Research Article

Technology, Social Media, And Changes In Communication In NW And Swing Time

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Technology gradually inceasing day by day. We are in a age where we cannot survive a single minute without technology and social media. The world is so fast changing with technology and social media. Zadie smith's famous novels NW (2012) and Swing Time (2016) depicts how social media and technology changing connections and relations. This article focuses how Zadie smith potrays digital communication plays a crucial role in shaping the identity and culture. It also studies how Zadie smith characters negotiate in a world where everything happens instantly.privacy is precarious, and every online action feels like a performance using ideas like Marshall McLuhan's famous line, "the medium is the message," and Manuel Castells's view of how networks dominate modern life.

Social media reflects the anarchy of city life in NW; characters use it to climb socially, locate their people, or simply survive in a world when money is limited. But it's a two-edged sword; while it provides connection, it also makes people feel alone, particularly in light of race and class. Conversely, Swing Time asks how digital life alters our perception of race, culture, and even do-gooder projects in locations like Africa, zooming out globally. Who is going to share whose story? Really who is in charge? Though the two books approach technology differently, they both address the same unsettling reality: social media lets people redefine themselves, but it also turns life into a stage everyone is watching. Smith does not offer simple responses. Rather, she challenges us to consider what digital connection actually means—especially in light of race, culture, and inequality influencing every click and scroll.

Keywords: Technology, social media, communication evolution, Zadie Smith, NW, swing time, digital identity, multiculturalism, network society, surveillance |

Introduction:

These days social media is the thing that most people use, its the way the majority of people connect with other people and also their self image in the world has changed quite a lot. Zadie Smith's NW (2012) and Swing Time (2016) examine the effects of these shifts onto the everyday. In the two novels, people are constantly using technology and digital media to track new people down and be found by them, express themselves and find community. Smith also mentions that it is not without its drawbacks these devices can bring on as well — the feeling that people are watching, they are alone, they are doing something for someone else.

NW tells the story of four friends who live in northwest London, a melting-pot of many cultures, and a city of increasing social division. Smith examines "how we use stuff like smartphones and social media to escape who we are. Indeed, Leah and Natalie employ these very skills to figure out who they are. But these technologies can also make people lonely. It is, for example, very hard for Natalie to reconcile her actual self with her internet-facade part of it.This relates to Marshall McLuhan's theory that "the medium is the message"—that our mode of communication shapes our perspective of the world. Smith's book captures this by illustrating how technology shapes not just what people say but also how people present who they are.

Following the lives of two mixed-race women brought together by their love of music and dance, Swing Time travels across nations. Here, technology exposes unfairness and issues in how civilisations are shared or portrayed even while it helps them stay in touch worldwide. The book draws on Manuel Castells's concept

 "Around the end of the second millennium … social, technological, economic, and cultural transformations came together to give rise to a new form of society, the network society, whose analysis is proposed in this volume." (Castells xvii). In the narrative, Smith employs social media tools to discuss more complex topics including race, migration, and cultural copying. This paper examines how NW and Swing Time show the impact of technology and social media on the way people communicate, form identities, and build relationships. Technology helps start dialogues between civilisations but occasionally makes inequalities worse. This is why they have grown to be a hot issue in studies of modern literature. As more studies on Zadie Smith's NW and Swing Time focus on how the books handle digital culture to grasp identity and social ties, This part summarises the opinions of academics on technology, social media, and the changes in communication as well as the main theories that support the examination in this paper.

Social media and technology in modern literature

In today's studies, the connection between technology and literature is growingly crucial. Scholars such as Hayles contend that "Deep attention is essential for coping with complex phenomena… hyper attention is useful for its flexibility in switching between different information streams… As contemporary environments become more information-intensive, it is no surprise that hyper attention is growing and that deep attention (Hayles 69-70) Technology is not only a backdrop in Zadie Smith's books; it also significantly shapes how characters live and see themselves. McIlwain notes, for example, how young people in the city use digital tools in ways that provide both power and problems. Swing Time also gets
attention for showing how digital communication operates across borders. He talks about the paradox of connection and isolation, meaning that while technology helps people connect, it can also make people feel more alone . The book examines how people create identities free from geographical boundaries
on social media. Thomas notes the complex power dynamics embedded in digital storytelling and says Smith questions the way charity and cultural interaction are presented online.
There are a raft of big communication and culture theories that are useful to have in ones back pocket when reading Zadie Smith. Marshall McLuhan's famous theory is that our medium of communication — what we use — is as important as our words. It also decides how, to what extent and, to a certain extent, in what context society is impacted, and how signals are received (Understanding Media). Smith makes this explicit in NW and Swing Time. Social media in these narratives is looked at as shaping the way in which characters make their demands, communicate and present themselves, transcending information sharing.
Poe's ideas, then, concerning the watchers and the watched become quite readily commensurate with Michel Foucault's understanding of the panopticon and surveillance. The author explains how people act differently when they feel they are being watched. While many critics have lauded Smith's treatment of both the positive and negative aspects of technology, there is still room to examine more closely how she connects social media to shifting modes of communication. Social media provides a tool for self-expression and way characters feel perpetually gazed upon — underlining privacy and control as increasingly pressing issues in digital life.

Technology and Correspondence in NW

The tweets and personality that Natalie adopts on social media underscore how difficult it is to stay true to oneself in cyberspace. " On the website she was what everybody was what everybody was looking for (Smith, NW 234). This may be compared to Judith Butler's performativity, where social behaviour and the repetition of action construct's identity.One of the other three lead characters, Leah has another kind of relationship with digital technology. Natalie's polished online persona demonstrates how social media can serve as a stage on which people playact their best selves and where their worth is often quantified by the number of likes and comments they receive.
Another crucial matter in the novel is technology in a class-and-access context; its rapid changes and interruptions mirror how people interact now: fast, fractured and sometimes baffling. Whereas other people in the story don't similarly succeed through their connections, Natalie ascends through the echelons of society with digital tools. This reveals the gap between those left behind and those benefiting from technology. …the social and cultural exclusion of large segments of the population of the planet from the global networks that accumulate knowledge, wealth, and power." (castelle xviii)
London's busy, upmarket NW area is closely associated with its digital topics. The book highlights the relationship between the physical space of the city and its online realm. Characters oscillate constantly between virtual and live relationships. They rely on yet struggle to control the "web of simultaneous connections," as McIlwain describes it, the environment in which their freedom to communicate, as well as the State's power to intercept, has expanded.After all, NW demonstrates that technology and social media can be both hero and villain. The mixture of being connected and feeling alone that explains these medium is actually the double-edged nature of these medium." They deliver pressure, distorted images and social ostracism with
the means of expression and connection for people. Smith does so by letting her characters' experiences prompt readers to explore how digital communication is remaking the texture of modern life — especially across cities that are both diverse and fast-changing.

Social Media as a Surveillance Space of Identity Performance

The platform is more important than ever on how people portray themselves to the world, and to viral fame. It's where people actually form and mold who they are, usually with an audience and, many times, judgment, not just a space of sharing. Judith Butler's belief that we are not only or even primarily born with identity (rather, we make it over time through what we do) certainly resonates with Zadie Smith's books NW and Swing Time, which is about how people use the web to figure out who they are but also about how those same spaces could feel stressful, exposed and laid bare. Like for example Natalie is a stickler for planning her NG posts. She knows that how she is perceived is altered by each picture or comment she shares. "Natalie Blake, who told people she abhorred expensive gadgets and detested the Internet, adored her phone and was helplessly, compulsively, adverbly addicted to the Internet." (NW 229) It demonstrates how frequently people behave on behalf of others online, carefully cultivating their own image as if on stage.The unidentified narrator in Swing Time also feels under observation. She talks of having an online "audience,"
always aware of every action she makes. This relates to Michel Foucault's concept of the panopticon—a venue where people act as though they are constantly under observation, so police themselves Social media operates in rather similar manner. "Search Aimee, search venue, search Brooklyn dance troupe, image search, AP wire search, blog search... I could reconstruct – 140 characters at a time, image by image, blog post by blog post – the experience of having been there, until, by one a.m., nobody could have been there more than me... I was everywhere in that room at all moments, viewing the thing from all angles, in a mighty act of collation. ... To observe, in real time, the debates as they form and coalesce, to watch the developing consensus, the highlights or embarrassments identified, their meanings and subtexts accepted or denied. The insults and the jokes, the gossip and rumour, the memes, the Photoshop, the filters, and all the many varieties of critique given free rein here, far from Aimee's reach or control" (Swing Time 298)Smith also demonstrates how social media can be a tool for control as it is not only about sharing. People from minority or underprivileged backgrounds often encounter more online judgement in NW. Though they have a voice on these sites, they are also more subject to criticism. NW "depicts social media as a space where racialised bodies are hyper-visible and subject to constant evaluation," Caitlin McIlwain notes Particularly for those from underprivileged groups, this reveals how some people are watched more closely than others. All this online pressure has emotional costs as well. Leah, a character in NW, is always worried about how others view her thus she feels stuck and anxious. "Leah takes her shirt in hand and shakes it free of her skin. The sweat pooled beneath each breast leaves its shameful trace on the cotton." (NW 294)This type of stress fits Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity," in which people are always adjusting to what others expect and nothing feels steady—not even
identity.

Social Media Affects Interpersonal Relationships in Smith's Novels

 Natalie's online presence helps her to arrange her hectic life, but it does not feel really personal. "hi finally / that wasn't so hard now was it / just don't like downloading things / me no like computerz / from the internet at WORK. Weak gov computers. One little virus and they die innit" (Smith, NW, 215)This line illustrates how empty online interaction seems yet can be beneficial. Digital contact sometimes provides a sense of connection without the demands of friendship, Sherry Turkle notes in Alone Together.Smith's narrative shows people who are always in touch online but lacking real emotional closeness, so reflecting this idea.

Social media helps long-distance couples in Swing Time demonstrate how technology can both link and divide people. Once they bonded over dancing, the narrator and her childhood friend Tracey. But their online messages and picture sharing fail to preserve their friendship as they get older and lead separate lives."A few minutes after I put down the phone the emails started to arrive, in little flurries, until I had fifty or more. I sat where I was reading them,. ... it was a one-way correspondence, a systematic dissection..(swing time 321) This demonstrates how sometimes in-person relationships cannot be replaced by digital tools. It also relates to Barry Wellman's "networked individualism," in which people remain in touch via personal networks but the ties usually feel weaker .Smith also shows how social media might lead problems with honesty and trust. People in North-West feel under pressure to present just the positive aspects of their life on internet. Jealousy and misinterpretation follow from this. Leah, for instance, feels more isolated when she contrasts her hardships with the ideal-looking life of others. This emotion is related to Erving Goffman's theory of public self-presentation aimed at creating the correct impression.

Digital communication weighs on family relationships in Swing Time as well. The narrator's correspondence with her mother and her time living in West Africa illustrate how social media can do both good and harm. Messages from home remind her of what she is missing as they help her feel that she belongs. The messages that came from home were threads that I tried, not always successfully, to hold onto, to stop them all from slipping through my fingers. In the end, Smith's books demonstrate that social media has transformed relationships in some pretty significant ways. This is an image of how rich online communication can be. But also of how it is not always enough to maintain deep emotional bonds, especially across cultures and generations. Though it provides new ways for people to communicate and share, it can also lead to shallow interaction, stress and pressure to act a certain way. The characters of NW and Swing Time challenge our ways of connecting online, because they both diagnose both the advantages and pitfalls of this system of linking up digitally.

Zadie Smith explores in both NW and Swing Time whose privy are accessible. She shows how people actually use digital technologies like phones and the internet in their daily lives and the ways that differences in income and class shape who gets to use them. The digital divide is really between those who have full access and those who don't. In NW, Smith sets down characters in a London postcode where money is tight for a lot of people. Smith is quick to point out, however, that this is a matter of knowing how to engage with technology and the experience or education to be able to profit from it, not simply about owning a phone or having access to the internet. Unlike Natalie and Leah, some of the characters do have phones and social media accounts. However, busy lifestyles limit their technology use. Everybody's got a phone, the important thing is to have the freedom to use it Natalie observes.This suggests one simply can't "max" out a gadget just by possessing it. This notion is similar to what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as "cultural capital," meaning the knowledge and the
skills needed for people to participate fully in a society, including online.

In Swing Time, Smith tackles this global issue.Even owning a basic phone is considered as rare and valuable in those rural areas. In some places, even the simplest phone was a luxury, a gateway to worlds unknown," the narrator remarks. Smith also questions the way some charities and celebrities try to help solve this issue; experts refer to this as the "global digital divide"—how poorer nations face more difficulties gaining access to digital tools and services.The narrator of Swing Time works on a
project headed by a pop star to introduce technology to underprivileged areas. She soon finds, though, that these initiatives do not always go as expected. Good intentions do not always translate into understanding the lived reality of those on the ground,she notes.This event relates to postcolonial
theory, which issues a warning against rich nations attempting to assist less developed nations without fully appreciating their needs.

Both books illustrate how bad digital access can compound existing social problems. In NW, the absence of real potentials in the cyber world perpetuates the lack of inclusion of its audiences. Leah wants to use the internet to voice herself but she has difficulty because of her environment and lack of money.All in
all, Smith's books serve as a reminder that having access to technology is not just about having devices, that being cut off from technology is often tied to bigger issues like poverty and inequality.

Social Media and Cultural Identity: Diaspora and Hybridity in Smith's Novels

Zadie Smith demonstrates in NW and Swing Time how people from many backgrounds express who they are in great part depending on social media. For those with roots in multiple locations—what we refer to as diasporic identities—social media becomes a place where they try to find where they fit and how they present themselves to the world. In NW, Smith sets the narrative in London, a city bursting with people from many backgrounds. Characters like Natalie and Leah negotiate several cultural groups. Social media complicates things even while it keeps them close to these identities. Natalie says she must shift between different versions of herself, depending on where she is, who's watching.This concept aligns with what Homi
Bhabha defines as "hybridity," in which case identity is always evolving and redefining depending on the context rather than fixed. People experiment with how they present themselves and how others view them on social media, which turns into sort of digital equivalent of this space.

The narrator of Swing Time goes through something comparable. The photos and messages helped me hold on to pieces of home, even if I was far away,she notes.Still, this link is not always
simple. She is divided between several locations and cultures. Here Stuart Hall's conception of identity as a continuous process of positioning fits rather nicely. Based on her surroundings and online contacts, the narrator's sense of self keeps changing.Smith also notes the difficulties in expressing mixed identities using social media. Leah talks about her race and background on social media in North Wales, but it's not always easy. She sometimes feels as though she has to fit preconceptions in order for others to grasp. This captures Bell Hooks' worries about media sometimes presenting one-sided or limited conceptions of Black identity .Leah wants to be seen as a whole person, not just a label; but social media does not always let that.

Swing Time also exhibits something like this. The narrator keeps in contact with loved ones in West Africa by means of digital tools. These instruments remind her how far apart they actually are as well as help to preserve their relationship. The screen showed faces I loved, but sometimes it felt like a window I could never quite step through,she notes.Overall, Smith's books show that social media is a strong but complex tool for people trying to find and express their cultural identities, even if technology helps us feel
closer and can also remind us of the distance and differences still existing. It provides them with a forum to discover who they are, but it also presents difficulties—particularly for those from several cultures. These tales inspire readers to consider how technology shapes identity in a society in constant cultural mixing and change.

The NW and swing times of Zadie Smith provide us a careful view of how social media and technology alter modern communication and self-awareness. These books make it abundantly evident that social media is like a two-edged sword. Smith shows both the good and the bad sides of digital life how it can connect people across many worlds and offer new ways to express who they are, but also how it can increase feelings of loneliness, unfairness, and a broken sense of identity. It preserves diasporic ties and helps establish fresh communities. The screen was both a lifeline and a reminder of the distance I carried," the Swing Time narrator notes, for instance .Stuart Hall's theory that cultural identity is "never singular or fixed but always a "production" fits this mixed feeling that shows how flexible and always changing identity is nowadays. Smith's characters negotiate this continuous process at varied degrees of success and challenge.

But Smith also very quickly says that not everyone has equal technology. As NW makes evident the digital divide makes technology a result of peoples social and economic position and that it is not fair or neutral .Her characters consciously craft their digital personas to land somewhere between showing and being real.

This tension speaks to wider issues about how instruments of identity form in a society led under screens and internet networks. Smith's books, in the end, get us to think about the knotty interplay between identity and communication in a society as interconnected and digital as ours. Technology challenges established notions of community, belonging, self-understanding and intimacy while it generates new ways to connect.

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