

Affective Affordances, Networked Status Quo, and Climate Communication: An Analysis of the Mobilization of Affect on Facebook

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Chamil Rathnayake¹  and Jenifer Sunrise Winter²

Abstract

This study achieves two objectives: (1) define two specific affordances—*affective embedding* and *rendering*—capturing the connection between affect and social media affordances from the perspectives of designers and end-users, and (2) examine the mobilization of affective reactions with an emphasis on the intersection between affective affordances and the networked status quo. A sample of 253,489 Facebook posts that contained key terms related to climate change is analyzed using a series of log-log models to examine the mobilization of affective reactions. We argue that possibilities for rendering affect using the Facebook reaction menu are nested within affective embedding and general platform affordances. Empirical analysis examines a two-step logic where the networked status quo determines content exposure, leading to content replication. Although affective reactions are primarily driven by content reach, the analysis reveals variations among six types of Facebook pages in terms of how their prominence contributes to generate affective reactions among audiences.

Keywords

affect, affordances, networked status quo, mobilization, social media

Introduction

Although a surge of scholarly work on networked affect (Blevins et al., 2019; Papacharissi, 2016; Siapera et al., 2018) stresses the role computer-mediated feelings and emotions play in digital publics, current literature does not adequately capture the nuanced connection between affect and social media affordances. As digital publics emerge within the relational structure between digital environments and users, it is essential to situate conceptualizations of networked emotionality within literature that examines platform affordances (boyd, 2011; Evans et al., 2017; Nagy & Neff, 2015). While affordances such as persistence, replicability, scalability, searchability, visibility, editability, association, and anonymity (boyd, 2011; Evans et al., 2017; Treem & Leonardi, 2013) capture action possibilities in digital environments on a general level, they do not provide specific insight into the mobilization of affective reactions. An inquiry of the interrelatedness affect and affordances can address this issue by guiding conceptualization of *affective affordances* and analysis of networked affect. Although scholars identify relevant notions, such as affective affordances (Wilkerson

et al., 2021) and *emotional affordances* (Bareither, 2019; Steinert & Dennis, 2022), the academic discourse surrounding affective affordances is still at an early stage.

The analysis of networked emotionality should be positioned within the intersection between platform affordances and social context, as the mobilization of affective reactions is determined by the interplay between these two elements. The nature and the extent to which the status quo is reproduced and operates within digital discourse is particularly relevant within this context, as social media offers avenues for alternative voices and community formation as opposed to news media, which support the status quo (McLeod & Detenber, 2006). This study is developed based on the premise that the mobilization of affective reactions takes place via affective affordances provided by platforms and the extent of

¹University of Strathclyde, UK

²University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, USA

Corresponding Author:

Chamil Rathnayake, School of Humanities, University of Strathclyde, St. James Road, Glasgow G4 0LT, UK.
Email: Chamil.rathnayake@strath.ac.uk



such mobilization is determined by the networked status quo—that is, socioeconomic, cultural, and political structures reconstructed within digital platforms—where distinct types of actors gain more exposure than others. The study achieves two related objectives. First, we explicate affective affordances—that is, “relational enactment of feeling through the vernacular of technological functions representing discrete emotions” (Wilkerson et al., 2021, p. 1045)—by situating emotionality within the relations between designers, platform architecture, and users. Two specific affordances— affective embedding and rendering—are defined from the perspective of designers and end-users and qualified based on the framework suggested by Evans et al. (2017). Second, we examine the mobilization of affective reactions within the intersection between affective affordances and the status quo.

We hypothesize two levels of effects that capture how the networked status quo determines content exposure and replication, and how that drives the mobilization of affective reactions. Within digital publics driven by phatic communion—communicative gestures that are primarily used for communion with others rather than for motivating action or political engagement (Miller, 2015)—expression of affect occurs mainly through minimal forms of expression, especially via design features that allow expression of emotion. This study approaches the mobilization of affective reactions within digital discourse with a special emphasis on emoji, which allow users to transmit and intensify affect as well as disambiguate messages (Riordan, 2017). We use Facebook content related to anthropogenic climate change as the empirical context. Emotions related to climate change have become a matter of normative scrutiny (Mosquera & Jylhä, 2022) and, as Neckel and Hasenfratz (2021) note, public debate related to climate change and environmental destruction involves intense emotions.

Conceptualizing Affective Affordances

Central to our discussion on affective affordances is a notion of affect allowing empirical work that examines its textual manifestation and metrification. Establishing such a basis is essential, as there is no commonly agreed-upon definition of affect (Thrift, 2004). Although affect is often associated with terms such as joy, sadness, disgust, shame, envy, fear, love, and hope, there is a lack of agreement on how it relates to affective phenomena, such as feelings and emotions (Simpson & Brigstocke, 2019). We identify affect as a meta-discourse of emotionality that describes the ways in which different scholarly traditions conceptualize affective phenomena. Such a “metaperspective” is useful, as extant literature discusses the emergence of affect as an object of study (Hemmings, 2005) as well as tensions between scholarly traditions within affect scholarship (Wetherell, 2013).

Social media scholars depend on different definitions of affect, such as ability to affect and be affected (Sundén &

Paasonen, 2018), pre-emotive intensity (Papacharissi, 2016), or as a cultural practice shaped by communication (Döveling et al., 2018). While the theoretical foundation developed by Spinoza, Deleuze, and Guattari is more prevalent in social media research, some researchers identify emotions as specific constructs related to affective states (Yi et al., 2022). The latter approach, which aligns with theoretical work in psychology and neuroscience (Barrett, 2011; Barrett & Russell, 1999), is more appropriate for our analysis, as it identifies visible outcomes of underlying combinations of valence and arousal. Russell and Barrett (1999) distinguish between core affect—“most elementary consciously accessible affective feelings” (p. 806)—and prototypical emotional episodes, which constitute the clearest instances of emotions (e.g., sadness, happiness, disgust anger), involve core affect, and are generally identified as full-blown emotions. For instance, Russell and Barrett note that a prototypical emotional episode of fear involves a range of reactions to a dangerous situation, including the recognition of danger, feelings of displeasure and arousal, flight, facial and vocal cues, and the self-perception of being afraid.

Social media researchers who use the above conceptualization generally focus on prototypical emotions. For instance, analysis conducted by Wang and Wei (2020) shows how emotions generated engagement with cancer-related tweets via likes and retweets. Similarly, Yi et al. (2022) discuss the diffusion of typical types of emotions within Weibo messages related to Covid-19. Arguably, their emphasis on prototypical emotions results from their choice of methods that rely on language. However, affect is expressed via both verbal and non-verbal expressions afforded by platforms. Although attempts have been made to examine visual expressions (i.e., emoji) using the same conceptualization (Kutsuzawa et al., 2022), such work is not adequately positioned within the theoretical context of platform affordances. Our position is that mobilization of affective reactions on social media is a sociotechnical phenomenon that relates to the way designers envision and enact modes of affective expression as well as user understanding of such enactment. Accordingly, affect is manifested through the use of affordances provided by technology. We discuss this position in the following section with a special emphasis on social media affordances and identify two levels of effects to estimate mobilization of affective reactions.

Affective Affordances

The notion of affordances (Gibson, 1976) has provided a foundation for understanding relations between technological artifacts and users, and several scholars have defined the term with a special emphasis on media and communication (Nagy & Neff, 2015; Ronzhyn et al., 2022). Ronzhyn et al. (2022) define affordances as “perceived actual or imagined properties of social media, emerging through the relation of technological, social, and contextual, that enable and constrain

specific uses of the platforms” (p. 14). Scholars have examined a variety of new media affordances, such as persistence, replicability, scalability, searchability, anonymity, visibility, association, editability, information richness, privacy, modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability (boyd, 2011; Evans et al., 2017; Koteyko et al., 2022; Sundar & Limperos, 2013; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Many general affordances identified by previous studies (e.g., searchability or anonymity) focus on end-users of technology. However, as Nagy and Neff (2015) argue, affordances are both environmental and perceptual and can include expectations of users as well as designers. They conceptualize affordances as imagined phenomena that “emerge between users’ perceptions, attitudes, and expectations; between the materiality and functionality of technologies; and between the intentions and perceptions of designers” (p. 5). Nagy and Neff identify increasing attention to affect and emotion among researchers as a main reason that demands a richer and more nuanced conceptualization of affordances. Nevertheless, the intersection between affect and affordances remains a relatively underexplored area within social media literature.

Affective Embedding and Rendering

Terms such as affective affordances and emotional affordances (Bareither, 2019; Steinert & Dennis, 2022; Wilkerson et al., 2021) are used to describe how social media allow emotion

expression. Wilkerson et al. define affective affordances as “relational enactment of feeling through the vernacular of technological functions representing discrete emotions” (p. 1045). We use this definition and the argument that affordances involve both designers and users (Nagy & Neff, 2015) to define two specific types of affective affordances: (1) affective embedding and (2) affective rendering. Figure 1 provides a schematic representation of our conceptualization of affective affordances. We argue that affective expressions are enabled by a relational structure between base technologies—that is, technologies, including software and protocols, that enable the design of technological artifacts—and designers, as well as designed artifacts and end-users, that enable and constrain expression of affect. Base technology offers designers the affordance of affective embedding—that is, actual and imagined potential for creating and structuring elements in digital environments in such a way that users perceive potential for affective expression via such elements. We define affective rendering as imagined and actual potential for verbalizing emotions and converting emotive intensities into visual expressions (e.g., emoji). While affective embedding enables conversion of imagined modes of affective expression into design elements, affective rendering allows affective expression via use of such elements.

Evans et al. (2017) propose three threshold criteria to identify affordances: (1) they are not objects or features of objects, (2) they are not outcomes, and (3) they are variable. Table 1 shows how the proposed affective affordances meet these criteria. Accordingly, traces of emotions on social media are an outcome of designers’ use of affective embedding, user understanding of technical functionality, and cultural practices within digital publics that result in affective expressions. As there are differences in norms of emotion expression (Waterloo et al., 2018) and features available for affective expression across platforms, the ability to trace and measure affective forms of engagement depends on the extent to which affective affordances are actualized.

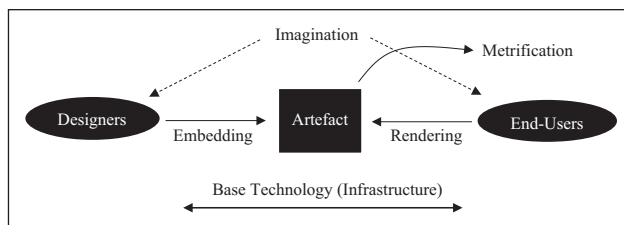


Figure 1. A schematic representation of affective affordances.

Table 1. Threshold Criteria for Affective Affordances (Based on Evans et al., 2017).

Affordances	Objects/features	Outcomes	Variability
Affective embedding	<i>Features and options available in base technology:</i> Protocols, functions in programming languages, database management options, graphic design functions	<i>Affective elements in digital environments:</i> Interfaces and features that offer options for expression and interaction to end-users	<i>Differences in design:</i> The ways in which designers imagine possibilities for designing affective elements vary across designers and depend on base technologies used
Affective rendering	<i>Features available on social media platforms:</i> Options for typing text commentary, options for using emoji	<i>Emotion expression:</i> Verbalized emotions and the use of emoji to express affect in digital publics	<i>Differences in emotion expression:</i> The way users verbalize emotions vary across different users and platforms. Variability in visual affective expression depends on the availability and user understanding of design features (e.g., emoji)

Networked Status Quo and the Mobilization of Affective Reactions

On Facebook, audience engagement takes place through communicative acts such as liking, commenting, and sharing (Heiss et al., 2018). Such minimal forms of engagement serve a social purpose in phatic communication and communion (Miller, 2008, 2015; Schandorf, 2013). However, they have limited potential to cause political change and are likely to reproduce the status quo (Miller, 2015). This leads to three arguments that form the basis of our analysis. First, mobilization of affective reactions is driven by both general affordances of social media and specific affective affordances. Second, traces of minimal acts of emotion expression enabled by affective rendering, such as the use of emoji, can be seen as evidence of the mobilization of affect in digital public discourse, as such reactions show the extent to which users choose to display affect publicly using visual clues in response to content. Third, such mobilization relates to the networked status quo, where actors who have high degrees of power and cultural capital, such as journalists and politicians, institutional actors (e.g., non-profits, media organizations), and collective phenomena (e.g., online communities), are likely to garner more affect around their content. Status quo—that is, prevailing social, economic, or political systems and power relations (Chandler & Munday, 2011)—is a commonly used term in media and communication literature. For instance, Durfee (2006) uses the term “status quo frames” to describe media content that reflect the interests of the current power structure. While this approach views media as a “guard dog” that protects the status quo, Berry et al. (2023) acknowledge that the status quo has become more contested within digital media, where the political elite do not depend on media as they use social media to communicate directly with audiences. Our definition of networked status quo acknowledges the permeation of status quo into digital spaces, shaped by the constraints of and possibilities offered by platform affordances. Accordingly, networked status quo may include conventional power relations as well as “digitally native” concentrations of power (e.g., influencers) established on social media.

Mobilization of emotion takes place via original social media posts as well as the subsequent reactions they elicit. Facebook reactions include seven emoji (like, love, care, sad, wow, haha, and angry) that can be used to respond to a post. We pay special attention to these specific affective reactions, which allow metrification of affect (i.e., conversion of subjectively felt affect and emotions into verbal or visual expressions, resulting in digital traces that allow quantitative analysis of emotion expression) and enable researchers to examine how affect accumulates around existing power structures and social capital. A range of studies explore the role emoji play as affective elements in computer-mediated communication (Li & Yang, 2018; Matamoros-Fernández, 2018; Neel et al., 2023; Sumner et al., 2020). Li and Yang (2018)

identified seven pragmatic functions of emoji: attitude/emotion signal, attitude/emotion intensity enhancer, illocutionary force modifier, humor, irony, turn taking/giving, and back-channel device. This shows that the role emoji play within digital conversations is not restricted to the expression of prototypical emotions. While some emoji can be directly associated with prototypical emotions, the use of others (e.g., hushed face and love-you gesture) are not evidence of prototypical emotions. Moreover, some emoji (e.g., haha) can be used to indicate both positive and negative sentiments. While emoji cannot be limited to prototypical emotions, they reflect various combinations of valence and arousal (Kutsuzawa et al., 2022). Therefore, emoji should be considered as affective expressions in their own right, rather than reflections of prototypical emotional episodes. Metrics such as the number of reactions received by social media posts can indicate the extent to which affect is accumulated around certain posts and actor types. Affective embedding is particularly relevant for understanding the affective mobilization facilitated by emoji, as the potential for embedding, imagined by platform designers, constrains or allows the use of emoji. Accordingly, the study asks the following question:

RQ₁. How does the use of affective reactions by users reflect affective embedding?

The extent to which affective reactions are mobilized within digital discourse depends on a range of factors including nature of the content that generates affective reactions, types of actors who post content, general affordances such as visibility, and specific affective affordances defined above. Eberl et al. (2020) argue that the number of angry reactions generated by a post is related to the salience of an issue addressed by a post and the sentiments reflected by the post. However, the extent of emoji use may also depend on other variables that relate to differences among actors. In this section, we raise two research questions, which encapsulate a sequential logic exploring how actualization of affective rendering is intertwined with the networked status quo.

Social network sites are “uneven spaces” that include individual and institutional actors representing different levels of power. Especially on platforms like Facebook, users are allowed to construct and self-categorize profiles and pages (e.g., politician, journalist, media page). This functionality enables users to display and reconstruct their positionality within platforms and influence power dynamics in digital discourse. Moreover, digital platforms facilitate the emergence of digitally native social formations, such as online communities centered around specific debates. The networked status quo is constructed within this logic, and context, in which digital engagement is likely to be organized around profile pages and social formations that possess high levels of political power, and cultural and social capital.

Table 2. Variables and Metrics.

Construct	Variables	Metrics
Content reach	Exposure	Number of post views
	Replication	Number of post shares
Networked status quo	Prominence of a page	Number of followers at posting, likes at posting
Mobilization of affective reactions	Emotive reactions	Number of likes, number of emoji (i.e., love, haha, wow, sad, angry, care) used

Attention to the networked status quo is essential for this study as the involvement of celebrities (Goodman & Littler, 2013), news media, social movements, and politicians (Chen et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2021) is prominent within digital discourse related to environmental and climate change. Moreover, social media facilitate the formation of communities that engage in climate activism (Wielk & Standlee, 2021). We approach the analysis based on the argument that the networked status quo determines the relative prominence of social media actors within climate change conversations and their ability to mobilize audiences. This argument is consistent with the general observation that actor types such as politicians, actors, sports stars, or news media dominate social media in terms of popularity (Kwak et al., 2010) and influence (Cha et al., 2010). Moreover, examining the extent to which certain actors gain visibility and the ability to mobilize networked crowds allow us to understand how status quo is intertwined with algorithmic functionality. This is particularly relevant when examining Facebook, where actors who post content and the likelihood of engagement with posts are crucial factors that drive algorithmic ranking (Meta Business Help Center, n.d.). We examine the role of the networked status quo in driving the mobilization of affective reactions on the level of general, as well as specific, affective affordances. As Evans et al. (2017) argue, general affordances such as visibility and searchability make finding, consuming, and engaging with content possible, and these actions are unattainable when affordances are unavailable. Therefore, on the level of general affordances, content reach can be sensitive to the networked status quo. Accordingly, we ask the following research question:

RQ₂. What is the extent to which the networked status quo (i.e., the prominence of Facebook pages) determines content reach related to climate change?

On the level of affective affordances, the extent to which posts generate affective reactions can be sensitive to both content reach and the status quo. This argument leads to the following question:

RQ₃. What is the extent to which the networked status quo and content reach mobilize affective reactions among audiences?

Method

A sample of 253,489 Facebook posts uploaded from 1 January to 31 December 2022 was obtained via Crowdtangle using 20 keywords related to climate change: green energy, plastic waste, ocean pollution, climate change, climate action, climate crisis, climate protest, climate justice, CO₂ emissions, greenhouse gases, fossil fuel, global warming, zero waste, deforestation, renewable energy, pollution, sea level rise, biofuel, carbon footprint, and coal mining. Self-reported page types were used to identify six types of pages under two groups (Group 1—individual pages: personal pages, journalists, and politicians; Group 2—communities and organizational pages: community, media, and non-profit pages) for comparative analysis. Personal pages were renamed to “celebrity, influencer, professional, and personal pages” as the subset of profiles labeled as person, personal, or personality in Crowdtangle data included a significant number of profiles with a large following and some of these accounts represented professionals (e.g., chef, lawyer, trainer) and online personalities (e.g., bloggers). Journalists were identified as a distinct category due to their critical role in climate communication. These categories were selected for sampling as they capture three levels of power (i.e., individuals, communities, and organizations) and gathered high levels of mobilization. The sample included post level metadata, including the number of affective reactions, comments, and shares per post, as well as page level metrics, such as the number of followers and likes at posting (i.e., the total number of likes received by a page at the time when the sampled post was added). Metrics included in each sample were used to define variables for statistical analysis (see Table 2). Facebook posts were treated as units of analysis, and post views and shares were considered as indicators of content exposure and replication, respectively. The number of likes and followers at posting indicated the prominence of pages where each post was uploaded. The prominence of pages was used as a proxy for the networked status quo, indicating the extent to which engagement is organized around different types of actors (i.e., pages). Table 3 shows the number of posts representing each page category included in the sample, average likes and following at posting for pages that published each post, and the average views and shares per post for each page category.

Log-log regression models were used to estimate effects. Log transformation was used to increase the quality of

Table 3. Sample Size, Average Likes and Followers at Posting, and Average Post Views and Shares.

Page type	Pages (N)	Posts (N)	Likes at posting	Followers at posting	Post views	Post shares
Community	8,958	39,069	126,453	130,542	333.4	23.36
Celebrity/influencer/professional/personal	7,358	27,776	298,704	345,892	1,692	56.98
Non-profit	12,482	82,138	229,581	291,723	967	14.93
Journalist	824	2,356	113,394	126,406	1,070	41.97
Politician	5,106	25,550	156,169	167,008	445.8	29.54
Media page	5,511	76,600	3,765,390	4,088,396	2,397	18.44

Table 4. Hypothesized Effects.

Hypothesized effect	Regression model
<i>Model 1:</i> Content exposure is determined by the prominence of pages	$\log(\text{Post views}) = \beta_1 * \log(\text{Followers at posting}) + \beta_2 * \log(\text{Likes at posting})$
<i>Model 2:</i> Content replication is determined by the prominence of pages and content exposure	$\log(\text{Post shares}) = \beta_1 * \log(\text{Followers at posting}) + \beta_2 * \log(\text{Likes at posting}) + \beta_3 * \log(\text{Post views})$
<i>Model 3:</i> The extent of affective mobilization is determined by content exposure, replication, and the prominence of pages	$\log(\text{nLikes/nAngry/nSad/nHaha/nLove/nWow/nCare}) = \beta_1 * \log(\text{Followers at posting}) + \beta_2 * \log(\text{Likes at posting}) + \beta_3 * \log(\text{Post views})$

regression models, as each metric spanned across a wide range. For instance, the number of followers at posting for the sample representing celebrity/influencer/personal pages ranged from 2 to 58.91 million. Distribution of the number of likes for the same sample ranged from 1 to 148,079. Log transformation based on natural logarithms increased the model-fit and minimized standardized residuals. Moreover, log-log models allow interpretation of effects as expected changes in percentages. Table 4 shows hypothesized effects and the regression models used to test each effect across page categories.

Results and Discussion

Affective Embedding and the Constraining of Reactions

The first research question focused on examining digital manifestation of emotionality within the confines of affective embedding. Sundar and Limperos (2013) highlight affordances such as modality and interactivity that capture the ability of new media to enable different modes of presentation and allow users to make real-time changes to content. Affective embedding is related to modality, as the options for affective reactions depend on designers' imagination and enactment of various modes of affective expression. The current design of Facebook allows features for those who post information and their audiences to show how they "feel." Embedding such features shapes the nature of affective rendering that takes place on the platform. Those who publish original posts can click on the smiley face emoji (Figure 2a) to open a menu that consists of 200 emoji (see Figure 2b), which include a range of affective reactions (e.g., blissful,

festive, irritated, heartbroken). Figure 2c to e shows the embedding of affective reactions that audiences can use to react to posts. As Figure 2c shows, the initial options include buttons for liking, commenting, and sharing content. A quick click on the like button results in an indication of positive affect (Figure 2d). However, the like button also has a hover-over effect, which opens six other emoji (Facebook reactions) that audiences can select (Figure 2e).

We observe several constraints related to affective embedding in this design. First, there is a lack of balance in the options for affective rendering between those who post and those who react. While those who post content have a wide variety of emoji to choose from, audiences have only seven options (including the like option). This limits the ability of audiences to render affect. Second, the embedding of emoji that show an additional six affective reactions within the like button creates internal contradictions, as likes show positive affect while some options in the hover-over menu include negative reactions. Moreover, the extra effort and engagement needed to use emoji may affect the extent to which emoji such as love, wow, and care are used to react to specific types of content or posts uploaded by certain types of users. Audiences that navigate streams of content may often opt for a quick like rather than making an extra effort to react using other emoji.

Table 5 shows the average number of likes and emoji reactions per post across page categories in the sample. As the averages show, the like button is more heavily used to react to posts than other emoji across page categories. Arguably, this relates to the abovementioned design (i.e., the actualization of affective embedding) that favors the use of likes. Moreover, the results in Table 5 also revealed differences in the use of emoji that may relate to factors other than

design, such as the nature of posts and the type of actors who posted content. Content posted by celebrity, influencer, professional, and personal pages also garnered more affective reactions than other page categories. Politicians and journalists received a considerable number of likes and other affective reactions. However, communities and non-profit pages showed limited ability to generate affective reactions around their content. This shows that, in general, personally framed pages are able to mobilize affect among audiences more than

communities, media, or non-profit pages. This may relate to the fact that logics other than political engagement, such as fandom and political affiliations, play a crucial role in encouraging minimal forms of political action.

Networked Status Quo and the (Re)Construction of Visibility

The second research question examined how the networked status quo determines content reach, which is an essential first step for analyzing mobilization of affective reactions. Top actors included celebrities, politicians, journalists, mainstream media, and non-profit organizations (e.g., Dwayne Johnson, CGTN, BBC, Barack Obama, Narendra Modi, Javed Chaudhry, Shaun King, WHO, UNICEF) as well as pages that emerged within the new media landscape (e.g., Facebook Marketplace Community, Scary Mommy, Netflix, LAD Bible). The diversity of these pages reflects a digital ecology of power and status in which individual and institutional actors with political power and cultural capital gain prominence. These actors dominate the (re)construction and maintenance of the status quo within the platform and metrics such as the number of followers and post views reflect the “networked status quo.”

Adjusted R^2 for models that estimated the relationship between the prominence of pages and content exposure (*Model 1*, Table 6) ranged from .376 to .520, indicating that the number of followers can explain variations in post views to a considerable degree. Followers at posting was a significant predictor for content exposure models across categories except politicians. Likes at posting was significant for all the models except for journalists. However, in each category except politicians, likes at posting associated negatively with the number of views received by each post. This shows that having a large following on Facebook is more important for increasing content reach than having posts that received positive reactions in the form of likes. The case of politicians is strikingly different from other categories as, although followers at posting was not significant in determining content exposure, likes at posting significantly predicted variation in post views ($\beta=0.482$). Therefore, for politicians, maintaining social media presence that generates positive reactions is important for them to gain exposure.

Results for *Model 2* showed that content replication via sharing is generally determined by content exposure (i.e.,

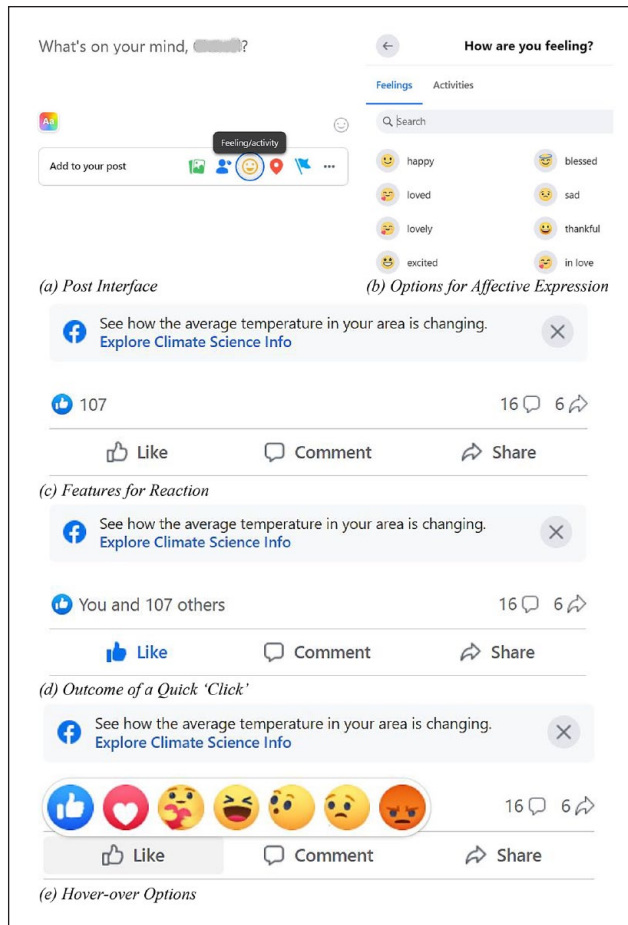


Figure 2. Facebook features for affective reactions: (a) post interface, (b) options for affective expression, (c) features for reaction, (d) outcome of a quick “click,” and (e) hover-over options.

Table 5. Averages Likes and Average Use of Emoji.

Page category	Likes	Angry	Sad	Haha	Love	Wow	Care
Community	84.8	1.486	2.354	6.49	13.34	1.168	1.43
Celebrity/influencer//professional/personal	281.6	5.784	8.7	24.99	62.7	4.631	5.424
Non-profit	69.79	1.68	2.341	3.076	10.15	0.877	2.725
Journalist	170.4	4.981	9.281	10.13	24.87	6.22	6.003
Politician	263.5	4.071	2.493	10.48	32.98	1.371	2.947
Media page	123.1	7.567	7.69	21.39	13.4	3.81	1.445

Table 6. Log-Log Models for Exposure and Replication (Models 1 and 2).

Outcome variable	Adjusted R^2	Intercept	β		
			Likes at posting	Followers at posting	Post views
<i>Community</i>					
Post views	.376	-1.518	-1.031***	1.633***	
Shares	.333	-0.205	-0.264*	0.211*	0.393***
<i>Celebrity/influencer/professional/personal</i>					
Post views	.414	-1.335	-0.299***	0.993***	
Shares	.554	-2.082	0.089	-0.114.	0.704***
<i>Non-profit</i>					
Post views	.468	-1.570	-0.854***	1.453***	
Shares	.481	-1.447	-0.678***	0.720***	0.464***
<i>Journalist</i>					
Post views	.520	-0.972	-0.053	0.745***	
Shares	.607	-2.022	0.304	-0.422	0.808***
<i>Politician</i>					
Post views	.471	-0.016	0.482***	0.171	
Shares	.635	-3.407	0.532***	-0.424***	0.689***
<i>Media page</i>					
Post views	.465	-1.500	-1.222***	1.806***	
Shares	.518	-1.509	0.124***	-0.192***	0.615***

Note. Significant codes: 0 **** 0.001 *** 0.01 ** 0.05 * .

views). Post views significantly predicted variation in shares for all page categories. This was not surprising, as visibility is essential for content replication. The total number of likes at posting was positively associated with shares for all categories except community pages and non-profits. However, this positive relationship was significant only for politicians and media. For these two categories, having profiles with a history of posting positively rated content increased replication of their content related to climate change (β : politicians=0.532, media=0.124). However, for community and non-profit pages, likes at posting was negatively associated with content replication (β : communities=-0.264, non-profits=-0.678). This may seem counterintuitive, as click activities (e.g., likes and favorites) affect algorithmic ranking (Kim & Ellison, 2022) and having content that generated likes can generally increase the extent to which audiences share new content posted by a page. However, followers at posting was significantly associated with an increase in replication of content for both community and non-profit pages (β : communities=0.211, non-profits=0.720). For all other categories, followers at posting had a negative association with shares. These results show that, while community and non-profit pages gain replication via post views and a base of followers, politicians and media pages are more likely to receive shares through views and by maintaining profiles that have generated positive reactions among audiences. In general, the above results show a two-step logic of content reach where the networked status quo determines content exposure, which results in replication of content. Accordingly, content exposure and replication can be seen as a digital and

collective process that contributes to the reconstruction of the status quo. However, various logics contribute to such reconstruction. Figure 3 shows examples of posts uploaded by top pages representing each category. These posts reflect different logics, such as consumption, awareness building, political commentary, and fandom. Mobilization of affective reactions takes place within these logics.

The above results can be further contextualized with an emphasis on ranking algorithms that determine the visibility of content. As Kitchin (2017) noted, algorithms are embedded within wider sociotechnical assemblages, and the potential for examining algorithmic functionality is hindered by three challenges: lack of access to source codes (i.e., “the black box”), algorithms are woven together with other algorithms within interconnected systems, and their application unfolds in a multitude of ways. Kitchin suggests that algorithms should be understood relative to their contextual application across situations, time, and space. Accordingly, focusing on the intersection between signals used for algorithmic predictions and specific contexts provides a reliable approach for understanding engagement within digitally mediated social and political spaces. The Facebook feed is primarily driven by the content shared by connections, and a range of signals including the source of posts (i.e., who posted content) and other engagements on such posts (Meta Business Help Center). The above results show how metrics related to such signals (e.g., likes and followers at posting, number of views) contribute to reproduce power structures where actors, groups, and institutions with social and cultural capital gain visibility and the ability to mobilize networked crowds within

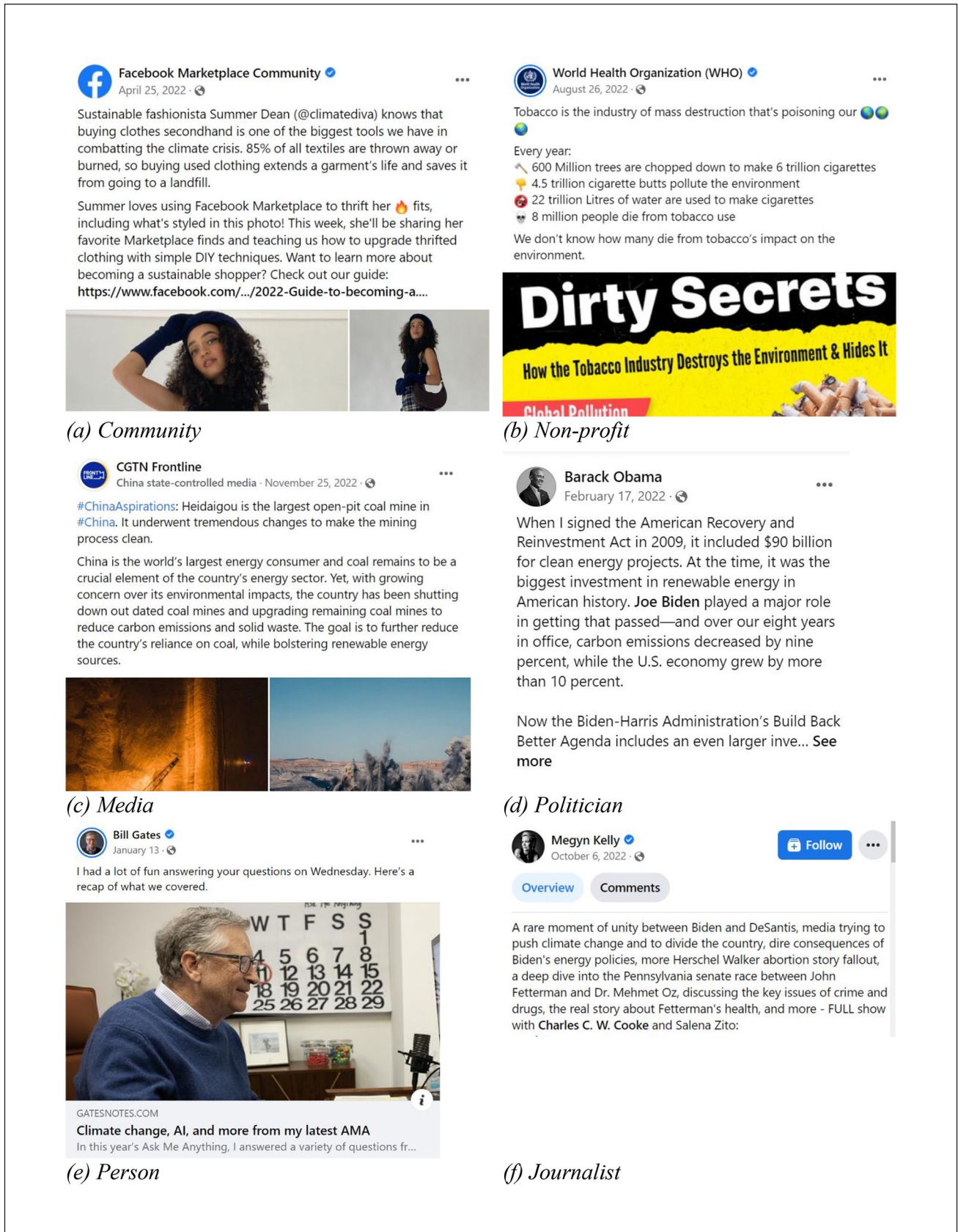


Figure 3. Examples for posts: (a) community, (b) non-profit, (c) media, (d) politician, (e) person, and (f) journalist.

Table 7. Log-Log Models for Affective Reactions (Model 3) (Individual Pages).

Outcome variable	Adjusted R ²	Intercept	B			
			Post views	Shares	Likes at posting	Followers at posting
<i>Celebrity/influencer/professional/personal</i>						
Likes	.794	-1.123	0.527***	0.366***	0.309***	-0.255***
Angry	.255	-1.916	0.160***	0.285***	0.224*	-0.126
Sad	.245	-0.988	0.157***	0.260***	0.302**	-0.296**
Haha	.299	-2.595	0.325***	0.205***	0.150	-0.070
Love	.445	-1.263	0.357***	0.304***	-0.086	0.103
Wow	.417	-1.780	0.258***	0.274***	0.064	-0.065
Care	.367	-1.723	0.205***	0.205***	-0.127.	0.165*
<i>Journalist</i>						
Likes	.847	-1.941	0.444***	0.371***	0.242.	-0.078
Angry	.292	-0.278	0.192	0.369**	0.184	-0.274
Sad	.207	-0.566	0.110	0.187*	-0.510	0.532
Haha	.450	-2.095	0.576***	0.195*	-0.217	0.070
Love	.504	-0.870	0.327***	0.269***	0.470.	-0.501*
Wow	.476	-1.545	0.257**	0.248***	0.206	-0.210
Care	.239	-0.764	0.129*	0.101*	-0.051	0.075
<i>Politician</i>						
Likes	.854	-1.563	0.495***	0.324***	0.236**	-0.067
Angry	.291	-1.045	0.254***	0.281***	0.704*	-0.726*
Sad	.261	-0.195	0.010	0.326***	0.151	-0.152
Haha	.382	-4.075	0.434***	0.035	0.269	-0.041
Love	.529	-2.249	0.325***	0.297***	0.474**	-0.325*
Wow	.422	-0.899	0.188***	0.321***	0.158	-0.235
Care	.441	-2.186	0.156***	0.180***	0.398*	-0.259

Note. Significant codes: 0 “***” 0.001 “**” 0.01 “*” 0.05 “.”

the context of climate communication. Accordingly, this analysis can be used as an indirect approach to observe algorithmic outcomes within specific contexts, as algorithms are created in environments that are not visible for scrutiny (Kitchin, 2017).

Status Quo and the Mobilization of Affective Reactions

Actors with different degrees of power gain content exposure and replication at varying levels (*Models 1 and 2*), and such power and exposure can determine the extent to which affect is mobilized within digital public discourse (RQ₃, *Model 3*). As Nightingale et al. (2021) note, emotions and affect are key ingredients that can be used to maintain, reinforce, or resist the status quo. While the design elements within platforms determine *how* affective rendering is actualized, the status quo determines the extent to which different actors generate affective reactions around their content. Tables 7 and 8 show the results of log-log models for mobilization of affective reactions across page categories. As the results show, the R² values for models that test the effect of page prominence, post exposure, and replication on the number of likes (*Model 3*) are considerably higher than the models for

other emoji. This shows that affective reactions take place primarily via likes and further demonstrates the impact of the abovementioned constraint related to affective embedding that favors likes.

As shown in Tables 7 and 8, post views and shares appeared as significant predictors of mobilization of affective reactions across models. This finding is not unexpected as content exposure is essential for social media pages to generate reactions. The results also showed that the impact of page prominence on affective reactions varies across different page categories. Likes at posting had a significant positive impact on likes, as well as angry and sad emoji for celebrity, influencer, professional, and personal pages (β values: 0.309, 0.224, and 0.302 respectively). Moreover, likes at posting had a significant negative impact on the number of care emojis used (β : -0.127, significant at 0.05) by audiences within this category. The number of likes, angry, love, and care reactions received by posts uploaded by politicians were affected positively by likes at posting (respective β values: 0.236, 0.704, 0.474, and 0.398). Likes at posting did not have a significant impact on affective reactions received by journalists, except for positive effects on the number of likes (β : 0.242, significant at 0.05) and love (β : 0.470, significant at 0.05). This indicates that the accumulation of positive

Table 8. Mobilization of Affective Reactions (Model 3) (Communities, Media, and Organizational Pages).

Outcome variable	Adjusted R ²	Intercept	B			
			Post views	Shares	Likes at posting	Followers at posting
<i>Community</i>						
Likes	.426	-1.160	0.437***	0.324***	-0.131***	0.194***
Angry	.120	1.247	-0.014	0.262***	0.109***	-0.184***
Sad	.141	-0.002	0.061***	0.220	-0.572.	0.572.
Haha	.103	0.868	0.092*	0.170***	0.494	-0.581
Love	.439	-0.700	0.238***	0.360***	0.315*	-0.300.
Wow	.353	-0.744	0.100**	0.318***	-0.543.	0.535.
Care	.346	-0.568	0.099***	0.251***	0.532**	-0.518**
<i>Media page</i>						
Likes	.738	-1.890	0.386***	0.405***	-0.060*	0.176***
Angry	.173	0.464	0.248***	0.202***	0.159*	-0.279**
Sad	.241	-0.966	0.103***	0.394***	0.211**	-0.180*
Haha	.217	-0.452	0.384***	0.138***	0.171*	-0.254***
Love	.424	-1.499	0.245***	0.392***	0.333***	-0.321***
Wow	.456	-1.564	0.234***	0.358***	0.009	-0.034
Care	.419	-1.602	0.153***	0.303***	0.144***	-0.123**
<i>Non-profit</i>						
Likes	.773	-1.512	0.417***	0.347***	-0.612***	0.717***
Angry	.264	-0.193	0.073***	0.392***	1.303***	-1.323***
Sad	.208	-0.914	0.097***	0.236***	0.102	-0.035
Haha	.298	-1.054	0.266***	0.261***	0.680***	-0.732***
Love	.462	-0.546	0.271***	0.359***	0.038	-0.066
Wow	.340	-0.475	0.112***	0.299***	0.377***	-0.417***
Care	.380	-1.466	0.152***	0.246***	-0.417***	0.483***

Note. Significant codes: 0 “***” 0.001 “**” 0.01 “*” 0.05 “.”

sentiments around celebrities, influencers, professionals and individuals labeling their pages as personal, and politicians contribute to generating affective reactions around their climate-related posts. In contrast, journalists do not demonstrate the same level of potential. The models that tested the impact of likes at posting on affective reactions among community, media, and non-profit pages were considerably different from the above results (see Table 8), as the number of likes at posting had a negative association with the number of likes (β values: -0.131 , -0.060 , -0.612 for community, media, and non-profit pages, respectively). This may seem counterintuitive, as one might expect positive sentiments accumulated over time to be positively associated with the number of likes received by posts related to climate change. Moreover, these three page categories showed both positive and negative effects of likes at posting on several affective reactions other than likes. While likes at posting positively affected angry, love, and care reactions for community pages (β values: 0.109 , 0.315 , and 0.532 , respectively), the same metric showed a negative impact on sad (β : -0.572) and wow reactions (β : -0.503). The positive impact of likes at posting was significant for all except the wow reaction for media pages. Likes at posting had a positive impact on angry,

haha, and wow reactions (β values: 1.303 , 0.680 , 0.377) and a negative impact on the number of care reactions (β value: -0.417) among non-profit pages. Differences in the impact between page types should be understood based on the argument made in the previous section that the embedding of emoji within the like button as a hover-over menu may affect the extent to which such emoji are used. Arguably, the negative impact of likes at posting on likes and the positive impact of the same predictor variable on other emoji may show more effort and engagement among audiences of community, media, and non-profit pages in terms of using the hover-over menu.

Followers at posting showed more negative associations with affective reactions in both groups, particularly among community, media, and non-profit pages. While the use of care reactions was positively affected by followers at posting for celebrity, influencer, professional, and personal pages (β value: 0.165), none of the other log-log models for personal pages, journalists, and politicians showed significant positive impact. However, followers at posting negatively affected the number of likes and sad reactions for personal pages (β values: -0.255 and -0.296), love reactions for journalists (β value: -0.501), and angry and love reactions for

politicians (β values: -0.726 and -0.325). In contrast, followers at posting showed stronger effects across log-log models for community, media, and non-profit pages). The number of followers at posting made a positive impact on the number of likes received by community, media, and non-profit pages (β values: 0.194 , 0.176 , and 0.717 , respectively). Moreover, followers at posting made a positive impact on sad (β : 0.571) and wow (β : 0.535) reactions for community pages and care reactions for non-profit pages (β : 0.483). The negative effect of followers at posting was more prominent among community, media, and non-profit pages (β values: -0.184 , -0.300 , and -0.518 , respectively, for angry, love, and care reactions received by community pages; -0.279 , -0.180 , -0.254 , -0.321 , and -0.123 , respectively, for angry, sad, haha, love, and care for media pages; and -1.323 , -0.732 , and -0.417 , respectively, for angry, haha, and wow reactions for non-profit pages). In general, these mixed results show that having a large following does not ensure an increase in audience reactions for both groups of pages.

Conclusion

Our conceptualization and empirical analysis provide a generalizable framework for scholars interested in networked affect to understand the role platform affordances play in the mobilization of affective reactions. The affective affordances defined above extend Nagy and Neff's (2015) work by developing a holistic perspective that describes how possibilities for affective expression are determined by both designers' understanding of the potential of base technologies and end-users' perception of designed environments. While this conceptualization incorporates the definition of affective affordances suggested by Wilkerson et al. (2021), it also offers a more nuanced perspective of how affective expressions are enabled in computer-mediated environments. The relationship between affective embedding and rendering as well as their connection to general social media affordances deserves attention in light of the above discussion. Our discussion on design constraints demonstrated that the way designers enact options for affective reactions determines possibilities for affective rendering and the extent to which it is actualized within the platform. Therefore, affective rendering can be seen as an affordance nested within affective embedding. As evidenced above and supported by Evans et al. (2017), general affordances drive specific acts of engagement, including affective expressions. This relationship reveals a nested structure where specific affective affordances operate within more general social media affordances, which are enabled by design possibilities afforded by base technologies. Accordingly, emphasis on social media affordances, affective affordances in particular, should be on action possibilities that can be (or are) embedded in platform design and how base technologies afford such embedding within specific social contexts, rather than action possibilities available to users.

Our analysis explores how affective rendering relates to the networked status quo. First, content reach constitutes a two-step logic where the number of followers drives the extent to which content is viewed by audiences, which then determines the extent of replication. This demonstrates how general affordances facilitates engagement within networked social contexts characterized by different actors, institutions, and levels of power. Mobilization of affective reactions takes place within this context, and our analysis demonstrates differences among page types in terms of factors that determine affective reactions among audiences. Accordingly, while developing a large following is essential for pages seeking online visibility, maintaining an engaged follower base is crucial for those with high network status quo to ensure their content effectively mobilizes audience reactions.

The above analysis is significant for several reasons. First, empirical analysis of the actualization of affective affordances has not previously been conducted. Second, our models can guide administrators of social media pages and communities to devise digital engagement strategies by identifying factors that drive affective reactions. Such guidance is crucial for raising awareness on anthropogenic climate change because, as Nightingale et al. (2021) note, emotional and affective relations are required to address climate change within a context in which scientific facts alone are inadequate for generating social and political action.

While the conceptualization of affective affordances and the empirical work above provides a general framework for researchers to examine affective engagement within specific digital discourses, there are several avenues for further investigation. The above analysis does not consider the impact of modality—that is, multiple modes of presentation (i.e., videos, images, text)—on affective reactions. This is a limitation, as differences in engagement between posts that contain different content modalities, such as photos or videos, can affect the like predictions and the ranking of posts by the news feed algorithm (Lada, 2021). As a result, our claims related to algorithmic functionality focuses on the user and the context, rather than different modes of content creation. Future work can examine whether the use of different modalities affects the extent to which affective reactions are generated among audiences. Future research can also examine the role of algorithmic functionality in shaping platform affordances. The current study does not examine the impact of content on the mobilization of affective reactions. For instance, the nature of content posted by journalists may play a crucial role in driving emotional reactions. Future work should examine such impact as it can provide a more nuanced analysis on the mobilization of affective reactions related to any given online discourse.

Our sample represents a broad scope, and the analysis does not pay attention to significant events within the selected time period. Specific events that social media users may relate to climate change can cause the formation of ad hoc issue publics that show more cohesiveness and a shared sense of direction,

and where the general patterns that we report may not apply. The models can be tested within the context of such specific issue publics. Data access provided by Crowdtangle covers a subset of posts representing verified users and accounts such as celebrities, politicians, non-profits, and journalists. Future work can examine differences among more actor/page types as well as general accounts. Moreover, future research should pay special attention to how social media affordances can enable affective engagement around alternative voices that can challenge the status quo and enable counter publics that promote effective solutions to address anthropogenic climate change.

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ORCID iD

Chamil Rathnayake  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1964-2639>

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Author Biographies

Chamil Rathnayake is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Humanities at the University of Strathclyde. His research focuses on computer-mediated publics, with a special emphasis on how

social media affordances restructure collective activity. Dr Rathnayake's recent work focuses on interdisciplinary approaches for mapping the mobilization of affect within digital issue publics.

Jenifer Sunrise Winter is a professor in the School of Communication and Information at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Her research addresses data governance and policy related to big data, artificial intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT). Dr Winter

studies how we can harness health data resources for societal good amid many competing claims on the value to be derived from these data and the substantial risks for individual privacy and security. Dr Winter also explores the governance of AI and personal health information (PHI), assessing the increasing challenges to governing the PHI essential for advancing AI/machine learning innovations in healthcare.