Researching Emotional Experiences as Discursive Elements – A Suggested Qualitative Method

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Abstract
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Keywords
emotions, emotional expressions, media, qualitative methods, emotional communities, media discourse

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Researching Emotional Experiences as Discursive Elements –
A Suggested Qualitative Method

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As scholars in the fields of political science, media research, and social psychology endeavor to understand crucial aspects of emotionality in the media, there is a growing need to methodologically address the communicative and discursive aspects of affective constructions in media texts. This article argues that by breaking down mediated emotional experiences represented through language in a set of identifiable elements, such as subject, emotion type, valence, intensity, proposed action, and object, those experiences could be used as workable and potent units of analysis when studying discursive and ideological media constructs of emotionality. By connecting insights from emotion science, the sociology of emotions, and media sociology, the qualitative method outlined, Emotional Experience Profiling (EEP), provides a flexible research tool conducive to an understanding of how emotional experiences represented through language in media texts are constructed and how they shape political discourse, identity, and emotional cultures. To demonstrate and illustrate the application of the method, the article provides examples from a pilot study which explores the research question: How do emotional experiences featured in Swedish far-right alternative news media construct and articulate political discourse?

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Introduction

There is a growing interest in the role and importance of emotionality in the make-up of the contemporary media landscape (Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Jukes, 2020; Kotisova, 2019; Lecheler, 2020; Wahl-Jørgensen, 2019b), and an increasing awareness of the importance to “understand the complex interplay of the range of distinctive positive and negative emotions, and how they structure mediated politics” (Wahl-Jørgensen, 2019a, p. 36). Phenomena pertaining to a purported “post-truth” media landscape, such as populistic propaganda, fake news, affective polarization, online hate-speech, and fact-resistance, call for an effort to mobilize research in the fields of sociology, media research, political science, and social psychology in order to contribute to a greater understanding of how mediated expressions of emotional experience circulate in society (Döveling & Konijn, 2022, p. 3); how they contribute to societal, political, and cultural discourse; and how they, in other ways, play a role in “the mediated construction of social reality” (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

Researching emotions as properties of media texts is difficult since the very concept of emotions is somewhat elusive and hard to define and operationalize, and since emotions are multi-faceted, and different research traditions focus on different aspects of the phenomenon, there is sometimes a confusion on what part, or what dimension, or what facet of the composite complexity is discussed or studied (Döveling & Konijn, 2022, p. 7; Fox, 2008, p. 2). Even the
epistemological grounds for research on emotionality in media texts are under debate. There is a methodological divide between scholars claiming that emotionality in media texts resides in reception only, and scholars claiming that emotions could be researched as a property of a media text irrespective of audience reception (Xia et al., 2022, p. 48). Some methodological approaches tend to be fuzzy and anchored more within the researcher’s own emotions and subjective judgement, and less within a framework of robust methodological categorization (Bertrand & Hughes, 2018, p. 268). Consequently, there is “some uncertainty about what it means to do research on emotions” (Flam, 2015, p. 3). There is, therefore, a need for methods that establish well-defined units of analysis, and thus enable a systematic and precise study of emotional content in media texts “to understand the multiple ways in which emotions and affect work within and through the media” (Nikunen, 2019, p. 324).

As a researcher in the field of journalism currently engaged in a project researching emotionality in news texts, my engagement in method development is driven by a desire to identify elements of emotionality in media texts and making them operational for the study of societal and political discourse. Even though studies have been done on “the social and cultural construction of emotional expression,” most of those have focused on audience reception and non-verbal expressions (Döveling & Konijn, 2022, p. 11), but few focus on emotional experiences represented by language as discursive properties of media texts (Hancock et al., 2007). The method I present in this article is therefore filling a gap by demonstrating how emotional experiences described in media texts could be operationalized for qualitative analysis of ideology and discourse. My main contribution to method development is the establishment of a flexible and versatile, but at the same time structured and well-defined unit, of analysis—the emotional profile—that is identifiable and comparative across texts.

My philosophical point of departure is a moderate, non-radical, social-constructionist perspective emphasizing the social aspects of knowledge production, and suggesting that individuals construct meaning through interaction and shared social practices (Gergen, 1994, pp. 49-50), of which production, circulation, and consumption of media are among the most important (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Orgad, 2014). Media representations are accordingly understood as “symbolic sites where issues, problems, tensions, and dilemmas are negotiated and contested” (Orgad, 2014, p. 135), and studied as to how they construct meaning and impact in particular social and cultural contexts. This perspective ties in with the theoretical framework of the sociology of emotion (Bericat, 2016; Turner, 2009; Turner & Stets, 2005), which elaborates on how, not only emotional experiences, but also the understanding and interpretation of displays and descriptions of emotional experiences are constructed and develop under the influence of shared institutions, culture, and language. According to the sociology of emotions, emotional expressions are not perceived as simple readouts of internal emotional states. They also have an important function as social communication (Sabini, 1995, p. 246), and are as such instrumental in interpreting social reality and forging discourse, as well as in constructing character and indicating social, cultural, and political affiliation (Demertzis, 2011; Eksner, 2015; Marinetti et al., 2011; van Kleeft et al., 2015; Wahl-Jørgenssen, 2019a). The method outlined in this article is based on the social constructionist assumption that emotional experiences represented through language in media texts are performative in the sense that they indicate a preferred set of emotional reactions to specific social events, and position their subjects socially and culturally in relation to their emotional reactions to those events (Döveling & Konijn, 2022). The constructionist perspective stresses that emotional experiences represented through language are given value and discursive meaning according to their structure, and according to the social, political, and cultural context in which they appear, and can thus be structurally and contextually analyzed as to how they perform discourse at an aggregated level. This position is critical towards the assumption that there is a single absolute account of social reality, and advocates a multiplicity of possible valid accounts,
which means that the quality criteria of validity and reliability often used in quantitative research must be adapted to a constructionist research design. In this article I propose the criteria: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance suggested by Yardley (2000), and Lietz and Zayas’ (2010) concepts of credibility (see the subheading Applied Research Criteria).

In line with that understanding I present and outline a developing qualitative method with the potential to provide a rich, in-depth understanding of how representations of emotional experience are constructed and how they constitute elements of political and societal discourse, and contribute to the construction of group identity. This is done by identifying such representations in media texts and structurally breaking them down into a set of meaning-making elements and using those elements to construct a multifaceted unit of analysis that may be subject to qualitative examination as to societal, cultural, and political meaning. The article presents the processes, strategies, validity, and rationale for evaluation and further development of the method as it has a potential to evolve in multiple fields of research where an understanding of how “the circulation of discursive emotionality” (Wahl-Jørgenssens, 2019a) in the media plays a role in affective polarization and the creation and maintenance of emotional communities, is an important research interest.

**Literature Review: Properties of Emotional Expressions and the Rationale for Emotional Experience Profiling (EEP)**

Since a convincing body of research indicates that emotional expressions at an aggregated level are instrumental in interpreting social reality, and constructing social, cultural, and political affiliations (Demertzis, 2011; Eksner, 2015; Marinetti et al., 2011; van Kleef et al., 2015), researchers in psychology, sociology, communication, and political science have for some time been interested in understanding their performative (Ahmed, 2014; Freistein et al., 2022; Reddy, 2001) and communicative aspects (Bartsch & Hübner, 2005; Hochschild, 1983). My research interest is how representations of emotional experiences in media texts are constructed, perform ideology, and constitute elements of societal discourse.

In this article I argue for a twofold rationale for a qualitative method to research emotional experiences represented through language in the media. Firstly, expressions of emotional experience are a versatile and meaning-packed object of study allowing for research on a wide range of emotional aspects of cultural, societal, and political discourse. Secondly, emotional experiences could, in their mediated form, be broken down into a set of well-defined elements that could be operationalized and analyzed at an aggregated level, and employed in longitudinal studies, as well as in comparative studies between cultural contexts and media platforms.

My key perspective in the quest for understanding the role and makeup of those mediated expressions is the theoretical formation of sociology of emotions (Bericat, 2016; Turner, 2009; Turner & Stets, 2005) through which I have identified a set of five characteristics that I argue, make expressions of emotional experience a suitable object of systematic research conducive to an understanding of the circulation of discursive emotionality that has “profound social and ideological ramifications” (Wahl- Jørgenssen, 2019a, p. 9). Firstly, at an aggregated level, emotional expressions identify and provide understanding as to the emotional and ideological mental make-up and values of communities and ideological groups (Rosenwein, 2002, p. 842). Reddy (2001) demonstrates that emotional communities often are defined by clusters of ideologically and politically charged emotional expressions which are generated by, expressed within, reinforced through, and challenged by media discourses, and in the process woven into the ideological fabric of the emotional community. He labels the concept, emotional regimes. Eksner (2015) adds that linguistic displays of emotion enact specific “affective
identities” and “serve important semiotic functions in the negotiation of relationships between social groups in stratified societies, such as class identification and ethno-cultural identities” and constitute “a site in which the relationship between emotions and social structure is enacted” (p. 193), which means that emotional expressions may be used as discursive devices to construct and characterize the ideological, ethnical, and cultural “other” (Koschut, 2018, p. 334).

Secondly, displays of emotionality are “social learning cues” (Harris, 2018, p. 260). They identify and demonstrate differences between legitimate and illegitimate emotions, they facilitate the socialization of values, they articulate emotional states of vital importance to desirable social interaction, and they are object lessons for how to express emotional experience in an acceptable way (Marinetti et al., 2011).

Thirdly, expressed emotions have motivating properties (Harris, 2018, p. 259), and Czarniawska (2015) stresses their value as rhetorical support in political discourse. Hess (2018) explains that they are indicators of social motives, and play an important role in the motivation of “coordinated social interaction” (p. 251). Expressed emotions accentuate the importance, urgency, and meaning attributed to specific events and societal issues, and could be displayed to “manipulate the internal states and behaviours of others, in service of social goals” (Harris, 2018, p. 257). Reddy (2001) claims that emotional expressions have a “relational intent” (being an attempt to influence the quality of a social relation), and he categorizes emotional expressions as “a dynamic tool that can be seized by attention in the service of various high-level goals” (p. 105). Turner and Stets (2005) discuss how cultural and dramaturgical theories on emotion stress the strategically performative function of socially and politically purpose-driven emotional displays (pp. 24, 25). The performativity of such displays motivates the analysis of them as a strategic tool used to elicit a set of preferred emotional responses as a part of what Katriel (2015) calls “emotion-evocative discourse” (p. 58).

Fourthly, displaying emotions performs morality, character, and personality, and signals social and political affiliation (Demertizis, 2014; Marinetti et al., 2011). The displays indicate status and dominance, likability, and degrees of masculinity/femininity (Hess, 2018; Sabini, 1995, p. 273). Koschut (2018) demonstrates how verbal emotional expressions also are used as elaborate means for “self-validation” (p. 334) by imputing moral excellence to internalized political and cultural views and positions. Displays of emotion are used as normative indications of appropriate conceptualizations of morality and justice (Rosenwein & Cristiani, 2018, p. 46). van Kleef et al. (2015) have demonstrated that “people use the emotional expressions of others to inform their own attitudes” and that those “effects occurred regardless of whether emotional expressions were manipulated through written words, pictures of facial expressions, film clips containing both facial and vocal emotional expressions, or emoticons” (p. 1124).

Fifthly, emotional expressions have an exploratory effect that forges an understanding of, and identification with, both our own emotions, and those of others. Reddy (2001) suggests that the articulation of emotions put the expressed emotions “into a peculiar, dynamic relationship with what we say about them” (p. 64), and that they possess an “exploratory and self-altering effect” (p. 100) (which means that the very articulation of, and exposure to, expressed emotions influences the way we perceive them). Expressing an emotion or being exposed to an emotional expression (or a description of such an emotional expression), may define, and intensify that emotion, bringing it from the domain of a diffuse circulation of thought material into an articulated and activated emotion to which focused attention is paid and importance is attributed, while suppressing, or ignoring it, may have the opposite effect (p. 100). This makes emotional expressions an important element in the discursive construction of a text.
Expressions of emotional experience could be verbal or non-verbal. The most immediate communication of experienced emotion is non-verbal, and there is an extensive body of research concerning emotions expressed through non-verbal “multimodal dynamic patterns of behaviour” (Burgoon et al., 2021; Keltner et al., 2019), composed by facial action, vocalization of sounds, gestures, altered posture, gazing, and other types of body language (Ekman, 2003, 2018; Hess, 2018; Kagan, 2007). Combinations of visual and auditive expressions of emotions are potentially a more intense mode of communication than verbal or textual descriptions of emotional experience. One reason being that “the brain sites that are primary foundations for feelings are less fully connected with the sites that represent language than the cortical locations that represent objects and locations in the environment” (Kagan, 2007, p. 10). It is thus considered that emotional expressions visually mediated by television news, and photojournalism have a stronger emotional impact than expressions described in written media texts. However, the objective of EEP is not to directly measure or analyse possible or potential emotional impact at the level of reception, but to study the textual construction of emotional expressions, analyse their discursive and performative value for the establishment of emotional regimes and emotional communities. For that purpose, the study of emotional experiences represented through language has some advantages.

Arguably, the study of verbally expressed emotions in a media text does not capture the whole spectrum of emotionality conveyed by multi-modal mediation of such expressions. However, Rosenwein (2002) argues that language-based emotional expressions are particularly valuable in identifying complex and diverse feelings and she underscores the importance of linguistic labelling of emotions “because emotions are inchoate until they are given names, emotional vocabularies are exceptionally important for the ways in which people understand, express, and indeed ‘feel’ their emotions” (p. 4). Referring to theories of psychological constructionism, she argues that “the brain’s circuitry is shaped in part by ambient emotion words and their association” (Rosenwein & Cristiani, 2018, p. 41). Harris (2018) discusses how language (a) is a more versatile mode of communication than non-verbal emotional expressions when it comes to expressing degrees and intensity of emotional experience, (b) allows for contextualization, reflexivity, and added affective value, and (c) is superior to other modes of communication when expressing complex and socially situated emotions (p. 259).

van Kleef (2021) argues that the formerly adopted scholarly position that nonverbal emotional expressions more accurately capture the essence of emotion than do verbal expressions is untenable in the light of recent findings, and that recent research has demonstrated that emotional expressions convey complex social meaning regardless of expressive modality (pp. 92, 93). Research has also shown that verbally expressed emotions not only communicate and convey emotional states, but also construe emotional perception and emotional experience by categorizing them through language (Lindquist et al., 2015).

The study of descriptions of expressions of emotion in media texts is about understanding how societal discourse is constructed and reinforced by emotional expressions, and how those expressions at an aggregated level form promote, facilitate, and validate certain discourses, and exclude and stigmatize others, and manifest and validate certain emotions, while delegitimizing and marginalizing others (Döveling, 2009).

There is also a practical aspect on the rationality of studying mediated expressions of emotional experience. Their make-up is possible to study structurally. There is agency and some sort of object. The expressed emotion is linguistically labelled and qualified, and there are often indications of intensity and valence in connection with the expression (Kagan, 2007). Since a mediated expression of emotion is not an isolated event, it is possible to determine a context. The aggregation of those aspects makes up discursive patterns that, using either qualitative or quantitative methods, could be studied, and discussed as to ideological implications. A methodological strategy for profiling emotional expressions in media discourse
can therefore provide useful information regarding their rhetoric and discursive role in such discourse.

**Mediated Representations of Expressions of Emotional Experience as an Object of Research**

In EEP, the object of study and unit of analysis is an emotional experience represented through language in a media text, that has an identifiable subject and a definable object toward which the represented emotion is directed. This definition includes emotion claims, described emotional states, emotion indicating metaphors, or represented emotional experiences embedded as a property of an object, person, group, or event (Gendron & Feldman Barret, 2018). The experience could be quoted as verbally expressed (e.g., He said: “I am very angry”) or attributed (e.g., She was overjoyed). Either subject or object could be abstract, or concrete. Subject may be a given embodied group, like “people” in the sense of people in general, and the object could be “the prevailing atmosphere in society.” The expression could be simple, or complex. The expressions are not studied as necessarily true feelings of the emotional subjects, but rather as meaning-making discursive, narrative, or rhetoric elements communicating social motives (Hess, 2018).

Textual representations of emotional experience in media texts can be structurally identified, categorized, and operationalized as they consist of a set of elements that could be selected, identified, and categorized. They are expressed by, or attributed to, a subject, they have a certain valence and intensity (Harris, 2018; Kagan, 2007), they are directed towards an object, they propose, explicitly or implicitly, some sort of action, or change of state of affairs (Frijda et al., 1989), and they appear in, and receive meaning through, a socio-cultural context (Wahl-Jørgenssen, 2019a). The expressions have both an emotion-expressive function (they indicate, and manifest felt emotions; Denzin, 2017, p. 124) and a social-communicative function (they emerge in a social context in which they have a complex communicative signaling function; Bericat, 2016). There is no necessary connection between a felt emotion and an emotional expression since a felt emotion may go socially unnoticed, and an emotional expression may be feigned. But regardless of being authentic or feigned, an emotional expression still has a signaling function, and thus plays a role in the social interaction of which it is a part and may therefore be studied and analyzed in that capacity (Hess, 2018).

**EEP as Research Method**

EEP is a structured method positioned within a tradition of qualitative research methodology. It is inspired, as well as informed by, the procedures of selective coding of text elements used in various types of content analysis (Bryman, 2016; Flick, 2022; Schreier, 2012), the flexible and research design specific categorization of those elements used in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Terry & Hayfield, 2021), and the dynamic interaction between deductive and inductive strategies of categorization of themes pertaining to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Ralph et al., 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wilson Scott & Howell, 2008). It is developed in concurrence with current qualitative methodology applied to research on emotions (Flam & Kleres, 2015). The proposed method could be sorted according to the type of method Flam (2015) classifies as “expressionist-dramaturgical” which implicates that the observed, or described, expressions of emotional experience are sampled, treated, and structured as emotion data, and at an aggregated level, subject to a theory-based analysis (p. 17). In this section, I will first give a step-by-step outline of how to conduct EEP, and then I exemplify how those steps were applied in a pilot study on the discursive performativity of emotions in Swedish far-right alternative news media.
The methodological point of departure within EEP is the identification of textually represented expressions of emotional experience in a media text, and the categorization of the elements composing the expressions (Bertrand & Hughes, 2018, p. 268). The represented experiences are coded according to those elements, and then profiled, or grouped together according to similarities, and then thematized and contextually analyzed as to discursive meaning-making.

EEP follows a number of analytical steps. The first step is to select a set of emotion data conducive to the research interest. The second step is to identify emotional experiences represented in the texts. The emotional experiences may be described, paraphrased, synthesized, metaphorical, or quoted. Simply put, the researcher is looking for and identifying textual elements describing how someone feels about something or somebody. In a third step, the identified emotional experiences are profiled by being coded according to the following set of properties.

**Type of emotion.** In the pilot study I have chosen the set of emotions described in Plutchik’s (1980) “Wheel of Emotions”, where he proposed eight primary emotions that serve as the foundation for all others, and grouped them in polar opposites, joy/sadness, acceptance/disgust, fear/anger, surprise/ anticipation (Williams et al., 2019, p. 622).

**Feeling subject.** Bericat states that “the self, the feeling subject, constitutes the central reference upon which emotions turn” (Bericat, 2016, p. 493). The subject may be an identified or anonymous individual or a group, but also a chronotope (a specific age, era, or geographic place given agency through linguistic discursive organization in space and time connecting it to individual or a body of feeling subjects. Examples: The Victorian era was appalled by sexual deviation. New York loves a good party).

**Valence.** The expressed emotion may be pleasant or unpleasant (Kagan, 2007).


**Object.** An emotional expression is always directed towards an object. Something or someone is interpreted as causing the elicitation of emotion and the ensuing triggering an emotional expression (Sabini, 1995).

**Context.** How is the expression contextualized? In what socio-cultural environment is the emotion expressed. What is the topic at hand? Is it commented on in an ironic sense? Is it legitimized or delegitimized? Does it have discursive or ideological implications? Is it performative (Reddy, 2001)?

**Complexity.** Simple, or complex. By complex I mean an expressed emotion that may be multi-faceted. If someone claims to be angry, but also scared – that is a complex expression (Harris, 2018).

**Proposed action/goal.** Emotions dispose their subject towards certain actions (Frijda et al., 1989), which means that emotional expressions suggest, implicitly or explicitly, some sort of action with some sort of goal, either the prolongation or amplification of a pleasant state, or a change of affairs to alleviate or extinguish the negative emotion expressed (Bericat, 2016, p. 493).

The profiles are entered into a descriptive matrix (Averill, 2002; Wilson Scott & Howell, 2008) (see Table 1), which allows profiles to be sequentially grouped together according to one property after the other, to get a stratified overview of the data, and to identify structures and categories pertinent to further analysis. To exemplify, If the research focuses on the type of emotions in the material, that property becomes the prime organizing element and the matrix will initially be structured according to that property. If the main interest is to find out who is attributed emotional experiences, the data will initially be structured according to subject. The objective is to organize the profiles in patterns and categories that correspond to the research interest. The matrix is a flexible instrument for the preparation of data for analysis.
as it is helpful when endeavoring to identify and typify profiles, and to visualize how the represented emotional experiences differ between different types of media, or within the same type of media, and how some profiles dominate regarding their salience and characteristics. Through this approach, the researcher is able to use emotional expression profiling (see Table 2) to structure and prepare the emotion data for the next step.

Table 1
Coding Matrix – Description of Analytical Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Valens</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Proposed action</th>
<th>Complexity</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of emotion expressed</td>
<td>Who is expressing, or being attributed the emotional experience?</td>
<td>Negative or positive?</td>
<td>High, low, or medium?</td>
<td>Towards what is the emotion directed?</td>
<td>What action, outcome, or change of affairs, does the feeling subject desire?</td>
<td>Simple or complex?</td>
<td>What contextual factors influence the meaning of the emotional experience?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next step the structured emotional profiles are subjected to a theory-based analysis of the performative dynamics and discursive meaning of the emotional experiences. To guide the analysis, a set of theory-based questions informed by the five performative characteristics of emotional expressions described in the literature review are employed. To recapitulate representations of emotional experiences, they are (a) indicating the emotional and ideological composition and values of communities and ideological groups, (b) identifying and demonstrating distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate emotions, (c) motivating action, (d) constructing morality and character, and (e) prompting the exploration of our own emotions and those of others. The analytical questions below are addressed to the accumulated body of emotional experiences, and formulated with the purpose of opening up the identified emotional profiles to an analysis at a performative and discursive level.

- What political, cultural, or social values are supported or contested by the emotional profiles represented?
- How are the emotional experiences legitimizied, or delegitimized?
- How are the emotional experiences motivating and performative?
- How do the emotional profiles signal morality and character?
- What discourses are represented by the accumulated body of emotional experiences in context?
- To what type of emotional regimes and communities does the body of representations of emotional experiences cater?

In a subsequent step the profiles are subject to a secondary analysis based on the application of any issue-specific theoretical perspectives, and the final thematization of categories of meaning-making corresponding to the research problem (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis and interpretation constitute a basis for the subsequent thematization of categories of meaning of the represented emotional experiences according to the research questions. This process includes revisions and adjustments in an iterative fashion until the themes, and possible sub-themes, are as accurate and relevant to the research questions and to the theoretic perspectives as possible.
Illustrating EEP through a Pilot Study on Discursive Patterns of Emotionality in Swedish Right-Wing Alternative News Media Reporting

As a pilot study to exemplify and demonstrate the method I have researched how representations of emotional experience by language are constructed, featured, and given discursive value in Swedish far-right news media reporting. My research question was

How do emotional experiences featured in Swedish far-right alternative news media construct and articulate political discourse?

I wanted to use EEP to examine how the experiences, at an aggregated level, relate to rhetoric strategies and discursive ideological constructions, how they contribute to discursive patterns and how they are positioned in relation to emotional polarization. My research interest was also to study how the represented emotions relate to the construction of display rules, or “social rules about what emotional expressions should be displayed in which circumstances” (Sabini, 1995, p. 241), and how they are conducive to the forging of an emotional community (Reddy, 2001).

As empirical material for the pilot study, some 150 textually mediated emotional expressions in 75 news articles from the Swedish right-wing alternative news organizations Samhällsnytt, Fria Tider och Nyheter idag, were analyzed. The articles were retrieved from the news sites’ own search engines. The searches counted from April 15, 2023, backwards, until 25 articles containing representations of emotional experiences from each news organization were sampled. In the following table I will repeat the abovementioned steps of research and show how the steps were applied to this particular data set.

Table 2
EEP - Steps, Method Description, and Application

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Method Description</th>
<th>Method Application – Pilot Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>The first step is to select and sample the most suitable data available for the research project.</td>
<td>I selected the three most well-known Swedish far-right media organizations’ news sites. I chose April, 15, 2023 as the departure date, and used the sites’ search engines for the sampling of the first 25 articles from the general news flow of each site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>The second step is to identify emotional experiences represented in the text. The emotional experiences may be described, paraphrased, synthesized, metaphorical, or quoted. Simply put, the researcher is looking for and identifying textual elements describing how someone feels something about something or somebody. Each represented experience is treated as an independent unit of analysis and is profiled by being coded according to the following set of properties: Subject, Valence, Intensity, Object, Complexity, Context, and Proposed Action. The profiles are entered into a descriptive matrix structured according to the abovementioned properties as column headings.</td>
<td>The entire material was examined and 150 representations of emotional experiences were identified as either the attributions or descriptions of emotional experiences, citations or paraphrasing of emotional expressions, descriptive use of emotion words or emotion indicating metaphors, or emotional experience embedded as a property of an object, person, group, or event. The identified representations were coded according to the predetermined set of properties described above. Each coded experience was inserted as a row in a descriptive matrix using the properties as column headings. The coding is akin to profiling since each row make up the profile of the emotional experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 3  In a third step, profiles are sorted according to selected properties to get a stratified overview of the data, and to identify initial structures and categories. The properties serve as primary, secondary, tertiary, etc., structuring principles depending on the research interest.

To study emotional agency in the texts, I started the structuring of the profiles by analyzing the variation of actors, or feeling subjects, by sorting the profiles according to the heading Subject. As a result, I found that the data contained a fairly even distribution between subjects featured as sympathizing with the ideological inclination of the far-right news organization, and subjects represented as ideological opponents, which incited me to examine if there were any qualitative differences between the experiences represented. A sorting of the material according to the other subheadings resulted in a number of analytically interesting differences in intensity, object, and context between the sets of far-right and left-wing emotional experiences that served as a basis for analysis in the ensuing step four.

Step 4  In step four, the researcher subjects the structured profiles at an aggregated level to a primary contextual and discursive analysis based on a set of theoretically established performative and discursive properties of expressed emotions. A secondary analysis of the same material is based on any issue-specific theoretical perspectives. The focus is to establish a rich understanding of discursive value and meaning of the profiles in context.

As I analyzed variances within the emotion data through the theoretical framework of performativity and discursivity of emotional expressions, as expounded upon in the literature review, I discerned a nuanced polarization, characterized by a consistent ideological contextualization of the two sets of emotional experiences. This dynamic delineated discursively significant character traits imputed to far-right and left-wing sympathizers, by attributions of morality, validity, relevance, and pertinence to their respective emotional experiences.

Step 5  The fifth step is a thematization with the objective of categorizing the collected data in relation to the study’s research questions and theoretical perspectives. The focus of analysis is to structure the given meaning into analytically meaningful themes. When the profiles are structured, and grouped together according to the research interest, the researcher proceeds by analyzing and thematizing how they construct discursive meaning. As the analysis proceeds, there is a revision and adjustment of the thematization in an iterative fashion. This process is repeated until the themes (and sub-themes) are as accurate and relevant to the research questions and the theoretic perspectives as possible. The results are presented as rich descriptions of each theme and sub-theme and discussed in conjunction with the theoretical concepts of the study.

The analysis in the previous steps resulted in the formulation two main themes: 1) Legitimized Far-Right Emotions and 2) Delegitimized Left-Wing Emotions. I proceeded by iteratively analyzing and sub-thematizing how other properties of the profiles tied in with those themes, and how they performed discourse by constructing and elaborating on differences between the two sets of emotional experiences. The iterative process resulted in a set of six sub-themes that were partly inductively determined, and partly informed by descriptive theories of ideological structures of far-right alternative media. Those subthemes and differences are described under the heading “Results of the Pilot Study Analysis” below.

The featured applied coding matrix (see Table 3) illustrates how the identified emotional expressions were coded to give an overview of the empirical material and to structure and prepare the data for the ensuing theory-based analytical steps. The matrix is a flexible and helpful visual representation of differences, similarities, trends, patterns, and connections across the various emotion profiles.
Table 3
Example: Applied Coding Matrix – Analytical Dimensions – Pilot Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Valence</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Proposed action</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Left-wing politician</td>
<td>Unpleasant</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Critique from the far-right</td>
<td>Stop criticizing me!</td>
<td>He is blamed as responsible for an irresponsible immigration policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Unpleasant</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>An envisioned future of unhinged immigration</td>
<td>Restrict immigration</td>
<td>Social problems due to the multi-cultural society will increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Disgust</td>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>Unpleasant</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Immigration policy</td>
<td>Change immigration policy</td>
<td>Integration as a failed project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Far-right editor</td>
<td>Pleasant</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Expulsion of criminal</td>
<td>Expulse more criminal immigrants</td>
<td>Indignation with purported leniency towards criminal immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Unpleasant</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Daughter converting</td>
<td>Stop foreign cultural influence</td>
<td>Islam attracting Swedish youth – relatives are concerned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For the sake of brevity, the data presented in this table are condensed representations of the actual data extracted from the analyzed news texts. This illustration aims to showcase the manner in which the coded units of analysis manifest as profiles within the matrix subsequent to the coding procedure.

Results of the Pilot Study Analysis

The EEP analysis and iterative thematization process of the pilot study resulted in two main themes: (a) Legitimized Far-Right Emotions and (b) Delegitimized Left-Wing Emotions and a set of sub-themes functioning as descriptors of the main themes: (a) character-building, (b) self-validation, (c) good fear/bad fear, (d) rationality/irrationality, (e) earnestness/hypocrisy, and (f) relevance/irrelevance.

Left-wing feelings were represented as high-pitched, naïve, overly sensitive, irrational, misplaced, and out of contact with reality. They were often placed in a context of ridicule and sometimes presented as hypocritical and feigned to achieve political purposes. When fear was expressed, or attributed, it was often presented as irrational or cowardly motivated and conducive to bad political decisions. Left-wing fear was presented as causing leniency towards immigrated criminals, useless measures against what was represented as an illusory notion of climate change, and submission to Islamic influence. The most prevalent objects of anger were the disclosure of personal or political failures and indignation of far-right political proposals or actions. Discursively the descriptions of those emotional experiences positioned their subjects as weak, and there were both implicit and explicit allusions to the displayed emotions as a token of a purported feminization of the left. The descriptions were “other-targeted” (Demertizis, 2014) in the sense that they imputed character traits that went beyond the expressed emotion itself. The intensity of the expressions was generally high, but in an ironic and mocking sense, giving them a desperate and hysterical slant.
Far-right emotions were represented as low-key, reflecting ponderation, insight and concern, and the subjects were morally bolstered by frequent references to expertise and character. The fear and indignation expressed were directed at the purportedly negative effects of immigration, the expressed bias of public service media, the political elite’s mismanagement of state affairs, the out-of-touchness of the cultural elite, the downsides of a multi-cultural society, and the expansion of Islam in Sweden. The expressed far-right emotions circulated within a narrow ideological spectrum. There was no fear of climate change, no anxiety over the rise of totalitarianism, no disgust over homophobia, no worries over the increased state-control over the media, nor any concern over lack of solidarity with marginalized groups. Feelings of disappointment often focused on the type of society that could have been, if only the far-right voices had been listened to long ago. The few feelings of joy were expressed over far-right political success in other countries. Political representatives of the far-right and “common people” were represented as expressing a similar range of emotions, but the emotions expressed by political opponents were never represented as being shared by ordinary citizens.

In my discussion I focused on how the represented emotions were used discursively to build purported far-right character, to self-validate far-right politics, to create, articulate, and consolidate a far-right emotional community, and to discredit left-wing representatives, primarily at a moral and character level. The range of mediated expressions identified in the study served as rhetorical reinforcements of the entire spectrum of the Swedish far-right’s core dogma and substantiated criticism of, not only immigration, but the whole spectrum of predefined objects of far-right discontent such as feminism, the socio-liberal elite, public service broadcasting, multi-culturalism, and climate-change politics. The expressions in the sample were in an elaborate way forging a tight-knitted emotional community by constructing legitimacy and validity for a specific far-right emotional discourse and constructing a communal range of shared emotional concerns. The representations of emotional experience created a social order of “we feel this way, and they feel that way” as the contextualization of the expressions established a sharp distinction between legitimate and illegitimate emotions, and delimited the range of accepted emotionality. Representations of emotional experiences were not used to illustrate or explain complexity, or illuminate any multi-faceted aspects of an issue. They served mainly to accentuate dominant far-right narratives, to provide emotional reinforcement to political rhetoric, and to articulate self-validation.

**Applied Research Quality Criteria**

Yardley’s (2000) criteria of sensitivity to context, commitment, and rigor; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance, and Lietz and Zayas’ (2010) concepts of credibility and transferability were employed as guiding principles when assessing the quality of the pilot study. The context sensitivity criterion was addressed by sampling data from far-right alternative news organizations identified as representative and relevant by previous research (Ihlebæk & Nygaard, 2020), by a detailed description of the sampling process, and by an analytical engagement with theoretical aspects close to the empirical material (Atton, 2001; Holt, 2020; Ihlebæk et al., 2022; Waisbord, 2022). Rigor and transparency were pursued by following a standardized analytical process informed by established methods of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Bryman, 2016, p. 387; Charmaz, 2006; Ralph et al., 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Terry & Hayfield, 2021), and further endeavored by providing a detailed and rich description of the research context, by describing the steps of the research method as clearly and detailed as possible, and making detailed references to its theoretical foundations (Bertrand & Hughes, 2018; Bryman, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2022; Flick, 2022). Credibility was addressed by comparisons of the results’ consistency with previous research and correspondence with issue-specific theories, by exemplifying results (Lietz & Zayas,
Since the method is based on a singular and identifiable unit of analysis and the identification of a standard set of properties of represented emotional experiences, it has a wide potential of transferability as it allows for standardization of research on emotional content and can be applied to comparative and longitudinal studies between data sets (Yardley, 2000). To facilitate the transferability of findings and fulfil the transparency criterion, I provided a step-by-step guide to the method, as well as a rich description of findings, so that researchers may study similar contexts and empirical material and evaluate and compare the results on the basis of my research.

And last, but not least, since I am studying ideological and discursive constructs, an important quality criterion is the issue of interpretivism, or the commitment to interpret the studied data in line with the perspective of the people producing it, and trying to access and analyze an intersubjective “life-world” that may not be in line with my own, without taking the ideological constructs of that world at face-value (Bryman, 2016, p. 393). To handle challenge that I have practiced reflexive bracketing (Ahern, 1999; Tufford & Newman, 2012), a concerted effort to set aside personal ideological preconceptions and biases, and arrive at a, both empirically and theoretically based, understanding of the social world constructed by the language, meaning and perspectives of the texts studied, and at the same time analyzing the discursive meaning-making of that world from a scientific media studies perspective (Bryman, 2016, p. 393).

Suggestions for Further Development

The lessons learned and conclusions drawn from the pilot study include the following. Firstly, a rigorous theoretical definition of the unit of analysis must be made and tested to delimit the study, avoid slipping coding precision, and enhance the stringency of the comparative aspects of the results. Secondly, a deep reflection on the researcher’s emotional position is imperative and the reflexive bracketing could be documented in a more systematic way (Ahern, 1999; Lietz & Zayas, 2010, p. 193), and interpretations of the initial profiling should be guided by theoretical rigor, and systematically challenged for consistent and multi-faceted results. There is room for a more eclectic selection of suitable theoretical concepts in this regard. In addition, my pilot study data were chronologically retrieved and used to identify and analyze emotional profiles independent of specific media events. A more poignant approach for comparative research projects may be the sampling of comparable news texts centered around specifical emotion eliciting events. The analytical categories could also be used as variables in a quantitative research design when researching numeric changes in volume of facets of expressions of emotional experience over time, or between media types. In the referred to pilot study, the method was used to analyze representations of emotional experiences in written news texts, but a multimodal approach could also be developed to encompass sound and images.

Discussion

EEP does not capture all dimensions of emotionality in media text. Represented emotional experiences are not the only emotion eliciting stimuli featured in the media, and there are other emotion related elements contributing to discursive patterns of a media text. A focus on emotional experiences represented through language does limit the scope of emotionality accessible to research. But the intersection of emotions and media is too complex
and multi-faceted to be covered by one single research method, and the method proposed in this article does give scholars a research tool that allows for a systematic study of one important aspect of the mediated circulation of discursive emotionality. It provides a procedure that identifies and operationalizes emotional content, standardizes and homogenizes units of analysis in a text, and at an accumulated level, furnishes enough emotion data to draw conclusions about discursivity and performativity that are comparative between media texts and time periods. It is a method with great flexibility, which could be used to research any theoretically guided aspect of emotional expressions. The analytical dimensions could be adapted and adjusted to fit the purpose of the study, and it is compatible with a wide range of qualitative analytical approaches such as narrative analysis, discourse analysis, thematic analysis, and dialogical analysis (Bertrand & Hughes, 2018; Bryman, 2016). The initial phases of the method could be used to operationalize emotional expressions into variables in a quantitative content analysis, and the standardized unit of analysis makes it suitable for both qualitative and quantitative comparative and longitudinal studies, as well as mixed-methods approaches. Even though the sample of the pilot study was too small to draw anything but provisional conclusions, the process and results proved EEP to be a flexible resource in systematic research of the role mediated emotional expressions play in the construction of societal discourse.

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