



Hyperreality Phenomenon in Virtual Roleplay Games (Case Study on The Seasons Group)

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Abstract: The development of digital technology today has brought forth various new forms of entertainment that not only function as a means of relaxation, but also create alternative social spaces for their users. One form of digital entertainment that has become increasingly popular among young people is virtual roleplay. This activity involves roleplaying in a digital environment designed to closely resemble everyday reality, whether in terms of appearance, interaction, or social dynamics. The phenomenon of roleplay becomes even more intriguing because player involvement is not limited to entertainment alone, but also extends to the formation of identity, social relations, and even influences emotional life in the real world. This indicates that virtual spaces no longer merely serve as reflections of reality, but have transformed into alternative worlds that significantly shape how individuals perceive themselves and others. Based on this background, this study aims to examine the phenomenon of hyperreality experienced by members of the roleplay group The Seasons. Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and hyperreality is employed as the main analytical framework to explain how digital representations can transform into realities that are perceived as more authentic and meaningful than reality itself. To achieve this objective, a qualitative approach was applied with data collected through semi-structured interviews conducted both online and offline, direct observation of player activities, and documentation related to their interactions within the roleplay world as well as outside the game. The research subjects consist of group administrators as key informants, group members who are actively involved and exhibit signs of hyperreality as primary informants, and family or friends in the real world who serve as supporting informants. The collected data was analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. The findings indicate that the roleplay world within The Seasons group has reached the stage of the Third Order of Simulacra as explained by Jean Baudrillard. At this stage, representations no longer refer to real-world reality, but instead create a new reality that is fully lived by the players. The conclusion of this study emphasizes that roleplay is not merely a digital game, but has evolved into a genuine social space in which hyperreality fully operates in shaping identity construction, communication, and interpersonal relations. Thus, this research contributes academically to the understanding of digital simulation phenomena and enriches the study of the relevance of Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and hyperreality to contemporary digital cultural practices.

Keywords: Roleplay, Hyperreality, Simulation, Simulacra

Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has brought significant changes to how people seek entertainment and construct social interactions. Digital platforms are not only used for relaxation but also serve as alternative spaces that provide immersive experiences for their users (Daifullah et al, 2024). Among the many digital entertainments available, virtual games stand out due to their ability to replicate aspects of everyday life through interactive and immersive features (Bylieva & Nordmann, 2023). These games encompass various genres, including Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG), First-Person Shooter (FPS), Real Time Strategy (RTS), Simulation Games, and Casual Games (Mulyadi & Mat Zin, 2019) (Ariningsih et al, 2016) (Senapartha, 2015) (Yusrin, 2018).

One unique form of virtual game that has gained popularity among young people is virtual roleplay. Roleplay allows players to assume fictional identities and act out scenarios in a digital environment. Unlike other types of games, roleplay emphasizes storytelling, social interaction, and identity creation rather than competition or task completion (Achsa & Affandi, 2015). It is commonly practiced on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Line, and Telegram, where users create characters and interact with others based on shared narratives (Azkia et al, 2024).

The attraction of roleplay lies in its ability to provide not only entertainment but also opportunities for socialization and self-expression. Players are free to interact, form relationships, and construct identities that may differ from their offline selves. Through activities such as designing personal profiles, engaging in group chats, and creating ongoing storylines, participants often experience roleplay as a social reality in its own right (Kumalasari et al, 2024). However, the strong engagement with these simulated environments also carries risks. Many players invest significant emotional energy into their roleplay characters and relationships, sometimes leading to difficulties distinguishing between the virtual and the real.

This condition reflects what Jean Baudrillard conceptualizes as hyperreality—a state where the boundary between reality and simulation collapses, and representations are experienced as more authentic than reality itself (Widiyanti & Herwandito, 2018). In roleplay communities, hyperreality emerges when digital interactions and constructed identities influence participants' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to the extent that they become indistinguishable from offline experiences (Gego & Sudrajat, 2023). Over time, simulations may form new realities that players inhabit fully, surpassing the significance of their everyday lives (Islam, 2017) (Oktavianingtyas et al, 2021).

The roleplay group The Seasons provides a compelling case for exploring this phenomenon. Within this community, players not only adopt characters but also build meaningful social connections, including friendships, conflicts, and romantic relationships. Observations indicate that members of the group sometimes prioritize roleplay interactions over offline activities, demonstrating how hyperreality manifests in daily life. This makes The Seasons an appropriate subject to examine the process through which simulations transform into authentic realities for their participants.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the hyperreality phenomenon in The Seasons roleplay group by applying Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and hyperreality. The research focuses on how roleplay participants construct identities, engage in simulated interactions, and experience emotions that blur the line between reality and simulation. In doing so, the study contributes both theoretically, by applying postmodern media theory to contemporary digital practices, and practically, by offering insights into the cultural and social impacts of prolonged engagement in roleplay communities.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the hyperreality phenomenon experienced by members of *The Seasons*, a virtual roleplay group on Telegram. Qualitative research was chosen because it emphasizes subjective meanings, social interactions, and lived experiences in natural contexts, with the researcher serving as the key instrument in both data collection and interpretation (Noor, 2015) (Moleong in Noor, 2015).

Research Site and Duration

The research was conducted online through the Telegram platform, which serves as the primary medium for the *The Seasons* community. Data collection lasted for approximately two months, with interviews and observations carried out during this period. The overall research process followed the schedule outlined in the thesis project timeline.

Informants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who possess knowledge and experience relevant to the study. The informants consisted of three categories:

1. Key informant – the group administrator (Yuki), who understands the community's dynamics.
2. Main informants – five active members (Billie, Max, Jacqueline, Shua, Ace) who displayed indications of hyperreality in their roleplay practices.
3. Supporting informants – family members and close friends of the main informants in real life (Theo, Mutiara, Sila, Sasha, Vira).

In total, **11 informants** were interviewed, with selection continuing until the data reached saturation (no new insights were obtained).

Data Collection Techniques

Three data collection techniques were applied to ensure triangulation:

- Semi-structured interviews: conducted both online (via voice/video call) and offline. The interviews focused on participants' personal experiences, identity representation, emotional involvement, and the impact of roleplay on real life. A flexible interview guide allowed probing and follow-up questions.
- Observation: participant and non-participant observation of group activities on Telegram, including interactions, the use of hashtags, and the construction of character

identities. Observations were guided by a behavioral checklist and systematically recorded.

- Documentation: screenshots of chats, character profiles, digital posts, and other artifacts shared within the group. These documents supported and validated findings from interviews and observations.

Data Validation

To ensure credibility, the study employed **source triangulation** by comparing data from different types of informants (key, main, supporting), direct observations, and documentation. This method minimized bias and strengthened the validity of the findings.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using **Miles and Huberman's interactive model**, which involves three stages:

1. Data reduction – transcribing interviews, selecting relevant data, and focusing on themes related to hyperreality and simulacra.
2. Data display – organizing the findings into thematic narratives, supported by quotes, tables, and documentation.
3. Conclusion drawing and verification – interpreting the findings in relation to Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and hyperreality, and cross-checking consistency across sources.

Research Ethics

All informants were given prior information about the purpose of the study and their rights. Informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing personal data. Research permissions were obtained from the relevant university authorities, and documentation was used only with approval from participants.

Limitations

This study focused on a single case (*The Seasons* group), which limits the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, the data depended on participants' openness and availability of digital documentation, meaning some aspects of their roleplay experiences may not have been fully captured.

Result and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal how members of *The Seasons* roleplay group experience hyperreality, where the boundary between reality and simulation becomes increasingly blurred. Two major themes emerged:

1. Self-Representation in Virtual Roleplay

Members of *The Seasons* construct and perform identities that extend beyond entertainment, shaping how they interact and perceive themselves. This is evident in three aspects:

- Communication behavior: Players adopt communication styles aligned with their roleplay characters, engaging in conversations and narratives that replicate real-life social dynamics. These interactions often feel more meaningful to them than offline exchanges.
- Identity visualization: Players carefully design character profiles, avatars, and online appearances. The construction of visual identity often represents an idealized self, which is treated as authentic within the group.
- Gender and sexuality representation: Roleplay provides space for experimenting with gender and sexuality. Several participants performed identities different from their real selves, and these performances were accepted by other members as “real” within the roleplay context.

2. Reality Distortion in Virtual Roleplay

The roleplay world is no longer perceived as “just a game,” but as an alternative reality that members inhabit fully. This reality distortion is reflected in:

- Blurring of boundaries between real and unreal: Players often find it difficult to separate their roleplay experiences from daily life. Emotional investment in virtual relationships and events sometimes overrides their real-world priorities.
- Emotional attachment: Members develop strong emotional bonds with their characters and with other roleplay participants. Conflicts, romantic relationships, and friendships within the group generate real emotional responses, often comparable to, or stronger than, those in offline interactions.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the study shows that *The Seasons* group has reached what Baudrillard terms the Third Order of Simulacra. At this stage, representations no longer refer to any real-world reality but instead create a new, autonomous reality. For the participants, the roleplay world is not secondary to everyday life but becomes a primary social space where identity, communication, and relationships are lived out authentically.

Discussion

The results of this study show that members of *The Seasons* roleplay group experience hyperreality, where simulations of identity and interaction are no longer seen as fiction but as authentic parts of their lives. Within this community, roleplay goes beyond entertainment and becomes a meaningful social environment that strongly influences how members construct their sense of self and relate to others.

Roleplay as a Space of Identity Construction

Roleplay allows participants to create and perform identities that may be different from their real selves. Through carefully designed profiles, visual representations, and character-driven communication, players present an idealized version of themselves that is treated as genuine within the group. This process demonstrates how virtual environments

enable experimentation with identity, including gender and sexuality, in ways that may not be possible in the offline world.

Emotional Investment and Reality Distortion

The study also reveals that members develop deep emotional involvement in their roleplay experiences. Conflicts, friendships, and romantic relationships within the group generate real feelings of happiness, sadness, or frustration. For some, these emotions are as strong as, or even stronger than, those experienced in everyday life. Such emotional immersion shows how the roleplay environment is perceived as more significant than offline interactions, creating a condition where the boundaries between reality and simulation become blurred.

Blurring of Reality and Simulation

As players spend more time in the roleplay world, the distinction between what is “real” and what is “virtual” becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. The roleplay community is not experienced as a secondary or imaginary space but as an alternative reality where individuals live out meaningful relationships and identities. This blending of realities highlights the extent to which hyperreality has taken hold, allowing simulations to replace or dominate real-life experiences.

Theoretical Implications

These findings suggest that virtual roleplay communities function as genuine social spaces, not simply as games. They show how digital simulations can create new realities that are fully inhabited by their participants, shaping communication, identity, and interpersonal relationships in profound ways.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the virtual roleplay activities within *The Seasons* community demonstrate a strong manifestation of hyperreality as theorized by Baudrillard. Players in this group no longer perceive roleplay merely as entertainment, but instead construct new identities, engage in meaningful social interactions, and develop emotional attachments that often transcend their offline lives. The findings indicate that *The Seasons* has reached the Third Order of Simulacra, where digital representations no longer reflect real-world reality but instead generate an independent reality that is fully inhabited by its participants (Widiyanti & Herwandito, 2018) (Oktavianingtyas et al, 2021).

The study concludes that virtual roleplay functions as a genuine social space in which hyperreality operates in shaping identity, communication, and interpersonal relations. This highlights the transformative role of digital culture in redefining how individuals perceive themselves and others in contemporary society.

From an academic perspective, this research contributes to communication studies by applying Baudrillard’s theory of simulacra and hyperreality to the analysis of digital cultural practices, enriching the understanding of simulation phenomena in online communities. From a practical perspective, the findings provide valuable insights for

society, especially digital users, to reflect on the consequences of prolonged immersion in virtual environments that may blur the boundaries between fiction and reality.

Future research could expand this study by comparing different types of roleplay communities or by integrating psychological perspectives to better understand the long-term effects of hyperreality on individual identity and social relationships.

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