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**Social Media in Contemporary Novels**

**Jana Špatenková**

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## ZADÁNÍ DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

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Jméno a příjmení: **Bc. Jana Špatenková**  
Osobní číslo: **H16342**  
Studijní program: **N7310 Filologie**  
Studijní obor: **Anglická filologie**  
Název tématu: **Sociální média v současných románech**  
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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Problematika sociálních sítí patří mezi nejdiskutovanější rysy současné doby. Studentka se ve své práci zaměří na skupinu současných románů, které se tímto tématem zabývají buď okrajově nebo ji staví do role ústředního motivu: Kruh (D. Eggers), Megasmutná pravdivá lovestory (G. Shteyngart), Komu patří budoucnost (J. Lanier), Feed (M.T. Anderson), Stačí jen chtít (J. Charbonneau), Look at Me (J. Egan). V první části práce autorka vypracuje teoretický rámec, ve kterém se s pomocí relevantní sekundární literatury zamyslí nad podstatou sociálních médií a jejich dopadem na současnou společnost (z hlediska sociálního, politického, aj.). Na tomto základě vypracuje detailní analýzu románů s cílem zmapovat povahu jejich zobrazování tohoto společenského jevu. Mezi témata, na která se bude soustředit, budou patřit otázky lidskosti, soukromí, svobody, moci, osobní identity, a podobně. V závěrečné části své práce autorka z předchozích zjištění vyvodí konkrétní závěry.

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**PhDr. Ladislav Vít, Ph.D.**

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

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prof. PhDr. Karel Rýdl, CSc.  
děkan



L.S.

doc. Šárka Bubíková, Ph.D.  
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### Primární zdroje:

- ANDERSON, Matthew Tobin. *Feed*. Berkeley: Candlewick Press, 2012.  
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I hereby declare:

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## **ANNOTATION**

Social media are modern means of communication, allowing people to share information. They can be a useful tool for chatting and approaching other people, but at the same time they may become a tool of control and power. Many contemporary American novels deal with the topic of social media as a particularly topical problem. One of them, *The Circle*, a novel written by twenty-first-century American writer Dave Eggers, depicts a story of a young girl who uses social media and experiences their negative influence on the society. Other interesting American novels examining the problematics of social media from different angles are *Feed* by M. T. Anderson, *Need* by Joel Charbonneau, and *Super Sad True Love Story* by Gary Shteyngart. All of these books depict social media in a hypothetical future.

The aim of this paper is to analyze in detail social media in novel *The Circle*, supplemented with the information about social media networks from other novels. The objective of the thesis is to demonstrate how social media influence moral aspects and humanity from the dystopian point of view.

## **KEYWORDS**

social media, dystopia, utopia, moral aspects

*The Circle, Feed, Need, Super Sad True Love Story*

## **NÁZEV PRÁCE**

Sociální sítě v současných románech

## **ANOTACE**

Sociální sítě představují moderní prostředek, který umožňuje komunikaci a sdílení informací mezi lidmi. Mohou být užitečným nástrojem pro psaní a kontaktování lidí, ale zároveň se mohou stát nástrojem kontroly a moci. Mnoho současných amerických románů se zabývá tématem sociálních sítí jakožto aktuálním problémem. Jedním z nich je i *The Circle*, román z dvacátého prvního století od amerického autora Davea Eggerse, který vypráví příběh mladé dívky, jež začne používat sociální sítě a sama zažije jejich negativní dopad na společnost. Další zajímavé americké romány zabývající se problematikou sociálních sítí z různých úhlů pohledu jsou *Feed* od M. T. Andersona, *Need* od Joel Charbonneauové a *Super Sad True Love Story* od Garyho Shteyngarta. Všechny tyto knihy zobrazují sociální sítě v hypotetické budoucnosti.

Cílem práce je detailně analyzovat sociální sítě v románu *The Circle* a doplnit je o informace o sociálních sítích z ostatních románů. Záměrem práce je ukázat, jaký vliv mají sociální sítě na morální aspekty a lidskost z dystopického hlediska.

### **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

sociální sítě, dystopie, utopie, morální aspekty

*The Circle, Feed, Need, Super Sad True Love Story*



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## INTRODUCTION

This diploma thesis deals with moral aspects of social media in contemporary novels. The analyzed books represent contemporary American novels with dystopian and science fiction tone. Some of them are set in a contemporary modern world, pointing out current problems related to social media, while the other ones are set in a hypothetical future with more advanced technology.

The aim of the paper is to show the negative aspects of social media and their influence on people. The moral aspects that will be described and analyzed are following: identity, socialization, addition, degradation, sharing, corporations, manipulation, monitoring, privacy, freedom, power and totality. The objective of the thesis is to clarify how social media influence the society as well as the above-mentioned aspects and how destructive they can be for humanity. The novels are written with a dystopian theme, which makes the focus of the thesis cleared and the analysis easier to examine.

The theoretical part begins with a chapter defining the basic concepts related to social media, namely science fiction, utopia, dystopia, humanity and morality, as they are necessary for understanding the given problematics. The next two chapters are devoted to the depiction of social media and related aspects. The first subchapter explains the terminology related to social media, starting with the definitions of the Internet, a medium, communication, and ending with the distinction between mass media and social media. The second subchapter clarifies various definitions of social media and its history, followed by an enumeration of the types of social media networks, and concluding with the definition of social media that is based on sociality.

The analytical part is divided into two parts. The first part of the analysis introduces the analyzed social media novels by depicting their stories. The first one is the story of *The Circle* as it is the most important book for the analysis and an insight into its story is necessary for its study. The stories of other novels, namely *Feed*, *Need* and *Super Sad True Love Story*, follow. Moreover, this part of the analysis includes a brief descriptions of social media tools which can be found in all the analyzed books. Due to providing such a depiction of social media, it will be easier to comprehend the analysis and individual aspects. The second part of the analysis is devoted to the description of social media in a book *The Circle*. Moreover, its depiction is supplemented by an analysis of social media networks in secondary novels such as *Feed*, *Need*, and *Super Sad True Love Story*. The third part of the analytical

section is devoted mainly to the deep examination of social media and aspects from the dystopian point of view. The examined, mostly negative, aspects are the following ones: identity, socializing, addiction, degradation, sharing, corporations, manipulation, monitoring, transparency and privacy, complemented by the aspects of freedom, free will and totality. The comparison of various, mostly negative, aspects of social media from the novels is included in the analysis, based on finding similarities and differences between the individual aspects of the novels.

The theoretical background of social media and their impact on people is described and added to the individual chapters of the analytical part in order to keep content compact and comparable. Theoretical pieces of knowledge are immediately presented on practical examples from *The Circle* which is the primary source of analysis. However, this book is not the only analyzed one; the information found in *The Circle* is compared with social media impacts in the other books, namely *Feed*, *Need* and *Super Sad True Love Story*, which are the secondary novels used for the analysis.

The conclusion presents the results of the analysis, showing that social media have a huge negative impact on people's lives. It sums up the knowledge and information gathered in the practical part.

# 1. Theoretical background of social media

## 1.1 Terminology

### 1.1.1 Science fiction

Science fiction (abbreviated to *SF*, alternatively *sci-fi*) is a literary genre which comes under prose fiction that deals with “the probable consequences of some improbable or impossible transformation of the basic conditions of human (or intelligent non-human) existence.”<sup>1</sup> Science fiction genre is connected with utopian and apocalyptic writings,<sup>2</sup> and it refers to a piece of work of the same name, or to imaginative fiction.<sup>3</sup>

Concerning setting, science fiction is usually set in the future and deals with technological progress. It describes “the influence of scientific advances on human life,”<sup>4</sup> as well as technology and futuristic inventions, and involves topics such as ecological catastrophes, extraterrestrial invasions, mutations of realities, time travels, etc.<sup>5</sup> In science fiction, the world and reality is different from our own. “The difference is based on extrapolations made from one or more changes or suppositions. The distinction is explained (explicitly or implicitly) in scientific or rational, as opposed to supernatural, terms.”<sup>6</sup>

### 1.1.2 Utopia

Utopia is a term denoting fiction describing ‘an imaginary ideal world’. The term was coined by Sir Thomas More; he firstly used it in his Latin work *Utopia* (1516) with the significance of a ‘perfect political state’. To explain the origin of the word, the word ‘utopia’ is a pun that has its origin in Greek; it consists of two words: ‘outopia’ (meaning ‘no place’) and ‘eutopia’ (meaning ‘good place’).<sup>7</sup> Another meaning of the word ‘utopia’ indicates “a place, a state, location, or condition which is perfect or ideal with regard to politics, economy, social structure, etc.”<sup>8</sup> or a work set in such a place. Moreover, utopia denotes “an imagined form of

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 230.

<sup>2</sup> Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 230.

<sup>3</sup> Jeff Prucher, *Brave New Worlds: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 172.

<sup>4</sup> David Mikics, *A New Handbook of Literary Terms* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 273.

<sup>5</sup> Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 230.

<sup>6</sup> Prucher, *Brave New Worlds: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*, 171.

<sup>7</sup> William Harmon, and Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature* (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009), 570.

<sup>8</sup> Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 257.

ideal or superior (thus usually communist) human society”<sup>9</sup> or a piece of work describing such a society. The concept of utopia usually stands for a paradise (not necessarily religious, but in the past related to religious theme) coined by humans serving their needs. Later, the term also symbolized “an ideal commonwealth.”<sup>10</sup>

The theme of utopia has been abundantly used in science fiction literature.<sup>11</sup> Utopian novel shows the “desire for an ideal world and a better way of living .... in its extreme form.”<sup>12</sup> In this type of novel, readers are confronted with a perfect society controlled by a totalitarian government promoting its ideology, in which all the negative aspects and problems have been destroyed. However, this is only an impression that the novel is offering; in fact, its aim is to point out the imperfections of the referred society.<sup>13</sup>

Another term related to utopia is ‘ideology’. It represents “the system of beliefs or ideas of an economic or political system,” which can be more concretized as “beliefs, concepts, ways of thinking, ideas and values that shape our thoughts and which we use to explain or understand the world.”<sup>14</sup> In history, the concept of ideology was closely connected with Marxism. According to Marxist doctrine, an economic system uses the ideology to secretly operate with power in the society. On the one hand, the dominant class uses the ideology for its own needs to gain power over a subordinate class, which believes that the ideas established by the ruling class serve the common welfare.<sup>15</sup> Besides, according to French philosopher Louis Althusser, the ideology is closely connected with language. He emphasizes that when we learn the language, we get a common sense which shapes our individual identity and leads us to the conclusion that ideology is imposed to us, thus we do not choose it by ourselves. He continues that social institutions such as the family, schools, and others have an impact on individuals.<sup>16</sup>

### 1.1.3 Dystopia

Dystopia is an opposite word to the word utopia. This term appears mainly in science fiction works.<sup>17</sup> However, the concept of dystopia can be used in many various forms (not only

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<sup>9</sup> Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 269.

<sup>10</sup> Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 269.

<sup>11</sup> Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 269.

<sup>12</sup> John Peck, and Martin Coyle, *Literary Terms and Criticism* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 131.

<sup>13</sup> Peck et al., *Literary Terms and Criticism*, 131.

<sup>14</sup> Peck et al., *Literary Terms and Criticism*, 157.

<sup>15</sup> Peck et al., *Literary Terms and Criticism*, 157.

<sup>16</sup> Peck et al., *Literary Terms and Criticism*, 158.

<sup>17</sup> Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 274.

literary ones such as fiction or drama), for example in movie production.<sup>18</sup> Dystopia denotes “a bad place” or pieces of work describing such a place.<sup>19</sup> It also denotes “unpleasant imaginary places,”<sup>20</sup> which are the worlds set in the future and the conditions set in them lead to unpleasant culminations.<sup>21</sup> Dystopia can be also referred to as “an imagined society or state of affairs in which conditions are extremely bad, especially in which these conditions result from the continuation of some current trend to an extreme,”<sup>22</sup> or a work set in such a society.

The essence of dystopia is to portray an ideology that struggles to create utopia, but instead it turns around to suppress human freedom and establishes a totalitarian regime in the name of higher ideals. In dystopian society, living conditions are appalling; people suffer from disease, misery, oppression, pollution, poverty or violence.<sup>23</sup>

Dystopian literature depicts a fictional future world where everything turns into a nightmare. It deals with topics such as disasters, oppression, overpopulation, rebellion revolutions or wars. Dystopian writings are intended to warn against such dreadful social events through a critique of the society. The authors of dystopian works “express their concerns about issues of humanity and society, and warn the people about their weaknesses.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the function of dystopian books is didactic; they forewarn the readers against an imperfect future that might arise.<sup>25</sup> Concerning the influence of dystopia on literature, the dystopian theme has influenced literary activity a lot. It was also adapted as movies. In addition, some terms used by the authors of dystopian works have become generally known technical terms such as “Big Brother” from *1984*.<sup>26</sup>

### **1.1.3.1 The features of dystopian societies**

There does not exist only one type of dystopia. The dystopian societies are defined by many various attributes. Yet, they share some common characteristic features described in the following paragraphs:

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<sup>18</sup> Harmon et. al., *A Handbook to Literature*, 182–183.

<sup>19</sup> Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 269.

<sup>20</sup> Harmon et. al., *A Handbook to Literature*, 570.

<sup>21</sup> Harmon et. al., *A Handbook to Literature*, 182–183.

<sup>22</sup> Prucher, *Brave New Worlds: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*, 39.

<sup>23</sup> New World Encyclopedia, “Dystopia.”

<sup>24</sup> Literary Devices and Terms, “Dystopia.”

<sup>25</sup> Literary Devices and Terms, “Dystopia.”

<sup>26</sup> New World Encyclopedia, “Dystopia.”

### ■ The resemblance between dystopia and utopia

Dystopias appear to be utopias. However, after a deep insight they contain a fatal imperfection. In utopian societies, people live harmonious and happy lives. On the other hand, “a dystopian society’s dreams are overshadowed by stimulating fears of the ugly consequences of present-day behaviour.”<sup>27</sup>

### ■ Social control

The inhabitants of dystopian societies live under constant surveillance and they are limited by varied restrictions imposed on their lives. Social control can assume different proportions. One type of social control is represented by a social stratification. In such a case, there are distinctions between social classes which are enforced. Furthermore, social mobility does not exist. The next form of control constitutes the environment in which people have no right to spend time alone and they are exposed to almost unremitting supervision. In another type of control, the conformity is demanded in order to maintain equality between people. The very opposite form of control is called “the lack of social cohesion.” It signifies that the measure of government control over inhabitants is very low.<sup>28</sup>

### ■ The absence of civil society

In dystopian society, there is only one central control represented by a state or an elite group of people. Moreover, religion is eradicated, or a new type of religion is established, with a main representative who is at the same time the ruler of the state. In some cases, religion is identical to state power. Concerning the family, in some dystopian societies families were completely destroyed. On the other hand, in the majority of dystopian works the concept of family is preserved, but it has a minor importance.<sup>29</sup>

### ■ Nature

In most dystopias, the environment is urban and nature is reduced. Inhabitants are told that nature is dangerous; for that reason, they are forbidden to go there. Due to the fact that citizens live mostly in cities, living conditions are appalling; people suffer from misery, poverty, oppression, violence, disease or pollution.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> New World Encyclopedia, “Dystopia.”

<sup>28</sup> New World Encyclopedia, “Dystopia.”

<sup>29</sup> New World Encyclopedia, “Dystopia.”

<sup>30</sup> New World Encyclopedia, “Dystopia.”

### ■ Political ideology

Dystopias are characterized by a presence of political ideology. Dystopian societies appear in one of many types of political systems which keep control over its inhabitants, such as communism, dictatorship, fascism, socialism, totalitarianism, etc. These systems have one common attribute: “the political system seeks to enforce a predominant ideology to the exclusion of all others. In their effort to enforce the prevailing ideology, these governments exert extra great power over the citizens.” To promote the ideology, the state uses censorship to manipulate people.<sup>31</sup>

### ■ An economic coercion

In many dystopias, there is an element of collectivism together with state-controlled economic systems. Planned economies lead to the control of people through a limited access to goods and services. In addition, many dystopian societies are governed by large private business companies (rather than by the state), which are responsible for privatization. Such corporations are capable of anything and they yield to corruption.<sup>32</sup>

### ■ Degeneration of society

Dystopian societies usually degenerate, which means that their inhabitants live in poor conditions. Although this tendency may be true, it is not a rule. In some dystopian works, people have higher standards of living, but this privilege is paid by a high price, by others disadvantages such as a loss of freedom or an emotional emptiness.<sup>33</sup>

## **1.1.4 Humanity**

Humanity is defined as a complex of highest virtues that humans can achieve towards each other. From the philosophical point of view, humanity is called “the master of our present lives”<sup>34</sup> and “the end of our hopes hereafter.”<sup>35</sup> The opposite concept to humanity is so-called “animality”. Humanity is a source of all the intellectual possessions that people have; from the knowledge, love, respect to treating other human beings right.<sup>36</sup> While this definition of

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<sup>31</sup> New World Encyclopedia, “Dystopia.”

<sup>32</sup> New World Encyclopedia, “Dystopia.”

<sup>33</sup> New World Encyclopedia, “Dystopia.”

<sup>34</sup> Frederic Harrison, “Science and Humanity,” *The North American Review* (vol. 129), no. 275 (October 1879): 323.

<sup>35</sup> Harrison, “Science and Humanity,” 323.

<sup>36</sup> Harrison, “Science and Humanity,” 322.



humanity is a philosophical one, for common people humanity means only “a general reminder that ‘people count’, that no one’s interests should be disregarded.”<sup>37</sup> It is a way of how to defend individuals from the exploitation or manipulation of any kind.<sup>38</sup>

The term ‘humanity’ is an equivalent to a Greek word ‘philanthropia’.<sup>39</sup> According to this definition, humanity requires certain skills and principles to be accepted, such as:

An ability to understand the world and to reason abstractly, the capacity and disposition to follow rational principles of prudence and efficiency, and acceptance (‘legislating to oneself’) of certain unconditional principles of conduct, that is, categorical imperatives, independently of fear of punishment and promise of reward.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, humanity is a hard-to-understand concept. But still, it “affects our brains, our hearts and our general behavior.”<sup>41</sup> To make a conclusion, humanity is an “objective end”<sup>42</sup> which is “valid for all rational beings.”<sup>43</sup> For that reason, humanity is embedded in every single human being, “even the most foolish and depraved persons.”<sup>44</sup>

### 1.1.5 Morality

Morality has a lot of definitions provided by many different authors. The most important definition<sup>45</sup> states that morality is a set of “prescriptive judgments of justice, rights, and welfare pertaining to how people ought to relate to each other.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, morality can be defined as a set of rules, ideas and principles that are applied in social environment. Moreover, it can be described as “normative in a robust and important way”<sup>47</sup> and it “accommodates oneself for the avoidance of what one regards as unpleasurable.”<sup>48</sup> Different types of moralities cannot exist at once, because there is no good or bad morality, there is only one in its basic neutral sense: “I am morality itself, and nothing else is morality!”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas E. Hill, Jr., “Humanity as an End in Itself,” *Ethics* (vol. 91), no. 1 (October 1980): 84.

<sup>38</sup> Hill, “Humanity as an End in Itself,” 84.

<sup>39</sup> Timothy J. Bergen Jr., “The Greeks and the Education of Humanity,” *The Journal of General Education*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (1994): 32.

<sup>40</sup> Hill, “Humanity as an End in Itself,” 85.

<sup>41</sup> Harrison, “Science and Humanity,” 341.

<sup>42</sup> Hill, “Humanity as an End in Itself,” 88.

<sup>43</sup> Harrison, “Science and Humanity,” 322.

<sup>44</sup> Hill, “Humanity as an End in Itself,” 85.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Haidt, “Morality,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (vol. 3), no. 1 (January 2008): 70.

<sup>46</sup> Haidt, “Morality,” 70–71.

<sup>47</sup> Eric Vogelstein, “Morality, Reasons and Sentiments,” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* (vol. 155), no. 3 (September 2011): 421.

<sup>48</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 126.

<sup>49</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 151.

The term ‘morality’ was coined by ancient Greeks<sup>50</sup> who were more interested in its absolute aim rather than in its structure: “Happiness is the goal, and people ought to live in the way that will make them be as happy as they can be.”<sup>51</sup> In their most famous works, Plato and Aristotle defined morality as “the nature and origins of good persons and good societies.”<sup>52</sup> Morality itself was most likely “enforced by a distinctive kind of social pressure or sanction.”<sup>53</sup> Although those works were written thousands of years ago, the morality itself changes in the course of time together with the development of the society.<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche believed that the morality was developed “in the soil of the ruling tribes and castes”<sup>55</sup>. On the other hand, other philosophers claimed that morality comes “from the coevolution of genes and cultural innovations,”<sup>56</sup> pointing out two possible sources of morality: a social normative together with genetics.

Furthermore, morality varies from society to society as it is “an ancient topic of perennial interest.”<sup>57</sup> Various everyday concepts and principle were created on the basis of morality. For example, some of the concepts include “Aristotle’s emphasis on habit, Hume’s critique of reason, Kant’s categorical imperative, and J.S. Mill’s ideas on liberty and utility.”<sup>58</sup>

## 1.2 Social media and related terminology

### 1.2.1 The Internet

The Internet is defined both in a technical and conceptual way. First, according to the vast amount of technical definitions, the Internet is labeled as “the largest computer network in the world”<sup>59</sup> or “a publicly accessible system of networks that connects computers around the world via the TCP/IP protocol.”<sup>60</sup> The Internet is made of specialized computers that are attached to each other “in more than 100 countries,”<sup>61</sup> forming a web of billions of

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<sup>50</sup> Paul Bloomfield, “Error Theory and the Concept of Morality,” *Metaphilosophy* (vol. 44), no. 4 (July 2013): 457.

<sup>51</sup> Bloomfield, “Error Theory and the Concept of Morality,” 457.

<sup>52</sup> Haidt, “Morality,” 65.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Singer, “Neil Cooper’s Concepts of Morality,” *Mind, New Series* (vol. 80), no. 319 (July 1971): 421.

<sup>54</sup> Haidt, “Morality,” 65.

<sup>55</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 124.

<sup>56</sup> Haidt, “Morality,” 70.

<sup>57</sup> Haidt, “Morality,” 71.

<sup>58</sup> Haidt, “Morality,” 65.

<sup>59</sup> Mark Pallen, “Introducing the Internet,” *BMJ: British Medical Journal* (vol. 311), no. 7017 (November 1995): 1422.

<sup>60</sup> William Lehr, David Clark, Steve Bauer, Arthur Berger and Philipp Richter, “Whither the Public Internet,” *Journal of Information Policy* (vol. 9), (2019): 4.

<sup>61</sup> Lehr et al., “Whither the Public Internet,” 4.

interconnected nodes. Second, the conceptual definitions define the Internet as “a virtual community, larger than many nation states, with its own rules of behaviour or netiquette.”<sup>62</sup> The Internet brings together people from all over the world<sup>63</sup> and provides them with virtual interaction.<sup>64</sup> Simply speaking, the Internet is a virtual place where different people “meet” in order to share various activities that they have in common. Nevertheless, it is not simple to define the Internet because there does not exist a generally accepted definition.<sup>65</sup> The potential of the Internet is beyond the human imagination. Although the Internet originated in the 1960s, it has immensely changed the world in the last few decades.<sup>66</sup>

### 1.2.2 Medium

For the sake of defining social media, a term ‘medium’ has to be specified. The word ‘medium’ comes from Latin (plural form is ‘media’), which signifies ‘the means’, in this case ‘means of communication’. The term does not denote only “the whole set of communication media and means, representing a social institution with a set of values, norms, rules – the environment, the background and culture,” but it also stands for “technical means (television, radio, computer) and communication flows, techno-social interaction, symbolic appropriation and cultural and organizational issues.”<sup>67</sup> Moreover, media mediate social interaction. They have become an important part of human life; they affect individuals as well as the groups. As Sodré specifies, media represent “a communication flow coupled with technical device,”<sup>68</sup> including “values and norms that mobilize individual and group action within society.”<sup>69</sup>

According to McLuhan, as technology develops, it usually exceeds its initial purpose. The same is true for social media – they are still being reinvented and reshaped and their function changes in the course of time. Thanks to new technologies, digital social media bring new opportunities and possibilities concerning communication and transmission together with the form of language. The development of the functional use of digital media has brought a

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<sup>62</sup> Pallen, “Introducing the Internet,” 1422.

<sup>63</sup> Leslie Daigle, “On the Nature of the Internet,” (2016): 17.

<sup>64</sup> Pallen, “Introducing the Internet,” 1422.

<sup>65</sup> Lehr et al., “Whither the Public Internet,” 2.

<sup>66</sup> Lehr et al., “Whither the Public Internet,” 1.

<sup>67</sup> Eugenia Mariano da Rocha Barichello, and Luciana Menezes Carvalho. “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” (2013): 4.

<sup>68</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 4.

<sup>69</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 4.

change in their perception and usage: digital media have become more social as their users interact and cooperate and create communities and a functional society.<sup>70</sup>

McLuhan has a theory which says: “Media is the message.”<sup>71</sup> He explains that “in the media there is influence about how the message is perceived. Media and message work as partners and media have the power to modify relationships and human activities.”<sup>72</sup> By this statement, McLuhan means that the content of the information is not as important as media itself because the media exert an effect on the society in terms of economic, cultural, political and technological terms.<sup>73</sup> Lastly, “when it comes to online social media, the technical and the social are becoming one.”<sup>74</sup>

First of all, it is important to emphasize that socio-historic context together with digital technologies allow media to create mass communication (due to a mediatization process). Then, media “can go beyond their mass character”<sup>75</sup> because the interaction between the users (which the media intermediate) makes the media to become a social tool.<sup>76</sup> To continue with terms, massive communication media (abbreviated to mass media) are “those issued by a sender and that are received in an identical manner by several groups of recipients, therefore having a large audience.”<sup>77</sup> Mass media are represented by a range of various media such as “press, radio, television, Internet, cinema, magazines, informative posts, traffic sign, etc.”<sup>78</sup> Most importantly, mass media allow mass communication thanks to the use of the Internet.<sup>79</sup>

### 1.2.3 Mass media in contrast with social media

It is important to realize the fact that social media have developed from mass media. In comparison with social media, mass media are more static and less interactive. The communication intermediated via mass media is one-way because the interaction between users is limited or zero. On the other hand, social media are more dynamic and more interactive because they allow the users to converse in a two-way manner and in addition to

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<sup>70</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 4–5.

<sup>71</sup> A. Velasquez, D. Renó, A M Beltrán, J. C. Maldonado, and C. Ortiz León, “From the Mass Media to Social Media: Reflections on the New Media Ecology,” *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, no. 73 (2018): 5.

<sup>72</sup> Velasquez et al., “From the Mass Media to Social Media: Reflections on the New Media Ecology,” 5.

<sup>73</sup> Velasquez et al., “From the Mass Media to Social Media: Reflections on the New Media Ecology,” 5.

<sup>74</sup> Enrico Coiera, “Social Networks, Social Media, and Social Diseases,” *BMJ: British Medical Journal* (vol. 346), no. 7912 (June 2013): 4.

<sup>75</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 6.

<sup>76</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 6.

<sup>77</sup> Velasquez et al., “From the Mass Media to Social Media: Reflections on the New Media Ecology,” 7.

<sup>78</sup> Velasquez et al., “From the Mass Media to Social Media: Reflections on the New Media Ecology,” 7.

<sup>79</sup> Velasquez et al., “From the Mass Media to Social Media: Reflections on the New Media Ecology,” 8.

share information. In addition, social media are “sites and applications in which anyone who has access to the web can produce and distribute content,” which keeps social networks to “live”.<sup>80</sup>

Digital social media are characterized by exchanging the information and active social participation in the field of the Internet, “including commentaries, recommendations and sharing and disseminating of contents produced by oneself and / or others.”<sup>81</sup> An example of digital social media sites is Facebook or Twitter. The majority of social media sites serve for transmitting the information rather than enabling a conversation. More and more it is the users who use them for exchanging messages, but it was not the original purpose.<sup>82</sup>

The difference between mass media and digital social media should be described more specifically. Concerning mass media, the user’s appropriation is transmissive. It means that mass media work rather as media for transmitting information without any interaction of their users. On the other hand, with reference to digital social media, the user’s appropriation is mediated through the Internet networks. Digital media function rather as social media, directly based on the interaction of their users. The transmission of information is less important than the exchange of content between the users. According to Lemos, even though “mass media are information media,”<sup>83</sup> they can also involve communication, but it is limited to the interaction between those who broadcast and those who receive the information. To the contrary, digital media (so-called post-mass media) are “medias of communication, dialogue and conversation.”<sup>84</sup>

Besides the division of media into mass media and social media, we can also distinguish the term traditional media. With reference to traditional media (such as television or radio), the users are dependent on the higher authorization from the production. On the other hand, new social media are interactive and based on Internet networks. “Users do not depend on authorization coming from the sphere of production,”<sup>85</sup> which means that the users create the content themselves during an exchange of messages and they do not need any approval of their distribution, which would be the case of traditional media.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 7.

<sup>81</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 7.

<sup>82</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 8.

<sup>83</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 8.

<sup>84</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 8.

<sup>85</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 8.

<sup>86</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 8.

### 1.2.4 Communication

Modern digital technologies allow a connection of two types of communication into one entity, namely ‘one to one’ or ‘one to all’ types. In the past, conversations mediated by media were possible via a telephone or a telegraph. However, these devices enabled only one-to-one type of communication. On the other hand, with the arrival of mass communication mediated by digital technologies (such as the Internet), “from one to all” type of communication has become immediately possible. Nowadays, due to the use of mass media, people can share a huge amount of information with a high number of other people at one time via centralized broadcasting systems. This leads to a creation of public communities in the virtual world.<sup>87</sup> In present days, mass communications media enable everyday communication between people, usually in a form of sending and receiving the messages. This type of communication has been made possible thanks to the access to the Internet and network web systems.<sup>88</sup>

McLuhan describes different types of communication based on the type of media, different types of media and different eras of media.<sup>89</sup> Still, there are different types of social media, varying in the way of how the information is communicated. Traditional media (such as a television or newspapers) usually spread the information one-way, while social media go further and allow exchanging the information two-way, which means that people can interact with each other and at the same time they can also interact with organizations.<sup>90</sup>

When we speak about users of social media, today the number of Internet users is huge – 2800 million users in the world – which is much higher than in the past. McLuhan points out that the number of people connected to the Internet – people who are using it and being interconnected to each other via social media - is rising. This growing tendency may lead to a collapse of our culture.<sup>91</sup> Besides that, digital technologies have created a sort of cyberspace on the Internet. Cyberspace is a virtual world in which people are interconnected and able to produce, distribute and share digital content via reciprocal interaction.<sup>92</sup>

Communication is a process of exchanging information performed by sending and receiving messages. The type of chosen media for intermediating the communication does not

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<sup>87</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 6.

<sup>88</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 6.

<sup>89</sup> Velasquez et al., “From the Mass Media to Social Media: Reflections on the New Media Ecology,” 6.

<sup>90</sup> Julia Daisy Fraustino, Brooke Liu, and Yan Jin, “Social Media Use during Disasters: A Review of the Knowledge Base and Gaps,” (2012): 7.

<sup>91</sup> Velasquez et al., “From the Mass Media to Social Media: Reflections on the New Media Ecology,” 6.

<sup>92</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 7.

affect its purpose.<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, communication might be affected by external factors, for example by noise.<sup>94</sup>

Communication is conducted in so-called communication process which consists of four parts:

- a code (a system of signs and rules combined with the aim of conveying information)
- a channel (a physical media through which the information is transferred)
- a sender (the one who wants to send the message)
- a recipient (the one to whom the message is targeted)<sup>95</sup>

Communicative process can also occur in media. An organization of mass media takes the information, decodes, interprets and codes it again, and then transmits it through a suitable channel to its recipients. However, in the age of the Internet and social media, recipients are not only passively receiving the messages, but they also provide new content into the communicative process by adding additional information and sending it further or back.<sup>96</sup>

Concerning the future of social media, McLuhan predicted the huge development of non-direct communication via social media. He coined a term “a global village” by which he anticipated a state when “the complete human society would start to transform, and also that all inhabitants of the planet would start to knowing among themselves and communicate in an instantaneous and direct manner favored by the technological progress.”<sup>97</sup>

In the past, there were only two main ways of how people communicated with each other, namely public and private types of communication. With the old types of media, public and private interaction was differentiated. However, with the arrival of the Internet, the communication has changed and mingled. For example, “an email could be sent to a group.”<sup>98</sup> The first way – the public communication – is represented by public broadcasting media (newspapers, radio or television) which allow one-way communication. It means that the broadcasters could not decide who will be their audience, although they may try to persuade people to take part. But anyone who has access to the usage of such types of media could become the audience. The second way – the private communication – is represented by other

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<sup>93</sup> Velasquez et al., “From the Mass Media to Social Media: Reflections on the New Media Ecology,” 2.

<sup>94</sup> Velasquez et al., “From the Mass Media to Social Media: Reflections on the New Media Ecology,” 2.

<sup>95</sup> Velasquez et al., “From the Mass Media to Social Media: Reflections on the New Media Ecology,” 2.

<sup>96</sup> Velasquez et al., “From the Mass Media to Social Media: Reflections on the New Media Ecology,” 2-3.

<sup>97</sup> Velasquez et al., “From the Mass Media to Social Media: Reflections on the New Media Ecology,” 5.

<sup>98</sup> Daniel Miller, Elisabetta Costa, Nell Haynes, Tom McDonald, Razvan Nicolescu, Jolynna Sinanan, Juliano Spyer, Shriram Venkatraman, and Xinyuan Wang, “What is Social Media?,” in *How the World Changed Social Media*, (UCL Press, 2016), 2.

types of media (a telephone) which allow two-way communication, but it is still based on “one-to-one conversations.” Nevertheless, “people could meet in groups face to face, but it was uncommon to create group-based interactions within media such as the telephone.”<sup>99</sup>

In the course of time, social media sites happened to witness a change – suddenly a private interaction had an effect on public – individuals spread information to groups of people (usually in chat rooms) and people in those groups were able to interact and discuss the information with each other, while all this interaction was still happening in the field of the Internet which was served as an intermediary-medium.<sup>100</sup> In addition, text-based communication (chatting) prevailed over the voice-based communication (done via the phone).<sup>101</sup> However, today the visual communication (including pictures) is used more often than textual communication.<sup>102</sup> With reference to text-base communication, text messaging and Internet messaging services started to be in use. Again, private communication and sharing private information was aimed to be shared with the groups of people, not only with individuals. It led to the communication in groups in the environment of web-based applications where all the members of the group chat could interact, post and write messages.<sup>103</sup>

## **1.3 Social media definition, use and types**

### **1.3.1 Definition of social media**

There are many different definitions of social media, depending on various factors, theories, authors, etc. For that reason, some of them will be enumerated and described in the text below, clarifying the essence of social media. ‘Social media’ or ‘social networking sites’ are popular labels used by the general public; however, they do not stand for scientific terms.<sup>104</sup>

When we want to define the concept of social media, we have to give a look to their essence. One option is to describe social media by social science, because social sciences portray “the way in which people associate with each other to form social relations and

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<sup>99</sup> Miller et al., “What is Social Media?,” 3.

<sup>100</sup> Miller et al., “What is Social Media?,” 2.

<sup>101</sup> Miller et al., “What is Social Media?,” 2.

<sup>102</sup> Miller et al., “What is Social Media?,” 6.

<sup>103</sup> Miller et al., “What is Social Media?,” 2.

<sup>104</sup> Daniel Miller, Elisabetta Costa, Nell Haynes, Tom McDonald, Razvan Nicolescu, Jolynna Sinanan, Juliano Spyer, Shriram Venkatraman, and Xinyuan Wang, “Academic Studies of Social Media,” in *How the World Changed Social Media*, (UCL Press, 2016), 2.



societies”<sup>105</sup> – in other words so-called sociality. In order to at least briefly explain the impact of sociality on social media, the following quotation is provided:

The full spectrum of sociality on social media, in return, helps us to understand further what social media is. Prior to social media, the main ways in which people communicate are either through broad casting or one- to- one conversation. On social media, however, the two ends meet in situations that we have called ‘scalable sociality’. .... Social media as scalable sociality allows people to gain much better control of their social life.<sup>106</sup>

If we return to more general definitions of social media, the most apt definition is offered by McLuhan: “Social media are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.”<sup>107</sup> However, a question arises: ‘How do the social media work?’ The essence of social media lies in creating social networks consisting of a huge number of users who interact with each other.<sup>108</sup> Social media are widely used by people. The users usually do not use social media only in terms of one platform, but rather on more platforms because the technology of social media allows it. This option is represented by a term polymedia. Polymedia denotes various media and technological platforms that work together. For instance, mobile phones, computers and social media can cooperate on technological level very well.<sup>109</sup> It follows that nowadays the situation is favourable for the expansion of social media usage because not only the computers, but also mobile phones and other devices are becoming more and more inseparable part of people’s lives. Moreover, according to sociologist Nathan Jurgenson, the term ‘digital dualism’ denotes a distinction between the concepts online and offline. Moreover, in the past, the online world was considered to be inferior to the offline one.<sup>110</sup>

Social media are called “new communication media” because they are a modern tool allowing people to communicate on a virtual level.<sup>111</sup> If we take into consideration that people are social beings who need social contact and interaction for their existence, then social media are tools that help people to maintain social relations. Social media networks represent “the ties that bind us as individuals into families, groups, organization, and societies. With the realization that even weak social ties have the power to influence, social network research has

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<sup>105</sup> Miller et al., “What is Social Media?,” 6.

<sup>106</sup> Xinyuan Wang, “Social Media and Social Relationships,” in *Social Media in Industrial China*, (UCL Press, 2016), 31.

<sup>107</sup> Sandy McKenzie, “McLuhan’s Relevance in Today’s Society: A Look at Social Media on Mobile Devices,” (2013): 22.

<sup>108</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 9.

<sup>109</sup> Wang, “Social Media and Social Relationships,” 19.

<sup>110</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013), 156.

<sup>111</sup> Miller et al., “Academic Studies of Social Media,” 12.

grown dramatically.”<sup>112</sup> It follows that social media have a positive effect on the society and they contribute to the creation of various communities of people. Moreover, social media allow us to create online virtual communities in which people can “interact, discuss, coordinate, or coproduce.”<sup>113</sup> To continue, “the social structures and networks of these online communities are as diverse as human social structures and can be anything from loose, open, and opportunistic through to closed, tight, and secretive.”<sup>114</sup>

The most important function of social media is communication. Social media platforms represent the concrete places where people can communicate.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, they allow two-way interactive communication during which people exchange content via messages. With regard to content, social media can be defined as “interactive digital tools that feature content users may generate, manipulate, or influence.”<sup>116</sup> Concerning relationships, social media offer many possibilities for communication and thus for maintaining social relationships.<sup>117</sup>

The more social media had been used, the more they have become an essential part of people’s everyday life: “Social media has not only become an integral part of everyday life, a place where people live alongside their offline life.”<sup>118</sup> As can be seen, social media have proven to be very popular. According to statistics, “in the United States, social media sites – such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube – are currently being used by two out of three people, and search engines are used daily.”<sup>119</sup> Unsurprisingly, search engines, for instance Google, are still more utilized, but it may change in the future with the rising popularity of social media platforms. Furthermore, social media are powerful tools; they have an influence on the world around us. With this types of technology, we have new possibilities how to interact and communicate than people had in the past.<sup>120</sup> To continue with this idea, it can be said that due to the fact that social media are perceived as a part of everyday life, it is apt to stress that social media connect two concepts, namely media and communication.<sup>121</sup> To be

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<sup>112</sup> Coiera, “Social Networks, Social Media, and Social Diseases,” 2.

<sup>113</sup> Coiera, “Social Networks, Social Media, and Social Diseases,” 2.

<sup>114</sup> Coiera, “Social Networks, Social Media, and Social Diseases,” 2.

<sup>115</sup> Miller et al., “What is Social Media?,” 6.

<sup>116</sup> Fraustino et al., “Social Media Use during Disasters: A Review of the Knowledge Base and Gaps,” 7.

<sup>117</sup> Wang, “Social Media and Social Relationships,” 14.

<sup>118</sup> Wang, “Social Media and Social Relationships,” 2.

<sup>119</sup> Panagiotis T. Metaxas, and Eni Mustafaraj, “Social Media and the Elections,” *Science, New Series* (vol. 338), no. 6106 (October 2012): 2.

<sup>120</sup> Miller et al., “What is Social Media?,” 1.

<sup>121</sup> Miller et al., “Academic Studies of Social Media,” 4.

more concrete, social media are based on the basic aims of the Internet such as social and communicative purposes.<sup>122</sup>

With the arrival of new technologies, so-called “moral panic” usually appear as well. The term signifies that people are worried about how new technologies will affect their life and if humankind loses a part of humanity or not. For example, people are concerned about the disappearance of interaction because face-to-face communication is more enhancing than virtual communication via digital devices, which are being more and more widely used in present days. To the contrary, some scientists have the opposite opinion. They are convinced that new technologies do not affect the essence of humanity. They claim that using social media has become part of human life, such as for example driving a car.<sup>123</sup>

Quite the contrary to the previous definitions, Jaron Lanier, a prominent world-famous technologist, offers a very different view on the definition of social media. He has created a new label, denoting social media networks as ‘Sirens’. Lanier characterizes Sirens and clarifies their negative aspects as follows:

A Siren Server ... is an elite computer, or coordinated collection of computers, on a network. It is characterized by narcissism, hyperamplified risk aversion, and extreme information asymmetry. It is the winner of an all-or-nothing contest, and it inflicts smaller all-or-nothing contests on those who interact with it. ... Siren Servers gather data from the network, often without having to pay for it. The data is analyzed using the most powerful available computers, run by the very best available technical people. The results of the analysis are kept secret, but are used to manipulate the rest of the world to advantage.<sup>124</sup>

### 1.3.2 History of social media

The beginnings of social media can be traced to Korea, where the first Korean social media site was spreading mainly among young people. Later on, the Korean version of social media was replaced in the world with more successful Facebook. It is important to emphasize the fact that nowadays different cultures and countries create and use different social media platforms. For example, China uses mainly its own platforms, despite the current world-dominance of Facebook which is used all over the world.<sup>125</sup> The epicenter of social media usage moved to the United States of America, introducing new platforms such as MySpace

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<sup>122</sup> Miller et al., “Academic Studies of Social Media,” 5.

<sup>123</sup> Miller et al., “What is Social Media?,” 8.

<sup>124</sup> Jaron Lanier, *Who Owns the Future?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 59–60.

<sup>125</sup> Miller et al., “Academic Studies of Social Media,” 5–6.

etc. After that, Facebook started to dominate the Western World except for China where Facebook was limited by the government; only the local social media platforms were allowed to be used there. Nowadays, a higher number of new social media sites appear in the world, namely for example Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, WeChat or WhatsApp.<sup>126</sup>

The history of social media use goes back to the past, returning to the development of technology and origin of computers and the Internet. With the first use of the computers, people found out that they could use the Internet for sending simple messages to each other. The Internet allows people to communicate on long distances without a need to be physically at the same place. This communication is called computer-mediated communication.<sup>127</sup> Currently, modern social media sites are still changing and evolving based on the development of the technology. Generally speaking, some social media platforms have developed from public broadcasting, while others have developed from private chatting.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, the purpose of social media platforms also goes through some development. The initial purpose of social media has changed as they developed in the course of time and today, they are perceived differently than in times of their origin. To set a specific example, Facebook was initially created for male students of an American university; it allowed them to rate their female friends. However, later on Facebook developed and today it is used as a social media site for sharing the content and allowing the interaction of people.<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, speaking about the development of social media in the course of time, it is stated that:

The growth of social media is ‘the most wrenching cultural transformation since the Industrial Revolution’ without bothering to produce much evidence. Keen simply presumes that the unprecedented scale of today’s transformations is self-evident—a hallmark assumption of epochalism.<sup>130</sup>

Furthermore, social media and online communication has a high potential for the future. Some scientists, such as Rainie and Wellman, foresee the third technological revolution to come, namely Social Network Revolution, which will be caused by the progress of social media. First two revolutions are called the Internet Revolution and the Mobile Revolution. The authors predict the third revolution to come, describing it as follows: “a continuous trend through the rise of the internet, the mobile phone and now social media

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<sup>126</sup> Miller et al., “Academic Studies of Social Media,” 7–8.

<sup>127</sup> McKenzie, “McLuhan’s Relevance in Today’s Society: A Look at Social Media on Mobile Devices,” 6.

<sup>128</sup> Miller et al., “What is Social Media?,” 3.

<sup>129</sup> Miller et al., “Academic Studies of Social Media,” 8.

<sup>130</sup> Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here*, 48–49.

which leads to a decline in people's relationships to groups and the rise of the individual-based network."<sup>131</sup>

### 1.3.3 The use of social media

Simply speaking, social media sites are used mainly for the following activities: conversation, participation, sharing or publicizing information.<sup>132</sup> In the past, the initial use of social media was to share the information and news. Later on, using social media turned to be really 'social' in a sense that people started to share their personal information and talk about their everyday lives.<sup>133</sup> Nowadays, people use social media to "maintain connections with family and friends, to learn more about consumer products, read consumer feedback, connect with others who share a hobby or interest, meet new people, read famous people's comments, and seek new romance."<sup>134</sup> Moreover, young people use social media to discuss their everyday life via messages or "for professional networking and education."<sup>135</sup> In response to the previous statement, there appears a problem connected with the age of people who are actively using social media. Social media networking sites are more welcomed and used by younger people than by older ones who adapt to new technologies with greater difficulties: "Younger people are enthusiastic adopters, while the older generations are likely to feel some concern and keep their distance from social media."<sup>136</sup> For that reason, the governments of individual countries should implement the education about using computers, the Internet and social media networks into their plans in order to increase the level of technological education and development in the country.<sup>137</sup>

Concerning the appropriate usage, social media may bring many positives. For example, social media might be used in emergency situations; the emergency information can be spread via social media sites to the citizens situated in locations affected by a disaster.<sup>138</sup> On the other hand, negatives exist as well:

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<sup>131</sup> Miller et al., "Academic Studies of Social Media," 14.

<sup>132</sup> Barichello et al., "Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan's Idea of Medium-Ambience," 11.

<sup>133</sup> Barichello et al., "Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan's Idea of Medium-Ambience," 9.

<sup>134</sup> Fraustino et al., "Social Media Use during Disasters: A Review of the Knowledge Base and Gaps," 7.

<sup>135</sup> Fraustino et al., "Social Media Use during Disasters: A Review of the Knowledge Base and Gaps," 7.

<sup>136</sup> Tom McDonald, "Broader Relations - The family, the State and Social Media," in *Social Media in Rural China*, (UCL Press, 2016), 26.

<sup>137</sup> McDonald, "Broader Relations - The family, the State and Social Media," 26.

<sup>138</sup> Coiera, "Social Networks, Social Media, and Social Diseases," 3.

When used carelessly and inappropriately, social media can cause problems; however, when using common sense and adhering to professional ethics ... the communication and networking benefits provided by social media clearly have an enormous potential.<sup>139</sup>

### 1.3.4 Types of social media

Social media can be divided into different types and categories, depending on various aspects such as their focus, popularity, etc. According to McLuhan, digital social media include blogs, microblogs, social network sites and sharing of videos and images.<sup>140</sup> More concretely, there are various types of widely-used social media platforms, for example: Friendster, MySpace, Facebook, WhatsApp, WeChat, Instagram, Snapchat.<sup>141</sup> To continue, social media represent many technologies used via the Internet or mobile devices; not only well-know Facebook or Twitter sites, but also sites for sharing photos and videos or various reviews forums.<sup>142</sup> Each one of them is focused on different activity and they vary by their popularity among users. For example, MySpace was oriented on teenagers and music, Friends Reunited on searching and meeting old friends, LinkedIn on business, Tinder on dating.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, it is important to realize that social media platforms differ from place to place in terms of their content. For example, Facebook in India is different than Facebook in Trinidad. Also, the content of social media sites changes based on people, and at the same time the users of social media are being changed by the site they use. Therefore, social media platforms are specifically local.<sup>144</sup> That is the reason why social media serve as “constitutive elements of the cultural environment,”<sup>145</sup> having an impact on forming the local culture and generations of people. The concrete examples of social media sites together with the description of their focus are following:

- Facebook (a social network site)
- Youtube (a video sharing site)
- Flickr (a photo sharing site)
- Twitter (a microblog or a micro-message service)

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<sup>139</sup> Susan Lindsay Mello, “Social media - The American Journal of Nursing,” *The American Journal of Nursing* (vol. 111), no. 10 (October 2011): 2.

<sup>140</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 3.

<sup>141</sup> Miller et al., “Academic Studies of Social Media,” 2.

<sup>142</sup> Fraustino et al., “Social Media Use during Disasters: A Review of the Knowledge Base and Gaps,” 7.

<sup>143</sup> Miller et al., “Academic Studies of Social Media,” 7.

<sup>144</sup> Miller et al., “Academic Studies of Social Media,” 9.

<sup>145</sup> Barichello et al., “Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan’s Idea of Medium-Ambience,” 3.

Each one of them works differently as can be understood from the specifying information in the brackets.<sup>146</sup>

We should have a deeper look on the most famous social media network called Facebook. Facebook's statement says as follows: "To make the world more open and connected."<sup>147</sup> Under this claim we can imagine that Facebook promotes a complete transparency and the connection of all the people in the world via social media. Actually, in the time of its origin, Facebook was perceived as a revolutionary invention:

That's what it all came down to—Facebook. The company. The revolution. ... This Mark Zuckerberg production was going to change the world. ... Facebook was all about freedom of information. A truly digital social network. Putting the real world onto the Internet.<sup>148</sup>

Mezrich explains the above-mentioned idea in the following words: "Facebook really was a revolution—world changing, creating a free exchange of information across social networks that would digitize the world in a way nothing else could."<sup>149</sup>

#### **1.4. Social media definition based on sociality**

Social media are media in which social aspects appear. For that reason, the terms media, sociality and related words will be clarified. First of all, sociality includes three essential constituents: cognition, communication and co-operation. These three elements are conditioned by each other and encapsulated into each other.<sup>150</sup> "Communication" represents the basis of social media, because it is the basic element of a human society. To specify it, communication is the reciprocal process in which people react to each other, interact and exchange information and symbols. If social activity is considered to be a means of communication and interaction between people, then the social media are "only those that support communication between humans."<sup>151</sup>

Together with communication comes a term "community". When people socialize and converse repetitively, their communication leads to the maintenance of social relationships, which subsequently results in the creation of social communities. Due to socialization via the

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<sup>146</sup> Barichello et al., "Understanding the Digital Social Media from McLuhan's Idea of Medium-Ambience," 7–8.

<sup>147</sup> Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here*, 6.

<sup>148</sup> Ben Mezrich, *The Accidental Billionaires* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2010), 174.

<sup>149</sup> Mezrich, *The Accidental Billionaires*, 208.

<sup>150</sup> Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: a Critical Introduction* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2014), chapter 2.

<sup>151</sup> Fuchs, *Social Media*, chapter 1.

Internet, people create online communities, for example on a social networking web site called Facebook.<sup>152</sup>

To continue with media, they are systems that “enable and constrain a social level of human activities that create knowledge that is produced, diffused and consumed with the help of the artefacts of the technological level.”<sup>153</sup> One of many examples of media is the Internet. The Internet is a technological network that enables online social communication to take place.<sup>154</sup> Moreover, due to the Internet, social media (in other words social networks) can exist. “‘A social network’ is ‘an online community that allows people to publish and share content, including text, audio, video, or multimedia.’”<sup>155</sup>

Basically, social media is online technology based on a use of World Wide Web. Via this software, people can interact with one another. The heart of the matter is that “social media applications encourage users to share their experiences, opinions, knowledge, and sometimes their locations.”<sup>156</sup> However, it is not as simple. According to Fuchs, there are many definitions of social media. To sum them up, most of them “describe various forms of online sociality: collective action, communication, communities, connecting / networking, co-operation / collaboration, the creative making of user-generated content, playing, sharing.”<sup>157</sup>

Furthermore, the differentiation between traditional media and social media has to be made. Traditional media represent the media with centralized control; it follows that the company owning the media controls the intermediated messages. They are intended to provide information to its customers. For example, press releases or giving interviews stand for traditional media.<sup>158</sup> On the other hand, social media are created collaboratively. Their primary function is to share information and get a feedback. The companies that use social media allow their users to “share, comment on, and sometimes modify”<sup>159</sup> posted information. Social networks such as YouTube and Twitter are the examples of social media.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Fuchs, *Social Media*, chapter 1.

<sup>153</sup> Fuchs, *Social Media*, chapter 2.

<sup>154</sup> Fuchs, *Social Media*, chapter 2.

<sup>155</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Uses of Social Media in Public Transportation* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2012), 44.

<sup>156</sup> National Academies, *Uses of Social Media in Public Transportation*, 7.

<sup>157</sup> Fuchs, *Social Media*, chapter 2.

<sup>158</sup> National Academies, *Uses of Social Media in Public Transportation*, 7.

<sup>159</sup> National Academies, *Uses of Social Media in Public Transportation*, 7.

<sup>160</sup> National Academies, *Uses of Social Media in Public Transportation*, 7.



## 2. Analysis of features in social media novels

### 2.1 Stories of the novels

#### 2.1.1 Story of *The Circle*

The story takes place in a near-future United States of America in Longfield and it revolves around a corporation called The Circle. The Circle is a huge technological company making innovations in science, social media, health, entertainment, etc. The Circle wants to create a perfect world with ideal democracy, knowledge and transparency. Everything will be connected and known, which is aptly expressed in its motto: ‘*Secrets are lies. Sharing is caring. Privacy is theft.*’ However, when everything will be tracked, recorded and broadcasted live, it will lead to a loss of privacy, freedom and no anonymity on the Internet. The truth is that the Circle, as a totalitarian company reaching for idealism, wants to take control over people and rule the world.

The main heroine Mae Holland is a young girl who starts to work in the Circle. Mae works in a Customer Experience department, dealing mainly with social media. The job was secured for her by her best friend Annie, who reached a high success in the company in a short time. The corporation was founded by three men: Ty Gospodinov (a founder), Eamon Bailey (a CEO) and Tom Stenton (a face of the company). Ty created a system called ‘TruYou’ which unifies many online functions (such as social media accounts, bank accounts, etc.) into one unified system. Besides working, Mae visits her parents in her hometown because her father is ill. In order to relax, Mae goes kayaking to nature.

Mae is hard-working; soon, she becomes successful. However, she is blamed for no participation in company events and spending time at home. For that reason, she puts aside her personal life in order to live in the company. At one meeting, Bailey introduces ‘SeeChange’ - a mini camera mounted on the body, allowing people to stream their life online in real time. At work, Mae is getting to know more and more information about the company she works in. She manages to ensure her parents special healthcare in exchange for their privacy. One day, Mae meets a mysterious, untraceable man Kalden who warns her against the power of the Circle. They start to have a relationship, but his identity remains unknown.

A lot of politicians start to use the camera in order to promote ‘transparency’, in other words a total openness without any privacy. Moreover, the company decides to install the cameras everywhere around the campus in order to monitor everything. Meanwhile, Mae argues with her ex-boyfriend Mercer as she promotes his products on social media without his

permission. Mercer warns her against the dehumanization of people by technology. Then, Mae literally steals a kayak, but she is caught by the police. She is cleared from accusations, but her crime is recorded. After that, she agrees that secrets are wrong and privacy is a crime, so she becomes fully transparent - she voluntarily wears a camera all the time, broadcasting online every part of her life and being recorded.

Mae's job changes; she presents the Circle to the virtual world. She has more than one million followers on social media; she has become popular and she has power to change the opinions of people. Unfortunately, she gets obsessed with social media and live streaming. Mae's parents do not want to be monitored all the time, so they cover the cameras at home. While investigating this incident, Mae finds her parents in an intimate situation, which leads to their mutual alienation. Her friend Mercer warns her against the technology and surveillance of the Circle, but she does not want to listen or see the truth, so he stops talking to her. She loses contact with her family and friends.

At another meeting, the Circle discusses the voting system; the company would like to increase the participation in elections. Mae suggests that all citizens should be obliged to have a Circle account through which they would be forced to vote. All the legal acts done by the state should be reassigned to the Circle. Mae believes that she is helping the democracy, but she is helping to create a totalitarian regime. Later on, Mae introduces a new tool called SoulSearch. It allows the company to track any criminal in the world with the use of social media networks. Mae demonstrates its function, but it takes its toll: Mercer, who tries to escape from the influence of the online and monitored world, dies when he is trying to get away from people who fanatically chase him. After the incident, Mae is blinded; she believes that Mercer died because he did not want to accept social media.

Suddenly, Mae meets Kalden (who turns out to be Ty), who warns her against the power and monitoring of the Circle, which is against humanity. He asks Mae for help to dismantle the company. Mae pretends to help him, but then she betrays him. At the end, Mae visits Annie at the hospital because Annie had overworked herself to a coma. Despite everything that happened, Mae is still blinded; she does not realize how bad the Circle is. She is annoyed that she cannot get to know Annie's private thoughts. She wants to know it, and the world has a right to know it as well.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Dave Eggers, *The Circle* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013).

### **2.1.2 Story of *Feed***

The story is set in a near future on Earth which is artificialized and devastated at the same time. The nature is damaged and natural environment was replaced by an artificial one. Technology is advanced. In the United States of America, corporations hold power; they control everything from schools and educational system, the environment, to the society and people. There is no democracy, and what is more, the rest of the world is in war with the USA, which has negative effects on the already-damaged planet.

Concerning the society, people are emotionless and bored because they have a comfortable life full of abundance and access to everything. They worship a consumer lifestyle, which is promoted by corporations via forced marketing and all-over-present advertisements. People are obsessed with fashion: young people wear lesions on their bodies. For communication, people use devices called ‘feeds’ which are actually chips implemented in a human brain. Feeds are connected to a computer network called ‘feednet’, which serves as a technologically-perfect Internet network. Feeds enable people to: access digital databases to search for information, experience different kinds of online entertainment (watching TV shows, listening to music, viewing memories), browse goods in shops, contact corporations or communicate telepathically with other users on social media sites via messages. People cannot live without feeds because they ensure their basic body functions.

The main hero Titus, together with his teenage friends, spend holidays on the Moon. They meet a girl Violet who criticizes the current world situation as she tries to save the world. Unfortunately, some hacker from an anti-feed organization starts to protest, warning against an apocalypse. After hacking their feeds, all the teenagers end up in a hospital. While recovering and being repaired, friends cannot access their feeds. Instead of virtual entertainment, they talk to each other in a real conversation for the first time of their lives. Titus and Violet fall in love with each other. After some time, their feeds get repaired and they return to the Earth.

One day, Violet and Titus go shopping to a mall. Violet, with her rebellious attitude, wants to resist the feed. Corporations record shopping habits of people in order to create their marketing profiles so that they can offer people goods based on people’s individual preferences. Meanwhile, the ever-present adverts persuade people to buy new products. However, Violet wants to break this tendency and become untraceable; that is why she asks for the products but does not buy them.

Later on, Violet finds out that her feed was damaged during the hack. She is getting more and more malfunctioned and she may even die. People usually get the feed installed when they are small children, but Violet got her feed in a later age, which caused higher risks of her body not to accept it. One day, Violet has a seizure, collapses and is taken to a hospital. Due to her malfunction, she starts to lose her memories; to prevent that, she sends them to Titus in order to keep them safe. However, Titus is childish, cold-hearted and egoistic – he does not know how to hold the burden of dating a dying girl, so he deletes all her memories. In the course of time, Violet’s body is getting more and more malfunctioned. She cannot afford repairs, so she asks corporations for help; however, she is refused because her customer profile is not profitable for the companies. After that, Violet decides to go for a trip to the countryside with Titus. Unfortunately, they get into a fight there because Titus does not reciprocate Violet’s romantic feelings towards him, and they break up. As more mature one, Violet apologizes to Titus, but he does not respond.

Few months later, Violet’s father requests Titus to come and say goodbye to Violet because she is in coma and dying. Violet’s father blames Titus for his bad behaviour towards his daughter; he shares with him Violet’s last memories full of suffering and pain. Titus leaves and, overwhelmed with sadness, starts to order goods unthinkingly via feed until he is out of money. Later, Titus visits Violet for the last time, narrating her stories from the past. While Violet is slowly dying, Titus does not feel anything.<sup>162</sup>

### **2.1.3 Story of *Need***

The story is set in a small American town where one day a new social media site suddenly emerges. *Need* is an anonymous social media network created for the students of a local high school. *Need* asks its users what they want, while explaining the difference between a need and a wish, promising to fulfil the wishes. In exchange for a wish, the users have to invite other people to the site or complete certain tasks.

The site starts to be popular among teenagers. The situation shows that people are immature, selfish and needy. Teenagers usually want things such as a new computer or a mobile phone, better grades, etc. They want things for free, but nothing is for free. They are not careful on what they wish as they believe that nothing bad can happen. At first, the tasks seem to be harmless, but soon they turn out to be harmful. The site turns out to be treacherous

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<sup>162</sup> M. T. Anderson. *Feed*. (Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2002).

because it requires people to fulfil more and more dangerous tasks. People do anything in order to get what they want, especially when they carry out things anonymously without a fear they will be disclosed. However, the tasks turn out to have deadly consequences.

The main heroine Kaylee needs a kidney for her sick brother. She is the only one who asks for a real need and not a mere wish. The website is growing - soon, everybody from the school is a member of Need. At the beginning, Need looks like an innocent social media site, but it monitors people, their actions and behaviour. When people make problems, the site threatens them with death. Need simply brainwashes people and nobody notices that. In a short time, the site terrorizes the town and its citizens and the death rate increases. Kaylee, together with her friend Nate, wants to find out what is happening and who is responsible for Need. After an investigation, Kaylee uncovers a conspiracy. She finds out that dr. Jain, a school's psychologist, is behind all of this. Need was a governmental psychological experiment intended for infiltrating other nations by finding dangerous subjects, eliminating them and ensuring the safety of the USA. The project was supposed to predict people's behaviour based on determining personality types and finding out what the subjects are able to execute. Dr. Jain was supposed to monitor a testing group and find suitable subjects. Unfortunately, she had chosen this town for accomplishing her personal revenge. The consequences are unpleasant because many people died before the conspiracy was revealed.<sup>163</sup>

#### **2.1.4 Story of *Super Sad True Love Story***

The story takes place in an apocalyptic future of America in which the world and the society has deteriorated. People are superficial and self-centered, caring only about themselves. They are illiterate - they do not read books anymore and they devote their time only to entertainment and fun. The society is obsessed with data, youth and eternal life, health, sex, consumerism, materialism, shopping, money, status, entertainment and social media. On the other hand, technology is advanced. People use apparäts which are devices connected to the Internet; they are used for: searching the information, social media communication, entertainment and many more. Everything is shared, connected, streamed and rated. For communication, people use a social networking site called 'GlobalTeens'.

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<sup>163</sup> Joelle Charbonneau. *Need* (New York: Young Readers Paperback, 2015).

The main hero Lenny Abramov falls in love with Eunice Park, a young Korean girl. Lenny is old and funny middle-class man. He is romantic, he believes in good, love and immortality. He is not wealthy nor attractive. He does not fit into the society, which makes him insecure, but he tries to improve himself and he dreams about a better future. He is old-fashioned as he likes books, but the society deplors them in favour of the Internet and social media. Eunice is a young and self-centered, but emphatic girl. She lacks self-confidence because she comes from an unstable and unhappy family, but she still loves her relatives. She is obsessed by appearance and shopping. She is constantly chatting with her friends on social media sites.

Lenny and Eunice establish a relationship and start to live together. Unfortunately, their relationship is not going well because of their differences, origins and cultures. In a few months, they introduce each other to their parents. After a political revolt, they try to contact their families and deal with their cultural differences. Meanwhile, Lenny works as a salesman for his boss Joshie in Post-Human Services corporation (Staatling-Wapachung) which prolongs life until immortality for rich clients because people desire to live forever.

When Lenny returns to the USA from his business trip, he is a witness to a decay of America. Everything is getting worse. America has political problems: it is not popular because it is involved in a war and it is dependent on China which dominates the world. Inside the country, there are frequent riots. The USA has changed into a police state ruled by Bipartisan Party, led by a totalitarian leader, which takes power and eliminates political enemies. The state is controlled by an army which spies on people and suppresses revolts. The government monitors and controls citizens; therefore, people have no privacy and no freedom. Moreover, there is an economic crisis because the country is poor and money loses its value. People are needy and unemployed; for that reason, they organize a revolt against the regime in which people are dying. During the riots, private corporation Staatling-Wapachung takes power and one totality is changed for another one. As a result, the city is destructed and apparäts stop working. People have no jobs and they are starving.

When the situation calms down, Lenny introduces Eunice to his boss Joshie. Eunice is enchanted and she starts to meet Joshie in secret. However, after a disclosure Lenny cannot forgive her and they break up. As years pass, Eunice finds another man and Joshie's company falls apart. Lenny stops searching for eternal life, accepts mortality and moves to Italy. He writes a book about his life experiences while he is calmly growing old.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Gary Shteyngart. *Super Sad True Love Story* (New York: Random House, 2011).

## 2.2 Social media networks in novels

For the sake of performing an analysis, social media that play roles in the examined novels are briefly described in the following paragraphs.

First, social media network in *The Circle* is called TrueYou. TrueYou is a Circle's account which enables its users to access all the other websites and services with one password from one source. Moreover, it combines all online activity into one entity: user names, passwords email accounts, social media profiles, bank accounts, shopping interests, etc. With TrueYou, people can perform many actions such as: using social media, communicating, online shopping, streaming their life online, checking the Internet, sharing data and location, monitoring their health, rating other people, etc. TrueYou is owned by the Circle, which means that due to this tool the company monitors its users and gathers their personal information.<sup>165</sup>

Second, social media website in *Need* is of the same name. Need is a powerful social media network created exclusively for the students of a concrete American high school. The website grants people what they wish in exchange for inviting other people to register to the network or fulfilling specific tasks. After completing the task, the users have to make a proof that the task was carried out. There are specific conditions for the membership: the users are obliged to hide their true identity and at the same time keep the site anonymous. Also, the profiles or posts cannot be deleted. Actually, Need (together with its inventor) gathers personal information about its users, monitors their actions and force them to commit crimes.<sup>166</sup>

Third, social media sites in *Super Sad True Love Story* are mediated by electronic devices called appäräts. An appärät provides its user with a constant connection to the Internet and online services. Appäräts store the personal information of their user and gather data from the surroundings. Moreover, appäräts offer people various online functions such as: searching for information and news, chatting on social media sites, socializing, storing and sharing personal data and location, monitoring their health, ranking other people, entertainment (watching videos, streaming), online shopping, explaining things, etc. People are obliged to have appäräts and use a social media site called GlobalTeens. Also, owning an appärät is a trend; a person who does not possess one is considered old-fashioned and inferior. Appäräts

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<sup>165</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*.

<sup>166</sup> Charbonneau, *Need*.

are owned by the government which can access people's personal data or track their location via them, ensuring the control over citizens.<sup>167</sup>

Fourth, social media networks in *Feed* functions via electronic chips inbuilt in a human body called feeds. A feed is ever-present as it is a chip inbuilt in a human brain. It can predict people's wishes based on their interests and preferences. Moreover, the feed gives recommendations to its user such as what to say or do (for example where to eat, what music to listen to, what drink to buy, etc.). Furthermore, the feed establishes a constant telepathic connection to the Internet. It provides its user with many functions such as: looking up information on the Internet, chatting real-time on social media, sharing data and memories, shopping, online entertainment (broadcasting news, playing games, listening to the music, watching videos) or accessing dictionaries online. If people do not have money, they could not afford buying a feed and without the feed, they are perceived as outdated. Feeds cannot be turned off because they control the basic functions of a human body. Unfortunately, feeds can get malfunctioned; in the worst case, the malfunction may lead to a death of the user. Feeds are owned by private corporations. Via feeds, the corporations gather users' data or track their location, which gives them a control over people.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story*.

<sup>168</sup> Anderson, *Feed*.



### **3. Analysis of social media and their influence on people**

Social media are means of online communication running via the Internet websites. Nowadays, they have become more and more popular; people use them because everybody else uses them. Social media have their positive and negative sides. The danger of social media lies in their unwise use without considering possible consequences. The problem is that when a new service or a tool is introduced to people, they start to use it because it seems to them that positive aspects outweigh the negative ones. Especially, when services bring an entertainment, then people usually do not consider if they are worth using or not – they simply use them. Unfortunately, negative sides may appear and they may not be immediately visible, but the more they are not apparent at first sight, the more dangerous and harmful they may be in the future.

Social media are favourite because they bring many advantages. People can write messages to each other, post commentaries, share their personal data such as photos and videos, and exchange information on the Internet. Social media are offered to people for free. Users only have to create an account on a social media network and agree with its terms and conditions. On the other hand, disadvantages exist as well. The greatest problem, which may not instantly cross people's minds, appears when the use of social media is conditioned by a permission, required by corporations, to monitor people's activities and store their personal data on the servers of the companies without a possibility to delete them. This strategy gives the companies a huge power and an opportunity to control people. Corporations assert that the data of their users cannot be misused and nobody can manipulate them, but the data may be actually misused - people may never know if the companies will track their location or use their sensitive information to blackmail them.

#### **3.1 Identity**

Identity is a set of people's personality traits, qualities, opinions and beliefs which together form a unique identity. The concept of identity can be perceived from many viewpoints. People may have a sense of their own personal identity or they may be aware of their place in a society, in other words a social identity. There are various factors which have an influence on shaping the identity. Those elements may be either positive or negative. Everything what people are exposed to shapes their personal identity, for example: other people and interaction with them, environment, personal experience, etc. Self-esteem is also formed together with

the identity. Besides, when people are socially active and interact with each other, they adopt a certain position or a role in the society, they socialize and communicate with others. According to their activity, they take their place in a community, which shapes their social identity.<sup>169</sup> In addition, nowadays an Internet identity has emerged: it is a face that people show to the world publicly on social media sites. People can disguise themselves as somebody else and it would be hard to identify their true identity, because people do not know who is sitting at the computer on the other side.<sup>170</sup>

Social media, their usage and influence, have an impact on people's thinking, values, priorities and perception of the world. People may change from better to worse or they may start to have different priorities and preferences than before owing to the use of social media. What is more, social media may change people's relationships towards other people. According to *The Circle*, Mae's values have changed under the influence of social media. At the beginning, she performs an ordinary telemarketing job. She is a common girl who is modest and kind, but with a low self-confidence. However, as she begins to work in the Circle, she becomes successful and popular. She gets higher self-confidence and starts to be superficial and selfish. Concerning relationships, Mae is not interested in her family anymore and she is not nice to people who love her. She cares more about herself, her promotion and the improvement of the company. She starts to be so cold-hearted that even a death of her close friend does not affect her and she continues to care only about new technology. Therefore, Mae is losing her family, friends and people who care about her because of the bad influence that the Circle imposes on her. In *Feed*, people's values are distorted as well. Social media are more important than family for people. Family members spend time together physically, but they do not socialize with each other because they are constantly chatting on social media and checking the Internet: "This is dinner together. That means family networking and defragging time."<sup>171</sup> For example, Titus does not need to spend time with his family, but he needs to feel loved. Absurdly, he feels the love from his family love just because he can track his relatives in the house via social media: "I could feel my family all around me. I could trace their feeds."<sup>172</sup>

Due to social media usage, people may also forget about their own life. They change to be so obsessed with social media that they forget their own life and they do not see what

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<sup>169</sup> James D. Fearon, "What is Identity (As We Now Use the Word)?," Department of Political Science Stanford University (1999).

<sup>170</sup> Krzysztof Wilaszek, Tomasz Wójcik, Andrzej Opaliński, and Wojciech Turek, "Internet Identity Analysis and Similarities Detection," AGH University of Science and Technology, (2012).

<sup>171</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 147.

<sup>172</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 147.

really matters. As can be seen in *The Circle* Mae's scale of values has changed. To support this statement with an illustrative example, Mae stops caring about her personal life. First, she devotes time to herself, her interests and hobbies, her family and friends. But later on, she forgets about her family and hobbies. For example, kayaking was Mae's favourite hobby for releasing stress from work. However, she stops kayaking in favour of her job at the Circle, which is suddenly more important for her than anything else.

Furthermore, Mae starts to prefer the Circle to her family. At first, her family is at the first place for her. She always makes time to go home and visit her parents because she wants to spend time with her family and friends. Afterwards, Mae starts to give the preference to the Circle than to her family. She is staying at the company because she believes that everything in the Circle is better than at home: "Everything was done better here."<sup>173</sup> Compared with the Circle, her home suddenly does not seem so special: "It was a sad place, especially after a day at the Circle."<sup>174</sup> In the end, Mae abandons her family and does not care about it anymore. She becomes fully devoted to the Circle and spends all her time there. In conclusion, people's values may get distorted after the pressure and influence of a powerful company. In addition, Mae feels at heart that she feels better in the Circle than at home with her family. She believes that the family brings only problems and argues contrary to the Circle. However, it is the other way round; people should look forward to returning home from work, but Mae looks forward to escaping to work from home. She feels more comfortable with her co-workers who share the same passion for work than with her parents and friends who warn her against the power of the Circle. The problem is that Mae was brainwashed by the company to adopt such an opinion:

Mae drove back to the Circle, determined that when she got back to campus, she would stay there. She'd had enough of the chaos of her family, of Mercer, her wretched hometown. ... Home was madness. On campus, all was familiar. On campus there was no friction. ... The Circlers, who implicitly understood her and the planet and the way it had to be and soon would be.<sup>175</sup>

### 3.1.1 Socializing

In the past, when the Internet was not widely accessible and wide-spread, children were naturally running outside and playing with other kids. It was a normal way of how they

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<sup>173</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 42.

<sup>174</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 39.

<sup>175</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 373.

socialized and made friends. Children sitting at home and playing with electronic devices were considered to be asocial. However, the trend has changed. Nowadays, in the age of the Internet - a digital age - children playing outside, just with the use of their imagination, would be perceived as being weird. It is more common that children sit at home at the computers and play online video games or chat with friends via social media. Clearly, the sense of sociality (of being social) has changed. Currently, people may be considered as being social when they are active on social media networks. In *The Circle*, Mercer points out the above-mentioned problem: “It’s just a very different planet. ... I’m social enough. But the tools you guys create actually manufacture unnaturally extreme social needs. No one needs the level of contact you’re purveying.”<sup>176</sup> Actually, the Circle forces people to socialize with others via social media or to attend company events. For example, Mae is urged to share her hobbies with other employees for the sake of meeting new people with the same interests and making social contacts with them. She is blamed for not being social enough; if she wants to work in the Circle, she is expected to do that:

How do you think other Circlers feel, knowing that you’re so close to them physically, that you’re ostensibly part of a community here, but you don’t want them to know your hobbies and interests. ... You’re not *engaged* with the people around you! ... Don’t you see that it’s all connected? You play your part. You have to *part-icipate*.<sup>177</sup>

Mae is not only forced to socialize and participate, but she is also forced to make a choice between her family and the Circle. According to the company, a community is of a high priority and it should be at the first place, even at the expense of a family. Mae has to choose either her family or the Circle’s community:

That’s very understandable. To spend time with your parents ... I just want to emphasize the *community* aspect of this job. We see this workplace as a *community*, and every person who works here is *part* of that community. And to make it all work it requires a certain level of participation.<sup>178</sup>

Communication can be of various types. Direct communication is personal, when people meet and speak face-to-face to each other in reality. On the other hand, indirect communication is impersonal, when people speak or write to each other online via computers or other electronic devices. With the coming of a digital era, the communication has changed:

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<sup>176</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 134.

<sup>177</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 188–189.

<sup>178</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 179.

it started to be impersonal with the use of the Internet and social media. People tend to have their mobile phones or laptops permanently in their hands and communicate with others online. If communication changes from the real (personal) communication into the online (mediated) communication, people stop interacting with each other face-to-face: they cannot see each other nor enjoy body language. As social beings, people need to interact with others in order not to suffer from a lack of social interaction. Most importantly, it has to be the real interaction (not online), which provides people with a lot of extra information such as talking face-to-face, body language, using gestures, etc. This kind of information is missing during virtual interaction. In *The Circle*, Mae starts to communicate with people via electronic devices allowing online communication instead of speaking with them in person. Mercer complains about the way how she talks with him; he emphasizes the fact that he wants to interact with Mae directly: “When you and I communicate, I want to do it directly. You write to me, I write to you. You ask me questions, and I answer them. You stop getting news about me from third parties.”<sup>179</sup> Moreover, talking with Mae is uncomfortable for him because she constantly speaks about other people and she is not able to devote him all her attention:

We have to change how we interact. Every time I see or hear from you, it’s through this filter. You send me links, you quote someone talking about me, you say you saw a picture of me on someone’s wall. ... I just want to talk with you directly. Without you bringing in every other stranger in the world who might have an opinion about me.<sup>180</sup>

In *Super Sad True Love Story*, communication is even more absurd. Online communication is more usual than face-to-face talking. For example, Lenny is surprised when he meets an old woman who speaks with him aloud, without the use of apparät. The same tendency can be found in *Feed*. Communication is not personal there as well, but mostly virtual. People prefer to chat telepathically via the feeds than to bother themselves to speak aloud. Absurdly, people sit next to each other and instead of speaking aloud, they are chatting silently in mind: “We were too angry to speak out loud. ... So we started to chat.”<sup>181</sup> For example, Titus’ father is not used to talk normally aloud anymore: “I forgot. No m-chat. Just talking.”<sup>182</sup>

Furthermore, people do not need only social interaction, but also friendships. People tend to make new friends not only outside, but they also socialize in the virtual world. Social

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<sup>179</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 132.

<sup>180</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 131–132.

<sup>181</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 167.

<sup>182</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 55.

media represent an easy and comfortable way to establish new friendships online. However, connections made this way are not real friendships, because true friendships develop in the course of time. If people add new ‘friends’ whom they even do not know personally, are those people still friends, or mere random contacts from social media? True friendships need more than that, for example common experiences and trust. Despite that, people feel that they have many friends because of a possibility to be connected with anybody all over the world. An example of a false friendship can be seen in *The Circle*. Unknown doctors follow Mae on social media and watch her medical data. They find out that she can be prone to a cancer in the future. Subsequently, they immediately warn her via social media against a potential illness which could endanger her. This act seems to be nice of them: “But the beauty of having so many friends out there, as you do, is that one of them, five thousand miles away, has helped you avert a growing risk.”<sup>183</sup> However, this cannot be classified as an act of a pure friendship because the doctors are strangers to her.

Social media has changed the way of how people perceive the concept of friendship and how fast they make new friends. In the past, when there were no social media networks and applications, it took people some time to socialize outside face-to-face, find new friends, getting to know each other personally and establish a real friendship which may last long time. Today, it is easy to search for new friends on social media sites because people can get to know a lot of information about others in advance from their social media profiles. Thereafter, they get in touch with a completely unknown person whom they “met” on the Internet. Of course, introvert or shy people appreciate this way of socialization as it is more comfortable to initiate a new contact via written messages than to address people aloud in public, which may cause misunderstanding or embarrassment. What is more, it takes only a few mouse clicks and a new ‘virtual friendship’ is established on social media. In *The Circle*, unknown people ask Mae if they can add her into their friends list on social media. But not only people who she knows personally, but also people from all parts of the world who just follow her profile on the Internet. In the next example, Mae helps an unknown woman to solve a work-related problem via social media. Mae believes that she has a new friend because she added that woman to her social media contacts. However, the woman is not her new friend as it is not a real friendship. To sum up, relationships established in this way are not real friendships, but mere virtual friendships created on social media sites.

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<sup>183</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 360.

Together with establishing relationships online arises a danger of exploitation. Some people may befriend with others only to take advantage of them in their own favour. Those people count on the goodness of people and their readiness to help without a refusal. As *The Circle* shows, some people contact Mae only because they want to exploit her popularity. For instance, an unknown man asks Mae for help because she has a high influence in the company; he does not hesitate to use emotional blackmail to persuade her: “It sure would mean a lot if you were to recommend Helena for a job there at the Circle. No pressure but we’re counting on you!”<sup>184</sup> Another matter is that people may not be always truly interested in making a friendship. In some cases, people may pretend to care about others in order to get what they want. To set an example from *The Circle*, when Mae’s father has a seizure, people send Mae seemingly caring messages expressing support: “There was a flood of messages from concerned viewers, followed by thousands of smiles from all over the world.”<sup>185</sup> However, the care is not real because Mae’s viewers are not her real friends. They are the people who are only watching her streams and enjoying entertainment. They are not really interested in her life and problems, it is just a pretence.

Nevertheless, people may still feel lonely despite the fact that they communicate with others online, because they have a lack of real contact, apart from other things such as gestures and body language. Perhaps, people may not realize it at the moment, but this cannot satisfy their need for human interaction. In *The Circle*, Mae is depressed because she wants to talk to her family, but she is unable to connect with them; she starts to feel abandoned and alone. When she receives messages from her watchers, she feels better because she has an illusion that somebody loves her: “Watchers from all over the world had reached out, sending her their support, their smiley – she’d gotten millions, tens of millions.”<sup>186</sup> But this is neither true love nor true friendships because Mae does not know those people at all. Another reason why people feel lonely may be the alienation caused by an addiction to social media and a need to use social networking sites all the time without interacting with real people. To push away the feeling of loneliness, people usually distract themselves with work or entertainment, but this effort mostly does not work. In *The Circle*, Mae buys clothes online, reads funny commentaries or watches the records of nature from cameras located around the world in order not to feel desperate from loneliness. In *Super Sad True Love Story*, Eunice and Lenny are physically next to each other in bed, chatting on social media, but still they feel lonely:

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<sup>184</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 377.

<sup>185</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 364.

<sup>186</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 470.

“Like we didn’t have to say much to each other, we could just lie there in bed for hours, doing whatever on our *äppäräti*.”<sup>187</sup> Actually, instead of connecting them, social media rather separate them. Even if one of them would wish to spend time with the second one, the second one could have been so occupied with chatting that he would not wish to do something together. To the contrary, people never feel completely alone in *Feed* since they are constantly surrounded by advertisements and social media from their feeds as Titus realizes: “The feed murmured to me again and again.”<sup>188</sup> Not only people cannot be disconnected, since a feed is a part of their brain and it ensures basic body functions, but moreover the feed is run by corporations which would not allow it.

### 3.1.2 Addiction

When people use social media, they start to be addicted to them. They still feel a need to be in constant contact and connection with others. The reason is that people are social beings, they tend to socialize with others and they like to keep contact with them in order not to feel alone. However, nowadays people do not go out to meet their friends in person as often as in the past because they can be in contact with people virtually via modern electronic devices such as computers, mobile phones, tablets, etc. The problem is that people have become addicted to these devices because they enable them communication and everything else started to be boring for them. Moreover, due to a constant connection to the Internet and social media, people have lost their privacy. In *The Circle*, Mae starts to be addicted to social media and virtual communication. She over-exaggerates their importance and she feels a need to constantly chat with people online. For example, she even wishes a good night to her customers: “She said good night to her watchers – a few thousand of whom reciprocated her good night wishes.”<sup>189</sup> Sadly, when somebody distracts Mae from her connection to social media, she over-reacts and gets angry. For instance, Mae gets upset when she is delayed at a family dinner. But being at home with a family should not be considered as wasting of time. Besides, she nonsensically measures the time of how long people can speak to her and delay her before her return to social media networking.

Similarly, in *Feed* people are addicted to social media as well. People get bored without constant connection to their feed because all the entertainment is online and provided

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<sup>187</sup> Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story*, 171.

<sup>188</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 148.

<sup>189</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 335.



by the connection to the Internet via the feed. For example, when Titus is disconnected, he misses the feed. Suddenly, he has an empty mind and he has time for his own thoughts not influenced by the Internet, which he considers peculiar. Furthermore, in *Super Sad True Love Story*, people are also addicted to apparäts: they are connected all the time and doing nothing else than chatting. This can be seen on the example of Eunice. She even forgets about her partner Lenny because chatting has a higher importance for her: “I lay in my bed, listening to Eunice teening furiously on her apparät in the living room, probably to her friends in southern California or to her family in Fort Lee.”<sup>190</sup> As well as in the previous examples, when apparäts stop working, people feel boredom. For example, Eunice gets into a depression without her apparät and she is not able to do anything else: “Eunice was sitting by the kitchen table, staring absently at her nonfunctional apparät.”<sup>191</sup> Nevertheless, addiction has the worst form in the case of *Super Sad True Love Story*, because people are addicted so much that they cannot live without apparäts - literally. Some of them even commit suicide because they are missing social media a lot and they are convinced that they cannot live without a constant connection:

Four young people committed suicide in our building complexes, and two of them wrote suicide notes about how they couldn't see a future without their apparäti. One wrote, quite eloquently, about how he “reached out to life,” but found there only “walls and thoughts and faces,” which weren't enough. He needed to be ranked, to know his place in this world.... We are all bored out of our fucking minds. My hands are itching for connection, I want to connect too.<sup>192</sup>

To continue with connectivity, in *The Circle*, not only people are obsessed with constant connection, but also the Circle itself strives to interconnect all the people from the whole world via its exclusive social media network: “We need to find more ways to connect. ... Find a way to make the connection between us and our users stronger.”<sup>193</sup>

What is more, people need to check social media networks all the time on their devices. In *The Circle*, Mae feels incomplete without her mobile phone; she needs to have it with her all the time, even during a family dinner. The phone is still beeping; she cannot turn it off because she needs to constantly check what is new on social media networks. She is absent-minded, she does not pay attention to her surroundings at all. When her parents are speaking to her, she is occupied with reading messages on her phone instead of paying

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<sup>190</sup> Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story*, 169.

<sup>191</sup> Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story*, 373.

<sup>192</sup> Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story*, 403.

<sup>193</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 349.

attention to them. Last but not least, in *Super Sad True Love Story* people also need to check their devices very often: “The Eternity Lounge was crammed full of smelly young people checking their äppäräti.”<sup>194</sup> People are also absent-minded as they are constantly looking on their apäräts without paying attention to reality like Mae in the previous example. For instance, Lenny’s friends are occupied with their social media a lot: “There they were, crowded around a table, their äppäräti out, speaking into their shirt collars while thumbing Content into their pearly devices, two curly, dusky heads completely lost to the world around them.”<sup>195</sup> Lastly, in *Feed* people are absent-minded as well. When they are using social media, they devote themselves only to their feeds and not to the world around: “People walking and talking on their feeds.”<sup>196</sup> Most absurdly, people may be physically next to each other and talk, but instead they prefer to communicate with others online without paying attention to real people standing next to them:

Occasionally, she’d [Titus’ friend] forget and she’d say out loud to no one, ‘Omigod! Yes! Right here’ or ‘Hello...?’ or whatever it was she was saying in her head. She would laugh at jokey we couldn’t hear.<sup>197</sup>

When people attend public events, they have a tendency to enjoy them indirectly - via making photos and videos with their mobile phones incessantly and sharing them on social media websites - instead of experiencing the events directly and personally. People do not pay enough attention and they cannot fully enjoy the present moment which will not repeat again. An example from *The Circle* supports this idea. When Mae attends a company event, she witnesses people around her recording it on their devices and posting it together with commentaries on social media sites. However, they actually do not really enjoy the event itself, but instead they focus on sharing it online to others. To conclude, as can be seen in all the cases mentioned above, people do not fully enjoy the present moment because they are constantly connected to social media.

Another demonstration of an addiction to social media from *The Circle* proves that Mae starts to be obsessed with rankings and likes that people give her on social media sites. She is blinded; during a family dinner she is fully occupied with rankings and therefore she does not realize that nobody else around is interested in it and that she is spoiling the family dinner:

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<sup>194</sup> Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story*, 95.

<sup>195</sup> Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story*, 125.

<sup>196</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 77.

<sup>197</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 52.

You haven't even heard the best part. On DesignMind, you already have 122 smiles. That's an incredible amount to get so quickly. And they have a ranking there, and you're in the top fifty today. Actually, I know how you could raise that.<sup>198</sup>

Similarly, in *Super Sad True Love Story* people are obsessed with data and rankings on social media which show many things, for example their popularity among others. However, this obsession has an impact on their self-confidence because they are constantly being watched, evaluated and criticized. In the next example from *The Circle*, Mae's colleague Francis demands an evaluation - a numerical rating - of sex that they experienced together. It is absurd to rate such an intimate act with numbers. Francis praises Mae as follows: "You were perfect. A 100."<sup>199</sup> But then, he gets angry because Mae evaluates him in words instead of exact numbers, which would be easier for him to understand:

We just argues about all this, about the words you used and what they meant. We didn't understand their meaning the same way, and we went around and around about it. But if you had just used a number I would have understood right away.<sup>200</sup>

To continue, social media are time-consuming. People spend a lot of time in front of computers, checking out what is happening around or what is new with their friends (what new photos, videos or commentaries they post, etc.). As a consequence, people forget their own life: they stop going out, meeting their friends, visiting their families or forget about their hobbies. In *The Circle*, Mercer describes this tendency, which is true about Mae, in the following words:

You're not doing anything interesting anymore. You're not seeing anything, saying anything. ... You yourself are becoming less vibrant. I bet you haven't done anything offscreen in months. ... Do you go outside anymore? ... You comment on things, and that substitutes for doing them.<sup>201</sup>

In a similar way, in *Feed* people waste a lot of time by constant chatting. Actually, they do not do anything useful because they care only about entertainment. Nothing significant and memorable remains after them in the future. What is more, for those people who are addicted, all the other activities which are not related to social media start to be

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<sup>198</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 258–259.

<sup>199</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 396.

<sup>200</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 384.

<sup>201</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 262–263.

boring because they are not as exciting as chatting with others online. In *The Circle*, Mae perceives visiting her family and friends boring as it does not bring any excitement.

In order to communicate via social media, people write messages to each other. However, sometimes the amount of messages might be too excessive. Answering all of them takes a lot of time. The flow of information is endless, and it may be very time-consuming. Furthermore, people usually expect others to pay attention to their messages and they require quick answers. If others do not reply immediately, people tend to measure the time: they see that others had read the message, but they did not answer. Thus, people get angry and start to ask others why they had not answered sooner. This is nonsense as people do not have time just to sit at social media networks and answer the messages. In *The Circle*, Mae's parents are overwhelmed by an immense amount of messages that they receive from their watchers. They do not have time and energy to reply to all of them: "Even if we spent one minute on each response, that's a thousand minutes. Sixteen hours just for some basic response to the messages!"<sup>202</sup> The situation is absurd, because it leads only to stress. Understandably, they refuse to obtain any more messages in the future because in their free time they want to deal with some non-online activities as well: "It's actually very stressful. And we've already had many people get angry when they don't hear back from us in a given amount of time."<sup>203</sup>

### **3.1.3 Degradation**

Social media cause the degeneration of thinking and language, its simplification and a loss of emotions. Written communication is not the same as oral communication. During oral communication, people can express much more, they can talk a lot and use a lot of words and synonyms; body language and gestures are included too. However, if the communication is only written and mediated by social media, people tend to express themselves compactly and use fewer words in order to be clear and save space and time spent on writing. The language is getting more and more simplified together with a gradual decline of rational and critical thinking. Moreover, nowadays it seems that people are not able to express their emotions well by written text, and especially in online communication: they tend to use pictures and smileys. It is an easier and more comfortable way for them. However, expressing their emotions via pictures instead of making an effort to explain the actual feelings is wrong. Furthermore, using social media may lead to dehumanization or even de-emotionalization. To be more

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<sup>202</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 367.

<sup>203</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 367–368.

specific, when people communicate via social media, their intelligence level drops, their language expression becomes simpler and their ability to show and explain emotions lowers. At the end, everything becomes simplified, which will result in dehumanization. In *The Circle*, Mercer explains the fact that in the past smileys were not important. They were considered a part of children's communication. To the contrary, in present days everybody uses them in text messages: "But now it's not just junior high kids who do it, it's everyone, and it seems to me sometimes I've entered some inverted zone."<sup>204</sup> It is important to realize that this tendency may lead to the degradation of language. Thinking will become simpler since people will get used to express everything in pictures and not think much about what they write and how they express themselves. Moreover, if written communication starts to prevail over spoken communication, many emotions may completely disappear from it.

In *Super Sad True Love Story*, people also express their emotions in pictures and smileys instead of written text. Their thinking got simpler and language got deteriorated: young people over-use simplified language such as abbreviations, slang and swear words, especially if they write on social media sites. Human intelligence got dropped; people do not read books anymore as information in books is too complex for them to understand. For example, when Lenny reads a book aloud to Eunice, she does not follow him at all and therefore she feels frustrated and inferior. In addition, with constant connection to the Internet, people do not need to study at schools anymore because they can look up all the information via the Internet and social media sites. For example, in *Super Sad True Love Story* aparäts immediately automatically explain to people things that they do not understand: "My apparät helpfully told me."<sup>205</sup>

However, *Feed* presents the most senseless example of degradation of people which is caused by social media. People do not study at school almost at all because they can look up everything instantly on the Internet via the feed: "You can be supersmart without ever working. ... You can look things up automatic, like science and history, like if you want to know which battles of the Civil War George Washington fought in."<sup>206</sup> For that reason, reading and writing are not necessary skills anymore because everything can be accessed telepathically via feeds. As a result, people are getting more and more illiterate. The language got simplified: people use slang, simple words and limited vocabulary. Moreover,

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<sup>204</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 133.

<sup>205</sup> Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story*, 139.

<sup>206</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 47.

corporations contribute to the degeneration of society as well because they try to make everything simpler in order to control people:

They [corporations] keep making everything more basic so it will appeal to everyone. And gradually, everyone gets used to everything being basic, so we get less and less varied as people, more simple. So the corps make everything even simpler.<sup>207</sup>

Lastly, in *Feed* the worst fact is that people even do not need to think by themselves because the feed thinks instead of them: “I didn’t know the word. Her spine was like...? The feed suggested ‘supple’.”<sup>208</sup>

Social media and searching all the information on the Internet has a negative impact on people’s critical thinking and their ability to consider the authenticity of information. When people gain information from the Internet or social media sites, they tend to take it for granted. They do not think about it more deeply and they usually do not verify the authenticity of such information. For example, in *The Circle* Mercer is not happy about the fact that Mae blindly believes everything what other people write about him on social media sites. He does not like her inability to ask directly the source and verify the information: “You can ask me! Actually ask me. You know how weird that is, that you, my friend and ex-girlfriend, gets her information about me from some random person who’s never met me?”<sup>209</sup> The previous example demonstrates that the expansion and development of the Internet and using social media networks makes people less careful and more lazy to consider if the information is true or false. People unquestioningly accept it as it is and do not verify its authenticity. This behaviour point out the decrease of rational thinking and its subsequent degradation.

### 3.2 Sharing

On the Internet, there is an excessive amount of information. When people search for some concrete piece of information, they have to go through a vast amount and select the data that they really need. However, nowadays it could be a problem to orientate in so huge amount of information and sort out the authentic from non-authentic one. In *The Circle*, Mae needs to check all the messages that accumulated in her feed since she started her new job. There is

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<sup>207</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 97.

<sup>208</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 14.

<sup>209</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 132.

about eight thousand pieces of news; looking through it is very time-consuming and the flow of messages is never-ending as the news are accumulating continually. An ordinary person would not have enough time to cope with such amount of information. An attempt to handle the messages leads to overwork, overtimes and exhaustion; Mae is simply overwhelmed by news and social media:

Her brain contained too much. That the volume of information, of data, of judgments, of measurements, was too much, and there were too many people, and too many desires of too many people, and too many opinions of too many people, and too much pain from too many people, and having all of it constantly collated, collected, added and aggregated, and presented to her as if that all made it tidier and more manageable.<sup>210</sup>

In *Super Sad True Love Story*, people are also overwhelmed by plenty of information because their apparäts show them constantly some adverts and data, despite people do not wish so: “My apparät started to warble. I was being hit with a serious data package.”<sup>211</sup> The users may be irritated by that, but they cannot do anything about it because it is a duty to own and use an apparät. The same overabundance of information can be found in *Feed*. When people walk around shops, feeds constantly offer them some adverts and information about products in order to persuade customers to buy them: “Our feeds were going fugue with all the banners. ... I was getting bannered so hard.”<sup>212</sup> Likewise, the feeds offer the adverts against the will of their users. Data are still popping up in their mind, making pressure upon them and limiting their freedom. Another example from *The Circle* shows Mae’s parents who are tired from the flow of messages that they receive on social media: “Both of them strung out, exhausted by the deluge you [Mae] unleashed on them. It’s too much. ... They want to be alone. And not watched. Surveillance shouldn’t be the tradeoff for any goddamn service we get.”<sup>213</sup> They do not want to be overwhelmed nor constantly monitored.

People like to share the details from their private life with their friends on social media for various reasons. One of them is a need for appreciation; people feel pleased when they are praised by others. According to *The Circle*, Mae feels happy when she can help customers on social media: “Mae was happy to answer them, feeling her opinion mattered and was being heard.”<sup>214</sup> Actually, she provides others with help so that she can be praised: “She felt that offering her preferences, and reading about others’, was one of the things she loved about her

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<sup>210</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 413–414.

<sup>211</sup> Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story*, 357.

<sup>212</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 8.

<sup>213</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 370.

<sup>214</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 329.

life online.”<sup>215</sup> Moreover, when Mae goes transparent and shares her personal life with the world, she is proud to be a role model for people: “They saw her as a role model and inspiration. And this felt good. This felt truly valuable to Mae. The customers made her better. And serving them while transparent made her far better.”<sup>216</sup> She feels good because she inspires others and then gets appreciation from them: “People called her a role model. ... That feeling of responsibility – to the Circlers, to their clients and partners, to the youth who saw inspiration in her – kept her grounded and fueled her days.”<sup>217</sup>

People have a right to know everything. Knowledge and information, as a basic human right, should be accessible to anyone without censorship and for free. People should share all the information they possess so that everyone could benefit from the experience of all the people. According to *The Circle*, the Circle wants to preserve the human knowledge: “Human knowledge will be preserved.”<sup>218</sup> The company justifies it as follows:

We’re obliged, as humans, to share what we see and know. And that all knowledge must be democratically accessible. ... It’s the natural state of information to be free. ... We all have a right to know everything we can. We all collectively own the accumulated knowledge of the world.<sup>219</sup>

To support the above-mentioned idea with an example, Mae is accused of not sharing information about her father’s sickness with the Circle and other coworkers. If she had done so, other people who suffer from the same illness could benefit from her shared experience and discuss it together in order to find help. Unfortunately, the problem is that the Circle forces people to share everything what happen in their life (including their free-time activities) with others via social media. Due to the fact that the Circle is the top-technological social media company, the employees are obliged to be open and transparent. However, such a forced practice violates people’s freedom and privacy and resembles a totality.

People who use social media usually share their personal information on the Internet. Sharing and exchanging information with each other are the basic functions of social media. People should record and share their personal experiences with other people because it may be beneficial for the welfare of the society. Primarily, those people who are unable to move and experience the world on their own (such as handicapped or immobile ones) might profit from the shared experience of others. According to *The Circle*, sharing is essential and people

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<sup>215</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 126.

<sup>216</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 330.

<sup>217</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 331.

<sup>218</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 64–65.

<sup>219</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 304.



are forced to record and share everything via social media. For example, when Mae went kayaking, she saw many beauties of nature, but she did not document anything. There are no records, the experiences are saved only in her memory. She is blamed for keeping it as a secret and not sharing it with others:

It ends with *you*. Like you're the only one who matters. But think if you'd been documenting, ... then anyone can benefit ... It's just maddening, thinking of how much knowledge is lost every day through this kind of shortsightedness.<sup>220</sup>

Mae should have been documenting her experiences and share them as it could be beneficial for the society. However, to point out a disadvantage, people are expected to suppress their needs and to do 'what is said to be the best' for the common good. But if people share everything, they will have no privacy anymore.

People have secrets and lie because they want to hide something from others; maybe they want to keep some secrets for themselves or they want to protect other's feelings and spare them from pain. When people have secrets and lie, they feel guilty; but when they have no secrets and are open, they feel better. On the other hand, according to *The Circle*, if people do not share and keep things as secrets – they keep their privacy - they are perceived as selfish people stealing from the society which has a right to know everything:

When you deprive your friends of experiences like I had, you're basically stealing from them. You're depriving them of something they have a right to. Knowledge is a basic human right. Equal access to all possible human experiences is a basic human right.<sup>221</sup>

Furthermore, in *The Circle*, there is discussed a question of morality. When people have secrets, they lie and feel guilty. But when people are open and sincere, they feel better. It follows that there should be no secrets, because secrets lead to immoral behaviour: "Secrets are the enablers of antisocial, immoral and destructive behaviour."<sup>222</sup> If people get rid of the secrets and openly confess the truth, they would be perceived as being moral.

In fact, all the lies originally come from the situation when people do not know something. When people do not know what others hide, they are paranoid and speculative, making up different stories. Speculations may be destructive, especially for relationships. To sum up, if there would be no secrets, there would be no paranoia and misbehaviour. However,

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<sup>220</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 187–188.

<sup>221</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 303.

<sup>222</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 291.

at the same time if people would be open and share everything, they would lose their privacy. With reference to relationships, if people would have known what their partner is doing, they would not need to worry and speculate. The same applies for the situation when people would have been constantly watched - they would not cheat on their partners because cheating would be revealed. Apparently, when people have a lack of knowledge, they feel bad. They should have access to all the possible information. This idea is supported by an example from *The Circle* in which Mae is depressed by not knowing: “The tear was not knowing. Not knowing who would love her and for how long. The tear was the madness of not knowing. ... It was not knowing that was the seed of madness, loneliness, suspicion, fear.”<sup>223</sup> The solution could be a complete transparency and openness together with an effort to reach perfection: “Clarity had made her knowable to the world, and had made her better, had brought her close, she hoped, to perfection. Now the world would follow. Full transparency would bring full access, and there would be no more not-knowing.”<sup>224</sup>

### 3.3 Corporations

Social media sites are usually run by private corporations, not by the state ones. It follows that there do not exist many regulations, especially if the companies are huge and rich: they can dictate their own rules. Anyway, their services use millions of people around the world because they are popular. In case social media companies offer the best services, the majority of people will use them and the companies will make more money and turn into monopolies. They may get more and more power via controlling people. There will be no competition and it may lead to a totalitarian regime. For example, the Circle is a private technological company whose devices and services are so popular that the company has become a monopoly. It has no real competition in terms of social media, so it can dictate trends. It is getting more and more power and control over people.

Corporations gather people’s personal data from different web pages and adverts that the people looked at on the Internet, but also from social media. Basically, the companies monitor people’s online activity in order to get to know their preferences so that they can use the information to make statistics and consequently improve marketing strategies and offer better services and products. Subsequently, the companies can offer people better content and adverts based on their wishes. At the cost of losing privacy, marketing is getting improved

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<sup>223</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 470.

<sup>224</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 470.

because it becomes simpler and more efficient. To set an example from *The Circle*, the Circle monitors the shopping habits of people in order to create better products and services based on customers' needs and preferences: "The actual buying habits of actual people were now eminently mappable and measurable, and the marketing to those actual people could be done with surgical precision."<sup>225</sup> Marketing is upgraded based on people's actual needs and wishes. Moreover, the Circle proclaims that the opinions of its employees are important because they are the basis on which the company makes improvements and developments: "We like to hear from people, right? That Circlers' opinions are valued? ... The Circle is predicated, to a large extent, on the input and participation of people like yourself?"<sup>226</sup> However, if people allow the company to monitor them, they will lose their privacy. What is more, if people have a Circle account, all their personal data are recorded, stored and publicly accessible. Besides, the Circle has many technological devices for improving marketing. For example, Homie is an application that scans houses for products that people regularly use and it orders new supplies when people are out of them. When producers know what exactly and how much the customers want, then they can produce exactly that amount of products and there will be no wasting.

*Feed* illustrates the best example of how marketing can be used to control people. According to the book, corporations collect personal data of their users, identify their personality types and sell products based on their preferences. Marketing gets easier both for the companies so that they know what to produce, and for the customers so that they buy exactly what they want. However, this is a constant monitoring of people, which leads to the loss of privacy: "They're also waiting to make you want things. Everything we've grown up with – the stories on the feed, the games, all of that – it's all stream-lining our personalities so we're easier to sell to."<sup>227</sup> Violet tries to resist this monitoring, she does not want the corporations to profile her: "I am going to create a customer profile that's so screwed, no one can market to it. I'm not going to let them catalog me. I'm going to become invisible."<sup>228</sup>

Many corporations offer using social media for free. As a usual trend, social media are not paid so everybody can use them. However, they are not really for free. Generally, in exchange for using services for free, the companies collect the personal data of their users via social media with the promise of improving marketing. Unsurprisingly, the main reason is making money. Moreover, the corporations monitor people via gathering their data; for

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<sup>225</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 22.

<sup>226</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 179.

<sup>227</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 97.

<sup>228</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 97.

example, they track users' location, purchases, credit card records, etc. People usually agree with terms and conditions of social media, but they are not aware of allowing the companies to monitor their life. The services should be either free or paid, but their usage should not be conditioned by unwanted surveillance. In *The Circle*, if people want to use Circle's services for free, they have to expose their personal information to the company. For example, Mae's parents voluntarily agree with monitoring because they want to have an access to a complex healthcare for free: "How can anyone provide you with good health care when you don't allow them to see how you're doing?"<sup>229</sup> The Circle openly confirms the condition by saying: "To heal we must know. To know we must share."<sup>230</sup> However, as parents realize later, surveillance means no privacy: "They [Mae's parents] want to be alone. And not watched. Surveillance shouldn't be the tradeoff for any goddamn service we get."<sup>231</sup> This example proves the fact that the Circle does not actually give the services for free, as it is claimed, but it always costs something, in this case losing personal privacy. In addition, not only the personal data of people may be misused. By constant monitoring, the state or corporations increase their power and control over the society. People may not be given an opportunity not to participate because nobody will ask them. If they want to use the services, they have to create a social media account, which means agreeing with the condition of being monitored. If there does not exist a possibility of choice, it resembles a totalitarian regime. In *The Circle*, Mercer warns against the Circle for being such a company dictating conditions: "This tool, which is far more insidious than any human invention that's come before it, must be checked, regulated, turned back, and that, most of all, we need options for opting out. We are living in a tyrannical state now."<sup>232</sup>

Corporations pretend to care about people and they act as if they make everything for the welfare of the society. But it is only a pretended care because they do not really care about people themselves. The companies act according to their own interests, for example to get control over people. But corporations do not seek only to monitor people; they make an extra effort to make more money. The same endeavour can be seen in *The Circle*. The Circle collects people's personal data in order to make money: "Your [Mae's] company is scanning all of our messages for information they can monetize."<sup>233</sup> To continue with a concrete example of pretended care, in *The Circle* the Circle pretends to be a caring company.

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<sup>229</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 366.

<sup>230</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 151.

<sup>231</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 370.

<sup>232</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 371.

<sup>233</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 135.

Untruthfully, the company seems to care about its employees and their happiness. However, it is not a real care; it is a mere pretence because the Circle does not really care about people themselves, it wants only to control them. If somebody does not agree with the policy of the Circle, they are being manipulated and brainwashed in order to change their mind or, in the worst case, destroyed. In the first example, Mae wishes to go home and spent time with her family. But her boss manipulates her, stressing the fact that it is not only her family who needs her, but the company needs her as well: “It totally makes sense you’d want to spend time with your parents. They’re your parents! It’s totally honorable of you. Like I said: very, very cool. I’m just saying we like you a lot, too, and want to know you better.”<sup>234</sup> However, the Circle does not care - if it would care, it would not force Mae to do something what is in contradiction with her personal life. The second example shows Circle’s care about the opinions of its employees. Thanks to surveys, the Circle knows what its employees want because the company asks them about their preferences, so that it can make necessary innovations according to them. However, in this case the company wants to gather employees’ personal data in order to use them for its own purposes. The third example is related to Mercer’s death. Publicly, the Circle pretends to care about his decease. Absurdly, in private the Circle admits that it does not care about his death, but only about money and improving the technology so that such a bad accident will not happen again. While being emotionless, Bailey explains this to Mae:

There’d be no chance of that happening if Mercer was in a self-driving vehicle. Their programming would have precluded this. Vehicles like the one he was riving should frankly be illegal. ... And not that it’s about money, but do you know how much it’ll cost to repair that bridge? And what is already cost to clean up the whole mess down below? You put him in a self-driving car, and there’s no option for self-destruction. The car would have shut down.<sup>235</sup>

### **3.4 Manipulation**

Corporations know how to manipulate people to do whatever the companies ask them. Moreover, the corporations force people to act against their will by blackmailing them or limiting their services. Generally, there are many ways of how the authorities can manipulate people in order to force them to do something. For example, the corporations can use mild practices such as praising people or persuading them by stressing the positive sides. In

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<sup>234</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 179.

<sup>235</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 467–468.

addition to that, the companies can use forceful practices such as emotionally blackmail people or blackmail them with best evidence, bribe them, brainwash them, openly force them to do things, or even use threatening them. Furthermore, the companies may manipulate people and even force them to use their services. They are skilled in persuading people to use social media networks. They emphasize only positives and omit negatives, stressing the welfare of the society, even at the cost of sacrifices (either of human privacy or deaths). Especially, when the corporations stress the safety advantages or offer services for free, people are willing to accept them without considering the consequences. However, if people protest that their privacy is violated, the companies always distort the information and manipulate people by finding counter-arguments which rebut and suppress the objections. To set an example, in *The Circle* Bailey claims that if there were cameras everywhere, “it would eliminate most crime.”<sup>236</sup> Additionally, he presents a new technological tool by stressing only its benefits, such as safety and people’s right to be informed:

You have a right to know who lives on your street. What’s the difference between this and simply introducing yourself to everyone on the street? This is just a more advance and thorough version of ‘good fences make good neighbours’.<sup>237</sup>

If people worry about their privacy, the Circle silences the objections by attacking with counter-arguments which reverse people’s protests about suppressing privacy. In addition, when the company emphasizes the benefits of safety, people surrender. To a similar extent, in *Feed* the corporations brainwash people by claiming that feeds are the best tools which people can use. However, the problem is that the feeds are still chips in people’s bodies: “The feed is tied in to everything. Your body control, your emotions, your memory. ... It could interfere with basic processes. ... It’s part of the brain.”<sup>238</sup> Feeds can get malfunctioned in the same way as any other electronic devices. If it happens, people may die, like in the instance of Violet.

Concerning online activity, corporations manipulate its employees to be active on social media. If people do not have a social media account, they cannot use company services and communicate with others. Moreover, the companies expect their employees to actively participate in company events and be involved in company’s life. For example, in *Super Sad True Love Story* common people are obliged to have an apärät: this device allows them to use

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<sup>236</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 283.

<sup>237</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 426–427.

<sup>238</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 171.

a social media service called ‘GlobalTeens’. People are forced by a totalitarian government to actively check and use social media on their aparäts. If people would not use aparäts, then the government would not have control over them, because via aparäts the government can monitor people’s location and many other things.

In *The Circle*, employees are forced to actively use social media: “Being social, and being a presence on your [Mae’s] profile and all related accounts – this is part of why you’re here. We consider your online presence to be integral to your work here.”<sup>239</sup> If people want to work in the Circle, they have to adapt and accept given conditions because online activity and participation belongs to the work duties. For example, Mae is forced to be more active on social media: “We actually see your profile, and the activity on it, as integral to your participation here.”<sup>240</sup> She is blamed for non-activity, so next time she promotes the company by documenting everything what is happening and by sharing the records publicly on social media sites: “She took a few pictures, posted them, and sent a series of zings, detailing and commenting on the proceedings.”<sup>241</sup> Simply speaking, Mae is brainwashed in order to do exactly what they tell her.

In addition, the Circle demands from its employees participation in company events, no matter if they are interested or not. Their personal life is not important; they have to spend their free time at the company. The Circle claims that the participation is not mandatory, but at the same time it blames employees for not attending the events, which is in contradiction: “There’s your absence [Mae’s] at most of the weekend and evening events, all of which are of course totally optional.”<sup>242</sup> For instance, Mae is blamed for missing a company event because she was visiting her family at home during the weekend: “So you go home, missing any number of activities here.”<sup>243</sup> She should have attended the event instead of spending time with her family. To prevent such a problem from happening, next time she makes sure that the Circle registered her attendance so she would not be accused again: “She’d stayed an hour, and they’d seen her, so she assumed she could leave.”<sup>244</sup> However, this is an example of emotional blackmail because the Circle exerts pressure on Mae, forcing her to obey. Another problem is that the Circle unremarkably does everything in order to make its employees stay in a campus as long as possible, even after the end of working hours. The company manipulates people by ‘bribing’ them, making perfect working environment, full of benefits.

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<sup>239</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 96.

<sup>240</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 95.

<sup>241</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 218.

<sup>242</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 182.

<sup>243</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 276.

<sup>244</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 218.

The intention is to create its own utopian world where everything will be perfect. Nevertheless, its real intention is that the employees will never wish to leave the campus. The Circle wants to monitor people and have control over them. The more they stay, the more they will become an integral part of the company.

If people want to use social media, they have to create a social media account. People want to use the same service as others do - for that reason, people agree with set terms and conditions of using social media without checking what exactly is specified there. Therefore, people are manipulated to agree with these conditions if they want to use the service for free. The same tendency is valid in *The Circle*. If people want to use all the benefits that the company offers, which include social media networking, they have to create a Circle account.

With reference to uploading the information on the Internet, people can post anything on social media sites, but the information will be publicly visible. But authorities may manipulate and change any information which does not support and fit their ideology and may damage their reputation. In *The Circle*, the Circle changes the statements which represent a danger to the company. For example, when Annie criticizes the Circle on social media sites, her accusation is modified – it conveys a different message with a different meaning - in order not to damage the company.

Not all the people like social media and agree with being constantly watched by people on social media and monitored by corporations. As can be seen on an example from *The Circle*, Mercer takes a negative stand against social media and monitoring of people. He warns against the misuse of social media and exploitation of people. However, during the demonstration of a new tool, he gets into an unfavourable situation as he becomes a target of a pursuit. His subsequent death was caused by the misuse of social media. The Circle twists the information and changes the truth in order to protect the company. Bailey claims that Mercer was unstable, mentally sick and paranoid: “This was clearly a deeply depressed and isolated young man who was not able to survive in a world like this, a world toward communion and unity.”<sup>245</sup> He did not let others help him because he wanted to be alone, far away from the reach of social media:

There he was, alone in some cabin. Of *course* he’s going to get depressed, and work himself into a state of madness and paranoia. When the participants arrived, I mean, the guy was far past gone. He’s up there, alone, unreachable by the thousands, millions even, who would have helped in any way they could if they’d known. ... People wanted to help.

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<sup>245</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 468–469.



They tried to help. You did. And certainly there would have been thousands more, if he'd let them.<sup>246</sup>

Bailey continues, saying that Mercer died because he did not want to use technology and social media and rejected the connection with the world:

If you reject humanity, if you reject all the tools available to you, all the help available to you, then bad things will happen. You reject the technology that prevents cars from going over cliffs, and you'll go over a cliff – physically. You reject the help and love of the world's compassionate billions, and you go over a cliff – emotionally. ... You reject the groups, the people, the listeners, out there who want to connect, to emphasize and embrace, and disaster is imminent.<sup>247</sup>

After all, everything turns out to be only Mercer's own fault because he did not want to use social media. Bailey points out the fact that if Mercer had been using social media – and being in connection with people - nothing bad would have happened. Furthermore, after Mercer's death, Bailey assures Mae that it was not her mistake:

You were trying to help a very disturbed, antisocial young man. You and the other participants were reaching out, trying to bring him into the embrace of humanity, and he rejected that. I think it's self-evident that you were, if anything, his only hope.<sup>248</sup>

But the truth is that Bailey manipulates the perception of the event in favour of the company, emphasizing the importance of social media: people should use them as they may prevent such fatal accidents from happening.

Corporations may manipulate people to do what they want by brainwashing them. They turn the information upside down: they always stress the fact they people should do what is the best for the welfare of the society. For example, the Circle forces people to share their personal information, because it is the best for the society as everyone has a right to know everything. More concretely, people should share their trip experiences because handicapped people could profit from that. Obviously, it is not right to deprive them from knowledge. Another example shows that the Circle promotes transparency by telling people that they have a right to know what politicians do in their time: "It is your right to know how they spend their days. Who they're meeting with. Who they're talking to. What they're doing

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<sup>246</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 468.

<sup>247</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 468.

<sup>248</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 466–467.

on the taxpayer's dime."<sup>249</sup> It is evident that the Circle pretends that it makes everything for the welfare of the society, but it is not true. The company only follows its own interests, for instance to gain control over people. However, the ideas are turned upside down and twisted – they manipulate people so that they believe everything is done for their good - so they correspond to the company's policy and ideology.

Companies can use people's personal information against them for a blackmail and force them to do something against their will. In *The Circle*, the Circle can utilize the transparency as a tool for blackmailing people. The records from cameras of transparent people could be used as evidential material in order to manipulate people to do bad things. Therefore, if everything bad what people had ever done was stored, there would be a permanent record of people's misbehaviour which may be misused against them in the future. Furthermore, the Circle has various tools – for collecting people's data – through which the company may manipulate people. For example, Homie application sends the Circle information about what food people have at home and which food is slowly on the decrease, so that people can order more. However, the application provides the Circle with people's personal data which may be manipulated and misused then.

In case people do not want to obey, corporations have a strategy of blocking services until people do what the companies want them to do. If people do not want to cooperate, the authorities prohibit them from the access to information and block their services. After that, people will have no other choice than start to cooperate. As can be seen in *The Circle*, if people want to use Circle's services, they are obliged to have a Circle's profile. Moreover, people are forced to vote by manipulation: if they refuse to vote, their services will be blocked. After voting, their services will be restored again. Transparency together with the obligation to have a Circle's account would ensure no corruption, full participation in elections and total democracy. Moreover, the Circle profile and voting would be required by law. As a result, a private company may take control over the public services such as elections. Similarly, in *Feed* democracy could be also ensured by mandatory voting via feeds: "We could have everybody vote. From the feeds. Instantaneous. Then it would be a democracy."<sup>250</sup> Until people vote, their social media would be blocked: "Maybe their accounts don't work that day till they vote."<sup>251</sup> The same tendency as shown by the previous example from *The Circle* is presented in *Need* as well. When users do not respect the rules of

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<sup>249</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 209.

<sup>250</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 112.

<sup>251</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 392.

Need, it blocks their accounts. However, this is a totalitarian practice of manipulating people and limiting their freedom. Generally, people may protest against corporations and their intrigues. However, when dissatisfied people pose a threat to the companies and point out their power and control over the society, they will be destroyed. In *The Circle*, a politician protests against the Circle and its monopoly as can be seen in the following statement: “Senator Williamson seeking to break up the Circle.”<sup>252</sup> After the incident, the Circle untruthfully accuses the senator from scandals in order to get rid of her. It follows that the Circle has corrupted the case and foisted the false evidence, because the company starts to propagate a new product and the senator could threaten its campaign. This is an example of how people who raise their voice against the Circle are falsely accused of being criminals and destroyed

### **3.5 Monitoring**

Corporations allow people to use social media and all their benefits. For example, if a dangerous incident is recorded via cameras which monitor some area, social media may ensure people safety by immediate calling for help. Nevertheless, companies are smart and they monitor people via social media and their social media accounts. The companies obtain various kinds of personal information about their users, such as their preferences, shopping data, location, etc. Moreover, when people are being constantly watched, they have no privacy and their free will and freedom is limited. The corporations, as chief authorities, set their own rules. All of this may lead to a control over people and totalitarian regimes. Needless to say, the corporations may act like they monitor people for their own good: if companies have an overview about people and their activities, they are able to bring them better services. Unfortunately, people believe this claim and they see only advantages. But it is just a cover-up as the companies want to have control over people.

Monitoring has an influence on people’s behaviour; people are more careful about their activities and actions. They pay attention to how they present themselves publicly because they care about what others think about them. When people are being watched, they behave better than if they are alone without supervision. They want to present themselves in a better light to the world as they know they will be judged. In *The Circle*, the same is valid for Mae. She is also affected by a camera. In order to look better to her watchers, she limits

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<sup>252</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 174.

herself and does only things which are perceived to be right; for example, she eats more healthy products instead of junk food (instead of taking chocolate, she grabs nuts). She suppresses her wishes in order to look good to the society. As the whole world is watching and judging, she makes rational choices because “the camera redirected her actions.”<sup>253</sup> As a result, Mae acts more reasonably in order to present herself in a better way to the world: “When thousands, or even millions, are watching, you perform your best self. You are cheerier, more positive, more polite, more generous, more inquisitive.”<sup>254</sup> To be more specific, when people are constantly being monitored, not only they are under the stress because they have no personal privacy, but also their actions are visible and judged, thus people have to think wisely of their behaviour, which limits their free will and freedom. In *The Circle*, Mae’s parents turn off cameras in their house because they want to have their privacy and not to be constantly watched. Later on, Mae finds them in an erotic moment; it is an embarrassing situation because it was broadcasted on social media. It is important to realize the fact that when people know they are being watched, they tend to behave affectedly as they know their behaviour will be judged. For example, Mae’s parents over-praise Mae in front of the camera: “As if remembering that they were on camera, and that their daughter was now a more visible and important person, her parents adjusted their behaviour.”<sup>255</sup> Another thing is that when people are being watched, they behave differently than usual, they may even pretend. Here is an example of Mae’s pretence when she tries to look better to her watchers:

With a wide smile – for she was surely visible on three or four outdoor SeeChanges – she took a breath. This was a new skill she’d acquired, the ability to look, to the outside world, utterly serene and even cheerful.<sup>256</sup>

Constant monitoring of people has an impact on their mental state. People who are being watched are under a constant stress and pressure, which has an impact on their health. According to *The Circle*, constant monitoring is stressful for Mae. The only time when she is not being watched is when she goes to the toilets where she can be alone, without any connection with the outside world. Still, Mae has to count every minute in order to return on time, which causes her even more stress. Thus, everybody needs their own time for themselves. People sometimes want to be alone, to have moments without any social contact,

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<sup>253</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 331.

<sup>254</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 330.

<sup>255</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 365.

<sup>256</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 324–325.

monitoring or broadcasting. However, constant monitoring and activity on social media collides with personal privacy. In *The Circle*, Mae has also moments when she needs to be alone for a while, without monitoring. She is stressed by the argues her family and friends; that is why she needs to go to the countryside to be alone for a while, to release stress and calm down.

On the other hand, if people are not being watched, they behave worse and commit crimes. But if they would have been under surveillance, they would not commit crimes because they would know that they would have been caught. In *The Circle*, Mae steals a kayak because she needs to relax. Mae affirms that she would not have committed a crime if she knew she had been watched. She would not want anybody to see her because it would have been wrong: “The fact that I thought I was alone, unwatched, enabled me to commit a crime.”<sup>257</sup> In addition, if the theft would had been recorded, there would be a permanent record of her misbehaviour. In *Need*, the situation is similar. People do not behave as they are expected, but as they want to, because when they are online, “there’s an invisible shield that Nate claims allows people to feel protected from the consequences of their actions.”<sup>258</sup> Moreover, *Need* is an anonymous social network and its users are protected by anonymity: “The privacy is important for *Need*. ... Not only privacy of users, but also of *Need* itself.”<sup>259</sup> When people are anonymous, they behave worse because nobody will get to know.

People suppose that they have freedom, but in reality they are being constantly watched, monitored and under the control of authorities, which may result in a totality. In *The Circle*, the Circle monitors its employees through cameras which are placed all around the campus: “Every movement within the Circle was caught on one camera or another, usually three, and reconstructing anyone’s movements, after the fact, was only a few minutes’ work.”<sup>260</sup> Under those conditions, it is hard to move around the campus unnoticed because everything is visible. In addition, the Circle monitors its employees with the use of health bracelets. The company conceals the fact that the bracelets are a perfect tool for surveillance for offering better healthcare while using the bracelets: “The idea is that with complete information, we can give better care.”<sup>261</sup> In addition, when people are being monitored by the authorities, they may conceal their true identity in order to escape the supervision. In *The Circle*, Ty Gospodinov hides his true identity in order to live in the company without

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<sup>257</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 332.

<sup>258</sup> Charbonneau, *Need*, 165.

<sup>259</sup> Charbonneau, *Need*, 127.

<sup>260</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 321.

<sup>261</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 156.

surveillance. To set an example from *The Circle* proving monitoring of its employees, the Circle knows when exactly Mae enters and leaves the campus in order to go home. Surprisingly, they tell her that they know when she left on Friday and at what time she returned on Monday. First, Mae is worried that she had to work during the weekend. But the truth is that she was expected to attend free-time activities which took place in the Circle during the weekend: “There wasn’t mandatory work here on the weekend. That’s not to say that there weren’t thousands of people here Saturday and Sunday, enjoying the campus, participating in a hundred different activities.”<sup>262</sup> It follows that the company expects its employees to exchange their home-life for the company-life which offers more entertainment.

Not only the companies, but also people may watch or spy on others. In *The Circle*, Annie secretly listens to Mae’s conversation with her boss. When Mae finds out, she gets upset that her friend spies on her. The Circle monitors its employees and their movement in order to have an overview over them. The company desires to know everything about people, including their free-time activities, so it can possess power and control over them. The employees cannot do what they wish in their free time if it does not correspond with Circle’s policy. Actually, the Circle persuades its employees to spend their free time in the campus and attend local events. For example, when Mae left the company to go home for weekend, her bosses wonder where she went: “The rest of the weekend, you basically go blank. It’s like you disappeared!”<sup>263</sup>

Unfortunately, people have no privacy thanks to a constant surveillance. If they want to speak privately, they have to get together in secret. Still, the amount of time is limited which reminds of a totalitarian regime. In *The Circle*, the Circle goes with its monitoring of people to the limits. People are being watched all around the campus; the only exception are the toilets. For example, when Mae wants to meet Annie to talk in private, they cannot because they would have no privacy thanks to the cameras placed in the whole campus. They have to meet secretly at the toilets, which are the only exception to all-over-the-campus monitoring. As being transparent, Mae has only limited time to turn off the camera in order to use hygienic facilities. Under the stress, girls count every minute - if they had been there too long, it would start to be suspicious and the Circle would start searching for them. Secret meetings are the only chance to meet in private; otherwise, there is no privacy thanks to the control of employees. Similarly in *Need*, Need also monitors its users and knows about their every step. For example, when Kaylee denounce Need to the police, the network immediately

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<sup>262</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 182.

<sup>263</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 184.

sends her a text message on her phone, warning her to stop her activities against it. Need wants to show her that it is powerful and all-knowing. In addition, the very same monitoring of people is presented in *Feed*. Corporations know about people's moves: "Someone just approached my [Titus's] feed. They were checking the specs and stats."<sup>264</sup> However, people cannot change it at all because they are dependent on the companies:

We all know they control everything. ... Everyone feels bad about it. ... They're the only way to get all this stuff. .... They're still going to control everything whether you like it or not. ... They keep like everyone in the world employed.<sup>265</sup>

Concerning data, the Circle collects employees' medical data and stores them in the company database. The data are public and accessible to anybody - for that reason, the company can offer better care for its employees: "It's accessible to you, to us, and we can make decisions, see patterns, see potential issues, given our access to the complete picture."<sup>266</sup> However, it is just another type of company's control over the people. The Circle manipulates the situation as it conceals the truth about surveillance behind the fact that everything is done for the good of the people.

### **3.5.1 Tools for monitoring**

Concerning technology, the Circle has many tools and inventions which make the lives of their users easier. The most visible example representing the way how all the Circle's tools work are SeeChange cameras, which stream everything online via social media. They have many positives. Most importantly, they are promoted to ensure the safety of people and prevent crimes from happening. If everything will be recorded and monitored, there will be a direct evidence, which means the criminality will be reduced. People will be afraid to commit crimes because they could be caught and declared guilty. Moreover, the Circle collects personal information about its users; based on it, the company offers people better services according to their needs and preferences. Also, all the human knowledge will be preserved because all the information will be publicly shared and stored. On the other side, there are negatives as well. The worst one is that all the Circle devices, especially the cameras, enable the company to monitor people. They intermediate a constant connection to the Internet and

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<sup>264</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 154.

<sup>265</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 48.

<sup>266</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 153.

social media, which means that people are always present online and the Circle can see what they are doing or even track their location. Furthermore, the Circle can manipulate or blackmail people (if they make troubles) because the company gathers users' private data which might be misused. Besides, people are never alone and constant monitoring leads to the loss of their privacy because the company gets to know people's habits, location, etc. If there is no privacy, people have no freedom, free will and no possibility of choice. They will be controlled and under the surveillance of the Circle, which may eventually lead to totality.

In *Super Sad True Love Story*, not only the company, but also people can monitor others via technology and social media. For example, Lenny tracks the position of Eunice and vice versa: "I tried to trace Eunice's position via GlobalTrace. ... She also monitored my moves, minute by minute. If I went off the course of the everyday routine ... she started to be slightly suspicious."<sup>267</sup> People have no privacy because of social media.

### 3.5.2 Transparency

Most importantly, the Circle presents a concept of transparency, which means that people constantly wear a personal camera which enables them to record, stream and broadcast every minute of their life on social media. Everything they see or hear is visible to the viewers all over the world. The Circle plans to use transparency to create a total democracy, in which politicians will not be corrupted because they will be open to the world. The politicians who do not want to go transparent are not trusted. Not only politicians, but ordinary people may adopt transparency as well. As can be seen, Mae also goes transparent. Anybody can have an insight into her privacy and life, seeing the good as well as the bad. People can watch her every step and hear her every word: "She was allowing viewers to see and hear precisely what went into her day, unfiltered and uncensored."<sup>268</sup> However, transparency is a powerful tool for supervision. For example, if Mae happens to be absent-minded, her watchers immediately start to be suspicious: "There were thousands out there seeing what she saw, having access to her health data, hearing her voice, seeing her face – she was always visible through one or another of the campus SeeChange cameras."<sup>269</sup> Any single peculiarity will not pass unnoticed as people want to know everything. Overall, transparency is in contradiction with privacy,

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<sup>267</sup> Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story*, 259.

<sup>268</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 240.

<sup>269</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 333.



personal freedom and human rights. It may lead not only to a total democracy, but also to a totality.

In addition to the concept of transparency, the Circle wants to place mini cameras at every place in the world in order to record all the world events. However, such devices could be used for espionage or secret monitoring of people without them knowing, since the cameras are so small that they could be hidden anywhere without being noticed.

### 3.6 Privacy

Social media have an impact on people's personal privacy. The rational use of social media, ensuring safety, requires awareness and maturity. People suppose that using the Internet, especially social media, has no impacts. However, people do not use social media wisely because they do not consider the consequences of uploading their private information on social media networks; they post anything, for example their personal photos and videos, without any worries. For that reason, their information does not remain personal, but it becomes public. But users should not put their private content on social media sites because it is visible to anybody and their privacy may be endangered. In the worst case, their sensitive information may be used for example for blackmailing or threatening them. As can be seen, Need blackmails its users with the use of their sensitive data against them (as an evidence of the crimes they had committed) in case they would not cooperate. For example, Need threatens Kaylee with death if she will not obey: "Another violation of the membership terms and conditions will result in removing the ability to violate that agreement—permanently."<sup>270</sup>

Concerning social media activities, at the first sight they may seem innocent as they are anonymous; people consider them to be virtual and not real. Nevertheless, using social media wisely requires a reasonable approach such as awareness and rationality. People suppose that using the Internet, and especially social media, is harmless, having neither impact nor consequences. But the reverse is true - the consequences may be serious or even deadly. That is why people should be aware of their online activities and do not underestimate the ramifications. An example from *Need* example shows that social media can be dangerous. People accomplish simple tasks in order to gain what they wish for, but they indirectly cause deaths of people. Online activities do have real consequences:

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<sup>270</sup> Charbonneau, *Need*, 157.

Most of the time people shrug them off because it's just the Internet. You can ignore them or convince yourself they aren't real... NEED insists on secrecy for both the network and the users, it's easier for members to pretend nothing bad is happening.<sup>271</sup>

Furthermore, corporations may violate privacy of their users because they gather people's personal data without their permission. When people agree with terms and conditions of social media networks, they usually do not read them. Subsequently, they are surprised when the companies accomplish activities related to people's profiles without their permission or without a direct notice. For instance, Need has its own terms and conditions as well as other web sites, but nobody reads them because people suppose they are the same all the time. Need protects its safety with their help: "By accepting membership and agreeing to these conditions, the need user absolves the need network and operators from any and all responsibility for actions taken outside of the need network. the only person responsible for your actions is you."<sup>272</sup> As can be seen in *The Circle*, the Circle does not respect people's privacy; it tracks their personal information such as phone records, credit card payments, etc. without their permission: "Let's check local real estate sites for rental histories. Let's check credit card records, phone records, library memberships, anything he would have signed up for."<sup>273</sup> The same violation of users' privacy occurs in *Super Sad True Love Story*, where corporations monitor people via their *apäräts* without their permission and they attack their personal freedom: "National Guardsmen were checking the *äppäräti* of the diverse crowd, Salvadorans and Irish and South Asians and Jews and whoever else had chosen to make this corner of central Long Island the rich, smelly tapestry it has now become."<sup>274</sup> Another example shows authorities do not ask people for permission when checking their personal information in *Feed* as well. For example, the police takes memories from people's feeds as evidence materials without asking for their permission: "The police handed over our data."<sup>275</sup> The government wants to monitor people and ensure control over them.

Besides, people may violate the privacy of others as well when they post personal and sensitive information about other people on social media without asking them. The following example depicts Mae while she wants to help Mercer with the promotion of his business. She posts photos of his products on social media networks: "I can't send you email, because you immediately forward them to someone else. I can't send you a photo, because you post it on

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<sup>271</sup> Charbonneau, *Need*, 217.

<sup>272</sup> Charbonneau, *Need*, 159.

<sup>273</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 458.

<sup>274</sup> Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story*, 195.

<sup>275</sup> Anderson, *Feed*, 68.

your own profile.”<sup>276</sup> But he is rightfully angry because she uploads the pictures without his permission - she does not respect his personal privacy. After the incident, Mercer does not talk with Mae anymore because he is afraid that their conversation will not stay private.

What is more, people expose their personal information to the corporations voluntarily. When people want to use social media, they have to agree with the rules provided by the particular company. However, when they start to use a social media network, they do not read in detail its specific terms and conditions. They see that other people do the same, so they just agree without thinking about the consequences. In fact, people willingly let corporations to monitor them and their activities on social media. In *The Circle*, people voluntarily allow the Circle to access their personal data and monitor them in exchange for using Circle’s services and social media: “No one’s forcing you to do this. You willingly tie yourself to these lashes.”<sup>277</sup> On the other hand, social media sometimes monitor users’ personal data automatically without their permission and then send it to corporations. In *The Circle*, there is a situation showing how social media gather the information about people automatically from their social media profiles. For example, Mae has been visiting Portugal years ago; this information can be found on her social media profile. Subsequently, she is automatically invited to a Portugal event because she might be interested in it based on her previous experience. Nobody asks her if she is really interested at the moment or not.

Concerning the ownership of users’ personal data, when some information is published on the Internet or social media web sites, it is no longer only the private property of its user, but it changes to be public and traceable, and it becomes the property of the web site or a company. In *The Circle*, all the data recorded by employees inside the Circle belongs entirely to the Circle and not only to people. Their data turns out to be public and accessible to anyone. For example, Francis records a video on his phone, but because his phone is connected to his Circle account, the video is openly shared with others: “Technically neither one of us [Mae and Francis] owns that video anymore. ... It’s like news. You don’t own the news, even if it happens to you. You don’t own history. It’s part of the collective record now.”<sup>278</sup> The problem is that the video becomes publicly accessible, thus anybody can access it even if the person who created it did not advertise it in public: “It [the video] was on his phone, it was in the Circle cloud, and accessible to anyone.”<sup>279</sup> In a similar way, in *Need* the data are the property of Need and users have no right for them: “All posts become the

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<sup>276</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 135.

<sup>277</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 262.

<sup>278</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 236–237.

<sup>279</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 205.

property of Need.”<sup>280</sup> A little bit different is the example from *Super Sad True Love Story*. There is no privacy as well, all the personal data are publicly visible, anybody can access them via aparäts and everybody is traceable on social media. For instance, the amount of money on CreditColumns is public: “There appeared the amount of your credit anytime you passed by.”<sup>281</sup>

In addition, the corporations save and store all the data of their users. The problem is that once people post some information on the Internet, the upload is irreversible – the information usually stays there permanently and cannot be deleted. Despite the data seems to be deleted and not visible anymore, it is still accessible by the companies themselves, which implies that sensitive personal data might be actually misused. To set a specific example from *The Circle*, the Circle wants to keep, preserve and store all the information forever. More concretely, all the personal data of employees is recorded, monitored and saved permanently to cloud servers, where everything is supposed to be stored for good. But what is the reason for doing that? The Circle promotes the idea of saving all the information and preserving the knowledge of humankind. If everything will be recorded, shared and saved, people will never lose any data again: “No data, human or numerical or emotional or historical, is ever lost again.”<sup>282</sup> To conclude, everything will be safely saved at one place and kept for the next generations. On the contrary, in *Feed* the storage of data is not needed as people can “store” their memories on feeds and have access to them anytime and anywhere. To continue with the issue of private data, according to another example, Mae records a sensitive video and she is afraid that somebody will see it because it is stored in Circle’s servers. But she is assured that nobody will see the video: “No one will ever see it. ... Ninety-nine percent of the stuff in the cloud is never seen by anyone.”<sup>283</sup> To dispel her fears, Francis also claims that the video is safe on the servers, hidden from others: “No one’s watched the video. It’s just a part of the archive. It’s one of ten thousand clips that go up every day here at the Circle alone. One of a billion worldwide, every day.”<sup>284</sup> However, if the video is stored, there may be a small probability that the administrators of the storages could hypothetically search for it if they want and misuse it.

Concerning the permanency of data, the Circle does not delete anything what has been already recorded, even if the information is private or sensitive: “We don’t delete at the

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<sup>280</sup> Charbonneau, *Need*, 127.

<sup>281</sup> Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story*, 69.

<sup>282</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 458.

<sup>283</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 206.

<sup>284</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 237.

Circle.”<sup>285</sup> For example, Francis makes a video record of sex that happened between him and Mae. After finding out, Mae is rightly annoyed and she urges him to delete the video immediately. However, Francis claims that it cannot be deleted: “It’s mine. ... Did you say ‘delete’? ... We don’t delete at the Circle.”<sup>286</sup> Likewise, users cannot delete their posts or profiles on Need, because data uploaded there become its property: “All uploads and posts to the need network are the property of need according to the terms and conditions of the site.”<sup>287</sup> Additionally, especially when the Circle promotes transparency in practice, the company prohibits any erasing of sensitive videos because then the whole concept of transparency would be lost: “What would transparency be if we could delete anything we felt was embarrassing in some way? You know we don’t delete.”<sup>288</sup> Mae has to set an example for others by her unselfishness in order to make transparency functional and universally accepted.

Nonetheless, the above-mentioned measurements concerning no deletion of any data result in no privacy and no right for users to decide about their personal information which could be then misused anytime. For that reason, keeping the information private might be problematic. Generally speaking, when people use social media networks, they are assured that their personal data are safely saved and protected, so nobody will ever see them and their data will stay private. However, in the worst possible case the data may be exploited. Simply speaking, if the data get into wrong hands (either hackers or the owners of social media sites), the information may be used for example for manipulation or blackmail. In *The Circle*, when people are afraid that somebody could steal their stored private data, they are assured by the Circle that nobody can access it. But is this really true? Personal data of users (which are not deleted) may be looked up and subsequently misused in the future.

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<sup>285</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 205.

<sup>286</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 205.

<sup>287</sup> Charbonneau, *Need*, 151.

<sup>288</sup> Eggers, *The Circle*, 372.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The main aim of the analysis was to compare the portrayal of moral aspects of social media in the primary source *The Circle* with the portrayal of the same aspects in secondary novels, namely *Feed*, *Need* and *Super Sad True Love Story*. The analysis was focused on the aspects such as identity, socialization, addiction, degradation, sharing, corporations, manipulation, monitoring, transparency and privacy, together with other aspects such as power, freedom, free will and totality. The objective was achieved through performing a complex analysis of the novels and examining the individual aspects, connected with social media, from the dystopian point of view. After performing a deep analysis, a great diversity of information about the social media networks was found. The theme of a negative depiction of social media site can be, to some extent, found in all the above-mentioned books.

The novels are set either in a near future of modern contemporary world or the setting takes place in a hypothetical future in which the technology reached more advanced level. All the books could be considered a part of science fiction genre; for that reason, they have a free sphere of activity in showing all the possible or hypothetical consequences of the influence of social media on the lives of people, in positive as well as in negative ways. As can be seen, the authors of all the novels have chosen rather the dystopian theme and environment as it allows to depict social media more freely. The important discovery, found out during the examination, is that all the aspects that were examined are to a large extent interconnected.

On one hand, social media networks are an inseparable part of people's lives in present days. They are used in various areas of people's activity, in private as well as in business sphere. Social media sites are used as the main means of human communication, although the communication is mostly virtual instead of the real face-to-face one. Moreover, social media networks enable people to connect with each other on huge distances. In addition, people feel great when they can spend their time with their friends, even though the meetings and conversations are mostly mediated in a virtual world. Therefore, people keep an impression that they can easily make contact with new people and, what is more, even establish new friendships. Concerning education, social media tools may help people in educating themselves, among other that all the information can be found on the Internet or people can ask others from any part of the world for help. Moreover, people use social media every day for sharing personal information, their experiences, photos, videos, etc., because social media got to be used practically worldwide and they can be accessed from any thinkable electronic device such as computers, mobile phones, tablets, and so on. Such

sharing of data brings people more advantages, because for example thanks to the sharing of personal data on social media sites, the corporations can use people's personal information for improving the marketing by offering people the services and products that they really desire and for free. People believe that the corporations make these steps in order to provide people with new technologies and improvements, exactly as the companies state. Everything is done for the welfare of the society because it will lead to perfection and it will ensure the best for the humanity and humankind.

The conducted research proves the fact that social media are presented as a great technological tool which possesses only positive sides that were already enumerated in the paragraph above. Although it may be true, to the contrary, social media networks also possess negative sides. They influence people's lives in an unfavourable way.

On the other hand, social media sites have a high number of negative effects. Active using of social media have a negative impact on people's values; for that reason, people's personalities change to worse. Another thing is that the communication that social media allow is mostly virtual, which implies that the real social interaction is deteriorating. Together with the active usage and communication via social media comes an addiction because social media are highly entertaining and addictive. Due to their overuse, people forget about their own personal life, family, friends and hobbies. The more people will be using social media, the more their language and expressing themselves will degrade, until the ever-present simplification will be everywhere, and the dehumanization will be inevitable. If we take into account corporations owning social media, they may contribute to the improvement of technology, but at the same time it will be at a cost of limiting people's freedoms. The more people will be using social media tools provided by the corporations, the more the online activities of people - and maybe not only online - will be monitored. The more people will share their personal data via the Internet and networks, the more personal data will be monitored, stolen and stored by the corporations. But not only that; the personal information will be used by the corporations against the users themselves. With the use of manipulation, the corporations may force people to do things which people would not normally do if they would not be blackmailed. Due to the increased number of tracking applications and connecting everything, the monitoring of people will be increasing, ensuring the corporations a total control and power over ordinary people and users of their social media services. People will have no privacy because everything will be shared, interconnected and controlled; the interests of common people will not be taken into account. If some process, like the process of transparency from *The Circle*, will appear, it may become popular among people and taken

over by the companies or even the government itself. It will bring nothing good as people will be already over-limited too much by all the manipulation, surveillance and control. The freedom and free will of people will be suppressed as the world will be dominated by such companies imposing control over the society. The mentioned impacts of social media will lead to nothing less than to a totalitarian regime.

To summarize, the principal task of this paper was to examine social media sites and their influence on people from the dystopian point of view. The complex analysis that had been performed points out the bad influence of social media sites on people. The results based on a vast number of concrete examples from the analysis of social media of the novels prove that although social media networks bring people technological improvements and positives making their life easier, they can be also used as tools for manipulation and monitoring of people, which results in the violation of people's privacy. The impact of social media on the society has a dystopian form because the misuse of social media may lead to control over people and, in consequence, to totalitarian regimes.

Surprisingly, the negative aspects of social media may not be visible at first sight because the positives are usually more visible and praised by the authorities. The same claim cannot be stated about the negatives; their enumeration and portrayal demonstrates where the influence of social media may lead. All this totalitarian control might be the result of people's present fondness for social media sites and celebrating their positive sides which cannot be opposed freely by anybody. Because what may happen if somebody would dare to criticize or attack such a perfect morale concept that the social media represent?

To conclude, according to the novels, social media have a huge influence on people nowadays. Social media networks bring positive as well as negative aspects, but unfortunately, the negative ones prevail. Instead of improving the humanity, social media may cause its decline. The novels present many possibilities and indicate where the use of social media may result. Some of the aspects depicted in the books have already become a reality, some of them are still a matter of a hypothetical, hopefully positive, future.



## 5. RESUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá zobrazením sociálních sítí v románu *The Circle* od amerického autora Davea Eggerse, a porovnává je s vyobrazením sociálních sítí v dalších současných amerických románech, jmenovitě *Feed*, *Need* a *Super Sad True Love Story*. Názvy děl jsou zachovány v originálním jazyce, protože ne všechny knihy byly přeloženy do češtiny.

Práce je rozdělena do tří velkých celků, které se dále člení na kapitoly a podkapitoly. Hlavním cílem práce byla podrobná analýza výše zmíněných románů s cílem zmapovat jejich vyobrazení sociálních sítí z dystopického pohledu. Knihy na pozadí příběhů krásně ilustrují negativní dopady sociálních sítí na lidskou společnost. Nejprve byly popsány jednotlivé aspekty sociálních sítí, které byly podloženy teoretickými údaji. Poté byly tyto poznatky doloženy konkrétními příklady ze všech zmíněných románů, především tedy z knihy *The Circle*, a následně důkladně analyzovány.

První část práce se věnuje teoretickému pozadí zkoumaného tématu. Nejprve jsou z teoretického hlediska definovány základní pojmy, související s výzkumem, jako je žánr science fiction, utopie, dystopie, lidskost a moralita. Následují dvě velké kapitoly, které se zabývají výhradně sociálními sítěmi a s nimi souvisejícími tématy. V první podkapitole jsou popsány pojmy, které se přímo dotýkají sociálních sítí, jako je internet, médium, komunikace, a dále také rozdíl mezi pojmy masová a sociální média. Poté jsou přehledně uvedeny a popsány rozličné definice sociálních sítí společně s krátkým představením historie vývoje sociálních médií. Nakonec je objasněno možné využití sociálních sítí společně s vyjmenováním jednotlivých platforem.

Druhá část práce se věnuje představení zkoumaných románů. Především jsou zde stručně popsány jednotlivé příběhy, neboť děje a události v nich popsané jsou nezbytné pro pochopení prvků, na něž se zaměřuje hlavní analytická část. Největší prostor je věnovaný obsahu knihy *The Circle*. Kromě příběhů se v této části práce nachází i kapitola, která detailně popisuje sociální síť v jednotlivých románech.

Třetí část práce se věnuje analýze jednotlivých morálních aspektů zkoumaných knih. Každá kapitola je doplněna o stručný teoretický popis jednotlivých témat, následovaný jejich rozborem a doložený názornými příklady jak převážně z knihy *The Circle*, tak i z ostatních románů. Negativní aspekty sociálních sítí, které byly analyzovány, jsou následující: identita, socializace, závislost, degradace, sdílení, korporace, manipulace, sledování a soukromí. Tyto prvky byly zkoumány převážně z dystopického hlediska, protože mají v románech negativní

dopad na lidstvo. Díky bližší analýze výše zmíněných prvků byly popsány i další aspekty související se sociálními sítěmi, jako je komunikace, osamocení, moc, cenzura, svoboda a totalita.

Knihy, které byly využity pro analýzu tématu, spadají do žánru science fiction. Příznačným znakem tohoto žánru je, že se soustředí na budoucnost a možný vývoj technologie a ukazuje, kam až by mohl její rozvoj vést. Analyzované knihy jsou navíc dystopické romány, což znamená, že ukazují negativní dopady technologie na lidstvo. Všechny zmíněné knihy vlastním způsobem popisují možnou alternativu budoucnosti, v níž mají sociální sítě velký vliv a ovládají společnost. Tyto dopady jsou jak pozitivní, tak bohužel i negativní.

Na první pohled vše samozřejmě vypadá idylicky: sociální sítě přinášejí lidem pohodlí a usnadňují jim práci a vzájemnou komunikaci. Především zajišťují lidem vzájemný kontakt, a to i na velké vzdálenosti, dokonce po celém světě. Díky sociálním sítím lidé navazují nová přátelství, či vzájemně sdílejí všechny své zážitky doprovázené fotkami a videi.

Z analyzovaných příběhů je vidět, že kladné stránky jsou vždy vyzdvihovány a propagovány korporacemi, které stojí za sociálními sítěmi. Pokud se objeví jakýkoliv problém a je na něj upozorněno, pokud jsou lidé nespokojeni a mají pocit, že je jim ubírána svoboda, daný problém je okamžitě ‚zameten pod koberec‘. Společnosti ovládající sociální sítě mají kontrolu nad informacemi, propagují, co se jim hodí, a pokud se ozvou hlasy lidu, který nesouhlasí a bouří se, jsou potlačeny. Korporace manipulují s lidmi, špatné věci ohrožující svobodu jsou vždy udolány protiargumenty zdůrazňujícími pozitiva a výhody sociálních sítí. Protesty nemají šanci obstát, a pokud se objeví lidé ohrožující ideologii, jsou zničeni, minimálně ve virtuálním světě.

Jak již bylo zmíněno, sociální sítě mají i odvrácenou tvář. Právě na jejich záporné stránky byla práce zaměřena. Používání sociálních sítí má v první řadě vliv na jejich uživatele. Lidé, kteří se nechají vtáhnout do virtuálního světa, začnou být ovlivňováni. Nejen, že se mohou změnit jejich hodnoty a priority, ale navíc mohou začít upřednostňovat sociální sítě a virtuální komunikaci před svou vlastní rodinou, před sebou samými. Mohou zapomenout, kým doopravdy jsou, mohou ztratit svou identitu a stát se otroky neustálého kontaktu s lidmi skrze virtuální síť.

Důležité je uvědomit si, že dnešní sociální sítě jsou ovládány velkými soukromými korporacemi. Sociální sítě nejsou tedy v rukou státu, ale v rukou privátních společností, které si mohou vytvářet vlastní pravidla a vynucovat si jejich dodržování. Pokud lidé chtějí využívat tyto služby, musí s nastavenými pravidly souhlasit. Sociální sítě jsou k dispozici

většinou zcela zdarma, což je jejich výhoda - proto je může používat opravdu kdokoliv, kdo vlastní elektronická zařízení s přístupem na internet. Faktem bohužel je, že dnes není nic zcela zadarmo, dokonce ani pokud se to veřejně tvrdí a propaguje. Sociální sítě požadují po uživatelích souhlas se svými specifickými podmínkami. Nikde ale není explicitně psáno, že by uživatelé souhlasili se sledováním nebo že by dovolili třetím stranám nakládat s jejich osobními informacemi. Právě tento fakt si většina uživatelů bohužel neuvědomuje.

Na první pohled to vypadá, že internet a jeho používání je zadarmo, ale není tomu tak. Korporace provozující sociální sítě na ně musí někde získávat finanční prostředky. Peníze čerpají ze zobrazování reklam, dále také ze shromažďování osobních informací uživatelů a z jejich následného statistického zpracování a nakládání s nimi dle svého uvážení. Společnosti toto vše provádějí tajně a nikde se o tom nešíří. Mají na to sofistikované nástroje, a většina lidí nemá o těchto praktikách ani potuchy. Tím pádem korporace neustále sledují své uživatele a mají přehled o každém jejich kroku a aktivitě.

Společnosti schovávají sledování za nezměrné výhody používání sociálních sítí, například zlepšení marketingu a nabízení lepších služeb uživatelům za předpokladu, že budou vědět, jaké jsou jejich preference. Nicméně je to jen zástěrka, hlavním cílem korporací je mapovat chování a aktivity lidí. Všechno toto sledování má nicméně negativní dopad na soukromí uživatelů, které se zcela vytrácí. Citlivé informace již nejsou pouze osobní, ale stávají se veřejně přístupné. Vše, co lidé nahrají na internet, se stává veřejně dostupnou informací. Navíc, pokud uživatelé vystaví svá data na sociální sítě, které jsou vlastněny konkrétní korporací, osobní informace lidí se stávají majetkem dané společnosti. Pokud se uživatelé rozhodnou nějaká data ze svého profilu odstranit, buď tak nemohou učinit, nebo to vypadá, že informace odstranili, ale jejich data jsou natrvalo uložena na serverech společnosti.

V současné době mají sociální sítě zdánlivě spíše pozitivní efekty. Nicméně analyzované dystopické romány ukazují, kam až by používání a zneužívání sociálních sítí mohlo vést. Na příkladech je jasně vidět, jak by sociální sítě mohly přímo či nepřímo způsobit lidem vážné nepříjemnosti, a dokonce zapříčinit smrt uživatelů nebo celých mas lidí.

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