Baudrillard's postmodernist perspective on aggression and violence expression in online media comment columns

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Abstract

This study explores how local print media in West Java sustain their business amid increasing competition in the media industry and the challenges of the digital era. Employing a case study approach, data were collected through interviews with editors-in-chief of local media, observations of print media activities, and analysis of related documents. The study finds that the digital era has significantly influenced business models, pushing print media to transform in order to survive. Several key factors support the resilience of local print media in West Java. First, they keep close ties with municipal and provincial governments, which ensure access to government grants. Second, they play role as partners in government advertising and publicity. Third, they maintain relatively affordable cost of advertising compared to national print outlets. Fourth, their strong connection with local communities. Fifth, the use of social media platforms that complement their print operations. Moreover, local print media continue to have loyal readers, while their leaders face the added responsibility of innovating and developing sustainable business strategies.

Keywords: adaptation; business; print media; ecosystem; digital

Introduction

Online media is a component of mass media institutions responsible for disseminating news through the internet (Daniar et al., 2020). This media served as a response to historical developments, which evolved during the discovery of the Internet. In addition, the evolution enabled mass media, previously operated through print and broadcast systems, to expand its operations to the Internet (Caeli et al., 2021). The discovery prompted the establishment of certain online media outlets, including the advent of the internet, such as www.detik.com and www.kumparan.com. Others operated as extensions or through the convergence of previously used print and broadcast media channels, namely www.kompas.com and www.jpnn.com, belonging to the Kompas and Jawa Pos publishing groups respectively. These entities were historically significant print media outlets in Indonesia prior to the advent of the internet.

Based on this viewpoint, the comments section is a crucial aspect of online media, because it helps boost posts or contents to the top of search engine results. Moreover, both positive and negative comments, enables news, articles, or posts to be visited more often. The more comments a contents recieves, the greater the chance to be visited, because it is an indicator of high engagement, alongside likes and shares. Social media algorithms tend to propagate posts with high engagement to more users, increasing visibility and potential for going viral.

Online media platforms applied algorithms to determine contents that should be visible to users. The algorithm enabled negative comments appearing in the comment columns to be ignored, since it accentuate contents with high engagement, including large numbers of both positive and negative comments. Contents with lots of negative comments, appeared more frequently in users' feeds, profile pages and search results, thereby increasing visibility and expanding its reach. In this context, negative comments depicted offensive language, defined as hurtful, derogatory or obscene

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remarks made by an individual to another or groups (Zhou, 2025). These remarks manifested in various forms, including toxic comments, aggressive content, cyberbullying, and hate speech. Social media has facilitated an immense rise in the spread of hate speech and harassment (González Esteban et al, 2024). This was often attributed to the anonymity that social media provides users, protecting the offenders from the consequences in the real world (Mondal et al, 2017). However, this assumption implied users with provided anonymity have the potential to attack, suggesting the existence of an insidious agenda, which needs an excuse to materialize (Scott, 2025)

Online media typically incorporated a designated section for commentary (Marta & Suryani, 2016), referred to as the comment column. In comparison to print media, the comment column is easily provided by online media due to the sufficient space on the websites. (Marta & Agustin, 2014). This is one of the several advantages of online media compared to the predecessor, the print media whether in the form of newspapers, magazines, or tabloids, which constantly faced limitations in printed publication space. Therefore, the interaction between print media and its audience was also insufficient, as proven by the letters in the editor section. Previous studies reported that the space allocated for readers to convey messages was restricted, barely exceeding five letters. (Sya & Marta, 2019).

Reflecting on the description above, several media online has closed the comment column, to prevent offensive language. This led to the introduction of the term Objectionable Content (OC), in the USA in 1996 by Communications Decency Act. The term OC denoted sexual, homicide, and violent texts, pornography content, drugs, weapons, gambling, violence, abhorrence, bullying and hate speech. Facebook also uses OC to designate different aggressor-victim relationships that appear through social media and related networks. In this regard, most social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, have adopted a strictly defined code of prevention and mechanisms for removing all kinds of Objectionable Content (OC). However, those phenomena are linguistically diverse and geographically widespread. A typical form of OC is hate speech (Weigand, 2017), which refers to *a broad umbrella term for numerous kinds of insulting user-created content, as the most frequently used expression for this phenomenon, and is even a legal term in several countries*.

To prevent offensive posts and contents on social network, the Indonesian goverment issued pasal 28 ayat (2) Undang-Undang Nomor 1 Tahun 2024 (UU ITE), for any person who intentionally conveys information intended to provoke hatred or hostility towards certain individuals or groups based on ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations (SARA).

Robert Baron, Coleman, Deutsch, & Marcus, (2014), described aggression as any form of behavior that harms or injures any living being, that does not desire to be treated in such a manner. In a similar publication, WHO defined violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, group or community, which has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.

Violence is categorized into two distinct forms, such as direct and, structural. Regarding this aspect, direct violence is described as physical and verbal aggression. Meanwhile, structural violence is not perpetrated by individuals or groups, rather systems, laws, economic structures, or societal norms. Its consequences adversely impact an individual's physical and psychological well-being. (Coleman, PT; Deutsch, M & Marcus, 2014)

Previous studies broadly described online aggression as the use of social network to intentionally inflict harm on others (Burt & Alhabash, 2018). This could be exhibited in several forms, including harassment (i.e., repeatedly sending inappropriate or hurtful messages), flaming (i.e., using insults and profanity often as a reaction to provocation), and exclusion (i.e., blocking an individual from contact) (Kowalski et al., 2014; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). Online aggression takes place across multiple platforms, namely email, social networking sites, instant messenger, or online games (Ybarra et al., 2012). Commonly used terms, such as cyberbullying, online aggression, and electronic aggression, depend on the type of aggression and specific ICTs (Mehari et al., 2014). In this context, the term digital aggression[1], refers to any hostile act committed online or electronically using any of the ICTs. (Kim et all, 2023)

This study focused on the phenomenon of aggression and violence manifesting within the context of online media. In terms of type, both represented non-physical attacks in the form of verbal violence carried out by commenters in the comment sections toward specific targeted parties. As a

result, this form of aggression and violence in comment sections were examined through the perspective of postmodern critical cultural studies, particularly drawing on the thought of a key figure Jean Baudrillard.

Postmodernism endeavors to reevaluate the dynamic between text and audience through the perspective of semiotics, particularly the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified (Chaer et al., 2022). Therefore, the semiotic analysis carried out by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce served as the foundational basis for this line of thought. Hill & Fenner (2010), stated that postmodernism evolved with the rise of feminism, declining influence of the Church in Europe, and the advent of more moderate views on issues of sex, class, and race. Based on this perspective, postmodernism describes the social construction of reality, role of language and discourse in shaping knowledge, and fragmentation of identities in contemporary society.

Following the description above, postmodernism viewed online aggression and violations as complex social constructs, not universal truths, shaped by diverse interpretations and the interplay of technology with power structures, rather than isolated acts of individual malice. It outlined how platform design and algorithms, anonymous and disinhibited online environments, as well as the blurring lines between real and virtual life contributed to aggression and the construction of harmful phenomena (Sumarni,2017)

Baudrillard (1996), stated that consumption in respect to this system centred on signs obtained through acts of manipulation, rather than material goods (Yunanda, 2020). In addition, consumption is a system of sign manipulation (Wijaya & Mashud, 2020). To avoid any potential misunderstandings, Baudrillard referred to the manipulation of consciousness by the producers, or the capitalist class. This form of manipulation was facilitated through the sophistication of mass media (Marta et al., 2020).

Relating to the discussion, Baudrillard stated that producers used mass media to hedonize society, particularly through advertisements (Hikmawan & Azwar, 2020). Furthermore, producers have successfully created a hedonistic moral system in which consumers become fetishistic toward commodities and this act was communicated through individual relationships. The society feels obligated to own certain goods, in line with the communication topics among fellow consumers. The act of not shopping is perceived as an aberration, a form of unconscious coercion that has taken place within society, either through signs or socio-economic-political systems and social logic (Kushendrawati, 2001:13).

Baudrillard, stated that people currently live in a world of hyperreality, defined as an artificial condition that emulates true reality. Considering that the condition is artificial, manipulation tended to occur. According to Baudrillard, this artificial condition was disconnected from the original reality (Maharani et al., 2022; Nisa Nurrakhmani & Rifayanti, 2019; Rahma, 2021). Hyperreality, developed through the process of simulation, reflects the evolution or revolution of the law of value. The revolution led to a situation of symbolic exchange, in which hyperreality consisted of symbolic signs being exchanged with one another, where the referent or meaning is realized through the relationship of signs within the system (Kushendrawati, 2001). In a state of hyperreality, the human subject defined as autonomous and rational is no longer capable of controlling the signified system (Pangaribuan, 2019).Therefore, for Baudrillard, people are currently residing in a world of simulacra. This concept is described as a world in which objects wielded dominance over subjects, with individuals surrendering to the dictates of advertisements, as well as willingly influenced by objects under human power.

Method

This study adopted a critical discourse analysis, developed by Teun A. van Dijk (Eriyanto, 2001), also referred to as the social cognition model (Yusar et al., 2020). The formulated model is composed of three interconnected components, namely text, social cognition, and context (Andayani et al., 2021; Fitriana, 2019; Tunziyah & Ri'aeni, 2019).

The approach focused on the cognitive aspects of discourse production, comprehension, and function through a related interface. This was termed the mental representations of language users as individuals and social members (Gyollai, 2022). In line with the description, discourse is a form of

social interaction in society as well as an expression and reproduction of social cognition. It is conditioned by both local and global social structures, realized through the cognitive mediation of shared knowledge, ideologies and personal mental models of members as the discourse subjectively define communicative events as context models. (Gyollai, 2022). The following is the social cognition analysis model proposed by Teun A. van Dijk.

Figure 1. Critical Discourse Analysis Model (Social Cognition) by Teun A. van Dijk
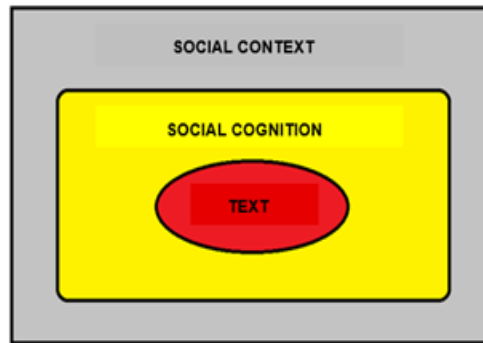

Source: Eriyanto, 2001, *Discourse Analysis*, p. 225, cited without prior permission.

The adoption of the social cognition analysis model by Teun A. van Dijk, enabled this study to construct an interpretation of the texts found in online media comment sections characterized by aggression and violence. Furthermore, the interpretation of textual content found in the comment sections was carried out by examining the social cognition of the commenters through the written statements. The existence of the comment sections is also a reflection of the broader social context. In respect to online news sites, the existence of comment sections is inherently connected to the credibility of these institutions. Regarding this perspective, texts found in the comment section were interpreted through the viewpoint of postmodernist thought concerning hyperrelity as proposed by Baudrillard.

The online media facilitated an uninhibited public forum, allowing individuals to articulate respective perspectives and disseminate messages with unrestrained freedom (Chinmi & Marta, 2020). This media also provided a letters to the editor section similar to print media. However, the comment sections of news articles were used by the audience to convey a variety of messages, not necessarily related to the information being commented on by users (Evanytha et al., 2022). Figure 2, shows two typical samples of messages that are aggressive or have violent undertones, found in the comment sections of online media. published news.

Figure 2. The aggressive and violent messages in the comment column of the online media
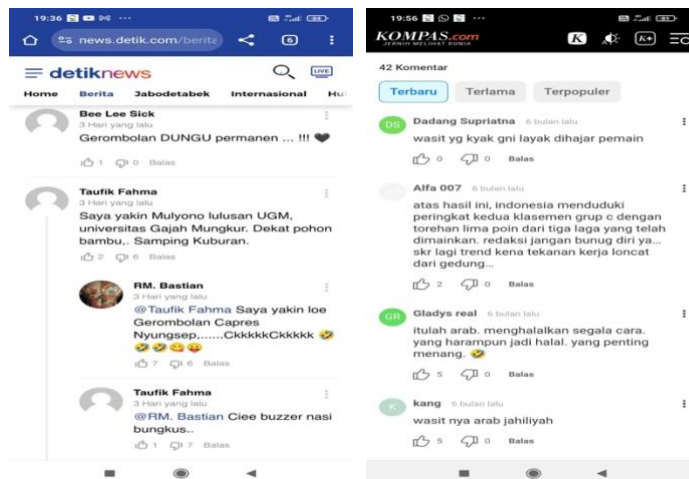
Source: www.detik.com 16-3-2025

Versi Online: http://journal.ubm.ac.id/
Hasil Penelitian

The content of the left part of Figure 2, characterized by its aggressive and violent messages, appeared on *www.detik.com* on Saturday, March 22, 2025, at 03:42, accompanying a news article titled *UGM Confirms Jokowi's Diploma is Genuine, Explains the Use of Times New Roman Font.* The screenshot in question was captured by the author on March 28, 2025, at 19:00. A total of 530 responses were received within six-days following the publication of the news article. These responses were disseminated in the comment section provided by *www.detik.com*, located at the bottom of the news article. A good portion of the responses contained violent and aggressive messages.

In the right part of the diagram, aggressive and violent messages were observed alongside a news article titled *Bahrain vs Indonesia Result 2-2: Garuda (Squad) Fights Hard for a Draw* published on *www.kompas.com* on October 11, 2024, at 01:09. The screenshot was captured by the author on March 28, 2025, at 19:30. The article was selected, because it represented one of the most significant events in football, an intense match between Indonesia and Bahrain. As evidenced by the comments section, this match was inundated with aggressive and violent messages, strengthened by a significant discourse among netizens.

Data from *www.detik.com* and *www.kompas.com* were provided as a unit analysis. The selection of these two online media outlets and the comment sections accompanying the news articles was merely a random sampling technique that was selected. The data in Figure 2 were selected based on certain considerations, accompanied by insightful reflections on Indonesian social norms concerning appropriateness (Marta & Fernando, 2020). In reality, there are comments that appear even more aggressive and violent in tone. For the purposes of this study, the aforementioned material was regarded as a sufficient representative.

Results and Discussion
Text dimension
This dimension refers to the structure of the discourse, including the words, sentences, and overall organization. Furthermore, the dimension oversees the words and sentences contain the intended meaning. In figure 2, certain harsh words and derogatory sentences, such as DUNGU, nyungsep, jahiliyah, were displayed. These words and sentences do have meaning as intended by the users.

Social Cognition Dimension
The social cognition dimension analyzes the mental processes of the participants, such as knowledge, beliefs, opinions, and mental models (schemata) that shape the production and interpretation of discourse. In line with the analysis, this dimension refers to the internal component of the model. Additionally, mental models are subjective representations of events or situations with a schematic structure enabling the categorization and identification of ongoing experiences. This subjective representation also consisted of both specific and personal emotions, opinions, sounds, gestures, including visions accompanying the situation in which the experience unfolds (Van Dijk 2018).

As shown in Figure 2, users perceive comment column as a place or situation where experiences and emotions are expressed (i.e, dislike about figure in the articles where comment column exist). Therefore, these users quickly comment to express personal feelings and opinions. Since discomfort was experienced after reading the articles, harsh or insulting words were expressed in the comment column. The articles and the comment column are not regarded as reality, which was constructed through news, and contents. Reciprocally, users perceive news, articles, and contents as a reality, and this is in line with the concept of hyperrality proposed by Baudrillard.

Social Context Dimension
The social context dimension account for how individuals define the circumstances of an experience or the communicative situation in terms of *relevance*. Context models represent the socially and communicatively relevant characteristics of a situation. It helps to avoid ambiguity and orient participants to act and speak appropriately (i.e. accordingly) in a particular social situation. The

models control the content, style and genre of discourses, depending on spatio-temporal factors, the institutional environment, the identity, status and role of participants, including personal relationship.

Mental models are based on and instantiated from, the socially shared generic knowledge of participants manifested in language, despite being uniquely constructed. Therefore, language is indicative of, and makes the subjective interpretations of participants mutually accessible. This is essentially the reason individuals, speaking the same language, tend to understand each other during a conversation (Van Dijk 2014a, 2018, pp. 49–61, 2012a, 2014b).

Figure 2 shows the word Mulyono was originally former President Joko Widodo's birth name. Recently, netizen referred to Joko Widodo by the birth name, expressing anger with the President, widely accused of abusing power to solidify political dynasty. The term Mulyono is used to describe Indonesians, especially netizens who like political issues. This was due to experiencing similar reality and language or term.

Van Dijk stated that text was produced through awareness, prejudice, or knowledge about an event. Humans depended on personal experiences and memory to understand the complex realities of life. This led to the creation of categories to organize the complex realities, making the outcome simpler, and easier to understand, orderly, coherent, and referring to in society. van Dijk described intertextual analysis in understanding the way discourse was produced and constructed. An analysis of society as a social context must pay attention to two aspects, namely power and access. In this context, power is the ability of a group to control another group, birthing direct or indirect control. Furthermore, the control later gave birth to domination and then discrimination. This kind of control occurred subconsciously and was deeply rooted in society.

Online Media Comment Sections

In a clear and straightforward understanding of the relationship between online media and its audience, the consumers are regarded as business objects for media entrepreneurs. The sequence was characterized by openness and transparency, realized through the establishment of an online media institution by a media entrepreneur. This was followed by the formation of a complete management team, which undertook the production process, resulting in the creation of news content. Subsequently, the online media platform provided a comment section for consumers to respond, and finally, engage with one another by posting comments. In this process, the media entrepreneur and consumer served as the subject, and object, respectively.

Baudrillard discovered that in certain instances the consumer elevated the status to become a subject (Baudrillard, 2017; Djalal et al., 2022). Therefore, it was posited that Baudrillard's theoretical framework was expressed in the phenomenon of online comment sections. The existence of the comment sections enabled consumers to articulate personal positive or negative opinions. When a consumer conveys own views either positively or negatively, these individuals, in turn, take control of the communication. Negative comment tended to attract more attention. Additionally, the opinions of a consumer may influence others, prompting the adoption of a similar perspective. In such cases, the initial consumer evolved from a mere object in the dynamic of the topic to a subject with the potential to influence the relational structure. As a result, online aggression and violence often occurred in the comment column.

Reflecting on this view, Baudrillard, (1970), reported that consumers should not be regarded merely as commodities within the confines of a consumer society system, because these individuals also play a significant role in the social order (Wikandaru, 2018). This objective was accomplished through the use of social systems, particularly language, as well as kinship relations, in which consumers constructed specific meaningful understandings. When connected to the phenomenon of comment sections, it was clear that Baudrillard's insights were highly accurate, where the use of language by online media consumers, as expressed through respective comments, elevated the position from object to subject.

Manipulation of Consciousness in Online Media Comment Sections

In reference to the initial point of analysis, it was inferred that to a certain extent, consumers of online media are, were fortunate or opportuned to become subjects. Although the consumers were

originally business objects for online media, the engagement in commenting has led to the realization of respective identity as subjects, returning to the position of signifier, not merely the signified.

This phenomenon was further examined through another of Baudrillard's ideas. In addition, Baudrillard (1996), established a correlation between the consumption activity and manipulation of systems by producers, realized through signs (Arsita, 2017). Producers also persuaded consumers to adopt hedonistic and fetishistic behaviors, through mass media. This phenomenon was facilitated by advertisements in mass media and the impact of consumer relationships, which evoked a sense of guilt in consumers due to the inability to purchase or possess the commodities promoted by the producers (Widodo et al., 2023).

Baudrillard's concept of manipulated consciousness offered a theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon. The concept suggested that, in reality, the audience of commenters in online media comment sections remained an object of the capitalist class, represented by media entrepreneurs. However, there is a possibility of returning to the phenomenon earlier described, where online media consumers readily post comments in response to certain news topics.

The Ecstasy of Communication in Online Media Comment Sections

As previously discussed in point 2, the manipulation of consciousness through online media comment sections can be considered a concrete manifestation of Baudrillard's concept of communication ecstasy. The essence of this concept (Naamy, 2018), focused on the chaotic nature of mass media communication, which occurred in response to the rapid pace of the changing times driven by advances in information technology, resulting in superficial communication practices. When examined through the perspective of online media comment sections, its superficial nature becomes readily apparent. Assuming, one is brave enough to witness the narratives evident in this context.

The comment narratives in Figure 2 were skimmed over briefly, as these were unpleasant for the eyes, mind, and emotions to revisit, reconsider, and further interpret in relation to aggression and violence. The issue was simply that these communication narratives appeared in the public sphere. This circumstance only occurs when the ecstasy of communication arises. The commenters showed an inability to adhere to ethical standards in the commentary. These examples were randomly selected for discussion.. In reality, millions of such narratives were easily found in the comment sections of online media.

Baudrillard, (1988), reported that ecstasy served as the origin for many social, political, and cultural phenomena, where driven by the essence of shallow, fast-paced action, led to the evolution of a new world, characterized by its obscenity, shamelessness, and perceived lack of quality. In line with the finding, this new world was manifestly displayed and explicitly communicated. The phenomenon was exemplified by the discourse observed in the online media comment sections. This exposed the users to two options, namely either become habituated to the culture of mediocrity, or adopt an alternative stance, including the decision not to engage at all.

Hyperreality in Online Media Comment Sections

This fourth section served as both an analysis and reflection of the overall inference drawn. According to Baudrillard, hyperreality refers to a condition of artificial reality that imitates a certain real situation, where all that exists is the symbolic exchange of signs. This was precisely observed in the comment sections, and instead of consumers receiving information to be processed, interpreted, and used for both personal and societal benefit, chaos was observed within the comment sections. The symbols of obscenity, violence, and worthlessness were exchanged within these online spaces. As a result, what should only reflect the intellectual quality of individual users currently adopted the shape as the intellectual quality of society as a whole. This was because online media institutions allowed such practices to continue, with the government permiting the act, and society turning a blind eye.

Following the description above, consumers were presumably residing in a state of hyperreality, with the consequence that the signifier had overtaken the signified. Capitalist owners of online media institutions were also driven by the pursuit of financial profit, resulting in

communication practices that often fell short of ethical standards. Furthermore, the ability to exercise control over the signified had become increasingly elusive. The signifieddepicted by the online media comment section, persisted in its state of undisturbed existence, filled with content that mocks the essence of human dignity.

Baudrillard, stated that the contemporary world was characterized by the prevalence of simulacra, whereby objects exerted a dominant influence over subjects (Fitrianti, 2021). In the contemporary era of online media comment sections, both humans and the society in general have experienced a significant loss of essential identity. Every circumstance is under the control of the signified, beneath the ecstasy of communication defining the comment section. Based on this perspective, the signified was clearly under the control of capitalists. In critical studies, a prevailing perspective proved the continued dominance of capitalists in global governance. According to Baudrillard, capitalists functioned as the monarchs of the simulacrum forged.

Resolution for the Hyperreality of Online Media Comment Sections

From a critical perspective, this study reported that the aggressive, harsh, low-quality, and verbally violent messages found in comment sections were not strange to online media, nor the individuals associated with the management and ownership. The finding firmly reported that both parties were completely aware of this reality. However, its perpetuation was permitted, due to the association with the financial benefit. Each comment has the potential to be used as a bargaining chip in the sale of advertising space, irrespective of the modest nature of the revenue generated. As long as there were no complaints from the public or the government, this substandard communication practice continued unaddressed. It was evident that no personnel was allocated to oversee incoming comments, despite the fact that such an action facilitated the selection and filtration of messages.

The resolution offered in this analysis is practical in nature, with a total of three parties being of particular relevance. Firstly, the focus was on online media institutions, due to the authorization to filter and moderate messages. The comments of an aggressive, vulgar, obscene, divisive, and verbally violent nature, as well as similar content, could be prevented from appearing by assigning personnel to verify and restrict the publication of such messages. Secondly, the government has the authority to establish regulations regarding online media publication, thereby ensuring that aggressive and violent messages were prohibited from appearing in such media. Thirdly, the public, which out of concern for cultivating a low-aggression, low-violence culture, has the capacity to promote change through relevant actions. This could be realized by urging both online media outlets and governmental entities to discontinue the practice of featuring aggressive and violent comment sections.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined the comment sections in online media that contained messages of aggression and violence, through the perspective of Baudrillard's postmodernist thought. The results showed that the comment sections on online media platforms frequently exhibited aggressive and violent communication practices, considered ethically inappropriate. This was in line with Baudrillard's view that individuals found themselves in a state of hyperreality, powerless in the face of controllable phenomena. In pursuit of the fast-paced lifestyle driven by advanced information technology, the ecstasy of communication wasexpressed as chaotic commentary in online media which appeared unchecked. It further seemed as though there was no opportunity to regulate communication practices that deviated from the principles of civility and superior cultural values. Meanwhile, online media entrepreneurs reaped the benefits of the users' ecstatic communication. The more comments appeared on the diverse platforms, the greater the potential for financial gain. The online media audience, comprised of commenters in the comment sections, thatexperienced a state of euphoria, believed to be an expression of freedom. However, these individuals remained unaware of being commodified by media entrepreneurs who profitted from advertising tied to respective activities.

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