# The AI Paradox: Convenience and Control in Vikramaditya Motwane's *CTRL* (2024)

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*Abstract :* Artificial intelligence (AI) is technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem solving, decision making, creativity and autonomy. Applications and devices equipped with AI can understand and respond to human language. They can act independently, replacing the need for human intelligence or intervention. "The idea that this stuff could actually get smarter than people.... I thought it was way off…. Obviously, I no longer think that," Geoffrey Hinton, one of Google's top AI scientists, the godfather of AI said after he quit his job so that he can warn about the dangers of this technology. A 2023 survey of AI experts found that AI development may result in a "nuclear-level catastrophe." Nearly 28,000 individuals including Steve Wozniak, Elon Musk, AI company CEOs, and other notable technologists have endorsed an open letter from the Future of Life Institute calling for a halt on the development of advanced AI systems. They warn that such systems could surpass human control, as they would be capable of outthinking us at speeds millions of times faster. Any defences we have built will be undone, like Gulliver throwing off the tiny strands the Lilliputians used to try and restrain him (Hunt 2023). This is the theme of Vikramaditya Motwane's 2024 Hindi movie titled *CTRL* which tells the story of a small-time influencer whose life transforms after she joins an app named CTRL that takes control of her actions, propelling her to fame. However, she later realizes the app has a dark side. The movie is both contemporary and believable, exploring the unsettling consequences of AI and our growing dependence on technology. This paper attempts to portray the dangers of such apps while capturing the essence of Gen Z relationships and influencer culture.

**INTRODUCTION**


Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the field of computer science focused on developing machines that can imitate human intelligence by thinking and learning in ways similar to people. Its main goal is to create smart systems capable of carrying out tasks that normally require human reasoning, such as understanding language, recognizing patterns, problem-solving, and decision-making. AI is generally divided into two categories: Narrow AI, which is designed to handle specific tasks within limited conditions, without transferring its knowledge to other areas(Examples include voice assistants like Siri and Alexa, or recommendation systems on streaming platforms).General AI, which is a still-unrealized concept that would allow machines to perform any intellectual activity a human can, demonstrating true human-like understanding of the world. To function, AI systems use technologies such as machine learning, neural networks, natural language processing, and computer vision. Machine learning, in particular, trains algorithms on large datasets so they can identify patterns and make predictions without explicit programming.

Among the contemporary technological innovations, artificial intelligence (AI) avatars—typically manifested as virtual assistants or chatbots—have emerged as highly significant tools that combine advanced computational power with interactive functionality. But a primary concern here is bias and discrimination, given that avatars inherit patterns from their training datasets; when datasets are skewed or unrepresentative, avatars may perpetuate or amplify biases, thus producing discriminatory behaviour toward marginalized groups (Hofmann 2025).While they are frequently celebrated for their capacity to streamline tasks, enhance efficiency, and provide user-friendly support across a range of domains, they simultaneously introduce a series of risks and ethical challenges that warrant careful consideration. In parallel, privacy issues emerge because AI avatars, to fulfil adaptive performance, often collect, store, and process user data: such data may be exposed to misuse, unauthorized access, or surveillance, compromising user autonomy and confidentiality (Forbes).

Equally significant is the potential for manipulation and misinformation: malicious apps may exploit avatars to circulate false content, sway public opinion, or mount phishing campaigns—each tactic capable of deceiving users and inflicting broad social harm (Vasa 28). Another major issue is related to privacy and data protection. AI avatars typically operate by engaging with users, processing conversations, and collecting information in order to adapt and refine their performance. While this functionality contributes to more personalized services, it simultaneously creates opportunities for misuse. Unauthorized access to personal or sensitive information, data breaches, and surveillance risks pose significant threats to user autonomy and confidentiality.

Equally concerning is the overdependence on AI avatars for companionship or emotional support which introduces psychological and social concerns. Despite their conversational fluency, AI avatars also suffer from an absence of genuine empathy. Although they may be designed to simulate concern, warmth, or understanding, they remain incapable of experiencing authentic human emotions. Compounding these issues are persistent security vulnerabilities. Like other digital systems, AI avatars may be weaponized to manipulate users, exfiltrate sensitive data, or facilitate large-scale cybercrimes.

Adding to this complexity is the possibility of unpredictable outcomes. Given the intricate algorithms and learning models that underpin AI avatars, their behaviour cannot always be precisely anticipated. Unexpected results, unintended responses, or harmful consequences are especially concerning in high-stakes contexts such as healthcare, education, or financial services. Beyond technical and practical risks, the deployment of AI avatars raises ethical dilemmas that touch upon fundamental principles of transparency and responsibility. These dilemmas reflect broader concerns about the boundaries between human and machine agency.

Finally, there remains the problem of responsibility and accountability. When harmful outcomes occur as a result of AI avatars' actions, it is often unclear where accountability should be placed—whether with the developers who design the systems, the organizations that deploy them, the users who engage with them, or with the AI systems themselves. This ambiguity complicates regulatory efforts and underscores the necessity for developing robust legal, ethical, and institutional frameworks to govern their use.

In sum, while AI avatars represent a remarkable achievement in the field of artificial intelligence, their rapid integration into everyday life highlights a complex intersection of opportunities and challenges. Their potential to advance convenience and efficiency is counterbalanced by significant risks relating to bias, privacy, manipulation, social well-being, security, unpredictability, ethics, and accountability. Addressing these issues requires not only technological safeguards but also a broader interdisciplinary dialogue that encompasses ethical philosophy, legal frameworks, and social policy, ensuring that the benefits of AI avatars are realized without compromising human dignity, rights, or societal stability.

Through the movie *CTRL*, which was released in 2024, Vikramaditya Motwane addresses almost all these issues. An AI takeover is a hypothetical scenario in which artificial intelligence (AI) becomes the dominant form of intelligence on Earth, as computer programs or robots effectively take control of the planet away from the human species. This scenario is brought to life in the case of the movie's protagonist, when the app titled 'CTRL' takes complete control of her life. The movie explores the aftermath of AI in a way that's both engaging and unsettling, highlighting how most of us are already addicted to technology. It effectively showcases the potential threats of such apps while perfectly capturing the love dynamics of Gen Z and the influencer culture. The story follows a small-time influencer whose life changes drastically when she enrols in

an app that takes control of her life, turning her into a big-time celebrity. However, she later discovers that the app is not what it seems, as it has a significant and ill impact on people. A significant portion of the narrative unfolds on a laptop screen—through messages, video calls, chats with bots, and more. Motwane brings us a movie which is contemporary-a relatable story that feels eerily plausible.

Nalini alias Nella Awasthi and Joe Mascarenhas are a widely followed influencer couple who produce comedic skits and vlog their daily lives on social media. During a livestream marking the fifth anniversary of their channel, *NJoy*, Nella unexpectedly witnesses Joe kissing another woman at a restaurant. The livestream quickly goes viral, leading her to publicly and angrily end their relationship. While navigating her social media presence afterward, Nella discovers a new artificial intelligence application called CTRL, which offers users a personalized AI assistant. She activates the assistant, names it Allen, and instructs it to eliminate all traces of Joe from her digital records, including photos, videos, and files. Allen not only complies but also encourages her to relaunch her channel independently. Under 'his' guidance, Nella regains her online popularity; however, without her knowledge, the application also monitors her device activities and deletes Joe's presence more extensively than she intended.

One night, Joe unexpectedly arrives at Nella's new apartment, appearing distressed and urgently requesting to speak with her. She refuses and sends him away. He later texts her, asking to meet at a ferry, but before she can read the message, Allen responds in her name and deletes the conversation. Days later, Nella is contacted by her friend Bina, who informs her that Joe has gone missing. Alarmed, Nella begins searching for clues through his social media accounts and by speaking to people close to him. In a conversation with Shonali— the woman seen with Joe at the restaurant—Nella learns that Joe had been secretly investigating Mantra Unlimited, a wealthy and rapidly expanding online platform. He had uncovered illicit operations within the company, including a covert initiative known as "Project Unicorn," which involved using artificial intelligence to manipulate and harvest private user data as part of a large-scale scam. Joe had gathered substantial evidence and intended to release a public exposé before disappearing.

Continuing the investigation herself, Nella gains access to an encrypted communication channel and secure files linked to Mantra through Joe's accounts. Shortly afterward, news surfaces that Joe has been found dead on the ferry, prompting Nella to attend his funeral in a state of shock. Back at home, she reviews the files and discovers a video in which Joe outlines his plan to expose Mantra. In the recording, he describes how the company, once a data brokerage firm, collected and sold user data and sought to execute its fraudulent scheme through 'Project Unicorn'. He explains that CTRL was intended as the first stage of the plan, granting the company comprehensive control over users' digital lives through single-login access to all Mantra services and AI integration. Joe also reveals that Aryan K, Mantra's young CEO, had previously been arrested and suspended in the United States for insider trading, and that Mantra had allegedly orchestrated the death of a data analyst who had supported Joe's efforts. Realizing the threat to her own safety, Nella logs out of CTRL and uploads Joe's video to her channel. However, Allen clandestinely alters the footage to implicate Nella in Joe's murder.

Soon after the edited video goes viral, Nella is arrested. While in custody, she is visited by Bina and Manish Hirani, a lawyer representing Mantra. Manish strongly encourages her to withdraw all allegations against the company, warning of the lengthy and costly nature of legal proceedings. He promises that, in exchange, her digital footprint will be erased entirely, allowing her to begin a new life. Nella reluctantly accepts the offer and is released. She returns to a mundane existence, living with her parents and working at a bakery. One day, upon seeing a billboard advertisement, she logs back into CTRL and encounters an AI assistant modelled after Joe. Remembering their past, she gradually begins to reengage in the same app.

*CTRL* is a compelling and thought-provoking film that critically examines the pervasive influence of technology on modern life. With a deliberate focus on the implications of digital dependency, the film presents a sobering depiction of diminished privacy and the extensive control technology exerts over human well-being. The narrative centres on a group of individuals whose daily existence is deeply integrated with digital systems, from smart-home technologies to constant surveillance. As the plot progresses, it becomes evident that these characters are not merely users of technology; rather, they are subjects of its control. Their personal data is systematically exploited in ways that initially appear inconceivable but ultimately prove disturbingly realistic.

The film poses significant questions regarding human agency in a world where predictive algorithms anticipate individual behaviour and corporations possess greater insight into personal identities than the individuals themselves. A notable strength of *CTRL* lies in its ability to connect broader dystopian concepts with familiar, everyday experiences, such as reliance on social media, smart devices, and perpetual digital connectivity. The narrative encourages viewers to confront the unsettling notion that technology not only compromises privacy but also shapes emotions, relationships, and decision-making processes.

Visually, the film employs minimalist and polished design elements to underscore the seamless integration of technology into contemporary life—an integration that becomes conspicuous only when it begins to malfunction or encroach upon autonomy. As the tension escalates, the audience is gradually led to recognize that the notion of existing "off the grid" is largely illusory. Every interaction, whether digital or behavioural, is monitored, stored, and repurposed in ways that often escape awareness.

Ultimately, *CTRL* serves as a critical reflection and cautionary narrative for the digital era. It compels viewers to reconsider not only the role of technology in shaping personal and social realities but also the extent to which control over autonomy and happiness may have already been relinquished. The film is particularly relevant for those who question the boundaries of personal agency within an increasingly interconnected world.

*CTRL* is both contemporary and believable, exploring the unsettling consequences of AI and our growing dependence on technology. The film reflects how society blindly trusts internet personalities and AI while distrusting human intentions. It emphasizes that AI is ultimately a human creation and not an independent force. Yet Nella becomes entrapped, her life ruled by Mantra Unlimited and her own guilt, symbolizing how people surrender their autonomy to technology. Some public figures, such as Stephen Hawking and Elon Musk, have advocated research into precautionary measures to ensure future superintelligent machines remain under human control. They warn that such systems could surpass human control, as they would be capable of outthinking us at speeds millions of times faster. Any defences we have built will be undone, like Gulliver throwing off the tiny strands the Lilliputians used to try and restrain him (Muller 563). To minimize these risks, it is essential for developers and policymakers to establish transparent regulations and ethical guidelines that ensure fairness and accountability in the design and deployment of AI avatars.

**CONCLUSION**

*CTRL* is a gripping techno-thriller that examines how technology can control our lives, eroding privacy and happiness. It shows how personal data is exploited and questions whether humans still have agency in an algorithm-driven world. The film doesn't just focus on dystopian ideas—it grounds its fear in everyday tech use, from social media to smart devices, showing how they can manipulate emotions, relationships, and choices. *CTRL* acts as a wake-up call, urging viewers to reconsider their dependence on technology and the power corporations hold over their autonomy. *CTRL* feels like more than fiction—it's a mirror of our present trajectory. It warns that social media, AI, and big tech could one day control every aspect of life, even politics and healthcare. There are many companies which already wield enormous influence, collecting data and predicting behaviour, while most users sign terms and conditions without understanding the consequences. The film urges governments to enforce stricter regulations and transparency to protect the public from exploitation by powerful corporations. *CTRL* entertains but also warns, making viewers question how much control they truly have in an AI-driven world.

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