this, it is seen how affective discourse online is used to spread information and mobilize people, and in this case, regarding understanding how the anti-Muslim propaganda of affection was used to spread misinformation over time.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is important to emphasize that the book makes a unique contribution to the understanding of the different dynamics that propaganda can take, drawing attention to the other way of doing propaganda- concerning how digital and social media has potential through its content-generated logic that use affect to influence the emotions and end up affecting the behaviors of users both online and offline. It enhances our understanding of how crucial the dynamics of affect are vital in terms of the realities of politics that are brought forth within the contemporary and mediatized online community.

The book, therefore, offers a significant insight on an interdisciplinary level providing the avenues for critical dialogue throughout social science as well as the humanities, with a key consideration for the links between contemporary media and affect (p. 37). The only issue I have with the book is its repetitiveness as it repeats and restates most of its points and hashes over almost the same contextual basis and information throughout the different chapters. But it is okay, as it helps the reader comprehend the similar contextual arguments and information in the different chapters.

References

- Boler, M., & Davis, E. (Eds.). (2021). *Affective politics of digital media: Propaganda by other means*. Routledge.