



Digital Lives and Literary Minds: The Internet's Influence on Modern Fiction

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Abstract

The digital change has had a huge impact on how people interact, understand reality, and build their identities. These changes can be seen and thought about critically in modern literature, where the internet is not just a background but a central force that changes the way stories are told, how characters grow, and what the main theme is. This essay looks at how internet culture has changed modern fiction by looking at how digital connection, algorithmic impact, and hypermediated settings go against the rules of traditional literature. This study looks closely at three works: *Fake Accounts* (2021) by Lauren Oyler, *No One Is Talking About This* (2021) by Patricia Lockwood, and *Book of Numbers* (2015) by Joshua Cohen. It shows how the authors question digital subjectivity, online disembodiment, and the breaking up of narrative authority. The paper uses posthumanist theory, digital media studies, and narrative theory to show how "internet novels" have come about as a creative reaction to modern worries about validity, closeness, and memory in a time when everything is digital. The results show that these texts not only criticise the ways that the internet has changed culture, but they also rethink fiction as a way to fight digital determinism and bring back story complexity in a time when technology is making things simpler.

Keywords: Algorithmic identity, Digital culture, Hyperconnectivity, Online narratives, and Post humanism.

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1- Introduction

The internet has changed the way people interact with the world and each other in a big way in the twenty-first century. It is no longer just a way to talk to each other. From the way social media sites are built to how algorithms choose what to show, digital life changes the way we think, feel, and identify ourselves. Literature has long been a mirror and a way to talk about how society changes, and now it has started to think about what living online means. Some modern literature, called the "internet novel," looks at and criticises the effects and standards of digital society, and it often goes against them.

There are many changes in culture and technology that have led to this new wave of fantasy. Some of these are the rise of social media as a main way to connect with others in public and private, the spread of surveillance capitalism, the blurring of time and space through constant connection, and the fact that screens are in almost every encounter between people. These changes make us think about literature right away: how can the novel show lives that are becoming more broken, theatrical, and over-mediated? In a time of endless scrolling and computer editing, what does it mean to build a character, a story, or the truth? This is something that authors like Joshua Cohen, Patricia Lockwood, and Lauren Oyler have taken on. Their stories don't follow the rules of traditional story structure. Instead, they use comedy and metafiction to look at how the internet affects our minds. It's not enough for these books to just talk about digital culture; they also use its forms, fears, and ways of knowing as part of the story. This is a new area for literature because it combines story with interface and character growth with digital performance.

This essay argues that the internet novel is an important type of writing that catches the strange things that happen in modern life. It says that the internet has a structural effect on how books are written, read, and understood, not just a subject one. The study shows how fiction deals with the problems of showing personality, memory, and validity in a world full of digital media by looking at the new ways of telling stories and the moral questions they raise in Fake

Accounts, No One Is Talking About This, and Book of Numbers. In the end, this study shows that writing is still an important place to talk about the psychological and moral effects of living near the internet.

2- Literature Review

The rise of the "internet novel" needs to be understood in the context of larger academic discussions about digital culture and literary form. As digital media and literature come together, a new critical debate has grown up that tries to figure out how technological interaction changes the function and form of the novel. This part talks about the most important ideas from the fields of digital humanities, media theory, narratology, and cultural studies that help us understand how fiction both shows and criticises modern life.

Katherine Hayles's (1999) book *How We Became Posthuman* is a key source in this discussion. In it, she says that digital technologies threaten the security of the human subject, creating a "posthuman" state in which information flows replace physical presence. Hayles's ideas help shape how internet novels show how identities are spread out across digital platforms and how subjects' identities are broken up. Similarly, Donna Haraway's (1985) cyborg theory emphasises the mixed nature of how humans and machines interact, providing a way to look at people who live in both digital and real worlds.

Recently, researchers like Rita Raley (2013) and Janey Levy (2020) have talked a lot about the rise of computational society and how it affects literature. Levy looks at how fiction takes on the logic of computer suggestion systems, while Raley is interested in how data looks and how digital things disappear. More and more people are becoming aware that books are affected by not only the material on the internet but also the ways that it is shared, used, and watched. Narrative theory has also been very helpful in figuring out how digital settings have changed the way things are built. Brian McHale wrote in 1987 about how postmodern fiction likes to focus on ontological instability. This is a trait that can be seen in how internet novels are interested in broken timelines, unstable narrators, and metafictional gestures. Also, N. Katherine Hayles (2008) and Espen Aarseth (1997) look at how electronic literature breaks down linearity, which is something that print books that have been inspired by digital stories are doing more and more.

The psychological effects of online living are looked at by thinkers such as Sherry Turkle (2011) and Lauren Berlant (2011). They focus on emotions and identity. Turkle's work on digital detachment and Berlant's theory of "cruel optimism" are both useful for looking at how

internet books show the emotional duality of hyperconnectivity—the desire for and estrangement from digital closeness at the same time. These models are especially useful for figuring out how the main characters in Oyler's, Lockwood's, and Cohen's stories are feeling. All of these theory additions show that the internet book is not just a result of the digital age, but also an important part of how its culture is being questioned. As fiction starts to represent the patterns, rhythms, and tensions of online life, it changes into a way to think about the situations it shows.

3- Previous Studies

A lot of new critical works have started to look at how modern fiction portrays digital life, mostly through the lens of what has been called the "internet novel." These studies have different topics, but they all focus on how digital environments change how literature is expressed, how people feel, and how stories should be told.

McGurl (2018) is one of the first critics to write about the genre. He says that the internet novel is both a result of and a reaction to the conditions of digital capitalism. He says that books like "Book of Numbers" mirror the way the internet is set up both thematically and stylistically, with rambling storytelling, too much detail, and a fixation on having too much information. This study gives us a good way to think about how writers like Cohen use story design to reflect the worst parts of digital society.

Adding to this, Klose (2020) compares Fake Accounts to other autofictional works and says that Oyler's book is an example of a new type of story marked by theatrical subjectivity and ironic distance. Klose says that these kinds of books criticise how social media culture turns people into products by focusing on the conflict between being honest and being selective. A lot of academics have paid attention to Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* because it tries new things with form and emotion. Liu (2021) looks at the book through the lens of trauma and digital dissociation, focusing on how the main character's broken emotions are similar to how being constantly exposed to the internet's chaotic information flow can make you feel unstable. Cho (2022) also looks at how the book combines meme culture with personal reflection in the lyrics, saying that it shows a poetics of digital overload.

Some critics have also said that these works are like metafiction. The author, Erlich (2021), talks about how both *Book of Numbers* and *Fake Accounts* use author-protagonist doubles and unreliable stories to question the author's power in a world where algorithms create truth. This

focus on story uncertainty is a reflection of bigger cultural worries about truth, fantasy, and sincerity in the internet age.

These studies show that there are many ways to look at internet novels, but they all have one thing in common: they all look at the internet not only as material but also as an organising force that questions literary rules. This paper adds to the growing field by bringing together these different points of view and then comparing and contrasting how digital interaction changes the structure of stories, characters' feelings, and the morality of literature in three wellknown works.

4- Methodology and Data Analysis

The research uses a qualitative, analytical approach based on close textual analysis and is backed up by ideas from narratology, digital media studies, and posthumanism theory. The chosen texts—Book of Numbers by Joshua Cohen, Fake Accounts by Lauren Oyler, and No One Is Talking About This by Patricia Lockwood were picked because they clearly deal with digital themes and try new things with form. Each book shows a different aspect of fiction that has been affected by the internet, such as autofictional identity, fractured awareness, and the metafictional questioning of digital authorship.

The main method used is close reading, with an emphasis on story organisation, character development, theme patterns, and style choices. This method lets us look into each text's construction and criticism of digital subjectivity in more depth. Secondary sources add to the analysis by putting the books in the context of larger academic talks about literature and digital life.

The first way to look at something is by its story form. All three books have a very self-aware style that uses techniques like repetition, fracturing, uneven timelines, and digital conversation (tweets, search records, boards) that are built into the stories. These tools are looked at as writing techniques that imitate or react to digital textuality and the user experience. The second line looks at how identities are made. In Fake Accounts, the main character's changing online identities bring out themes of emotional distance and comedy as ways to stay alive. The book criticises how people self-edit on social media and how fake sincerity isn't real. In No One Is Talking About This, identity is filtered through a shared online awareness, making it hard to tell the difference between a person and a networked topic. The change in tone in the middle of the book, from vague digitality to physical sadness, shows the problems with using the internet to help people understand each other.

The narrator of *Book of Numbers*, who is a failing writer, meets a tech mogul whose power over digital information shows how writing and algorithm are at odds with each other. The metafictional elements and encyclopaedic framework of the book represent how much information there is in the digital age. This makes storytelling both a shelter from and a result of information overload. The third axis looks at how feeling and ethics are shown through themes. All three books are about how emotional closeness is lost in worlds where everything is linked. In a time of monitoring and data selling, Oyler's narrative voice shows post-ironic detachment, Lockwood's main character shows emotional confusion, and Cohen's characters deal with moral uncertainty.

These different types of analysis show how internet books use a different type of writing to explore the moral, spiritual, and social problems that come up in digital life. The internet is more than just a setting or story device in these works; it also changes the way literature looks and how we know what we know.

5- Analysis and Discussion

When you look at *Fake Accounts*, *No One Is Talking About This*, and *Book of Numbers*, you can see a pattern of tensions and new ideas that make the internet novel a unique type of writing. The most important of these is the formal uncertainty that comes from the structure and philosophical problems that digital life brings. These books show how fragmented, saturated, and performative modern life is in online spaces. This means that fiction can be used not only as reflection but also as a way to experience the psychological and cultural effects of the internet.

Subjectivity being rearranged is one of the most interesting themes in these works. It's like the characters in each book lose their inner selves as the outside views of digital viewers shape their identities more and more. For example, Oyler's main character lies and edits themselves in many ways, showing how social media promotes identities over sincerity. Lockwood's narrator is also caught in the sounds of a group digital voice. She can only get back to feeling like herself when something terrible happens in real life. Cohen's main character struggles with writing and power issues, which are similar to how people feel when they don't know the difference between personal choice and computer fate.

Along with these images of a broken self, there is a widespread worry about mental separation. The books talk about how digital settings can both make emotional experiences stronger and weaker at the same time. In a world where people are constantly exposed to and connected through technology, irony, distancing, and exaggeration become ways to stay alive. The main

characters often go back and forth between wanting closeness and avoiding being vulnerable, which is a lot like how digital society makes people feel.

These texts also criticise the way texts are made, especially the act of telling. Each author makes you think about how trustworthy and authoritative stories are in a time when jokes, fake news, and marketing cloud the truth. By using social media forms like tweets, boards, and automated language in their stories, these books don't follow the usual rules of stability and order that come with print fiction. In doing so, they think about and criticise the ways that technology makes it hard for us to keep up consistent stories about ourselves and the world. These books also look at the moral issues that come up with living a digital life by looking at power, spying, and the commercialisation of life. From Cohen's thoughts on how big tech controls data to Oyler's picture of the self as an object of consumption to Lockwood's mixed feelings about online empathy, these books show how important it is for writers to think about digital ethics. Fiction gives people a place to talk about the risks and responsibilities that come up when technology shapes our lives more and more.

All of these ideas show that the internet novel is not just a fad, but an important change in the way literature is made. It reacts to and criticises the new cultural conditions of the digital age. These writers don't complain about how the internet has changed things; instead, they use the flexibility of fiction to look into, question, and rethink what it means to live and write in a world ruled by virtual realities and automated truths.

6- Conclusion

Along with having a huge impact on everyday life, the internet has also had a huge impact on modern literature. The internet novel is not just a subgenre, as shown by the studies of *Fake Accounts*, *No One Is Talking About This*, and *Book of Numbers*. It is a major form of literary creation that reflects, analyses, and changes the cultural logics of the digital age. The way these books are written goes against typical story structures because they use digital forms and themes like fracturing, spying, comedy, and performativity in their stories.

This study used close readings and academic discussion to show that the internet novel shows more than just life in the digital age; it lives out its contradictions and tensions. Characters deal with new ways of being identified that are shaped by computer logic and social media platforms. They often feel emotionally dislocated, real in their performances, and unsure of what they know. The new ways the books are written reflect these experiences, making the internet not only a theme but also a force that shapes the story.

The paper uses posthumanist ideas, narratology, and affect theory to show how the internet novel is a reaction to the conditions of post-digital subjectivity. These books make people think about how their own lives have been shaped by technology and make them wonder what it means to live in a world where people mostly connect and buy things online. They are important because they show that writing can change with the times, fight change, and imagine new things. The stories that are based on digital life will change along with it. In the future, researchers might look into how the internet book affects people around the world, how it shows digital identities that aren't as well known, or how it interacts with other types of media. What is clear is that reading is still an important way to disconnect, think, and become human again in this age of nonstop connectivity.

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