

Hyperreality and simulation as elements of the media's influence



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HOW DO THE CONCEPTS OF HYPERREALITY AND SIMULATION CONTRIBUTE TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTEMPORARY MEDIA WORLD? ILLUSTRATE YOUR ANSWER BY DEVELOPING TWO EXAMPLES.

French theorist Jean Baudrillard was essential in formulating and analysing two very important theories in media studies, these being hyperreality and simulation. These two are very important to understand how the media is used to influence or manipulate people's decision in specific matter.

Hyperreality is part of the postmodernist theory formulated independently by Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco. This world explains the way representation in the contemporary world has evolved in a way that it has almost become more real than the reality it tries to copy. A simulation is instead is completely transform reality to fit our imagination. Therefore, there's no clear divide between reality and representation. ()

For the two concepts to exist it's also necessary to understand what reality is. The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology describes the concept of reality as anything that is interpretable and comprehensible from logical induction or theoretical analysis (). Baudrillard believes to the current world, society has developed a such dependency in media, that reality itself has now become a parody of itself. People are no longer able to distinguish between reality and artificial influences

Simulations is described as " the present-day attempt to make the real, all of the real, coincide with their models of simulation" (Baudrillard, 1994, in Bougen and Young, 2012). Baudrillard (1983) states that simulation threatens people's understanding of a division between real and imaginary.

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Due to the influence of different media channels very relevant in our lives, these being advertising, cinema and digital media, people are constantly exposed to false and undeniably far from real expectations and ideologies which can then influence the way we behave in real life. Baudrillard's simulation is essentially a model of reality, used to explain how reality is generated (1994, p. 2).

A very tangible example that can be related to Baudrillard's simulation theory is Instagram. This is a photo-sharing social network. In the modern world thanks to digital technologies visual representation such as photographs and films are easy to produce, as well as modify, and are made accessible immediately through the internet. Especially because of alterations, those being a simple addition of a filter, or a complete modification in someone's aspects through simple mobile application or the more complicated Photoshop, these visual representations become something more desirable than the reality behind it. Instagram could be defined as a database of simulations, as it gathers images only then better parts of people, this being a vacation, a sculpted body, a smile. In his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), Jean Baudrillard explains four different phases that a representation takes to then become a simulation, which I will relate to Instagram. A photograph becoming a simulation is a process that could be argued, happens throughout the four phases. The first phase is the "reflection of a profound reality", that is a basic picture taken and shared without modification, as it could be argued that an unaltered photograph is a perfect representation of reality. At this stage the picture is a faithful representation of the original version found in the real world. The second

phase is the “masking and denture of a profound reality”, we can relate this to when people upload picture on Instagram and apply filters to change the colour of the overall picture. In the sociologist words this is just a slight perversion of the reality, as there are the identity of the subject is clear, but it's still not an authentic representation of reality as if we were to look for the same characteristics in nature, we would not be able to find them. The third phase is the “masking of the absence of a profound reality”, in this case the image, has become a copy without original. For example, by not only adding filter but also using tools to completely alter the aspect of the subject, the distorted image completely masks reality becoming something greater than the real. The photograph on Instagram is no longer a representation, but it's now become the way in which we identify the person or object behind it. The fourth stage is then the simulation itself, the picture has now become a copy of a copy with no relation to the pure original. Baudilards critical study helps to understand how a platform such as Instagram has slowly become a collection of simulations. This social networking site has successfully created an illusion, that is a new online world that seems real but it is actually not so. Especially with new generations being accustomed from a very young age to use social media, and possibly get their self-worth from the engagement, in other words the amount of followers and likes, the concept of simulation is very important to understand to safeguard our mental health, although this result is linked to the type of personality has in regards to caring about other people's opinion (Jackson. Luchner , 2016).

Baudrillard uses the Disneyland present in the Unites States as an example of simulation. Lane (2009) describe how Baudrillard saw Disneyland as “ a

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fantasy representation of reality, a simulation of the real taken to extremes”, Disney castles are in fact representation of real-life building in Europe. A place such as Disneyland represent a third other simulation, meaning an hyperreality, or “ the generation by models of a rea without origin or reality” (Lane, 2009 , in 1983, p. 84). Baudrillard therefore argues that the hidden purpose of Disneyland, is to cover up the events and possibly the evil of the real world. Baudrillard specifically, does not believe in reality and instead sees society as made from simulacrum, which are representations of real objects, people and events. The philosopher expresses how he believes that the hyperreality created by the media, in the modern world, nothing is pure and original anymore, instead reality is made of simulacrum from which people base their ideologies. Essentially, we are no longer able to distinguish from the real and imagination. An example that Baudrillard created to explain this theory, is related to Disneyland, which is makes people believe that they’re living in the reality due to monuments found in reality and houses mimicking the ones found in most wester countries, however also making it obvious of the fact that it is a reproduction of reality thanks to the magical factors (Eco, 1998, p.). Hyperreality is a process that happens due to simulation, reducing reality into a Hyperreality especially in modern days is basically instilled in peoples mind, involuntarily being part of their ideologies. Through media, information is no longer shared as a need to share knowledge, but it’s instead used to indoctrinate audiences into buying products. People, therefore, are no longer interested in purchasing goods for real-life necessities and are instead buying because of a subconscious sense of desire or to fill their need of belonging. With tactics such as advertising people are constantly offered unobtainable results thanks to a product.

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Reality is not been considered in such media operations, and this has, therefore, created fake customs and impossible expectations for society. Media made the current sense of hyperreality more tangible through many ways. With advertising, hyperreality, is achieved easily because agencies indirectly or directly imply that by purchasing the product that they offer the consumer will achieve the unobtainable results that the advertisement offered. In the modern world, especially, thanks to our constant online connection with one another, it's as if people live in a hyper-reality. Besides advertising, there's also cinematic industry and digital media. These two media systems create a sense of hyperreality by creating false expectations and ideals based on stereotypes. Most films and tv programs are based to reality so that audience can better relate to it, however they use many aspects which credibility can be argued such as falling in love at first sight, or even fact based on stereotypes such as people of Indian descents mostly portraying taxi drivers and “nerds” in tv shows. To explain hyperreality a good example is the movie *The Truman Show* which gives an almost obvious idea of this concept.

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