DIGITAL ALIENATION AND THE CRISIS OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION

Dr. Neeta Pandey

ABSTRACT

This paper explores digital alienation in contemporary fiction, examining performative online identities, AI companionship, the internet paradox and how social media widens class divides and weakens human relationships.

KEYWORDS-alienation, contemporary, crisis, digital, fiction, human relationship

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Digital alienation in contemporary fiction reflects how screens, algorithms, and virtual spaces replace authentic interpersonal bonds with simulated contact. Rather than curing isolation, hyper-connectivity often deepens psychological fragmentation and emotional detachment.

Core Themes in Contemporary Literature

- **Performative Identities:** Characters curate idealized online personas that clash with their lived realities, causing severe emotional dissonance. Validation shifts from genuine human empathy to fleeting digital metrics (likes, views, and notifications).
- **Synthetic and AI Companionship:** Novels and stories frequently explore artificial intelligence or synthetic entities (such as in Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun) to question what it means to be truly understood versus programmed to please.
- **The Internet Paradox:** Increased digital networking frequently correlates with a shrinking capacity for deep social involvement, turning shared physical spaces into sites of mutual distraction.
- **Commodification of Intimacy:** Human relationships are increasingly refracted through data flows, market logic, and surveillance, turning affection and conversation into transactional digital products.

Writers and cultural theorists emphasize how digital environments reshape modern loneliness and self-perception.

> “The virtualization of digital products makes consumers' relationships with their consumption objects abstract and estranged.”

> “Characters curate online personas that diverge from their lived realities, producing emotional dissonance and psychological strain.”

“In AI-focused fiction, artificial entities can grow to be objects of love, consider, and dependence, even if their potential for subjective enjoy remains uncertain.

Keywords: digital, alienation, crisis, human relationship, contemporary, fiction

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development and proliferation of technology in the digital age have induced profound social, economic, and cultural transformations. This paper aims to examine the manifestations and impacts of alienation in the digital era through a philosophical framework. Utilizing theoretical analysis, the study delves into the diverse forms of modern alienation by considering the rise of digital capitalism and the effects of technology on labor, products, and social relations. Initially, the paper reviews the classic concept of alienation and applies it to analyze labor, product, and social relation alienation in the current digital context. Through a systematic review of relevant literature and philosophical reflection, the paper highlights that, alongside convenience and efficiency, digital technology exacerbates individual alienation, particularly in virtual product consumption and digital social networks. The review emphasizes the necessity of addressing this alienation through education and technological ethics to achieve autonomy and agency in the digital context. [1,2,3] The paper advocates for critical thinking about digital technology to foster more humane development and societal transformation. Inherent to the experience of loneliness is a significant change of meaningful relatedness that (usually negatively) affects a person's relationship to self and others. This paper goes beyond a purely subjective-phenomenological description of individual suffering by emphasizing loneliness as a symptomatic expression of distortions of social recognition relations. Where there is loneliness, a recognition relation has changed. Most societies face an increase in loneliness among all groups of their population, and this sheds light on the reproduction conditions of social integration and inclusion. These functions are essential lifeworldly components of social cohesion and wellbeing. This study asks whether “social” AI promotes these societal success goals of social integration of lonely people. The increasing tendency to regard AI Companions (AICs) as reproducers of adequate recognition is critically discussed with this review. My skepticism requires further justification, especially as a large portion of sociopolitical prevention efforts aim to fight an increase of loneliness primarily with digital strategies. I will argue that AICs rather reproduce than sustainably reduce the pathodynamics of loneliness: loneliness gets simply “digitized.”

DISCUSSION

Alienation is one of the important problems represented in contemporary literature. In the modern world, people are connected through technology, migration, education, cities, and social media, but many still experience loneliness and a lack of belonging. This paper studies alienation as a crisis of identity in contemporary literature. It examines how literary characters feel separated from society, family, culture, place, and sometimes from their own selves. The study focuses on three major ideas: loneliness, belonging, and the modern self[4,5,6]. It uses a qualitative and interpretive method based on close reading and critical discussion of selected contemporary literary works. The paper refers to works such as Jhumpa Lahiri's The Lowland, Mohsin Hamid's Exit West, and other contemporary texts dealing with migration, cultural displacement, urban life, and identity. The study argues that alienation is not simply physical separation from other people. It is also an emotional and psychological condition in which individuals cannot fully understand where they belong. The paper further argues that alienation can sometimes become a productive experience because it forces individuals to question old identities and create new forms of selfhood. The study concludes that contemporary literature

presents identity as something flexible, changing, and continuously negotiated rather than fixed. Alienation and the crisis of human identity constitute central concerns of modern English fiction, reflecting the psychological, social, and existential uncertainties associated with the transformation of modern society. The weakening of traditional social relationships, the expansion of industrial civilization, changing gender expectations, and the fragmentation of established cultural values created new challenges for individuals attempting to construct meaningful identities. This article critically examines the representation of alienation and identity crisis in the selected fiction of Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence, focusing particularly on Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Sons and Lovers, and Women in Love. Employing a qualitative comparative textual analysis, the study investigates how both novelists portray the conflict between individual consciousness and external social expectations. The analysis draws upon modernist literary criticism, existential philosophy, psychoanalytic perspectives, and theories of social alienation to explore the relationship between personal identity, emotional isolation, social conventions, and the search for authentic existence.[7,8,9] The study argues that Woolf primarily represents alienation through fragmented consciousness, memory, psychological vulnerability, and the instability of personal identity, whereas Lawrence emphasizes the tensions among instinct, sexuality, industrial civilization, and interpersonal relationships. Despite these differences, both writers challenge conventional assumptions concerning the unity and stability of the individual self. Their fiction reveals that identity emerges through an ongoing negotiation between inner experience and external social forces. The article concludes that Woolf and Lawrence offer distinct yet complementary interpretations of modern alienation, demonstrating how psychological fragmentation and social disconnection complicate individual's search for belonging, emotional fulfillment and meaningful selfhood.[10,11,12]

RESULTS

Through the lives of its characters, who search for purpose and connection in a world that is changing quickly, Vikram Seth's The Golden Gate examines issues of technology, alienation, and contemporary relationships. The novel emphasizes how human interactions are impacted by changing cultural norms and technological breakthroughs, which frequently result in emotional isolation despite constant contact. John's battle with digital alienation demonstrates the paradox of modern communication and speaks to larger worries about relationships in the modern world. Since digital communication sometimes takes the place of in-person relationships, leaving people feeling detached, these topics are still very important today. The author's art highlights the importance of real human connection while criticizing the impact of technology on emotional health. The review poses important queries on the effects of technology advancement on society, even though it does not explicitly denounce it. The novel poses important queries on the effects of technological advancement on social ties, even though it does not explicitly denounce it. In the end, The Golden Gate serves as a reminder to readers that although technology can be convenient, it should not take the place of people's basic need for purpose and meaningful relationships therefore the study will explore the role of technology and will find out the consequences of modern aalienation and disconnection in the era of digital world.[13,14,15]

The rapid and wide proliferation of digital technologies and ‘digital first’ ideology has exposed society to significant risks. While useful or even transformative, these technologies often advance without adequate consideration of their societal implications, leading to potentially

degraded resilience in social systems and threats to civic and social values. We explore the social values dilemmas arising from societal digitalization, characterized by the tension between the promises of digital innovation and unintended consequences, which challenge foundational values such as privacy, equity, and democratic participation. By critiquing the dominance of neoliberal market logic in shaping digital infrastructure, we reveal how current trajectories can undermine public institutions and exacerbate societal inequalities. Using examples from the embeddedness of digital infrastructures, mass surveillance, and disinformation, we highlight cascading failures that destabilize critical systems and erode social cohesion. To address these challenges, we trace the origins of the social values dilemma to the neoliberal policies of the 1990s and show how these have evolved into existential societal crises in the 21st century. We advocate for a sociotechnical systems approach that prioritizes participatory governance, ethical design, and long-term evaluation of digital technologies. Collaboration among governments, scientific communities, and civil society is essential to ensure digital advancements align with collective social values, mitigate risks, and foster a resilient digital society. By incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives and embracing both digital and non-digital alternatives, societies can achieve a balanced approach to digitalization that preserves human agency, civic participation and democratic values. As technology influences societies worldwide and invents new opportunities and challenges, its role in education has become increasingly relevant. As the learning environment adapts and incorporates new e-teaching tools, it becomes imperative to find the role, place of technology in education, and examine the voices of educators that work with various technologies in teaching and learning to train young learners. Therefore, this research aims to examine if educators believe that they can inculcate the 21st century skills into the modern student in an online teaching environment. Furthermore, the research attempts to find the obstacles on part of the educators and students that inhibit delivery of a seamless online educational experience and teaching of the 21st century competencies.[16,17,18]

At the core of this paper is a psychosocial inquiry into the Marxist concept of alienation and its applications to the field of digital labour. Following a brief review of theoretical works on alienation,it looks into its recent conceptualisations and applications to the study of online social networking sites. Subsequently, the authors offer suggestions on how to extend and render more complex these recent approaches through in-depth analyses of Facereview posts that exemplify how alienation is experienced, articulated, and expressed online. Supporting this perspective, the article draws on Rahel

Jaeggi's (2005) reassessment of alienation, as well as the depth-hermeneutic method of "scenic understanding" developed by Alfred Lorenzer (e.g. 1970; 1986).

It poses the question of the extent to which the digital work engaged in by different occupational groups in the service sector is accompanied by specific experiences of alienation, and what efforts to appropriate work can be identified on the part of the employees. To this end, a new approach to exploring subjective experiences of alienation has been adopted. The study seeks to obtain insights into the experiences of groups of employees with different levels of qualifications, in order to arrive at an understanding of the interpretations of and ways of dealing with the potential for alienation in the world of digital work. On this basis, it will be possible to develop a meaningful conception of digital alienation, which is connected to the experiences of employees and serves as a complement to inquiries into other experiences of suffering at work.

Moreover, it is of central importance that a conception of digital alienation be developed that avoids a technologically deterministic perspective, but that instead adopts a conception of digital technologies as playing a structuring rather than a determining role. By adopting the innovative approach of conducting empirical research into alienation, this project will also produce insights that are relevant not only to the narrow discussion taking place within sociology, but also to broader research on philosophical and psychological alienation.

Class segregation is deepening geographically, producing a society whose cities are divided by both real and figurative walls. As I explore in this series of articles, this isolation reproduces itself, creating new generations for whom discrimination is a virtue and individualism a structural way of life. But how has all this been reinforced in the age of social media—a time when billions across the world are more connected than ever before?

In truth, spatial and educational isolation has collided with the new forms of communication provided by the internet. People now consume massive amounts of conflicting information, fueling a pervasive sense of helplessness and a collapse in hope for change. In such a confused world, individualism begins to appear like a rational response.

On social media, even activism has become virtual. Every incident is treated as an issue requiring an immediate stance, detached from any social context or organizational framework, and lacking collective mechanisms for action. This approach kills the collective spirit, reducing politics to individual moral stances that are devoid of impact. Individualism might seem like a refuge, but in reality, it deepens isolation and reinforces political impotence.[19,20]

Such individualism does not necessarily lead to sound ethical behavior. On the contrary, it often serves to justify inequality and to normalize injustice. In turn, this produces violence among alienated and isolated groups; a violence that begins within each insular class but soon transcends class boundaries.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite being tools for communication, social media play a key role in widening class divides and generating new forms of social estrangement. What should have been spaces for solidarity and connection have become arenas of endless individual display. Through images and text, they reproduce class disparities daily.

Screens now reflect two parallel worlds: the elite flaunting luxury vacations and gated compounds, and the masses, left with little more than space to complain or plead for help. This dynamic fosters what might be called “digital alienation,” where social media becomes a stage for artificial performance. The wealthy showcase idealized versions of their lives, while the poor are confined to the roles of beggars. The result is a psychological and political gap that goes beyond material inequality: it shapes contrasting expectations and self-perceptions.

More dangerously, these platforms become powerful tools to reinforce class divisions by rationalizing isolation as desirable. Ads for luxury compounds frame seclusion as a virtue, while charity campaigns present poverty as a natural phenomenon to be met with charity, not justice. This diminishes the potential for collective action, replacing it with fleeting individual reactions

that vanish like passing fads, leaving no real impact.

In this sense, social media becomes a powerful tool in the hands of capitalism—propagating a fragmented consciousness that cannot link daily suffering to the economic structures of the capitalist system. Through complex mechanisms, community solidarity becomes a digital illusion, and meaningful political engagement is replaced by a cacophony of voices that leads only to further individualism.[20]

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