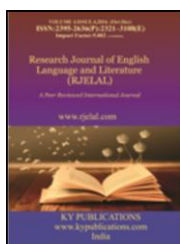**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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Hyper reality and Life in Social Networks

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ABSTRACT

The research paper focuses on an analysis of life in social networks based on Jean Baudrillard's notion of simulacra. There are so many people using social networks in the world. Many of them are not real. Do they have real identities? What is the difference between actual life and virtual life? Do social networks mould an era of hyperreal beings? Through analysis, the paper reaches into a conclusion that social networks are simulacra where the representation gets superiority over real. The study will contribute the existing knowledge on identity studies.

Keywords: Simulacra, Hyperreality, Social network, Real, Representation.

Jean Baudrillard problematized the notion of simulacrum and hyperreality in his book *Simulacra and Simulations*. Baudrillard thinks that the contemporary world is a retreat from reality into the realm of simulated scenarios that construct hyperreal world. The surplus simulacra guides to a new era of simulation where all referents are abolished and the distinction between real and representation crumbled and what remains is a hyperreal world. Social networks are the best examples to represent hyperreality in human life. People mould an era of hyperreal social relationships in virtual space and become Whatsapp beings, Facebook beings, Twitter beings, and Skype beings rather than human beings. We process our relation to the world completely through these images and the hyperreality of those images overwhelms the reality of the people they actually live among. As they are assailed by the images, people internalize them, they become part of it. All social networks are pure simulacrum, or an idealized model, which has hyper resemblance to the real world to legitimize its existence and authority. This paper proposes an analysis of hyperreal identities depicted in social networks like Watsapp, Facebook, LinkedIn, Myspace, Twitter, and google plus+.

By log in to the world of virtual reality, one is immediately in contact with millions of avatars. The hyperreal communication between the people include chats, comments, status updates, likes, interests, pokes, blocks, pictures, audios, and videos. They create social platforms like groups, and make pages for favorite movies, books, sports, and events. Many social networks provide games and advertisements. It can be called the substitution of the signs of the real for the real. In social networks, all the real life communications are transformed to a hyperreal communication by "deterring every real process via its operational double" (*Simulacra and Simulation* 4).

Murder of the Real

Simulacra have superiority over the originals and they have the power to represent them for the real. Social networks build communities inside it. In that experience, the participant spends hours in the virtual space and the reality becomes obsolete or it gets no true referent to validate. Social network acts as the representational double of human life. It fabricates a

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life of complete simulation without a referent. They are simulacra with hyper resemblance to real life elements in society.

Profile Page

1.   **Profile Picture:** A person, who lives in social network connections, portrays his/her profile picture as his representational double. It may be real, distorted, or unreal but will not make any difference. Gradually, this virtual double makes people to take it for real. The profile pictures of the participants in social networks can be analyzed in Baudrillard's four different models of image.

- As the reflection of a profound order, the profile pictures represent the real. There is truth, a basic reality which is faithfully represented.

- In the second stage, the picture masks or denatures the real. In this simulation, reality exists but it is distorted in representation. Photoshop editing, cropping, adding colours denatures photos from the reality.

- Profile picture masks the absence of a profound reality. Here reality does not exist, but the fact is hidden through representation. Many of the profile pictures are of film stars and other pictures and most of them are fake identities. They make existence in virtual space without a real.

- Fourth stage is pure simulacrum, where the reality has no connection with the representation because there is no reality. This is also called hyperreal.

2.   **Profile Information:** The basic information about the person is necessary for almost all social networks. But all this information is simulations indirectly or directly represents the real and eventually grab its place. Linkedln is a professional networking which gives the professional information and qualifications of the members. It is purely job oriented unlike Facebook, Watsapp, and Google plus+ that create a gathering of friends. Twitter is more like a public platform where you will get followers when Myspace gives music emphasis. With immense power of superiority, all profiles represent themselves for the real and force others to take them as true.

Groups: There are groups in almost all social networks including Whatsapp, Facebook, and Google plus+. Groups are meant for the gathering of more than two people to share common interests and talks in a platform. It is the replica of associations and clubs in the society, where people with same interests meet, and make connections. Virtual groups give a participatory experience to each and everyone. Friendship with unknown people is a facility given by all social networks. Some professional networks provide facility to find out the opportunities by interacting with people or companies who engage in similar jobs. People of same interest vary to different levels like friends, family members, job seekers, classmates, gays, lesbians, poets, musicians etc. They take the group as a platform to meet and chat to each other and form a social gathering. Baudrillard explains "everywhere we live in a universe strangely similar to the original - things are doubled by their own scenario" (*Simulacra* 10). Some of the social networks like facebook give the facility to create personal or professional 'events' in the hyperspace and ensure the participation of the members. Eventually the signs of the real will displace the original by its proliferation. Facebook, Watsapp, Google plus+ and many other social network sites help people to connect and make virtual communication.

Chat: Chatting to a friend through a social network is not unknown to anyone in this era. All interactions are migrated to a virtual environment of Facebook, Whatsapp, Skype, Twitter, and to other social networks. It influenced the language. Mobile language is displaced by Whatsapp language which subverts the spelling, grammar, alphabetic systems and facilitates the abundance of signs. Social networks have impact on language and it introduces new words like 'unfriend', 'selfie' to the vocabulary. Virtual language incorporates acronyms, abbreviations, and neologisms. Emotions and other non verbal communications were absent in social network communications in earlier times. But later smileys are added to include facial expressions and physical actions to the communication. 'Hashtags' in

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twitter can be seen everywhere as part of language. Just like Baudrillard says, now there is more information and less meaning or there is a loss of meaning behind increase in signs (*Simulacra* 56). Some examples of the virtual language are given below.

- You- U
- Please – Pls
- Good Night- Gdnt/Gdn8
- Mobile picture- Mob pic
- That message- Dat msg
- I will not be able to come tomorrow- I wont b abl t cm 2mrw

We check and upload new pictures, update status, wish happy birthday on the given day like robots. We chat, post comments, and add life events, relationship status in facebook, watsapp and in many other social networks. We live in a world where we fall in love like the robots in the fiction film *Wall-E* . Existing order can only exert real and with rational causes and ends. Baudrillard says that power is dismantled somewhere in the virtual space and becomes the simulation of power. Power tries to re-inject the real language but simulation strives to implode it to subvert all kind of distinction between real and representation. Baudrillard observes that, with the proliferation signs, the displacement of meaning can be seen. "We live in a world, there is more information and less meaning" (*Simulacra* 79).

Likes and Interests: It gives opportunity to mark favorite movies, tv shows, books, and other interests along with one's profile information. LinkedIn provides professional interests and areas of professional focus. Some people are interested in music, film, paintings, books, institutions, and many other things and many social networks provide facility to mention their likes and interests publically. Facebook gives a 'like' button to mark one's 'like' over any comment or photos in facebook, When Twitter provides the 'following' option. One can share, sent, follow, and post what they like and want to circulate. It gives the common man a chance to connect with their favorite celebrities, writers, musicians, politicians, and other great people. Profiles, with the interests and likes of

common people, give many business opportunities and the most important opportunity is that of advertising.

Advertisements: Advertisements and online purchasing of the products are arranged in some social networks. Baudrillard calls advertisement as the culmination of the effacement of meaning by simulacra. Social network acts as a hypermarket by providing different advertisements which is instantaneous and instantaneously forgotten. He calls hypermarket as nucleus that moulds post modernity by controlling the natural sprawling growth of metropolitan cities. Major benefit of social network advertisements is that the advertisers can take advantage of the user's demographic information and target their advertisements properly. About half of the internet users are members of at least on one social network. Social media combine current targeting, geo targeting, and socio-psychographic targeting of advertisement. Like any hypermarket, social network market is also beyond all traditional concepts. It is model of "all future forms of controlled socialization, retotalization in a homogeneous space- time of all the dispersed functions of the body, and of social life" (*Simulacra* 53). So that Baudrillard's words about hypermarket can be applied in this context too. He says " the hypermarket centralizes and redistributes a whole region and population, how it concentrates and rationalizes time, trajectories, practices - creating an immense to-and-fro movement totally similar to that of suburban commuters, absorbed and ejected at fixed times by their work place"(*Simulacra* 52)

Games: Social networks provide different games like Farmville, Mafia wars, Frontier Ville, City Ville, Candy Crush Saga etc. Facebook provides different categories of games like simulation games, sports games, puzzle games, role playing games, builder games, casino games, slot games, action games, adventure games which bring all of us to a hyperreal world. Virtual games build a three dimensional environment based on historical, sport, scientific fiction. Just like the avatar, we prefer to interact with people in a new and exciting ways and need new experiences in our lives. Action games, adventure games, and role playing games pass a feel

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of identification with the super hero in the game and give the feel of a satisfied parallel life of simulation.

Games are simulacra which is located in somewhere, perhaps in a territory neither precedes, nor survives the map (Baudrillard, *Simulacra* 3). It is a pretension of something one does not have. In a world of hyperreal games, people are incapable to find out the distinction between real and imaginary. Baudrillard admits that this lack in distinction is the worst kind of subversion (*Simulacra* 5).

Block: This is also a part of almost all social networks. Baudrillard says that it is the flawlessness that fascinates human beings in simulacra because people are obsessed with security and are fond of the programmatic infallibility of the simulated world. Blocking is a facility to block the communication that one does not want to entertain. We block the virtual communication in a hyperreal world and believe that we bar that person from our real life. We are satisfied with the privacy settings of the social networks. They ensure the safe guarding of our personal details including our birth day, phone number, address, and educational details on password security

Conclusion

What we experience in our real life is too a illusory reality and that is why Baudrillard makes a statement that "Many other events (the oil crisis, etc.) never started, never existed, except as artificial occurrences - abstract, ersatz, and as artifacts of history, catastrophes and crises destined to maintain a historical investment under hypnosis"(*Simulacra* 27). Apart from the social network world, we get a vision that the whole world is hallucinated by a manipulated collective consciousness. A social network is a pure simulacrum unlike the simulated thought structures in human life. Our lives are migrated to a virtual environment of simulacra. As a result, we live in a hyperreal world than the world outside. We make connections and form gatherings in that hyperreality where communication is peripheral. Social communities are forms based on similar likes and interests. It facilitates a hypermarket function and a game place. Social networks allow us to display the representational double of our identity with a profile picture and

basic information. It ensures security with its different features. And in this new world, it is only model, symbols, and images without origin and true referents engender and sustain the real.

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