JEAN BAUDRILLAD'S HYPERREAL: ANALYSIS OF THEME IN YOASOBI'S SONG "IDOL"

Muhammad Aghni Ismatuloh
mai004@ummi.ac.id
Muhammadiyah University of Sukabumi

Abstract

Jean Baudrillard is one of many prominent thinkers of postmodernism. One of his notable ideas is the Hyperreal. In his book "Simulacra and Simulation," Baudrillard proposes the idea of something that transcends beyond the state of fake and reality, the Hyperreal. This concept can be found as a theme in the lyrics of a song titled "Idol" by Yoasobi. This paper aims to dissect the lyrics and find the implications of Baudrillard's concept of Hyperreal within the implicit and explicit meanings of the lyrics. The idol profession has gained significant prominence in the 21st century. The common perception is that they are selling 'fake identities' to their audience. The research objective is to examine how Baudrillard's Hyperreal is depicted in the song. The methodology employed for this study is a descriptive qualitative analysis of the lyrics. The key findings reveal that idol production can be understood as a staged process of simulation, wherein individuals are transformed into a hyperreality. The lyrics portray idols as being constructed from a certain idea, which transforms into something distinct. This study focuses on literature analysis, specifically exploring the theme presented in the song's lyrics and its connection to Jean Baudrillard's philosophy of postmodernism. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research, as it is confined to a single song and relies on the interpretation of the lyrics and theoretical concepts within the realm of literature study. The significance of this analysis lies in offering an alternative perspective to understand the idol profession, aiming to prevent harmful misconceptions. Baudrillard's theoretical framework of the Hyperreal allows the idea that idols have crossed the boundary of falsehood and authenticity and become 'real' in their sense.

Keywords: *Baudrillard; Hyperreal; Idol; Simulation; Yoasobi*

INTRODUCTION

Jean Baudrillard is one of the most prominent thinkers of the 21st century. His ideas renounced him as one of many influential figures of Postmodernism (Elva & Tang, 2021). His perspectives give new insights on how to view the relationship between people and the world and his notions, up to this day, are still referenced (Wikandaru, 2018). One among many of his notable works is *Simulacra and Simulation*. The book consists of Baudrillard's critiques of some concepts he theorized that exist in the postmodern era. It gave birth to a popular theory that probes the concept of reality and fabrication, which he named Hyperreal.

Baudrillard states in Simulacra and Simulation: "(*it is*) *the generation by models of a real without origins or reality: the Hyperreal*" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 1). It is a perfect concept to define what we refer to as "fake realities". Antony (Antony &Tramboo, 2020) simply explains this concept as something that allows the mingling of physical and virtual reality. The hyperreal is a product of 'simulating' a certain (first) reality through 'masking' the truth of another (second) reality which resulted in the third reality which Baudrillard called a Simulacrum -which bears no relation to any reality whatsoever. The concept can be identified with ease in today's society of technological convenience and especially consumerism specifically in the entertainment industry. This concept can be found in the 2023 global phenomenon of Idol which can be identified as a theme in the song Idol by Yoasobi.

Idol is a song by the Japanese duo Yoasobi which was released on April 12th, 2023. The original song which is in Japanese has dominated the music charts as it was listed as number 1 on the Billboard Japan Hot 100 for 8 straight weeks (Billboard Japan, 2023). The official English version was then released a few weeks later and it reached number 9 on the Billboard Global 200 Music Chart (Gostick, 2023). The impact resulted from being an opening song for an animated series titled *Oshi no Ko* and its parallel to a principal element that emphasizes the series, which is a story surrounding the entertainment industry and specifically a profession often referred to within it, as an Idol.

Japan is among many countries that thrive in the entertainment industries both locally and globally. One of the selling points of their entertainment is their culturally-rich music and performances. They are known to produce a successful profession called Idol. Patrick W. Galbraith wrote and edited a book with abundant information on the topic, titled 'Idol and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture', which he published in 2012. To understand the parallel between Baudrillard's concept of Hyperreal and Idol in the context of the entertainment industry, this paper will reference some of the ideas from Galbraith's book as he has offered one of the best academic sources to comprehend the term.

Galbraith defined the word Idols (plural of Idol) literally as: "*highly produced and promoted singers, models, and media personalities.*" (Galbraith, 2012, p. 2). In simple terms, idols are people who engage in the act of giving entertainment, mostly in the form of music performances. However, there is a deeper meaning to the term which holds a significant cultural and social context. They have become such figures whom their audiences look up to as something to be emotionally attached to -becoming the literal definition of an Idol, an object of worship. The key factor contributing to the success of an idol is the 'imagery' it needs to maintain–which is somehow indefinite and constantly evolving–to cater to its audience. Notices the words 'produced' (in Galbraith's definition), 'imagery', and 'maintained' are some of the keywords that can be drawn into a parallel of Baudrillard's Hyperreal.

Baudrillard explains in his book how something is processed into a Simulacrum -a simulation of reality. 4 stages are transformative as Baudrillard explains in his book. The 4 stages of the simulation are Reflection; of a certain 'reality' (a), Masking & perversion/alteration; of a 'reality' (b), Masking the absence; of reality (a), Pure Simulacrum; which bears no relation to any reality whatsoever. A new reality (c) (Baudrillard, 1981)

Baudrillard then gives an example of Disneyland being a simulacrum which is a perfect representation of a Hyperreal. Disneyland is a simulacrum, something that has gone through the stages of simulation as it is a 'copy' of civilization. The park was modeled after what exists in the real world which then they 'altered' by adding something new to it -a fantasy element- making it into a new reality. The illusion makes people believe that Disneyland is real in and of itself while it crosses the boundary of fakeness and reality. Hence, the hyperreal.

The concept of Baudrillard's hyperreal as a theme exists in many forms. One among them is through the proses which a song possesses in its lyrics. Hence, this paper will discern the theme of Baudrillard's hyperreal in Yoasobi's song, Idol by dissecting its lyrics. The idea of fake identity as a form of entertainment has been increasingly relevant in the 21st century. People consume such kinds of entertainment without a profound understanding of what they are. This lack of

awareness can cause many negative effects, one being 'harmful' fanaticism (Pan, 2022). Therefore, this paper emphasizes education by showing the concept of Hyperreal which in simple terms general public will call a false reality through the object of the analysis in this paper.

There has not been any previous academic study on the song Idol by Yoasobi since it is relatively new. However, there are many studies on the topic of Baudrillard's Hyperreal in the field of literature. Dalimu (2020) studied the concept of Hyperreal in a film in her study "*The Portrayal and the Effects of Hyperreality in Ready Player One Movie by Steven Spielberg (The Application of Jean Baudrillard's Theory)"*. Dalimu discussed the concept of the hyperreal and its relation to technology as in the film, there is a virtual world that serves as another reality that is created by technology. There was a study done by Sulaiman(2020) which researched the underlying impact of Baudrillard's Hyperreal on an individual on a psychological and personal level. In his study "*Simulacra and Hyperreality in Novel Aku Lupa Bahwa Aku Perempuan by Ihsan Abdul Qudus: Perspective Jean Baudrillard*". Sulaiman highlights that hyperreality causes a consumeristic behavior of life in an individual on a personal level which ultimately changes the collective society as a whole through that characterization. Although not exactly in the field of Literature, there is one other previous study that might hold significant relevance to this paper. Christian (2021) in her study of social science titled "*' Instagramable': Simulation, Simulacra and Hyperreality on Instagram Post"* discussed how the 'Instagramable' phenomenon is an example of hyperreality within a social context. She concludes that the pictures that people post on their Instagram have gone through the stages of simulation, making them a simulacrum, in which it is hyperreal or 'false reality' as a result of creation.

Themea in a song is one of many important intrinsic factors that are being studied in Literature. The lyrics on Idol by Yoasobi give almost a literal and figurative explanation of Baudrillard's hyperreal as its narrative theme. The prose in the lyrics encapsulates the messages it tries to convey. It entails a philosophical meaning to the profession of Idol. There has not been a study that dives into that

specific, hence this research is conducted to explain more about the major theme the song has within the explicit and implicit meanings within the lyrics.

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze and provide an answer to the formulation of the problem. The paper will focus on the lyrics (prose) of the song "Idol" by Yoasobi as the data for the analysis. Using the text from the lyrics, a study of its theme will be conducted through the segmentation of sub-topics on the subject, which is Baudrillard's hyperreal.

The primary source, the text of the lyrics of the song, will be obtained through online findings. Later, it will be presented in lines that hold significance to the subjects. The theory on the subject of Hyperreal is taken from Baudrillard's book "Simulacra and Simulation." Some other sources to support the subject theory are also being referenced, such as Galbraith and other related sources. In the end, the conclusion will be drawn through a thorough analysis of the data.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

"Ideal" Image of an Idol Depicted in the Lyrics of Yoasobi's Idol

One thing to note when speaking about the profession of an Idol is their image. Galbraith states that the image of an idol "*gathers and focuses desires, and become a commodity in and of itself"* (Galbraith, 2012, p. 185). While Idols sell what they are associated with (music, dance performance, photographs, etc), their main selling point is their image which makes it so important. Therefore, an "ideal" image of an idol exists in the entertainment industry. This image and its qualities are depicted in the lyrics of Idol by Yoasobi.

> "***Complete*** *and* ***perfect***
> *All you say is a bunch of lies*
> *Dear miss* ***genius idol****, unmatched*
> (*You're my* ***savior****, you're my* ***saving grace***)"
>
> -half of the Interlude of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

The interlude provides 3 lines that depict the 'ideal' image of an Idol. The line '***complete and perfect***' refers to the ability that an idol should possess in which if possessed by someone, they will be considered a '***genius idol***' as stated in the

third line above. Idol is a profession in the entertainment industry, specifically music. They often possess the ability to sing, perform dancing and some even do acting in television or other visual media. As subjective as the word is, a 'perfect' idol is considered to be multitalented in that area of expertise. One thing to note is that this image is generated by their audience, fans as the lyric on the fourth line "***You're my savior, you're my saving grace***" comes from the perspective of the fans in the form of backing vocals (not sung by the singer).

"*So unconcerned, although you **brightly glow***"

-First line of Verse 2 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

A single line in verse 2 of the song depicts another quality that exists in an image of an idol, "...***brightly glow***". This refers to the invisible charm an idol has which is perceived by fans.

"*That emotion melts all hearts, all eyes on you*
*Cause you are **perfect**, **the most ultimate idol***
***Unrivalled**, will not appear again*
*It's **the brightest star** reborn, yes, indeed*"

-First half of Chorus 1 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

The first half of the first Chorus depicts more of the image. The second line repeats what has been said in the interlude about Idol being something of a "*perfect*", before then states it as "*most ultimate...*", denoting again an ideal image of an idol. The line that consists of "*the brightest star"* supports the earlier line in the 2nd verse about the depiction of an Idol as something that 'brightly glow'.

"*That emotion seized all hearts worshipping you*
Yes, indeed
*So **strong**, it's you, **unrivalled** idol*
There cannot be weaknesses to find
*The **brightest star** is residing in you"*

-First half of Chorus 2 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

Chorus 2 adds a new image of an ideal idol with the word "*strong...*", referring to the charisma an idol possesses which ables to "...*seized all hearts...*" and makes

them 'worship' the idol. Lastly, the words '*unrivall'* and '*brightest star'* are once again repeated for emphasis.

Galbraith points out the importance of the image of an idol to the fans as something that helps them understand the idol and get a sense of intimacy from them (Galbraith, 2012). As explained before, images are an idol's main commodity or a selling point. Some are taking this subject and approaching it through the context of capitalism and specifically consumerism. As an example, Lvyin Zhuang discussed the phenomenon of "the idol effect" in the economy Zhuang states that Idols attract the public's attention through their positives attributes that represent both internal and external images which stimulate fans to show consumerist behaviors by purchasing any products which their idols love (Zhuang, 2019). Disregarding its purposes, it is worth noting that the image of an idol is subjectively real and can not be denied.

The data shown above can certainly be identified as two certain stages of simulation of Baudrillard's concept. Those are simultaneously the 1st and the 4th stages of simulation; both a reflection and a simulacrum. Images of idols being associated with all the positivity (*complete, perfect, bright, genius*) are a reflection of a reality which is, an 'ideal' idol.

> 1st Stage of Simulation: Reflection of an'Ideal Idol'
> (Reality a = Positive attributes, images of an 'Ideal idol'.)

At the same time, those positive attributes (on the data) are also somewhat a blueprint to the end goal it trying to achieve. Meaning that an idol should possess all of that attributes and 'simulate' the reflection (of Reality a) and once they do, they will ultimately become it -The Ideal Idol-.

> 4th Stage of Simulation: Pure Simulacrum – 'The Ideal Idol'
> (Reality c= A newly-created, 'Ideal Idol' which was originally based on Reality a.)

In Baudrillard's concept of Hyperreal, Reality a and Reality c are essentially two different things. One might simply say that Reality c is a 'fake' copy of Reality a, and while somehow it holds a certain degree of truthness in it, it is slightly more complicated than that. Baudrillard's theory allows us to consider Reality c as

something real by itself and does not have any relation whatsoever to Reality a. It transcends beyond the boundary of realness and fakeness which makes it a 'Hyperreal'. To understand the differences there are two other stages of the simulation which happen between stage 1 and stage 4 that need to be explored. They are the alteration process (stage 2) and the masking of absence (stage 3).

An Idol is 'Produced' and 'Maintained'

It is not a secret that Idols are in a way 'created' as most often they belong to a company in the entertainment industry. Producers play a lot in the 'creation' of idols as they and the management are directly responsible for their success. Marx wrote about Aoyagi Hiroshi, a professor of Kokushikan University in Tokyo, who believes the management of a company to have full control of all aspects that attribute to their idols, whether creatively and commercially, as even he believes they (the company) 'shape' the idols' even down to the personalities (Galbraith, 2012).

Youjeong Oh of Texas University wrote a book Pop City which is about Korean popular culture in general and specifically discusses Korean idols in the second part of the book. One takeaway from a specific chapter (of that 2nd part) is how Oh mentions how images of idols are 'crafted' to be unique and marketable (Oh, 2018). Oh then goes on to elaborate on how it is done with certain rules the company has for their idols which Oh refers to as human capital.

Hiroshi and Oh both highlighted the main point of images of an idol. It is something that is not naturally born but rather 'produced' out of something. The song Idol by Yoasobi also gives information on this matter.

> "***Secret side**, I wanna know it, **so mysterious***
> *Even that **elusive side**, **part of her controlled area**"*
>
> -Lines from the Interlude of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

The first line depicts one aspect that an idol has which is somehow '*mysterious*' and has a '*secret side'*. The two refer to anything that is associated on a personal level with something that is the 'idol' itself, and of course in this case a person. Idols have an image of being a 'perfect' being and to maintain that some parts that are not aligned with that image are being kept a secret. This fact makes an idol

'*elusive'* from the fans' perspective in which it is something that the idols also '*control*' to maintain the image while at the same time making them harmful.

"'*What did you eat today?*
What book do you love?
Whenever you go out for fun, tell me, where do you go?'
Haven't eaten anything
It's a secret, unknown
Any questions you're facing, always acting so vaguely"

-Verse 1 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

Verse 1 offers more practical information. The last three lines are the answers commonly given by an idol when they are given personal questions either by the audience or the media. The line '*haven't eaten anything*' is one perfect response to '*vagueness*' which is one of a quality of an Idol. Once again, having a secret and being '*unknown*' are common traits of the profession.

"*So unconcerned, although you brightly glow*
Any ***seemingly unveiled secrets*** *are as* ***sweet as honey***
Confusing, why, why, why?
Essential lie*, lie, lie*"

-Line from Verse 2 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

Verse 2 gives more emphasis on the idols' secret being as something very valuable for the fans with the line '*...sweet as honey'* and to produce such valuables idols are commonly known to tell lies which are '*essential'* for their image.

"'***I don't have any idea how I could love anyone '***
'I don't seem to know what it signifies'
Cannot find out if it's true or it's a lie"

-Line from Pre-Chorus 1 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

The first 3 lines from the Pre-chorus part give an example of a common response given by idols when they are asked about their romantic subject. To maintain a degree of intimacy with their fans idols are supposed to have an image of 'purity' and the facade of somehow 'attainable' to their fans (Galbraith, 2012; Valge & Hinsberg, 2019). The first and second lines are generic responses of the idols every time they are asked about the subject of love while the third line is how the

effect it has on fans left them with the feeling of uncertainty, once again denoting the fact of idols being secretive.

"***There cannot be weaknesses to find***
The brightest star is residing in you
The gaps and shortcomings, don't show 'em
Dammit, dammit
Parts nobody wants to know should remain hidden"

-Lines from Chorus 2 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

The lines from chorus 2 give more explanation which is more literal regarding the truths of an idol. Humans are never perfect in any way and arguably have flaws. The simple rule of nature applies to everyone, even to idols who are just normal people, a human beings. In the industry, it is common for such '*weaknesses*', *'gaps*', or '*shortcomings*' of an idol to be hidden as those are something that '*nobody wants to know*'.

"*How can we not feel* ***jealous while being around***
It's not a joke, you know, right?
So, ***I cannot forgive you*** *for that*
Completely deny
Imperfect you that I sight*"*

-Lines from Verse 3 of Idol by Yoasobi(2023)-

The truth of Idols having weakness can be seen in some lines from Verse 3. The third verse interestingly gives perspective from people who are '*around*' the '*perfect idol*'. Idols usually come in groups and among the members, it is always the case that only one particular performer stands up and overperforms. Most of cases, this particular individual is the one being dubbed as the 'perfect idol' while the others are 'sides' that support the main one. Verse 3 tells the perspective of those 'sides' being '*jealous*' of the 'perfect idol'. Being in the same space as the overperformer, the 'sides' actually know and even '*see*' the '*imperfect*' sight of the supposedly 'perfect idol'. They 'cannot forgive' the fact that those '*imperfections*' are being denied.

*"****Keeping everything about my secret deep inside***
'Im in love with you' my career is built on such a lie"

-Lines from Bridge of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)

The bridge gives an ultimate take on idol profession being a career that '*...is built on such a lie*'. All lines from the bridge are told from the perspective of the person who is being the 'perfect idol' themselves. Most of the lines are self-awareness shown by the person, the ‘perfect’ idol, about what they do which is fabricating a reality. Idols are often saying 'I love you' to the fans on many occasions but most of the time they are out of courtesy. Those 'lies' the idols perform or utter are parts of the idol’s image.

The data given from the lyrics show proof that idols are something purposely 'created' into a reality it wishes to aim for. It is reality a -the reflection of a 'perfect idol, which has been discussed in the previous section. Hence, it can be easily inferred that the 'production' of idols is the process of stages 2 and 3 in Baudrillard's simulation concept.

> 2nd Stage of Simulation: Masking & Perversion/Alteration of Normal Person
> (Reality b = Idol is a normal human being)
>
> 3rd Stage of Simulation: Masking the absences of 'The Perfect Idol'(Reality a) in a normal Person
> (Reality b is in absent of traits of Reality a, hence the masking)

In the sense of idol production, Stage 2 can be easily identified from its early stage. Idols are a person -normal human beings who perform in the entertainment industry. Producers need to find someone for them to 'produce' into idols. This 'someone' is a reality (reality b) which then will be undergoing 'alteration' to match what is reflected in stage 1 of simulation (reality a). The following step is the selected person becomes a pre-idol person. They are to be trained and 'crafted' (quoting Aoyagi) since they are designated to idols.

The 'alteration' of that person can sometimes be literal as idols' physical and visual appearances are controlled by the company. For example, some idols company in Japan prohibited idols to have hair colors other than black. In Korea, some idols go through to some extent of having plastic surgery to make them more visually attractive. Stage 3 of the simulation happens subsequently since all the 'alterations' that are being done to the idols mask the absences which exist in

reality b- a normal person. In their initial state, the normal person is in an absence of the quality and traits of 'The Perfect Idol'.

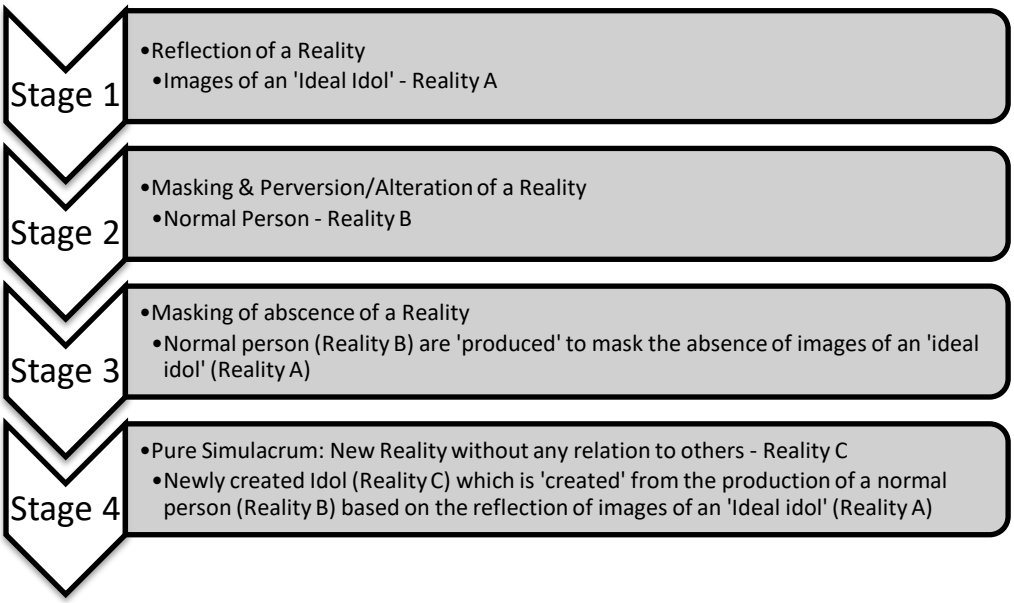


Chart 1 Complete Stages of Simulation of Idol

The process of 'producing' an idol ultimately ends with stage 4, the simulacrum (reality c). It The Idol, a 'completely' produced profession, which is based on reality and in stage 1 after masking and 'altering' reality b. Here lies the final problem. Some people argue that the completed idol (reality c) is fake as it is an altered copy, that is based on reality a (images of 'The perfect idol') of reality b which is a normal person. Baudrillard would disagree with that notion since he states that the simulacrum bears no relation to any reality whatsoever. It has become something that transcends any reality and is one of itself. The state of Hyperreality.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Jean Baudrillard's concept of Hyperreal is a philosophical notion that transcends the boundary between reality and fakeness, creating its distinct reality. This concept is prominently portrayed in the song “Idol” by Yoasobi, serving as one of its major themes. Through its lyrics, the song explains how the profession of an Idol is constructed from a particular reality, an idealized reflection of a perfect entertainer. This idea then becomes the foundation to transform another reality, that of a normal person, through the processes of perversion and masking,

which are integral to the production of idols. As a result, a new 'reality' emerges, the Idol profession, which bears no resemblance to its previous states. Thus, the Idol we commonly witness in the entertainment industry stands as a prime example of Hyperreality, existing in a realm that blurs the line between authenticity and artifice.

The advent of globalization has improved civilization in many scenes. The entertainment industry only has a limited number of idols that can be recognized in their early emergence. Now there are more than can be counted, as many companies trying to emulate the success of the previous ones. Hence this idol production is becoming more and more extensive to the extent that mass-produced idol has become normal. Baudrillard's concept of simulation certainly put the phenomenon of idols into a postmodernist condition in which the values of it can be understood through deconstruction.

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