



## **Social Media Impact on Modern Text: A Study of Jennifer Egan's Novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad***

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### **Abstract**

This research paper explores the significant influence of social media on modern written communication, focusing on Jennifer Egan's novel "A Visit from the Goon Squad" as a specific example. This text examines the progression of social media, its incorporation into everyday existence, and its profound impact on the structure and manner of storytelling. The paper analyses Egan's novel to explore the utilization of social media as a narrative device. The protagonist Alex's challenges in safeguarding his child from digital devices serve as a central theme, prompting inquiries about the hazards presented by social media to individuals of all ages. Egan's depiction of a slightly advanced New York City highlights the difficulties of integrating digital communication into the lives of children. The paper concludes by speculating on the future of literature in the digital era. It emphasizes the ongoing significance of maintaining a balance between technological influences and traditional literary values, as well as the democratization of literature through social media.

**Keywords: Technology, Identity, Social Media, Literature, Digital device**

“Media is literature in a hurry.” – Mathew Arnold

The statement made by Mathew Arnold regarding media remains applicable in the present day, although there have been significant transformations in the realm of literature. Nowadays, literature is characterized by a sense of urgency, aiming to be completed and published quickly. In this regard, social media has proven to be extremely beneficial.

In the current era dominated by digital technology, social media has become an ever-present and powerful influence, significantly impacting multiple facets of our lives. The influence of these digital platforms is unquestionable, as they shape our communication, information consumption, perception, and interaction with the world. Social media, characterized by its distinct combination of promptness, interconnectedness, and availability, has not only transformed our day-to-day communications but has also expanded its impact into the domains of literature and societal discussions. Francesca Baker's words, “Literature itself is media, a tool for messaging, communication and art.”



The rise of social media has been extremely rapid, signifying a significant change in how we engage, distribute, and consume information. The journey commenced in the early 2000s with the emergence of platforms such as "Friendster" and "MySpace", which established the fundamental basis for online social networking. Nonetheless, the introduction of "Facebook" in 2004 marked the beginning of the social media era, fundamentally transforming how individuals interacted online. Twitter was launched in 2006, introducing the concept of micro-blogging and popularising real-time commentary. The subsequent emergence of platforms such as "Instagram", "Snapchat", and "TikTok" further expanded the variety of social media platforms, each introducing unique aspects to digital communication. Benedict Mathew said in his article "Social media platforms have become virtual stages where individuals perform their identities through text. From status updates to tweets, our online personas are curated and crafted, shaping how we are perceived and how we perceive others."(Mathew11).

In contemporary society, social media has transcended its original purpose as a means of personal communication and has become an integral part of all aspects of our existence. These platforms have become essential in shaping our social connections, news consumption, political discussions, and creative self-expression. The widespread presence of social media is apparent in its astounding user metrics — billions of individuals worldwide actively engage with these platforms, rendering them an essential component of our everyday digital consumption.

The incorporation of social media into everyday life has had significant consequences. It has revolutionized our ability to obtain information, enabling a more equal and immediate sharing of ideas. The demarcations between the personal and public spheres, as well as the local and global domains, have become indistinct, resulting in the emergence of a novel digital realm that is interconnected and constantly evolving. Social media has not only revolutionized our means of communication, but also transformed the manner in which we showcase and interpret our identities, both on an individual level and as a group.

Social media has had a profound impact on the structure and style of contemporary narratives, bringing about new and inventive ways of storytelling. The transformation is apparent in how contemporary literature frequently reflects the immediacy, conciseness, and interconnectedness that are inherent in digital communication.

An important consequence is the tendency towards briefer and more succinct narrative structures. In the current era, where information is rapidly consumed via tweets, status updates, and instant messages, there has been a noticeable change in literary preferences towards concise storytelling. This phenomenon has led to the emergence of genres such as micro-fiction and flash fiction, in which stories are conveyed in a few hundred words, yet still possess a strong and impactful narrative. These literary forms present a challenge for writers to effectively express



profoundness, sentiment, and narrative progression within a limited number of words, mirroring the concise style of communication commonly found in social media.

Another notable advancement is the rise of 'Twitterature' - a genre that employs Twitter as a medium for storytelling. Within this context, narratives are presented in a sequential manner through a collection of tweets, providing an engaging and ever-evolving storytelling experience that encourages user participation. This format not only mirrors the fragmented and episodic characteristics of social media content, but also exploits its capacity for reader engagement and immediacy. Stasy said "Social media has redefined the boundaries of text, transforming it into a dynamic and interactive medium that transcends linguistic and cultural barriers. In this digital landscape, words have the power to inform, inspire, and ignite change like never before."

Moreover, the impact of social media has resulted in a shift towards a more colloquial and casual tone in narrative voices. Contemporary literature is increasingly adopting the casual and direct tone commonly found in online communication, which appeals to a generation that is used to digital dialogue. This style is distinguished by a subjective and intimate narration, frequently obscuring the distinction between the author and the narrator, akin to the merging of personal and public identities on social media.

Moreover, the interconnectedness of social media platforms has fostered the exploration of different genres and the creation of multimedia narratives. Increasingly, there is a rise in works that combine text with visual elements, hyperlinks, and social media posts. This trend reflects the multi-modal nature of digital communication.

Social media has become a significant influence in contemporary literature, serving as a potent resource for content and inspiration. It has a profound impact on the art of storytelling and the evolution of characters. Authors are increasingly incorporating the digital landscape as a setting for their stories, integrating social media dynamics into the core of their narratives.

This research paper investigates the complex correlation between social media and modern exploration, analysing how social media has evolved into a significant source of inspiration and literature. The objective is to investigate the impact of digital platforms, which have become essential components of our everyday existence, on the storytelling, subjects, and artistic techniques employed in contemporary literature. As we explore this material for writers, we also examine how it has fundamentally altered the language and framework of modern storytelling. In a society where the distinction between the digital and physical realms is becoming less clear, comprehending the impact of social media on contemporary written communication provides valuable perspectives on the changing dynamics of storytelling and its ability to reflect and shape societal perspectives.



### *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

Contemporary writers frequently employ social media as a storytelling tool, seamlessly incorporating it into the development of the plot and interactions between characters. This integration encompasses a wide range of communication, from individuals expressing their thoughts through tweets or status updates to entire stories that are organised around digital correspondence. In novels such as "A Visit from the Goon Squad" by Jennifer Egan, social media is employed to examine concepts of time, identity, and connection within the context of the digital era. Egan willingly indulges in the captivating pleasures of the online world, an experience that is considerably more enjoyable than most of us are willing to acknowledge. She accomplishes a portion of her world-building by depicting scenes of complete digital realism. In the language used in that context, Egan skillfully critiques and judges us. One-sixth of the novel consists of a 50-page chapter that exclusively consists of snarky and gossipy emails exchanged among a specific group of characters. These emails contain all the dramatic and petty elements reminiscent of Shakespearean literature, including the use of bcc and fwd.

In Jennifer Egan's novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, the chapter titled "Pure Language" explores the character Alex's conviction to protect his child from the influence of digital devices, following his recent experience of becoming a father. These findings indicate that children are vulnerable when they are exposed to the internet and social media. However, Alex's career choice and interactions with others indicate that adults are equally, if not more, vulnerable to the dangers linked to social media and digital communication compared to the children they are supposed to protect. This raises scepticism regarding whether children are genuinely the ones at risk from these technological platforms. Egan utilises fictional narrative to create a relatable parental character, facilitating a connection with and comprehension of parents who are responsible for raising technologically sophisticated offspring. This supports her assertion that digital communication and social media present hazards not only to children, but to individuals of all age demographics. Egan utilises Alex's internal dialogue to depict the anxiety felt by parents concerning their children in relation to the internet and modern digital devices.

Nevertheless, she argues that these technologies are unavoidable in the present state of childhood.

The depiction portrays a New York City with a subtle futuristic touch. In this society, it is customary for children to possess "kiddie handsets,"(Egan,313), which are smartphones specifically tailored for their use. Nevertheless, Alex and his wife are in agreement that their "daughter will not be granted a kiddie handset until she reaches the age of five"(Egan,313).

Alex and his wife support the "childhood at risk" argument "emphasizes inherent vulnerabilities in childhood" as well as adult responsibility for children, "exploiting parental fear...{and} delaying traditional milestones of adulthood" (craft,176). Alex deliberately limits

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his child's access to digital gadgets, demonstrating his belief that he is safeguarding his child by restricting her use of these "kiddie handsets". Alex perceives both of his children as susceptible and regards technology as menacing. Alex's desire to shield his child from mobile devices reflects his belief in the responsibility of parents, including himself, to preserve the traditional concept of childhood that existed before the advent of digital entertainment and communication. When Alex's mobile device vibrates, his daughter indicates his pocket and declares, "That's mine!" This leads Alex to ponder "whether it is feasible for his daughter to perceive the vibrations through his body" (Egan, 321). The use of the term "mine" indicates that the daughter considers the device as her own, suggesting that these mobile devices are essential to a child's sense of self, possession, and overall experience of childhood.

Egan skillfully portrays a relatable moment for parents through Alex's interaction with his daughter, simultaneously asserting that the integration of digital communication devices into childhood has already taken place. In Egan's "Pure Language," the societal structure highlights the role of children in the market, revealing the generation divide between young people and adults and emphasizing the influence that children acquire through digital devices. In Egan's world, children are referred to as "pointers" because they possess the ability to download music simply by pointing, thus making them the ultimate "judges of musical success" (Egan, 313).

In "Pure Language," Egan constructs a world where the internet and electronic devices pose as menacing entities, thereby asserting that these technologies also possess destructive qualities within our society. However, it is not only children who are put at risk by these devices.

Children, unlike adults, are not alienated by the presence of technology in their lives. Instead, they grow and learn alongside these technological advancements, such as the internet and smartphones. As a result, children are aware of the positive and negative aspects of these technologies and are able to utilise them to their full potential.

## Conclusion

The changing digital landscape makes it fascinating to consider the future of literature in light of technological progress. Social media and literature are already closely linked, but their relationship is expected to grow, resulting in new patterns and significant changes in literature expression.

Artificial intelligence and virtual reality are being used in literary works. AI could create interactive narratives that adapt to the reader's choices, like more advanced choose-your-own-adventure stories. Virtual and augmented reality can immerse readers in the book's world and blur the line between text and reality.





The impact of social media on literature is expected to grow. Collaboration between authors and readers on digital platforms may increase. Social media's interactivity can encourage participatory storytelling, where reader feedback shapes the story in real time.

Even with these advances, balancing technological influences and literary principles will likely remain important. Digital and social media-influenced formats will increase, but captivating storytelling, well-developed characters, and articulate writing will remain essential to literature. The widespread availability of literature is also important. Social media and digital platforms can highlight underrepresented authors and stories, creating a more diverse and inclusive literary environment worldwide. Exploring the relationship between social media and literature offers fascinating insights into storytelling's future in the age of technology. Social media is pervasive in our daily lives and has transformed literature and public discourse, as this study has shown. A close look at Jennifer Egan's "A Visit from the Goon Squad" shows how social media affects time, identity, and connection in modern fiction.

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