

Nonverbal Behavior in the Digital Age: Explorations in Internet Social Communication

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Abstract This Special Issue of the Journal of Nonverbal Behavior explores nonverbal issues in the digital age, with an emphasis on how information is communicated and received on social networking sites such as Facebook. In addition to showing that a variety of user characteristics play an important role in the exchange of information, the featured articles also reveal the impact of different types of nonverbal cues individuals use to create and manage impressions.

Keywords Social networking · Facebook · Digital age

Facebook may be described as a social networking website which allows users to create personal profiles, upload images, and post messages to friends, family members, colleagues, and others. From the perspective of researchers in nonverbal behavior, Facebook and other internet social communication sites are much more than that! These digital environments offer rich empirical opportunities not only to test assumptions about nonverbal communication and social interaction, but also to examine new aspects of behavior in an emergent contemporary context. This Special Issue of the Journal of Nonverbal Behavior gives readers a taste of what research that explores internet environments like Facebook can reveal about the components of nonverbal behavior in the digital age.

The opening article by Lueders et al. (2014) reaffirms the pervasive nature of identity management and its relevance to on-line self-construction, along with suggesting characteristics of individuals who convey accurate on-line personality profiles. As well, their research findings reveal differences in aspects of interpersonal and nonverbal sensitivity which impact the extent to which to individuals can accurately decipher computer-displayed identities. Taken together, these researchers argue that the interactive nature of the

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Facebook medium and other social networking applications should challenge researchers to consider the implications of impression management in digital environments from *both* the perspective of good targets and good judges as opposed to either unit alone.

Research by Fleuriet et al. (2014) emphasizes the varied roles and relationships in social communication sites beyond typical, everyday social interaction. In addition to strategic impression management, digital environments readily elicit a range of surveillance activities from virtual people watching to personal investigation, lurking, and spying. With this in mind, these researchers investigate people's likelihood of experiencing negative emotion in response to a potentially jealousy-inducing Facebook post on a romantic partner's site. In addition to demonstrating the expected impact of facial appearance, evidence was found for the impact of facial emoticons in provoking negative responses. As well, differences in viewers' attachment styles moderated reactions to on-line information. This work reinforces the importance of considering both target and judge characteristics in investigating on-line social behavior, and begs for more attention to the implications of visual artifacts and other nonverbal cues which users have at hand to enhance profiles and augment postings.

Miller et al. (2014) highlight further the moderating impact of attachment styles in response to hypothetical on-line scenarios which depicted images of romantic partners engaging in various forms of touch with cross-sex friends. Consistent with the findings of Fleuriet et al. (2014), viewers' attachment styles moderated their jealous affective responses to the touch intimacy manipulations. Moreover, variations in touch elicited different responses with face touch and lower back touch yielding stronger jealous emotions (anger, sadness, fear, and embarrassment) than no touch. Once again, these findings reinforce the importance of examining target and judge characteristics to garner a more cogent understanding of the nature of on-line nonverbal interactions and outcomes. Interestingly, gender-related differences were also observed, with men indicating more sexual arousal when seeing their partners interacting with a friend, in contrast to women who showed more sadness, fear, and envy in their responses. Fleuriet et al. (2014) also found that women reported being more likely to experience negative interpersonal affect in response to the manipulated Facebook posts than men. Exploring the broader nature of gender effects, along with age and other social group differences, should prove interesting and informative in future research involving internet social communication.

The final article by Samp and Palevitz (2014) again demonstrates how user characteristics and the nature of on-line information drive reactions in the digital social environment. Specifically, these researchers examined how individuals in dating relationships managed perceived relational transgressions by partners on Facebook, distinguishing between face-to-face responses versus those that are expressed nonverbally (photo vs. wall posting). Consistent with the role of individual differences noted in other articles, variations in dependence power were associated with perceptions of the threat of a transgression, the likelihood of confronting a partner face-to-face about the perceived transgression, and engaging in Facebook-monitoring behavior after a perceived transgression.

Social networking via Facebook and other on-line sites and applications has emerged as an integral, pervasive, and potent means of developing, fostering, and maintaining casual, intimate, professional, and other relationships in the digital age. The work brought together in this Special Issue points to several important issues researchers should bear in mind as they examine nonverbal behavior in the digital environment. Moving forward, it is clearly important for researchers to assess how variations in user and viewer characteristics (including digital knowledge and experience along with personal traits, states, and social group differences) influence how on-line information is received, interpreted, and

responded to. It is also important that researchers pay close attention to the nature of the stimulus information, which can include a variety of simultaneous, synchronized nonverbal cues in conjunction with verbal cues. In turn, nonverbal researchers will be poised to expand and refine nonverbal theory about nonverbal behavior in the evolving digital age.

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