Facebook as the Hyperreal

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Abstract

If Facebook is not the first page you type into your browser when online, you may find it difficult to understand the concept of hyperreality through Facebook that I aim to explain in this paper. Fortunately for the purpose of this paper, Facebook does play a large role in your time online or at least you know of someone who does. Facebook is an online social networking service founded in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and a group of his college friends. Many of use are familiar with Facebook, and anyone over the age of 13 can register to make an account. Once registered, users create personal profiles, add other users as friends, upload images and picture albums, exchange messages, and receive notifications of activity conducted by their Facebook friends. Facebook currently has over one billion active users, which all but 8.7%, of them represent real users. Facebook allows users to join common interest groups, create events, and associate themselves with pages by clicking the like button or "following" the page. Facebook has clearly provided a place for an online and virtual community to thrive.

Social insecurities even play a role on Facebook, as friends will experience feelings of rejection or exclusion if they have not been publically invited to an event or included in a tag. Friends reaffirm connections and publically establish connections through wall posts. Even your relationship status needs confirmation on Facebook, and many will have heard the phrase its not official, until its Facebook official more than once. Umberto Eco, in Travels in Hyperreality, introduces the idea of the fake or imitation appearing better or more satisfying that the actual original or the true. This is similar to the desire users experience for Facebook acknowledgment over the actual physical friendship and its meaning. Users even tend to feel their friendship belittled if they dont get posts or attention from their Facebook friends, regardless of the strength of their friendship in the physical world. Umberto Eco, further expands by stating that the unreal is offered as a real presence. [1] This is exactly what is seen on fake interactions and edited pictures circulated through Facebook. This seems to be acceptable because Facebook is not feigning your Friendships and life or even representing it, it is simulating it. As Jean Baudrillard highlighted in Simulacra

and Simulation, to feign is only to mask the difference between true and false and to represent is only to interpret and be a derivative version. What Facebook does is simulate our lives and connections, and it renders the same emotions, or more general symptoms, as real interactions do. [2]

Essentially Facebook allows enough activities to reflect ourselves online, and even further to negotiate our very own identity, and bridge the contexts of our many identities as employee, student, friend, team member, etc. Facebook groups range from categories including the workplace, school groups and school work, all forms of extracurricular activities, and pretty much anything that our brain can muster. It creates a place that we can reconcile and bring together in one common space many of the communities that we are a part of , and even to construct, maintain, and representvarious identities.[3] Users, and many do choose to, can of course confine themselves to a small role of only some participation and partial interaction, but as has been seen in studies and literature, and specifically in A Place Called Home: An Immigrant Adolescents Digital Literacy Practice by Cheryl A. McLean, users can move beyond thatto a strategic creation of a place called home. [3]

This paper aims to expand on concepts previously presented, and to delve further into the concept of Hyperrealism and the role it pays in the social networking site that we know as Facebook.

References

[1] U. Eco. *Travels in Hyper Reality: Essays.* A Harvest book. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986.

[2] J. Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation.* Body, in Theory: Histories. University of Michigan Press, 1994.

[3] Cheryl A. McLean. A space called home: An immigrant adolescent's digital literacy practices. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 54(1):13–22, 2010.