Volume 4, Issue 1, June 2025

Authenticity of Identity in Lauren Oyler's Fake Accounts

Raj Kishor Singh*

Article Type: Research Article

Assistant Professor, Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Received: 18 January 2025; Revised: 17 March 2025; Accepted: 27 April 2025

*Corresponding email: drrksnp@gmail.com ISSN: 2976-1204 (Print), 2976 – 131X (Online)

Abstract

This study explores authenticity in Lauren Oyler's Fake Accounts *through the lens of Goffman's self-presentation theory, Baudrillard's simulacra and hyperreality, and Turkle's insights on digital disembodiment. It analyzes the protagonist's negotiation of online and offline identities, revealing how digital personas operate as curated performances detached from an underlying "real" self. Using Goffman's dramaturgical model, the study shows how social media fosters continuous impression management similar to theatrical role-playing. Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality further exposes these digital identities as simulacra, self-referential images that supplant authenticity. Turkle's framework highlights the alienation and fragmentation arising from fragmented digital selves. Together, these theories illuminate the novel's critique of performative pressures and the crisis of authenticity in hyperconnected, postmodern digital culture. Ultimately, Fake Accounts questions the possibility of genuine selfhood amid pervasive simulation and digital disembodiment.*

Keywords: Authenticity, digital identity, digital disembodiment, hyperreality, performativity, social media

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32674/nwm18k07

Introduction

In an era dominated by digital mediation, social media has redefined how individuals construct, negotiate, and perform their identities. These platforms thrive on curated self-presentation, collapsing the distinction between public and private selves while fostering a culture of surveillance, visibility, and performativity. The notion of authenticity, once anchored in coherence and interiority, has become increasingly elusive in digital spaces where identity is often commodified and performative. Within this context, Lauren Oyler's debut novel *Fake Accounts* (2021) emerges as a critical literary exploration of identity, deception, and the spectacle of online life.

The novel's unnamed narrator navigates a disjointed world where personal relationships, political consciousness, and self-presentation are all filtered through algorithmic logic and virtual performance. Her journey, marked by the discovery of her boyfriend's secret conspiracy theory blog and her subsequent decision to reinvent herself in Berlin, serves as both plot and critique. *Fake Accounts* interrogates the porous boundaries between truth and performance, fiction and reality, digital and real-world selves. Oyler crafts a narrative landscape in which the self is not only fragmented but also mediated through the very platforms that promise connection and self-expression.

This study investigates how *Fake Accounts* critique the construction of identity in the digital age by addressing the following research question: Can authentic selfhood be sustained within digital environments that inherently reward performance and curation? To explore this question, the analysis is situated within key theoretical frameworks. Drawing on Erving Goffman's theory of self-presentation, the study examines how Oyler's characters perform identity as a series of social roles within shifting digital "front stages" (Goffman 22). Baudrillard's concept of *simulacra* and *hyperreality* further illuminates how the novel deconstructs the illusion of authenticity by exposing the layers of mediated representations that supplant the real (6). Sherry Turkle's scholarship on digital disembodiment also informs the analysis, emphasizing how identity becomes increasingly disconnected from embodied experience in online spaces (11).

The objectives of this study are twofold. First, it aims to critically examine *Fake Accounts* as a cultural text that reflects and satirizes contemporary anxieties about identity and authenticity in the age of social media. Second, it seeks to demonstrate how Oyler's narrative formally and thematically destabilizes coherent notions of self, inviting readers to confront their complicity in digital performance.

In doing so, this research advances three significant contributions. At the literary level, it situates *Fake Accounts* within the emerging canon of post-2010 digital-era fiction, highlighting how contemporary literature negotiates the challenges of identity in a post-truth world. At the cultural level, the novel functions as a mirror to society's ongoing struggle with authenticity in a climate of algorithmic manipulation and curated personas. Finally, at the theoretical level, the study bridges literary analysis with sociological and media theories to reveal the deep entanglement between digital technologies and the self.

While concepts of identity and authenticity are themselves fluid and contingent, shaped by evolving cultural and technological paradigms, *Fake Accounts* captures the dissonance at the heart of modern selfhood. By decoding Oyler's satirical yet sobering portrayal of digital life, this paper offers insights into how fiction reflects and critiques the performative nature of contemporary identity, challenging readers to rethink the boundaries between the real and the constructed in their own lives.

Theoretical Foundations and Literary Analysis

This research adopts a qualitative and interpretative methodology grounded in textual analysis of Oyler's *Fake Accounts*. The study explores themes of identity, authenticity, and social media performance through close reading techniques, supported by socio-media theories. The novel's narrative strategies, character development, and thematic elements are critically examined to uncover its engagement with digital identity issues.

Primary sources include the novel itself and relevant socio-media theoretical works. Secondary sources, such as research articles and reviews, are used to situate the text within the broader context of digital culture studies. This comprehensive approach enables a nuanced understanding of how Oyler critiques the influence of social media on contemporary identity formation.

The exploration of identity in *Fake Accounts* draws on foundational theories of self-presentation and identity formation. Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* provides a critical lens through which one can understand the performative nature of social interactions. Goffman likens individuals to actors managing their impressions on a metaphorical stage, a concept that seamlessly translates into the digital world, where social media becomes the "stage" and curated profiles form the "performance." The protagonist's deliberate manipulation of her online identity mirrors Goffman's notion of impression management, prompting an investigation into the authenticity of digital self-presentations. His work likens social life to a performance where individuals manage impressions (22), distinguishing between "front stage" behavior, where curated personas are displayed, and "backstage" behavior, where true selves emerge (112).

However, while Goffman describes impression management as a fundamental aspect of social interaction, Oyler critiques its intensification in the digital sphere. The protagonist's shifting of online personas reflects Goffman's notion that individuals adopt roles to maintain social coherence (55), yet Oyler exposes the psychological toll of such continuous identity modulation. This suggests that while performativity is an inevitable part of identity construction, the heightened demands of online self-presentation lead to exhaustion and disillusionment. Rather than contradicting Goffman, *Fake Accounts* extends his framework by demonstrating how digital spaces amplify impression management to an unsustainable degree, turning an everyday social function into a source of alienation.

Sherry Turkle's *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* further informs this research by highlighting the disconnect between digital personas and authentic selfhood. She argues that online interactions often lead to fragmented identities,

a theme deeply woven into the fabric of *Fake Accounts*. The novel critiques the alienation and performativity resulting from navigating dual realities, both digital and physical, while exposing the inherent tension between curated online representations and real-world authenticity. She asserts that digital technology separates individuals from their embodied experiences, leading to fragmented identities and emotional detachment: "We are lonely but fearful of intimacy. Digital connections… offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship" (1). She observes that digital connections "offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship" (1). She discusses how virtual interactions create fragmented identities, where users disconnect from authentic selfhood and embodied experience (152). Her work provides a lens to understand the psychological consequences of digital duality. Her argument that online life fosters fragmented identities (205) is reflected in the protagonist's inability to reconcile her online persona with her offline self. The novel illustrates her assertion that despite constant digital connection, individuals often experience deeper alienation (221).

In *Fake Accounts*, the protagonist experiences this disembodiment as her online persona thrives while her offline life becomes increasingly disconnected and passive. Her engagement in virtual activism and social commentary highlights the divide between digital performance and lived experience, mirroring her critique of disembodiment in virtual spaces. Oyler emphasizes the emotional toll of inhabiting dual identities, one crafted for digital audiences and another that struggles to maintain authenticity in the physical world.

Baudrillard's concept of simulacra and hyperreality, as discussed in *Simulacra and Simulation*, explores how representations and symbols in media environments eventually replace reality, creating a world where signs no longer reference anything "real." In *Fake Accounts,* the protagonist carefully constructs an online identity and becomes a hyperreal version of herself, a persona that exists independently of her real-world experiences and emotions. Social media interactions, instead of connecting individuals to reality, foster a hyperreal existence where authenticity becomes obsolete. As Baudrillard argues, the hyperreal self is indistinguishable from the authentic self because there is no longer a stable, original reality to anchor it. Baudrillard argues that simulacra represent "a real without origin or reality" (1). Oyler critiques this phenomenon by illustrating how the protagonist's online life supersedes her real identity, rendering her existence fragmented and alienated. In the context of media and digital culture, these simulations replace the need for real-world reference points, creating a hyperreality where distinctions between the real and virtual blur (Baudrillard 5).

The interplay of Goffman's performative self, Baudrillard's hyperreal simulations, and Turkle's fragmented selves in *Fake Accounts* captures the complexities of digital identity formation. Oyler critiques not just the digital platforms that demand curated personas but also the cultural obsession with visibility and validation. The novel reveals that the very tools meant to foster connection ultimately alienate users from both their true selves and genuine relationships. Through this intersection of theoretical perspectives, Oyler's work illustrates the challenges of maintaining authenticity in a hypermediated world where performance, simulation, and fragmentation define contemporary existence.

Fake Accounts explores themes of authenticity, identity, and performativity, resonating with contemporary critiques of digital culture. The novel's portrayal of fragmented online and offline identities echoes Goffman's concept of impression management and Turkle's insight on technology-driven alienation. Baudrillard's concept of simulacra and hyperreality provides an additional critical lens through which to analyze the protagonist's fragmented sense of self. His theory asserts that, in hyperreal environments such as social media, the boundary between reality and simulation becomes blurred, and representations of reality eventually replace it entirely. The protagonist's carefully constructed digital persona is an example of this hyperreal existence, where her online identity becomes more significant and influential than her authentic self, thereby aligning with Baudrillard's critique of the loss of the real in favor of the simulated (5).

Critics argue that Oyler's novel offers a sharp critique of the performative nature of social media, where individuals craft and maintain curated personas to fit societal expectations (Smith 45). The protagonist's creation of multiple online identities highlights the relentless demand for self-reinvention in the digital age. This reflects Goffman's argument that people, like actors on a stage, manage their social interactions by adjusting their performances to fit perceived audience expectations (22).

Literary commentators have noted the protagonist's alienation as emblematic of the tension between authenticity and digital performance (Brown 78). Turkle's analysis aligns with this critique, as *Fake Accounts* captures how digital engagement fosters fragmented identities and emotional disconnection. She contends that technology users often feel "alone together," simultaneously connected yet isolated by their digital personas (145).

The novel not only examines individual identity but also critiques societal norms shaped by pervasive connectivity. Oyler suggests that social media interactions often lack authenticity, functioning instead as rehearsed performances (Jones 103). The protagonist's performative existence illustrates the pressures of navigating dual realities, emphasizing Turkle's concern that digital communication often masks genuine human connection (189).

Critics and Critiques on *Fake Accounts*

Critics have explored how *Fake Accounts* portray identity as inherently unstable in the digital age. Fisher argues that the protagonist's shifting personas reveal a deeper commentary on identity as a fluid construct, shaped by social expectations and technological environments (67). The novel demonstrates how digital spaces allow for the creation and destruction of identities, challenging traditional notions of a stable, unified self. Oyler uses this fluidity to critique societal pressures to present a coherent identity online, even when it contradicts personal authenticity (72).

Several critics view the novel as a biting satire of contemporary social media culture. Larson notes that Oyler's critique of influencers, curated profiles, and performative activism highlights the emptiness of online performativity (124). The protagonist's internal monologues often

highlight the absurdity of digital culture, exposing its detachment from real-world concerns and relationships. This satirical approach, Larson argues, allows Oyler to dissect the social norms enforced by digital platforms (126).

The theme of surveillance also emerges as a critical concern in *Fake Accounts*. Taylor asserts that Oyler draws attention to the omnipresent gaze of social media, where users are both performers and audience members under constant scrutiny (154). This digital surveillance fosters a sense of paranoia and alienation, as the protagonist grapples with her diminishing sense of privacy and autonomy (156). Turkle's assertion that technology encourages users to become both "voyeurs and exhibitionists" is vividly illustrated in the novel (200).

Oyler critiques the concept of self-branding, where individuals commodify themselves to gain social capital online. According to Susan Greenfield, this commodification blurs the boundaries between personal identity and market-driven personas, creating dissonance between authentic self-expression and the need for social validation (88). The protagonist's manipulation of her identity reflects this tension as she navigates the pressure to perform and the desire to remain authentic (92).

White suggests that Oyler's portrayal of fragmented identity aligns with postmodern theories of subjectivity, which reject the notion of a singular, cohesive self (144). The protagonist's fragmented self-aligns with Goffman's understanding of identity as a series of performed roles rather than an essential truth (88). Oyler uses the protagonist's dual existence, online and offline, to critique the commodification and surveillance of identity in postmodern society.

While some may struggle to elevate digital engagement into literature, *Fake Accounts* succeeds in doing just that. This comic novel dissects how the internet influences both personal identity and societal relations, illustrating how digital spaces alter our internal lives while simultaneously affecting the external world. Oyler portrays the complexities of navigating online and offline identities, critiquing the performative nature of the digital realm and its capacity to dilute authenticity. The protagonist, a millennial woman from Brooklyn, self-reflexively acknowledges her position as the narrator and playfully engages with the reader through section titles such as "Beginning" or "Middle (Something Happens)." This metatextual approach hints at postmodern irony but avoids being either overly cutesy or parodic. Instead, Oyler creates a compelling narrative that draws attention to the internal fragmentation caused by digital personas, mirroring contemporary concerns about identity in the online age.

The plot follows the protagonist's discovery of her boyfriend Felix's secret life as an online conspiracy theorist, which leads her to create multiple fake dating profiles after his death. This process of inventing new online selves raises critical questions about the authenticity of digital identities, especially as they collide with real-life interactions. As Oyler delves into the protagonist's engagement with online spaces, the novel highlights the emotional toll of managing dual identities, both virtual and physical. Through sharp cultural commentary and dark humor, *Fake Accounts* becomes a compelling critique of the way social media shapes self-perception and personal relationships. Oyler's exploration of the interplay between reality and simulation aligns with theories of hyperreality, as her protagonist constantly questions what

it means to truly know oneself in an age where digital representations often replace authentic experience. By the novel's end, Oyler exposes the deep ambiguity and unresolved nature of self-interpretation in the hypermediated world of social media, making *Fake Accounts* a powerful reflection on the blurred boundaries between selfhood and the virtual world.

Shanyang Zhao's research on the digital self explores the role of others in shaping identity within online spaces, a theme that has been underexplored in studies of cyberspace self-presentation (387). While much of the existing literature on the self in digital environments has focused on how individuals present themselves to others, He flips the question to investigate how individuals come to understand themselves when others, in the form of "intimate strangers" or "anonymous friends," are the ones who become disembodied and anonymous. His study emphasizes that online interactions create a distinct "digital self," different from the self-formed offline. This distinction is particularly crucial for teenagers, who are still in the process of forming stable identities, as their online engagement can significantly shape their self-concept. Through qualitative interviews with young women, Zhao connects this idea to Instagram use, noting how individuals manage their self-presentation using tools like filters, captions, and photo choices. This process of impression management on Instagram highlights Goffman's notion of self-presentation as performance, where the online identity is carefully curated to present a positive, socially acceptable image (22). His work reinforces the importance of telecopresence, being present online but disconnected from physical presence, in shaping a person's sense of self. The study suggests that the "digital self" is not merely a passive reflection of the offline self but an active construction influenced by both the self's performance and the feedback received from others in the digital environment (389).

Emma Baker's review of *Fake Accounts* highlights the novel's intricate interplay between self-awareness, performativity, and the tension between online and offline identities. The story, revolving around a disaffected young woman in 2016 Brooklyn who discovers her boyfriend's online alter ego as a pro-Trump conspiracy theorist, unpacks the ways postmodern identity is fragmented and manipulated within digital and social spaces. Baker notes how the protagonist's existential ennui and pervasive self-consciousness echo a broader cultural moment, wherein online personas and real-world behaviors blur, creating a self-referential, hyper-aware subjectivity (Baker). Oyler's choice to write in the first person intensifies the link between author and protagonist, creating a direct but elusive connection that mirrors the fragmented identity of postmodern individuals who construct, maintain, and manipulate their online selves. This mirrors Zhao's concept of the "digital self," where teenagers, in particular, shape their identity through digital interfaces, influenced by anonymous online interactions, thereby cultivating a "digital self" distinct from the one formed offline (387).

Baker's analysis emphasizes *Fake Accounts* as a deliberate use of irony and self-parody to critique the vacuity of online self-presentation. The novel, while executed with wit and a sharp command of language, becomes self-reflective to the point of evading critique, mirroring the protagonist's deepening self-absorption and the relentless scrutiny that surrounds digital performance. Baker's frustration with the book's slipperiness, where the narrative seems to resist traditional forms of engagement, aligns with Oyler's exploration of the consequences of

excessive self-awareness. In this regard, Oyler critiques not only the performative nature of digital life but also the sense of alienation and guilt that arises from constant self-monitoring, which Baker interprets as indicative of a broader cultural malaise (Baker). This mirrors Zhao's observation that online interactions, through impression management and performance, can distort self-concept, leading to a fragmented and sometimes pathological sense of identity (389).

Both Baker and Zhao examine the interplay between self-identity and digital media, suggesting that the self-formed through online interactions is not only shaped by how others present themselves but by the disembodied and anonymous nature of digital existence itself.

In her novel *Fake Accounts*, Oyler sets out to explore the dissonance of living in an online world. The unnamed narrator, a Brooklyn-based blogger who discovers her boyfriend's secret pro-Trump conspiracy Instagram account, retreats to Berlin after his untimely death. While the premise might suggest an exciting exploration of identity and deception, Oyler's sharp, cynical tone quickly overshadows any potential for narrative depth. The protagonist's self-awareness, much like Oyler's own critique of the world, turns inward and is consumed by a sense of transactional relationships and ideological superiority. Oyler's portrayal of her generation's online disconnection feels almost like a parody of millennial attitudes, offering sharp commentary on authenticity but ultimately failing to transcend its irony and self-referentiality.

The novel's tone is a sustained exercise in snark, and while this may serve as an apt vehicle for Oyler's critique of social media and millennial culture, it also risks alienating readers. The narrator's fragmented thoughts and disdain for other forms of writing, especially those influenced by social media, serve to critique a generation's fixation on surface-level authenticity. Oyler's self-awareness as an author, often undermining her characters' motivations with direct commentary, leads to a tension between form and content that ultimately diminishes the emotional depth of the story. The novel, although provocative at moments, fails to truly engage with the lived experiences it seeks to depict, leaving behind a sense of detachment and irony that is more exhausting than enlightening. As Oyler herself reflects through her protagonist, *Fake Accounts* is trapped in a "twitchy, frantic boredom," a sentiment that the book's structure and tone embody rather too well (Thomas-Corr).

Kristin Iversen's article "Lauren Oyler Doesn't Think You're Dumb" offers a deep dive into Oyler's approach to both literary criticism and her debut novel, *Fake Accounts*. Iversen explores how Oyler's criticism is far from being a superficial attack on popular literature; instead, it engages with works on their terms, offering readers an opportunity to think more critically. Oyler's criticisms often challenge the conventions of literary discourse, pushing beyond the familiar best-book-worst-book binary to present an argument that is intellectually rigorous, nuanced, and never patronizing. This commitment to elevating the discussion around literature is reflected in her fiction, where she seeks to engage readers similarly, providing both entertainment and insight.

In *Fake Accounts*, Oyler tackles the issue of authenticity, using the protagonist's experience in Berlin to explore identity and the confusion of online personas. Iversen notes that Oyler subverts the typical narrative of self-discovery through travel, instead highlighting the emptiness of adopting pre-determined personas. Her novel is both a critique of the hollow nature of online life and a reflection on the difficulty of authentic self-presentation in the digital age. Oyler's work, both as a critic and a novelist, is unafraid to experiment with form and push back against conventions, whether in the realm of literature or online discourse. Through her precise, thoughtful writing, Oyler challenges readers to think critically, and she refuses to simplify complex ideas for the sake of popular appeal (Iversen).

Kat Rosenfield's review of *Fake Accounts* in *Tablet Magazine* offers a critical yet engaging analysis of the novel's themes and style. The review emphasizes how the book reflects postmodern millennial life and the internet age, where individuals are simultaneously drawn into and repelled by the digital world. The protagonist, like Oyler herself, works in the media industry and navigates a world dominated by social media, conspiracy theories, and fragmented identities. Rosenfield captures the unsettling nature of *Fake Accounts*, describing it as a deep dive into the intellectual machinery that drives social media, likening it to "Internet Hell." The novel's exploration of self-reinvention through digital personas resonates with anyone familiar with the pervasive influence of social media on personal identity, and the protagonist's discomfort with this world is palpable throughout.

Rosenfield also highlights the dissonance between the novel's intellectual exploration and the claustrophobic, often stagnant perspective of its protagonist. The review critiques the novel's narrative approach, comparing the protagonist's fake identities and performative tricks to the manipulation and confusion seen in works like *American Psycho*. Despite the novel's sharp critique of contemporary culture and its social media-driven fragmentation, Rosenfield expresses frustration with the narrative's lack of surprising developments. The review ultimately positions *Fake Accounts* as a book that offers a profound and relatable exploration of postmodern identity, but one that leaves the reader with the same hollow feeling that comes from excessive internet consumption.

Kat Rosenfield critiques *Fake Accounts* as a reflection of millennial solipsism and the hyperconnected, media-literate world that consumes and produces online discourse. She highlights the novel's protagonist, who embodies the narcissism of a generation obsessed with self-image and online identity, yet is unable to recognize her desires or agency. The protagonist's struggle with authenticity mirrors Oyler's commentary on contemporary life and identity in the age of social media, where individuals are constantly curating their personas. She notes that Oyler's novel is precisely the type of book that her critical persona would normally tear apart for its self-indulgence and cultural insularity. However, she also acknowledges that this insular world is familiar to those deeply embedded in the internet-driven, millennial mindset, thus making the book resonate with a specific audience.

Rosenfield further critiques the novel for its intentional exclusion of a larger audience, recognizing that it caters specifically to a niche group of online millennials. The novel's references and humor are steeped in the world of hashtags and internet drama, offering a

sharp commentary on the saturation of media and cultural discourse. The book's targeted audience, familiar with the insular world Oyler depicts, will find it engaging, but Rosenfield questions the broader cultural implications of such exclusion. Oyler's decision to write a book that deliberately alienates many readers is seen as a comment on the present media landscape, where content is tailored to specific tastes and can thrive despite, or because of, its limited appeal. This raises questions about the inclusivity of contemporary literature and the role of cultural criticism in shaping narratives for increasingly fragmented audiences.

In her reflection on *Fake Accounts*, the protagonist's intense discomfort and self-recognition within the novel resonate deeply with the author, as she identifies with the narrator's internal struggles and narcissistic tendencies. The protagonist's actions, like searching through her boyfriend's phone out of a desire to be "righteously wronged," are portrayed with unflinching honesty, capturing the twisted thought processes that many readers, particularly women of a certain generation, may recognize within themselves. The author acknowledges that this discomfort is an intentional part of the reading experience, reflecting Oyler's acute commentary on the neurotic spirit of postmodern millennials. The protagonist's sense of self is profoundly shaped by the world of social media, and *Fake Accounts* lays bare the contradictions and anxieties of a generation grappling with self-presentation, identity, and the performative aspects of postmodern life. This neurotic self-awareness and critique of digital culture are central themes that Oyler weaves into the narrative, making the novel both a personal and a critical lens on the world of online self-construction.

Oyler's *Fake Accounts* is recognized not only as a cultural critique but also as a narrative experiment in autofiction. Drawing heavily on her own experiences, Oyler presents a protagonist whose internal monologue mirrors the author's critical voice, blurring the lines between fact and fiction. The novel's disorienting and often uncomfortable tone challenges readers to confront the mediated version of themselves they present to the world, offering no escape from the self. The critique of social media's impact on the self is unmistakable: the narrator's journey is a painful yet humorous exploration of how the internet and its constant connectivity shape our identities. As Oyler deconstructs the act of public self-building, the emotional and mental toll of living a life constantly scrutinized online becomes a central theme. This novel demands an engagement with the self, not just as an audience of the story but as a participant in the cultural conversation about identity, narcissism, and authenticity. The discomfort that readers feel in confronting these issues is precisely the point, making *Fake Accounts* a compelling, although emotionally draining, piece of postmodern literature.

Textual Analysis

In *Fake Accounts*, Oyler examines the tension between authentic and performative identity through the protagonist's growing detachment from her offline self. The quotation, "Increasingly, the things I said online felt like performances, rehearsed, and modified over time for maximum impact. Offline, I was barely saying anything at all" (103), encapsulates the theme of self-presentation in the digital age. This resonates with Goffman's assertion that individuals manage impressions in social contexts like actors on a stage, crafting personas

to meet societal expectations: "When an individual appears before others, his actions will influence the definition of the situation which they come to have" (15). Oyler critiques how digital platforms amplify self-performance, creating pressures for optimization and visibility that lead to identity fragmentation.

The protagonist's digital performance aligns with Goffman's concept of role-playing, where individuals craft their personas to suit their audiences. This is evident in her reflection: "When I was online, I wasn't myself, not exactly, I was who I wanted to be perceived as, or maybe who I thought I should be" (Oyler 87). Goffman's theory explains this behavior as the "front stage," where individuals act out roles, compared to the "backstage," where they can be more authentic (22). The protagonist's admission, "The quieter I became offline, the more vibrant I seemed online" (Oyler 123), illustrates how the curated online persona overshadows her unperformed self, further emphasizing the divide between front-stage and backstage identities. This calculated self-presentation demonstrates how individuals increasingly view their lives through the lens of their digital audience, sacrificing genuine offline expression.

Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, which describes a world where representations replace reality, is central to understanding the protagonist's online persona. He writes, "It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (1). The protagonist's carefully curated online identity, "crafted for engagement, likes, and shares, but ultimately hollow" (Oyler 159), reflects this notion. Her realization, "What mattered wasn't who I was but who I appeared to be to others" (178), highlights how the simulation of identity overtakes her authentic self. The protagonist's online presence, detached from her embodied reality, becomes a simulacrum, echoing Baudrillard's idea that simulations are "copies without originals" (2).

The statement, "I felt like a character in my own story, the details rearranged to make me more palatable" (Oyler 190), captures the hyperreal nature of her online life. Baudrillard's notion that "reality itself founders in the operational delirium of hyperreality" (19) is evident in the protagonist's struggle to distinguish between her digital persona and her real self. The digital world amplifies this disconnection, creating a performative version of her identity that feels more real than her offline life.

Sherry Turkle's analysis of digital disembodiment provides critical insights into the protagonist's alienation. Turkle asserts that "we create a self that only exists in words and images, a self that we can compose and recompose over time" (13). This aligns with the protagonist's observation: "The more I posted, the less I felt like a real person. My life existed in snapshots, captions, and carefully filtered moments" (Oyler 142). Turkle's argument that digital platforms encourage fragmented self-presentation helps explain the protagonist's detachment from embodied experiences.

Further, Turkle notes, "The computer offers a new way of thinking about the relationship between mind and body, as it allows people to leave the body behind" (15). This mirrors the protagonist's reflection: "I was starting to feel like my body didn't matter at all, it was just a vessel for the self I projected online" (Oyler 210). Turkle's concept of disembodiment

emphasizes how digital engagement fosters self-estrangement, leading to the protagonist's existential crisis: "If the real me wasn't here, where was I?" (211). This fragmentation highlights the paradox of digital identity, where connection and alienation coexist.

The passage, "The louder I was online, the more I seemed to disappear from my own life" (119), encapsulates the cumulative effect of these tensions. Goffman's framework interprets this as the protagonist's exaggerated front-stage performance overshadowing her backstage self, while Baudrillard's hyperreality explains how her online presence supplants her real existence. Turkle's analysis adds that this detachment fosters alienation, leaving her fragmented and disconnected from her embodied experiences.

The protagonist's question, "What was left of me when I turned off my phone?" (198), brings the analysis full circle. This inquiry echoes Goffman's suggestion that "we are not visible to ourselves as others see us" (20), Baudrillard's idea that "authenticity is no longer necessary in a world of endless simulations" (10), and Turkle's argument that "our digital lives can make us strangers to ourselves" (24). Together, these theories illuminate Oyler's critique of digital identity, offering a multidimensional perspective on the protagonist's struggle to reconcile her online persona with her offline self.

Oyler's exploration of the protagonist's identity crisis highlights Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, where the distinction between real and simulated identities dissolves. The protagonist's observation, "I didn't know if I was lying, exaggerating, or just being who people wanted me to be" (174), exemplifies the ambiguity of hyperreality. Baudrillard explains that "the real is not only what can be reproduced but that which is always already reproduced: the hyperreal" (2). The protagonist's digital persona becomes a hyperreal construct, constantly reproduced, iterated, and reinterpreted to maintain its relevance in the digital space.

This blurring of boundaries mirrors Goffman's theory of self-presentation, where the "performance" becomes indistinguishable from the "authentic" self. Goffman writes, "When an individual plays a part, he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them" (30). In the protagonist's case, the curated persona she projects online requests validation from her audience, even as it erodes her sense of authenticity. The recurring theme of uncertainty about her identity, "Was I still myself, or was I just what people saw of me online?" (198), emphasizes the hyperreal disconnection Baudrillard describes and the performative dynamic Goffman theorizes.

Oyler's protagonist experiences identity as a fragmented construct, resonating with Turkle's idea of digital disembodiment. Turkle argues that digital technologies "encourage the presentation of multiple selves, creating a fragmented identity that shifts depending on the context" (14). This fragmentation is evident when the protagonist reflects: "There were days when I felt like I was juggling versions of myself, none of them real, none of them complete" (220). The digital sphere, which offers infinite opportunities for reinvention, destabilizes the notion of a cohesive identity.

Goffman's differentiation between front-stage and backstage selves further clarifies this fragmentation. The protagonist's statement, "I could be decisive and opinionated online, but in real life, I couldn't even decide what I wanted for lunch" (145), demonstrates the dissociation between her online and offline personas. This echoes Goffman's assertion that the front-stage self, crafted to suit an audience, often masks vulnerabilities and inconsistencies that emerge in the backstage. Turkle's concept of disembodiment amplifies this analysis, as the protagonist's physical self becomes increasingly irrelevant in the context of her digital performance.

Oyler's novel critiques how the digital landscape exacerbates feelings of alienation and disconnection, themes deeply tied to Baudrillard's and Turkle's theories. The protagonist's admission, "I spent hours scrolling, watching other people's lives, wondering if mine even counted" (163), reflects the alienation caused by hyperreality. Baudrillard's assertion that "we live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" (79) explains this existential void. The endless consumption of curated digital content fosters a sense of inadequacy, as the protagonist measures her offline existence against hyperreal simulations of others' lives.

Turkle's analysis of digital alienation adds another dimension. She writes, "In the digital age, we expect more from technology and less from each other" (20). The protagonist's diminishing offline interactions, "Conversations felt harder than they should have been, like I'd forgotten how to talk to people face-to-face" (147), highlight how digital engagement erodes meaningful human connection. This alienation, coupled with the pressures of performative identity, drives the protagonist to question her very existence: "If I disappeared tomorrow, would anyone notice, or would they just keep scrolling?" (230).

The digital age, as Oyler presents it, amplifies the performative nature of identity theorized by Goffman, Baudrillard, and Turkle. Goffman's claim that "we are all, in a sense, players in a social drama" (26) finds new relevance in the protagonist's hyper-curated online persona. Oyler critiques how the protagonist's life becomes a continuous performance for a faceless audience: "Everything I did, I thought of how it would look online, as if someone was always watching" (188). The omnipresent "audience" of social media transforms her daily existence into a performance, leaving no space for a genuine self.

Baudrillard's hyperreality intensifies this dynamic, as Oyler's protagonist navigates a world where the simulation of life, her Instagram posts, tweets, and curated photos, supplants the substance of life itself. The protagonist's lament, "Even the memories I cherished felt fake, filtered, and captioned" (219), reflects Baudrillard's warning that simulations replace and overwrite reality. Turkle's insights complete this picture, emphasizing that the digital age fosters disembodiment, leaving individuals disconnected from their physical selves.

Through the protagonist's journey, Oyler masterfully synthesizes these theoretical frameworks, illustrating the complexity and alienation of identity in the digital age. Each layer of analysis, from Goffman's performative roles to Baudrillard's hyperreal simulations and Turkle's fragmented selves, reveals how digital environments transform the way individuals understand themselves and relate to the world around them.

Conclusion

Lauren Oyler's *Fake Accounts* offers a critical exploration of identity formation and authenticity in the digital age. Through the protagonist's fragmented existence between her curated online persona and lived reality, the novel illustrates the performative pressures and alienation inherent in digital self-presentation. The application of Goffman's self-presentation theory emphasizes how online spaces mirror theatrical stages, where individuals meticulously craft and manage impressions. Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality reveals the collapse of boundaries between real and simulated identities, highlighting the replacement of authentic selfhood with hyperreal versions that exist solely for digital consumption. Turkle's insights on digital disembodiment illuminate the emotional and psychological toll of inhabiting parallel identities, where connection is substituted by isolation and fragmented identity.

Ultimately, *Fake Accounts* critiques the pervasive influence of social media on personal authenticity and identity construction, questioning whether true authenticity can exist within the hypermediated, performative framework of contemporary digital culture. This study highlights the need to reimagine authenticity in an age defined by simulation and performance, prompting broader reflections on how individuals might reclaim a sense of genuine selfhood amid the digital deluge.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express our sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions who helped complete this research article.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicting interests in the reasearch work.

Fundings

No funding was received.

ORCID iDs

Raj Kishor Singh : https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6994-1429

Works Cited

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Brown, Jane. *Digital Identities in Fiction: Fragmentation and Authenticity*. OUP, 2018.

Brown, Lisa. "Authenticity in a Digital World: A Critical Reading of *Fake Accounts*." *Journal of Modern Fiction*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2023, pp. 75–79.

Fisher, Mark. *Digital Selves and Modern Identity Crises*. University of Chicago Press, 2020.

Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books, 1959.

Greenfield, Susan. *The Self-Branding Paradox: Identity in a Networked World*. Princeton UP, 2017.

Jones, Rebecca. *Social Media and the Performance of Selfhood*. Routledge, 2019.

Jones, Richard. "Social Media and the Illusion of Authenticity: Analyzing *Fake Accounts*." *Digital Culture Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2023, pp. 100-105.

Kakutani, Michiko. "A Whole Lot of Swiping: Review of Lauren Oyler's *Fake Accounts*." *The Guardian*, 15 Feb. 2021, www.theguardian.com.

Kerrigan, Finola, and Andrew Hart. "Theorising Digital Personhood: A Dramaturgical Approach." *ResearchGate*, www.researchgate.net. Accessed 14 Jan. 2025.

Larson, Emily. *Satire and the Digital Age: A Critical Analysis of Contemporary Novels*. Harvard UP, 2021.

Oyler, Lauren. *Fake Accounts*. Catapult, 2021.

Smith, John. *Narratives of Self-Presentation in Modern Literature*. CUP, 2021.

---. "Performativity and Identity in the Age of Digital Media: A Review of *Fake Accounts*." *The Literary Review*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2023, pp. 40-47.

Taylor, James. *Surveillance and Digital Culture: A Sociological Perspective*. Routledge, 2019.

Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. Basic Books, 2011.

Vicdan, Handan, and Ebru Ulusoy. "Symbolic and Experiential Consumption of Body in Virtual Worlds." *ResearchGate*, www.researchgate.net. Accessed 14 Jan. 2025.

White, Douglas. *Postmodern Identity and Narrative in 21st Century Fiction*. Columbia UP, 2018.

Williams-Mulligan, Brett. "Social Media and Baudrillard's *Simulation and Simulacra*." *Medium*, 2023, medium.com/article-link.

Bio

Dr. Raj Kishor Singh is a renowned scholar and educator in English literature, linguistics, and language education. Assistant Professor of Tribhuvan University and has authored numerous academic works. He supervises advanced research and actively contributes to Nepal's academic community as General Secretary of the Linguistic Society of Nepal. With leadership roles in various organizations and editorial boards, he remains committed to academic excellence, inspiring scholars through his research, teaching, and international engagement**.**

Email: drrksnp@gmail.com

Cite as: Singh, Raj Kishor. "Authenticity of Identity in Lauren Oyler's Fake Accounts." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Innovation in Nepalese Academia,* vol. 4, no. 1, June 2025, pp. 202-216. https://doi.org/10.32674/nwm18k07