

SUBREALISM.com

Title: *Subrealism: The Hybridization of Subjective Reality in the Digital Age*

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Background and Rationale

In the span of two decades, social media has reconfigured how countless people communicate, project themselves, and even conceptualize their own identities. In a pre-digital era, the sense of self was largely formed through direct, face-to-face interactions in relatively stable social environments, where community norms, familial ties, and local peer groups provided cohesive contexts in which identities could be consistently developed. Today, individuals refine and re-envision themselves in multiple digital arenas such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, or emerging virtual environments. These dynamic spaces encourage not just connectivity but active self-curation: algorithms reward content that appears polished, aspirational, and endlessly engaging.

The consequences of this shift are profound—social media has democratized expression, allowing people to reach global audiences and articulate hidden aspects of their personalities in ways once unimaginable. On one hand, offline experiences continue to shape who people are through embodied activities and presential relationships, while on the other, the online sphere encourages rapid, hyper-curated portrayals of self, often diverging from everyday realities. This tension can spark feelings of dissonance and compartmentalization, in turn contributing to broader societal challenges: eroding communal values, superficial forms of social bonding, and heightened anxieties around authenticity.

Against this backdrop, the need emerges for a new theoretical lens that captures both the coexistence and friction between physical embodiment and digitally mediated identities. This thesis introduces Subrealism as that lens, providing a means to conceptualize the perpetual interplay between subjective reality and the intensively curated online personas that dominate social media culture. By centering on how these “sub-realities” inform, clash with, and reshape each other, this framework provides a structured way to analyze identity fragmentation and hyper-curation as defining forces of modern existence. Subrealism builds on established philosophical discussions of authenticity, identity, and self-presentation, yet it adds a novel dimension: rather than viewing digital and offline selves as merely intertwined or seamlessly merged, it highlights their ongoing negotiation as a prime catalyst for contemporary identity formation.

1.2 Defining Core Concepts

To provide a rigorous analysis of Subrealism, it is essential to delineate the key concepts underpinning this research:

Subjective Reality: Refers to an individual’s interpretation of the world, molded by cultural background, psychological predispositions, and personal experiences. In digital spaces, this fluid notion underpins the creation of online personas, where selected traits are amplified, suppressed, or recontextualized for public display.

Subrealism: Describes the condition in which an individual’s digitally curated self and physically embodied self, coexist and shape one another in real time. Rather than blending into a single persona, these parallel realities intersect in ways that can amplify contradictions, distort narratives, and disrupt a cohesive sense of identity.

Hypercuration: Is the process of meticulously crafting an online persona, highlighting certain attributes while masking or downplaying others. Reinforced by social validation and platform algorithms, hypercuration drives the construction of polished, aspirational identities—often magnifying the disconnect between digital and offline selves.

The Role of Social Media: Serving simultaneously as both stage and architect for Subrealism, social media platforms go beyond simple content hosting. They actively shape digital sub-realities by rewarding engagement (through likes, comments, and algorithmic boosts) over authenticity, propelling hypercuration and reinforcing the growing distance between online and offline selves.

1.3 Research Questions and Study Statement

The central research questions guiding this investigation are:

1. **How does Subrealism shape personal identity construction through the performative behaviors encouraged by social media platforms?**
2. **In what ways does Subrealism influence the psychological and emotional dimensions of self-representation across multiple digital ecosystems?**
3. **How do social media platforms drive a growing fragmentation between online and offline selves under the framework of Subrealism?**

Study Statement: In line with the key research questions, this thesis proposes Subrealism as a conceptual framework for examining identity fragmentation in a world increasingly influenced by digital interactions. By synthesizing classical philosophical theories with the realities of contemporary social media, the study explores how online self-presentation heightens the divide between virtual and offline selves. Through this perspective, Subrealism provides a critical lens for analyzing the emotional, psychological, and social consequences of modern hyperreality. In doing so, this research offers new perspectives on how authenticity, identity, and social engagement are renegotiated in the digital era.

1.4 Methodological Overview

This study employs a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative data analysis to explore how individuals construct and navigate their fragmented identities within both digital and real-world contexts.

Justification for Mixed-Methods Approach: The mixed-methods approach was chosen to capture both personal experiences (qualitative) and measurable trends (quantitative) related to Subrealism. While this combination offers rich insights, it also has limitations, particularly potential biases in interpreting open-ended responses. However, this method is essential for exploring the nuances of identity construction, while quantitative data helps assess broader impacts across diverse populations.

Platform Selection: Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube were selected for their distinct contributions to digital identity formation. Each embodies a unique aspect of Subrealism: Instagram fosters aesthetic curation through visual content, TikTok drives performative identity through algorithmic trends, and YouTube promotes long-form development of personas. While this platform-specific analysis offers valuable insights into the mechanisms of Subrealism, it remains limited in scope. Further research should extend beyond these platforms to encompass emerging digital spaces such as virtual reality and new social media ecosystems, to better explore Subrealism's broader implications across diverse cultural and technological landscapes.

1.5 Significance and Contribution

By bridging media studies, philosophy, and psychology, this research offers fresh insights into how these identities coexist and reshape one another, advancing our comprehension of modern identity formation.

Broader Implications: Beyond its academic scope, this thesis enhances our understanding of how societal notions of identity may evolve. The findings indicate that Subrealism could influence how future generations construct their personality and perceive reality. As technologies continue to shape human interactions, they will further affect how individuals define their sense of self and how communities form collective identities. Recognizing the implications of Subrealism is therefore critical not only for academic discourse but also for determining the trajectory of digital culture and social behaviors.

Interdisciplinary Impact: Although this thesis primarily engages with digital media studies, philosophy, and psychology, its impact extends into other fields, including sociology, cultural studies, and even economics. For instance, the financial incentives behind social media platform's promotion of Subrealism could have consequences for market behaviors and consumer culture. From a sociological perspective, Subrealism may also redefine how online spaces modulate social interactions and collective identity formation, leading to shifts in societal norms and cultural values.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Philosophical Foundations of Subjective Reality

2.1.1 Immanuel Kant: The Framework of Perception.

Immanuel Kant's philosophy provides a foundational understanding of subjective reality, a central theme in this study. According to Kant, our knowledge of the world is interpreted by the inherent categories of the human mind rather than being a direct reflection of external objects. This concept is essential for examining how new media platforms shape perceptions and create realities that diverge from objective truth. In the context of Subrealism, Kant's insights elucidate how individuals navigate and interpret these environments, where interfaces and algorithms alter our engagement with one another. By acknowledging that our interpretation of reality is constructed rather than merely reflected, Kant's philosophical grounding sets the stage for theories that delve into the mediated nature of digital experiences.

2.1.2 Maurice Merleau-Ponty: The Embodied Self and Perception.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology highlights that perception is rooted in bodily experience, where physical engagement with the world fundamentally shapes how we perceive reality. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the disconnect that occurs in online spaces, where the absence of tangible interactions often leads to fragmented or distorted perceptions. Merleau-Ponty's exploration of *embodiment* offers valuable insights into how digital interactions, lacking direct physical presence, contribute to identity disintegration. This division, characterized by the split between one's online persona and their real-world existence, is central to Subrealism, highlighting the binary tension between the virtual self and embodied experiences.

2.2 Identity Construction and Fragmentation

2.2.1 Jean-Paul Sartre: Existentialism and Identity Construction.

Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy, particularly his concept of *bad faith*, is integral to understanding identity construction within Subrealism. Sartre asserts that existence precedes essence, meaning individuals are responsible for creating themselves through their choices and actions. His focus on the psychological tensions inherent in bad faith provides a powerful

framework for analyzing the fracture between online and offline identities. Within this framework, hypercuration becomes a central process by which individuals meticulously craft their personas, often leading to a stark divergence from their authentic offline selves. This continual adjustment of the digital self mirrors Sartre's notion of bad faith, as individuals deny the authenticity of their lived experiences in favor of hypercurated representations that align with societal expectations.

2.2.2 Jacques Derrida: Deconstruction and Identity Fragmentation.

Jacques Derrida's philosophy of *deconstruction* provides a powerful tool for analyzing the instability and fragmentation of digital identities. Derrida's concept of *différance*—the idea that meaning is always deferred and never fully present—can be applied to identity construction in virtual spaces. The online self is continuously deconstructed and reconstructed through the shifting play of signifiers, leading to an identity that is never fully stable or coherent. This perpetual deferral of a “true” self is a hallmark of Subrealism. Derrida's deconstruction is particularly useful for understanding the fluidity and volatility of these identities, as users oscillate between different personas across various digital platforms.

2.3 Reality and Simulation

2.3.1 Jean Baudrillard: Hyperreality and the Blurring of Reality.

Jean Baudrillard's concept of *hyperreality* is crucial for understanding Subrealism. In a hyperreal world, Baudrillard argues, the distinction between reality and simulation becomes increasingly blurred, leading individuals to experience simulations that often surpass real life in their influence. Social media platforms, where users engage with highly curated and idealized versions of themselves and others, serve as prime examples of environments where hyperreality thrives. However, Subrealism diverges from hyperreality by emphasizing not the merging but the coexistence and interaction of digital and physical identities. While hyperreality focuses on the indistinguishability between the real and the simulated, Subrealism highlights the fluidity and differentiation that arise as individuals navigate between these distinct realms, maintaining their separate identities while still influencing each other.

2.4 The Spectacle and Mediated Experience

2.4.1 Guy Debord: The Society of the Spectacle.

Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* provides a crucial lens for examining Subrealism. Debord argues that modern society is dominated by the Spectacle—an accumulation of images that mediates relationships and distorts reality. In the digital age, social media platforms epitomize this Spectacle, where curated visual representations shape how individuals perceive their surroundings and interactions. Within Subrealism, the Spectacle plays a central role in identity development, as individuals continuously project and perform themselves for public consumption. This ongoing performance contributes to identity fragmentation and a further detachment from objective reality.

2.5 Power, Surveillance, and Identity

2.5.1 Michel Foucault: Power, Surveillance, and Digital Identities.

Michel Foucault's exploration of power and surveillance offers critical insights into the dynamics of digital identity construction. His concept of the *Panopticon*—a structure of power where individuals regulate their behavior under constant monitoring—applies to social media platforms functioning as digital panopticons, where users self-regulate their behavior based on the perceived surveillance of their online personas by peers and anonymous observers. This constant monitoring shapes how individuals present themselves, often leading to the creation of subrealistic identities that conform to societal norms and expectations. Unlike traditional surveillance, which seeks to unify and control, Subrealism highlights how these mechanisms simultaneously reinforce and fracture identities, perpetuating a complex interplay between the online and offline selves.

2.6 Agency in Digital Networks

2.6.1 Bruno Latour: Actor-Network Theory and the Agency of Digital Platforms

Bruno Latour's *Actor-Network Theory* (ANT) provides a framework for viewing digital platforms as active agents in shaping subjective realities. According to ANT, social media algorithms play a crucial role in influencing human behavior and social structures. In the context of Subrealism, these platforms actively modulate individual perceptions and interactions. Recognizing algorithms and platform designs as influential non-human actors deepens our understanding of how these ecosystems contribute to defining one's sense of identity and perceived reality. This perspective is essential for analyzing the interplay between human and non-human agents in constructing subrealistic identities.

2.7 Contemporary Interpretations and Critiques

2.7.1 Shoshana Zuboff: Surveillance Capitalism and the Commodification of Identity

Shoshana Zuboff's concept of *surveillance capitalism* is crucial for understanding the economic foundations of Subrealism. She argues that social media platforms commodify user data, transforming private information into products for advertisers. This extends to identity, as users are encouraged to present marketable and advertiser-friendly personas. As a result, subrealistic identities are influenced more by market demands than by individual authenticity. Zuboff's work illustrates how economic incentives prioritize profit and engagement over authenticity and well-being.

2.7.2 Byung-Chul Han: The Transparency Society and the Culture of Visibility

Byung-Chul Han's critique of *The Transparency Society* and his exploration of the Culture of Visibility provide insights into the pressures of self-presentation in our hyperconnected age. Han argues that the demand for transparency erodes the boundaries between public and private life. This relentless exposure creates a compulsion to be seen and recognized, contributing to the formation of subrealistic identities that are always visible and engaging. Han's work offers a critical lens on how visibility pressures in online environments perpetuate this cycle, deepening the divide between the digital persona and the offline self, leading to a fragmented sense of self and increased psychological stress.

2.7.3 Evgeny Morozov: The Net Delusion and the Risks of Digital Optimism

Evgeny Morozov's *The Net Delusion* critiques the belief that emerging technologies inherently lead to greater freedom and democracy, arguing instead that they often reinforce power structures and create new forms of control. This perspective illuminates the darker aspects of Subrealism, where online platforms entrench inequalities and exacerbate identity fragmentation. Morozov's theories underscore the potential negative consequences of these technologies, emphasizing the need for critical examination of optimistic assumptions, often surrounding digital media, and their broader impacts on social cohesion and information governance.

2.7.4 Manuel Castells: The Network Society and Power in the Digital Age

Manuel Castells's theory of *The Network Society* provides an essential perspective on how Subrealism operates in the contemporary era. Castells argues that networks have transformed societies into complex systems where power increasingly hinges on the management of information flows, and identity construction is shaped by the underlying structures and logics governing them. His insights significantly contribute to understanding how virtual spaces influence identity, distribute power, and create new social hierarchies. Applying Castells's theory broadens the discussion to encompass sociological and structural forces at play, revealing how power dynamics drive identity fragmentation and hybridization.

CHAPTER 3: Theoretical Framework and Operationalization

3.1 Introduction to the Theoretical Framework

This chapter establishes the theoretical foundation for analyzing Subrealism, drawing on key thinkers such as Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord, Michel Foucault, and Bruno Latour. Their theories provide insights into how media platforms shape subjective reality and lead to the differentiation of self-concepts through the interaction between digital and physical realms. These ideas will guide the empirical analysis in subsequent chapters, offering a cohesive approach to understanding how online interactions modulate individual and societal perceptions.

3.2 Theoretical Integration

This section integrates the concept of Subrealism with the key theories discussed in Chapter 2, forming an integrated framework for analysis.

3.2.1 Baudrillard's Hyperreality and Subrealism

- **Integration:** Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality suggests that virtual simulations within online environments can have a more profound influence than actual experiences. His theory helps analyze how projected online personas, constructed through digital spaces, contribute to the fragmentation of personal identity by supporting the development of hyperreal versions of the self.
- **Application:** Baudrillard's framework will be used to examine how these projected identities foster the disconnection between online and offline selves, contributing to the fragmented experience of selfhood in Subrealism.
- **Indicators:** The prevalence of idealized digital representations (e.g., filters, avatars) and the degree to which these hypercurated constructs are perceived as more authentic than lived experiences.

3.2.2 Debord's Spectacle and Subrealism

- **Integration:** Debord's concept of the Spectacle emphasizes how real life is replaced by curated representations, leading to an existence dominated by false perceptions. Subrealism builds on this by examining how virtual identities, curated through social media, create dissonance with offline experiences. This study integrates Debord's framework to explore how mediated images foster the pervasive interaction between fragmented digital and physical identities.
- **Application:** Debord's theory will be applied to understand how image-driven platforms influence the construction of virtual selves by exacerbating the existential gap between one's curated online persona and concrete offline reality, amplifying the Subrealistic experience.
- **Indicators:** The prominence of image-based dynamics on platforms where algorithms amplify tailored content, shaping societal behaviors and trends based on mediated images over direct engagement with reality.

3.2.3 Foucault's Surveillance and Subrealism

- **Integration:** Foucault's concept of surveillance, particularly his idea of the Panopticon, is central to understanding how digital environments enforce self-regulation and fragment identity. In Subrealism, the omnipresent sense of constant oversight shapes the formation of online personas. These carefully constructed identities diverge significantly from their offline counterparts, creating a profound sense of separation that aligns with concepts explored by Baudrillard and Debord.
- **Application:** Foucault's framework will be applied to examine how technological surveillance—through algorithms, social tracking, and other observation mechanics—contributes to the development of fragmented self-concepts. The study will demonstrate how individuals alter their online behavior in response to perceived monitoring, amplifying the disconnection between their digital and physical selves.
- **Indicators:** The effects of constant observation are evident in behavioral adjustments made by individuals who modify their actions due to the expectation of being watched, creating distorted self-perceptions modulated by the watchful nature of online interactions.

3.2.4 Latour's Actor-Network Theory and Subrealism

- **Integration:** Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) provides a framework for understanding how automated processes operate as active agents in Subrealism. Rather than being passive tools, these systems mold both identity construction and social dynamics within interconnected networked environments. This theory emphasizes that digital and non-digital entities—algorithms, platforms, and users—influence individual and collective identities.
- **Application:** ANT will be applied to explore how digital ecosystems, through automation and network structures, actively influence both online and offline identities. The study will investigate how these interactions condition social behaviors, power dynamics, and relationships between virtual and real-world experiences within Subrealism, focusing on the interconnected roles of human and algorithmic agents.
- **Indicators:** Algorithmic systems will be analyzed as key drivers of identity formation and social behaviors. The study will focus on how these networks influence user interactions, contributing to the differentiation and hybridization of the self within Subrealism.

3.3 Operationalizing Subrealism

This section outlines specific indicators and criteria for empirical research. These metrics, based on the theoretical framework of Subrealism, will assess its presence and impact using survey data.

3.3.1 Indicators of Media-Induced Hyperreality

- **Definition:** Media-induced hyperreality in Subrealism highlights how virtual extensions of the self, such as filters and avatars, are perceived as more influential than their offline counterparts. These indicators reflect how digital constructs shape real-world experiences.
- **Application:** Survey data will assess how participants engage with their digital identities, particularly where online selves diverge from physical realities, focusing on psychological effects like altered self-perception and identity.

3.3.2 Indicators of Digital Identity Fragmentation

- **Definition:** Digital identity fragmentation refers to the divergence between one's online and offline personas within Subrealism. This binary tension, emerging from the construction of curated virtual identities, leads to a disconnection that alters one's self-concept.
- **Application:** Survey responses will measure the extent to which participants experience separation between their virtual and physical selves, focusing on psychological and social impacts like role conflict or inconsistencies in behavior and self-perception.

3.3.3 Indicators of the Influence of the Spectacle

- **Definition:** The influence of the spectacle in Subrealism refers to the dominance of image-based interactions that affect societal views and actions, especially on social media platforms.
- **Application:** Survey responses will assess how image-driven content modulates social trends and individual behaviors, focusing on how it impacts perceptions of reality and identity.

3.3.4 Indicators of Network Society Dynamics

- **Definition:** Within networked systems, Subrealism refers to the role of algorithms and online platforms in social interactions and identity formation, emphasizing power dynamics within digital ecosystems.
- **Application:** The analysis will investigate how network structures contribute to the divergence of digital and physical personas and give rise to new forms of social stratification. Survey data will be used to assess the societal impact of these interactions.

3.4 Application to Empirical Analysis

This section outlines how the operationalized concept of Subrealism will be applied in the empirical chapters.

3.4.1 Empirical Data

- **Introduction:** Survey results will be analyzed through the framework of Subrealism, focusing on how the divide over digital and physical identities, media-induced hyperreality, and the Spectacle influence interactions between virtual and offline selves. This analysis seeks to demonstrate the empirical impact of fragmented identities in these environments.
- **Application:** The previously established metrics will be used to examine how Subrealism affects participant's online behaviors, drawing from survey data to identify psychological and social consequences of having disconnected identities.

3.4.2 Analytical Methods

- **Methods:** This research employs content analysis alongside thematic evaluation to examine Subrealism's representation within digital spaces. These methods help interpret patterns that emerge from participant's experiences navigating their online and offline personas.
- **Application:** These analyses will uncover recurring manifestations of disconnected identities across platforms, offering a broader understanding of how individuals manage themselves in various online ecosystems.

Conclusion of Chapter 3

This chapter developed a theoretical framework and operationalized Subrealism in preparation for empirical analysis. This integrated framework examines the hybridization of reality and its impact on identity formation.

Chapter 4: Empirical Analysis of Subrealism Across Digital Platforms

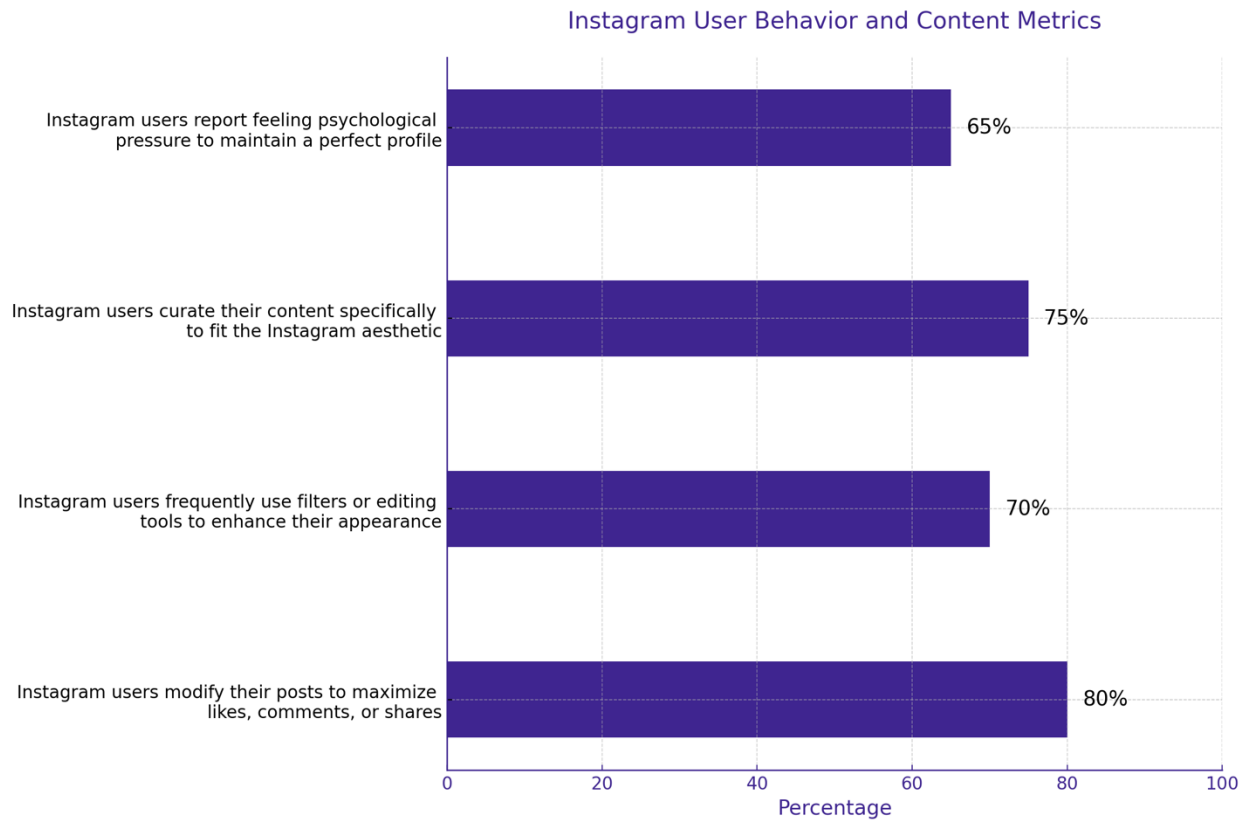
4.1 Instagram: The Visual Culture of Identity

Introduction: Instagram profoundly influences the interplay between digital and physical identities through its emphasis on aesthetics and visual curation. This environment fosters *media-induced hyperreality* central to Subrealism, where virtual representations often outweigh the influence of physical reality. Users oscillate between their crafted online personas and real-world selves, creating fragmented yet interconnected identities.

Key Findings: The study "*Visual Culture on Instagram: The Impact of Image-Based Platforms on Identity and Self-Representation*" (Prata, 2022) reveals:

- **65% of users report feeling emotional strain** to maintain an ideal profile, especially when engaging with social validation mechanisms such as likes and comments.
- **75% of users modify their content** to align with the platform's aesthetic expectations, emphasizing visually appealing and curated appearances.
- **70% of users frequently use filters and editing tools** to refine their appearance before posting content.
- **80% of Instagram users tailor their posts** to optimize engagement (likes, comments, shares), aiming to enhance visibility and maintain social influence.

Visual Aids:



These statistics demonstrate how Instagram's aesthetic-centric culture and focus on interaction metrics shape user behavior. They highlight the psychological strain of maintaining an idealized profile, often through filters, content modification, and engagement-maximizing strategies.

Analysis: The visual curation on Instagram fosters a binary tension, as users alter their digital selves to meet platform-driven expectations. Challenges like “Instagram vs. Reality” underscore the widening divide between presenting idealized representations and the authentic self, reflecting how hypercuration deepens the separation between online and offline personas.

Conclusion: Instagram reinforces the fragmentation central to Subrealism by perpetuating the constant reconstruction of virtual identities, thus deepening the separation between online and offline realities.

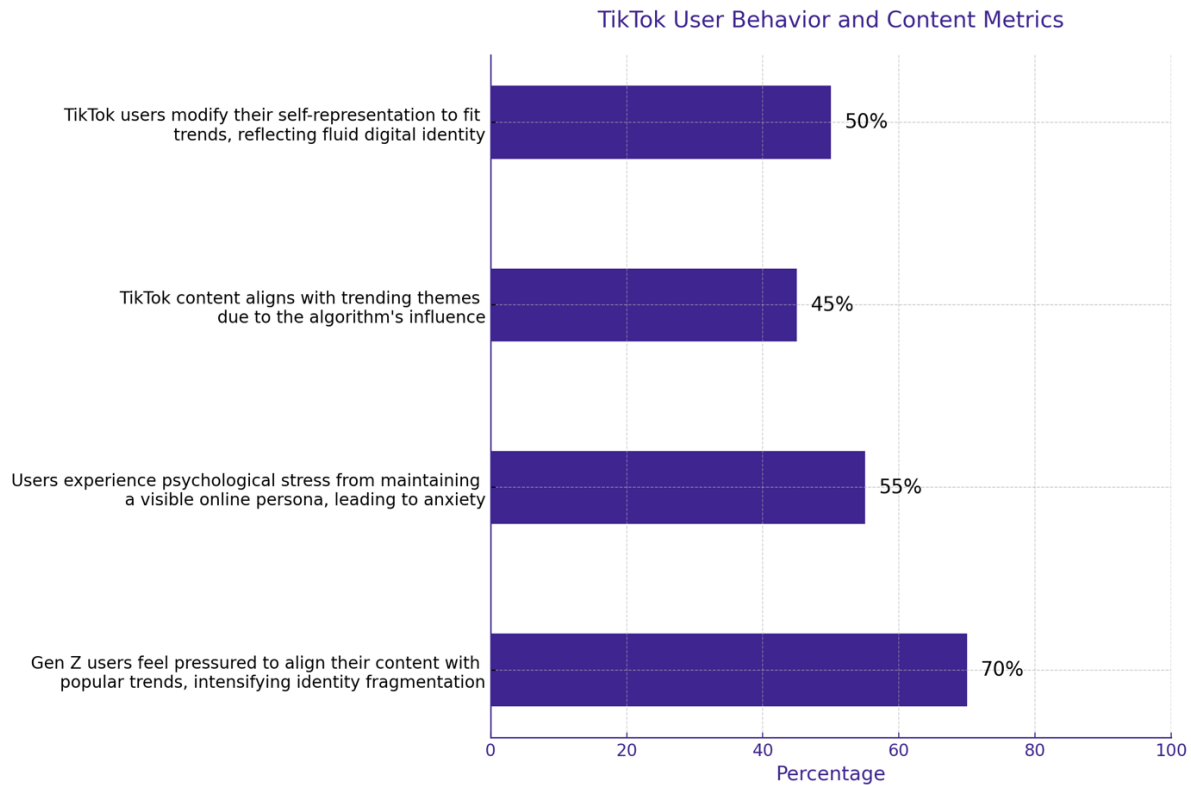
4.2 TikTok: Algorithmic Curation and Identity Performance

Introduction: TikTok's algorithm-driven ecosystem exemplifies the dynamics of Subrealism, where virtual and physical selves coexist and interact. Algorithms encourage users to align their personas with trending content, intensifying identity differentiation and reinforcing the Spectacle. As users modify their behavior to fit these trends, their online selves increasingly diverge from their offline realities.

The study "*Performative Selves on TikTok: The Role of Algorithmic Curation in Shaping Digital Identity*" (Prata, 2022) highlights:

- **50% of TikTok users frequently adjust their self-portrayal** to fit trends, reflecting the fluidity of digital identity on the platform.
- **45% of TikTok content aligns with trending themes**, as the algorithm heavily influences what users are shown based on previous interactions.
- **55% of users experience psychological stress** from maintaining a visible online persona, with average daily usage reaching 95 minutes, contributing to issues like anxiety.
- **70% of Gen Z TikTok users report feeling pressured** to conform their content to popular trends, heightening their sense of identity fragmentation and reliance on the platform for self-representation.

Visual Aids:



These statistics illustrate the strong influence of TikTok's algorithm on user behavior and content curation, highlighting how the platform drives identity performance through psychological pressure and alignment with trending themes.

Analysis: TikTok fosters a performative culture, prompting users to tailor their identities to align with trending content and audience expectations. Trends like the “Glow Up” challenge encourage heavily curated self-representations, highlighting the fragmented and fluid nature of identity in Subrealism, and reflecting the Spectacle's influence over modern social interactions.

Conclusion: TikTok exemplifies Subrealism in action, where the intersection of algorithms and self-construction leads to fragmented, hyperreal personas. The platform demonstrates the powerful role of digital media in shaping self-representations driven by performance, algorithmic pressures, and audience expectations.

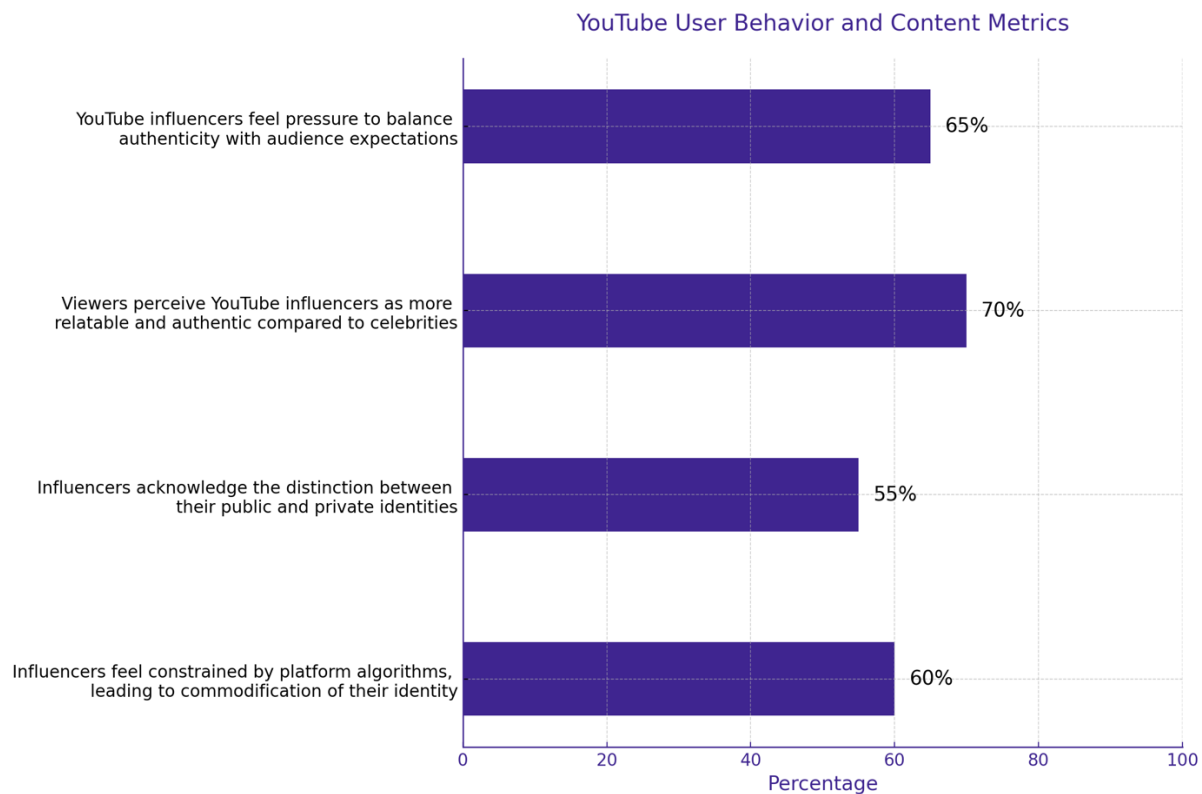
4.3 YouTube: The Paradox of Curated Authenticity

Introduction: YouTube exemplifies the tension between real and projected identities, reflecting the coexistence of digital and physical selves central to Subrealism. Influencers often navigate carefully curated version of themselves, where their virtual personas overshadow their offline identities in perceived authenticity.

Key Findings: The study "*Curated Authenticity: The Dichotomy of Real and Performed Identities in YouTube Influencers*" (Prata, 2022) reveals:

- **65% of influencers are aware of the pressure to balance authentic content** with audience expectations, often modifying their content to maintain a relatable yet polished appearance.
- **70% of viewers consider YouTube personalities more relatable** and authentic than traditional celebrities, largely due to their immersive personal storytelling and perceived accessibility.
- **55% of influencers recognize a clear divide between their public (projected) identity and their private self;** however, the constant demands of vlogging and content creation gradually erodes this boundary, shifting the balance between their online and offline realities.
- **60% of creators report feeling constrained by platform algorithms,** leading them to adjust their content style for maximum visibility and engagement, often transforming their personal identity into a marketable commodity.

Visual Aids:



These statistics highlight the complex balance between authenticity and performance in content created by influencers. They underscore the psychological tension faced by creators in maintaining a relatable yet polished persona, shaped by audience expectations and algorithmic pressures.

Analysis: YouTube personalities present idealized versions of their lives to meet audience expectations, leading to fragmented self-representations. “Day in My Life” vlogs often portray routines that are selectively framed, enhancing the portrayal of an idealized, hyperreal self that coexists with, yet remains distinct from the creator's offline identity.

Conclusion: YouTube epitomizes Subrealism, where influencers construct hyperreal identities shaped by audience expectations and performative self-presentation. The platform perpetuates fragmented yet interconnected identities, highlighting a meticulously crafted illusion of authenticity.

Note: While this chapter presents empirical findings, it is important to acknowledge inherent methodological limitations and ethical considerations, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.¹

Chapter 4 Conclusion

This chapter explored the manifestation of Subrealism across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Each platform plays a role in disrupting the sense of self, fostering media-induced hyperreality, and reinforcing the Spectacle's influence. The interplay between online and offline identities underscores the fractured and complex nature of selfhood in the digital age.

¹ Ethical research guidelines were strictly followed. All survey participants were informed about the nature of the study, provided informed consent, and were assured anonymity in compliance with applicable privacy laws. No personally identifiable information was collected, and data confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter integrates the findings from the empirical analysis with theoretical perspectives, offering a comprehensive view of how digital and physical selves interact. It explores key themes of self-construction, identity fragmentation, hyperreality, and hypercuration in online spaces while addressing study limitations, proposing future research directions, and summarizing major contributions. By linking empirical findings with the theoretical discussions from Chapter 3, it emphasizes Subrealism's broader implications for understanding identity in the digital age.

5.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

5.2.1 Theoretical Contributions

This research sheds new light on online identity formation within the framework of Subrealism, examining how virtual and physical realities intersect. Subrealism moves beyond classical philosophical theories to offer a distinctive approach for exploring identity in relation to modern technological landscapes:

- **Extension of Existing Theories:** Subrealism extends the work of Baudrillard, Debord, Foucault, and Latour by applying their theories to social media contexts. Baudrillard's hyperreality illustrates how idealized representations influence self-perception. Debord's spectacle addresses the commodification of social experiences, Foucault's surveillance highlights self-regulation under scrutiny, and Latour's Actor-Network Theory positions platforms and algorithms as active agents in constructing identity. Together, these theories affirm Subrealism's unique contribution to understanding identity in the digital age.
- **New Perspectives on Identity:** Subrealism provides a nuanced view of the coexistence of virtual and physical identities, challenging earlier theories that considered them either fully integrated or entirely distinct. By exploring this dynamic interaction, it offers deeper insight into how individuals negotiate competing facets of their identities, exposing the binary tension between their fragmented selves.

5.2.2 Practical Implications

The findings provide practical implications for platform developers, content creators, and users:

- **Platform Developers:** A deeper understanding of Subrealism's impact on identity construction can guide developers in designing features that encourage more genuine interactions. By prioritizing tools that reduce the pressure to curate idealized personas, they can foster meaningful online engagement and alleviate the psychological strain of fragmented, hyperreal identities.
- **Content Creators:** Recognizing the pressures of maintaining curated authenticity, creators can balance content creation with audience engagement. By fostering more meaningful relationships with their followers, they can become more conscious of how hypercuration shapes audience perceptions.
- **Users:** Users should critically reflect on their online behavior and its influence on self-perception. Greater awareness of identity fragmentation can help maintain a healthier balance between digital and real-life experiences, resulting in greater coherence across both spheres.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

While providing valuable insights, the study has limitations that need to be acknowledged:

- **Scope of Platforms:** The study focuses primarily on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which may limit the generalizability of its findings to other virtual arenas like the metaverse and VR platforms. These immersive realms may exhibit distinct identity dynamics, warranting further research to explore Subrealism's influence across diverse digital landscapes.
- **Methodological Constraints:** The reliance on self-reported data in survey-based research introduces potential biases. Participants' perceptions may not always mirror their actual behavior, potentially limiting the accuracy of findings related to how digital selves are constructed and represented.

5.3.1 Suggestions for Future Research

- **Broader Platform Analysis:** Expanding Subrealism research to include virtual reality and other emerging digital ecosystems could provide fresh perspectives, as these immersive environments and avatar-based interactions may reveal unique dynamics of identity differentiation.
- **Longitudinal Studies:** Long-term studies tracking the evolution of digital selves could offer valuable insights into the psychological impact of sustaining multiple personas over time, further advancing our comprehension of the cognitive and emotional strain associated with maintaining these parallel selves, and their broader implications for personal integrity and authenticity.
- **Intersectional Approaches:** Examining how factors such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status shape the development of online personas would provide a deeper understanding of Subrealism. These social dimensions significantly influence identity construction and contribute to the dissolution of the self. Studying the role of digital literacy programs can help us understand how individuals from marginalized communities navigate these challenges. Such programs could empower users to critically assess their virtual identities and develop strategies to maintain authenticity across both online and offline domains.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

The findings of this study reinforce the value of Subrealism in both theoretical and practical applications, offering new insights into self-conception in digital environments. By investigating the tension between online and offline representations, this research contributes to broader discussions on identity fragmentation and proposes strategies for managing modern selfhood. Practical methods such as self-auditing tools for analyzing online behavior and curated personas, alongside identity resilience training, provide effective solutions. Additionally, promoting ethical engagement strategies—such as platform accountability, algorithmic transparency, and digital literacy programs—empowers users to engage more mindfully within these environments.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion and Future Directions

6.1 Summary of Findings

The study identifies several key phenomena, including the differentiation of self-representation, the prevalence of media-driven hyperreality, and the Spectacle's influence within Subrealism. These factors underscore the ongoing negotiation between virtual and physical identities, with the resulting binary tension becoming a hallmark of contemporary selfhood:

1. **Subrealism as a Conceptual Lens:** This framework captures the intersection of subjective experiences and digital sub-realities, providing an analytical tool for examining the duality between online and offline identities, thereby challenging conventional understandings of selfhood.
2. **Theoretical Integration:** This thesis synthesizes the work of Baudrillard, Debord, Foucault, and Latour to enhance our comprehension of identity formation in digital contexts. The framework of Subrealism extends their theories by emphasizing the continuous interplay between virtual and physical selves.
3. **Empirical Insights Across Platforms:** The findings illustrate how Subrealism manifests distinctly on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, with each platform facilitating different forms of identity disruption and fostering the creation of hyperreal personas.
4. **Cultural and Ethical Implications:** The research draws attention to several societal issues such as the commodification of identity, visibility pressures, and the psychological toll of navigating a hyperreal digital landscape. It raises essential cultural and ethical questions, including how increased anxiety and lowered self-esteem result from managing idealized online profiles.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study offers fresh theoretical insights into identity research and media studies, focusing on how individuals reshape their sense of self in digital environments:

1. **Subrealism as a Novel Concept:** Subrealism introduces a pioneering framework that connects subjective reality with virtual sub-realities, framing identity as fluid and multifaceted. It challenges traditional notions of selfhood by exploring how identity formation evolves in the digital age.

2. **Extension of Existing Theories:** Subrealism expands on the works of Baudrillard, Debord, Sartre, and Foucault, applying their theories to the digital realm, particularly regarding the duality between virtual and physical selves. Rather than blending these identities, Subrealism demonstrates how classical theories manifest within modern social media contexts, offering new insights into these philosophical frameworks.
3. **Empirical Insights into Digital Identity:** This research provides empirical evidence of how online platforms influence identity formation, with Subrealism serving as a guiding model for understanding the consequences of hypercuration across various digital media landscapes.

6.3 Broader Implications and Interdisciplinary Impact

The findings of this research extend beyond media studies, impacting multiple fields:

1. **Societal Implications:** Subrealism offers new insights into how future generations might construct their identities by navigating increasingly separate online and offline realities. As technologies evolve, identity fragmentation may lead to increased anxiety, social isolation, and difficulties in sustaining a coherent sense of self.
2. **Interdisciplinary Impact:** Subrealism's framework applies to multiple disciplines, including sociology, psychology, cultural studies, and economics. The economic incentives driving social media platforms notably influence consumer behavior and identity construction. The role of echo chambers in shaping collective solidarity warrants sociological investigation, particularly regarding their impact on interpersonal relationships. Subrealism's relevance extends to education by emphasizing the importance of teaching critical digital literacy, enabling students to navigate and assess the duality of virtual and physical identities critically.
3. **Ethical Considerations:** The commodification of identity and the pressure to maintain online visibility highlight the ethical challenges of Subrealism, underscoring the need for scrutiny over the engagement practices of social media companies. Key issues like data privacy, algorithmic transparency, and user well-being should be prioritized in policymaking to mitigate the negative effects of hyperreal online environments.

6.4 Future Directions

Although this thesis has explored Subrealism in depth, several avenues for further research could enhance our understanding of this evolving phenomenon:

1. **Expanding the Study of Subrealism:** Future research could investigate how Subrealism manifests in diverse immersive environments such as the metaverse, virtual reality, and online gaming, offering new perspectives on identity differentiation.
2. **Longitudinal Studies:** Long-term research on the development of digital personas could provide insights into the lasting effects of fragmented identities on psychological well-being and social relationships.
3. **Intersectional Approaches:** Exploring the intersections of gender, race, and socioeconomic status in modern identity formation could expand our comprehension of Subrealism, revealing how diverse groups experience hyperreality and identity fragmentation.
4. **Policy and Ethical Considerations:** Future studies should explore how policy can address the ethical challenges posed by Subrealism, including developing clear guidelines for data privacy, algorithmic transparency, and identity commodification to create healthier digital environments and reduce the psychological and social risks associated with hyperreal experiences.

Thesis Conclusion

Subrealism, as presented in this thesis, provides a critical framework for understanding the hybridization of subjective reality in the digital age. Central to this concept is the recognition that specific digital environments—particularly social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube—significantly influence disjointed self-perceptions and contribute to hyperreal experiences. These platforms have created a dual reality where individuals constantly negotiate between their online and offline personas, offering a valuable lens through which the fluid nature of identity can be examined.

This research integrates and extends classical existentialist and poststructuralist thought, drawing on the philosophical theories of thinkers like Guy Debord, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jean Baudrillard. Situating these ideas within the digital context, Subrealism challenges traditional notions of selfhood and proposes a reconceptualization of the self as a fluid and fragmented construct, shaped by the continual oscillation between virtual and physical realms.

The societal repercussions of these findings are profound. The commodification of identity, driven by the pressures of maintaining a visible online profile, raises serious concerns about psychological well-being, especially for those who constantly hypercurate their narratives—frequently exaggerating certain aspects of their lives. Many individuals suffer from increased anxiety, diminished self-esteem, and a weakened sense of social belonging. These challenges demand urgent attention, underscoring the need for robust ethical guidelines and policies that address the potential harms of living in hyperreality.

Over the past decade, social media has become a defining force in the lives of younger generations, particularly those who have grown up navigating both online and offline domains. For many of these young people, identity development occurs within a dual existential space, unprecedented in previous generations. Subrealism, as a novel concept, highlights the potential dangers of hypercuration and over-reliance on digital spaces, where the boundary between reality and fabrication becomes increasingly polarized. Understanding how future generations will

navigate this divide is crucial, as they will face a reality where online interactions dominate both their personal and social lives.

While this study has primarily focused on social media, its implications extend beyond these platforms. Future research could explore how Subrealism manifests in immersive environments such as VR and the metaverse, where the lines between virtual and physical become even more complex. Furthermore, the exploration of self-perception must expand to consider the broader intersections between digital spheres and real-world experiences, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of modern identity formation.

As this landscape continues to evolve, the insights provided by Subrealism will remain relevant in addressing the challenges posed by fragmented self-representations. These findings support and contribute to academic discussions, laying the groundwork for developing future ethical frameworks that promote healthier and more balanced digital media engagement. By offering a fresh perspective on identity, this study invites contemporary society to reconsider how individuals interact with online spaces and to reflect on the broader implications of this hybrid personal experience for future generations. As the binary tension between digital and physical realms becomes increasingly pronounced, the societal, psychological, and moral impact of this integration should be closely monitored. This provides a lens through which these complexities can be understood, focusing on how identity, agency, networks, and social interactions are reshaped in virtual spaces.

By addressing the potential dangers of a hypercurated existence, this thesis emphasizes the importance of developing frameworks that not only analyze the present state of identity construction but also propose ethical interventions to mitigate the negative effects of modern digital life. Ultimately, Subrealism encourages a rethinking of how individuals engage with media platforms, urging society to seek healthier, more balanced modes of interaction as we continue to navigate the hybrid realities of the future.

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