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SPECTACLE AND SIMULACRA: CONSUMERISM IN DON DELILLO'S *WHITE NOISE* THROUGH THE LENS OF JEAN BAUDRILLARD

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Abstract: In contemporary digital and analog cultures, consumerism and media saturation shape not only our daily lives but also the way we perceive reality. Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) vividly captures this condition through its depiction of supermarkets, television, and the commodification of fear. The novel portrays a world where images and signs increasingly mediate human experience, often replacing reality itself, anticipating debates on digital hyperreality and mediated existence. Through this paper, the relationship between consumer culture and the spectacle in *White Noise* is examined, drawing on Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra from *The Precession of Simulacra* (1981). Scenes such as the supermarket aisles, television broadcasts, the "airborne toxic event," and the famously photographed barn illustrate how everyday life becomes saturated with signs that circulate independently of their referents. These examples reveal a postmodern reality in which meaning is constructed through media consumption, whether in analog forms like television and photography or in their digital extensions—rather than through direct experience. By juxtaposing DeLillo's narrative with Baudrillard's theory, this paper argues that *White Noise* functions not merely as a satire of late capitalist consumer culture but as a critical exploration of the mediated nature of existence. It demonstrates how spectacle and simulacra govern perception and identity, highlighting the ways literature can reflect, critique, and illuminate the complexities of life across both analog and digital media environments.

Keywords: *Postmodernism, Consumerism, Spectacle, Simulacra, Digital Culture, Jean Baudrillard, White Noise, Don DeLillo*

Introduction

In the contemporary world, the sense of what is "real" has become increasingly uncertain. Everyday life unfolds through a mix of images, screens, and consumer rituals that shape how people see themselves and the world around them. The physical world, with its tangible objects and direct social interactions, often feels secondary to the mediated environments that surround it. Television, advertisements, and now digital media don't simply reflect experience—they begin to define it. This transformation captures what theorist Fredric Jameson calls the "cultural logic of late capitalism," a phase where culture itself becomes an extension of the market and where even emotion, identity, and memory are structured by systems of consumption (Jameson). In such a world, desire is not

spontaneous but continuously produced through social and commercial forces, and the idea of a shared or stable reality becomes difficult to sustain.

Literature has long responded to these shifts, and few writers illustrate them as sharply as Don DeLillo. His 1985 novel *White Noise* offers one of the clearest portraits of a society overwhelmed by media and consumer spectacle. DeLillo's fictional world—filled with supermarkets, television voices, and endless background "White Noise"—captures a culture where the boundaries between the authentic and the artificial blur. Although the novel was written during the analog age of broadcast media, its portrayal of mediated existence now feels strikingly prophetic, anticipating the immersive and hyperreal experiences of twenty-first-century digital culture.

The characters in *White Noise* rarely encounter the world directly. Instead, their lives revolve around consumer routines and the influence of mass media, which dictates how they perceive emotions, relationships, and even mortality. Beneath the novel's surface humor lies a deep anxiety about mediation—the sense that reality itself has been replaced by an endless flow of symbols. DeLillo's depiction of this environment aligns closely with Jean Baudrillard's theories on simulation and hyperreality. In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Baudrillard suggests that modern societies have moved beyond the stage where signs represent reality; instead, signs circulate independently, creating a world of copies without originals. This process produces what he terms "hyperreality," a state where the boundary between the real and the representation disappears, and people experience life more through images and codes than through direct engagement (Baudrillard 6–7).

Viewed through Baudrillard's framework, *White Noise* becomes not just a cultural satire but a serious exploration of how meaning and experience are mediated in a postmodern society. This paper examines the novel's depiction of consumerism and spectacle through Baudrillard's lens, focusing on three key spaces and events: the supermarket, the televised "airborne toxic event," and the "most photographed barn." The supermarket functions as a microcosm of hyperreality, where identity and belonging are constructed through brands and commodities. The airborne toxic event demonstrates how media coverage can transform a physical disaster into a symbolic one, where language and framing outweigh lived experience. Finally, the "most photographed barn" scene presents a distilled image of simulation itself—an object that exists only as an image, endlessly reproduced and consumed.

This study argues that *White Noise* is not simply a critique of late-capitalist culture but a literary meditation on how signs, images, and technologies govern human consciousness. DeLillo's fictional world helps us recognize our own—the digital spaces where identity, emotion, and even tragedy are packaged and circulated as spectacle. By tracing this connection between DeLillo's analog media landscape and today's digital hyperreality, the

paper seeks to show how *White Noise* continues to illuminate the anxieties and contradictions of modern existence.

Literature Review

Scholarly engagement with Don DeLillo's *White Noise* has consistently examined its critique of consumer culture, the media spectacle, and the postmodern condition of existence shaped by simulacra and simulation. Since its publication in 1985, critics have viewed the novel as one of the most incisive literary representations of life under late capitalism. Yet, while much scholarship has deeply explored the novel's analog media landscape of television, photography, and material shopping spaces, few studies have extended this framework into the digital sphere. This gap between analog and digital readings of DeLillo's work is what the present paper addresses.

A significant portion of the conversation focuses on the novel's consumer spaces. For instance, Andrew G. Christensen's paper, "*White Noise* and the Supermarket Aesthetic" (2012), provides one of the most influential readings of the novel's consumer environment. Christensen argues that DeLillo's supermarket represents a "supermarket aesthetic," where visual arrangement, packaging, and lighting transform ordinary commodities into objects of fascination. Drawing parallels to Pop Art, he demonstrates that the consumer world operates through images and surface effects rather than material utility. Similarly, E. B. Hidalgo's comparative study "The Consumer Society in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and Andy Warhol" (2004) extends this discussion by positioning DeLillo alongside Warhol's art. Hidalgo argues that both artists transform consumer goods into "floating signifiers," reinforcing the view that consumption in DeLillo's world is a semiotic process rather than a material one. This critical foundation is central to understanding how the novel transforms the act of shopping into a ritual of mediated meaning-making.

Building on the aesthetic critique, other scholars engage directly with the Baudrillardian tradition. Hamdi's article "Consumerism, Simulation, and the Fear of Death in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*" (2020) applies Jean Baudrillard's theories directly to the text. Hamdi interprets the novel within a culture where death and fear are mediated through consumption and media representation, arguing that the characters' anxiety about mortality is displaced onto the comfort of commodities and the spectacle of television. This insight supports the present paper's analysis of the supermarket and the airborne toxic event as zones where human emotion is constructed through mediated signs rather than direct experience. Ahlam Dhahir Mohsin Al-Shamarti's article "Hyper Reality, Discursive Power and Resistance in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*" (2023) adds a more contemporary theoretical perspective. She argues that DeLillo's media and consumer spaces operate as

technologies of power that structure consciousness and suppress the "real," while also identifying subtle acts of resistance that challenge total absorption into simulation.

Together, these studies firmly establish *White Noise* as a foundational text for exploring the interplay between media, consumerism, and the construction of meaning in postmodern society. However, they largely remain situated within the analog conditions of the late twentieth century.

The present study extends this critical conversation by positioning DeLillo's analog hyperreality within the continuum of digital culture. It argues that the novel prophetically anticipates today's algorithmic media, e-commerce environments, and social networks, where the same processes of spectacle, simulation, and identity construction have intensified. By bridging these contexts, this paper contributes to the evolving dialogue on how analog and digital forms of mediation shape the contemporary human condition.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Building on the preceding review of scholarship, this study aims to examine how Don DeLillo's *White Noise* anticipates and illuminates the cultural logic of both analog and digital hyperrealities. While previous studies have focused on the novel's depiction of consumerism, media saturation, and postmodern subjectivity, this paper extends the inquiry by situating DeLillo's analog world within the broader continuum of digital culture. Guided by Jean Baudrillard's theoretical framework of simulacra and hyperreality, the study investigates how analog media environments in *White Noise* foreshadow the digital spectacles that define contemporary life.

The research is structured around the following central questions:

1. How does Don DeLillo's *White Noise* represent consumer culture as a mediated spectacle shaped by signs and simulations, particularly through spaces such as the supermarket and media events?

2. In what ways do these analog spectacles prefigure the digital hyperrealities of the twenty-first century — such as online consumerism, social media performance, and algorithmic mediation?

3. How does Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and hyperreality help explain the continuity between DeLillo's postmodern analog world and our digital culture of representation and spectacle?

4. What does *White Noise* ultimately suggest about the human desire for meaning, security, and identity in a world increasingly dominated by mediated experience?

From these questions, the study develops the following working hypothese:

H1: The consumer spaces and media environments in *White Noise* operate as analog prototypes of digital hyperreality, revealing an early model of how signs and simulations replace direct experience.

H2: Baudrillard's framework of simulacra provides a coherent lens for tracing the evolution of spectacle from analog to digital culture, demonstrating a shared structure of mediated perception across both.

H3: Through the supermarket, the airborne toxic event, and the "most photographed barn," DeLillo constructs a fictional world where human meaning is produced through consumption and representation, prefiguring the logic of contemporary digital life.

H4: The novel's critique of consumerism and spectacle remains relevant in understanding how identity and reality are constructed today through digital networks, social media imagery, and algorithmic systems of attention.

In addressing these questions and hypotheses, this paper positions *White Noise* as a crucial text that bridges the conceptual gap between analog and digital cultures. It argues that DeLillo's narrative, read through Baudrillard, not only critiques the late-capitalist condition of its time but also anticipates the mediated structures of the digital age.

Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology rooted in literary and cultural theory. The study combines textual analysis with theoretical application, using Jean Baudrillard's framework of simulacra, hyperreality, and the spectacle as the primary analytical lens. Rather than relying on empirical or quantitative data, the analysis proceeds through close reading of key episodes in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*—the supermarket scenes, the "airborne toxic event," and the "most photographed barn"—to trace how consumerism, media, and representation function as systems of signs that construct human perception and experience.

The approach is theoretical-analytical in nature. It draws on Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) to interpret how the novel's analog media and consumer environments produce what he terms the "precession of simulacra," where images precede and replace reality. Through this framework, the paper reads DeLillo's fictional world as a site where the boundaries between the real and the simulated collapse, anticipating the digital conditions of the twenty-first century.

The methodology also incorporates elements of comparative cultural analysis. By juxtaposing DeLillo's representation of analog media forms—television, photography, and advertising—with contemporary digital phenomena such as online consumerism, social

media visibility, and algorithmic mediation, the study demonstrates how the logic of hyperreality operates across both analog and digital domains. This comparative dimension situates *White Noise* not only as a postmodern text of its time but also as a critical precursor to digital culture.

The analysis proceeds in three stages:

1. Theoretical groundwork, where Baudrillard's key ideas are outlined to establish the interpretive framework.

2. Textual analysis, focusing on the supermarket, the media spectacle of the "airborne toxic event," and the "most photographed barn," examining how these scenes embody the circulation of signs and mediated experience.

3. Cultural contextualization, where the analog hyperreality of *White Noise* is connected to present-day digital culture—particularly e-commerce, algorithmic marketing, and online spectacle—to demonstrate the continuity between the two.

Throughout, the study maintains an interdisciplinary perspective, drawing on postmodern literary theory, media studies, and cultural studies. This method aligns with the journal's theme of Digital and Analog Cultures by tracing how different media environments—material and virtual—shape perception, identity, and meaning.

Baudrillard's Theoretical Framework

Before turning to DeLillo's *White Noise*, it is worth pausing to consider Jean Baudrillard's ideas, which offer a powerful lens for making sense of postmodern life. Baudrillard, one of the central cultural theorists of the late twentieth century, extends the work of earlier thinkers by proposing something radical: in the postmodern age, reality itself has been transformed. In his influential text *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), he argues that modern societies are no longer organized primarily around the production of material goods but around the endless circulation of signs, symbols, and images (Baudrillard 1–3). This shift produces what he famously calls the "precession of simulacra," a state in which representation comes before, and often replaces, the real. What we encounter as "reality," he suggests, is already prefigured by models and codes. This idea becomes essential for understanding how *White Noise* presents a world where the distinction between the genuine and the artificial has largely collapsed.

At the heart of Baudrillard's philosophy lies the concept of simulacra—copies or images that, over time, become more significant than the realities they once represented. He outlines four stages in the history of the image: first, the image reflects reality faithfully; second, it distorts or masks reality; third, it conceals the fact that there is no longer any underlying reality; and finally, it becomes a pure simulacrum, a sign that refers only to

itself (Baudrillard 6–7). In this fourth stage, meaning circulates freely without any original referent. We might think of this in contemporary terms: a social media avatar or virtual influencer exists as an identity that never had a physical origin, yet it generates real emotional and cultural responses. Baudrillard's framework, though developed decades before digital culture, feels strikingly prescient in capturing this condition of free-floating signs.

From this concept emerges Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality—a condition in which simulations are experienced as more real than reality itself. In hyperreality, the distinction between truth and representation dissolves, and the world becomes mediated through advertising, television, and technology. What we see and believe are shaped not by direct encounters but by the models through which they are presented. Hyperreality, then, is not simply illusion or falsehood; it is a new kind of reality built from simulation. When a major event occurs—say, a political crisis or natural disaster—what most people experience is not the event itself, but its media reproduction: its headlines, its camera angles, its endless replay. The same phenomenon now extends to the digital realm, where algorithmic feeds, filters, and curated posts create realities that feel immediate, even intimate, yet are profoundly mediated (Baudrillard 10–12).

Consumer culture forms the backbone of this system. For Baudrillard, objects in late capitalism acquire value not because of what they do, but because of what they signify. A car, for example, is not merely transportation—it is a social marker, a declaration of class, aspiration, or taste. What people consume, then, are not goods but meanings. Advertising and branding organize these meanings into coherent fantasies that people can buy into, turning consumption into a kind of social ritual. Baudrillard seems to suggest that consumption itself becomes a spectacle—an act through which individuals perform belonging and identity. This is as visible in the glossy magazine culture and televised commercials of DeLillo's 1980s as it is in the influencer-driven aesthetics of Instagram today.

In Baudrillard's view, we now inhabit a culture where the real has been replaced by the sign. The saturation of life with images—from television to film to social media—creates a reality that is always already mediated. Once inside this world, there is no easy way to locate a "pure" or unmediated reality. *White Noise* vividly dramatizes this predicament. Its supermarkets, television broadcasts, and even disasters become arenas where meaning is manufactured through repetition and representation. When read through Baudrillard's lens, DeLillo's analog world of the 1980s begins to look like an early map of our own digital hyperreality, where images and codes continue to structure how we live, think, and feel.

The Supermarket as Hyperreality

The supermarket in *White Noise* is more than a mundane site of consumption; it stands as one of the novel's most revealing spaces—a kind of miniature world where the logic of consumerism, spectacle, and simulation converges. DeLillo presents it not simply as a commercial arena but as a symbolic and almost sacred environment where Jack Gladney and his family seek meaning, comfort, and stability. Read through Jean Baudrillard's lens, the supermarket becomes a perfect "microcosm of hyperreality," a space where images and signs govern human experience and where consumption itself functions as a ritual of belonging.

Jack's reflections on shopping reveal how consumer goods become substitutes for emotional and spiritual fulfilment. After one visit, he observes the "mass and variety" of the family's purchases—the "sheer plenitude those crowded bags suggested, the weight and size and number, the familiar package designs and vivid lettering, the giant sizes, the family bargain packs with Day-Glo sale stickers." These ordinary items, he notes, provide "a sense of well-being, the security and contentment these products brought to some snug home in our souls… a fullness of being" (36). This passage encapsulates DeLillo's critique of consumerist psychology: the Gladneys are not merely buying food, they are buying signs—images of stability, abundance, and identity. Their "fullness of being" is symbolic rather than material, confirming Baudrillard's claim that under late capitalism, commodities are valued not for their use but for the meanings they carry (Baudrillard 9).

Yet this sense of security is built on an illusion. As Akhter and Khanum note, the characters are "terrified of dying because of the capitalist way of life" and attempt to shield themselves from existential dread through the comfort of consumption (32). The supermarket thus becomes a refuge from mortality, an artificial sanctuary bathed in fluorescent light, filled with the gentle hum of machines and background "White Noise." It offers not salvation but distraction. The endless aisles and polished surfaces mask decay with an illusion of control, embodying what Baudrillard might call the fetishism of signs—a faith in representation to ward off the real.

The atmosphere of the supermarket reinforces this sense of simulated transcendence. DeLillo describes it as "ultra-cool," alive with "the jangle and skid of carts, the loudspeaker and coffee-making machines, the cries of children" (61). This sensory choreography produces a comforting illusion of order and predictability—a controlled environment sealed off from the chaos of the outside world. Murray Jay Siskind captures this perfectly when he remarks that the supermarket "recharges us spiritually, it prepares us, it's a gateway or pathway" (63). His observation transforms the act of shopping into a form of worship. In a post-religious, capitalist culture, the supermarket becomes a temple—its rituals providing a new kind of transcendence mediated by goods.

Even small details in this world carry symbolic weight. Murray's fascination with generic food items—plain packages labeled only "CANNED PEACHES" or "IRREGULAR PEANUTS" (33)—shows how even apparent simplicity is absorbed into the logic of simulation. He calls these blank labels "the last avant-garde," finding a strange aesthetic purity in their emptiness. What appears to resist consumer spectacle becomes another form of it, a sign of authenticity that is itself commodified. Baudrillard's point is echoed here: even the rejection of spectacle becomes spectacle. There is no outside to the system of signs.

DeLillo's vision of the supermarket's hyperreality remains strikingly relevant. The analog consumer spaces of *White Noise* have evolved into today's digital marketplaces, where abundance is experienced through scrolling screens rather than physical aisles. Online shopping platforms such as Amazon and Flipkart, particularly during large-scale events like Diwali sales, reproduce the same "spiritual consensus" DeLillo describes—a collective participation in the ritual of consumption. In both analog and digital forms, these environments promise community and meaning through purchase, transforming consumerism into a shared act of identity-making. The glow of fluorescent lights has been replaced by the glow of screens, but the illusion of plenitude remains intact.

The supermarket in *White Noise* embodies Baudrillard's insight that in postmodern society, meaning no longer arises from lived experience but from participation in the circulation of images and codes. It is a space where consumption is both performance and faith, a substitute for the authenticity it displaces. Through this setting, DeLillo anticipates the ways in which even our digital landscapes—designed for endless scrolling, liking, and buying—extend the same logic of hyperreality that once animated the supermarket aisles of the 1980s.

The Media Spectacle and the "Airborne Toxic Event"

If the supermarket in *White Noise* offers a private ritual of comfort, mass media represents the public face of simulation—the shared spectacle that binds society through images and repetition. Television, radio, and news are not neutral transmitters of information in DeLillo's world; they are the very forces that construct reality. What people believe, feel, and fear is mediated through the screen. DeLillo uses this to expose a deep cultural dependence on representation: individuals no longer trust their senses but instead rely on the mediated version of events to understand the world around them.

The clearest example is the "airborne toxic event." When a train derails and releases a dangerous chemical cloud, Jack Gladney and his family experience the disaster almost entirely through the lens of the media. The cloud itself—first described as a "feathery plume"—evolves linguistically as the family listens to the radio. It becomes the "black billowing cloud" and finally the authoritative "airborne toxic event" (DeLillo 188). The

changing terminology matters more than the physical threat; language itself defines the event. The sign replaces the referent. Even the family's physiological responses—sweaty palms, déjà vu, nausea—are mediated by the radio's descriptions. They do not feel the symptoms until they hear about them. In this scene, DeLillo dramatizes Baudrillard's argument that in postmodern culture, simulation precedes and produces reality.

DeLillo's satire of media spectacle in the 1980s feels eerily relevant today. What he observed through television and radio has only intensified in the digital age, where news breaks not by scheduled broadcast but through the endless stream of live updates, notifications, and viral posts. The "airborne toxic event" can be read as an early metaphor for the circulation of crisis and panic that dominates both analog and digital media. What changes is not the mechanism, but the speed and scale of mediation.

A striking parallel can be seen in the media frenzy surrounding the Darshan murder case. The spectacle that unfolded was less about the facts of the crime and more about the rupture between the actor's public image—the "Challenging Star"—and the alleged reality of his actions. His celebrity persona became, in Baudrillard's sense, a simulacrum: a self-contained image more real and emotionally powerful than the man himself. Continuous television coverage, social media commentary, and debates across platforms turned the legal case into a moral drama consumed like entertainment. The focus on the persona rather than the event reflects exactly the condition Baudrillard describes—where spectacle becomes the public's primary mode of experiencing truth (The News Minute).

This influence of mass media runs deeper than simple distraction; it reshapes collective consciousness. As Akhter and Khanum point out, "television blurs the distinction between the simulation and the real" (31). They note that DeLillo's characters are "morbidly obsessed" with media, suggesting that television is not background noise but a structuring force in their lives (31). The same argument extends naturally into today's media environment, where algorithmic feeds and continuous notifications dictate how people perceive social and emotional realities. Just as DeLillo's characters watch television to know how to feel, we refresh our screens to confirm what is happening and how we should react.

The same logic underlies the digital spectacle surrounding the Soujanya case. Content creators such as Sameer MD used emotional narratives and "imaginary facts" to frame the story, creating a powerful sense of involvement among viewers (Oneindia). The resulting discourse—full of outrage, moral fervor, and performative solidarity—demonstrates how the spectacle of justice often replaces justice itself. Audiences engage less with verified information than with the emotional script provided by the influencer or algorithm. In this way, the simulation of truth becomes more compelling than truth itself. What DeLillo imagined through the analog medium of television has now migrated to smartphones, YouTube feeds, and social platforms, creating an even denser web of mediation.

Through the "airborne toxic event," DeLillo reveals how the media transforms crisis into narrative and narrative into spectacle. His world, filled with the hum of radio and television, prefigures our own, where screens—large and small—organize emotion, belief, and fear. The scene is not simply a parody of 1980s news culture; it is a warning about the future that has arrived. The "event" never ends; it loops endlessly through media, where reality is no longer what happens but what is seen, shared, and repeated. In this sense, *White Noise* continues to function as a prophetic study of hyperreality—a world where the difference between living and watching collapses entirely.

The "Most Photographed Barn" as Pure Simulacrum

The "most photographed barn in America" scene in *White Noise* stands as one of DeLillo's most concise yet profound meditations on the logic of simulation. In just a few pages, he captures what Jean Baudrillard calls the final stage of the image — the moment when representation becomes entirely detached from reality and begins to exist only in reference to itself. It's a brief episode, but one that distils the novel's philosophical core.

Jack Gladney and his colleague Murray drive out to see the famous barn, a tourist attraction announced by countless roadside signs proclaiming "THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA" (DeLillo 24). Before the characters even reach it, they are already caught in a web of mediation. The signs themselves create anticipation, framing their perception long before the barn comes into sight. When they finally arrive, they find a crowd of tourists snapping pictures from nearly identical angles, documenting not the barn but the act of documentation itself. "Once you've seen the signs about the barn," Murray remarks, "it becomes impossible to see the barn" (DeLillo 25). His observation reveals the heart of Baudrillard's theory: the object is no longer experienced directly but only through the signs that announce and reproduce it.

The barn, then, is not an object of vision but a site of ritual. Each camera flash and each printed postcard adds to its myth, reaffirming its significance through repetition. What people come to witness is not the barn's architecture or history but its fame. The sign "THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA" is no longer a description; it's a performative act — it produces the truth it declares. This feedback loop of visibility and recognition mirrors Baudrillard's notion of the pure simulacrum: a sign system that has no external referent, where representation generates its own reality. As Murray puts it, "We see only what the others see… we've agreed to be part of a collective perception" (DeLillo 25). Seeing becomes a social contract, a shared illusion in which participation itself replaces meaning.

What makes this scene remarkable is how prescient it feels. DeLillo was writing about analog photography, but the logic of the "most photographed barn" now governs digital life. In the age of social media, "Instagrammable" spots and "selfie points" function

exactly like DeLillo's barn — their value lies in their visibility, not their experience. People visit such places not to encounter them but to produce proof of having been there. The photograph becomes a badge of participation, a signal to the collective that one has entered the circuit of representation. Experience becomes secondary to performance. As in *White Noise*, the image is not an outcome of the real; it is the real.

The viral logic of the internet extends this even further. Memes, dance trends, and short-form videos circulate endlessly, each repetition severed from its origin. Meaning no longer resides in authenticity but in familiarity — the number of times something has been seen or shared. Every re-post, like every photograph of the barn, reinforces the simulacrum's power to sustain itself. In this sense, DeLillo's short scene operates as a small-scale allegory for the networked age: a culture of images feeding on their own visibility.

By placing this analog moment within a broader continuum of media evolution, DeLillo shows how simulation moves from commodity to spectacle to pure sign. The supermarket offered a ritual of consumption, the "airborne toxic event" a spectacle of mediated fear, and the barn completes this trajectory — it is the pure simulacrum, the image detached from the world entirely. What DeLillo captured in the 1980s was not only the crisis of representation but the very shape of the digital future, where meaning itself dissolves into circulation.

Results and Discussion

Reading *White Noise* through Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and hyperreality reveals a world where meaning, identity, and emotion are all produced through layers of mediation. DeLillo's spaces — the supermarket, the airborne toxic event, and the "most photographed barn" — don't simply illustrate different themes; they work together to trace a progression, almost a map, of how reality itself gets replaced by images and signs. What begins as the comfort of consumption gradually becomes dependent on the media and finally ends in pure simulation, where the image has no referent at all.

The supermarket is a good place to start, because it captures how consumption functions symbolically rather than practically. When Jack Gladney feels a "fullness of being" after shopping, it isn't hunger or survival he's satisfying — it's something psychological, even spiritual. His satisfaction comes not from food but from brands, arrangement, and abundance. In Baudrillard's terms, the products have lost their use-value and gained sign-value; they are codes of identity and belonging. The supermarket's bright aisles, rhythmic order, and glossy packages create a sense of perfection that stands in for emotional security. It's striking how easily this extends to our own time — we scroll through Amazon or Flipkart with the same quiet ritual DeLillo described in 1985.

Shopping, whether in fluorescent aisles or on glowing screens, becomes a way of confirming that we exist within a shared system of meaning.

The airborne toxic event takes this process further by shifting from private consumption to collective spectacle. Here, catastrophe becomes content. The Gladneys do not experience the disaster as it happens; they experience it through media narration — the radio's voice, the news terminology, the evolving label "airborne toxic event." The name itself produces fear. This dynamic anticipates what we now call "mediated crisis culture," where people feel events most intensely when they are broadcast, framed, and repeated online. Just as Jack and his family wait for the radio to tell them how serious the situation is, we wait for our screens to update us, to confirm what we should feel. The emotional script of reality, DeLillo suggests, is no longer written by experience but by the spectacle that interprets it.

By the time we reach the "most photographed barn," the circle is complete. The barn no longer even needs a physical presence; its meaning exists entirely through images, signs, and repetition. Murray's observation that "once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn" (DeLillo 25) captures Baudrillard's pure simulacrum — representation without a real object behind it. What matters is not the barn itself but its visibility. And isn't that the logic of the digital age? Social media posts, viral locations, and influencer images function in precisely the same way. The photograph, the tag, or the hashtag becomes a proof of existence; the image is the experience. Like the barn, digital identities now survive through circulation, not substance.

When we look at these three spaces together, DeLillo's analog media world begins to look uncannily like a prefiguration of our digital one. The supermarket reflects the early stage of mediated identity — the comfort of consumption and brand belonging. The airborne toxic event marks the rise of collective simulation, where fear and knowledge are broadcast. And the barn represents the endpoint: a world of pure visibility where representation has consumed the real. What DeLillo wrote as satire of late-twentieth-century consumer life reads today as cultural prophecy.

So what does this mean for the larger argument? The analog and the digital are not opposites, as we often think, but phases of the same process — two expressions of the same logic of mediation. Baudrillard's theory provides the conceptual bridge between these worlds. His simulacra map the continuum from television and print to algorithms and social media. The underlying question remains the same: how do humans construct meaning in a reality increasingly defined by images rather than experience?

In that sense, *White Noise* is more than a postmodern novel; it becomes a foundational text for understanding digital modernity itself. DeLillo captures not only the absurdity of a consumer society but also its deep psychological truth — our desire to find comfort in the simulated. What his characters experience through aisles and screens has only expanded in

our own time, where identity, community, and even emotion are filtered through spectacle. The novel, read today, does not just predict digital life; it explains it.

Conclusion

Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) stands today not only as a satire of late twentieth-century consumer life but also as a strangely prophetic reflection on how people live within the noise of representation. What seemed, in the 1980s, like a sharp critique of television culture now reads like a blueprint for understanding our digital present — a time when reality and its image have become almost indistinguishable. Through Baudrillard's ideas of simulacra and hyperreality, the novel opens up a way of seeing how meaning itself gets produced and recycled through the systems of media and consumption that surround us.

The supermarket, as we saw, is the most ordinary of places, yet in DeLillo's hands it becomes a site of quiet worship — a kind of consumerist temple where identity is bought, arranged, and displayed. For Jack Gladney and his family, the act of shopping offers not satisfaction but reassurance, a confirmation that they still belong to something coherent. This same search for symbolic comfort continues today, only through digital storefronts and curated feeds. The "fullness of being" that DeLillo's characters find among aisles and brands mirrors the small bursts of validation that come from online visibility.

The novel's depiction of the airborne toxic event takes this even further, turning the crisis into a collective performance. Here, the media doesn't simply report on the disaster — it creates it. The radio's shifting language gives the event shape, tone, and legitimacy, showing how the name becomes the reality. This, too, feels familiar. Whether it is breaking news, viral outrage, or a celebrity scandal, the media spectacle continues to define not just what we know, but how we feel. The Darshan and Soujanya cases, where emotional narratives overshadow the slow work of justice, prove that DeLillo's insight into mediated fear and fascination remains as accurate as ever.

And then, in the quietest of scenes, the "most photographed barn in America" closes the circle. The barn is no longer a building; it's a performance of looking. Its meaning depends entirely on its visibility — it exists because it is seen. In this final image, DeLillo captures the pure simulacrum: a reality that has lost its anchor. Today, the same logic governs our digital lives. Every image, every post, every act of sharing sustains the illusion of being seen. The copy becomes more important than the original; the photograph replaces the experience itself.

Across these scenes, DeLillo gives us not just a portrait of postmodern America but a way of understanding our own condition. The analog and the digital, though separated by decades, are part of the same cultural circuit — both ruled by the spectacle and its endless circulation of signs. What *White Noise* offers is not nostalgia for a simpler time but a

mirror held up to the present: a reminder that our need for meaning, belonging, and truth often gets absorbed into the very systems that manufacture illusion.

DeLillo's novel remains deeply human. Beneath its irony and its noise lies a quiet question — how do we live meaningfully in a world where everything, even emotion, comes to us mediated? That question, perhaps more than any theoretical framework, is what gives *White Noise* its lasting power. It doesn't just describe the postmodern condition; it helps us recognize our place within it.

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