

Cyberspace Metaphor and Online Identity in *Olivia Sudjic's Sympathy* (2017) and Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* (2021): An Interdisciplinary Approach

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Abstract

Technology, with its digital platforms, posits new challenges which make the study of identity, especially online identity, an entangled issue with the newly-created cyberspaces that can fake reality. Cyberspace/Virtual space displays a world with no boundaries of time and space. The current research examines the representation of online identity in two debut novels: *Olivia Sudjic's Sympathy* (2017) and Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* (2021). The two selected novels penetrate the influence of Instagram and Twitter respectively on shaping the identity of the heroines. They present how social media constructs identity in a sense that shows identity as a process of communication. The research adopts an interdisciplinary approach that integrates the concept of cyberspace as a metaphor with Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) to show how identity is shaped through the affordances provided in the virtual spaces. Analysis of online identity has not been given its due study in literary texts; therefore, this research endeavours to fill this gap by examining the two selected novels whose narratives expose obsession with virtual platforms and the underlying implications of constant online presence.

Keywords: *Affordances, Communication Theory of Identity, Cyberspace Metaphor, Online Identity, Sudjic's Sympathy, Lockwood's No One Is Talking About This*

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Introduction

Identity is a complex construct that identifies the subjectivity of the individuals and their relationship with the environment which shapes their identity. Identity has many facets that are revealed through different demarcations: “gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation” as well as other factors that “pertain to politics, religions and class distinctions” (Cover and Doak 547). These demarcations underscore identity formation as an intertwined and developmental process that can be interpreted through media affordances that dictate the status of the individual user: online or offline. Appropriately, digital technology and its social media affordances provide a new concept of identity as a communicative process.

Identity is a debatable and developmental concept throughout literary history. Not only is it the concern of writers, but also it is a leading topic in psychological, philosophical, sociological researches and recently in social media discourses. The present research examines online identity in *Olivia Sudjic's* Instagram novel, *Sympathy* (2017) and Patricia Lockwood's Twitter novel, *No One Is Talking About This* (2021). It penetrates how the distinctive affordances of Instagram and Twitter reveal the heroines' identities. The heroines in the two selected novels are obsessed with the Internet (the Internet and cyberspace are used interchangeably throughout the research) and spend most of their time in cyberspace that becomes a metaphor for their identities. The two novels are chosen as they both display heroines overwhelmed by media applications and their online status that is reflected in the fragmented narrative structures.

The current research penetrates the impact of the affordances provided by Instagram and Twitter on shaping the heroines' identities, the distinctions between these two media applications in revealing identities as well as the threats posed by the excessive online presence. It adopts an interdisciplinary approach that is

prompted by the complexity of identity issue. It integrates the concept of Cyberspace as a metaphor with Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) which shows how identity is shaped through the affordances provided in the virtual spaces. The present research attempts to answer the following questions: What is the metaphor of cyberspace in the two selected novels? What are the frames of identity depicted in the two novels? To what extent CTI is instrumental in understanding online identity?

Identity as a Developmental Theory

Identity theory is developmental as it has loomed throughout the changing social and cultural epochs, asserting the fluidity and interactivity of the concept to the predominant characteristics. It is believed that modern identity theory emerged in Europe and Great Britain during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Cover and Doak 547). This development incited the humanist perception of identity and asserted by René Descartes's " *cogito ergo sum*" "I think, therefore I am" (18). Core to the modern concept of identity is self-autonomy which underscores individuality as articulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's view of "individuality grounded in nature and Immanuel Kant's equation of selfhood and consciousness" (Cover and Doak 547). In his preface to *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau argues for the development of human soul/identity that is "modified in society by innumerable constantly recurring causes " (58). Moreover, Kant in his book, *Critique of Pure Reason*, asserts the combination of relational factors in shaping self-consciousness (81) Although Descartes, Rousseau and Kant approach identity differently, they agree on individual human consciousness and autonomous self-perception.

One of the salient approaches to identity examination is the psychoanalytic one that has been developed by Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Eric Homburger Erikson, Heinz Hartmann and other psychoanalysts. The psychoanalytic approach to identity explores the individual's relationship with the environment as well as identity

disorders. For example, Freud examined the fragmentary unconscious which asserts the embedded desires. Likewise, Lacan examined desires' role in forming identity. Lacan cherishes the inseparability of subjectivity and desires. According to Lacan, desire aims at "catching the *jouissance* of the other" (183). *Jouissance* is the desire or ecstasy that has become the catalyst of individuals' actions that shape their identity (ies). Applying Lacan's concept of desire to online presence undermines how individuals construct their self-image(s) in their interaction with the Other. Searching for pleasure through constant online presence is interpreted by Jodi Dean, in "Affect and Drive", as "a desire for a *jouissance* that can never be attained" (133). Accordingly, individuals' obsession with their online identity can cause pain and alienation as well as other societal crises.

Unlike Freud's three components of identity (ego, id, superego), Erikson presents the concept of *ego identity* which changes due to one's knowledge and interactions. According to Erikson, the ego shapes one's identity and integrity. Erikson's *ego identity* develops through eight stages which assert the individual's unconscious continuous quest to develop socially and psychologically (56-121). Therefore, Erikson's psychosocial concept of ego supports the developmental nature of identity as he holds that identity develops through eight stages that end with identity integrity.

Undoubtedly, the psychoanalytic approach to identity illuminates the developmental nature of identity studies to cope with the changing social and cultural parameters and factors shaping identity. These factors reflect one's self-image and self-representation which are ostensibly interchangeable. The self-image is constructed by one's perception of himself/herself and others' assessment of him/her. This self-image affirms the relational aspect of identity which is most appropriate to the individual's online presence. The self-image concept is tackled by Hans-Peter Hartmann

as a distinctive component in his self-psychology theory. Hartmann's self-image concept is an expression of the self's complex interactions where the self struggles for "recognition", aspiring for "narcissistic" integrity and a whole self. (88). This idea is the core of Axel Honneth's *The Struggle for Recognition*. In the context of cyberspace, online infatuation and identity branding can be interpreted "not as 'struggles for self-assertion' but as 'struggles for recognition'" (Honneth 43). Hence, the psychoanalytic approach underscores identity as a construct in a developmental process that mirrors online identity in its attempt to assert itself and interact with others.

Another approach to identity was agitated by the social and cultural constructionist theories (1960s and 1970s) which exhibit the individual identity as the product of "environment, language and sociality" (Cover and Doak 548). The constructionist perspective is a historically and culturally oriented approach that undermines how "identities are constituted and formed" and "the very meanings of identity, subjectivity, and selfhood today (Cover, *Digital Identities* xii). It is assumed that individual identity achieves its volition and authenticity in its interaction with the collective identity. Similarly, Confucius considers personal identity as *a construct molded by the environment, family and social context* (Grego). Relationality postulates the formation of identity in contexts that are not entirely "in people's control (Cover, *Identity and Digital Communication* 6). Relational identity is asserted also by Michel Foucault's concept of power as a relational force that shapes identity and makes it socially constructed since power is a schema that is "homogeneous for every level and domain - family or State, relations of education or production" (*Power/Knowledge* 139). Foucault stresses the formation of identity through the entangled relationship between power and knowledge. Moreover, Foucault's discourse is one of mediated identity where the individuals can transform themselves to achieve what they aspire to through manipulating the available

affordances to effect certain changes and establish their public figure (Urbansk 4). Mediated identity is a reflection of the role of media platforms in constructing and branding one's identity. Therefore, the constructionist view stresses implications of Relational identity as a manifestation of online interconnections.

With the invasion of the Internet and the diverse media applications, a new perspective of identity has emerged. Jenny Davis maintains that digital technology prompted a different approach to identity theory as it produced new contexts and situations ("Identity Theory" 137-165). Davis reports, "the key components of identity theory—the situation, identity negotiation processes, and identity verification outcomes—are affected by existing and emergent digital social technologies" (137). Along the same line, Jan E. Stets and Richard T. Serpe assert the significance of new identity approaches to understand "the self, interaction, and the social structure within which self and interaction are embedded" (4). Consequently, this research adopts the interdisciplinary approach which integrates cyberspace metaphor with CTI as a new perspective through which online identity is examined *Olivia Sudjic's Sympathy* (2017) and Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* (2021).

Literature Review

Exploration of cyberspace and online identity has not been given due study in literature, so this research attempts to fill this gap. This literature review focuses mainly on surveying cyberspace as a metaphor and the concept of online identity as core concepts to analyze the two selected novels. These two concepts have been examined in many media researches, but due to the limitations of the research, the focus will be given to the most appropriate studies for the current research.

Cyberspace as a concept was first coined by William Gibson in his science fiction *Neuromancer* (1984). It is defined differently due to the implicit meanings it evokes and the diverse perspectives from which it is handled as well as the entanglements of the

concepts of space and place. In *Neuromancer*, Gibson proposes that cyberspace is a “consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts. A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity” (67). As ‘a consensual hallucination,’ cyberspace is a place where the user is disembodied and numbed from the real world. Furthermore, Gibson describes cyberspace as “a metaphor that gives us to grasp this place where, since the Second World War, more and more things have been created and are being created that we perceive today as part of our culture” (“I Don't Even Have a Modem”). Michael Benedikt describes cyberspace as a “parallel universe” (15). Benedikt’s view reflects the dichotomy between the virtual and the real worlds or more exactly the shattering of the border between the two worlds. In addition, Stephen Graham believes that cyberspace is “a fragmented, divided and contested multiplicity of heterogeneous infrastructures and actor-networks” (178). As an intangible space, cyberspace has “liminal” presence because it occupies “a position that is essentially a boundary or a threshold between a space where we are and one we can also not be physically within” (Kannen and Langille 3). These approaches to cyberspace undermine its spatial and metaphoric significance as a concept that invaded manifold disciplines, including social media, and ushered a new discourse of the metaphoric implications of cyberspace and its impact on identity representation.

Cyberspace has been approached as a form of “virtual reality” that both “afford[s] social interaction and embod[ies] cultural values” (Kalay and Marx 770). From an architectural perspective, Yehuda Kalay and John Marx consider cyberspace a spatial setting that incorporates cultural disparities. This again adds spiritual and cultural implications to cyberspace, in addition to its physical entity. As a spatial metaphor, cyberspace indicates an

interdisciplinary, multi-dimensional and multi-leveled “space” (Freeman and Jacob 96). The aesthetic and metaphoric overtones of cyberspace have been emphasized by a number of theorists (Batty; Strate; Freeman and Jacob). Lance Strate holds that cyberspace is a manifestation of multiple meanings which he classifies into three levels: “Ontology, Building blocks and Synthesis” (382). The Synthetic level of cyberspace asserts its metaphoric aesthetic interactive space exhibiting human relationships. The metaphoric cyberspace is also undermined by Strate who suggests that cyberspace is a representation of “the idea of the virtual community, specifically computer networks and nodes, bulletin boards, web pages, MUDs, chat rooms, and commercial services, virtual environments, etc.” (395). Furthermore, Michael Batty explores the divergent functions of cyberspace as a data container and multi-faceted browser of face-to-face contact with underlying associations(339).

Actually, cyberspace is a disputable phenomenon which has elicited divergent perspectives of its actuality and virtuality. A salient approach to cyberspace is its social dimension. This social dimension propels the opposition between space and place. One perspective on place and space is that space is a physical reality whereas place is a cultural construct. Steve Harrison and Paul Dourish assert the relational reciprocity of space-place continuum where “[s]pace is the structure of the world; it is the three-dimensional environment in which objects and events occur, and in which they have relative position and direction” (69). They add that “[w]e are located in “space”, but we act in “place”. Furthermore, “places” are spaces that are valued” (69). The advocacy of place as a cultural construct is also supported by Yi-Fu Tuan (6).

Another approach to the space-place relationship is that both space and place are complementarily and mutually interlinked. This view asserts the interdependence of space and place as one cannot exist without the other. This idea is also asserted by Espen Aarseth

in his examination of “Allegories of Space” (2007). Aarseth estimates cyberspace as parallel to “real space to be “hallucinated” as space” (44). The ‘space’ in cyberspace is no more than a metaphor for a ‘place’ constituted of ‘place-like ‘units” (Freeman and Jacob 99). As a spatial metaphor, cyberspace gives symbolic implications to people’s presence on it.

Cyberspace is estimated by Richard Coyne as a place or space that “enables and constrains human interaction in ways similar to physical space” (155). Therefore, Coyne advocates the idea of cyberspace as a medium of human interaction. Ziyed Guelmami and Francois Nicolle support Coyne’s view of cyberspace as a social space. They summarize the role of cyberspace as “the sum of numerous online places defined by their social utility and by their implicit and explicit social rules: social media for self-expression and communication, online multiplayer games for entertainment, community forums for socialization, educating oneself, etc.” (362).

Cyberspace is also appraised as a mediated form of human existence and interaction (Guelmami and Nicolle 362). This epistemological, ontological view shows how cyberspace has conquered people’s life to the extent that it has become “a lived space” (Schatzki 35). Cyberspace has become the technological interface designed by humans to serve as a mirror of human identity. This view is supported by Sherry Turkle's suggestion that “[w]e make our technologies and in turn our technologies shape us” (*Alone Together* 263). Accordingly, human identity is shaped and constructed by the distinctive characteristics of cyberspaces or virtual platforms. In this respect, cyberspace can be considered a teleotopic space that is structured and provided with certain affordances that enhance specific purposes (Guelmami and Nicolle 362).

In the light of Heidegger’s concept of “cyber-spatiality,” online/digital identities are constructed in their interaction with

others as Guelmami and Nicolle propose (364).⁽¹⁾ The online/digital identity is a manifestation of Heidegger's existential concept of *Dasein* (being of one's existence) where the user's personal profile is a representation of his/her *Dasein* or being-in-world or "*Dasein existentials*" as Martin Heidegger reveals in his book, *Being and Time* (42). These *existentials* underscore the distinctive characteristics of the individual beings' identity which is revealed through interaction with followers and the social spaces they have access to. Cyberspace, suitably, has psychological effects emerging from social interactions since it is "a place to "act out" unresolved conflicts, to play and replay characterological difficulties on a new exotic stage" (Turkle, "Cyberspace and Identity" 644). Sherry Turkle's suggestion echoes Heidegger's *Being-in-the-World* and *Being-with-Others* (49-105). *Being-in-the-World* is one of the Heideggerian constituents of *Dasein* where individuals demonstrate their authenticity and relationship with their environment---virtual platforms in the context of digital age. Another Heideggerian constituent is *Being-with-Others* which is called by Heidegger "The Being of Beings Encountered in the Surrounding World" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 62). It illuminates individuals' social interactions which are manifest in communication with others. In fact, *Being with-Others* is involved in *Being-in-the-World* as human beings do not live in seclusion and they prove their existence through interaction with others and the environment.

In investigating the impact of modern technology on identity, Heidegger concludes that modern technology is "*Enframing*" identity into "a mode of Being's revealing of itself" (*The Question* xxx). From Heidegger's philosophical existential perspective, *Dasein* of the individual subject reveals not only one's being-in the world, but also being-with others, asserting relational identity. *Dasein* underscores humans as cognitive existential beings. It is argued that digital technology " has transitioned humanity from a primarily corporeal existence to what may be termed as Digi-sein"

(Hambali276). Accordingly, digital technology has revolutionized Heidegger's existential philosophy to a paradigm shift that mirrors contemporary humans grappling with estrangement and attempting to prove their authenticity.

By establishing a circle of interactions with the different social groups with whom the individual user communicates, the online identity emerges as an intricate multi-faceted construct that needs to be penetrated. Online identity allows individuals to present their identities through posts, videos, photos etc., in a sense that provides more details and creates more interactions as well as widening the individual users' estimation of their relationship with the Internet and the world around them. Social media applications like Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, if used soundly, can deepen human beings' social interaction which is a dearly-cherished human need in the fast-sweeping contemporary world.

Online Identity is a debatable issue that has been examined by a number of theorists, sociologists, psychologists and media cyber analysts such as Sherry Turkle, Rob Cover and Steven Doak. It has been regarded as social media identity which is "an extension of everyday life and cultural change tool" (Zajmi 331). The cyber theorist, Sherry Turkle, is concerned with the social and psychological impacts of the computer/Internet on its users. Turkle considers the "cyberspace a new "frontier" that displays "the decline of language in favour of the growing dominance of media affordances" (*Alone Together* 40). Turkle's book, *Second Self* shows how the computer/Internet becomes a 'second self' or a 'mirror' of the user's identity. This 'second self' is the second nature which is "evocative and fascinating" (19). The computer/cyberspace, according to Turkle, "is a powerful projective medium" that mirrors the user's self and mind (20). Turkle's studies on the interaction between the individual user and the computer/Internet illuminates the construction of "online identities" that have become "more projective than real identities" (*Second Self* 185,193). Turkle finds in

cyberspace the opportunity to explore the different facets of human identity. One can conclude that Turkle's *Second Self* tackles the early stages of the Internet's involvement in people's lives as Turkle in this book penetrates how cyberspace reflects the multiple facets of human identity. It is believed that through virtual environments, individuals "explore different aspects of themselves including the ability to play with their identity and try out new ones" (*Second Self* 391). In addition, people in cyberspace not only reveal their roles in society but also their "imagined roles conjured up in cyberspace"(391).

Moreover, in *Life on the Screen*, Turkle asserts that "[h]ome pages on the web are one recent and dramatic illustration of new notions of identity as multiple and coherent" (279). Turkle, in this book, presents online identity as a developmental complex construct, shaped by the diverse affordances in cyberspace. In the light of Turkle's views, cyberspace should not be considered a prison or alternative life but as a metaphor mirroring the multiple facets of human identity through interaction with others. Therefore, online identity should be given its due study in fiction to dig into the aesthetics of cyberspace and the interlinking of literature with media discourses.

Actually, Turkle's developmental exploration of the social and psychological implications of using computers and presence on the Internet/ cyberspace reveals the intricacies of constructing human identity. In this respect, "cyberspace, also known as the Internet and the World Wide Web, is an environment defined by the nature of its essence, a pure communication devoid of clear boundaries...the vehicle by which we enter a state of psychological immersion" (Rosenfeld 3-4). Accordingly, the Internet/cyberspace has psychological influences on shaping identity. These psychological influences can be estimated by the degree of individuals' online presence that affects them intellectually and emotionally.

A notable study on online identity is Rob Cover and Steven Doak's "Identity Offline and Online" (2015). Cover and Doak assert that identity (online/offline) is constructed through "various cultural, political, legal and linguistic formations" (547). They focus mainly on the development of modern theory of identity that highlights the autonomy and coherence of identity construction. They survey the theories that tackled the role of the Internet in forming identity with much emphasis on Turkle's view of the "unitary identity" where "the unconscious performative self" in the virtual environment "is less critically aware, more connected, more anxious and more concrete" (551). Therefore, cyberspace problematizes the formation of a cohesive identity as being online means having diverse relationships with others.

Furthermore, in Cover and Doak's view, online identity is different from other "Enlightenment" forms of identity with three distinctive characteristics: "Relationality", "Categorization" and "Surveillance" ("Identity Offline and Online" 551-552). Relationality identifies the relationships established through the social media applications where users assert their identity in its" multiple, simultaneous interactions" (551). This idea is emphasized by Victoria Kannen's constructionist perspective as she defines identity as "...a relational process through which we understand ourselves/others/groups at any given time in any given place" ("Pregnant, Privileged and PhDing" (179).

Categorization is the classification of identity according to race, gender, nationality, class, ethnicity, etc. It is believed that media networks are good sites for identity categorization which is "the normalization and stabilization of identity" (Cover and Doak 552). This categorization is a complex process as the user can belong to more than one category due to the intersectionality of the different aspects that shape identity. In contrast, another user cannot comply to anyone of the given categories, resulting in the "offline risk of being classified as a nonperson" (552). Surveillance, as another

characteristic of online identity, provides a realm of self-inspection and self-control (552). Surveillance is viewed as an “internalized process that operates alongside externalized practices of surveillance (552). Users of cyberspaces express themselves through profiles, selfies, videos and so forth. These forms of expression should abide to the regulatory and disciplinary rules of media networks.

Considerably, online identity has prompted investigation in the different disciplines, each from its unique and specialized perspective. A significant study is “A Literature Review of Online Identity Construction” (2021) by Jiao Huang et al. Their study tackles the fragmentation of online identity through reviewing the theoretical and thematic patterns of online construction (1-3). Another influential research on online identity is Marcos Barros et al’s (2022) “Online Identities In and Around Organizations”. Their research surveys what has been written on online identity, and they identify three waves of online identity. The first wave, as they maintain, adopts “a postmodern view of identity as fluid, fragmented, and multiple” (5). The second wave, as Marcos et al advocate, highlights “identity performance” through digital affordances (6). The third wave, as scholars propose, highlights difficulty of distinguishing the “virtual” and “real” selves (6). These divergent waves and perspectives on online identity assert the emergence of a new concept of identity that renders an authentic representation of remediated identity. This identity, according to Theresa M. Senft, is framed by “what people do while on the Internet” (347). In due course, identity is "the narrativization of the self" dictated by manifold social and cultural factors (Hall 4).

Through surveying concepts of cyberspace and online identity, it is crystal clear that online identity is an intricate concept connected with the wide-spread manipulation of cyberspace. The study of online identity necessitates using an interdisciplinary approach to probe into cyberspace as a metaphor that prompts the construction of online identity. This interdisciplinary approach

intertwines fiction with media discourse, psychology and philosophy to study the two selected novels for the research: *Sudjic's Sympathy* and Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This*.

Sympathy and *No One Is Talking About This* have not given their due study and nor have they been examined together in previous reviews or studies. On the one hand, *Sympathy* has been subject to a number of book reviews and few researches which mostly focused on narrative techniques and the heroine's obsession with Instagram. Kate Loftus O'Brien finds in *Sympathy* "a smart and lyrical evocation of that murky emotional terrain between our online and offline selves." Similarly, Hermione Eyre comments on the issue of media attraction and estimates the novel as a "smart story of obsession and technology... exquisite... an astute, quirky, slow-burning satire on emerging codes of behaviour, intergenerational differences, globalization, the tech industry and the vortex of the dark web." Dorothee Birke, in her book, *Narrative in Culture* (2019) discusses the narrative techniques within media applications. She examines *Sympathy* in a chapter entitled: "New Media Narratives: Olivia Sudjic's *Sympathy* and Identity in the Digital Age." Another notable research on *Sympathy* is by Spandita Das. Das discusses Olivia Sudjic's *Sympathy* and Lauren Oyler's *Fake Accounts* through a critique of the networked society. She shows how digital interfaces display estrangement and heightened emotional experiences through foregrounding the characters in the two novels (892–905). In addition, Richard William Bingham's study of *Sympathy*, along with other novels (2019), shows how the technological revolution is in fact a generational one (7). In the chapter entitled, "Interface: Flat Affect and the Mediated Other in *Taipei* and *Sympathy*", Bingham explores the flatness of protagonists in Tao Lin's *Taipei* (2013) and *Sudjic's Sympathy* (2017). Bingham maintains that the narrative creates "a flatness that alienates the reader from Alice's perspective" and the

"flat affect...is rather a result of the unreliability and limitations of [Alice's] narration" (181).

On the other hand, the reviews and articles on *No One is Talking About This* by Patricia Lockwood highlight the novel as a genre tackling the overwhelming power of the Internet in the contemporary world. Heller McAlpin (2021) maintains that Lockwood masterfully captures the spirit of the time through the portal "with its vapid, mind-numbing, addictive culture." In a similar vein, Lindsay Clarke (2022) finds the novel "an internet-themed book", distinguished by "ambiguous, poetic snippets" which mirror our contemporary dilemma. Mark O'Connell (2021) also agrees with McAlpin and Clarke on the issues tackled in Lockwood's novel. O'Connell praises the novel for its attempt to encounter "the horror and absurdity of being extremely online." In a nuanced *Affect* context, Viktoria Herold in her study *(Dis)attending to the Other: Contemporary Fictions of Empathy* (2022), examines the novel as social fiction that penetrates the essence of empathy in online presence. Herold applies Dean's "Affect and Drive" model to study the novel in comparison with Camille Laurens's *Celle Que Vous Croyez* (211-249). Moreover, in a recent research entitled, "Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* and Cyberfeminism(s)" (2023), Srinjoy Dey examines the "cyberfeminist avalanche" of images that "disrupt traditional narrative structures" (8). In her cyberfeminist approach, Dey examines the intersections of feminist identity and digital technology.

Through surveying what has been written on *Sympathy and No One Is Talking About This*, it is apparent that the two novels have not been given due research which can highlight the entanglement of social media with literature. The present research delves deep into the online identity representation in the two novels through exploring them in the light of the concept of Cyberspace as a metaphor and Communication Theory of Identity (CTI).

Theoretical Framework

Identity is a complex construct shaped by entangled factors: social, cultural, political, psychological, etc. With the emergence of media applications, identity is considered as a developmental communicative process (Shotter and Gergen; Hecht et al). Identity is explored through the diverse messages sent through media applications. These messages convey symbolic implications that can be considered as “enactments of identity” (Hecht 78). This means identity construction is a communicative process underlying the interaction of diverse factors and revealing embedded implications.

Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) combined with the concept of media affordances is more relevant to examine online identity as they complement each other in exploring identities influenced by the Internet or more exactly the overuse of virtual platforms.

CTI provides a new perspective of identity which centers on “identity as relational and takes into consideration identity as a discursive process” (Hecht and Cho 139). CTI was proposed by Michael Hecht et al who believe in a synthetic perception of identity that integrates “community, communication, social relationships, and self-concepts, while “locating” identity in all these layers” (Hecht and Cho 139). Through communication, the individual, constructs, enhances and changes his/her identity (139).

Significantly, CTI goes beyond the individual’s identity to penetrate the multi-layered roles enacted by the individual (Hecht et al). Hecht proposes four frames or layers for understanding identity: Personal, Enacted, Relational and Communicative frames. These frames can be considered the ways through which human beings “conceptualize their identity” (Hecht 81). These frames of identity resemble, to some extent, Erving Goffman’s view of identity as divided into three frames: personal, social and felt identity (1963). Both Hecht and Goffman’s frames assert the interaction between the different frames of identity.

Hecht's Frames of Identity

Hecht's frames of identity attempt to "capture the complex, fluid and multilayered nature of identity" (Hecht and Philips 223). Firstly, the personal frame of identity manifests the unique characteristics of the individual embedded in self-recognition and self-image (Hecht 79). This personal frame of identity advocates the belief that identity is a progressively ordered construct where meanings are attributed to it by the social world. In addition, this personal frame supports identity as a source of "expectations and motivations" (79).

Secondly, the enacted frame of identity shows identity as in a process of interactions revealed through messages. Identity in this frame is "part of all messages" where messages express more than one identity (Hecht 79). The identity as Enactment is "emergent... enacted in a social behavior and symbols; and "hierarchically order social rules" (79).

Thirdly, the relational frame postulates that the individual's identity is "embedded in his or her relationships" (Hecht and Cho 141). Likewise, identity "emerges in relationship and becomes a property of the relationship because it is jointly negotiated" (Hecht 79). Accordingly, the relational frame asserts the formation of identity in its relationship and enactment in connections that "develop identities as social entities" (80).

Lastly, the communal frame "located identity in the group not the individual or the interaction as previously posited" (Hecht 80). This frame proposes the formation of identity "out of groups and networks" (80). The communal frame and its focus on community presents identity as a construct of cultural factors. Dorothy Holland et al suggest, "Identity is a concept figuratively combines the intimate and personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations" (5). Consequently, identity is shaped by the interaction of different social and cultural agents that demonstrate individuals as not living in alien landscapes. In this

frame, hence, the community rather than the individual is the locus of the discourse/narrative.

Notably, these frames are not separated from each other, but they are integral and complementary in shaping identity in its enactment and relationships with groups and networks. Therefore, understanding online identity is a complex task that reflects the intermingling of diverse factors that give symbolic connotations to the users' actions via media applications. Since the present research discusses online identity, it is appropriate to integrate affordances theory with CIT to penetrate the complexity of online identity and come with fresh understanding of online identity.

Affordances concept was coined by James J. Gibson (Sun and Suthers 3017). According to James J. Gibson, "the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill" (127). Gibson's affordances formed the basic tenets in ecological psychology. As applied to media platforms, affordances are the internet characteristics that distinguish communication through digital platforms. In this respect, Gibson maintains that "affordances are relationships that exist naturally that do not require preexisting knowledge or necessity need to be perceived" (Chong and Proctor 120).

Gibson's concept of affordances is based on his psychological theory of perception which explores the surroundings in which human beings live. In this light, affordances are defined as "the perceived actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used" (Norman 4). These perceptive affordances can be considered the unique characteristics of media platforms. These characteristics distinguish one media platform from another and contribute in constructing digital/online identities. This idea is also implied in William W. Gaver's estimation of affordances as "properties of the world defined with respect to people's interaction with it" ("Technology Affordances" 80).

Significantly, online identity representation of self highlights social activities as embedded in and constructed “by the material environment” (Gaver “Affordances for Interaction” 125). Likewise, social affordances are considered by Barry Wellman as that “possibilities technological changes afford for social relations and social structure” (228).

Another trajectory to affordances focuses on its communicative nature. Ian Hutcbly refers to ‘communicative affordances’ as “the possibilities of action that emerge from [...] given technological forms” (30). Drawing on this conceptualization of affordances, Ian Hutcbly and Simone Barnett assign two functions to affordances: “functional and relational” (151). On the one hand, affordances are functional as they are affording and constraining. This idea is emphasized by Davis’s view that affordances refer to objects that “enable or constrain particular ways of acting in the world” (*How Artifacts Afford* 20). This perspective of affordances highlights the virtual platforms as having distinctive qualities that can present or hide aspects of identity. In a similar vein, Coyne assesses cyberspace as a means of enabling and constraining “human interaction in ways similar to physical space” (156).

On the other hand, affordances are relational as they differ from one species to another in shaping possibilities in varied ways (Coyne 151). As an ontological concept, affordances are instrumental in exploring digital/online identity as the individual user is located in a space provided by specific affordances that enable users to reveal their identity (ies) differently. Facebook, Twitter or Instagram platforms parallel Gibson’s terrestrial environment. This means that Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are social media sites with distinctive affordances and constraints.

Each media platform has its specific affordances that enable individuals to exhibit their online identities differently. It is assumed that “[I]n everyday cycles of self presentation and impression formation, individuals perform on multiple states, and in doing so,

they blend social spheres online that may have been separate offline, thus confusing private and public boundaries” (Parpacharissi 307). In displaying varied identities on the virtual spaces, it becomes difficult to distinguish authentic identity from the one shown via media applications. Therefore, identity can be considered as a means of communication shaped through the affordances of each platform. This idea is the core of CII which explores the “mutual influences between identity and communication and conceptualizes identity as communication rather than seeing identity as merely a product of communication or vice versa” (Jung and Hecht 266).

Contextualizing *Sudjic’s Sympathy* and *Lockwood’s No One Is Talking About This*

Sympathy and *No One* are a plea against obsession with social media. They probe into the dilemma of contemporary society’s surveillance and lack of personal privacy. They penetrate millennials’⁽²⁾ experience of the engulfing power of social media and the threats they pose on authentic human interactions. The two novels render a manifestation of the dark comedy of the reality of social media’s invasion of life.

On the one hand, *Sympathy* is a debut novel which exposes the grave consequences of immersion in Instagram. On the other hand, *No One Is Talking About This* is also a debut novel that explores the impact of Twitter on shaping human identity. Both novels are about millennials due to the authors’ age and the issues tackled in the two novels. They penetrate the representation of online identity through media applications illuminating the conversion of humans into posthumans. In addition, *Sympathy* and *No One* exhibit similar contexts of postmodern man’s infatuation with the Internet.

***Sudjic’s Sympathy*—The First Instagram Novel**

Sympathy is Sudjic’s vision of the influence of the Internet on life. Commenting on the publication of her novel, Sudjic meditates... “the superficiality of internet culture... *asinine internet effluvia*... the first page drops an f-bomb... themes include internet

porn, threesomes, and a boatload of blather only a fifteen year [sic] would care about” (“How Social Media Breeds” Emphasis added). Sudjic asserts how writing is a reflection of its time and how social media underscore the disparity between real and virtual identities.

Sympathy is the story of Alice, a twenty-three college graduate young woman who is abandoned by her real parents and feels unsafe by the troublesome marriage of her adoptive parents. The only haven she finds after being revoked by her mother is her ailing adoptive grandmother, Sylvia. Sylvia is a representation of Olivia Sudjic herself, adding autofictional elements to the story as Sudjic incorporates personal data with fictional elements in a sense that blurs the boundaries between autobiography and fiction. The autofictional elements are manifest in Alice's obsession with a Japanese celebrity, Mizuko Himura. Both Alice and Mizuko are obsessed with their online identities and technology in a sense that their life intersects.

Having a sense of alienation, Alice searches for companionship and solace in the virtual world. She commandeers a Japanese celebrity's smartphone. She intrudes into Mizuko Himura's life manipulating the contents of her smartphone and forcing her into friendship with her. The possession of Mizuko's smartphone made Alice feel having influence over Mizuko as if she were controlling her brain and directing her thoughts (239).

Feeling internally digitized, Alice finds herself “gliding” around New York “like a robot on the ocean floor, from point to point on the city grid” (47). Being bored and physically exhausted, Alice likens herself to a download symbol, “buffering on the pavement as she swings round a scaffolding pole” (62). Alice's identity is formed by her relationship with Instagram. This is asserted by Mizuko's view that Alice has “the Zeitgeist” which means the spirit of the time (73). In the context of online identity, having ‘the Zeitgeist’ characterizes one's fluid identity and entanglement in virtual spaces. Alice's obsession with Instagram

comes to the foreground because of her online stalking and harassing of Mizuko.

Hecht's frames of identity can be applied to Alice's relationship with Mizuko and Instagram. The personal frame of identity illuminates Alice's expectations of using Instagram as a self-representation image and self-branding of oneself. In the digital age, the personal frame identifies to what extent individuals are digitized and the degree of their entanglement with digital technology. Moreover, this personal frame demonstrates Alice's identity as a millennial. Accordingly, Alice can be seen as a foil to Sudjic as both are concerned with representation issues of identity in the digital age.

The personal frame is demonstrated by narrating the novel in the first person which gives Alice opportunity to reflect her *being-in-the world*, her self-image, her relationship with Instagram and Mizuko. She finds in Instagram affordances an outlet to display her self-image and her fondness of posting pictures (82). One of these affordance is Feeds that enable Alice to render "a coherent narrative to explain who [she] was and what it was [she] was supposed to be doing" (Sudjic 22). Instagram is a mirror of Alice's identity and a metaphor of her self-revelation and self-branding. Alice tolerates her boyfriend as long as he provides a lot of material and a lot of likes for Instagram (101).

Instagram, as a window into Alice's personal life, is reflected in the epigraph of the novel: "I wouldn't mind being a pawn, if only I might join" (8). This epigraph is an example of intertextuality as it was taken from Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1871). This allusion undermines the discrepancy between online and offline identity as looking through the mirror is looking at something that is unusual and unexpected. The mirror motif throughout *Sympathy* displays Instagram as a means that creates a feeling of sameness and the Internet as a tool enabling individuals to peep into other people's lives and voyeur of their life. This point

asserts the assumption of the blurring demarcation between online and offline identity (Hongladarom 534).

Alice is aware of Instagram as a window into her personal life. Alice confesses: “like a window, and every time I posted one, I felt that it added a new room around the window and each room housed another self.... The grid format of the app means you play with juxtapositions” (83). Considering Instagram as a window means that it is like a mirror which reflects the juxtaposing roles of Alice on the Internet. Throughout the novel, Alice goes through different mirrors/screens that display distinctive incidents/scenes of "Higgs boson" (the revolutionary discovery in Physics) (20, 29); New York City with its "sprays of blossom shining on black branches" (47); and the recurrent open screen of photos featuring the Holocaust (55). In addition, Alice is captivated by the photos Mizuko took for "herself in mirrors" (57). Therefore, the different screens/mirrors display Instagram as a powerful documenting memory that stores data and recalls them when needed.

The personal frame is illuminated by the data Alice shares on her Instagram. Most of this data is concerned with her obsession with Mizuko and how it develops. Narrated in a first-person non-linear style, Alice has the floor to present the different facets of her identity. Through online presence, Alice defines her virtual self-image that, to some extent, mirrors her real self. Sudjic demonstrates that “[t]he relationship between the two selves becomes a feedback loop, eventually they converge” “How Social Media”. Possessing Mizuko’s smartphone, Alice assumes that she is manipulating not only Mizuko, but also her online self-image---which is an illusive assumption. Inherently, Alice has fallen under the spell of media affordances that facilitated to her harassing and following Mizuko. She is manipulated by Instagram feeds that dictate her the next steps in her relationship with Mizuko.

Instagram also emphasizes identity as an enactment. Sudjic manipulates the affordances of Instagram that reveal identity through

enacted messages connected with the characters' social interactions. 'Follow and Unfollow' Instagram features become a manifestation of accepting or rejecting communication. It is stated in *Sympathy* that "*Unfollow*." "Intended as a symbolic gesture only, a symbolic *fuck you*, assuming that I'd still have a level of public access" (9 Emphasis in original). Alice's words reveal the power of the Internet to navigate into others' lives and encroach on their privacy which in turn is an ethical violation. Instagram and other media applications establish human interaction but at the same time create weird relationships.

Through following Mizuko on Instagram, Alice becomes infatuated and obsessed with her. She recognizes that Mizuko's "status morph from *last seen* to *online* and from *online* to the pendulous *typing*: a sign of life, like steam on a mirror" (Emphasis in original¹⁰). Mizuko's posts, photos, and diaries reflect her interior world as if being inspected by Alice's eyes. Alice expresses, "I also found it hard to accept that the Mizuko I'd known in multiple miniatures was one physical person" (14). On the screen, reality multiplies through the different open windows which become mirrors, and one begins to sense that he/she is "being watched" and "the interior world is being inspected by eyes one "cannot meet" (15). Accordingly, the enacted identity frame shows how Alice and Mizuko communicate and manage their identities.

The relationship between Alice and Mizuko is what prompts the plot forward. Alice is obsessed with following Mizuko online and developing online passion for her. On the one hand, Mizuko to Alice does not have a physical presence. Sliding her finger into Mizuko's picture, Alice "had thought of her more like a liquid or a gas, but in fact she was a solid" (14). Alice also has given Mizuko a symbolic meaning by identifying her with "Jesus or Father Christmas, or any long-dead figurehead of an ancient cult" (14). The relationship between Alice and Mizuko is a "love story that is mostly made up, from memories that are mostly false, between

people who were mainly not there” (317). It starts in virtual space but it engulfs Alice’s existence and prompts her to follow Mizuko wherever she goes. Commenting on her attachment with Mizuko, Alice reveals that it “was cultivated through her pictures, photographs and quotes and all the things she put online, not just because of what they were and how they related to [her], but because of the attitude, the way of seeing the world they suggested” (73). She regards Mizuko as her mirror. Alice says, “I saw myself in her, and whenever I did anything, I was watching her in my rearview mirror” (74). Alice’s perception of the relationship with Mizuko pinpoints that what one shares on the virtual spaces is a manifestation of his/her relationship with others, which in turn proposes that not all what is displayed virtually is fake or deluding. Commenting on her intrusion into Mizuko’s life, Alice asserts, “As with all her favourite things, I already knew what and where they were, so I mentioned it [a bookshop] before she did” (196).

On the other hand, Mizuko’s vision of Alice is manifest throughout the narrative. Mizuko, who is older than Alice, is captivated by Alice whom she considers a “Rabbit” that has “claustrophobic existence” (23). Such an enigmatic connection between Alice and Mizuko is interweaved with the title of the novel that evokes ambiguity about what Sudjic means by ‘Sympathy.’ It can be assumed that Sympathy is showing intimacy and love towards others. However, the novel displays Sympathy as “what it is like to live someone else’s life” (Sudjic “How Social Media”). This meaning is accentuated by the recurrent motifs of demons, quantum theory soul swapping. In a highly illuminating post, Alice reveals her ideological perspectives:

I enjoyed *Descartes’s demon*, *Locke’s soul swaps*, the *neo-Lockeans*, and especially *quantum theory*, which said that an exact replica of you could suddenly appear somewhere—next door, or in another country, or even on another planet. That

replica would be identical to you: same memories even, but the unity wouldn't last long. (35 Emphasis added)

This post demonstrates the complexity of understanding online identity. Referring to Descartes's *demon* is an allusion to the overwhelming power of the Internet which can be considered as a demon that has limitless impacts on its users. The reference to *soul swaps* is a manifestation of the relationship between Alice and Mizuko as *soul swapping* is the identity transfer where two human beings exchange their minds/souls. This meaning is also underscored by the reference to *quantum theory* that highlights Alice's interconnectedness with Instagram as an identification of her identity, mirroring the existential plight of contemporary human beings. In addition, Mizuko to Alice is her "beautiful, quantum self" (69). Quantum Self is a term coined by Danah Zohar in her book, *The Quantum Self*, which she wrote in collaboration with I. N. Marshall. Zohar draws parallel lines between the particle system and the components of human consciousness. She defines Quantum Self as a "composite of already existing subselves" that merge and shift (120). The *Subselves* concept postulates the integration of human selves. This concept mirrors the relationship between Alice and Mizuko as they can be considered twin identities who are forming a 'Quantum self.' The formation of their *Subselves* is brought about by Instagram as the medium of their space consciousness. Describing Mizuko as her quantum self asserts Alice's perception of Mizuko as her alternate self and a mirror into her consciousness. Through her quantum consciousness, Alice asserts her *Being-in-the-World* and *Being-with-Others* through her affair with Mizuko. She sees the world through what Mizuko addresses and posts.

Constant online presence is hazardous as it disrupts one's self-image and can end "living on the periphery of all these other selves" (Sudjic "How Social Media"). This meaning is echoed in Alice's confession that she feels infertile after spending her time playing online poker and watching Japanese pornography (46). She

estimates her state as having “Locked-in-syndrome” (38). Alice, with her constant online presence, did not have friends in real life as “[her] friends were behind screens, dispersed in random parts of the globe” (37). In addition, Alice calls her online presence a period of “pornography/gambling/autism” that became a symbol of her “uselessness and dislocation from normal society” (39). She justifies her obsession with online presence: “I wanted the world to know I was here, not me as I had been but a self-constructed from bits of New York. My vision zeroed in on a city made up of little squares. I began popping them like vitamins” (46). As a result of being manipulated by the Instagrammable properties and by Mizuko, Alice’s self-image is not authentic, and she is not a reliable narrator as she narrates what she wants the readers to believe about her. Being infatuated by Mizuko as an influencing celebrity, Alice develops into living Mizuko’s life. This is the essence of what Sudjic means by ‘Sympathy’, and it is the blatant condemnation of online presence that can engulf human beings into intriguing their real identities and committing immoral violations.

Alice’s adoration for Mizuko becomes the main concern in her life. Alice comments on her fascination for Mizuko: “It’s a state so all-encompassing that it’s almost impossible to remember how it felt to live inside your own head before it began” (Sudjic 240). Alice’s persistent online presence is for Mizuko. Alice demonstrates, “For her, the Internet was primarily a tool of self-promotion and reinforcement for her multiple selves while for me it became a tool for the sole purpose of observing her” (68). These words by Alice assert the Internet affordances that reveal different facets of identity that have been perceived as multiple identities, and it also supports the Internet as a means of branding and marketing one’s self. Moreover, through following users’ accounts, the Internet is a means that has distorted human privacy, a fact that shatters many ethical and social norms in contemporary world. Furthermore, this matter becomes worse as Alice goes beyond following Mizuko’s Instagram

account to follow Mizuko in her travels. Alice's dearest wish is to meet Mizuko face-to-face. After meeting Mizuko in Tokyo, Alice "felt at ease by her side now that I was not required to speak. I could simply sit and cast sidelong glances in her direction" (56).

The relationship between Alice and Mizuko is the locus of Alice's identity. Alice's online identity is mutually formed and negotiated through her memory and comments on her infatuation for Mizuko. The ongoing process of Alice's identity reflects the impact of media applications on human communication or what can be called relational identity. This relational identity develops through cyberspace which becomes a metaphor of identity manifestation. Mizuko reveals to Alice that they were "born either side of a divide" (68). Alice comments: "I hoped, so she could watch me watching her. I was an object of curiosity" (68). This confession by Alice is revelatory of her identity and the degree of her involvement in cyberspace. This is asserted by Mizuko's view that Alice "didn't grow up IRL" (68). Alice is aware of not being grown up in real life experiences as she is digitized. Mizuko connects Alice with her generation as one that "had been rewired and could now learn only through "gamification" (68). These words reveal the extent of contemporary generation's addiction to motivational and edutainment online gameful techniques that overcome the reading hobby.

Certainly, Mizuko's vision of Alice entangles the enacted frame with the relational one, demonstrating the negotiation of the communication gaps as the two frames are integral and complementary. In other words, the enacted frame of identity overlaps with the relational one showing the heroine's identity through her online interactions and most specifically, her social roles on her Instagram account. This overlapping of frames is described as "interpenetration" (Hecht 80). This interpenetration, according to Jung and Hecht, emerges from the contradictions and discrepancies among the frames. They call this type of "dialectical

interpenetration,” “*identity gap*” (268). However, the ‘interpenetration’ involves not only contradiction as frames coexist and integrate in shaping identity as well as enhancing each other (Jung and Hecht 267). Identity gaps are the contradictions among the four frames caused by the inconsistency and intransparency of the individuals’ identities. The interpenetration of the personal-enacted frames is manifest in the posts of the Alice and Mizuko as their posts reveal not only their identities but also their relationship with Instagram.

The enacted-relational frame overlapping is very well-represented in Alice-Mizuko’s estimation of their relationship to the Internet. Mizuko considers herself as a “digital immigrant” while Alice is a “digital native” (Sudjic, *Sympathy* 68). *Digital Immigrant* and *Digital Native* are terms coined by Marc Prensky to describe individuals’ divergent knowledge of the Internet. On the one hand, Digital Natives are people who were born in the digital age and they are well-versed in media applications. On the other hand, Digital Immigrants were not born in the digital age, but they adapted to its applications (2). Genuinely, both Alice and Mizuko are engulfed in the glamour of online presence with different purposes. Significantly, the interpenetration of the enacted-frame undermines the relationship between Alice and Mizuko as well as their perception of the role of the Internet in their lives.

Sympathy also delineates the impact of the Internet in shaping the group identity and the joint factors that determine their orientations. Sudjic states, “These things that we think are all about choice are actually being predicted, nudged and shaped. What we get access to online, the links that float to the top of our searches – that’s all coloured by information we often don’t even realise we’ve given out” (226). The Internet is a communal platform that can trick people into the assumption that they are powerful—actually they are passive and submissive to the glamour of the Internet. As a communal means of communication, the Internet distorts individual

privacy. Sudjic maintains that “[t]here’s no end to things, no way out ... that nothing stays private and nothing goes away” (89). Therefore, the communal frame penetrates the role Instagram plays in people’s life in a way that blurs offline identity and violates ethics of privacy.

As depicted in *Sympathy*, cyberspace can be considered the conceptualization of contemporary world’s deterioration into the net of digital communication and digital life where the virtue of reading a book and communicating face to face decrease. In this way, media platforms have created virtual spaces that invaded contemporary life and given in it wider implications. This is also noticeable in Patricia Lockwood’s *No One Is Talking About This* which renders Twitter as a metaphor of the heroine’s obsession with her online presence.

Patricia Lockwood’s *No One Is Talking About This* and Twitter-The Portal

Narrated in a fragmented stream of consciousness technique, Lockwood’s novel opens with a pivotal question: “Why did the portal feel so private, when you only entered it when you needed to be everywhere?” (9). This question exposes the distortion of privacy on media platforms and the viral mania of online presence. The novel is divided into two parts, displaying the obsession of the unnamed heroine with her online identity and her presence on what she calls “the portal” (9). The first part takes place online where the heroine is texting and interacting with others through the portal/her private cyberspace. In addition, the first part revolves around the heroine’s Internet popularity after her highly provocative tweets. One of these tweets comes at the beginning of the novel. On her portal, the unnamed heroine writes, “*chuck e cheese can munch a hole in my you-know-what*” (10 Emphasis in original). This tweet is an epigrammatic expression that evokes a sense of vagueness. It is also a thought-provoking post that penetrates the incongruity between *chuck* as a slang for sexual gratification and ‘*munching*’ as eating audibly. In slang, *munching* means performing oral sex. The tweets posted on the portal, accordingly, are not trivial matters, but

they mirror the dilemma of modern man and his existential presence. This is manifest in the vulgar posts, tweets and videos that arouse sexual desires with complete ignorance to moral ethics.

Posts on the portal vary from jokes, debates, to vulgar pictures of male feminists' nipples (15). The heroine does not care about what she posts-whether provoking or nauseating. She asks her sister to post her picture where she is standing by the window "wearing nothing but a thong and a Cincinnati Bengals hat?" (27) Out of unconditional love, her sister agrees. These posts highlight the action of posting itself as a peculiarity of social media where people feel free to share their ideas overtly. This, in turn, gives symbolic function to the portal. The portal becomes a representation of the heroine's Twitter persona where each tweet is crafted in a way that renders the novel as an autofictional work. The autofictional nature of the novel is asserted by the fragmented style. In her interview with Adrienne Westenfeld, Lockwood reveals that writing about the Internet "has to have that shock of surprise of the thing you encounter being totally unexpected." The portal becomes the window where everything about the heroine is material from the trivial to the most serious. Lockwood wonders, "Why were we all writing like this now? Because a new kind of connection had to be made, and blink, synapse, little space-between was the only way to make it. Or because, and this was more frightening, it was the way the portal wrote" (48). The portal reveals a new sense of humour, manifesting a twist in language where a new connection should be established. This twist of language is due to the display of mystifying posts and kaleidoscope humour. Correspondingly, it is hold that *the portal* has become the "novelization of Twitter" (Shaw).

"I begin to feel that the whole world is conscious" (137). These words are the core of the second part of *No One Is Talking About This*. The second part of the novel is the representation of reality and the offline identity of the heroine. The heroine rethinks

her relationship with the Internet and its harrowing reality as it cannot capture the splendor of real life interaction. Her sister's suffering from cancer, the birth of her niece with a genetic dysfunction and the death of her sister are calamities which open her eyes to life beyond the screen. She recognizes that reality is something divergent from online presence.

If Instagram is a dominant metaphor and a manifestation of Alice's online identity in Sudjic's *Sympathy*, Twitter is a representation of the world of Lockwood's heroine, a world that "hurtles at us as a kaleidoscopic decoupage of images, jokes, memes, new items, video snippets," as Lockwood confessed in her interview with Adrienne Westenfeld. Similar to Sudjic's *Sympathy*, the four frames of identity can be traced in Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This*.

The personal frame reflects the self-image of the heroine shaped by Twitter affordances. The heroine becomes popular with her controversial tweets. Her tweets are imbued with meaningful content reflecting the power of social media in fostering or discarding certain ideas. Tweets capture the attention of the followers especially with their constant presence on the portal; *persistence* is a Twitter affordance as tweets remain accessible and searchable until deleted. The protagonist's tweets establish her personal self-image which she wants her followers to construct about her. Her tweets assert the intertwined connection between her identity and the self-image she displays through the tweets. Through tweets, she can choose certain aspects of her personality to be presented. In this respect, "social networking sites seem to emerge a new kind of self in the online world" (Hongladarom 534). This new image enhances the idea of the users' branding or marketing themselves online

The popularity of her tweets made her a panelist invited to discussions about the Internet culture. Her self-image is confined by her presence on the Internet/portal which she considers a melting place where people are on "the verge of losing [their] bodies". The

heroine meditates, “Are we in a hell?” (Lockwood 15). This description of the portal reflects the devastation caused by the Internet through the dominating force of the Internet and human beings’ immersion in online secret chatrooms.

The personal frame of her identity starts to fade in the face of the overwhelming power of the portal. The presence on the portal threatens her individuality as “the interpolation of the user into the machinic system does not require his or her conscious recognition” (Liu 26). The portal imposes itself into the heroine and her followers’ lives as “... everyday their attention must turn, like the shine on a school of fish, all at once, toward a new person to hate” (Lockwood 13). These words on the portal underscore the integration of the frames as in reflecting personal frame; she also mirrors the image of the portal’s followers asserting the entanglement of internet users in its glamour.

The relational framework is cleverly manipulated through the heroine’s relationship with Twitter. Her online identity is molded by her relationship with her portal. The heroine is conscious of the disparity between her online and offline identity as a result of immersing herself *inside* the portal. Her online “performance” is not real life, and her personality is not the one she “had no access to in ordinary times”, and after watching the performance, she is struck: “Who is that woman? Who told her she could talk to people that way?” (16) The heroine’s confession asserts the opposition between online and offline identities and also shows the Internet/cyberspace as an overwhelming power and a metaphor of addiction and numbness. This idea is also stressed in Sudjic’s *Sympathy* in the juxtapositions Alice finds in the open mirrors that undermine the multiple facets of her identity.

In considering her relationship with the portal, the heroine asserts delving inside the portal where she feels that she is like a “Child Chained Up in the Yard” (17). She repeatedly asserts that her “whole life is there” where she “disappeared into the Internet” (45,

98). The portal to her was a place where she knew what was going to happen, it was a place where she would always choose the right side, where the failure was in history and not herself... and she floated as the head at the top of it and saw everything, everything, backward, backward, and turned away in fright from her own bright day. (17-18)

The heroine rethinks her relationship with the portal which proves “the parasitic communion between user and platform” (79). She is aware of the overwhelming power of online presence which makes her wonder, “This did not feel like real life, but nowadays what did” (85). She confesses the danger of the Internet, but she stays hand-folded and powerless to stop navigating it until the family calamity forces her to remediate her relationship with the Internet.

The personal and relational frames are entangled with the posts that meticulously mirror the vagueness and the juxtaposition between the heroine’s relationship with the portal and Lockwood’s writing style in digital age. Through the heroine’s equivocal tweets, Lockwood asserts the contradiction between the weird, hilarious and the enigmatic. The protagonist viscerally comments on James Joyce’s stream of consciousness in a way that pinpoints the impact of digital technology on literary style. She expresses, “Stream-of-consciousness was long ago conquered by a man who wanted his wife to fart all over him” (33). The stream of consciousness technique that shapes the novel, especially its first part, accentuates the autofictional aspects of the novel and establishes affinity between Virginia Woolf and Lockwood’s narrative styles and exploration of human dilemma. Significantly, the heroine in Lockwood’s novel is about to finish reading Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*. As the characters in *To the Lighthouse* feel estranged and isolated, the portal in the first part locks the heroine into it.

A further discrepancy can be found in the entanglement of the personal and the enacted frames manifested in what the protagonist posts, and what she discards from posting. A catalog of

minor things is not algorithmically posted on the portal, asserting what should and should not be posted. Lockwood states:

She knew that as you scrolled you averted your eyes from the ones who could not apply their lipstick within the lines, from the ones who were beginning to edge up into mania, from the ones who were Horny, from the dommes who were not remotely mean enough, from the nudeness that received only eight likes, from the toothpaste on the mirror in bathroom selfies, from the potato salads that looked disgusting, from the journalists who were making mistakes in real time, from the new displays of animal weakness that told us to lengthen the distance between the pack and the stragglers. But above all you averted your eyes from the ones who were in mad grief, whose mouths were open like caves with ancient paintings inside (86).

These words by Lockwood exquisitely undermine the social media's degradation to human decency and expression. Lockwood highlights the Internet and the different applications as a net that captures human beings into it and deprives them from the splendor of real social interaction.

The enacted frame of identity overlaps with the relational frame showing the heroine's identity through her online interactions and most specifically, her social roles on her portal: as a social critic, an advocator for Twitter, an interpreter and performer to her posts. The enacted frame penetrates her relationship with the portal and what is written on it. She confesses, "Why were we all writing like this now? Because a new kind of connection had to be made, and blink, synapse, little space-between was the only way to make it. Or because, and this was more frightening, it was the way the portal wrote" (48). The heroine finds connection among the posts as the plot may be a laugh, her motionless movement, washing, having a shower and others (48). What is crucial in the disconnection among posts is that a new connection has to be established through

language to produce the funniest post—that is fake. On the portal, the heroine writes:

I have eaten
the *blank*
that were in
the *blank*
and which
you were probably
saving
for *blank*
Forgive me
they were *blank*
so *blank*
and so *blank*

In such mystifying poetic style, Lockwood contributes to the Internet novel by exposing the distortion and manipulation of people's courtesy through fake reality rendered in twisted language. It degenerates the followers' decency as they have to laugh at nonsensical or incomprehensible tweets.

The communal frame is asserted through the heroine's belief in the Internet as the "communal mind" where human beings dip in and out of sharing their perspectives and comments on matters that range from the trivial to the most serious. As a Communal Mind, the portal becomes a manifestation of the heroine's consciousness of *Being-with-Others*. She is aware of the power of the portal in interacting with people. This is demonstrated in the speeches she released in conferences to talk about her portal and communicate her experience with the public. In a lecture at the British Museum,

[s]he said the words *communal mind* and saw the room her family had sat in together, looking at that singular gray brain on an MRI. She thought about the 24-hour NICU badge in her coat pocket, that she kept there to remind herself she had once been a citizen of necessity. Why had she entered the

portal in the first place? Because she wanted to be a creature of pure call and response: she wanted to delight and to be delighted.” (136 Emphasis added)

Described as the ‘communal mind’, her portal becomes the communal timeline that displays a stream of multiple posts undermining diverse issues. One of the tweets in the timeline is “*In remembrance of those we lost on 9/11 the hotel will provide complimentary coffee and mini muffins from 8:45–9:15 am*” (22). This tweet is written in the anniversary of the calamity of 9/11. In the timeline, there is the post of the “subcultures” where “one who spurred the other members to greater and greater heights of rhetoric and answer back and improvisation, the candida board might conceivably birth a new vernacular—one that the rest of the world at first didn’t understand, and which was then seen to be the universal language” (25). Another post in the timeline is on “Climate Change,” followed by her sister texting: “Think if your body changes 1-2 degrees . . . it’s called a fever and you can die if you have one for a week. Think if the ocean has a fever for years . . . lol” (26).

The timeline, as manipulated in Lockwood’s *No One Is Talking About This*, is a media affordance that enables the protagonist to communicate with her followers. It displays tweets from the chosen accounts. Most importantly, it reconfigures and reorganizes displayed material, chronologically highlighting the topics that have been given wider discussion

Lockwood’s varied topics on the portal assert the communal impact of virtual spaces, especially on molding the cultural milieu. Through engaging in online communities, users’ identities are influenced remarkably. One of these influences is that it can threaten decency and established cultural norms. In one of her timelines, she writes a number of tweets that are erotically alluring in a manner that distorts human decorum and degrades human beings (28). In her

portal, the heroine mentions “[t]he diary where she used the sort of jokes that would get people fired now!” (21)

A remarkable affordance technique in her posts is using gaps for followers to fill. These gaps add to the ambiguity of the posts and demand the followers’ active participation to infer the hidden implications. In one of her timelines, she posts: “A million jokes about wishing to leave this timeline and slip into another one—we had so nearly entered it” (28).

The online presence does not satisfy her sense of pleasure and belonging which she found within the family and her immersion in real family dilemma. This family crisis restores to her the authentic meaning of life—to be within real human company not a virtual one. She feels a gap between herself and real world, which is asserted by her words on the portal:

if the world is still there when she gets her haa

Gap.

Gap.

Gap.

Gap.

Great gap in the thrumming of the knowing of the news. (81)
Writing the novel as twitter memes intensifies Lockwood’s millennial experience of the schism the portal created in the heroine’s life. The heroine established the portal to be a means of social collaboration, but actually it created a gulf between her and her family and friends as it entangled her in its web and made her obsessed with permanent online presence for fear of losing any news! Through constant online presence, she forms her self-image and she brands herself via epigrammatic mysterious tweets.

Cyberspace as a Metaphor in *Sympathy* and *No One Is Talking About This*

Throughout the two novels, the Internet (Instagram or Twitter) has a dominant presence asserting its deluding power in the heroines’ lives. The Internet/cyberspace has also metaphoric

connotations that underscore contemporary man as a posthuman controlled by digital applications. Alice in *Sympathy*, resembles a cocooned person who inhabits “either the centre of some cosmic attention or one-self-important speck in an infinite multitude, a bubble in an ocean of foam” (34). She thinks profoundly of possessing “robotic tendencies” and she considers, her friend, Dwight as a master in using others’ apps as “a magician with a pack of cards—that suggested he knew how to exploit the psychological vulnerabilities of humans but that he was not quite *human himself*” (133 Emphasis added).

Instagram is a metaphor of a magical power that controls and entraps Alice into its world where she finds in communicating with Mizuko “the only way [she] could be led out of the maze [she] had created for myself” (316). Alice’s grandmother, Silvia, holds that Alice’s obsessive online presence has eroded her “memory and brain” (35). Instagram to Alice is a means of self-determination (Sudjic 45). In her constant scrolling through it, she feels as if she were “hallucinating from exhaustion” (133). This image of her physical degeneration makes Instagram a metaphor of addiction and a powerful force that orchestrates human beings’ lives if not used wisely. This idea is asserted throughout the novel in what Alice reveals about her relationship with Mizuko and Dwight respectively as well as her behaving like a robot (46). Accordingly, Instagram and other social media virtual platforms are metaphors of millennials’ obsession with social media and online self-image in a way that can affect them physically, socially, mentally and psychologically.

Likewise, the portal is an extended metaphor in Lockwood’s novel. “Myspace was an entire life,” the protagonist wrote in the portal (23). These words reveal to what extent digital technology manipulated human beings and transformed them into posthumans. The portal is a metaphor of contemporary man’s search for recognition and autonomy. The unnamed heroine constantly scrolls

into the portal that becomes a brand and identification of her personality. The portal makes her a celebrity influencer. In one of her snapshots:

She lay every morning under an avalanche of details, blissed, pictures of breakfasts in Patagonia, a girl applying her foundation with a hard-boiled egg, a shiba inu in Japan leaping from paw to paw to greet its owner, ghostly pale women posting pictures of their bruises—the world pressing closer and closer, the *spiderweb* of human connection grown so thick it was almost a shimmering and solid silk, and the day still not opening to her. What did it mean that she was allowed to see this? (12 Emphasis added)

Her cyberspace/portal is the *spiderweb* that invades human privacy and posits challenges in front of humanity. This metaphor of the portal as a *spiderweb* makes it resemble a prison where the protagonist is entangled. The metaphor of the portal as a prison is asserted by the heroine's husband. Her husband would sometimes express: "Are you locked in" (20). The heroine also asserts that she is intertwined "inside the portal" (13). In the portal, she loses her real identity as she comes to "have an absolutely intact personality that she had no access to in ordinary times" (16). On the one hand, as a spider web, the cyberspace users are entrapped in its glamour as it becomes like a gleaming sturdy strip that entangles its users to it and to its open spaces. The gleaming sturdy thread is the splendor of social interactions through the virtual space. As a shining thread, the virtual space/portal reflects the inauthenticity of the self-image and the interactions presented through it. On the other hand, the sturdiness of its thread underscores the stunning power of the virtual space and hazards of its overuse. Excessive use of the virtual platforms is a major challenge to contemporary society as the individual user encounters a virtual world divergent from reality, which in turn can impose fake images of the self.

The heroine's constant online presence threatens her agency and autonomy. On the portal, she posts a reporter's question to an unbomber of losing his brain in prison: "... what worries me is that I might in a sense adapt to this environment and come to be comfortable here..." (43). The unbomber is Theodore John Kaczynski who was a prodigy in mathematics, but advocated terrorist and anarchist ideas. He justified his bombing attacks to awaken humanity to its degeneration into the webs of modern technology. Similarly, Lockwood through the portal's power on the heroine underscores the erosion of human integrity and ethics. The heroine is aware of how far the portal engulfed her into its glamour to the extent that in a moment she can lose her memories. She finds it difficult to recall her memories because her mind is engrossed with innumerable tweets, snapshots, videos, etc. the portal replaces memories and becomes an entity in itself. This in turn asserts that technology has transformed man into posthuman.

Commenting on whether she is going to discard the Internet entirely, Lockwood provides an answer which reflects the *Internet as a manifestation of the posthuman*. In an interview with Adrienne Westfield, Lockwood clarifies:

People ask me, 'Are you going to leave the internet entirely?' Lockwood says:

Sure, until the next time a wolf shaman tries to overthrow American democracy. At that point, I've got to get online and see what's going on. It might not be Twitter. It might be some other platform, some other *panopticon*, some other eye, that we're going to be living inside. But it's hard to give it up completely, because that's the way we see now—through the million facets of the eye and all of us looking together. (Emphasis added)

The Internet as a metaphor enmeshing people in its affordances resembles Lockwood's *panopticon* ---a prison. *Panopticon*, as coined by Michel Foucault in his book, *Discipline*

and Punishment (1995) is a metaphor of surveillance where citizens are subjugated and watched by the powerful institution (192-228). In the context of the Internet, this metaphor is connected with the windows/mirrors of the virtual platforms that create heterotopic spaces that demonstrate otherness and juxtaposition. Twitter, Instagram and Facebook are virtual platforms that create heterotopic spaces. The different available open windows resemble the mirror which is “a sort of mixed, joint experience,” as Foucault advocates. In Foucault’s perspective, the heterotopic function of the mirror is its impact on shaping the place in which one exists and making it “at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (“Of Other Spaces”). The mirror (the Internet), a heterotopic space, asserts otherness and juxtaposition in a sense that reflects the disparity between online and offline identity.

The metaphor of cyberspace as a mirror is cleverly delineated in Lockwood’s novel. The mirror is not only a heterotopic space that displays the heroine’s obsession with her online identity, but it also undermines the heroine as a mirror of Lockwood’s relationship with virtual spaces. The novel is an autofictional, semi-autobiographical narrative in which the mirror metaphor is a representation of Lockwood’s millennial style and issues. Lockwood grapples with the language of the Internet in her allusions to significant events in the conjuring Internet language. Among these events are “the dictator” (elected 11/8/2016)” (10), “caucasianblink.gif,” “Cat Person,” Antoni Porowski’s guacamole gaffe. She maintains: “(I feel certain that there are references I missed.) Names—of movements, of characters, of celebrities—are more often withheld than not” (40; 56). These references are autofictional elisions that create identity gaps that provoke curiosity and render virtual platforms as tools of penetrating not only personal frames of identity but also the

interconnectedness of the different frames mirroring the multiplicity of identity.

In a final analogy, Lockwood compares people living on the portal to the experimental rats. She states:

The people who lived in the portal were often compared to those legendary experiment rats who kept hitting a button over and over to get a pellet. But at least the rats were getting a pellet, or the hope of a pellet, or the memory of a pellet. When we hit the button, all we were getting was to be more of a rat.(90)

Generally speaking, rats are associated with filth, evil, darkness, horror and corruption. This metaphoric representation to people on the portal as experimental rats shows how far people have been manipulated and hunted by the internet, mirroring the collapse of moral and ethical codes with the shattering of privacy and surveillance in multiple cyberspaces.

Overwhelming presence on cyberspaces as revealed in *Sympathy* and *No One IS Talking About This* exposes the dilemma of contemporary man and his shift into a posthuman as a result of his immersion in virtual platforms. The dangers of excessive exposure to social media is complex to penetrate. Dwight, Alice's friend in *Sympathy*, believes that he has tech expertise which enables him to manipulate the media applications users like a "magician" through exploiting "the psychological vulnerabilities of humans" (133). The Internet and its cyberspaces have deep influences on family and social interaction. This idea is very well represented in Lockwood's novel. The heroine communicates with her husband through texting. She texts him saying "*Glitch. Glitch. The simulation is glitching again. to say Proof. Proof? Isn't this proof? Proof that we're living in a simulation?*" (50 Emphasis added). Glitch is an allusion to Legacy Russell's book, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (2020) in which she explores feminism in the context of cyberspaces. Russell's *Glitch Feminism* explores the flawed society where the glitch "

creates a fissure within which new possibilities of being and becoming manifest" (15). The world the heroine lives in is not real but a simulation that reflects contemporary human beings engulfed and trapped in the virtual spaces. Furthermore, the language of the cyberspaces is indecent with the description of people gathering together to watch the naked in "incest commercial!" (Lockwood 53). The distorted language of the cyberspaces prompts the heroine's brother in Lockwood's novel to text: "Why were [we] talking like this?! (61)

Unquestionably, *Sympathy* and *No One Is Talking About This* highlight the twist of language in posts and tweets which are loaded with inherent messages that penetrate the hazardous overuse of virtual platforms. In this respect, posting or tweeting reflects not only the characters' self-representation, but also what they wish others to perceive about them. As communication mediated means, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc. make users curate what they post more than face-to-face interaction. Hence, what is posted is called a "selective self-representation" process which "provides" individuals with sufficient affordances to modify their online identity performance (Walther et al 4). This perspective provokes the question of authenticity/inauthenticity of online self-representation as users are performing their identities. It also calls forth to examine the language shift in online interaction. Furthermore, it asserts the characters' *Dasein* the demonstration of their *Being-in-the-World* and *Being-With-Others* through manipulating the multiple digital affordances that exhibit their online identity in a manner that mirrors the multi-dimensionality of online identities. Accordingly, what Alice and Mizuko in *Sympathy* and the heroine in *No One IS Talking About This* post needs to be scrutinized to disclose the aesthetics of internet/social media novels in mirroring the dilemma of contemporary human beings and their turn into posthumans as a consequence of being overwhelmingly digitized.

Conclusion

Identity is developmental and changeable not static. Hence, online identity is an entangled process dictated by the varied affordances of each platform/cyberspace. The self-image established on the platform is the core of the online identity, mirroring Hecht's frames of identity and the premise of contemporary man as a posthuman. Through manipulating media affordances, *Sympathy* and *No One Is Talking About This* render online identity in a conceptual discourse that accentuates the role of the Internet/cyberspace as a communicative medium that moulds the intertwined frames of identity.

It is crystal clear that the interdisciplinary approach is contributory in investigating online identity in *Sympathy* and *No One Is Talking About This*. Definitely, it is difficult to tackle online identity and cyberspace metaphor without probing into the interconnected disciplines that intensively show the implications of Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) and Cyberspace as a metaphor.

Frames of identity are influential in exploring the different facets of online identity and obsession with online presence on cyberspaces. As a consequence, cyberspace has become an outlet for self-representation. Through Instagram and Twitter, the heroines in *Sympathy* and *No One Is Talking About This* demonstrate their personal engagement, enactment with the virtual space, relationality with cyberspace and others as well as the communal perception of cyberspaces as a mirror of community's social and cultural catalysts.

Significantly, frames of identity are not separate from each other but integrate and complement in shaping identity in its enactment with groups and networks. These frames are significant conceptualizations of the heroines' perception of their identity. The heroine in Lockwood's novel invests more in asserting her personal-enacted self-image through her constant online presence. However, this enactment changes with the familial calamity shifting enactment into the relational collaboration with her family and sensing authentic splendor in the family integration. In contrast, Alice, in Sudjic's novel, is plagued by her Instagram and her relationship with Mizuko, asserting the enacted-relational frames of identity. In addition, Mizuko, as a

celebrity, is obsessed with her personal as well as communal image. Therefore, frames of identity are auxiliary in understanding online identity. This, in turn, is an intricate task that reflects the intermingling of diverse factors that give symbolic implications to the user's actions on the screen.

A significant implication highlighted in the two novels is the technophobia or specifically obsession with online presence that renders life as a fragmented experience where characters are immersed on branding their self-image through media affordances. As a celebrity, Mizuko finds in Instagram a means of fostering and marketing her self-image and enhancing her popularity through her posts and photos. In a different vein, the unnamed heroine in *No One Is Talking About This* achieves her self-esteem through her controversial, thought-provoking tweets.

Another implication illuminated in the two novels is connected with excessive involvement in cyberspace and online presence. It is inferred that the overuse of virtual spaces causes estrangement, depression, anxiety, etc. This is well represented in the two novels. In the closing chapters of *Sympathy*, Alice finds herself in a maze she created for herself after Mizuko abandons her by blocking her account (319). Likewise, the heroine in *No One Is Talking About This* feels estranged from real life until the family calamity restores her to authentic real life interaction.

Online identity is a virgin field that needs more exploration to penetrate the pitfalls and the hazards of obsession with online self-image. This issue highlights the role literature has to play in deconstructing social media's collaboration in threatening privacy, authenticity and ethical commitments. The disparity between online and offline identity is another issue that has not been examined thoroughly in literary works.

Endnotes:

1. Online identity and Digital identity are confusing terms. On the one hand, Online identity mainly highlights the formation of identity during online presence whereas digital identity is the electronic information that exists online through the digital affordances. Online identity is “a configuration of the defining characteristics of a person in the online space” (Kim et al 1760). Accordingly, online identity is the online self-image and self-representation. On the other hand, digital identity is the sum of data associated with the person in a digitized form or it is “the conversion of human identities into digital data” where the personal data released on the platform form the basis of identity construction (Masiero 1).
2. Millennial novel is a novel written by a writer who was born (between 1981 and 1996). The millennial novels explore issues of contemporary man’s anxiety, alienation, displacement, dark comedy of digital technology and desperate grasping for meaning in the social media

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