

CAREY JEWITT, SARA PRICE, KERSTIN LEDER MACKLEY, NIKOLETA YIANNOUTSOU, DOUGLAS ATKINSON (2025). *INTERDISCIPLINARY INSIGHTS FOR DIGITAL TOUCH COMMUNICATION*. HEIDELBERG: SPRINGER, PAGES: 131, ISBN: 978-3-030-24564-1

The reviewed book explores the growing field of digital touch communication, emphasizing its social, technological, and ethical implications. Published by Springer in 2025, this book is part of the *Human-Computer Interaction Series* and is a product of the *InTouch* project. The authors provide an in-depth analysis of how digital touch is transforming human interaction, focusing on emerging technologies such as virtual reality (VR), haptics, and sensor-based communication (pp. 1–6).

As digital communication evolves beyond traditional visual and auditory modalities, the book argues that touch is becoming a critical element of interaction. The authors highlight how advancements in haptic feedback, remote touch, and multisensory communication are reshaping human experiences across different fields, from healthcare to virtual collaboration. This perspective situates the book within a broader discussion on the future of human-computer interaction and its societal impacts.

This review evaluates the book's structure, key arguments, and contributions to the field. It assesses how effectively the authors present their interdisciplinary approach and whether the book successfully bridges the gap between theoretical exploration and practical application. Additionally, the review considers the book's relevance to academics, designers, and policymakers interested in the ethical dimensions of digital touch communication.

The book is organized into eight chapters, beginning with an introduction to digital touch communication. The first chapter establishes the significance of touch in human communication and its transition to the digital realm. The authors introduce key concepts such as “digital touch,” “haptic communication,” and “remote tactile interaction” (pp. 1–6). These foundational ideas set the stage for understanding how touch-based interactions have evolved from direct physical contact to technologically mediated experiences, providing a framework for the discussions in subsequent chapters.

The second chapter discusses interdisciplinary approaches to studying digital touch, highlighting the multimodal and sensory methodologies employed in research (pp. 23–35). The authors emphasize the need for interdisciplinary

collaboration, incorporating insights from sociology, psychology, and human-computer interaction. The chapter presents a framework that integrates multimodality and sensory ethnography, arguing that these approaches enable a richer understanding of digital touch experiences. “We understand the physical, material, and sensory aspects of touch as a part of when and how touch-based resources are taken up (or excluded) and how they can shape—or are shaped by—people to become semiotic resources” (p. 24).

The third chapter maps out various applications of digital touch technology, examining human-human, human-robot, and human-object interactions (pp. 39–50). The authors present case studies showcasing how haptic technology is being used in diverse sectors, such as remote healthcare, social robotics, and immersive virtual environments. The chapter also highlights emerging and speculative touch technologies that push the boundaries of how humans interact with the digital world. “We look beyond our everyday interaction with touch screens, to focus on emergent and semi-speculative touch technologies that ‘want us’ and ‘make’ us want to be able to touch and feel objects in new ways: from tangibles, wearables, haptics for virtual reality, through to the tactile internet of skin” (p. 40).

The fourth chapter explores the role of social norms in shaping digital touch practices (pp. 57–69). The discussion centers on cultural differences, ethical concerns, and user acceptance of touch-based technologies. The authors argue that social norms around touch are neither static nor universal but evolve through societal and technological changes. “Social norms are in a state of continual flux, tension, and negotiation pulled across these sites of life, they are (simultaneously) fluid and fixed” (p. 59).

The fifth chapter addresses the psychological and emotional aspects of touch presence, absence, and connection (pp. 73–86). The authors examine how digital touch can bridge emotional gaps in remote communication, referencing studies on parental bonding and long-distance relationships. They discuss the “social shaping” perspective, which acknowledges that technology and social relations mutually influence each other, leading to the emergence of new ways to conceptualize presence and absence (p. 74).

The sixth chapter introduces the concept of “sociotechnical imaginaries,” illustrating how digital touch is envisioned and designed within various societal and technological frameworks (pp. 89–104). The chapter defines sociotechnical imaginaries as “collectively held and performed visions of desirable futures... animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology” (p. 90).

The seventh chapter delves into ethical considerations surrounding digital touch, including consent, trust, and data privacy (pp. 107–119). The authors emphasize that “ethical touch technologies” must be designed with a focus

on human values, taking into account issues of agency, harm, ownership, and transparency (p. 108). They explore how mediated touch can create complex ethical dilemmas, particularly in remote personal touch communication and virtual touch, where the sender and receiver may not have equal control over the interaction. The discussion also highlights the challenges of ensuring consent in digital touch interactions, where “touch does not have to be synchronous, reciprocal, or bidirectional” (p. 116). Furthermore, the book raises critical questions about the collection and use of tactile data, stressing the need for policies that safeguard privacy and prevent misuse of sensitive touch-based information.

Finally, the eighth chapter provides a thought-provoking conclusion by synthesizing key insights from previous discussions and offering a roadmap for future research and design in the field of digital touch communication (pp. 123–131). The chapter underscores the importance of adopting a socially grounded perspective in understanding digital touch, emphasizing that „recognizing and benefiting from the potentials for difference and cultural flexibility” is essential in the development of inclusive and effective digital touch technologies. The authors reflect on the evolving landscape of touch-based interactions, highlighting the ways in which social norms, ethical considerations, and sociotechnical imaginaries shape the design and implementation of these technologies. This perspective is crucial as digital touch moves beyond the experimental phase and becomes integrated into everyday human-computer interactions.

Furthermore, the chapter presents an emergent research and design framework that serves as a guide for interdisciplinary collaboration in digital touch communication. The authors advocate for methodological approaches that are multimodal and interdisciplinary, ensuring that technological innovations align with real-world social and cultural dynamics. They state that “the thematic directions, emergent ideas, and provisional framework... highlight both the speculative and emergent character of digital touch communication,” signaling the need for continued exploration and iteration in this field. The chapter concludes with a call for further research that considers ethical dimensions, user experiences, and the broader implications of digital touch in various domains, from healthcare to education and social connectivity. By providing these insights, the authors not only summarize the book’s key contributions but also inspire future inquiries into the complex interplay between technology, touch, and human interaction.

The book’s strength lies in its interdisciplinary approach, effectively integrating theoretical and practical perspectives. The authors draw from diverse fields, including cognitive science, user experience research, and social theory, to provide a holistic understanding of digital touch communication. The inclusion of case studies, such as *In Touch with Baby* (pp. 84–86) and *Remote Contact*

Exhibition (pp. 81–82), enriches the discussion by offering real-world applications of digital touch.

However, one limitation of the book is its predominantly Western perspective. While the authors acknowledge cultural variations in touch norms (pp. 57–59), a more in-depth exploration of non-Western perspectives on digital touch could enhance the book's global relevance. Additionally, although the book provides a comprehensive overview of ethical concerns, it could benefit from more concrete policy recommendations for governing digital touch technologies (pp. 115–117).

Sokhi Huda

STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY (UIN) SUNAN AMPEL SURABAYA