The Influence Of Technology On Society And Individual Behavior In The Circle By Dave Eggers

Asst.Prof. Afrah Abdul Jabbar

University of Misan - College of Education- English department

Abstract

This paper analyzes The Circle by Dave Eggers, a novel that presents a dystopian view of a hyper-connected society where the distinction between public and private life disappears. It explores the pervasive effects of social media, data collection, and digital culture on identity, relationships, and societal norms. Eggers critiques how technological advancements, when unchecked, can lead to a loss of privacy, autonomy, and authenticity, as individuals prioritize virtual validation over genuine human connections. Through an examination of the novel's themes, characters, and narrative, this study highlights the ethical and psychological implications of living in a surveillance-driven, technology-dominated world. The paper emphasizes the dangers of unregulated technological integration, offering a cautionary tale about its potential doing so, it underscores the need for a balanced approach to technology that prioritizes human well-being over corporate or systemic control. The Circle as a cautionary tale, emphasizing the dangers of prioritizing corporate interests and systemic control over human dignity and freedom. The paper ultimately calls for a more balanced approach to technological integration in society.

Key words: Technology and Society, Social media impact, Loss of identity, Dystopian vision, Individual behavior.

Introduction

The inclusion of personal technology in the lives of human beings has deeply transformed and revolutionized the way they experience various aspects of life. This widely recognized and well-regarded novel extensively explores and delves into the profound consequences and impacts of social media on society as well as individual behavior on both a collective and personal level. Through its compelling narrative, filled with intricate details and nuanced character development, it vividly presents a dystopian society that unveils and reflects chilling moments of tyranny, resonating eerily with the current state of affairs at the narrator's prestigious college. As the pages continue to unfold, the story artfully paints a detailed picture of an interconnected world that grows increasingly entwined, revealing the shocking and thought-provoking willingness of the American populace to sacrifice crucial aspects of privacy, personal space, and even identity itself, in exchange for the illusory promise of safety and security. This profound and captivating reflection leaves readers deeply pondering and contemplating the intricate dynamics and choices that shape our very existence in this rapidly evolving, ever-advancing technological era. (Bail, 2022)

The subject of internet culture is becoming increasingly examined and explored. This digital culture ranges from privacy, surveillance, computer networks, and autocracies. The tech obsession and the outsourcing of our memories and emotions are the basis of a semi-metaphorical opening to today's society - our movements in public are endlessly documented, and our relationships are controlled by our online identities. This novel is more than just an examination; it is a cautionary tale discussing our reliance on gigabytes. "This future is still a utopia, which is why it's too late to talk about it now." It is further perceived as fiction. In this view, the author knew where our current social situations would end up. The utopia is actually today's internet society. The virtual reality with constant check-ins and followers can easily be compared with the real world of followers. "You can live your life entirely digitally." (Tanner, 2020)

1.1. Background of The Circle

This novel is a portrayal of the potential dangers of our present-day technology and a critical reflection and exploration of our tech-obsessed culture. The novel serves as a cautionary tale that prompts readers to consider the potential implications of some of the technologies and ideologies that we're building modern society on. The protagonist, Mae Holland, becomes a central figure and agent negotiator of the novel's core themes that speak volumes about contemporary society. These themes include the relationship between individuality and the power of communities, the privacy of information, the monitoring of individuals, totalitarianism, and the deep, constant, nagging fear of losing our reputation or identity. (Fisher, 2022)

The current study explain the main conflict in the novel reveals that the damage wrought by technology is not only the result of individual choices. By examining the behavior of key characters, this study observes that technology also changes society as a whole, and society applies pressure on individuals. Consequently,

technology not only motivates behavior and individualism, but it also forms society as a whole in its own image. "Bad code is riddling nature and traditional hierarchies, dissolving stable architecture, changing, changing, forcing crisis and thrilling institutional authors, yet there is no mandate that beats us back to traffic. Technology does not house an iota of the good. Technology is all bad, all good. Appreciation is the question." In an age where technology continues to develop toward an unimaginable future, it seems that The Circle illuminates our current society. The Circle acts as a critique of the technocentric civilizations in which we star. (Koch, 2021)

2. Surveillance and Privacy Issues

Dave Eggers's 2013 best-seller The Circle is a thriller dystopia about the seeming benefits and inevitable dangers of the empowered communication society-technological state complex. The Circle depicts contemporary surveillance technologies in an extended version. The narrative is built around subjects who are victims of total supervision. The community is plagued by a "transparency cult" which affects both the public and private life, leading to their fusion. Eggers questions the obsessive habit of sharing one's private life. According to the critics of "oversharing," the gadget-driven society has adopted the axiom: Nothing to hide, nothing to fear. (Troster and Van Quaquebeke, 2021)

The novel narrates the story of three characters who live in a society where everything is visible, complete with participatory cops and their omnipresent cameras. The rampant surveillance leads to better safety for everybody. Moreover, it leads to increased connectedness. The ruling agenda of the Circle is to increase safety and connections to unprecedented levels, and therefore the company is planning to create "universal access to all human knowledge." The omnipresent surveillance is justified by the increased connectedness. The suggested conference topics cover the surveillance society and the joy of connectivity in the "real world," marked as 2013 rather than in fiction literature. For the characters, to be cut off and to unplug are abnormal deprivations. Privacy is seen as an out-of-date concept, something to frown upon.

2.1. Surveillance in The Circle

Surveillance in The Circle, the all-powerful technology company at the heart of the novel, represents control and observation. Characters in The Circle are watched constantly, but all the employees of the business and client companies, as well as consumers, have been invited to engage in live broadcasts of their days, accessible through their transparent page/email hybrids, to wear a variety of cameras and record their lives 24/7; signing a waiver made them eligible for the company's doctor's care. This kind of surveillance focuses on two areas: safety and accountability. The characters cite kidnappings, child disappearances, plummeting crime rates, and the thousands of unsolved missing persons cases as reasons for greater transparency. The novel depicts a society with the technological ability to track everyone's actions through a variety of methods, but it's not just about keeping everybody safe. (Yao et al.2021)

Throughout the novel, there are glimpses of actual surveillance occurring, but the novel is more concerned with the implications of a company, state, or band of technologists that are in a position to watch everyone; through these investigations into one possible future, the author discusses the surveillance regimes that exist today. The sections of the novel that depict these hypothetical technologies extrapolate to discuss these issues. When Mae loses her phone and has to hail a taxi on the streets of San Francisco, everything goes to hell. The whole time, she can feel the company bearing down on her, with the option elsewhere to pinpoint an instant on her map. She feels as though someone is behind her; in fact, she is that presence. Similarly, Annie uses a global trace, a real-time map technology, to locate Mae in Pennsylvania, and clicks on a screenshot of the car she and her new boyfriend, Francis, are driving. Mae begs Annie not to watch her in her private time, but Annie admits looking at the computer screen is better than real life. (Aho and Duffield, 2020)

2.2. Privacy Concerns in The Circle

Bluntly speaking, the acts of privacy invasion showcased in The Circle point to genuine ethical concerns that thrive in our society. Technological advancement certainly poses major issues of privacy breaches. From casual conversations and various daily activities, Mae's personal life is occasionally documented on the internet. The individual private sphere rapidly diminishing due to the public interconnectedness that technology provides is a significant concern of today. Technological convenience becomes a double-edged sword with an invitation to the public that used to be restricted to Mae's personal interview. The pressing question of privacy versus connectivity is contemplated. Some actions taken by Mae are depicted as the internal struggle to make a connection, and her main facilitation—constant disclosure—makes her a better Circle servant and increasingly obliterates her personal beliefs in privacy. (Stewart and Hartmann, 2020)

To fully understand privacy and its impact on society, two main character behaviors are analyzed: transparency and circle-sophism. It is her digital presence, inextricably intertwined with her personal life, that confuses the two and brings to the surface why she has to take the private stance she does. We ask whether such privacy invasion is going too far, and to what extent should we have control over ourselves? Ironically, this concept of the new wild is analogous to teaching for real but using that information to better The Circle. Romantic privacy suggestions weighed quite heavily in Mae's decision-making, certainly an idealized dream that she dares to define the ultimate connectedness. Digital connectivity poses two conflicting ideals: expressing oneself through the internet or ensuring the right to omit and control oneself. The Circle raises the question of society's view on privacy, loss of personal autonomy, and what we as a whole believe. (Helsper, 2021)

3. The Theme of Transparency in The Circle

In the novel The Circle, the theme of transparency is deeply entwined with the portrayal of society and technology. The idea of transparency can be difficult to navigate, as what is presented so earnestly as a way of ensuring honesty and integrity can seem equally like policing or voyeurism. The struggle at the heart of The

Circle is the rhetorical one we've laid out: is transparency really something we encourage for ourselves or for others? Do we want to see what others show us? With how much we pride ourselves on celebrating the authentic these days, do we even trust an unfiltered look at someone else's life? Moreover, as the novel progresses, this rush for transparency ultimately proves to have damaging consequences. However well-intentioned the impulse to mass identify everyone, in the end, this emphasis on transparency – for candidness, for purity, or for some other reason altogether – becomes self-serving and politically viable. (Robinson, 2020)

In The Circle, characters are constantly and consistently desiring a more transparent experience — such is the context in which they share and connect via technology. Then, an equally central motivational factor: in an age of rapid online connectivity, transparency becomes tied to authenticity too. As readers of The Circle, we see that characters are willing to endure all sorts of transparency to feel appreciation, to feel heard, or just to feel that they are indeed themselves. Particularly for Mae, but even for the character of Frank when he records everything and hauls his life online, exposure is sought and celebrated when they see it as evidence of sincerity and earnestness. In other words, together, these layers of demand for transparency in The Circle underscore the qualities about our world today where we see and experience the effect of this obligation.   (Cornelissen et al.2021)

4. Social Media and Online Identity

One of the main features of the social media era in which The Circle is set is the great quantities of personal data users feed to digital platforms, which in turn begin to shape their online presence and their behavior. In The Circle, the way characters nurture their online presence directly influences their perceptions of themselves and their interactions with the people around them. Two of the main characters, Mae and Francis, struggle between leading their physical existence and being fully aware of their digital presence. Given the large amount of data they spread through the internet, their personal environments are affected as they battle with their authentic identity as opposed to their online persona. (Wu and Taneja, 2021)

A Mae and Francis interaction shows his intention of distancing himself from his digital presence. His strong statement is labeled as "a retraction." This silencing may indicate his refusal to share details of his life on the internet for public consumption. He is rejecting any outside pleas "to answer." Despite the reader's knowledge of his inner character, Mae does not have the privilege. His online announcement can construct a certain image of Francis to the outside world, indicative of his actual position within this establishment. Being simultaneously present in both physical reality and the virtual world is quite an overwhelming mandate. Being a part of the virtual is important to maintain some sense of relevance and, ironically, authenticity. The Circle employs imagery to mimic the dichotomy of Mae's coexisting self. (Murray, 2020)

4.1. The Impact of Social Media on Identity Formation

The search for personalized validation through social media primarily functions as a collective approval engine. The isolated friends and relatives of the users of these platforms waste no time in affirming the "daredevil" exploits of those uploading videos or pictures. The nail-biter is not the jump or the desert trek; it's the wait for the first "like," comment, or other metrics indicating approval. Individual investment in these platforms creates a kind of parallel life, double life, or dream life that becomes more and more important for the users as they seek to merge or replace real life with virtual life. (Ognibene et al.2023)

4.2. Online Identity in The Circle

In the Circle, online identity is a major focal point of its world. Digital identities, and how they are managed, can help or hamper an individual at various points throughout the text. Characters engage in a struggle with how much or which parts of personal lives are visible to the company, which inevitably impacts their value as workers and members of society. Online profiles curate specific aesthetics reflecting each Circle employee's personal values, while also managing top-tier online influence. The perspectives of some characters bring forward the view of the regular, non-engineer perspective of keeping up on all social media platforms. When Mercer cuts himself off completely from social media, his placement in this tech-obsessed society plummets, showing that both the assumption is employable and for the tech-savvy, tech employees, social media is a representation of a personal brand and how feasible they are for high-ranking jobs within the Circle. (Alam and Mohanty2022)

This strategy, however, makes some of the Circle's employees struggle with their place in their work environment, as they feel that their time and investment in their online brands might not fully pay off. For the wage they make per hour, they are shouldering too heavy a burden by 'smiling' for the impression of being a community builder. The Circle's use of the digital rights systems still makes it easy for them to conceal problematic details of their internal operations. This is because the idea is that no one is on the computer when they are at work. All the high-profile interactions by Circle employees with their technology are done at work, with the digital joining of Mae and Annie's friendly chat room with the audience for her demonstration revealing that the social ties made over the Circle's technology are fake and not authentic. These interactions are all immersed in a consciousness of marketing oneself and contributing to furthering one's online relevance. (Bi et al.2021)

5. Workplace Culture and Technology

The Circle is a techno-thriller novel set in a near-future Silicon Valley. One critical concern of the novel is workplace culture in the tech industry, which is thought to fester due to its symbiotic relationship with the technology the companies produce and, consequently, the employees who make that production possible. While the novel's title refers to a specific corporation within the fictional universe, the "circle" is also a fitting allusion

to the feedback loop that binds humans to technology and feeds every aspect of their behavior; it circles back onto itself and goes around and around endlessly in a manner hard to predict or govern. (Berman, 2024)

5.1. The Circle's Work Environment

An essential element of a big part of the novel is The Circle itself. This chapter examines the work environment of The Circle in order to relate individual and societal criticism with the critique about technology generally and the recent global and societal developments. From a reader's perspective, the corporation can be viewed as a microcosm. The Circle's work culture profoundly mirrors current technologies and social developments, and in the novel, those specific technologies and sociocultural trends are addressed very often. The novel is saturated with modern digital hyperconnectivity, via electronic communication devices. The question is, why does it contain all these details? Evidence is accumulated to illustrate the overwhelming significance of modern technology and social media in the narrative. (Allam et al., 2022)

First, the corporation in the novel is characterized as a very innovative place, with its innovation being technological, which makes use of the most recent digital data and communication technologies. The workers are themselves highly connected via modern devices like laptops and smartphones to the Internet, public social media, and a private version of social media produced and provided by The Circle. All of this takes place in a business area heavily driven by customer-oriented technologies like online shopping. The dominance of technology is reflected in the fact that The Circle has abandoned a conventional business structure or mere finance in favor of digitally enabled customer acceptance and business activities. This "customer universalism" determines which technological innovations are to be fostered and no longer just the demands of the company as a one-off unique intranet. (Amit and Zott, 2020)

5.2. Technological Innovation and Work Productivity

In The Circle, technological innovation is often positioned as a reflection on work and an empowerment tool, creating a relationship concerning both typical philosophical discussions about the nature of technology and the technologization of work and late-stage capitalism theories. In The Circle, tools are frequently described as beneficial because they increase productivity and efficiency. This narrative often brings up concerns of proper utilization, interpretations of quantified productivity measures, and adequate ethical considerations of varying sizes. The history of work and technology indicates that these conversations are often combative. New technologies excite possibilities for increasing efficiency, while also obviously leading to concerns about replacing human labor. Indeed, as a property of late capitalism, work advances rarely address living or working conditions for laborers. (Coy et al.2021)

6. Ethical Dilemmas and Moral Choices

In a techno-dystopian novel, ethical and moral responsibilities largely begin at the level of the individual, and the tensions of living a life with both personal integrity and societal pressure to fall into the ethical umbrella of "all that occurs within the community." From almost the very beginning of the novel, Mae Holland has consistently been presented with one ethical challenge after another. When a person is digitally or even physically displaced, he or she — through technology and society — is forced to make a moral choice. The reader may see him or her make choices with which he or she morally, ethically, or at the very least personally disagrees. The gums, Circler, and other workers feel the same social pressures from technology. (Holmes et al.2022)

Conclusion

In the novel *The Circle*, readers are invited to critically engage with the application and impact of technology in society as the limits of technology and its influence on individual and collective behaviors are ever more stretching. In synthesis, the exploration in this paper demonstrated that the technology in The Circle not only parallels the constructed surveillance ecosystem presented by the theorized literature of technological surveillance but also examines how the individual's privacy, ethical guidelines, and boundaries have slowly been eroded as the narrative follows the exponential and rapid growth of TruYou and the Circle. The reading demonstrates that The Circle writers' ethical positionality is compromised but also reflects even broader real-world ethical considerations related to technological advances. Also the narrative presented a world where technological improvement was unquestionably beneficial to society. However, The Circle makes clear that developments in technology and their implications for society and individuals are not just pertinent to dystopian fiction, but implicate our behavior daily in real life. There are indeed numerous examples of the themes and issues used in The Circle that are of concern in today's digital economy. For example, pervasive surveillance, a crisis of privacy, and the erosion of free societies are increasingly urgent challenges attributable to fundamental structural and ethical principles. There is an urgent need for individuals who recognize that participation could cost them their personal and professional lives. The earlier in The Circle someone's awareness is sparked, the better off they are in terms of both being motivated to acquire tech literacy and avoid making life-changing mistakes.

References:

- C. Kobis, N., Soraperra, I., and Shalvi, S. "The consequences of participating in the sharing economy: A transparency-based sharing framework." Journal of Management, 2021. sagepub.com

- Centobelli, Piera, et al. "Blockchain technology for bridging trust, traceability and transparency in circular supply chain." Information & Management 59.7 (2022): 103508. e-tarjome.com

- Robinson, S. C. "Trust, transparency, and openness: How inclusion of cultural values shapes Nordic national public policy strategies for artificial intelligence (AI)." Technology in Society, 2020. sciencedirect.com

- Aho, B. and Duffield, R. "Beyond surveillance capitalism: Privacy, regulation and big data in Europe and China." Economy and Society, 2020. researchgate.net
- Arnall, A. "Climate change and security research: Conflict, securitisation and human agency." PLOS climate, 2023. plos.org
- Bail, C. "Breaking the social media prism: How to make our platforms less polarizing." 2022. [HTML]
- Bina, O., Inch, A., and Pereira, L. "Beyond techno-utopia and its discontents: On the role of utopianism and speculative fiction in shaping alternatives to the smart city imaginary." Futures, 2020. whiterose.ac.uk
- Cornelissen, Joep P., et al. "Building character: The formation of a hybrid organizational identity in a social enterprise." Journal of Management Studies 58.5 (2021): 1294-1330. wiley.com
- EGGERS, D. "11: Literary Imagination at the Digital Frontier: Dave Eggers's Recent Technological Dystopian Novels." degruyter.com, . [HTML]
- ElBatanony, Ahmed, and Giancarlo Succi. "Towards the no-code era: a vision and plan for the future of software development." Proceedings of the 1st ACM SIGPLAN International Workshop on Beyond Code: No Code. 2021. academia.edu
- Fisher, M. "The chaos machine: The inside story of how social media rewired our minds and our world." 2022. [HTML]
- Helsper, E. "The digital disconnect: The social causes and consequences of digital inequalities." 2021. [HTML]
- Koch, N. "Whose apocalypse? Biosphere 2 and the spectacle of settler science in the desert." Geoforum, 2021. nataliekoch.com
- Maiurova, Aleksandra, et al. "Promoting digital transformation in waste collection service and waste recycling in Moscow (Russia): Applying a circular economy paradigm to mitigate climate change impacts on the environment." Journal of Cleaner Production 354 (2022): 131604. utm.my
- Marinescu, Adrian, et al. "The future of manufacturing: Utopia or dystopia?." Human Factors and Ergonomics in Manufacturing & Service Industries 33.2 (2023): 184-200. wiley.com
- Schuilenburg, M. and Pali, B. "Smart city imaginaries: Looking beyond the techno-utopian vision." The Algorithmic Society, 2020. eur.nl
- Stewart, E. and Hartmann, D. "The new structural transformation of the public sphere." Sociological Theory, 2020. evan-stewart.com
- Tanner, G. "The circle of the snake: Nostalgia and utopia in the age of big tech." 2020. [HTML]
- Troster, C. and Van Quaquebeke, N. "When victims help their abusive supervisors: The role of LMX, self-blame, and guilt." Academy of Management Journal, 2021. [HTML]
- Wilf, J. "Technically Utopia: Technology and Control in Utopian Fiction." 2024. hawaii.edu

-   Yao, Linlin, et al. "Detection of coronavirus in environmental surveillance and risk monitoring for pandemic control." Chemical Society Reviews 50.6 (2021): 3656-3676. rsc.org
-   Zuk, P. "On the role of utopia in social thought and social sciences." History of European Ideas, 2020. [HTML]