

Emotional Expression and Digital Ethics: A Philosophical Study of Affective Intensity In Virtual Media

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between emotional expression and digital ethics in online communication, emphasizing how affective intensity shapes social interactions in virtual space. Using an interdisciplinary qualitative approach that combines the philosophy of affect and information ethics, the analysis focuses on the performativity of affect, the mechanisms of emotional commodification by algorithms, and the ethical implications of digital expression practices. A review of concepts referencing the work of Sara Ahmed, Brian Massumi, and Luciano Floridi indicates that emotions in digital media are constructed through algorithmic logic operating within the framework of affective capitalism. Affective intensity can be a means of social and political mobilization, but it also has the potential to give rise to forms of emotional violence, including polarization and doxing. On the other hand, the pressure to display certain emotions for digital incentives creates tension between authenticity and performativity. The digital space ultimately creates a hierarchy of affection that blurs the lines between expression and manipulation and reinforces inequalities in emotional representation. Based on these findings, this study proposes strengthening affective literacy to equip users with the skills to critically recognize and evaluate emotional dynamics, while also promoting the development of more ethical and inclusive technology designs to create a healthy and emotionally just digital ecosystem.

Keywords

Digital emotions; digital ethics ; affective intensity; algorithms; affective literacy

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1. INTRODUCTION

The transformation of communication due to advancements in digital technology has brought significant changes in the way humans express emotions. Emotions that were once private are now public consumption in the virtual space through social media, instant messaging apps, and other online platforms. This phenomenon raises philosophical and ethical dilemmas, particularly in assessing the authenticity and intensity of emotions displayed online. Emotional expressions that were



previously spontaneous are now heavily influenced by algorithms designed to elicit specific affections for user engagement. Thus, emotions, whether anger, sympathy, or sadness, are no longer merely inner expressions but economic and political instruments. The logic of affective capitalism drives the intensification of emotions such as anger, sadness, or sympathy to increase the monetization and virality of content. In the digital space, emotional expression becomes part of social and economic calculations, no longer solely an inner expression. As a result, society faces a reality where affective expression can be manipulative, aggressive, and inauthentic. This phenomenon challenges traditional concepts of emotion and demands a new approach to understanding the relationship between affect and digital ethics. Awareness of the importance of ethics in managing affect becomes crucial in the information age, which is rife with emotional manipulation. For example, users expressing anger can easily shape public opinion, even without a strong factual basis. Therefore, it is important to understand that every emotional expression in the digital space is not just a personal statement but also a social action with far-reaching consequences. This underscores the need for philosophical reflection on the relationship between affect, technology, and social structures.

Previous research has extensively discussed how emotions in digital media are commodified and politicized. According to Massumi and Ahmed, affect is a force that flows between bodies, technology, and social space and cannot be reduced to personal emotion. On the other hand, Floridi emphasizes the importance of information ethics in responding to the increasingly complex digital reality. In an algorithmic context, Kamal points out that emotional data has now become a commodity that can be used for both commercial gain and surveillance, creating new privacy and ethical challenges. Other research highlights that social media algorithms actively promote highly emotional content because it more reliably guarantees user engagement. In Indonesia, the study by Manalu et al. (2024) revealed that certain online communities express anger as a form of strengthening emotional solidarity, although this is not always constructive. Rubawati's (2018) research also emphasizes that the digital space tends to reduce religious and cultural values to tools for commercialization. The concept of affect in digital da'wah also shows a shift from spiritual sincerity to religious performativity, as revealed in the studies by Rizal (2024) and Kholis (2023). However, little research has philosophically examined how affective intensity operates within power structures and algorithms. Existing research tends to be partial, whether from a communication, psychological, or technological perspective, without formulating an integral ethical framework. Therefore, a synthesis is needed that combines affect theory with digital ethics to fully understand this complexity.

Most previous research has only examined emotional expression in the digital space from a communication or media psychology perspective, without touching on the philosophical aspects of affective intensity as an ethical domain. This creates a significant gap in interdisciplinary studies,

particularly regarding how affect functions not only as a feeling but also as a structure of power and social control within digital platforms. This study attempts to fill that gap by conceptually examining the relationship between affect, algorithms, and information ethics. There are not many studies that combine the thinking of Ahmed, Massumi, and Floridi within a single digital philosophy framework to explain how emotions are constructed, circulated, and used as a tool of control. In addition, research on the affective hierarchy, which is how certain emotions are more likely to go viral than others, is still very limited. Literature on affective justice, affective literacy, and emotional performativity in the digital religious context has also not been extensively explored philosophically. This study highlights how emotional expression becomes a form of affective politicization and part of the architecture of algorithmic power. With this approach, the author aims not only to map the phenomenon but also to construct an affective ethical framework capable of responding to contemporary digital issues. Focusing on affect as a socio-technological construct is the main characteristic of this study. Therefore, this article aims to bridge the conceptual gap that has been minimally explored in previous research and offers a new way of understanding digital communication ethics.

The urgency of this research lies in the increasingly dominant role of affect in shaping public opinion, social mobilization, and digital identity. Uncontrolled affective intensity can lead to new forms of emotional violence, such as doxing, hate speech, or empathy manipulation. In the Indonesian context, the public's weak digital literacy, as revealed by Syapriani et al. (2025), exacerbates this situation because many users are unaware that their affection is being commodified or used as a social weapon. On the other hand, existing regulations like the ITE Law are more focused on hate speech than on regulating how affection is algorithmically constructed. Therefore, this study offers an ethical approach based on affective literacy that serves not only as a critique but also as a practical solution. This research is also important because the digital space is currently the main arena for shaping public morality, including on religious, political, and cultural issues. Without ethical awareness of affect, society can get caught in "flash activism" that is emotional but has minimal long-term impact.

The transformation of contemporary digital communication has brought about a complex phenomenon: affective intensity that not only changes how humans express emotions but also creates new power structures through algorithmic manipulation. Facts show that global social media users exceeded 5 billion in 2024, with an average usage time of 2 hours and 23 minutes per day. In Indonesia, this situation is even more concerning, with 73.7% of the population actively using social media, placing Indonesia sixth globally in terms of the highest social media usage duration, at 3.25 hours per day.

Recent research reveals that social media algorithms systematically exploit human emotions as an economic commodity. A 2024 study in *Psychological Science* shows that digital platform algorithms are designed to prioritize content that triggers extreme emotional responses, creating a dopamine-based addiction cycle. More concerning is that the integration of emotional intelligence into algorithms has created "pseudo-intimacy" between users and platforms, where human emotions are manipulated to artificially increase engagement. This phenomenon of emotional manipulation is reinforced by the finding that highly emotional content spreads six times faster than accurate information. Digital platforms exploit users' psychological vulnerabilities through echo chambers and filter bubbles that create emotional polarization, as confirmed in studies on the role of algorithms in shaping public opinion during political campaigns.

The Indonesian context shows a more critical urgency. Recent data shows that 80% of Indonesian teenagers experience cyberbullying almost every day, with 27.5% of university students experiencing cyberbullying and 32.1% experiencing social media addiction. This phenomenon is not isolated to a specific age group; research on Generation Z shows that 46.16% spend 1-2 hours per day on social media, while 25.14% use it for 2-3 hours, and 7.84% use it for more than 4 hours daily. More concerningly, cases of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) in Indonesia increased by 118 cases in the first quarter of 2024 compared to the previous year. SAFEnet reports that cyberbullying perpetrators are increasingly exploiting digital gaps to commit emotional violence, including online sexual harassment and the non-consensual dissemination of intimate content.

2. METHODS

This study uses an interdisciplinary qualitative approach with a philosophical conceptual study method. The main focus of the research is to analyze the phenomenon of affective intensity in digital communication from the perspective of the philosophy of affect and information ethics. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the ontological, epistemological, and ethical dimensions of emotional expression in virtual space, which cannot be reduced to a purely empirical framework. The data in this study is secondary, obtained through a literature review of relevant primary sources, both classical and contemporary, particularly the ideas of Sara Ahmed, Brian Massumi, and Luciano Floridi. The literature search was conducted through scientific databases, journal articles, theoretical books, and recent academic publications related to affect, digital media, and information ethics. The analysis was conducted using the technique of philosophical hermeneutics, which is a critical interpretation of key concepts and how these concepts relate to each other in forming a framework for understanding digital emotional expression. The author also provides a theoretical elaboration of the conceptual findings by linking them to current phenomena.

such as emotional performativity on social media, affective virality, and the ethical implications of digital algorithms. The aim of this method is not only to map concepts but also to formulate critical reflections and offer a framework for digital affective ethics in response to the dynamics of emotional communication in cyberspace.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the research have to be supported by sufficient data. The research results and the discovery must be the answers, or the research hypothesis stated previously in the introduction part.

3.1. Performativity and Commodification of Emotions on Social Media

This phenomenon of affective identity construction is also consistent with the findings of Ardiansyah, Mustiawan, and Tiara (2025), which show that individuals in digital spaces often construct their self-concept through communicative performativity, as seen in the crossdressing cosplayer community. Communication becomes a psychological mechanism that shapes identity through public emotional responses and repeated interactions. Mass media is often referred to as the fourth pillar of democracy because of its ability to influence public opinion and social awareness through its function as a means of socialization and education. Media holds a strategic position because it can become an institution with significant influence on the formation of social reality. Emotional expression in virtual media is not merely a reflection of an individual's inner state but a form of communication that is produced, circulated, and consumed within the digital affective ecosystem.

The recognition of emotions by AI raises various ethical and privacy issues that need to be addressed. One of the main concerns is the collection and use of emotional data without user consent. In some cases, facial expression or voice data collected for research purposes can be misused for commercial or mass surveillance purposes. Essentially, platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter not only provide a means of expression but also act as emotional architects through interface design, selection algorithms, and feedback systems based on likes, shares, and comments. Affective intensity in this medium is not neutral but rather is shaped and directed to maximize user engagement. In this case, the logic of affective capitalism turns emotions into a commodity that can be monetized. Characterization is an element that can enhance the reader's emotional engagement. Characterization can evoke feelings of sympathy, pity, idealization, hatred, anger, annoyance, and so on. This research successfully identified a number of desirable and undesirable character traits based on informal conversations with several students. Highly intelligent characters are favorite characters, in addition to humorous, independent, and sensitive characters. These character qualities provide readers with

the opportunity to fantasize and project themselves onto the characters, thus influencing the formation of the reader's identity. Affection in the digital space also shapes social interaction patterns that are fast-paced, impulsive, and reactive. When emotions are displayed in a clickable or directly replyable format, users tend to respond to content not based on ethical considerations or deep reflection, but on immediate emotional reactions. This reinforces a culture of "clicktivism" that blurs the line between genuine participation and performative emotional representation. This phenomenon raises an ethical dilemma: is the emotion displayed a form of genuine empathy or merely an engagement strategy dictated by media logic?

According to the recently released Tetra Pak Index 2017 report, there are approximately 132 million internet users in Indonesia, and nearly half of them are social media enthusiasts, or about 40%. The dominance of algorithms in regulating the flow of information means that affective experiences on social media are no longer the result of spontaneous interaction but rather the result of highly structured technological engineering. Content with a high emotional charge, whether anger, empathy, or surprise, is more likely to be displayed because it is assumed to increase user interaction and dwell time. This means that algorithms function as emotion curators, displaying effects considered beneficial within the digital capitalist system. Affective intensity no longer reflects the strength of the emotion itself but rather how "valuable" it is within the context of digital engagement. As a result, emotional expression in the digital space becomes tied to performative logic. Social media users often feel compelled to display certain forms of affection not out of internal desire, but because of algorithmic incentives like likes, retweets, or comments. In this context, affective expression has the potential to become a symbolic strategy exploited for social or economic capital. The ethical challenge that arises is how to distinguish between genuine and instrumental affection. Does a sad expression truly contain grief, or is it merely a strategic representation to gain public empathy?

3.2. Ethical Dimensions of Affective Intensity in Digital Space

Restianto and Salisah (2024) explain that the emotional response of a cultural community to sensitive issues involves complex communication psychology mechanisms. Their research on the responses of Reog Ponorogo artists to Malaysian cultural claims shows that digital affection can mobilize collective identity and emotional solidarity. Affect and values are very closely related to an individual. Values are a concept or principle considered very important and valuable and are related to a person's perspective on good and bad, good and not good, and so on. Generally, people use this value to improve their self-quality and potential through the assessments others give them, as values are fundamentally related to a person's perspective. One of the most tangible forms of algorithmically mediated affective intensity is the phenomenon of emotional virality, where content containing

extreme emotions such as collective anger or public grief spreads very rapidly. This virality creates a state of mass affective conditioning that seems organic, even though it is triggered and sustained by a digital system that prioritizes engagement. In situations like this, affection becomes part of the technopolitical infrastructure, not just a spontaneous human outpouring. Emotions become a collective tool that can be directed to create social pressure, influence public opinion, or even change the direction of policy. However, unethically managed affective intensity can also lead to what is known as "affective violence" or emotional harm. In this context, digital expressions such as doxing, hate speech, or cyberbullying are destructive forms of using affect. When emotions like anger and hatred are formed collectively and directed at specific individuals or groups, the digital space transforms into an arena of symbolic repression with very real consequences. Therefore, there is a need for a digital ethics framework that not only assesses the truth of information but also how affect is constructed and distributed.

The phenomenon of affective assessment in the digital space is a major concern in efforts to shape a generation that is not only cognitively intelligent but also morally upright and highly integrated. Affective assessment is the process of evaluating attitudes, values, and character that reflect emotional and spiritual aspects. The importance of affective evaluation in education is supported by various studies showing that strong character development can influence academic achievement as well as the quality of students' social lives. In the context of digital affection, it is important to understand that emotions are not present in isolation but within a complex network that is multi-subjective. Affect circulates in virtual space, forming an "emotional community" connected not by geographical location, but by shared affective resonance. Social media has become a place where people can express themselves, share their opinions, get information, and connect virtually with others without geographical limitations. For example, user groups united under a specific hashtag often create intense emotional solidarity even though they don't know each other personally. This solidarity can be constructive or destructive depending on the dominant affect circulating. In this sense, social media is not just a channel for expression but a space for the production of subjectivity. However, the intensity of this emotional solidarity is also vulnerable to manipulation. Many political actors or digital corporations use affective strategies to shape opinions or stimulate public support by creating carefully designed emotional narratives. This is where digital ethics is tested: how to distinguish organically grown affection from strategically engineered affection. If public emotions can be produced and directed by digital campaigns, then there needs to be affective literacy—the ability to critically and ethically read and assess the dynamics of emotions in digital content.

Philosophical criticism of emotional expression in digital space cannot be separated from the issue of authenticity. Existential philosophy and phenomenology question whether emotions

published on social media can be considered authentic, given that such expressions have undergone processes of selection, editing, and even dramatization. Within this framework, affection is not only a response to experience but also a result of awareness of the public gaze. This digital dimension requires individuals to understand the ethical, moral, and legal issues related to online commerce and the reproduction of content using digital resources. Forms of expression like "sadfishing," oversharing, or the performativity of sadness on social media illustrate the ambivalence between expression and exploitation. On one hand, virtual media opens up space for the expression of affection that was previously suppressed. On the other hand, this affection can be used for specific purposes such as gaining attention, sympathy, or social validation. This behavior can blur the line between genuine and manipulative expression, ultimately making ethical judgments more difficult. In this context, affective intensity becomes an area that requires a more flexible and contextual understanding of moral philosophy.

The phenomenon of affective intensity can also be analyzed through the concept of "affective economy," where emotions have exchange value and become commodities that can be managed, sold, and exchanged. The problems that arise in the context of national and state life in Indonesia can be identified as disorientation of Pancasila values, shifting ethics, fading national cultural awareness, and weakening national independence. In this context, digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok monetize emotional expression, especially when that affection is able to attract attention and trigger user responses. Digital celebrities and influencers consciously build an affective identity that touches, motivates, or inspires audiences to increase engagement. This makes emotional expression part of a self-branding strategy in the digital market. However, the use of affection as a tool for commercialization also leads to emotional fatigue for both content creators and their audience. In a culture where emotional expression is a prerequisite for social participation, individuals are encouraged to continuously perform emotionally in public. Over time, this creates a paradox: users feel the need to appear emotionally "authentic," but they actually lose spontaneity due to this performative pressure. This fatigue creates a kind of affective emptiness that reduces the meaning of the emotion itself in digital interactions.

Another relevant aspect in discussing affective intensity is how collective trauma is articulated in digital space. Events of global disasters, conflicts, or tragedies are now always accompanied by an explosion of emotional expression on social media. Expressions of grief, solidarity, and anger spread in the form of hashtags, mourning profile photos, or crying videos. Although it can create a sense of togetherness, this expression is also susceptible to the banality of affection, which is when emotions lose their meaning because they are reproduced too often in the same format. As a result, emotional involvement becomes superficial and fleeting. In this regard, an ethical question also arises regarding

who has the right to express affection over a particular tragedy. Does everyone have the right to show sadness over events that don't directly affect their lives, or does such expression actually reinforce an affective hierarchy where only viral emotions get attention? Digital media creates an "architecture of affect" that defines which emotions are appropriate to display and which are marginalized. This challenges the concept of affective justice in contemporary digital communication.

Affective intensity in the digital space also shows how the boundary between public and private spaces is becoming increasingly blurred. Social media users actively display their deepest feelings to the public, creating a kind of "intimate affection" that is consumed on a mass scale. Emotions that were once a personal domain have now become part of the attention economy, where emotional openness is a selling point. This creates tension between the need for emotional connection and the risk of losing privacy. This phenomenon shows how digital space has become a battleground between intimacy and exposure. Additionally, digital affection also creates new forms of social control. Emotions considered "inappropriate" for community norms or platform culture can be easily met with symbolic sanctions, such as ignoring, ostracizing, or mass backlash. This shows that affective intensity also serves as a mechanism for regulating behavior in digital communities. In this context, affect is not neutral but rather plays a role in maintaining or shaking symbolic power structures. Therefore, expressing emotions in virtual media is also a political act.

The issue of affect is also intertwined with the algorithmic dimension that shapes the structure of user experience in a personal yet systematic way. Filter bubbles and echo chambers formed by algorithms tend to reinforce existing affections, making the digital space an increasingly emotionally polarized environment. By only viewing content that confirms their own feelings or opinions, users risk getting trapped in a cycle of affirmation that closes off space for dialogue. In situations like this, affective intensity not only strengthens emotional connection but also narrows ethical and cognitive horizons. When affective intensity is channeled through a digital system that is predictive and automated, an urgency arises to reexamine the relationship between affect and agency. Does the user still have full control over the emotions they display, or does the digital system also manipulate that affective experience? In many cases, algorithms determine not only what users see but also how they feel. This means that affective freedom in the digital space is heavily influenced by technological design. Therefore, a philosophical approach to technology is needed to critique this aspect more deeply.

3.3. Literacy and Affective Justice as a Responsive Strategy

Ruqqayah, Salamah, and Febrina (2025) assert that exposure to public affection, especially in children and adolescents, can have a significant impact on psychological development. Interactions on

Instagram in the case of grooming news coverage create emotional pressure due to public comments and media framing, thus reinforcing the urgency of affective literacy. In the fast-paced digital dynamic, there is often no space for experiencing reflection on affection. Emerging emotions must be immediately addressed, responded to, or re-displayed to keep up with the impulsive rhythm of digital communication. As a result, emotional experiences become shallow and fragmented, lasting only a moment before being replaced by the next emotional content. This raises ethical questions about the depth of human emotion and the capacity to fully experience life amidst the ever-flowing stream of affect. Speed is the enemy of depth. Fleeting affections also impact how society responds to crises or social issues. The digital society's tendency to respond emotionally, but briefly, creates an illusion of engagement known as "affective flash activism." This is a form of activism based on intense but quickly fading bursts of affection, without long-term commitment or concrete action. Here, affection becomes a powerful symbolic tool, yet it is easily reduced to a fleeting performance. In such situations, the digital ethics dimension demands consistency between emotional expression and real actions.

In the context of digital literacy, it is important for us to develop good attitudes and behaviors so that digital literacy can function well. Digital literacy is not just about developing technical skills but also involves aspects of attitude and behavior in wisely utilizing digital information. Digital literacy is the capacity to delve into and use information from various sources, which are unlimited and can be accessed through computer devices. The educational dimension of digital affection is also worthy of study within the context of ethics and communication philosophy. The affective intensity circulating in cyberspace has pedagogical potential in shaping empathy, social awareness, and moral sensitivity. Touching content, such as stories of struggle, injustice, or cross-cultural solidarity, can raise collective awareness of issues that might be overlooked in mainstream media. Here, social media serves as a space for emotional learning that engages users' inner involvement. However, this educational potential is only effective if accompanied by affective literacy. Unfortunately, affective literacy is still a concept that is minimally and systematically applied in digital education. Many users are not yet equipped with the ability to recognize, understand, and assess emotional dynamics in online interactions. In fact, this ability is very important for fostering critical awareness of how affect shapes our views, choices, and attitudes in the digital public sphere. Without that literacy, users are vulnerable to becoming passive consumers of emotions curated by algorithms. Affective literacy, in this case, is not just a technical skill but part of ethical practice.

In everyday communication practices in the digital space, affect is often used as a mechanism of legitimization for claims of truth, solidarity, and resistance. Expressing emotions can strengthen a narrative and enhance one's moral authority in delivering a message. For example, angry statements against social injustice are more easily accepted by the public than neutral arguments. In this context,

emotions become symbolic capital that can mobilize the audience. However, this kind of legitimacy can lead to ethical bias if used manipulatively to control or suppress dissenting opinions. Furthermore, the forms of emotional expression in digital space also shape self-image or affective identity. Social media users often construct a digital persona through repeated emotional narratives, such as becoming an "animal lover," an "environmental activist," or a "victim of personal struggles." This identity is not a form of deception but a representation constructed performatively through the repetition of certain expressions. This concept aligns with Judith Butler's idea of performativity, which suggests that identity is formed through continuously repeated actions. In this case, affective expression becomes a medium for the formation of digital subjects.

Affective expression also becomes a site of resistance in contemporary digital culture. Marginalized communities often utilize social media to channel emotional experiences that are not given space in mainstream discourse. By voicing their suffering, fear, or anger, these groups seek recognition and social justice. Emotions become a tool for dismantling dominant norms as well as a form of claiming existence. In this context, digital affection serves as a space for political articulation that brings together personal and structural dimensions and expands the meaning of democratic participation. However, high affective intensity can also backfire on these communities, especially when their emotions are exploited by the media or negatively received by the public. Initially supportive empathetic sentiment can turn into distrust, cynicism, or even backlash. This is where digital ethics is tested to see how participatory space can be protected from polarization or emotional abuse. Protecting minority affective expression requires inclusive media design and collective awareness to avoid making emotions solely an object of consumption.

The intersection of affect and technology can also be observed in content moderation practices, where algorithms and platform policies work to determine which emotional expressions are acceptable and which should be censored. This process is not only technical but also ideological because it involves selecting affective values worthy of circulation. For example, the political expression of anger from certain groups is more quickly restricted than from others, creating an imbalance in the distribution of emotions. Thus, the algorithm not only regulates content but also unevenly regulates affective intensity. This shows that control over digital affective expression is closely related to the structure of symbolic power and digital political economy. Emotions considered "safe" or "productive" will be more widely disseminated than emotions that are subversive or challenge existing dominance. In such conditions, emotional expression becomes a form of power that must be constantly negotiated, not only between users and technology but also between ethical, legal, and cultural values. Therefore, building a just digital ethic also means opening up equal affective spaces.

The consequences of this affective inequality are not only symbolic but also psychological and social. When certain groups feel that their emotional expression is not considered valid or worthy of circulation, it can lead to alienation and the delegitimization of their experiences. The neglect of affection on a digital scale can create collective wounds that linger in social memory. The digital space, which should be inclusive, is becoming an arena of affective exclusion that deepens representational inequality. Therefore, it is important to recognize that affective justice is part of epistemic and social justice. On the other hand, digital platforms have great potential to redress this inequality if they consciously build systems that support diversity in affective expression. The weakness of social media regulation in Indonesia is a serious concern as digital communication ethics violations increase. Existing regulations, such as the ITE Law, are still reactive and not responsive enough to the ever-changing dynamics of platforms. As a result, oversight of problematic content, such as hate speech or hoaxes, is often delayed. The integration of legal regulations and platform oversight strategies is key to creating a healthy digital public space. The government needs to actively collaborate with digital service providers to design mechanisms for the rapid and fair removal of problematic content. This includes algorithmic transparency, whistleblower protection, and the establishment of comprehensive digital ethics guidelines. Ethical design in technology through features like participatory moderation, protection for vulnerable groups, and unbiased emotional visualization can be a concrete strategy for creating a more emotionally just digital space. However, this change demands collaboration between ethics, public policy, and technology design. Affective technology should not only be directed toward engagement but also toward justice and recognition.

Philosophical reflection on affective intensity in virtual media also demands an understanding of the concept of "affective citizenship," which refers to the extent to which individuals can participate emotionally in digital public space. This kind of citizenship is not only measured by formal political rights but also by the extent to which someone can articulate their feelings without fear of repression or delegitimization. In a digital society, where national borders are replaced by algorithmic and platform cultural boundaries, affective expression becomes an essential part of public life. Therefore, digital democracy requires equal effectiveness. However, without a clear ethical framework, affective intensity can also lead to a populist form of citizenship, where collective emotions are used to override reason, facts, or critical dialog. Sentiment formed through virality often replaces rational consideration, thus creating emotional polarization. In this situation, digital public space more closely resembles a theatrical arena than deliberative discourse. Therefore, digital ethics is not just about content regulation but also about fostering an affective culture that supports democratic dialog and empathy across differences.

One approach that can be used to restructure affective intensity in digital space is to apply the principles of care ethics, which is an ethics centered on relationships, empathy, and responsibility between subjects. In the digital context, this principle encourages awareness of the emotional impact of every interaction, as well as the need to create a mutually supportive communication ecosystem. Care ethics rejects the competitive and exploitative logic that dominates the attention economy, replacing it with an ethic of emotional sustainability. Thus, expressions of affection can be directed toward care, not just performance. This care ethics also provides a foundation for developing more humane platform designs. For example, features like control over recommendation algorithms, mood settings options, or protection against digital trauma can help users consciously manage their emotions. Affective experiences are no longer formed in a one-way manner by the system but are the result of a dialogue between users and technology. This kind of approach encourages the creation of participatory and reflective technologies, which make affection a meaningful experience, not just data to be analyzed.

We also cannot ignore the role of educational institutions and media literacy in shaping digital affective awareness. A curriculum that incorporates affective aspects as part of digital literacy will help individuals not only understand how emotions are produced and circulated on social media but also how to respond to them ethically. In other words, affective education must be directed toward forming digital citizens who are reflective, not reactive, and capable of caring for digital space as a shared emotional environment. This is an important step toward emotional democracy. Amidst the flow of emotional globalization, it's important to revisit how affective expressions in virtual media often cross cultural boundaries without contextual sensitivity. Emotions displayed publicly can have very different meanings within a specific cultural framework. Without cross-cultural understanding, affective expressions have the potential to be misunderstood or even offensive. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a global affective ethic that combines cultural awareness, empathy, and sensitivity to the diverse plurality of emotional expressions. This is the main challenge in cross-border digital communication.

Among the many challenges in digital affective ethics, there are also opportunities to develop emotional solidarity across identities. The digital space allows individuals from very different backgrounds to connect with each other through shared emotional experiences, such as collective grief, sports euphoria, or social success. This kind of solidarity creates a new form of togetherness not based on geographical or ideological similarity, but on affective resonance. In this framework, virtual media opens up the possibility of forming more fluid, open, and dynamic affective communities. Affective sensitivity develops social justice values, helping society understand political rights and responsibilities, which impacts active participation in elections. Additionally, the level of public

political participation is a key indicator of democratic success, especially the participation of age groups that will influence future policies. However, we also need to be wary of the risk of "instrumentalizing solidarity," where expressions of empathy are strategically exploited by political actors or corporations to shape their image or gain legitimacy. Emotions are a very effective campaign tool because they are easy to touch and difficult to refute rationally. When solidarity only lasts for the duration of the viral cycle, affection loses its transformative capacity and becomes trapped in a circuit of consumption. Therefore, digital ethics needs to consider the aspect of sustainability in affective solidarity so that it doesn't stop at reaction but also leads to action.

Digitally produced and globally distributed affection also presents challenges to individuals' emotional privacy rights. In many cases, emotional expressions shared on social media are often archived, analyzed, or even monetized without the full consent of the users. Affective data such as facial expressions, emoji choices, or personal experience narratives become economic assets in the big tech industry. This situation shows that emotional expression is no longer personal but rather a commodity extracted for the benefit of algorithms and the market. From this arises a profound ethical question: does humanity still have full authority over the affection it expresses in the digital space? In many ways, emotional expression has become data that can be analyzed and manipulated by artificial intelligence systems. Content that should be a form of intimacy has become raw material for predictive analytics. This shows that the battle for affective freedom is now taking place not only in the social realm but also in the highly technological digital landscape. Therefore, digital ethics must expand its scope to include the right to affection.

Philosophical criticism of this phenomenon highlights that digital capitalism not only exploits labor and time but also human emotions. The concept of "emotional capitalism" asserts that emotions are a resource extracted and commodified like merchandise. This shows that in the digital space, affective expression is no longer just a form of human communication but rather a part of a complex economic infrastructure. Therefore, emotions are not only personal but also belong to the system. In such situations, it is necessary to develop what is called "critical affective ethics," which is an approach that not only emphasizes freedom of emotional expression but also awareness of the structures that influence those emotions. This ethics demands that users not only understand emotions as personal experiences but also as a socio-political field. This allows individuals to assess whether the emotions they express are truly their own or the result of algorithmic mediation and digital social pressure. This kind of awareness becomes an important foundation for emotional autonomy.

Critical affect ethics also questions how certain emotional standards become the norm in digital communication, while other expressions are considered inappropriate or excessive. For example, emotions like women's anger, minority sadness, or the fears of vulnerable groups are often considered

"inappropriate" to display in digital public spaces. This shows that the distribution of affect also follows the logic of power, which is exclusive. Therefore, affective ethics is not just about digital etiquette but also about the fairness of emotional representation. From a decolonial perspective, digital emotional expression also reflects global hierarchies where affect from the Global South is often overlooked or not viralized to the same extent as affect from the Global North. The representation of suffering, solidarity, and courage in cyberspace is still very much tied to Western aesthetics, language, and algorithms. Therefore, affection is not just about who feels but also about who is heard. This confirms that emotional justice in the digital space must consider unequal global relations and advocate for the plurality of expression from various cultural contexts.

As artificial intelligence (AI) technology advances, affective expression is now performed not only by humans but also by non-human entities such as chatbots, avatars, and virtual assistants. The presence of affective AI challenges our understanding of emotional authenticity, as these systems are capable of "mimicking" affective expressions without genuinely experiencing the feelings. This creates new space in the ethics of digital affection: how should humans respond to digital entities that display emotions? Does empathy toward machines mean blurring the lines between subjectivity and simulation? This question becomes more complex as affective interactions with AI begin to replace authentic human relationships. In some contexts, people are more comfortable confiding in chatbots than in humans, as there is no risk of rejection or judgment. However, this also raises concerns that society will become increasingly emotionally isolated and reliant on technology for affective validation. In this context, affective ethics needs to evaluate how technology can either strengthen or weaken real emotional connections between people.

Digital affective ethics also needs to consider the ecological dimension of the massive production of emotional intensity. Our dependence on technology and digital platforms creates a significant carbon footprint from data center infrastructure, energy consumption, and hardware production. Therefore, digital emotional expression is not an environmentally neutral practice. Awareness of this "ecological affective footprint" is crucial for connecting digital ethics with the principle of sustainability, which is how emotions and technology are managed without disrupting the ecological balance. Furthermore, digital spirituality can offer alternative perspectives on understanding and managing affect in cyberspace. In many Eastern religious and philosophical traditions, emotions are not something to be expressed impulsively but rather to be guarded, controlled, and directed toward inner harmony and relational balance. Values such as patience, humility, or sincerity have an affective meaning that contrasts with the explosive emotional intensity on social media. This perspective can enrich the discourse on digital ethics by offering a more contemplative and reflective model of affect.

3.4. Spirituality and Affection in Digital Islamic Expression

Bringing religion into the digital space is an innovation for spreading values and spiritual trends. This is because the digital space is not foreign to society, especially those who are connected to the internet and technological devices like smartphones. In the context of digital Islam, expressing affection in virtual space can be seen as part of symbolic worship that reflects intention and sincerity. Expressions like online prayer, charity through digital platforms, or solidarity for the suffering of Muslims in Palestine, for example, show that affection in Islam is not only personal but also social and spiritual. However, new challenges arise when such expressions are used performatively for image or political identity interests. Therefore, there needs to be a separation between the expression of affection as worship and as social capital. Islamic ethics offers an affective approach that emphasizes the balance between intention (niyyah), action (amal), and social impact (maslahah). In the digital space, this principle can serve as a basis for evaluating the emotional expressions of Muslims, determining whether they strengthen brotherhood, spread mercy, or instead cause slander and hostility. Thus, Islamic spirituality can contribute to the formation of digital ethics based on compassion, responsibility, and emotional honesty. This opens up the possibility of integration between religious values and technology in shaping an ethical digital society.

The dynamics of affect within the Muslim digital community also show how feelings can be tools for both proselytization and resistance. Emotion-based solidarity campaigns like #PrayForUyghur, #SavePalestine, or #HijrahMovement demonstrate that affection can mobilize faith-based social movements. From a substantive and applied perspective, spirituality has, in principle, existed since the dawn of human civilization and can be traced back at least to the hunter-gatherer era tens of thousands of years ago. However, this emotional expression is not always accompanied by a deep understanding of the issues raised, making it prone to simplification or even affect-based misinformation. Therefore, it is important to combine affection with religious and political literacy in building ethical communication among digital Muslims. In the context of Islamic communication, respondents agree that social media can be used as a tool to spread positive messages and religious values. We can use social media to spread da'wah and beneficial information. At the same time, expressions of affection can also create intra-traumatic polarization, which is when the Muslim community disagree with each other due to differences in emotional expression toward religious issues. For example, debates about preaching styles, the use of music, or even the use of social media itself are often fueled by very intense emotions. This situation shows that affection is not only a unifying tool but also a potential source of conflict. Therefore, building a culture of empathetic and compassionate discussion is a key step in keeping the digital space of the community healthy and

productive.

The digital space also opens up the possibility for the emergence of "affective imams," popular figures who influence their followers more through emotional appeal than through scholarly authority. This phenomenon can be seen in the increasing popularity of social media ustazs whose communication style is very expressive, touching, and easily shareable. While this approach is effective in reaching young people, it also raises concerns about the superficiality of substance and the commodification of spirituality. Therefore, it is important to reconsider the relationship between affection, authority, and accuracy in digital preaching. Within a philosophical framework, this invites reflection on the role of affection in shaping religious truth in the digital age. If emotion becomes the primary basis for accepting religious messages, there is a risk that what is accepted is not truth but emotional comfort. This leads to a condition known as "affective relativism," where every truth is measured by how well it can touch the heart, rather than by reason or logic. The challenge ahead is how to balance the affective and epistemic dimensions in media-based spiritual communication.

The influence of affective intensity in digital interactions is also evident in the ritualization of religious expressions, such as status updates during Ramadan, collective condolences, or the sharing of hadith quotes with an emotional touch. This phenomenon shows that emotions are becoming an integral part of virtual diversity. However, it should be noted that repetitive emotional expressions can become performative habits that lose their spiritual meaning. In this regard, communication philosophy reminds us to keep affection connected to deep reflection and intentionality. Furthermore, affective expression in digital Islam can also be seen as a process of decontextualizing religious meanings. For example, a Quranic verse that originally had a historical context and complex interpretations could be used as an emotional quote in a social campaign without theological consideration. This process blurs the line between spiritual expression and political rhetoric. Therefore, it is important to develop an Islamic communication ethic that can distinguish between expressing affection as a form of appreciation and affection as a mobilization strategy. This is where the role of religious scholars, educators, and intellectuals is greatly needed.

To fully understand the phenomenon of affective intensity in virtual media, it is important for us to combine philosophical, ethical, and cultural approaches within a holistic analytical framework. Affection is not merely a psychological response but also a social construct influenced by technology, power, and values. Therefore, the study of digital affectivity demands interdisciplinarity between philosophy, media studies, anthropology, and theology. Only through this kind of approach can we unravel how affect works in the digital realm, both as a potential and as a problem. We live in an era where emotional expression not only takes place in private spaces but has become part of algorithmic calculations, marketing strategies, and symbolic struggles. Therefore, it is important for digital society

to build a new form of civilization that is sensitive to the affective dimension, namely an ethic that not only answers "what can be said," but also "how we feel and how we make others feel." This reflection needs to be part of the agenda for digital education and media policies that are emotionally and socially just

4. CONCLUSION

Emotional expression in the digital space has undergone a profound transformation with the development of technology and algorithmic logic in communication platforms. Emotions are no longer solely a form of autonomous individual expression but have become part of a complex affective ecosystem filled with structural interventions. This study found that affective intensity, the strength of emotions spread and felt in digital media, has a significant influence on shaping social interaction, virtual identity, and even the direction of public discourse. In a digital world driven by the logic of affective capitalism, emotions become commodities that are produced, curated, and monetized. Emotional expression is not only used to build interpersonal relationships but also to create user engagement, mobilize political solidarity, and even manipulate public opinion. Emotions like anger, fear, happiness, or sadness are not only expressed organically but are also driven by digital incentives such as likes, shares, and trending tags. As a result, there is a shift from emotional authenticity toward emotional performativity, which in turn raises ethical dilemmas.

Furthermore, this study underscores that social media algorithmic systems play a crucial role in determining which emotions will go viral and which will be silenced. This results in an "architecture of affect" that subtly shapes emotional hierarchies, where certain emotions receive more space and attention than others. In this context, there emerges an imbalance in affective representation that has the potential to reinforce exclusion, polarization, and symbolic violence. On the other hand, the digital space also opens up new possibilities for the emergence of affective forms of expression that advocate for social justice and emotional diversity. Marginalized communities and minority groups can use emotion as a tool for political articulation to demand recognition and justice. However, this emotional solidarity is also vulnerable to manipulation and commodification, especially when it becomes part of strategic campaigns or media consumption. Therefore, it is important for digital users and platform managers to develop affective literacy, which is the ability to critically recognize, understand, and evaluate emotional dynamics in online interactions. This literacy includes awareness of how affect is constructed by technology and how emotional expression can have social impacts. Without this kind of literacy, society will continue to be trapped in a cycle of shallow, impulsive, and easily manipulated affections.

Digital ethics that considers the affective dimension also needs to adopt a care ethics approach, which focuses on relationships, empathy, and responsibility between subjects. In this context, every emotional expression must be seen as an action that has a moral impact on the digital community. Therefore, the fundamental principle of digital affective ethics is that emotions are not only individual possessions but also part of a shared life that requires attention, management, and justice. Finally, this study confirms that digital space is not a neutral space. It is an affective field colored by economic interests, power structures, and cultural values. In this field, emotional expression must be understood not only as a form of communication but also as a form of resistance, representation, and social engineering. Therefore, to build a healthy, inclusive, and emotionally fair digital space, critical philosophical reflection, contextual ethics, and a continuously strengthened collective consciousness are needed.

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