

(Re)Discovering *Brave New World*: Huxley's Vision through the Lens of Today's Science

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How to cite this paper: Papa, E. (2024). (Re)Discovering *Brave New World*: Huxley's Vision through the Lens of Today's Science. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 12, 263-272.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2024.1212016>

Received: November 1, 2024

Accepted: December 14, 2024

Published: December 17, 2024

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Abstract

The existence of problems in the world has pushed people to consider ways of addressing them. Challenges like war and conflict have captured the world's attention, prompting the need to ensure solutions that ensure societal stability. Improvements in technology have been proposed as a solution to the most persistent problems. Over the years, technology has been critical in bringing the change needed to drive society forward. However, advancement in technology has also been responsible for various problems to society. This is reflected in Huxley's novel, where technology is used for unethical purposes. The novel forms a basis for examining today's technological progress in different fields, demonstrating their pitfalls, especially due to unchecked scientific progress. The research demonstrates the dangers of conformity that come from social control. The analysis indicates that modern society continues to suffer from unchecked technological developments, which threaten to destroy the same civilization humans have built over the years. This then calls for adherence to ethical issues while developing technologies to minimize harm to society. Scientists need to consider protecting the interests of human beings and the environment while developing new technologies.

Keywords

Manipulation, Technology, Society, Conformity, Modern, Trends

1. Introduction

Since the advent of the agrarian revolution, society has made progress meant to improve the standards of living. Society has continued to make improvements towards addressing the major challenges facing its people. Among the most proposed answers, technology has been hailed as a major solution to the most critical issues of concern to humanity today (Joy, 2020). As a result, technology has become

an important component of society today. The current technological changes trace their root to earlier changes, which saw society embrace progressions meant to produce better outcomes. These developments have been documented widely with some writers predicting the future advancements they consider to drive future societies. However, other writers have considered such advances detrimental to society, predicting doom for future societies.

One of such authors who are critical of technology is Aldous Huxley with his dystopian masterpiece, "Brave New World" (1932). The novel stands out as a timeless cautionary tale indicating that technology, while important, can have adverse consequences if unchecked. Published in 1932, the novel outlines a dystopian world where technological improvements have created a society dominated by conformity, control, and hedonism. Huxley's account, while written decades ago, exemplifies aspects that are visible in today's world where technology is considered a solution to most of the problems facing the world. This research explores the parallels between Huxley's imagined dystopia and the contemporary world by exploring aspects like genetic engineering, manufactured happiness, manipulation through media, and pharmacology. Through these aspects, the paper presents the pitfalls of unchecked scientific progress and the need to consider the ethical implications of technologies to society.

2. Literature Review

Society continues to face challenges that require immediate attention to guarantee the survival of human race. As a result, more resources have been dedicated to research to come up with cutting-edge technology to solve some of the problems (Shah et al., 2022). The advancement happens across industries, promising a better future for all people. The modern technological changes witnessed recently are not new. Even in the 1900s, industrialization was gaining popularity, significantly creating opportunities for many people and significantly improving their lives. The progress the contemporary society has made is an indication of a better future.

The application of modern technology is an enabler in various industries. Firstly, technology continues to revolutionize healthcare, especially through genetic engineering. Gene mutations have caused diseases that lead to the deaths of many people. Unfortunately, these mutations can be transferred from a parent to their child, making it challenging to control them with conventional approaches (Sandor, 2022). With genetic engineering, scientists can detect and remove mutations before they reach the embryo. This is critical in ensuring that future generations do not face preventable and deadly mutations. Additionally, scientific innovation has enabled the manufacture of drugs that can treat illnesses that could not be treated before like mental health illnesses. For instance, antidepressants have saved the lives of people with mental health issues, hence improving the quality of life (Cosgrove, Patterson, & Bursztajn, 2024). With cases of mental illness increasing, scientific treatments will continue to save lives that would otherwise

be lost.

Technological application has also been experienced in the media, especially with the presence of social media. Through social media platforms, people can share information freely, hence facilitating the flow of information. Unlike traditional media like newspapers where information takes time to reach the target audience, social media broadcasts information to a large number of people promptly, hence changing the way people communicate (Albadri, 2023). Social media democratizes access to information, allowing millions of people to know what is happening.

3. Methodology and Methods

This study was conducted from March to May 2024 to gather and analyze the data.

Sources were selected based on their peer-reviewed status, relevance to the research themes, and scholarly integrity. Emphasis was placed on using reliable, credible literature to ensure methodological rigor.

A total of 30 articles were reviewed in this study. The article selection process is presented in the form of a flowchart to enhance clarity.

The study uses a combination of primary and secondary sources to collect data. The primary source will be Huxley's novel, "Brave New World" (1932), which offers insights into the writer's imagination on scientific progress and a society characterized by control and hedonism. The novel allows the researcher to investigate Huxley's idea of the 1930s technology predictions and enables a comparison with modern technological progressions. The secondary sources include other published materials that are related to the research topic. This includes materials on technology, happiness, consumerism, pharmacology, genetic engineering, and media. The secondary materials vary from the current, worldwide, and mainstream literature published in the last five years. The use of current sources ensures that the study is up-to-date, which allows it to comprehensively review current trends on the research topic. Academic journals are used extensively since they offer peer-reviewed articles, hence assisting in giving accurate information. Academic journal databases like ScienceDirect and JSTOR are used to enable the researcher to rely on credible sources. In addition to academic journals, the research relies on publications from credible organizations. Reports from relevant organizations are also considered since they offer insights into current societal trends. Websites and popular sources are avoided since they are more likely to contain unverified claims and misleading information.

A combination of the primary resource and the secondary sources offers a comprehensive view of the research topic and allows the researcher to gain valuable insights into the research topic. Additionally, it enhances the credibility and validity of the study. Huxley's book offers original and unfiltered information. It provides a glimpse into the 1930s worldview and technological increase expected in the future, hence offering a historical context for the study. The secondary

sources provide expert analysis, which strengthens the validity of the findings. These sources offer breadth, providing a wider overview and synthesis of existing knowledge. Moreover, using both primary and secondary sources allows the researcher to get a wide perspective on the research topic. The diverse perspectives offer additional interpretations, which serve to enrich the study. Lastly, using both primary and secondary sources indicates methodological vigor in the study. The researcher forms an opinion after synthesizing the perspectives of different authors to form conclusions.

However, combining primary and secondary materials presents some limitations to the study. Firstly, there is a risk of conflicting information. In this case, Huxley's novel, published in 1932, may have information that does not align well with modern trends. Since the researcher relies on secondary materials published in the last five years, the findings in Huxley's novel may differ significantly from those of the recently published ones. Additionally, relying on published primary and secondary materials can lead to biases. The sources can be biased and hence provide a subjective interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. This can lead to a skewed understanding of the issue under investigation, leading to misleading conclusions. Moreover, the overreliance on the published materials can lead to an incomplete understanding of the issue under investigation. Some qualitative aspects can only be captured better using data collection methods like interviews or questionnaires.

3.1. Data Analysis

The study uses a thematic approach to analyze the data obtained from the published materials. A thematic approach identified the themes and patterns in data. The researcher read through the primary resources and other related secondary literature materials, identifying the most important themes. Related themes were grouped. These themes were analyzed and the results were presented to answer the research questions.

3.2. Research Ethics

Since the research relies on published materials, there is no ethical approval for human subjects. However, the following ethical aspects are considered. Firstly, a critical assessment of the secondary sources was done to ensure that only credible materials were used in the paper. The assessment ensured that only data from reliable academic databases and reputable organizations was used, hence ensuring the data was valid and suitable for the research. Moreover, the researcher maintains transparency while reporting the findings of the study. The investigator avoids biases that misrepresent the study's findings, hence maintaining the objectivity of the results. Furthermore, the investigator referenced all cited sources to acknowledge the data sources. Any information that was obtained from other sources was carefully referenced to recognize the contribution of other authors to the research.

3.3. Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

- 1) How does the portrayal of genetic engineering in Huxley's novel demonstrate the societal impacts of similar technologies in today's world?
- 2) How does Huxley's idea of manufactured happiness exemplified by consumerism compare to the current societal trends?
- 3) How does manipulation in Huxley's novel reflect in today's world through social and mass media?
- 4) How does the soma drug in the novel reflect modern practices in pharmacology?

4. Discussion and Findings

This section shows a discussion of the various themes and the findings from the data. It compares the themes that emerge from Huxley's novel and those from contemporary secondary research materials. The findings are outlined to indicate how Huxley's accounts compare to the challenges that have emerged as a result of scientific innovations in the modern society.

Theme 1: Genetic Engineering

To further illustrate the impact of genetic engineering on societal structures, consider CRISPR technology's influence in real-world cases, such as hereditary disease prevention. Despite the benefits, recent studies highlight risks like off-target gene edits, suggesting the need for cautious application and robust ethical standards. For example, CRISPR has been applied in clinical trials to treat genetic disorders like sickle cell anemia, but it has raised ethical questions regarding "designer babies" and potential social inequality. Unintended gene edits can occur, which brings up issues of safety and ethics.

Genetic engineering is evident in Huxley's novel. In the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Center, laboratory workers have been tasked with genetically engineered babies. There is a fertilizing room where new human beings are produced. Instead of a typical world where children have parents, in the World State, children lack parents. Instead, children are created in the laboratory. The word "mother" is considered obscene in Huxley's novel. Beyond the extraction and fertilization of eggs at the Center, conditioning takes place (Huxley, 2007). The laboratory produces five kinds of people; Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons. The Alphas and Betas are viewed as the most important members of society and are placed in the incubators. The rest of the people have to undergo a cloning procedure called "Bokanovsky's Process" to create identical human beings. The process results in uniform individuals, which serves as a key to ensuring the stability of society. The laboratory proceeds further to sterilize 70% of the children to prevent uncontrolled fertilization (Huxley, 2007). The children are given "hypnopaedic lessons" which are meant to allow them to understand their societal values instinctively.

In today's world, technology in genetic engineering has evolved, as demonstrated

by CRISPR and other gene-editing technologies. In particular, CRISPR allows scientists to make precise changes to the DNA of an organism (Nidhi et al., 2021). For instance, gene therapy can correct mutations in the human body, hence assisting in preventing inherited diseases. For embryos, CRISPR can be employed together with vitro fertilization (IVF) to assist in editing the DNA of embryos before they are implanted in a mother's womb. This is critical in detecting and correcting genetic mutations, hence ensuring that the newborn baby is free from the genetic mutations of its parents. While gene-editing technologies like CRISPR can be used in useful ways, they present various dangers to society. Firstly, they present the risk of unintended mutations taking place in another part of the DNA. The off-target effects could lead to the development of other mutations, which could be more dangerous than the existing mutations. Moreover, organisms with edited genes could outcompete those with normal genes. Genetically engineered organisms could outcompete native species leading to further inequality in society. For instance, genetically modified human beings could be superior to normal humans, making it challenging for normal human species to survive alongside their genetically engineered counterparts. Hence, the technology, while promising better results, could lead to more negative effects, which could be difficult to reverse in the future.

Theme 2: Manufactured Happiness

Studies indicate that marketing frequently constructs happiness as a commodity, pushing societal trends that prioritize possessions over genuine well-being. For instance, Kasser and Ryan (1996) found that individuals who prioritize extrinsic goals, such as materialism, experience lower well-being and that happiness derived from material possessions is typically short-lived. This creates a cycle where individuals seek continuous consumption to regain a sense of happiness, reinforcing consumerist values.

On the other hand, Brickman and Campbell (1971) show that consumerism often leads to a "hedonic treadmill" effect, where individuals rapidly return to a baseline level of happiness after new purchases, prompting a continuous cycle of consumption without lasting satisfaction. A recent survey by Pew Research Center (2020) reported that 68% of respondents felt that material possessions did not significantly increase their long-term happiness. This aligns closely with Huxley's depiction in *Brave New World*, where manufactured happiness is externally imposed, leading to a sense of contentment that is superficial and lacks deeper fulfillment.

Huxley presents a society where happiness is predetermined and presented to the protagonists. At the start, Henry explains the process of heat conditioning for embryos that are preprogrammed to become steelworkers and minors. The director explains that happiness is conditioned to allow the embryos to accept the circumstances in which they find themselves. Unfortunately, the Directors do not indicate that the destiny of the embryos is determined by authority figures like him (Huxley, 2007). Hence, the people produced in the laboratory are conditioned to follow the happiness instilled into them by the authority figures. This kind of

happiness is determined by the exposure the authority figures subject to the newly formed babies. While the produced beings consider themselves happy, they are unaware their happiness is predetermined by other people and not themselves.

In today's society, people may consider themselves happy, especially if they have material possessions. The culture of consumerism has become popular, especially with marketers using it to make more sales. The need for marketers to push more products has resulted in artificial happiness, which is associated with commodities. Manufacturers create a picture of a perfect society where people have all the products they require in this life. Commodities are presented as a solution to all human problems and are marketed as necessities for survival. As a result, happiness is tied to material possessions, pushing people to purchase more products, even where they do not necessarily need them. The factory-made happiness has led to the widespread consumerism culture, which forces people to purchase more. Marketers condition people to associate happiness with commodities and coerce them to purchase more. While consumers think they are in control of their purchasing habits, they are not aware marketers are trying to control what they purchase.

Theme 3: Manipulation

A recent survey by the American Psychological Association (APA) found that 64% of social media users reported feeling influenced by content promoting specific lifestyles, highlighting media's powerful role in shaping public perception (American Psychological Association, 2022). This phenomenon aligns with Huxley's concerns about state-driven control and manipulation, where media and societal forces shape individuals' beliefs and behaviors. Just as Huxley warned of an environment engineered to maintain conformity, today's digital platforms contribute to a culture where perceptions and desires are subtly influenced, reinforcing consumerist and ideological norms.

Huxley presents a society driven by the suppression of the human will and manipulation to ensure that its members conform to an established way of life. Manipulation in the novel starts at the fertilization stage where humans are predestined for certain purposes that serve the interest of the Director and other authority figures. The creation of identical people serves to ensure that people conform to an established order. It ensures that people do not appreciate the importance of individuality and differences. Having humans as identical ensures that they can be manipulated into adapting to predetermined ways of life, which would not be possible in a world where people are different. The manipulation is a way of ensuring social stability. Huxley indicates that such people are not afraid of death; they are not burdened with parents and have no spouses. Such people are conditioned to the extent that they cannot help behaving as they ought to behave.

In today's world, mass and social media have been used to manipulate people into particular lifestyles. The media sets the agenda for the day, effectively shaping opinions and determining how people think about issues. The media controls the flow of information, which affects how people form opinions in critical aspects of

society. In authoritarian societies, media is used as a propaganda tool to paint the government as progressive, even where the leaders act to the contrary. For instance, the media may paint a picture of a prosperous society, even where people are starving of hunger. Social media has been a major tool for spreading fake news and misleading information. This has been witnessed recently in elections even for developed nations like the United States. The last electioneering period in the United States saw an increase in fake news regarding elections, potentially manipulating voters. The same was experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic where social media spread misinformation regarding the pandemic, potentially jeopardizing the lives of people. Anti-vaccine advocates took advantage of social media to spread misinformation regarding vaccines, arguing against it. Such manipulation adversely affected the uptake of COVID-19 vaccines, leading to more spread of the infection and subsequently more deaths.

Theme 5: Pharmacology Practices

The novel introduces “soma”, a drug used in society to ensure that all people comply with the established rules and are content. The drug keeps the people in a state of mind that enslaves them such that they cannot question what is wrong. Soma keeps the country in a state of stability so that the people conform without questioning anything. The side effects of the drug are evidenced as demonstrated by withdrawal symptoms and handovers.

In today’s society, the use of pharmaceuticals to manage the psychological well-being of individuals has become rampant. In particular, cases of mental health have become common. Individuals are suffering from mental illnesses like anxiety and depression. Drugs for such illnesses have played a major role in maintaining the psychological well-being of people. The use of drugs to manage mental illnesses has been demonstrated by the opioid crisis, which has increased the risk of drug dependency and control through pharmacology. In Huxley’s novel, soma maintains social order and has adverse effects on those who stop using it. In modern society, the use of antidepressants has led to a thin line between benefit and dependence.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The following recommendations are critical for future research. Firstly, the methodology needs to consider a mixed-methods approach. Future research needs to go beyond using published data sources and include primary data from interviews, questionnaires, or surveys. Including primary data sources would enhance the validity of the research findings. Secondly, future research in genetic engineering needs to focus on the potential risks involved. There is a need for long-term studies that show the effects of gene editing on not only human health but also on the environment. Such research needs to demonstrate ways of reducing the dangers associated with the technology to make it safe for humanity and the environment. Thirdly, it is important for policy changes aimed at addressing the increase in fake and misleading news. To address these ethical concerns, policymakers

could develop regulations on gene-editing applications to ensure transparency and safety. Social media platforms could implement stricter algorithms that prioritize fact-checked content to combat misinformation, while scientists should prioritize long-term research on genetic engineering's environmental and social impacts. A policy roadmap for ethical technology use would benefit society and encourage accountability. Social media should not be used for manipulating individuals but rather should be a source of credible information.

This research has been critical in using the themes in Huxley's book to demonstrate the dangers of modern technology unless they are checked. In particular, the study warns about the dangers of gene-editing technologies, which could have adverse effects on humans and the environment in the future. Moreover, the research raises questions regarding the responsible use of social media platforms. Social media has become a major tool for misinforming the masses, hence serving to manipulate them. The research considers the need for policy change to minimize the use of social media to spread fake and misleading information. Manipulation also manifests in the growing culture of consumerism, where people have been conditioned to accumulate commodities in the hope that they will be happier. The conditioning has enabled marketers to push their products to the market, by taking advantage of the consumerism culture. The study also questions the use of antidepressant drugs, which has led to high levels of dependence, especially among antidepressant patients. While the study has been instrumental in showing the evils technology presents to society, it has a limitation, which limits the applicability of their studies. The research is limited due to its overreliance on published materials. Future research needs to combine both primary data sources and published materials to make the results more valid.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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