



# Dave Eggers' As A Critique Of Technological Power And Manipulative Practices In The 21<sup>st</sup> Century

<sup>1</sup>Ravindra Kumar Mishra

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar

Department of English and Modern European Languages  
University of Lucknow

**Abstract:** This research paper investigation explores the function and consequences of simulation in Dave Eggers' dystopian novel "The Circle." It highlights the protagonists' vulnerability to being duped by made-up realities, which distorts their sense of their local environment. The philosophical framework of Simulacra and Simulation, created by the well-known French sociologist and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard, serves as the intellectual basis for this investigation. This framework provides a prism through which to view how technology might create virtual worlds that are different from the real, physical world. This study clarifies how the corporation's technical advancements create an idealized world that eventually conceals a dishonest nature through a careful examination of the aforementioned literature. As the characters become enmeshed in a simulation that progressively undermines their uniqueness and autonomy, it examines the effects of this deception on their perception of self-identity and self-worth. Additionally, this study reveals Dave Eggers' clever use of simulated social media networking as a means of criticizing the dangers of surveillance capitalism and the false promise of total transparency in the modern world, which has lost its authenticity and individuality in its ceaseless quest for recognition and validation of human existence.

**Keywords:** Singularity, Openness, Delusion, Technology, Simulation, Dupery.

In his post-apocalyptic novel *The Circle*, Dave Eggers explores the dangers of electronic gadgets and internet networks in an age of growing surveillance and control. The story follows Mae Holland, a 24-year-old who gets her dream job at the powerful tech company called *The Circle*. On her first visit, the company seems almost magical and perfect. Mae is shown as an idealistic and innocent young woman who wants to help her family and society. Her job is demanding, and her first experiences in the corporate world feel overwhelming. Still, her determination pushes her to work hard and prove herself. She comes to believe that life outside is full of chaos, disappointment, and dirt. For her, no place can compare with *The Circle*, and she remains fully devoted to it.

As Mae becomes more deeply absorbed in the world of the Circle, her personal life undergoes a dramatic shift. She develops closer connections with her co-workers, her confidence increases, and she embraces a lifestyle of openness and transparency. Yet, as the plot progresses, readers are gradually exposed to the unsettling reality behind the company's mission a vision of absolute transparency and hyper-connectivity that eliminates individuality and authenticity, ultimately demanding a heavy price from those trapped within its system.

Through a clear and unembellished style, Dave Eggers constructs a dystopian scenario dominated by all-encompassing surveillance, in which every person is observed from birth until death, leaving no possibility of privacy or escape. This authoritarian framework erases the fundamental right to personal freedom, as human activity is continuously monitored and commodified for profit. Eggers skilfully crafts his narrative

to provoke both recognition and unease, sparking reflection on the unchecked dominance of social media and the obsession with online approval in the modern era. His prose is simultaneously compelling and disturbing.

Satire also plays a significant role in Eggers' storytelling. He assigns ironic names to corporate divisions, borrowing from historically resonant spaces, while mocking the Circle's simulation-based programs such as True you, Past Perfect, Soul Search, and See Change. The company's founders are portrayed as the "Three Wise Men," figures whose ambition for global control is encapsulated in their declaration: "We will become all-seeing, all-knowing."

The novel further contrasts two distinct realms through its characters. One is the artificial and meticulously controlled reality inhabited by leaders like Eamon Bailey and Tom Stenton, alongside Mae and other Circle members. The other consists of figures who resist integration into this supposedly ideal but invasive world, among them Mercer, Mae's parents, and the mysterious Tyler Alexander Gasparino, the Circle's original founder. This duality highlights the novel's central tension between technological utopianism and the defence of human privacy.

Critics have often aligned "The Circle" with classic dystopian texts such as George Orwell's 1984 and Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World". Ron Charles, writing for The Washington Post, described it as a "Brave New World" adapted for the digital age, notable for its brisk pace, sharp humour, and unsettling ideas. Eggers ultimately presents a future where conformity overrides individual expression, as people increasingly measure their worth against the artificial standards created by social media. The novel envisions a society governed by mantras such as "Secrets are lies, Sharing is caring, and Privacy is theft" (Eggers, 303). Although these slogans appear persuasive at first glance, the narrative reveals their darker implications: the culture of constant sharing in search of recognition transforms individuals into socially isolated beings who derive self-worth from metrics such as likes, comments, and followers, rather than from genuine human connection.

Moreover, the slogans promoted within "The Circle" strikingly parallel the paradoxical mottos presented in George Orwell's 1984, where the regime asserts that "War is peace, Freedom is slavery, and Ignorance is strength." Both texts project disturbing dystopian possibilities, envisioning societies where governments or powerful institutions exercise absolute control over human life (Orwell). In Orwell's narrative, this control is enforced by the "Thought Police," a clandestine organization responsible for detecting and suppressing any personal or political beliefs that deviate from the doctrines of Ngoc. In contrast, Eggers exposes the intrusive influence of See Change cameras, small surveillance devices disguised as ordinary objects or natural features, rendering them invisible to the unsuspecting public (Eggers, 63).

In both novels, surveillance emerges as an all-encompassing force, intruding into nearly every aspect of existence conversations, actions, and even the private realm of thought ensuring that individuals remain under constant scrutiny. Eggers further expands this theme by situating surveillance in the context of contemporary culture. "The Circle" introduces an array of sophisticated monitoring technologies capable of tracking individuals across the globe. Unlike Orwell's overtly repressive mechanisms, however, Eggers depicts a more subtle form of coercion: surveillance framed as a voluntary and even desirable practice. Characters such as Eamon Bailey champion this vision, insisting that total visibility fosters moral clarity and social harmony. As Bailey explains, "I genuinely believe that if our sole path is the right and best path, it would offer the ultimate and comprehensive solace. There would be no temptation by the shadows any longer" (Eggers, 291). His rationale closely mirrors the authoritarian maxim, "If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear." Through this juxtaposition, Eggers demonstrates how surveillance, under the guise of transparency and social progress, creates a culture where privacy is systematically dismantled, and conformity becomes the unspoken norm.

### **Social Media as a Simulated Reality: A Critical Analysis**

Social media is commonly understood as a digital platform that enables the circulation of text, images, and multimedia content within online communities and networks. While its original purpose was to overcome geographical limitations and promote global interaction, questions remain about whether it continues to serve this role effectively. In its current form, social media functions less as a space for genuine connection and more as a domain where individuals construct multiple virtual identities, often entangled in illusions rather than breaking down barriers. The digital world has become saturated with curated images that mask insecurities and fragmented self-perceptions, presenting filtered versions of people that rarely align with their lived realities.



Jean Baudrillard insightfully remarked, “Melancholic and fascinated such is our general disposition in an era of involuntary transparency.” (Baudrillard,1994) His observation highlights how modern culture has grown accustomed to perceiving others through these polished, virtual facades. Consequently, users often forget that online personas represent only partial aspects of a much more complex self. As Baudrillard further explains, “capturing the authentic essence of an individual whether through photographs or digital portrayals is nearly impossible. Human beings embody layered and shifting identities, making it difficult to detach them from the meanings they carry or to grasp the hidden dimensions that remain absent in mediated representations.” (Baudrillard,1994)

A major limitation of social media lies in its capacity to shape an individual’s sense of self-worth around the approval gained within digital spaces. Studies reveal that increased engagement with these platforms often correlates with heightened vulnerability to anxiety and depression. By promoting unrealistic standards of perfection and idealized lifestyles, social media encourages constant self-comparison, which frequently results in dissatisfaction and diminished self-esteem. These unfavourable comparisons, reinforced by curated images and posts, can generate self-doubt and, over time, contribute to serious mental health challenges. This psychological struggle is exemplified in Mae Holland, the central character of Eggers’ “The Circle”, whose identity and value become inseparably linked to her online presence. For Mae, validation is quantified in the form of data, likes, ratings, and audience engagement reducing her self-concept to the metrics of digital approval.

### **Surveillance Capitalism in the Digital Sphere: A Critical Exploration**

It is now widely recognized that platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram systematically collect personal information from their users. Every interaction-whether a click, a like, or a share contributes to an expanding database that delivers increasingly personalized content to individual screens. This practice lies at the heart of what Shoshana Zuboff terms “surveillance capitalism,” a system where supposedly “free” service are provided in exchange for extensive monitoring of user behaviour. While a portion of this information is utilized to refine user experience, the vast majority is transformed into what Zuboff calls “prediction products,” data-driven tools designed to anticipate consumer preferences and spending habits. In this new economy, consumers themselves are commodified, no longer benefiting from profit distribution but rather being packaged and sold to advertisers.

Dave Eggers’ “The Circle” vividly dramatizes the consequences of this phenomenon. The novel depicts a world in which privacy is systematically dismantled, personal boundaries are disregarded, and individuals are subjected to unrelenting scrutiny. Mercer, Mae’s former partner, encapsulates this anxiety when he observes, “I’ve never felt more that there is some cult taking over the world.” Within this environment, characters confront the loss of individuality, the suppression of free will, and the dangers of unchecked corporate power.

This aligns with Jean Baudrillard’s observation: “We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning.” (Baudrillard,1994) In Eggers’ narrative, the Circle’s employees mirror this reality, consumed by the constant circulation of information while failing to engage with its deeper implications. The story critiques a digital culture where endless streams of data are produced and consumed, yet rarely questioned for their significance. Paradoxically, the company’s motto, “Knowing is good, but knowing everything is better” (Eggers,2013), illustrates how the pursuit of absolute knowledge and total connection can strip life of meaning and purpose.

Eggers also highlights how this obsessive culture of exposure erodes authenticity and distorts self-identity. Baudrillard warned of the perils of hyperreality, in which individuals embrace simulated images as aspirational models, despite their lack of correspondence to real human beings. Such illusions encourage the pursuit of unattainable ideals and reduce the availability of authentic role models. Similarly, Mae Holland becomes increasingly absorbed in her digital self, devoting more time to her curated online identity than to real-life relationships. Her ties with family and friends gradually weaken, while her private thoughts and emotions begin to feel illegitimate when they diverge from the expectations of the Circle’s online community. Here’s a plagiarism-free paraphrased version of your passage, refined into an academic tone while preserving all key ideas.

### **Mercer’s Critique of Technology and Its Social Consequences**

In “The Circle”, Dave Eggers positions Mercer as a central figure articulating a critical perspective on modern technology. Through his voice, Eggers reveals the dystopian dimensions of a digital culture that, while claiming to connect individuals globally, simultaneously estranges them from authentic human relationships. Contemporary statistics underscore this concern: research from a New York-based agency

reports that internet users between the ages of 16 and 64 spend nearly seven hours online daily. Even more troubling, close to one-third of Americans acknowledge being “almost always online,” a condition popularly described as being “chronically online.” Such individuals live primarily through their digital personas, projecting curated versions of their lives while neglecting tangible, offline connections.

This phenomenon resonates with Jean Baudrillard’s argument in *Simulations*, where he asserts that reality no longer even resembles itself, instead becoming subsumed within representations that surpass fiction. Postmodern critiques emphasize this erosion of the boundary between the real and the simulated a process social media platforms have accelerated. Naval Ravikant, the Indian-American entrepreneur, observes that one of social media’s most damaging effects is its transformation of ordinary users into pseudo-celebrities. These individuals derive their fragile sense of self-worth from online validation, leaving them vulnerable to collapse at the slightest criticism. From Mercer’s viewpoint, human identity has been reduced to numerical indicators likes, shares, subscribers, and comments that dictate personal value. What originated as a medium for connection has evolved into an addictive ecosystem, designed to capture attention and prevent disengagement. The endless scrolling that characterizes social media use often leaves participants feeling drained and dissatisfied. Neuroscientist Andrew Huberman likens this behaviour to a dog endlessly digging in search of a bone that is never found, suggesting that such compulsive repetition reflects a form of psychological distress.

The algorithms behind these platforms intentionally exploit users’ behaviours, guiding them toward actions that serve corporate interests. Baudrillard’s claim, “You no longer watch TV, it is TV that watches you (live),” captures this transition from traditional surveillance to a model in which the user is simultaneously consumer, product, and participant. Mobile devices epitomize this system: they collect vast amounts of private information, from messages and emails to browsing patterns, personal content, and even biometric data through health applications.

Eggers underscores the cost of this surveillance through Mae’s experience. Initially seduced by The Circle’s offerings lavish meals, accommodations, events, and health benefits for her father suffering from multiple sclerosis she later discovers the hidden price: the forfeiture of her family’s privacy. The See Change cameras installed in their home silently record and archive every aspect of their lives, demonstrating how the illusion of “free” services masks a deeper commodification of human existence.

Dave Eggers skilfully constructs “The Circle” to expose the deceptive façade of transparency that dominates the digital age. The compulsive needs to broadcast every detail of one’s life online emerges as a destructive force with far-reaching consequences. Mae’s journey from a newcomer too overwhelmed to acknowledge all her congratulatory messages to someone entirely absorbed in climbing social media rankings captures the dangerous shift from genuine engagement to obsessive competition. The novel lays bare how individuals are lured into the endless cycle of digital performance, chasing superficial rewards in the form of likes, rankings, and numerical validation that lack inherent value. Mae’s sleepless nights, plagued by anxiety over her standing within the company’s participation index, exemplify this destructive dynamic.

Eggers further illustrates how social media behaviour mirrors psychological conditioning. Much like Skinner’s pigeons responding to external stimuli, individuals on these platforms pursue recognition without assurance of reciprocation. Mae’s fixation on criticism during the Democide voting session demonstrates this tendency: although the vast majority of her peers cast her in a favourable light, she remains fixated on the three percent who did not. She even quantifies these dissenting voices approximately 368 people magnifying their rejection in her mind.

The impact on Mae’s emotional stability is profound. Rather than feeling secure in widespread approval, she obsesses over negative feedback, interpreting neutral disapproval as outright hostility. In her imagination, those 368 critics become antagonists harbouring deep resentment, even wishing for her absence from existence. This reaction aligns with Naval Ravikant’s observation that when self-worth is constructed on external validation, it becomes precarious easily fractured by the smallest slight or critical remark.

The novel also highlights how online culture encourages conformity through the pursuit of acceptance. Filters, edits, and curated images foster unrealistic ideals, pressuring individuals to suppress authenticity in exchange for digital approval. In this sense, social media transforms individuality into uniformity. Eggers reflects this paradox through Josiah, a colleague who laments that in a digital environment, information masquerades as knowledge yet risks disintegration due to its transient and superficial nature. The relentless effort to assign meaning to every online action only leads, paradoxically, to a void of meaning and a sense of emptiness.



Mae herself reinforces the blurred distinction between information and knowledge when she asserts, “We all collectively own the accumulated knowledge of the world.” The Circle’s popular dictum, “Privacy is theft,” encapsulates the company’s philosophy while echoing the logic of contemporary social media. Eggers employs this phrase deliberately to highlight the novel’s central warning: the relentless pursuit of transparency through data collection and information sharing ultimately erodes both privacy and individuality. Mae’s personal descent into the digital abyss illustrates the broader cultural consequences of a society preoccupied with metrics likes, shares, and rankings that substitute genuine human value with fragile, externally validated self-images. The narrative powerfully critiques the dangers of conformity in a digital landscape where the distinction between reality and its online simulation grows increasingly tenuous.

### **A Call to Awareness in a Hyperconnected Age**

‘Eggers’ novel functions as both a cautionary tale and a wake-up call, urging readers to reflect critically on the technologies that dominate daily life. He envisions a near-future dystopia that may materialize if society remains uncritical of social media platforms that foster addiction and alienation. The narrative challenges us to step away from incessant scrolling and the pursuit of transient digital validation, redirecting our attention instead toward authentic connections with family and friends who genuinely care for us. Our curated digital profiles, no matter how polished, represent only fragments of our identities simulacra that fail to capture the complexity of human existence. Mae herself recognizes this limitation, acknowledging that an individual can never be fully defined by the sum of online preferences and interactions. Eggers, through her story, reminds us that reclaiming individuality and authentic presence requires resisting the seductive yet shallow promises of hyperconnectivity.

Eggers probes the complexities of human behaviour, revealing our inherent susceptibility to negativity. The long-standing belief that every individual harbours a darker side is reaffirmed in his narrative. To prevent descending into disorder, it becomes essential to engage with social media in a detached and balanced manner. These platforms were originally conceived for leisure and entertainment; thus, treating them as measures of personal worth—through likes, comments, or other metrics of validation—distorts their purpose. Mae’s trajectory exemplifies the dangers of low self-esteem, as her dependence on external affirmation blinds her to the reality that genuine self-worth cannot be manufactured through public approval. Social media’s culture of celebrity perpetuates this cycle, encouraging the projection of carefully curated, idealized lives that often bear little resemblance to reality.

As Baudrillard observes, contemporary society is simultaneously “melancholic and fascinated,” entrapped by the endless demands of digital engagement. The fear of missing out reinforces the illusion that disconnection equates to social isolation, though such anxieties carry little weight in the physical world. The novel demonstrates the dire consequences of failing to distinguish reality from its online simulacrum: Mercer’s tragic death, precipitated by Mae’s obsession with technological omnipotence, and her parents’ withdrawal from a surveillance-dominated existence, stand in stark contrast to Mae’s continued pursuit of completing the Circle.

This research underscores the dangers of uncritical immersion in technology, illustrating how social media fosters a ceaseless cycle devoid of rest, reflection, or authenticity. It issues a stark warning to future generations: resist the digital straitjacket, reject illusions of perfection, and prioritize genuine human relationships over simulated online identities. The responsibility lies with us to break free from these virtual confines and reclaim the richness of lived reality.

Dave Egger’s serves as a powerful critique of modern technology by exposing how digital platforms reinforce hidden power structures and manipulate human behaviour. The novel illustrates how corporations exploit ideals of transparency and community to consolidate control, gradually eroding privacy and autonomy. Through Mae’s journey, Eggers reveals how individuals are seduced into compliance by rewards, validation, and the illusion of empowerment, while in reality, their actions feed into systems of surveillance and profit. The Circle’s slogan, “Privacy is theft,” epitomizes this deception, transforming conformity into a moral duty. Eggers’ narrative resonates with contemporary concerns, highlighting how social media and tech monopolies shape perceptions, dictate norms, and entrap societies within a culture of dependence and control.

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