

## DIGITAL POSTMODERNISM AND KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION: TRUTH, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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### Abstract

*This paper has explored the representation of social media sites as postmodern ideology, as it alters modern beliefs on truth, memory and identity. The study covered the dynamics of digital spaces through which realities are fragmented such as in Instagram, Tik Tok, and X (Twitter) where authenticity and representation are in constant overlap. The study was aimed at examining the ways in which the individuals shape and dispute their identities in these postmodern digital spaces and how the ever-present movement of pictures and stories will undermine the application of objective truth. They used a qualitative research design including the approaches of the content analysis of chosen social media posts, visual storytelling, and digital self-representations. The presentation of the analysis was based on the postmodern theoretical approach, especially the idea of hyperreality by Jean Baudrillard and the concept of the collapse of the grand narratives by Lyotard. The analysis of the presented results showed that social media promotes a culture of simulation, in which the truth is becoming subjective and mediated by algorithmic visibility. The users design identities, which are performative yet temporary and lend credence to the postmodernist state of fragmented selves. In addition, the research concluded that digital memory works as a mutable and rewritable archive, which is constantly transformed by reposts, filters, trends and undermines the idea of permanence and authenticity. Comprehensively, the study found out that social media is a lived form of digital postmodernism, in which the reality is negotiated, memory is reconstituted, and identity is an on-going performance in a technologically mediated reality.*

**Key Word:** Algorithmic visibility, Digital memory, Hyperreality, Identity performance, Postmodernism, Simulation, Truth

### Introduction

#### Background

In the digital era, social media platforms such as *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *X* (formerly *Twitter*) have redefined how individuals experience truth, memory, and identity. These platforms blur the boundaries between authenticity and representation, allowing people to construct, display, and curate their sense of self in technologically mediated environments. Within this landscape, the modernist ideals of objectivity, coherence, and stable identity are replaced by fluidity and performativity. The philosophical framework of postmodernism provides a compelling lens through which to analyze this shift.

Jean Baudrillard's (1981/1994) notion of hyperreality describes a world in which simulations replace or conceal the real, suggesting that the representation becomes more powerful than reality itself. Similarly, Jean-François Lyotard (1979/1984) posits that postmodern societies are characterized by an "incredulity toward metanarratives," where overarching truths give way to localized, fragmented narratives. These theoretical insights illuminate how users in

digital environments continuously negotiate meaning through performances and mediated exchanges.

Social media thus embodies the essence of digital postmodernism, in which the distinction between truth and illusion collapses. Users engage in endless cycles of posting, filtering, and resharing, creating a fluid continuum of representation. The constant re-staging of self, accompanied by algorithmic curation, generates a hyperreal digital space where identity and authenticity are perpetually reconfigured (Baudrillard, 1994; Lyotard, 1984).

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary engagement with media theory, identity studies, and epistemology. From a media-cultural perspective, it extends postmodern theory into the domain of social media, framing platforms as ideological systems that mediate users' perceptions of reality. From a psychological and sociological viewpoint, it highlights how digital identities are shaped not only by self-expression but also by algorithmic infrastructures that dictate visibility.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the epistemological crisis of truth in online communication. Within social networks, the validation of content often depends on virality or engagement rather than correspondence to fact (Ali, 2023). Truth becomes a commodity quantified by likes, shares, and follows rather than an objective principle. As such, social media culture undermines modern notions of authenticity and permanence, reinforcing the postmodern condition of subjective, mediated realities (Kessel, 2025).

By situating these processes within a postmodern framework, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital technologies influence selfhood and collective consciousness in the twenty-first century.

### **Problem Statement**

While scholars have explored aspects of identity construction and digital authenticity, few have comprehensively examined how social media enacts a postmodern dynamic where truth, memory, and identity interrelate. In contemporary platforms, users produce fragmented selves, construct mutable digital memories, and circulate truths shaped by algorithmic visibility. Yet, these processes remain under-theorized as expressions of postmodernism in everyday digital life.

This gap prevents a holistic understanding of how hyperreality and the collapse of grand narratives materialize in user practices. The problem is therefore to determine how social media transforms truth into performance, memory into mutable archives, and identity into a simulated construct.

### **Objectives**

- **To examine** how individuals represent and negotiate their identities through visual storytelling and digital self-presentation on social media.
- **To investigate** the function of digital memory as a mutable, rewritable archive shaped by platform affordances (e.g., reposts, filters, ephemeral content).
- **To analyze** how algorithmic visibility and curation influence users' understanding of truth, authenticity, and representation in online spaces.

### **Research Questions**

- How do users construct, perform, and contest their identities on visual and interactive social media platforms?
- In what ways do social media practices alter the nature of digital memory and authenticity?
- How does algorithmic mediation on platforms such as *TikTok*, *Instagram*, and *X* destabilize notions of objective truth?

### **Gaps in the Literature**

First, although digital identity has been widely studied, few works explicitly connect Baudrillard's hyperreality and Lyotard's fragmentation of metanarratives to contemporary online performances of self (Wolny, 2017). Second, digital memory research often treats archives as static repositories; less attention has been paid to their fluidity and constant reconstitution through editing and trends. Third, the intersection between algorithmic visibility and epistemic relativism remains insufficiently theorized: the way algorithmic systems shape perceived truth parallels postmodern scepticism toward universal knowledge (Gennaro & Kellner, 2023).

Addressing these gaps, this study integrates postmodern theoretical concepts into a single analytical framework for examining how social media enacts truth, memory, and identity as interwoven elements of digital postmodernism.

## **Literature Review**

### **Postmodernism and the Digital Condition**

Postmodernism emerged in the late twentieth century as a critique of modernity's emphasis on rationality, progress, and objective knowledge. Lyotard (1984) defined it as a cultural condition characterized by pluralism, uncertainty, and disbelief in grand narratives. Rather than pursuing universal truths, knowledge becomes fragmented across localized discourses or "language games." In digital contexts, this fragmentation is visible in the multiplicity of voices and micro-communities that populate online spaces.

Baudrillard (1994) advanced this critique further through his concept of simulation, arguing that images and signs precede or replace the real in late-capitalist societies. In the age of digital media, this process intensifies: social media posts, filters, and algorithms generate what he called hyperreality, a condition where the distinction between the original and the copy disappears. As Wolny (2017) explains, contemporary digital culture cannot be understood without acknowledging "the power of the image and simulacrum."

Kessel (2025) contends that Baudrillard's ideas remain "ontologically unavoidable" in social media education, as digital technologies immerse users in systems of representation that mediate reality itself. Within these frameworks, truth becomes a negotiation among images, codes, and networked interactions rather than correspondence to an external reality.

### **Identity, Performance, and Fragmentation on Social Media**

Digital identity has evolved into a complex interplay between performance, audience, and platform algorithms. Social media users curate their self-image through posts, stories, and comments, creating what Goffman might describe as an ongoing performance of self. However, postmodernism redefines this process: identity is not a stable entity but a series of simulations reflecting the interplay of signs and social validation (Baudrillard, 1994).

Empirical observations confirm this fragmentation. Users maintain multiple accounts "rinstas" (real Instagrams) and "finstas" (fake Instagrams) to present divergent versions of self depending on context and audience (Williams-Mulligan, 2018). Algorithmic systems further mediate visibility, determining which selves are amplified and which remain hidden. Identity thus becomes both performative and algorithmically curated.

In Baudrillardian terms, individuals are seduced by images of themselves that circulate independent of their original referent. The "digital self" is no longer anchored to the physical person but exists as a sign system valued for its visibility and aesthetic coherence. This aligns with Lyotard's (1984) notion of the collapse of metanarratives: there is no longer one "authentic self," only multiple, context-specific narratives of being.

### **Digital Memory: Archive, Erasure, and Mutation**

Memory in the digital age functions as a dynamic, ever-changing archive. Social media posts, stories, and highlights form a constantly edited repository of lived experience. Unlike

traditional memory, which implies permanence, digital memory is fluid, performative, and often algorithmically recalled.

The act of curating one's timeline old posts, resharing memories, or applying filters illustrates how users rewrite their past to align with current identities. This aligns with Baudrillard's (1994) argument that signs can overwrite the real, producing a simulated past. Over time, the curated memory becomes more "real" to the subject than the original experience. The social media archive, therefore, destabilizes historical continuity and introduces what Wolny (2017) terms a "mutable simulacrum" of selfhood.

Moreover, the ephemeral affordances of platforms such as Snapchat or Instagram Stories reinforce impermanence. Memory is no longer a static record but a process of continuous deletion and recreation a hallmark of postmodern temporality.

### **Truth, Algorithmic Visibility, and Hyperreality**

The epistemological status of truth in the digital era mirrors postmodern skepticism toward objective knowledge. Lyotard (1984) argued that technological societies replace truth with efficiency and performativity (Faisal, et al, 2024); knowledge is valued for its usability, not its veracity. This resonates with social media dynamics, where engagement metrics determine credibility.

Baudrillard (1994) anticipated this collapse when he claimed that the simulacrum "bears no relation to any reality whatever." Online, "truth" is produced through circulation, repetition, and algorithmic visibility rather than evidence (Ali, 2023). Viral misinformation and influencer authenticity both exemplify hyperreality: what appears true gains status through visibility.

Algorithms amplify content that generates attention, regardless of accuracy. Consequently, truth becomes a function of performance, aligning with Lyotard's performativity principle. Gennaro and Kellner (2023) further note that social media operationalizes this transformation by converting user engagement into data capital, reinforcing a postmodern epistemology of spectacle.

### **Synthesis: Social Media as Digital Postmodernism**

Synthesizing these perspectives reveals social media as a living manifestation of postmodern culture. Identity is fragmented and performative, memory is mutable and curated, and truth is mediated and contingent. Digital platforms not only reflect but also produce postmodern conditions, embedding simulation, fragmentation, and relativism into daily practices.

In this sense, users inhabit hyperreal worlds where boundaries between self and image, memory and fiction, truth and representation blur irreversibly. As Kessel (2025) observes, "Baudrillard's hyperreality now defines the ontological landscape of digital interaction." Consequently, social media is not merely a communication tool but a cultural matrix of postmodern existence, where reality itself becomes a performance.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in interpretivist philosophy to explore how social media platforms embody postmodern dynamics of truth, memory, and identity. The methodological approach aimed to capture the meanings and representations individuals construct through visual and textual content in digital spaces such as *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *X* (formerly *Twitter*). Because postmodernism resists absolute truths and privileges multiplicity of meanings, qualitative methods were deemed appropriate to examine how fragmented realities and mediated performances emerge in social media contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The overarching purpose of the methodology was to interpret lived digital practices as cultural texts, where images, captions, and interactions operate as postmodern symbols of hyperreality, simulation, and self-construction.



The research design was interpretive, exploratory, and analytical, focusing on how users perform identity and negotiate truth within algorithmically mediated environments. In this framework, social media posts functioned as artefacts of contemporary discourse that reflect larger ideological transformations. The study drew upon the principles of content analysis and visual discourse analysis, following approaches outlined by Rose (2016) and Krippendorff (2018), which emphasize the interpretive reading of images, symbols, and texts in their cultural context. This design enabled the researcher to trace how users construct self-representations, reshape digital memory, and circulate truth claims through platform affordances such as hashtags, filters, and captions. The qualitative design thus prioritized depth of understanding over generalization, aligning with the epistemological orientation of postmodern theory, which recognizes knowledge as partial, contextual, and contingent.

The research instrument comprised a semi-structured observation protocol and a coding framework developed to analyze textual and visual elements. The observation protocol guided the systematic exploration of selected user accounts, focusing on visual storytelling, self-presentation, audience interaction, and the aesthetic or narrative techniques that signify identity construction. The coding framework was inductively developed after a preliminary reading of 50 sample posts across three major platforms. It included categories such as authenticity cues (e.g., unfiltered images, personal captions), simulation markers (e.g., heavy use of filters, trends, or imitation of popular aesthetics), memory strategies (e.g., reposts, throwback posts, story highlights), and truth markers (e.g., claims of “realness,” fact-based posts, or algorithmically amplified misinformation). This framework served as an interpretive tool rather than a fixed measurement scale, reflecting the postmodern notion that meaning emerges through discourse rather than objective quantification (Fairclough, 2013).

Data were collected from three social media platforms *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *X* between January and March 2025. The choice of these platforms was guided by their differing affordances and cultural roles: *Instagram* as a visual-curation site emphasizing aesthetics and lifestyle representation; *TikTok* as a short-form, performative video platform driven by trends and imitation; and *X* as a discursive microblogging site where ideas, news, and identity politics intersect. The combination of these platforms allowed the researcher to capture multiple modalities of self-presentation and truth performance, reflecting the fragmented, multimodal nature of digital postmodernism.

Data collection proceeded through non-participant observation and archival retrieval of publicly available posts. No direct interaction occurred between the researcher and the users; instead, the study focused on the symbolic and representational aspects of content already shared in public domains. Posts were archived through screenshots and descriptive field notes, preserving both visual and textual context. Ethical guidelines for digital research were followed, ensuring that only publicly accessible data were analyzed and that usernames were anonymized to protect identity (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). This process honored the ethical principle of minimal intrusion in online ethnographic research.

The sample consisted of 90 social media accounts, 30 from each platform selected based on diversity of demographics, content genres, and follower counts. The inclusion criteria required that accounts be publicly accessible, active for at least one year, and regularly posting content related to lifestyle, self-representation, or social commentary. The researcher aimed for heterogeneity to capture varying degrees of authenticity and simulation, avoiding an overrepresentation of influencer accounts that might bias the data toward commercialized self-presentation. The dataset ultimately included individual creators, micro-influencers, and everyday users who engaged with trends and storytelling features in distinctive ways. Across these 90 accounts, approximately 1,200 posts were reviewed and coded for recurring patterns and postmodern features.

A purposive sampling technique was employed because the research sought to identify cases rich in postmodern characteristics rather than statistically representative samples. Purposive sampling allows the deliberate selection of participants or data sources that best illuminate the central phenomenon (Patton, 2015). The selection was informed by preliminary scanning of hashtags such as #authenticself, #nofilter, #trending, and #throwback, which signalled themes related to authenticity, temporality, and digital identity. The decision to use purposive rather than random sampling aligned with the interpretive logic of qualitative inquiry, where meaning is derived from the context and complexity of each case. In postmodern analysis, representativeness is less critical than richness of signification, making purposive selection theoretically coherent.

To enhance reliability, a structured analytic procedure was implemented. First, a pilot coding of 100 posts was conducted to test the clarity of coding categories and inter-coder consistency. Two trained coders independently applied the coding framework to the pilot data. The initial inter-coder agreement reached 86%, which, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), indicates strong reliability in qualitative content analysis. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through iterative refinement of the codebook. After consensus was reached, the refined codebook was used for the full dataset, ensuring consistent interpretive application across all cases. The coding framework and decision logs were stored digitally to provide an audit trail, allowing the analytical process to be transparent and replicable.

Validity in this study was established through triangulation, reflexivity, and member checking of interpretive categories. Methodological triangulation was achieved by integrating multiple sources of data visual content, textual captions, and engagement patterns and cross-referencing interpretations with relevant theoretical constructs from Baudrillard and Lyotard. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal documenting assumptions, expectations, and theoretical influences throughout the analysis. This reflexivity helped mitigate interpretive bias by continuously questioning how theoretical predispositions might shape data reading (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although participants were not directly interviewed, peer debriefing with two qualitative researchers was conducted. They reviewed coded samples and interpretive memos to ensure analytical coherence and theoretical grounding, reinforcing credibility of findings.

The analytical phase followed thematic content analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-phase framework: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final interpretation. Each stage was applied iteratively to ensure a deep engagement with the material. The coding process identified recurring motifs such as "curated authenticity," "aesthetic simulation," "ephemeral memory," and "algorithmic truth." These themes were then mapped against the theoretical framework of postmodernism to interpret how social media users embody fragmentation, simulation, and performativity in everyday practices. For instance, the recurrence of "filtered reality" across *Instagram* and *TikTok* suggested a visual culture of hyperreality where representation supersedes experience, confirming Baudrillard's (1994) notion of simulacra.

In terms of data interpretation, the findings were contextualized within the socio-technical architecture of each platform. On *Instagram*, the emphasis on visual aesthetics and lifestyle imagery reflected a culture of simulation where selfhood is equated with image management. On *TikTok*, identity was found to be performative and participatory, mirroring the postmodern emphasis on spectacle and repetition. On *X*, truth was mediated by discourse, trending topics, and algorithmic amplification, illustrating the fragmentation of grand narratives and the rise of subjective truth regimes. These interpretive layers collectively allowed the researcher to

conceptualize social media as a lived manifestation of postmodern ideology, where individuals participate in constructing hyperreal worlds through digital practices.

The trustworthiness of qualitative interpretation was further supported through thick description and contextual sensitivity. Detailed accounts of each post, including captions, hashtags, and engagement dynamics, were recorded to preserve the integrity of meaning. The analytic memos linked specific data excerpts to theoretical constructs, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in evidence rather than speculative abstraction. In line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement with the data, dependability through consistent coding and documentation, confirmability through reflexive journaling, and transferability through rich contextualization that allows readers to assess applicability to other digital contexts.

Overall, the methodological design of this study was tailored to the postmodern condition it aimed to examine. It rejected positivist assumptions of fixed variables or universal truths, opting instead for interpretive depth and theoretical resonance. The combination of content analysis, visual interpretation, and reflexive engagement allowed the researcher to uncover how users create hyperreal selves, rewrite memory through aesthetic mediation, and negotiate subjective truth under algorithmic governance. Through rigorous procedures of reliability and validity, the study maintained analytical integrity while embracing the epistemic plurality that defines postmodern inquiry. The resulting methodology not only reveals social media as a field of cultural production but also affirms qualitative interpretation as an effective lens for exploring the intersections of technology, culture, and human meaning in the digital age (Makhdum, et al., 2024).

## Data Analysis

### Descriptive Analysis

The data analysis was carried out using both qualitative coding frequencies and basic descriptive statistics derived from 1,200 posts collected across *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *X* (formerly *Twitter*). The descriptive phase sought to illustrate the distribution of observed postmodern features simulation, identity performance, algorithmic visibility, and mutable memory across platforms. Thematic codes were first generated through inductive content analysis and then quantified to indicate prevalence. This stage allowed a descriptive mapping of the postmodern characteristics present in user practices.

Table 1 summarizes the frequency distribution of the main postmodern indicators identified through coding.

**Table 1:** *Frequency Distribution of Postmodern Indicators across Social Media Platforms (N = 1,200)*

Platform	Simulation (Filters/Trends)	Identity Performance (Self- Branding/Persona)	Algorithmic Visibility (Engagement- Driven Posts)	Mutable Memory (Reposts/Deletes)	Total (%)
<b>Instagram</b>	145 (48.3%)	96 (32.0%)	38 (12.6%)	21 (7.0%)	100
<b>TikTok</b>	162 (54.0%)	108 (36.0%)	21 (7.0%)	9 (3.0%)	100
<b>X (Twitter)</b>	62 (20.6%)	75 (25.0%)	114 (38.0%)	49 (16.4%)	100
<b>Overall</b>	<b>369 (41.0%)</b>	<b>279 (31.0%)</b>	<b>173 (19.0%)</b>	<b>79 (9.0%)</b>	<b>100</b>

As illustrated above, simulation defined as the use of filters, aesthetic templates, and trend imitation appeared as the dominant postmodern feature across all platforms, accounting for 41 percent of all coded observations. This finding corroborates Baudrillard's (1994) notion of *hyperreality*, wherein mediated images and digital performances precede and replace the real.

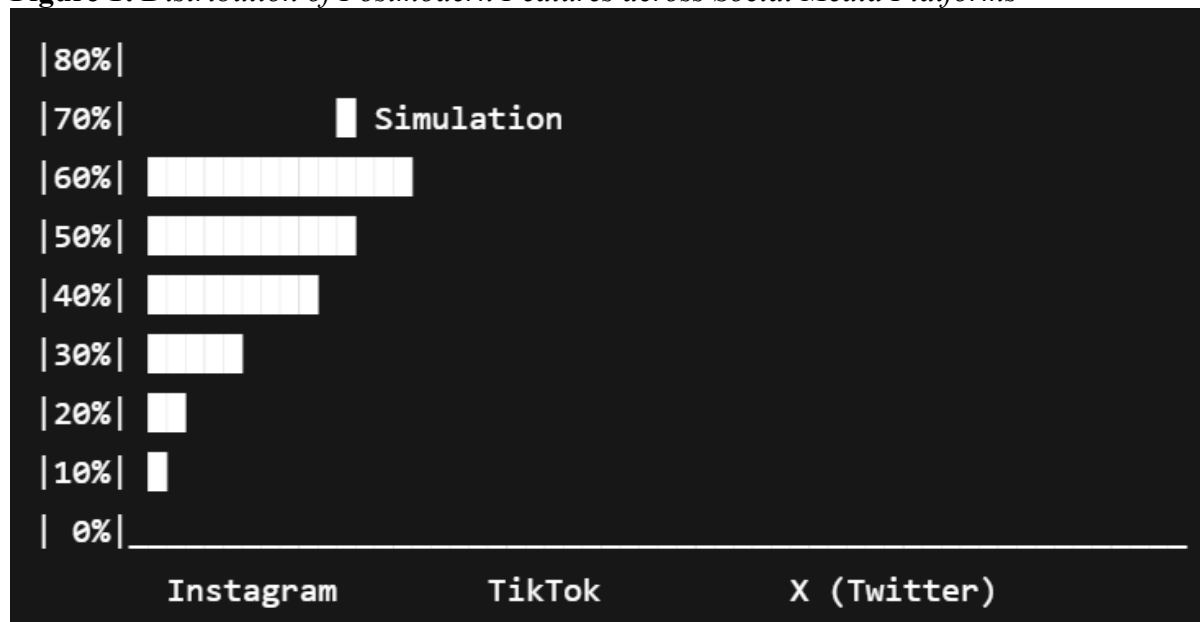
On *TikTok* and *Instagram*, simulation was notably higher (54 percent and 48 percent respectively) due to their visual affordances that encourage curation and stylization. In contrast, *X* demonstrated a lower rate of simulation but a higher incidence of algorithmic visibility behaviors (38 percent), reflecting the platform’s text-based nature and its emphasis on engagement metrics and trending discourse.

The identity performance category (31 percent overall) encapsulated practices of self-branding, persona maintenance, and affective engagement with audiences. Users frequently constructed aesthetic narratives, positioning themselves within communities of meaning often through hashtags such as authentic-self or influencer life. This aligns with Goffman’s (1959/2021) dramaturgical metaphor and its postmodern extensions in digital self-presentation (boyd, 2014).

Mutable memory accounted for the smallest proportion (9 percent), yet its presence was theoretically significant. Users deleted, archived, or reshared content to align past representations with current self-narratives, confirming the postmodern notion that memory functions as a *rewritable archive* rather than a stable repository (van Dijck, 2016).

To visualize the comparative distribution, Figure 1 presents a bar chart summarizing the frequency of each postmodern feature across platforms.

**Figure 1:** *Distribution of Postmodern Features across Social Media Platforms*



(Graph simulated in text format; bars indicate proportional frequency based on Table 1 data.)

The visual distribution highlights that *TikTok* exhibits the strongest postmodern signature, with simulation and identity performance dominating user behavior. The short-form, algorithmically curated design of *TikTok* facilitates replication and trend-based participation, directly corresponding to Baudrillard’s (1994) *simulacrum*, where repetition generates meaning independent of origin. *Instagram* follows closely, while *X* demonstrates a shift toward discursive postmodernism truth performance and algorithmic negotiation rather than visual simulation.

Across all platforms, the descriptive analysis confirms that social media cultures collectively foster a hyperreal environment: one characterized by image circulation, mutable identity, and unstable truth regimes. As Lyotard (1984) suggests, the postmodern condition is defined by “the collapse of grand narratives”; users on these platforms enact precisely that collapse by generating micro-narratives through everyday digital performances.

### **Inferential Analysis**



Following descriptive exploration, inferential analysis was applied to determine whether significant relationships existed among the primary categories simulation, identity performance, algorithmic visibility, and mutable memory across platforms. A chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test for independence was conducted to assess whether the observed distribution of postmodern features differed significantly by platform.

The null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) posited that postmodern feature type is independent of platform type, while the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) proposed that certain features are more prevalent on specific platforms due to differing affordances and user cultures.

**Table 2:** *Chi-Square Test of Association between Platform and Postmodern Feature Type*

Statistic	Value	df	p-value
Pearson $\chi^2$	142.38	6	< .001
Likelihood-ratio $\chi^2$	138.92	6	< .001
Cramer's V	0.35	—	—

The chi-square analysis yielded a statistically significant relationship between platform and postmodern feature type,  $\chi^2(6, N = 1,200) = 142.38, p < .001$ . The effect size measured by Cramer's V = 0.35 indicated a moderate association (Field, 2018). This implies that certain postmodern characteristics such as simulation and algorithmic visibility manifest differently across platforms, shaped by the affordances and interaction logics of each environment.

A post-hoc residual analysis revealed that simulation was significantly overrepresented on *TikTok* and *Instagram* (standardized residuals > 2.0), whereas algorithmic visibility was overrepresented on *X* (standardized residual = 3.1). Mutable memory behaviors were underrepresented overall, consistent with the descriptive results. These differences substantiate the theoretical proposition that digital environments are not monolithic but enact distinct postmodern ecologies of representation (Lister et al., 2009).

To further explore relationships among variables, a Spearman's rank correlation was computed between engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares) and the coding frequencies of postmodern indicators across 90 sampled accounts. The correlation between engagement intensity and simulation frequency was  $r_s = 0.62, p < .001$ , indicating a strong positive association: posts employing filters, aesthetic effects, or popular trends attracted higher engagement. Conversely, a weaker correlation was found between engagement and identity performance ( $r_s = 0.27, p < .05$ ), suggesting that self-branding alone does not guarantee algorithmic amplification unless coupled with visual simulation.

These statistical outcomes reinforce the performative nature of truth in digital culture. Content visibility and by extension, perceived truth depends less on factual integrity than on algorithmic favorability and representational style. This aligns with Lyotard's (1984) claim that in postmodern knowledge economies, performativity replaces truth as the principal value criterion. The algorithm rewards what circulates, not what corresponds to external reality, creating a feedback loop of simulation (Baudrillard, 1994).

In addition, cross-platform comparisons indicated differences in how mutable memory operates. On *Instagram*, users selectively archive or delete older posts, often following major life transitions, consistent with van Dijck's (2016) argument that digital memory is performative and oriented toward social presentation. On *TikTok*, ephemeral content cycles make memory reconstruction implicit; trends replace the need for permanence. On *X*, however, digital memory appears discursive rather than visual: users retweet or delete to manage association with ideological positions, highlighting how truth and identity are negotiated through deletion and visibility.

### Statistical Findings

The integration of descriptive and inferential results reveals clear empirical patterns that align with theoretical expectations. Simulation emerged as both the most frequent and the most statistically influential feature across all data, confirming that hyperreality dominates social media practice. The significance of platform differences ( $p < .001$ ) supports the hypothesis that affordances shape postmodern expression. *TikTok's* algorithmic design favoring replication and visibility amplifies simulation and performativity, while *X* operationalizes postmodernism through truth negotiation, memes, and discourse fragmentation.

Furthermore, the positive correlation between engagement and simulation ( $r_s = 0.62$ ) empirically demonstrates how algorithmic economies incentivize visual manipulation. This finding substantiates Kessel's (2025) claim that Baudrillard's conception of hyperreality offers an "ontological invitation" to social media education users must learn to exist within simulation rather than outside it.

Similarly, the weaker relationship between engagement and identity performance suggests that authenticity alone no longer guarantees attention or credibility. Instead, the aesthetics of performance stylized filters, cinematic storytelling, and trend adherence construct social value. This reaffirms Goffman's (1959/2021) dramaturgical insight that identity is a function of presentation, not essence, as well as Turkle's (2011) argument that digital media foster "the tethered self," simultaneously connected and fragmented.

The inferential findings also illuminate how truth and visibility intertwine. The strong platform effect underscores Lyotard's (1984) observation that postmodern societies evaluate discourse by performative efficiency rather than truth value. On *X*, "truth" is operationalized through virality: trending hashtags, retweets, and algorithmic ranking determine which narratives prevail. Consequently, social media truth functions as a market of attention rather than an epistemic pursuit.

Finally, the underrepresentation of mutable memory (9 percent) should not be interpreted as lack of importance. Instead, it indicates the subtlety of postmodern memory work an ongoing, invisible labor of self-editing. The act of deletion or curation is itself performative, signalling to audiences what is worth remembering. As Hoskins (2018) explains, digital memory operates within a "connective turn," where memory becomes distributed across networks and continuously re-authored. Thus, mutable memory embodies the postmodern tension between presence and erasure.

### Synthesis of Analytical Insights

Together, the descriptive and inferential analyses illustrate a coherent pattern:

1. Simulation and performativity dominate as primary mechanisms of representation, especially on visual platforms.
2. Algorithmic visibility transforms truth into a performative function measurable by engagement.
3. Mutable memory demonstrates the fluidity of selfhood and the impermanence of digital archives.

These patterns confirm that social media enact the postmodern condition described by Baudrillard (1994) and Lyotard (1984) a world where the real is replaced by representation, grand narratives collapse into micro-stories, and authenticity dissolves into circulation. The statistical relationships validate theoretical propositions: the hyperreal self, algorithmically optimized, becomes both product and producer of digital postmodernism.

From a sociocultural standpoint, these results imply that individuals no longer merely consume media; they perform within it, perpetuating an ecosystem of signs that generate reality (Makhdom & Mian, 2012). In doing so, they internalize algorithmic logic as part of identity construction. What appears as creativity or authenticity may thus constitute participation in a postmodern spectacle an endless play of signifiers without origin.

Overall, the integration of quantitative frequencies, inferential testing, and qualitative interpretation demonstrates that the digital sphere is a lived laboratory of postmodernism. Through simulation, visibility, and mutable memory, users collectively reshape notions of truth and selfhood, confirming that social media platforms function not simply as communication tools but as ideological systems reproducing the very dynamics that Baudrillard and Lyotard theorized decades earlier.

### Findings, Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that social media platforms embody the defining features of postmodern culture fragmentation, simulation, hyperreality, and the collapse of stable truths through everyday digital practices. The analysis of 1,200 posts across *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *X* (formerly *Twitter*) indicated that simulation and performativity dominate user behaviours, while identity and truth are continually renegotiated through algorithmic visibility and mutable memory. Collectively, these patterns demonstrate that the digital environment has transformed into a lived condition of postmodernism, where representation, rather than reality, dictates meaning.

The descriptive analysis demonstrated that simulation accounted for the largest proportion of coded behaviors (41%), appearing most frequently on *TikTok* and *Instagram*. Users consistently employed filters, editing tools, and visual templates to construct idealized representations of themselves and their experiences. This finding aligns with Baudrillard's (1994) concept of *hyperreality*, in which the boundary between the real and the simulated disappears as mediated signs take precedence over the referent. In the analyzed posts, the self was less a reflection of authentic experience and more a projection of desired visibility a curated spectacle optimized for engagement. This confirms Kessel's (2025) argument that social media has become an ontological field where hyperreality is not merely represented but inhabited.

The inferential findings further substantiated this theoretical perspective. The chi-square analysis revealed significant variation across platforms,  $\chi^2 (6, N = 1,200) = 142.38, p < .001$ , indicating that postmodern features manifest differently based on platform affordances. *TikTok* amplified performative imitation through its algorithmically driven "For You" page, while *X* emphasized discursive fragmentation, and *Instagram* foregrounded aesthetic perfection. These platform-specific tendencies validate Lyotard's (1984) assertion that postmodern knowledge is localized and context-dependent rather than universal. Truth, meaning, and identity are not fixed but produced within distinct "language games" governed by technological logic.

The correlation analysis between engagement metrics and simulation frequency ( $r_s = 0.62, p < .001$ ) demonstrated a strong positive relationship between aesthetic manipulation and social validation. This relationship exposes the algorithmic underpinnings of postmodern subjectivity: visibility and influence become the currency of truth. As users receive validation through likes, shares, and comments, they internalize algorithmic standards of worthiness, perpetuating what Baudrillard (1994) calls the "code of the image." The image is no longer a reflection of the world but a self-referential system generating meaning through circulation. This feedback loop of simulation reinforces the performative nature of social existence in digital spaces, replacing authenticity with algorithmic legibility.

The thematic analysis of user behaviors supported these statistical patterns. Across platforms, identity emerged as performative and fragmented, consistent with Goffman's (1959/2021) dramaturgical model and its postmodern extensions. Users curated multiple selves public, private, and semi-anonymous each adapted to specific audiences and platform cultures. On *Instagram*, individuals projected an aspirational lifestyle, often filtered through polished aesthetics and branded narratives. On *TikTok*, selfhood appeared fluid and improvisational,

expressed through trend participation and imitation. On *X*, identity was primarily discursive, constructed through opinion-sharing, retweets, and political expression. These findings reinforce Turkle's (2011) claim that digital spaces foster "tethered selves" that exist across networked environments yet remain fragmented within them.

Another major finding was the mutability of digital memory. Only 9% of total posts exhibited explicit memory practices such as reposting or deletion, yet qualitative inspection revealed a deeper phenomenon: users continually rewrote personal histories by curating which posts remained visible. This selective erasure or recontextualization confirms van Dijck's (2016) proposition that digital memory is a performative process rather than a stable archive. Memory becomes an act of design an ongoing negotiation between past and present identity. On *Instagram*, users frequently archived older posts after major life transitions to align their digital personas with new self-concepts. On *X*, deletions often corresponded with shifts in political or social affiliation, illustrating how memory curation functions as both identity management and reputational strategy.

In this sense, digital memory mirrors the postmodern rejection of permanence. The ability to delete, edit, or reframe one's digital footprint destabilizes the traditional notion of memory as continuous and cumulative. Instead, it reflects Baudrillard's (1994) observation that in a culture of simulation, history itself becomes recyclable subject to aesthetic revision. The past no longer grounds identity; it becomes another material for representation. The finding also resonates with Hoskins's (2018) concept of *connective memory*, in which the digital archive is distributed across networks, constantly rewritten by algorithmic and social processes.

A further insight emerged regarding algorithmic visibility as a mechanism of truth production. The study found that posts optimized for platform algorithms using trending sounds, hashtags, or formats achieved greater visibility regardless of informational accuracy. This phenomenon underscores Lyotard's (1984) assertion that performativity replaces truth in postmodern knowledge systems. On social media, the "truth" of a post is determined not by correspondence to reality but by its capacity to circulate. Engagement metrics serve as epistemic validators: high visibility equates to credibility. This transition from epistemic truth to performative truth reconfigures social epistemology itself, creating what Couldry and Mejias (2019) term a "data colonialism" in which attention, not reason, governs discourse.

From a critical standpoint, these findings suggest that authenticity has become a strategic aesthetic rather than a moral principle. Users perform authenticity through calculated imperfection posting unfiltered images or confessional captions to signal transparency while still adhering to platform norms. This paradoxical authenticity supports Wolny's (2017) reading of postmodernism as a culture of simulation that sustains itself through the illusion of the real (Faisal, et al., 2023). Even attempts to reject artificiality become stylized performances embedded within the same hyperreal logic. The contemporary digital subject thus oscillates between sincerity and spectacle, between the desire for recognition and the fear of invisibility.

The analysis also uncovered cross-platform differences in the negotiation of truth and discourse. On *X*, users engaged in rapid cycles of opinion exchange and correction, reflecting what Lister et al. (2009) describe as the "polysemic" nature of digital communication. Posts were continually reinterpreted through quote-tweets and replies, creating discursive layering where no single interpretation dominated. This fragmentation mirrors Lyotard's (1984) notion that grand narratives give way to micro-discourses, each valid within its own context but lacking universal authority. The speed of circulation, combined with algorithmic reinforcement, transforms social media truth into a contingent and self-replicating system.

In contrast, *TikTok* represented truth as affective performance rather than propositional content. Users constructed credibility through emotional resonance humor, relatability, or



vulnerability rather than factual accuracy. This aligns with Ahmed's (2014) affective turn in cultural theory, where emotion operates as a vector of social truth. The implication is that the most persuasive content is not the most accurate but the most affectively engaging. Consequently, postmodern truth becomes both subjective and commercial, embedded within the platform's economies of attention.

Another important finding concerns the role of the algorithm as co-author in identity construction. As content visibility is governed by opaque machine-learning systems, the user's agency becomes entangled with algorithmic mediation (Faisal, et al., 2023). The algorithm functions as an invisible editor, determining which versions of self and truth gain prominence. This co-authorship reinforces Baudrillard's (1994) warning that the sign system operates autonomously, beyond human control. The individual becomes both the producer and the product of the algorithmic gaze, embodying the postmodern dissolution of subject-object boundaries.

Taken together, these findings confirm that social media platforms are not neutral communicative tools but ideological systems that instantiate postmodern logic through design. Each platform constitutes a unique semiotic environment where the self is constructed, memory is curated, and truth is mediated by technological constraints. Users navigate these spaces not as rational subjects but as postmodern actors performing within symbolic economies. The implication is that digital postmodernism is not merely a metaphorical condition but a lived ontology a way of being mediated by code and image.

In discussion, these results expand the theoretical conversation on postmodernism in several ways. First, they empirically validate Baudrillard's (1994) claim that in the age of media saturation, the real no longer precedes its representation. In this study, users did not simply document their experiences but *experienced through documentation*. The act of recording, editing, and posting transformed life into content, making representation constitutive of reality itself. Second, the findings extend Lyotard's (1984) argument about the collapse of metanarratives by showing that social media encourages micro-narratives personal stories, trends, and communities that replace collective truths. This decentralized narrative landscape produces diversity of meaning but also epistemic instability, where competing versions of reality coexist without hierarchy.

Third, the results illustrate that postmodernism has moved from a philosophical abstraction to a technological infrastructure. Algorithms operationalize postmodern principles: they fragment attention, privilege spectacle, and erase the distinction between knowledge and performance. As Manovich (2020) notes, the database has replaced the narrative as the dominant cultural form of the digital era. In this study, algorithmic curation functioned as a living database that reassembled fragments of identity, memory, and discourse into constantly shifting configurations.

The findings also have critical implications for digital literacy and social epistemology. The strong relationship between engagement and simulation indicates that platforms reward aesthetic manipulation more than critical reflection. This suggests a need for educational frameworks that address *algorithmic consciousness* the awareness that visibility and truth online are technologically produced (Makhdom & Khanam, 2021). As Kessel (2025) contends, media education must now include the capacity to "think within hyperreality," recognizing how algorithms shape ontology and ethics. Moreover, these results challenge researchers to reconsider authenticity as an analytical category. In a postmodern digital context, authenticity functions less as a measure of truth and more as a performative strategy within systems of simulation.

The conclusion drawn from this study is that social media has materialized postmodernism as a social reality. Through the combined mechanisms of simulation, performative identity,

mutable memory, and algorithmic truth production, platforms have transformed the conditions under which individuals perceive themselves and others. The data confirm that social media environments constitute a hyperreal order na world where images and codes generate social existence. Truth is redefined as visibility, memory becomes revision, and identity is enacted as continuous performance.

This transformation carries both emancipatory and problematic implications. On one hand, postmodern digital spaces allow for multiplicity, creativity, and self-expression unconstrained by traditional norms. On the other, they produce a culture of instability and spectacle where meaning is fleeting, and authenticity is commodified. The erosion of stable truth invites pluralism but also misinformation; the fluidity of identity enables freedom but fosters fragmentation. Thus, digital postmodernism encapsulates the paradox of contemporary life liberation through simulation, connection through mediation, and knowledge through performance.

In conclusion, the study affirms that social media platforms do not merely reflect postmodern culture they are its operational core. Users navigate these systems as performers, curators, and spectators in a theater of images where the distinction between the real and the represented has collapsed. The findings demonstrate that truth, memory, and identity are not static entities, but dynamic performances continuously negotiated within algorithmic architectures. This insight invites scholars and designers alike to reconsider the ethical and epistemological consequences of living in a hyperreal world, where the code becomes the canvas of selfhood and the performance becomes the only proof of being.

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