

17. *THE CIRCLE*: A POST-DIGITAL CRITIQUE OF SURVEILLANCE AND MULTIMODAL NARRATIVES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

P.B. Byravi

II MA English, Department of English, Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli – 620 020.

ABSTRACT:

This paper deals with the novel *The Circle* (2013) by Dave Eggers it explores the ramifications of a digital society that is hyperconnected and controlled by monitoring. As a piece of post-digital fiction, the book examines how identity changes, privacy is undermined, and personal data is turned into a commodity in a time where digital transparency is valued. Through its interaction with corporate jargon, social media culture, and algorithmic regulation, the narrative structure which is often linear reflects multimodal storytelling and reflects the immersive and participatory aspect of modern digital encounters. *The Circle* explores the conflict between connectedness and control in a post-digital world where digital technologies are not new but rather pervasive in daily life. The novel shows how electronic ubiquity changes social behavior, ethical boundaries, and even ideas of selfhood, criticizing the normalization of constant digital interaction. The novel is an extension of the digital experience rather than a critique of it because Eggers' depiction of social media interactions, data analytics, and live-streaming culture is similar to real-world digital interfaces. The novel's relevance in talks about post-digital narratives is further supported by its thematic concerns, which speak to current discussions on data ethics, surveillance capitalism, and the psychological impacts of online existence. This study aims to illustrate *The Circle*'s function in linking literary fiction and digital culture by analyzing the book within the context of post-digital and multimodal narratives. By highlighting this, *The Circle* emphasizes how crucial it is to understand how technology affects human agency, privacy, and autonomy in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: *Post-digital society, Surveillance capitalism, Multimodal storytelling, Digital identity and Technological dystopia.*

INTRODUCTION:

The Circle (2013), a dystopian novel by Dave Eggers, criticizes the growing power of technology in contemporary society. The story examines the effects of monitoring, digital identity, and the degradation of human privacy in a near-future society where a dominant tech business, the Circle, controls all digital interactions worldwide. *The Circle* explores how the digital era has changed interpersonal relationships, government, and individual liberty as a piece of post-digital literature. It is also a powerful illustration of a multimodal tale, in which storytelling transcends conventional textual formats, due to its narrative structure and technological integration.

This paper examines *The Circle* from the perspectives of multimodal narratives—which integrate several forms of communication outside the written text—and post-digital literature, which is a term used to describe works that critically examine digital technology and its social impacts. We can gain a deeper

understanding of Eggers' novel's critique of digital culture and its implications for the future of narrative by examining it through these perspectives. Post-Digital Literature in *The Circle*

POST-DIGITAL LITERATURE IN THE CIRCLE:

The nexus of technology and narrative gives rise to post-digital literature, which frequently tackles issues of digital overload, monitoring, and the degradation of conventional human experiences. This genre is best represented by *The Circle*, which shows a civilization in which offline existence is completely replaced by digital technology. In the scenario portrayed in the story, the digital and physical worlds blend together, making it difficult to operate outside of the technical framework. The illusion of progress and transparency is one of the main themes of post-digital writing in *The Circle*. A company called The Circle, which looks like Google or Facebook, proposes laws that claim to better society by doing away with secrecy. The business promotes the ideas that "secrets are lies" and "privacy is theft" with initiatives like "SeeChange," in which people wear cameras to livestream their lives. These catchphrases illustrate how digital platforms coerce people into giving up their independence in exchange for a feeling of safety and belonging. The book criticizes how IT companies downplay ethical issues while portraying their innovations as inevitably advantageous.

The Circle's critique of digital identity and self-presentation is another important aspect of post-digital literature. The protagonist Mae Holland's journey from a motivated new hire to a committed supporter of complete surveillance serves as an example of how digital technologies mold personal identities. Mae's growing reliance on the Circle's algorithms for approval, validation, and even feelings demonstrates how technology shapes human conduct. Identity is now outwardly curated through internet participation and visibility in the post-digital world rather than being internal. The Circle also embodies the post-digital idea of technical inevitability, which holds that once a technology is developed, it will inevitably be widely adopted. This is demonstrated by the company's drive for total digital integration, which renders offline existence redundant. The novel illustrates the repercussions of a society in which digital technology controls every element of human existence, from voting to social interactions, as Mae fully adopts the Circle's philosophy.

MULTIMODAL NARRATIVES IN THE CIRCLE:

Multimodal narratives employ a variety of storytelling techniques, such as digital media, text, graphics, video, and hypertext. *The Circle* feels like an extension of the digital world it condemns because, although being a traditional print novel, it uses multimodal storytelling through its thematic investigation of digital interfaces, real-time surveillance, and online communication. The Circle's incorporation of digital speech and corporate jargon is among its most notable multimodal features. In order to simulate the sensation of exploring a social networking site, the novel regularly displays information in the form of slogans, emails, and live comments. For instance, the text replicates the fragmented, nonlinear nature of internet interactions by incorporating real-time audience reactions when Mae starts broadcasting her life through See Change. The reader is drawn into the same deluge of information that Mae is by this strategy.

The impact of algorithmic decision-making on the narrative structure is another important multi-

modal feature. Mae's decisions are increasingly influenced by data-driven feedback as she integrates herself deeper into the Circle's system. The novel's portrayal of her choices, which are frequently based on audience reactions, polls, and numerical rankings, reflects how social media algorithms affect behavior in the real world. Readers are compelled by this storytelling technique to consider the extent of people's agency in a digital world where analytics and metrics rule.

Furthermore, to illustrate how ubiquitous online culture is, *The Circle* employs recurring digital discourse. Throughout the book, phrases like "Privacy is theft" and "Sharing is caring" are used often to mimic how viral content spreads online. By demonstrating how ideology is strengthened by continuous exposure to carefully chosen content, this repetition serves as a type of digital conditioning. By using these linguistic patterns, the novel mimics how users' thoughts are shaped by repeated engagement on digital platforms. By fusing digital reality with fiction, the book also experiments with multimodal storytelling. Readers who understand how Silicon Valley businesses operate will see similarities between the Circle and actual tech behemoths like Google, Facebook, and Amazon. The novel feels like an extension of the reader's digital life because of how closely the book's fictional social media exchanges and corporate terminology mimic real-world online encounters. In this sense, *The Circle* actively interacts with a multimodal reality rather than merely portraying it.

SURVEILLANCE, TRANSPARENCY, AND POST-DIGITAL CONTROL:

One of the defining themes of post-digital literature in *The Circle* is the relationship between surveillance and transparency. The novel presents a world where privacy is considered obsolete, and individuals are expected to share every aspect of their lives online. The company's slogan, "Privacy is theft," reflects the growing ideology that personal secrecy is harmful to society. Through projects like "SeeChange," which requires individuals to wear cameras that broadcast their lives 24/7, the Circle promotes the idea that total transparency leads to a more accountable society.

However, Eggers critiques this notion by demonstrating how such transparency leads to the erosion of autonomy. Mae Holland, the protagonist, begins as an idealistic employee but eventually embraces the company's philosophy, allowing surveillance to dictate her behavior. Her gradual transformation illustrates the dangers of a world where individuals are conditioned to self-surveil for fear of being excluded or punished. In this way, *The Circle* functions as a post-digital warning, showing how digital technology creates a culture of voluntary surveillance that ultimately eliminates personal agency.

ALGORITHMIC IDENTITY AND THE LOSS OF INDIVIDUALITY:

Another key aspect of post-digital literature in *The Circle* is the idea of algorithmic identity—the notion that a person's value and choices are determined by data-driven feedback. Mae's life becomes increasingly governed by her social media engagement, with her popularity measured through online rankings, surveys, and audience reactions. This reflects how modern digital platforms influence real-world behavior, encouraging individuals to seek validation through algorithmically controlled systems.

Eggers critiques the quantification of self-worth by showing how Mae's interactions become performative. She constantly seeks approval from the Circle's audience, shaping her personality around what is most popular or acceptable. This mirrors how social media platforms in the real world reinforce certain

behaviors while discouraging others, ultimately shaping individual identity based on digital metrics rather than personal autonomy. The novel suggests that in a post-digital society, identity is no longer personal but externally curated. Mae's increasing dependence on the Circle's system reflects how digital culture erases authentic individuality, replacing it with algorithmically driven conformity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE:

The Circle's combination of multimodal components and post-digital themes emphasizes how modern literature is constantly changing. By integrating internet discourse, fragmented communication, and algorithm-driven decisions into its framework, *The Circle* defies the linear storytelling and solitary narrative views that are frequently seen in traditional novels. The novel's examination of narrative control in the digital era is among its most important contributions to post-digital literature. The Circle explores the subject of who controls tales in a world when algorithms and user interaction are increasingly influencing stories. Mae's experience shows how digital platforms affect people's thoughts and actions in addition to what they see. This analysis of storytelling in the digital age raises questions about literature's future in a world when data manipulation, artificial intelligence, and surveillance rule the day.

The novel also implies that literature will continue to be shaped by multimodal storytelling. Literature is probably going to become more interactive and hypertextual as digital technology develops, pushing the limits of print and digital media. In this way, *The Circle* functions as a critique of digital culture as well as an illustration of how technology is changing literature.

CONCLUSION:

The Circle by Dave Eggers is a key piece for comprehending the relationship between technology and storytelling since it perfectly captures the traits of post-digital literature and multimodal narratives. The story highlights the perils of an unregulated digital society by criticizing the prevalence of digital surveillance, the degradation of privacy, and the predominance of algorithm-driven identities. The multimodal aspect of modern storytelling is also reflected in its use of corporate language, fractured communication, and online interaction strategies.

Literature will increasingly address these issues as digital technology develops, stretching the limits of storytelling and audience experience. *The Circle* challenges readers to critically interact with the structures that create their world by acting as a warning and a mirror of the digital present. We may better understand how technology affects not just our lives but also how we tell and understand tales in the twenty-first century by examining the novel using the frameworks of post-digital literature and multimodal narratives.

Work Cited:

- [1] Eggers, Dave. *The Circle*. Knopf, 2013.
- [2] Andrejevic, Mark. *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.
- [3] Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. MIT Press, 1999.
- [4] Gane, Nicholas. "Surveillance, Security and the Digital Turn: *The Circle*, Big Data and the Securing of Life." *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2018, pp. 24–37.

-
- [5] Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*. University of Chicago Press, 2012.
 - [6] Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. PublicAffairs, 2019.