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Platform-based emotions in the personal biography of criminals: a dialogue between situated affectivity and forensic criminology

Keywords: situated affectivity; online platforms; affective arrangements

Abstract:

The internet facilitates criminal behavior by connecting people with like-minded others. Yet, gaps remain in how the Web and criminal behavior are related. In this paper, I combine situated affectivity and forensic criminology to show how emotions, in online environments, are crucial in the formation of criminals.

Situated affectivity highlights the environmental nature of emotions. According to situated affectivity, emotions arise from individuals integrating environmental elements into their cognitive processes. This way, criminal behavior is influenced by specific online affective arrangements made of platform features, algorithms and smartphones. In affective arrangements, individuals manipulate online resources to reach violent emotional states (visiting online groups to feel anti-migrant disgust) or are steered by the context into experiencing extremism-oriented emotions (recommendations keep users watching far-right videos). Forensic criminology provides a methodology to examine the biographical trajectory of criminals. Criminologists dissect the “behavioral history” of individuals and show the importance of personal routines in criminal behavior.

The two approaches yield a mutually-informative explanation of how individuals leverage the internet to engage in criminal behavior. Situated affectivity offers a framework to study emotions in criminal behavior that can be integrated into forensic criminology. Forensic criminology furnishes a methodology for investigating the impact of emotional habits.

First, I explore how extremism and the internet are intertwined. Second, I introduce affective arrangements in relation to violent extremism, Third, I show the strengths of forensic criminology in analyzing the biographical trajectory of criminals. Last, through a case study, I showcase the integration points of these two research paradigms.

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