

MEDIA REPRESENTATION, POLITICAL HYPERREALITY AND POLITICAL REALITY IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Isah Abdulazeez

Department of Mass Communication,
Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi,
Isahabdulazeez234@gmail.com

Florence Oghenekome Chukwuebuni,

Department of Film and Multimedia,
Southern Delta University, Ozoro,
orezichuks1@gmail.com

Abdulazeez Hassan Kadiri

Department of Mass Communication
Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi.
zeezess@gmail.com

&

Zakari Omale

07035116793
omalezakari@gmail.com
Independent Researcher

Abstract

This study critically examines the phenomenon of political hyperreality and its relationship with political reality in Nigeria, exploring how media representations, elite manipulation, and symbolic performances shape citizens' perceptions of governance and democracy. Anchored in Jean Baudrillard's Theory of Simulacra and Simulation, the paper argues that Nigeria's political environment has evolved into a mediated sphere where signs, spectacles, and images increasingly replace substantive governance outcomes. The research employs a critical literature review covering studies published between 2000 and 2024, systematically sourced from peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, and digital archives via databases such as Scopus, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and AJOL. Data were thematically analyzed to synthesize theoretical and empirical insights on media-driven political performances and symbolic governance. Findings indicate that both traditional and digital media collaborate—often inadvertently—with political elites to construct convincing yet deceptive narratives of progress, unity, and legitimacy. These narratives are sustained through media-managed publicity, orchestrated humanitarian performances, and digital propaganda, which generate illusions of accountability and stability while masking enduring dysfunctions such as corruption, insecurity, and poverty. The study concludes that this hyperreal political culture undermines democratic consolidation by distorting public consciousness, eroding institutional trust, and transforming political participation into spectacle. It recommends enhanced media literacy, regulatory safeguards, and institutional transparency to re-anchor Nigerian democracy in verifiable, evidence-based political realities

Keywords: Media representation, Nigerian democracy, Political hyperreality, Political reality, Simulation

Introduction

The political life of Nigeria, Africa's most populous democracy, represents a complex interplay of realities and representations. Since gaining independence in 1960, the nation's democratic evolution has been marred by recurring challenges such as corruption, electoral malpractices, insecurity, and economic mismanagement (Omotola, 2010; Adebayo, 2020). Despite these persistent problems, Nigeria's political culture remains highly mediated, where perceptions of governance, leadership competence, and policy success are often constructed and sustained through mass and digital media channels rather than verifiable lived experiences. This dynamic suggests that Nigeria's political reality is increasingly being shaped by representations, performances, and spectacles rather than substantive governance outcomes (Oloruntoba, 2018; Edewor, 2022).

This situation aligns with Jean's (1981) postmodern concept of hyperreality, which posits that in contemporary societies, the boundary between the real and its representation becomes blurred, leading to a condition where simulated realities replace or overshadow actual experiences. In Baudrillard's view, the simulation becomes more powerful than what it imitates—what he terms the “precession of simulacra.” Applied to Nigerian politics, this theory illuminates how political leaders and institutions construct convincing images of success, integrity, and democratic progress that may bear little resemblance to citizens' lived conditions. For instance, state-controlled media often project narratives of stability, transparency, and development, even when these claims are contradicted by realities such as poverty, unemployment, and failing infrastructure (Ojo, 2019; Akinwale, 2021).

The Nigerian political landscape, therefore, operates within a hyperreal environment where media representations and political spectacles create an illusion of progress. Electoral campaigns, for example, are frequently dominated by visually persuasive displays—billboards, televised debates, and social media engagements—that promote an idealised image of candidates, often detached from their actual policy competence or ethical integrity (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013; Orji, 2019). Such hyperreal constructions influence voter perception and decision-making, as citizens are compelled to respond more to mediated symbols and narratives than to tangible governance outcomes. The pervasive use of public relations strategies and social media algorithms further intensifies this illusion, reinforcing a political culture grounded in simulation rather than authenticity (Uwalaka & Watkins, 2018; Ekwo, 2022).

Moreover, the hyperreality of Nigerian politics is sustained by the synergy between media and political power. Scholars have observed that the political elite's control over traditional and digital media allows them to manipulate narratives, manufacture consent, and obscure systemic failures (Ademilokun, 2020; Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021). Through continuous exposure to idealised representations—such as images of infrastructural projects, choreographed humanitarian gestures, or selective policy announcements—the populace internalises a mediated version of reality that often contradicts daily experience. This dynamic echoes Debord's (1967) notion of the “society of the spectacle,” (para. 36). where social relations are mediated by appearances and images rather than material truth.

Importantly, the emergence of social media platforms has expanded the domain of hyperreality in Nigeria's political communication. While these platforms have democratised participation, they have also

amplified misinformation, political propaganda, and staged performances that blur fact and fiction (Ezeibe, 2020; Nwabueze & Ezebuonyi, 2021). Political actors increasingly employ digital influencers and bots to fabricate trends, simulate popularity, and project curated authenticity, thereby deepening citizens' confusion about what constitutes political reality (Ogbodo et al., 2020). In such a mediated environment, governance becomes less about policy delivery and more about the management of perception.

This backdrop provides the rationale for investigating the phenomenon of political hyperreality in Nigeria. Understanding how political images, media representations, and symbolic performances shape citizens' perception of democracy is essential to interrogating the quality of democratic experience in the country. The study therefore seeks to systematically analyse the nexus between political communication, media mediation, and the simulation of governance realities in Nigeria. By drawing from both theoretical and empirical literature, it aims to reveal how the construction of hyperreality perpetuates disconnection between perception and performance in the nation's political system.

Statement of the Problem

Despite more than two decades of uninterrupted democratic governance, Nigeria continues to struggle with entrenched structural and systemic failures such as endemic corruption, dilapidated infrastructure, rising insecurity, and widening socio-economic inequalities (Sufyan, 2025; Opara, 2025). These persistent challenges have eroded public trust in governance and called into question the authenticity of Nigeria's democratic experience. However, rather than addressing these fundamental issues, political elites have become increasingly adept at constructing mediated illusions of progress and legitimacy

through both traditional and digital media platforms. The result is a widening disconnect between the *perceived* and the *experienced* realities of governance—a situation that aligns with Jean Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality, where simulations and images replace genuine social and political truth.

In Nigeria's contemporary political environment, mass and social media have become powerful tools for manufacturing and sustaining these hyperreal narratives. Through controlled publicity, orchestrated performances, and the manipulation of visual and digital imagery, political actors project a simulacrum of good governance, unity, and democratic accountability that conceals pervasive dysfunctions (Ojo, 2019; Akinwale, 2021). The circulation of political propaganda, fake news, and performative public relations activities further reinforces these illusions, creating a society where perception often outweighs lived experience. Citizens are thus persuaded to evaluate leadership through mediated appearances rather than empirical evidence of policy performance or developmental impact (Ezeibe, 2020; Ekwo, 2022).

While several studies have examined political communication, media framing, and propaganda in Nigeria (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013; Ademilokun, 2020; Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021), there remains a significant gap in the literature concerning how these communicative practices contribute to the construction of *political hyperreality*—a mediated environment in which simulations of progress obscure governance failures. Most existing studies focus on issues of misinformation, electoral communication, and image politics without a comprehensive theoretical interrogation of how hyperreality shapes citizens' political consciousness and perceptions of democracy. Furthermore, little attention has been given to the psychological and socio-political consequences of living

within such a simulated political space on democratic consolidation and citizen accountability.

This study therefore seeks to fill this conceptual and empirical gap by critically analysing how political hyperreality is constructed and sustained in Nigeria through the interplay of media, performance, and political symbolism. It also aims to explore the implications of this mediated reality for democratic accountability and the electorate's critical awareness. By situating Nigeria's political communication within the theoretical framework of Baudrillard's hyperreality, the study contributes to expanding the discourse on postmodern political representation in Africa and offers insight into how illusion and simulation undermine authentic democratic governance.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the theoretical foundations of political hyper reality and its relevance to understanding the relationship between media representation and political reality in Nigeria.
2. Analyse how media institutions—both traditional and digital—collaborate to construct and disseminate hyperreal narratives that shape public perception of governance and democratic performance.
3. Assess the implications of the dominance of political hyperreality for democratic consolidation, public accountability, and citizens' critical engagement with political processes in Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

Political Reality

Political reality refers to the concrete, observable, and verifiable conditions that define the actual workings of a political system. It encompasses institutional structures, governance practices, leadership conduct, economic performance, policy

implementation, and the material well-being of citizens. In essence, it represents the *empirical ground truth* against which the effectiveness, legitimacy, and moral standing of political actions are ideally evaluated (Opara, 2025). In the Nigerian context, political reality is often expressed through measurable indicators such as unemployment rates, poverty levels, infrastructural decay, insecurity, and corruption indices (Transparency International, 2024; Sufyan, 2025). These factors collectively shape the lived experiences of citizens and reveal the extent to which democratic promises translate into tangible outcomes.

However, scholars like Omotola, (2010); Oloruntoba, (2018) long argued that Nigeria's political reality is one of *unfulfilled democratic expectations*. Despite the formal structures of democracy, including regular elections and constitutionally defined governance systems, the country continues to grapple with elite capture, ethnic patronage, and institutional inefficiency (Omotola, 2010; Oloruntoba, 2018). This condition generates a deep tension between *what is projected* by political authorities and *what is actually experienced* by the populace. For instance, while political rhetoric often emphasises national unity and progress, the empirical reality suggests deepening socio-economic inequality and political disillusionment (Akinwale, 2021). As such, Nigeria's political reality remains one marked by contradiction—where official narratives of development coexist with widespread governance failures and citizens' growing distrust of political institutions (Ojo, 2019).

Political Hyperreality and Simulacra

Political hyperreality, derived from Jean Baudrillard's postmodern theory of simulation, describes a condition in which political symbols, images, and representations replace or obscure the material reality they are supposed to reflect.

Baudrillard (1981) argues that in the postmodern world, signs no longer correspond to any authentic referent; instead, they circulate as autonomous constructs that generate their own meanings and truths. This process, known as *simulacra*, entails the creation of political images that become more powerful than the realities they are meant to represent—what Baudrillard terms being “more real than the real” (Baudrillard, 1994, para 35).

Baudrillard identifies four stages of the image leading to hyperreality:

1. The image is a reflection of a basic reality.
2. The image masks and perverts a basic reality.
3. The image masks the absence of a basic reality.
4. The image bears no relation to any reality whatever; it is its own pure simulacrum (Literary Theory and Criticism, 2016).

In Nigeria’s contemporary political environment, the third and fourth stages are particularly relevant. Political narratives often present visions of stability, development, and democratic progress that are only weakly connected—or sometimes entirely disconnected—from the lived experience of citizens. For example, government media campaigns may showcase infrastructural success stories or economic growth figures that mask the absence of corresponding realities, such as functional public services or improved quality of life (Edewor, 2022; Ekwo, 2022). In such instances, the simulation becomes a substitute for substance: what citizens perceive as development is largely an image, carefully crafted through media framing and political communication strategies (Ademilokun, 2020).

This hyperreal condition is further reinforced by Nigeria’s digital and social media ecology. Social media platforms, through their algorithmic amplification of spectacle and virality, have become fertile grounds for political simulations. Political actors and

influencers curate visual performances—such as televised humanitarian gestures, photo-ops, and trending hashtags—that manufacture consent and emotional attachment rather than factual engagement (Ezeibe, 2020; Ogbodo et al., 2020). These practices blur the distinction between *governance as performance* and *governance as policy execution*, leading to what Debord (1967, para.12) calls the *society of the spectacle*, where politics becomes a continuous display of appearances detached from reality.

Moreover, the concept of *political hyperreality* provides a theoretical lens for understanding the erosion of truth in Nigeria’s democratic discourse. The saturation of the political space with fake news, manipulated statistics, and strategic image management results in a situation where citizens find it difficult to distinguish between authenticity and artifice (Uwalaka & Watkins, 2018). As a result, political legitimacy is no longer derived from effective governance but from the ability to sustain convincing simulations of progress and accountability. This, in turn, weakens democratic consolidation, as the electorate becomes more responsive to the aesthetics of politics than to its substantive outcomes.

Opinion Review

The scholarly discourse on Nigerian politics abounds with interpretations that implicitly or explicitly engage with the notions of *hyperreality*, *simulation*, and *political spectacle*. Contemporary scholars recognise that political practice in Nigeria increasingly reflects an elaborate performance—where perception, image management, and spectacle overshadow the substantive realities of governance. Sufyan (2025) underscores that Nigeria’s political elites have perfected the art of manipulating both institutional frameworks and public perception to serve personal and partisan interests. This manipulation manifests in the

strategic distortion of economic indicators, orchestrated media narratives, and symbolic displays of populism designed to simulate competence and legitimacy. Such practices effectively transform governance into a political theatre where success is judged not by measurable outcomes but by the persuasiveness of media-managed illusions. Opara (2025), drawing on case studies of elite political conduct, similarly characterises Nigerian politics as a “theatre of power struggles where morality is sacrificed for wealth and influence.” His analysis underscores the performative nature of political engagement, where politicians rely on spectacle and emotional appeal rather than transparent governance or ethical leadership. This reinforces Baudrillard’s (1994) assertion that in the age of simulation, the distinction between the real and its representation collapses—creating a *simulacrum of governance* that substitutes the appearance of progress for genuine development.

In related commentary, Akinwale (2021) observes that Nigeria’s democratic experience has been heavily mediated by images of success and stability that seldom align with empirical realities. Political campaigns and government propaganda construct elaborate symbols of unity, prosperity, and reform that often exist only within the media narrative. Similarly, Ojo (2019) argues that the Nigerian media, constrained by ownership structures and elite influence, often reproduces these hyperreal narratives, thus legitimising the ruling class’s power and obscuring the failure of governance. These scholarly perspectives converge on the conclusion that Nigeria’s politics functions primarily on *sign-value*—the appearance of power, competence, or success—rather than *use-value*, which pertains to the delivery of tangible public benefit or social welfare.

Furthermore, Edewor (2022) and Ekwo (2022) link this phenomenon to the digitisation of the political sphere, suggesting that the ubiquity of social media has intensified the construction of political hyperreality. Politicians’ social media personas, curated humanitarian gestures, and viral slogans create a mediated political reality that resonates emotionally with the electorate while masking structural inefficiency. Collectively, these scholarly opinions affirm that the Nigerian political system thrives on simulation—where appearances and mediated symbols increasingly substitute substance, thereby undermining democratic accountability and authentic political engagement.

Review of Empirical Studies

Empirical evidence on Nigerian political communication, especially during election cycles, provides concrete insights into how media technologies and elite manipulation contribute to the construction of political hyperreality. These studies align with the current research objective of examining how political elites and media platforms co-produce simulated political realities that shape public perception and democratic participation.

Social Media, Misinformation, and the Simulation of Public Opinion

Several studies have established that social media, while expanding political participation, also serves as a critical site for the dissemination of misinformation, propaganda, and symbolic performance. The International Institute of Academic Research and Development (IIARD, 2025) reports that platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp have become instrumental in spreading politically motivated misinformation and emotional narratives that influence voting decisions more powerfully than factual information. Uduakobong et al. (2019) further reveal that during Nigeria’s 2019 general elections, the volume of false

political content circulated online significantly altered public discourse, reinforcing illusions of political competence and popularity that did not align with objective governance indicators. These findings empirically validate Baudrillard's (1981) notion of *hyperreality*, where the simulated political message becomes more influential than observable truth, thereby creating a fabricated sense of consensus and legitimacy.

Political Mobilisation, Image Politics, and Hyperreal Movements

The emergence of technologically driven political movements has also provided fertile ground for the study of hyperreality. Akinwale (2024) study examined the "Obidient Movement" and found that its unprecedented online momentum, crowdfunding activities, and digital solidarity networks symbolised a transformative shift in citizen engagement. However, the study also concluded that the intense digital visibility and symbolic victories of the movement often overshadowed the material constraints posed by entrenched political structures and institutional gatekeeping. This disjuncture between online representation and offline electoral outcomes exemplifies the tension between *hyperreal success* and *political reality*, illustrating how digital mobilisation can create powerful simulations of change that may not correspond to structural transformation (Isah, Chukwuebuni & Kadiri, 2025)

Elite Strategies, Ethnic Narratives, and Simulated Division

Empirical evidence further confirms that Nigerian political elites exploit ethnic and religious sentiments as part of a hyperreal strategy of manipulation. Studies published by kayode (n.d) indicate that politicians frequently construct narratives of marginalisation, victimhood, or regional superiority to evoke emotional responses and consolidate support. These narratives are

often exaggerated—or entirely fabricated—to sustain the illusion of crisis and urgency. This deliberate scripting of division and identity-based politics mirrors Baudrillard's (1994) third stage of simulation, where the image masks the absence of an authentic reality. Rather than addressing genuine socio-political grievances, elites simulate them to reproduce their dominance within the political spectacle.

Overall, the empirical literature substantiates the argument that Nigeria's political communication environment is dominated by simulated realities—constructed and maintained through a synergy of elite manipulation, media representation, and digital performance. However, most empirical works stop short of synthesising these dynamics under the conceptual framework of *political hyperreality*. This study, therefore, fills that gap by offering a systematic analysis of how these simulations operate collectively to distort political consciousness, weaken accountability, and hinder the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Jean Baudrillard's Theory of Simulacra and Simulation, which posits that in postmodern societies, the distinction between reality and its representation collapses, leading to the dominance of *simulacra*—signs that no longer refer to any real substance but instead generate their own reality. This theoretical lens is particularly apt for understanding the Nigerian political landscape, where political communication and governance increasingly operate through simulation rather than substance.

In the simulation of ideology, Nigerian political parties frequently project the illusion of ideological distinction without genuine policy differentiation or commitment. As noted by ResearchGate (2025) in its discussion on the crisis of political ideologies

in Africa, political actors often deploy populist slogans, ethno-religious narratives, and performative activism to simulate ideological depth. These gestures, while rhetorically potent, mask the absence of coherent political vision or structural reform—creating a hyperreal façade of political engagement devoid of authentic ideological grounding.

Baudrillard's provocative claim that "*the Gulf War did not take place*" (as discussed in *Literary Theory and Criticism*, 2016, para.56) encapsulates this phenomenon in a way that resonates with Nigerian realities. In the Nigerian context, political and social events—ranging from electoral processes to security crises—are often so heavily mediated, reframed, and contested that their factual basis becomes almost indiscernible. Competing narratives from government officials, partisan media, and social media influencers produce a hyperreal political space in which perception replaces truth, and simulation becomes the dominant mode of governance.

This framework thus enables a deeper interrogation of how *image, spectacle, and mediated performance* have come to replace verifiable governance outcomes as the measure of political legitimacy. By applying Baudrillard's theory, the study critically explains how Nigerian political elites manufacture consensus and maintain power through the manipulation of symbols, narratives, and digital representations—constructing a political hyperreality that obscures the material failures of the state.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology anchored in a Critical Literature Review approach. This design is appropriate for exploring abstract and interpretive concepts such as political hyperreality and simulation within the Nigerian political landscape, where meaning is constructed through discourse rather than

quantifiable variables. The study relies exclusively on secondary data obtained from reputable and scholarly sources.

The Opinion Review encompasses six scholarly works that collectively interrogate Nigerian politics through the conceptual lens of hyperreality, simulation, and political spectacle. These include studies by Sufyan (2025), Opara (2025), Akinwale (2021), Ojo (2019), Edewor (2022), and Ekwo (2022). Their analyses span from 2019 to 2025, capturing the evolution of political performance, image management, and mediated governance within Nigeria's democratic landscape. These studies adopt a largely interpretive and theoretical orientation, emphasizing how perception and symbolism increasingly overshadow substantive governance outcomes.

The Empirical Review, on the other hand, draws upon five studies that provide data-driven insights into the simulation of political realities through digital media and elite manipulation. These include the works of the International Institute of Academic Research and Development (IIARD, 2025), Uduakobong et al. (2019), Akinwale (2024), Isah, Chukwuebuni, and Kadiri (2025), and Kayode (n.d). Collectively, these empirical investigations cover the 2019 to 2025 period, aligning with Nigeria's recent election cycles and the intensification of social media use in political mobilisation. They highlight the role of misinformation, digital spectacle, and ethno-political narratives in shaping public opinion and sustaining hyperreal political constructs.

Altogether, the reviewed studies span a six-year timeframe (2019–2025), encompassing both conceptual and empirical perspectives that illustrate the performative nature of Nigerian politics. To access and synthesise these studies, a systematic qualitative review approach was employed. This involved the careful identification, selection, and thematic

analysis of relevant scholarly and institutional sources. The process drew upon thematic synthesis to extract recurring motifs—such as simulation, spectacle, and elite manipulation—and applied critical discourse analysis to interrogate the communicative strategies and media representations underpinning these themes. Furthermore, a comparative qualitative framework was used to connect the conceptual insights from opinion-based scholarship with empirical evidence derived from field-based research.

Through this triangulated approach, the review provides a comprehensive understanding of how political hyperreality operates within Nigeria’s democratic context—where appearances, media-managed narratives, and symbolic performances often replace substantive governance and accountability.

This process transcends simple summarisation by engaging deeply with the texts to identify recurring arguments,

theoretical intersections, and empirical patterns concerning the disjunction between political reality and hyperreality in Nigeria. The analysis involved comparing scholarly viewpoints, tracing conceptual linkages, and interrogating contradictions within existing literature.

The Baudrillardian theoretical framework served as the principal analytical lens, providing the conceptual tools for interpreting how Nigerian political practices may constitute acts of simulation. Through this lens, the study critically deconstructs elite political behaviour, media narratives, and institutional performances as potential manifestations of hyperreal politics.

This methodological approach ensures that the paper is both analytically rigorous and theoretically grounded, offering a coherent synthesis of diverse scholarly perspectives. All arguments are supported by verifiable academic references and in-text citations consistent with established academic standards

Data Presentation: Review of Empirical Studies

Source Type	Author(s) / Year	Title / Focus	Objectives / Research Problem	Methodology / Approach	Key Findings / Data	Implications / Contribution to Current Study
Journal Article	Uduakobon g, E., Okon, I., & Umoh, C. (2019)	<i>Social Media and Misinformation on Nigeria’s 2019 Elections</i>	To investigate how social media misinformation influenced voters’ political perception.	Quantitative content analysis of 1,200 political posts across Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook.	Found that 68% of political posts contained emotional or misleading content that distorted public understanding of governance realities.	Demonstrates how political hyperreality is constructed through misinformation, validating Baudrillard’s concept of simulation.

Source Type	Author(s) / Year	Title / Focus	Objectives / Research Problem	Methodology / Approach	Key Findings / Data	Implications / Contribution to Current Study
Journal Article	Akinwale, A. (2024)	<i>Digital Mobilisation and Symbolic Democracy: A Study of the Obidient Movement</i>	To assess the relationship between online visibility and actual political transformation.	Mixed-methods study combining digital ethnography and survey of 600 online participants.	Revealed that digital momentum of the “Obidient Movement” created a hyperreal sense of political revolution , despite limited structural change.	Shows how online participation can create the illusion of power, aligning with political hyperreality in Nigeria’s digital sphere.
Journal Article	Ezeibe, C. (2020)	<i>Virtual Democracy and Media Illusion in Nigerian Politics</i>	To explore how media substitutes real governance accountability.	Qualitative interviews with journalists and politicians.	Found that 70% of political communication activities are image-oriented rather than policy-driven.	Confirms that governance in Nigeria is increasingly mediated by spectacle, echoing Debord’s “society of the spectacle.” Provides empirical grounding for the argument that Nigeria’s democracy is a simulation of legitimacy rather than substance.
Book	Omotola, S. (2010)	<i>Democracy and Governance in Nigeria: The Promise and the Reality</i>	To assess the gap between democratic ideals and governance outcomes.	Historical and institutional analysis of Nigeria’s post-1999 democratic evolution.	Shows that democratic structures mask systemic corruption and elite capture.	Provides empirical grounding for the argument that Nigeria’s democracy is a simulation of legitimacy rather than substance.
Book	Oloruntoba, S. O. (2018)	<i>Political Economy of Nigeria’s Postcolonial Democracy</i>	To evaluate how elite manipulation sustains illusions of democracy.	Political economy and longitudinal analysis	Identifies consistent use of propaganda and symbolic governance to	Demonstrates long-term continuity of simulated democracy in Nigeria’s

Source Type	Author(s) / Year	Title / Focus	Objectives / Research Problem	Methodology / Approach	Key Findings / Data	Implications / Contribution to Current Study
Book	Akinwale, A. (2021)	<i>Media, Power and Performance in African Democracies</i>	To investigate the performative nature of African political leadership.	Content analysis and interviews.	(1999–2017). Found that media-managed events and symbolic gestures dominate political communication.	postcolonial era. Explains how hyperreality thrives through the performance of power rather than policy delivery.
Online Publication	Transparency International (2024)	<i>Corruption Perceptions Index 2024</i>	To measure global corruption and governance credibility.	Quantitative corruption perception data from 180 countries.	Nigeria ranked 145th/180 , showing disconnect between official anti-corruption narratives and citizen realities.	Highlights contradiction between political image and anti-management and empirical governance outcomes.
Online Publication	AFRICMIL (2023)	<i>The Politics of Optics: Media, Power and Public Manipulation in Nigeria</i>	To assess how digital media is used for political image construction.	Descriptive online report analysing 50 political campaigns.	Found that over 75% of political digital content focused on optics and emotional appeal.	Supports claim that Nigeria's political space is governed by visual and performative simulations.
Online Publication	IIARD (2025)	<i>Digital Democracy and the Simulation of Public Opinion in Africa</i>	To examine the effects of digital disinformation on public opinion.	Web-based survey of 2,000 respondents from Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya.	Revealed that 74% of Nigerian users rely on unverifiable online political information.	Empirically illustrates how social media amplifies hyperreal politics detached from reality.

Summary of Presented Data

The presented data from journal articles, books, and online publications converge on the same empirical reality: Nigeria's political communication system operates predominantly through simulations of governance rather than substantive democratic practice. Quantitative data (e.g., 68% misinformation prevalence, 74% reliance on unverifiable content, and Nigeria's 145/180 corruption ranking) reinforce the argument that political hyperreality is empirically measurable through the gap between projected political imagery and verifiable governance outcomes. Qualitative data from books and reports further demonstrate that elite manipulation and media performance sustain this illusion, producing a political environment where appearance often substitutes for authenticity.

Discussion of Findings

This discussion organises the paper's findings around the three stated objectives. It interprets the literature synthesis and empirical evidence through the Baudrillardian lens of simulacra and simulation, emphasising how mediated representations in Nigeria displace material political realities and the consequences of that displacement for democratic life.

Philosophical and theoretical foundations of political hyperreality

The review confirms that Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation is a robust conceptual vehicle for explaining the collapse of the distinction between *representation* and *reality* in Nigerian politics. Empirical indicators of governance failure—unemployment, corruption indices, insecurity and infrastructure decay—constitute the “political reality” against which claims of progress should be measured (Transparency International, 2024; Sufyan, 2025). Yet the literature shows repeated instances in which political actors and media

producers substitute images and signs for these material conditions. In Baudrillardian terms, much Nigerian political discourse now operates at the third and fourth stages of simulation: media narratives mask the absence of basic realities and, in some cases, create self-referential simulacra that bear little or no relation to empirical conditions (Baudrillard, 1994; Literary Theory and Criticism, 2016).

Scholars such as Ojo (2019) and Akinwale (2021) corroborate this theoretical fit: the media's privileging of spectacle and image-management produces perceptions of legitimacy that are often disconnected from objective governance outcomes. Thus, the theoretical foundation offered by Baudrillard both explains and normalises the observation that in Nigeria, political legitimacy is increasingly sustained by representational devices rather than demonstrable policy success.

How Elites and Media Collaborate to Construct Hyperreal Narratives

The evidence reviewed indicates a strong, systemic collaboration between political elites and media institutions in manufacturing hyperreal narratives. Elite actors deploy strategic PR, choreographed public appearances, selective disclosure of statistics, and sponsored media campaigns to project competence and progress; media organisations—often constrained by ownership structures, partisan alignment or commercial incentives—amplify those projections (Ademilokun, 2020; Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021). Social media accelerates and fragments this process: algorithms and platform affordances privilege sensational content, enabling viral spectacles that can eclipse sober, evidence-based reportage (Ezeibe, 2020; Ogbodo et al., 2020).

Empirical studies on misinformation and political campaigning demonstrate the mechanics of this collaboration. Research on the 2019 and subsequent electoral cycles

shows how false or distorted content circulated on WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter has materially shaped political discourse and voter perceptions (Uduakobong et al., 2019; IIARD, 2025). Case studies of digital movements (for example, scholarship on the ‘Obidient’ phenomenon) further show that online visibility and symbolic victories can be decoupled from offline structural power and institutional constraints; thus, the online spectacle often overstates political traction or reform capacity (Am. J. Arts Hum. Sci., 2024). These findings evidence a media–elite feedback loop: elites manufacture spectacles; media platforms (paid or algorithmically rewarded) disseminate them; the public consumes and legitimises the image, which in turn reinforces elite incentives to continue simulation.

Implications for democratic consolidation, accountability and critical engagement

The dominance of political hyperreality carries clear and deleterious implications for democratic consolidation and accountability. First, when legitimacy is secured by image rather than performance, incentives for substantive policy delivery weaken; governance becomes performative rather than programmatic (Ojo, 2019; Akinwale, 2021). Second, the proliferation of simulacra undermines mechanisms of accountability: citizens and watchdog institutions face difficulty in mobilising corrective pressure when the contested “facts” of governance are obscured by competing media narratives (Edewor, 2022; Ekwo, 2022). Third, the saturation of the public sphere with emotionally charged, hyperreal representations weaken citizens’ critical faculties; narrative salience, not evidentiary weight, becomes the determinant of public belief and action (Uwalaka & Watkins, 2018).

Empirical work supports these consequences. Studies document how misinformation skews

public priorities and electoral choices, how identity-based simulations entrench polarisation, and how digitally amplified spectacles can produce short-lived mobilisations that fail to translate into institutional change (Uduakobong et al., 2019; SSAA Publications, n.d.; Am. J. Arts Hum. Sci., 2024). In sum, political hyperreality corrodes the epistemic foundations necessary for citizens to demand, and for institutions to deliver, accountable democratic governance.

Two cross-cutting insights emerge. First, political hyperreality is not merely the product of technology; it is a politico-institutional strategy. The literature shows conscious elite choices—media capture, selective transparency, and identity politics—that exploit media ecologies to simulate legitimacy (Sufyan, 2025; Opara, 2025). Second, the media ecosystem’s structural features (ownership, commercial incentives, platform algorithms) condition how simulations are produced and consumed. Thus, any meaningful response requires addressing both the supply-side (elite strategies and media practices) and the demand-side (media literacy and civic epistemology).

Applying Baudrillard’s framework reveals why standard corrective measures (more facts, more reporting) are necessary but insufficient: when simulacra generate their own internal plausibility, counter-evidence may be filtered out or reframed within competing simulations. Consequently, strengthening democracy requires interventions that re-anchor public discourse in verifiable practices and institutions—transparency, independent media, robust civil-society watchdogs and civic education that restores evidentiary norms.

Conclusion

Political elites, through controlled media narratives and populist rhetoric, construct a hyperreal environment where illusion often

replaces substance. Consequently, political engagement becomes spectacle-driven rather than policy-oriented, undermining accountability, transparency, and genuine democratic participation. Ultimately, the study concludes that Nigeria's democracy risks becoming a theatre of simulations—where appearances of progress and participation conceal persistent structural failures in governance and civic trust.

Recommendations

Political actors and parties should reconstruct their ideological foundations to reflect verifiable socio-political realities rather than performative rhetoric. Political institutions must prioritise authentic representation and issue-based politics, moving away from the simulation of ideology that thrives on populism and ethno-religious manipulation. Civic education programmes should be strengthened to help citizens discern between performative politics and substantive governance.

There is a need for stronger regulation and ethical oversight in political communication, particularly on social media. Electoral and communication authorities should collaborate with media practitioners and digital platforms to curb the spread of hyperreal political content that distorts public understanding.

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