

DIGITAL AGE CONNECTIONS: THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON RELATIONSHIPS IN JOHN GREEN'S "THE FAULT IN OUR STARS"

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Abstract:

This research paper examines the role of digital technology in shaping relationships in John Green's novel "The Fault in Our Stars". This study highlights how characters, especially Hazel and Augustus, exploit digital communication to form, sustain, and navigate their relationships amidst the challenges posed by their terminal illnesses. Furthermore, the characters' reliance on digital media, including text messages, email, and social media, brings forth broader societal trends, illuminating the evolving nature of interpersonal relations in the digital age.

The research employs a textual analysis approach, examining the key instances of technology use. It demonstrates that these digital interactions are not only instrumental in developing the plot but also the metaphorical manifestation of the character's desire to leave a lasting impact in the face of their limited life span. Furthermore, the paper demonstrates how authentic relationships do take birth in the lap of digital spaces. It also explores the global nature of technology, which facilitates communication between Hazel and reclusive author Peter Van Houten. Additionally, the study sheds light on the accessible and inclusive aspect of technology, allowing the characters limited by their illness to have experiences they might otherwise miss. While focusing on the positive aspects, the paper also acknowledges the potential shortcomings of digital communication, as shown in the novel, including miscommunication and the masking of emotional pain.

The depiction of digital connection in this study contributes to the understanding of the psychological and emotional impact of technology, such as closeness and immediacy, in the lives of young adults, particularly those facing life-threatening conditions.

Key Words: John Green, The Fault in Our Stars, Digital Communication, Young Adult Literature.

Introduction:

In contemporary society, the invasion of digital technology can be experienced in every aspect of life. Literature, particularly young adult literature, has also begun to ascend this chariot of new reality. Young adult literature, dedicated to creating a space of belongingness for young adults, leverages the technical aspect of digital communication. Authors like Michael J. Rosen, Jessica Brody, Lauren Myracle, Cory Doctorow, and John Green have successfully and effectively represented digital communications in their works. The new forms of communication among adults have informed the increasing representation of digital communication in young adult literature (Koss R. Teale, 2009). John Green's 2012 novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, is a true specimen of how contemporary young adult fiction embodies and explores the impact of digital communication on human relationships. The novel, a poignant tale of two terminally ill adolescents, offers a unique opportunity to peek into their lives through digital communication, thereby providing them with intimacy, self-expression, and connectedness.

"*The Fault in Our Stars*" narrates the story of Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters, who meet at a cancer support group and establish a serious relationship. The use of various forms of digital technology -text messages, social media, and email- demonstrates how easily they could form meaningful connections not only with themselves but also with the people around them. These digital connections serve as anchors for characters, which help them stay grounded in the whirlpool of their physical disability- imposed challenges and navigate through the sea of their lives with confidence and courage. Additionally, the novel paves the way for discussion on the authenticity of online connections and self-expression through social media.

The paper aims to explore the various ways in which Green incorporates digital communication into the weave of "*The Fault in Our Stars*" and how these threads develop the plot and characters. The close textual analysis of key instances of technology use demonstrates that Green portrays a nuanced and positive perspective on digital-age connections. Furthermore, this analysis investigates the constructive ability of digital space to shape new-age relationships, and in doing so, it sheds light on evolving human connections and their representation in literature.

Discussion:

John Green's novel demonstrates how modern technology shapes and sustains relationships in the contemporary digital age, in particular for young adults facing terminal illnesses like cancer.

Authentic Digital Relationships:

Hazel and Augustus form a bond at a cancer support group. Cancer support groups are places where the victims share their hopes and battles. Such a place is created by Green in the novel for cancer patients led by Patrick, who himself is a cancer survivor and competent enough to instill optimism in the group members with his mantra, "Living Our Best Life Today" (Green 14). Hazel and Augustus' bonding blooms later through text messages and online interactions. Augustus risks his life to grant Hazel her wish to meet Peter Van Houten in Amsterdam. The depth of their bond is revealed at the end through the message left for Hazel by Augustus:

"I love her, and I am so lucky to love her, Van Houten. You don't get to choose if you get hurt in this world, old man, but you do have some say in who hurts you. I like my choices; I hope she likes hers." (Green 313).

Our finding aligns with a BBC article from May 2015, where the writer Charlotte Walker underscores the authenticity of emotional support in online relationships necessary for mental health. "I couldn't count the times someone has generously helped my virtual hand through suicidal feelings or debilitating anxiety."

Immortality:

Augustus Waters, a courageous and optimistic adolescent, despite being crippled by bone cancer, wishes to immortalize himself like a martyr, dying for a cause. However, he dies battling cancer. Ironically enough, he is immortalized through the letters emailed to Mr. Peter Van Houten for Hazel before his death. Hazel was emotionally devastated after the death of Augustus and desperately looked for something that she could preserve as a memory of him. Green beautifully exploits the use of technology in creating a digital legacy in the lines below:

"I clicked open the four attachments. His handwriting was messy, slanting across the pages. The size of the letters is varying, and the color of the pen changing. He had written it over many days in varying degrees of consciousness." (Green 310)

Global Connectivity:

The novel underscores the global nature of technology. Hazel is portrayed as a die-hard fan of Peter Van Houten. His work, *An Imperial Affliction*, is like a Bible to her. After writing this philosophical book, he disappeared. The herculean task of connecting and meeting with him could become possible only through email interaction. Augustus finds his assistant, Lidewij, and facilitates the meeting:

"Dear Mr. Waters," he answered. "I am to thank you for your electronic correspondence, received via Mr. Vliegthart this sixth of April, from the United States of America, insofar as geography can be said to exist in our triumphantly digitized contemporaneity."

"He has an assistant," Augustus said, "Lidweij Vliegthart. I found her. I emailed her. She gave him the email. He responded via her email account." (Green 67)

This aspect of the novel reflects the widening interconnectedness of the world enabled by technology and its potential to help people realize their dreams. "The youthful male progressives had the option to handily dazzle young ladies with lofty languages of Marxism which had not figured in their psyches" (Shanmugam, Sudha Devi, and Kannadhasan Manimurasu 414).

Self- Expression:

Green poignantly narrates the circumstances created after the death of Augustus Lancaster. His facebook page gets loaded with condolences. His near and far-off friends took to his page to express their fond memories of him:

"I love you, Augustus. God bless and keep you." (Green 264)

"You were always such a great friend. I am sorry I didn't see more of you after you left school, bro." (Green 265)

"Just heard that Gus Waters died after a lengthy battle with cancer. Rest in peace, buddy." (Green 266)

This aspect of the novel reveals how young adults use technology as an element to fill in for them. Sending a message to someone is like meeting and expressing oneself in person.

Limitations:

While the novel presents the technology used by characters in a positive light, it also hints at some potential drawbacks, like miscommunication and the masking of true emotions. Green skillfully leverages text messaging at a juncture when Augustus, Hazel, and her mother were leaving for Amsterdam to meet Peter Van Houten, and they reached early at Augustus' home, where they happened to overhear the loud argument between Augustus and his parents, apparently about Augustus' decision to go to a different country while his cancer had recurred.

Hazel pretends not to overhear them and messages him:

"We got back in the car, and I texted Augustus that we were outside whenever he was ready." (Green 139)

After a while, Augustus messages her back:

"I just can't decide what to wear. Do you like me in a polo or a button-down?" (Green 140)

In a fluid manner, the whole play of emotions was masked by the messages.

Conclusion:

"The Fault in Our Stars" presents a nuanced and positive portrayal of contemporary digital-age connections, especially in the context of young adults grappling with terminal cancer. Furthermore, it highlights the significant trend of integrating digital elements into young adult literature. "Unlawful love affairs, therefore don't just enliven the narrative of Indian opportunity development in the epic Quartet yet assume a significant part in the fictionalization of the different political occasions relating to Indian opportunity battle" (Shanmugam, Sudha Devi, and Kannadhasan Manimurasu 416).

Additionally, it opens new horizons for discussion on the nature of connection, expression, and digital legacy in the digital age. This analysis also contributes to understanding the changing mechanisms of human relationships. The further necessity of research into the role of digital interactions to support people with chronic illnesses in young adult literature is also highlighted through this study.

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