

Review 4

Title: Emotions, Media and Politics. By Karin Wahl-Jorgensen (2019). 220 p. Cambridge: Polity Press. ISBN 978-0-7456-6104-9

Reviewed by: Lotte Daens (University of Antwerp, Belgium).

This book would be interesting for students as well as people who have more expertise in research on emotions. It provides a good collection of existing research and at the same time, it adds new insights. The examples used in the book are recent and clearly illustrating the ideas of the author. In addition, Wahl-Jorgensen tries to develop new conceptual and methodological tools. The book concludes with specific suggestions for further research. Furthermore, it gives non-academics a clear understanding of the subject as everything is explained in simple language.

The introductory chapter (Understanding Emotions in Mediated Public Life) provides the necessary information for people who don't know much about research on emotions and it is a good recap for those who do. First of all, Wahl-Jorgensen explains why it is a relevant timing for the book. There is a clear rise of populism and emotional intelligence seems to be more important nowadays. Wahl-Jorgensen made the specific choice to have a closer look at emotions in news media. She believes that it is particularly interesting because of the *'significance and distinctiveness of the articulation of emotion'*. An important premise of this book is that emotionality and rationality aren't each other's opposites, but rather go hand in hand. In this introduction, the author tries to define emotions and provides multiple definition. Interestingly, these definitions originate not only from communication studies and political science but also from psychology.

The first chapter (Taking Emotion Seriously: a Brief History of Thought) briefly discusses the evolution of studies in media and politics and how they slowly took into account the role of emotions, after treating emotions as irrational and a threat to good citizenship. Later, academics started challenging the binary division of emotionality and rationality and concluded that emotions are neither good nor bad in itself, just like rationality is.

The first research on this subject was in humanities and cultural studies and that eventually spilled over to the social sciences. This is further applicable to journalism, where objectivity used to be seen as the opposite of emotions, and an emotive news article used to be seen as less a less qualitative one. The current book explicates the differences between political communication studies and news media research. Academics in political

communication mainly focus on the increasingly close relationship between the media and popular culture (e.g. celebrities in politics). By contrast, the focus of media studies has been on objectivity.

The second chapter (Emotions are everywhere: The strategic Ritual of Emotionality in Journalism) deals with journalistic storytelling in award-winning news articles. Wahl-Jorgensen has researched Pulitzer Prize-winning stories and the use of emotions within those articles. Journalists of quality newspapers are supposed to be neutral and objective and should not show their emotions. On the other hand, tabloids are considered more sensational and therefore more emotional. However, the author found that quality news articles use emotions too. Journalists are confronted with a paradox: the “more ‘objective’ they are, the more unreadable they become”. Furthermore, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalism makes a lot of use of emotional storytelling. Objective reporting is after all a rarely used criterion for journalistic awards.

Reporting about the emotions of groups or individuals is seen as presenting ‘facts’. Besides, it makes the news more understandable for the public. Yet, to distinguish emotions from a text is rather hard. The author divided emotions in articles into two categories: on the micro level and on the macro level. Emotions on micro level are embedded in the language, for example the use of words as ‘angry’, ‘happy’ etc. Emotions on macro level are embedded in the narrative itself. An example of this could be the presupposition in a text that the death of a child is a tragic event.

Chapter 3, (Authenticity, Compassion and Personalized Storytelling) focuses even more on personalized storytelling. The chapter shows that personalized storytelling helps to make people understand complex (political) situations and events, as well as convey authenticity. Moreover, emotions cause compassion which in turn might lead to the creation of a community for seeking social and political change. The success of social media pages like Humans of New York; Refugee Stories of UNHCR and hashtags like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter can also be explained by the use of personalized storytelling.

Chapter 4 (Towards a Typology of Mediated Anger) deals with the role of anger. First, Wahl-Jorgensen gives some background information, defining anger as a negative emotion, crucial for politics. Typically, it is considered to be an individual emotion that goes together with a desire for payback. Yet, anger can be collective too, and even have a positive connotation, if we think of certain social movement protests. We need to make a distinction between “collective anger articulated in public” and “individual anger aired in private”.

Mediated anger turns out to be performative, which means it is based on the performance of people in public life. Furthermore, it is discursively constructed via journalists’ interpretation of those emotions. Finally, mediated anger is usually political and collective, such as, for instance, in reports on protests.

For research on the use of anger in the mainstream media, the author looked at articles of UK newspapers containing the word ‘protest’ or ‘demonstration’ and also contained words related to anger. Most cases (86%) turned out to discuss rational and legitimate anger. The anger was used as an explanatory framework. A small percentage (under 6%) of the cases used “aggressive and/or disruptive anger motivated by rational and legitimate concerns”. The remaining cases (under 9%) were seen as a form of illegitimate and

irrational anger. Journalists are more likely to report about an illegitimate protest when it results in violence, when it can be associated with intolerance or extremism and small groups or individuals.

The next chapter, chapter 5 (Shifting Emotional Regimes: Donald Trump's Angry Populism) further elaborates on the emotion of anger. This time the main focus is Donald Trump. First, the author tries to define populism and discusses the global trend of rising populism. The rise of Donald Trump should not only be seen via the cultural, historical, and economic circumstances in the USA, but also be placed in a global perspective. It is linked to transformations in the 'media regime' around the world which implies a shift in the 'emotional regime'.

Next, Wahl-Jorgensen compares the US news articles about Trump and Obama between their election (the first one of Obama) and their inauguration containing words related to anger. Results show that way more articles could be found for Trump and that anger was seldom directed at Obama himself. By contrast, Trump himself was almost always the target of anger. He also uses a lot of anger himself. Trump's anger is dangerous not because it's violent or uncontrollable, but because it fosters negative feelings. Besides anger can be seen as something negative, but for Trump supporters it might be positive and mobilizing.

In Chapter 6 (The Politics of Love: Political Fandom and Social Change) the author gives more attention to positive emotions. Wahl-Jorgensen discusses two recent examples of political fandoms. On the one hand, she looks at the fandom of Ed Miliband on Twitter. On the other hand, she focuses on the fandom of Donald Trump on Reddit. The Miliband fandom movement spread photoshopped images which helped to make Ed Miliband and his political ideas more visible. They did this as they thought the politician deserved more (positive) attention. On the other hand, the Trump-fandom used Reddit to create a community with shared ideas. A lot of these messages conveyed hate towards 'enemies'. The first example shows that love for a politician can do something positive. The second example is more negative as the love for a politician turns into anger towards 'the others'.

The seventh and last chapter (The Emotional Architecture of Social Media) discusses the architecture behind social media website Facebook that can have political consequences, intended or coincidental. Wahl-Jorgensen takes a closer look at the use of emojis at Facebook and points out the algorithmic manipulation of Facebook posts. Positive news gets more attention and less 'liked' posts disappear in the background. There used to be only a 'like button'. More recently you can react with other emotions too at a post. However, post which are received more positively get more change to be seen by the other users. News platforms turn out to have little hesitation in manipulating people. They even tend to use smartphone cameras and webcams to monitor emotions to provide even more personal advertisements.

Finally, the concluding chapter (Nine Propositions about Emotions, Media and Politics), as the title reveals, provides nine propositions for future research to build on. Those propositions are: emotions matter to mediated politics (1); emotionality and rationality are not mutually exclusive (2); mediated emotions are performative (3); emotions are everywhere in mediated politics (4); emotional storytelling may cultivate authenticity and compassion (5); anger is the essential political emotion (6); love

motivates us to engage in politics (7); the circulation of emotion is shaped by the affordances and architectures of platforms (8); research agendas in media and politics must consider the role of emotion (9). At the end of the book, you can find some notes to clarify the research done by the author, an extensive bibliography, and a useful index.

In sum, it is an interesting book, that comes up with new insights and every chapter is very relevant and interesting. The language is simple, and the examples are clear. This makes the book an appeal to everyone interested in the study on emotions and not just academics. An additional strong point is that the book makes specific suggestions for further research.

However, this book could benefit from more insights into how the author did her research. Only two small tables in chapter 5 are used throughout the book and the reader is only provided with some basic information on the methods. Of course, the methodological details could make the book less readable and open to everyone. Yet, this could be a useful addition in appendices. Furthermore, possibly this book could have included some information on the difference of use in emotion between quality newspapers and tabloids too. Alternatively, a comparison of the use of emotions between newspapers that are historically seen more left-wing and more right-wing newspapers would also be interesting. What's more, with the main focus on written media (and social media), the book could have also benefited from information on television and radio.

All in all, this book is recommended to everyone interested in research on emotions, media and politics'. It gives a lot of new insights illustrated by well-chosen examples, presenting good mixture of recent and less known cases.