

Philosophical Perspective on Hyperreality as a Phenomenon of Fashion Language – do we Really Want to be Deceived?

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This article focuses on hyperreality as a phenomenon used in fashion communication. The paper elaborates on the philosophical approach of Jean Baudrillard towards hyperreality, and Georg Simmel's ideas about fashion's role in society. The continuity of these authors' ideas in later works highlights their cultural longevity. From a philosophical perspective, both fashion and hyperreality derive from dualism. Jean Baudrillard defines hyperreality as a condition in which what is real and what is simulated are seamlessly blended together. Hence, it becomes complicated to distinguish them. Fashion, according to Georg Simmel, is also firmly based upon dualism – one power pushes us to bind ourselves to others while another pushes us to distinction. In fashion communication, hyperreality is often used to create a sense of desire and excitement around the brands and products. The effect of passion and the edge of reality combine and evoke many philosophical approaches. We discuss hyperreality as a new reality dialectically – looking for the opposing ideas that would contribute to answering the main question – do we unconsciously want to be deluded? This paper reveals the link between hyperreality as a philosophical approach and fashion communication uncovering the delusion as a human desire.

Keywords: fashion communication, hyperreality, simulation, simulacra

INTRODUCTION

The concept of hyperreality was first introduced in literature by J. Baudrillard. French sociologist, philosopher and cultural theorist is known for his controversial ideas about contemporary culture, media, and perspectives towards reality. J. Baudrillard first used the term hyperreality, which refers to a state where reality and fiction are indistinguishable, and people can no longer discern between the two. Even though, at that time, J. Baudrillard did not refer to Artificial Intelligence, he forecasted the future of mass media quite well. Baudrillard's ideas about hyperreality significantly influenced contemporary studies across various fields, including philosophy, sociology, media studies, cultural studies and art studies.

Even though J. Baudrillard was the first to mention the term hyperreality, this sight of the concept can be found in earlier literature – Plato's 'Allegory of a Cave' (Plato 1976) is relevant

today. The prisoners who only see the shadows on the wall embody people who spend a lot of time on social media and see just the reflection of actual events, and social media is the so-called 'internet cave' (Thoma 2023). The allegory addresses the effect of education and the perception of reality and strongly bonds with today's questions. The dualism of dark and light, image and shadow in the allegory reflects the dualistic hyperrealism, which maintains a dualistic position somewhere between reality and simulation.

Being in an internet cave leads to consumers being biased according to the source of information that they use. J. Baudrillard argued that hyperreality can lead to bias in multiple ways. One way is that the abundance of images and simulations can make it challenging to distinguish between what is real and what is not. When Baudrillard's famous essay 'Simulacra and Simulation' was written, mass media was highly centralised and controlled by a few corporations, so partiality was unavoidable.

Today, with free mass media, the phenomenon of 'simulacra' seems to be less visible. However, considering that people can choose the media channel and the content, they create their own 'bubbles' of information (Pariser 2011). Paraphrasing Baudrillard's Simulacra's idea, everyone sees their chosen 'shadows in the cave'. Furthermore, the boundary between mass and interpersonal communication is disappearing, and personal communication becomes public. Social media intertwines public and private communication to a level where it is no longer possible to control the context. The opposition between public and private becomes meaningless (Savicka 2012). Therefore, personally biased information can easily reach the masses.

Biased media and their perceptions of reality can lead to disinformation and deception. Scholars notice that even though media cannot change our attitudes, they can easily change what we think about. So even if fake news or images do not alter our primary knowledge and beliefs, they may amplify false beliefs, make them more attention-grabbing, or even control the news cycle (Lazer et al. 2018).

Our beliefs can be influenced by the Artificial Intelligence (AI) used widely in the media. AI can be seen as a new form of hyperreality as it can create simulations and change how we interact with the world – leading to a loss of our sense of reality (Manovich 2002). On the other hand, in an era with such a high pace, escaping reality becomes desirable for most people. The idea of escaping reality with social media was discussed by Z. Bauman (2000). The Polish sociologist and philosopher argued that we live in an uncertain, fluid world. Fluidity makes it challenging to find meaning and stability in our lives, so we may use social media as a way to escape from the challenges of the real world. Even though social media can lead to loneliness and addiction, it gives us a sense of belonging to a community. In the world of a high pace and an unstoppable flow of information with an easy access, hyperreality became a way to escape reality and its problems. Hyperreality is like a new reality with endless possibilities that merge inexorably into our lives. People creating their new or improved identities seek services to enhance their online experiences. An example of the experience can be being a part of a luxurious community and following luxurious brands. It creates an illusion that it is affordable at the same time, exceptional. Surrounding ourselves with the media content that expresses a luxurious lifestyle satisfies the need to be successful in our own eyes, and with the help of artificial intelligence, we can create this image of ourselves for others.

Hyperreality is a multifaced phenomenon with its advantages and disadvantages for consumers and society. However, the simulation has a negative connotation in society as covering reality and deceiving consumers to sell more. In this paper, we combine different philosophical approaches to address the question – do we want delusion?

FASHION COMMUNICATION AS A FORM OF SEDUCTION

In his essay 'Fashion', G. Simmel (1957) points out that fashion is a universal phenomenon that satisfies the demand for social adaptation. Simmel also highlights other needs that fashion satisfies simultaneously – imitation, differentiation, and desire for change. R. Barthes (1967) argued that fashion is a system of symbols and is used to communicate a particular meaning and construct one's identity. French philosopher and writer G. Lipovetsky contributes to this idea of fashion as a message transmitter and states that it is a powerful tool for social communication (Lipovetsky 2017).

Fashion, according to Simmel, is based on dualistic powers. Fashion combines the need for social equalisation and the desire for differentiation. Benvenuto (2000) uses Simmel's ideas to elaborate on the dialectic approach and notes several opposites whose relationship is fuelled by fashion: imitation and distinction, heredity and individual variation, universality and particularity, femininity and masculinity, and others. Such duality is natural for a human being – we live in a clear distinction between day and night, birth and death, and the world itself is based on the dualism of water and fire, air and earth. Humans see themselves as both physical and non-physical beings and unconsciously seek such dualism in life as it makes it more convenient.

On the contrary, with hard work comes a meaningful reward. The dark and stormy night brings a bright morning. We tend to look for dualism as it brings a sense of the world. For example, we can easily detect fake stories as we feel they are too good to be true. This means that we do not find a dualistic approach.

Plato's allegory of the cave depicts the essence of a human mind that is able to see both the light and the dark. And it is an individual decision to choose what to see and trust. The fashion domain can signify a particular status or an attitude of a person – therefore, be a shadow of a reality that is not a primary truth. In addition, people can be trapped in their illusions or possessions that are embodied by fashion. A cave can be linked to the socially accepted norms and rules of fashion – its shadows are leading a person into a cave.

Even though fashion products are a powerful tool for managing people's demands and leading towards some attitudes, the fashion business's backbone is fashion communication (Chaturvedi 2020). Fashion communication is a way in which fashion brands express their identities. Lipovetsky (1996) argues that fashion communication is a form of seduction – fashion images create a sense of desire and longing, which drives people to consume fashion products. His so-called 'fashion system' is a self-perpetuating cycle of desire and consumption. E. Wilson (2003) argues that fashion communication is a form of cultural expression, and fashion images can be used to communicate ideas about gender, class and power. Sociologist and cultural theorist Wilson calls this the 'politics of fashion,' which is the idea that fashion can be used to challenge or reinforce social norms. In this way, fashion frames our minds into what is right and what is not.

Fashion communication strategies have employed different tools of AI as it became inseparable from people's everyday lives. The most effective channels for fashion communication turned into social media, which dictates several attributes related to hyperreality.

R. Barthes in his essay 'The Fashion System' (1967) highlights that fashion is not just about clothing. It is a language, a system of codes, which help individuals to express their identities and position within society. Fashion has long been considered as more than an industry whose products are just performing their pragmatic functions. Fashion has a nature of forming societal needs and choices, influencing lifestyle and attitude. Fashion covers many social needs of people, such as belonging to a community and self-realisation.

Hyperrealism is a natural condition for fashion as the apparel itself can create an illusion. If one decides to change his or her appearance, it can easily be done by fashion items. Fashion products can cover and alter reality – the language of fashion can satisfy different reality representation levels introduced by J. Baudrillard. The concept of hyperreality is broadly employed in the fashion industry to attract consumers – from virtual fashion shows to digital clothes that do not exist in reality. Hyperreality has become the new form of reality to live in.

However, even though fashion brands encode some message through their communication, the decoder is a consumer. R. Barthes (1968) argues that the author of contemporary artwork is not definitive – the meaning that the author intended to send is not necessarily the one that the reader accepts. Barthes metaphorically states the Birth of a Reader – the concept that the receiver of a message can interpret the text and give meaning to it. These ideas of R. Barthes are connected to fashion communication as a form of contemporary art. G. Simmel notes that fashion is a way to signal a social status. So the consumer decodes not only the message sent by fashion brands but also the messages that the other people involve in their everyday apparel. Fashion communication is a tool to convey messages and shape understanding between fashion and the construction of the meaning. Fashion communication uses different methods to reach the consumer, and hyperreality is one of the most effective ones today.

When talking about hyperreality, the fashion industry is the one of high importance. We learn to act according to the rules and norms from a very young age. Even though we create our own styles combining different products that match our needs and tastes, fashion brands and their communication play an essential role in our sense of beauty and understanding norms. We understand the social norms and the eligibility of clothing mostly unconsciously, depending on our experience, the environment in which we grew up, and the social norms formed by fashion statements.

HYPERREALITY AS A DESIRED DECEPTION OF A FASHION CONSUMER

Simulation in digital media meets all levels of reality representation defined by Baudrillard – it can reflect reality, cover reality, be unrelated to reality, or have no reality in nature (Angeliqa, Andriani 2020). Even though simulation is a deception, it is a game that people play willingly. An example can be video game streaming. It is an activity when people watch others playing video games. According to Baudrillard's perception of reality, it would be called simulacra – the simulation of reality without any nature of reality itself. People willingly choose such simulacra for different kinds of gratifications. Scholars found that people watch others playing video games (streaming) to get cognitive, affective, social, tension release, and personal integrative gratifications. Moreover, the more relaxed users feel after watching a stream, the more likely they watch longer streams (Sjöblom, Hamari 2017). The proof that people have hedonic motivations endorses the approach that people want to be simulated and consciously choose hyperreality as it simply relieves them.

German philosopher F. Nietzsche (1872) argues that we do need to embrace illusions if we want to live full and meaningful lives. Illusions can provide us with a sense of meaning and hope and they can help us to cope with our challenges. The deception brings us back to Plato's allegory of the cave. As the prisoners see the shadows all the time, it becomes their truth, and being in the sunlight means destruction to them. The cave symbolises a safe place to hide with your own true. Overall, deception is a medicine from harsh experiences in life, so no wonder why with the help of various technological achievements it has spread out into many elements of life.

These motives stimulate fashion consumers to observe fashion communication. Fashion communication is highly exposed in employing digital media tools. First, what is most apparent, many fashion brands, influencers, and other industry-related channels alter images using digital tools. Consumers of fashion brands can use filters of some fashion brands and try out new products or join the brand community. By Baudrillard's terms, this kind of communication covers reality.

Notably, scholars have delved into the realm of hyperreality and its detrimental implications, yet they also note its potential to impart positive effects on one's social existence. The realisation is undeniable – our present reality is evidently dominated by our presence on social media platforms and the consumption of hyperreality as a commodity. While we can indeed explore the favourable and unfavourable aspects associated with this paradigm, reverting to a wholly authentic world in the contemporary society, fashion consumers exhibit a desire to establish a connection with a specific brand's community due to various motives that extend beyond mere practicality. These motives entail an inclination toward social connections, the cultivation of personal identity, the pursuit of valuable information, and the acquisition of inspiration. Additionally, individuals seek a sense of belonging within these communities while aiming to capitalise on advantages such as receiving the best bargains, discounts, and pertinent updates. It is essential to acknowledge that social factors are paramount in this phenomenon. It is an implausible prospect.

Moreover, AI use in everyday technologies has spread some threats as well. Image altering has gone beyond colour or minor defects editing – it can now easily fake the whole image or video. Nowadays, we can meet face replacement or face swapping, face re-enactment, face generation, and speech synthesis (Farid et al. 2019) without recognising something faked. This can cause damage to people's self-esteem or lower willingness to participate in the real world where no filters exist. With such alterations becoming casual, being real becomes a luxury and a burden at a time. Even the greatest technologies and discoveries, making our lives easier, have some drawbacks regarding long-term effects. Being authentic has become synonymous with becoming brave and imperfections, real emotions – the highest goal and source of engagement.

However, even though reality is a product in demand, consumers still want to be a part of a particular tribe, and they accept reality as long as it is an attribute of a particular social group. It highlights the paradoxical nature of human behaviour – while we seek genuine experiences and connections, our desire for social acceptance often compels us to conform to the realities dictated by our social circles. Fashion relying on dualistic powers therefore uses a language to satisfy this confrontation.

Due to the emergence of different AI tools, the fashion industry has been working with digital influencer-social media accounts that do not have a natural person beside them. Scholars point out the possible negative aspects of such communications – threats to the company's reputation by spreading misinformation (Colucci, Pedroni 2022). In addition to the unreal people, unreal clothes – digital fashion – greatly impact the industry. These contemporary digital media artifacts impersonate Baudrillard's simulacra definition. AI challenges people's understanding of what it means to be a human and what it means to be real. And being on social media, people automatically accept the rules that it suggests. By signing in to a social networking site, people agree to create a profile that does not necessarily reflect reality or reflects it on a particular level.

CONCLUSIONS

Fashion communication is considered to be influential as it transforms our needs and shapes social norms. Fashion brands create a sense of community for their consumers, thus satisfying social needs. With endless possibilities created by AI technologies, the threats are also rising – hyperreality creates disinformation and deceives people. However, even though we often relate deception to negative aspects, such as disinformation that causes damage to society, some level of deception is needed in our lives.

In the realm of fashion communication, we witness a captivating interplay between reality and illusion, where boundaries between the two are blurred. The interplay, as observed by philosophers like Jean Baudrillard and Georg Simmel, is deeply rooted in the dualistic nature of fashion itself. This duality of fashion communication manifests in the tension between the desire for authenticity and the allure of illusion. Fashion therefore can serve as a tool for social commentary, challenging norms and conventions, and fostering a sense of belonging to a particular tribe of subculture.

Hyperreality is the new reality where people can create their wanted personalities and follow hedonic motivations. No wonder that one of the primary and fundamental needs of today's humans is to release the tension of a high living pace – the need that can be satisfied by hyperreality. As Nietzsche stated, we need illusions as they make a life bearable. People enjoy being deceived, and communication tools supplemented with hyperreality details are desired.

To conclude, the question of whether we want to be deluded remains a complex one, deeply intertwined with the nature of fashion communication itself. Fashion communication, with its inherent duality, presents a paradox: we simultaneously seek authenticity and crave illusion, and while the illusion may raise concerns about detachment from reality, it is essential to recognise the empowering potential of it. It can be concluded that even though hyperreality is another form of reality that covers a part of it, we want it and need it in our lives. While the allure of illusions can provide a sense of empowerment, it is crucial to maintain a critical awareness of its potential drawbacks.

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Filosofinė hiperrealybė, kaip mados kalbos fenomeno, perspektyva – ar mes tikrai norime būti apgauti?

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje dėmesys sutelkiamas į hiperrealybę kaip mados komunikacijoje naudojamą reiškinių. Straipsnyje išsamiai aprašomas Jeano Baudrillardo filosofinis požiūris į hiperrealybę ir Georgo Simmelio idėjos apie mados vaidmenį visuomenėje. Šių autorių idėjų tęstinumas vėlesniuose darbuose išryškina jų kultūrinį ilgą amžių. Žvelgiant iš filosofinės perspektyvos, tiek mada, tiek hiperrealybė kyla iš dualizmo. J. Baudrillardas hiperrealybę apibrėžia kaip būseną, kai tai, kas yra tikra, ir tai, kas imituojama, susilieja. Todėl juos atskirti tampa sudėtinga. Mada, pasak G. Simmelio, taip pat tvirtai remiasi dualizmu – viena jėga verčia mus pritapti, kita – išsiskirti. Mados komunikacijoje hiperrealybė dažnai pasitelkiama norint sukurti noro jausmą ir jaudulį apie prekių ženklus ir produktus. Aistros efektas ir tikrovės riba sujungia ir sukelia daugybę filosofinių požiūrių. Hiperrealybę kaip naują tikrovę aptariame dialektiškai, ieškodami priešingų idėjų, kurios padėtų atsakyti į pagrindinį klausimą – ar nesąmoningai norime būti apgauti? Šis straipsnis atskleidžia ryšį tarp hiperrealybės kaip filosofinio požiūrio ir mados komunikacijos bei atskleidžia apgavystę kaip žmogaus troškimą.

Raktažodžiai: mados komunikacija, hiperrealybė, simuliacija, simuliakras