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Fifth generation warfare and digital protection mechanisms: an approach to Baudrillard's proposal

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Abstract:

This study examines the manifestations of digital consciousness on social media platforms within the context of fifth-generation warfare (5GW), a non-traditional cognitive war targeting human consciousness through algorithms and artificial intelligence. It aims to highlight the role of digital influencers and digital consciousness as tools for user empowerment and opinion formation in cyberspace. Employing a critical analytical approach and qualitative discourse analysis, the study explores dimensions of digital influence, including space-time disruption, user autonomy, and the adoption of a "contradictory logic." The study concludes by proposing a philosophical and sociological foundation linking fifth-generation warfare to Jean Baudrillard's paradigm of hyperreality. It demonstrates that contemporary conflicts transcend the falsification of reality to achieve the creation of a parallel symbolic reality that disconnects the masses from their lived experience, making control of the production of meaning and symbols the primary factor for victory.

Keywords: Fifth generation warfare (5GW); digital consciousness; digital influencer; social media platforms; hyperreality; Jean Baudrillard.

1. INTRODUCTION

The current global arena is the scene of numerous conflicts and wars between nations. A closer examination of the nature of these conflicts reveals profound shifts in the methods and technologies of confrontation. These are no longer limited to traditional weaponry or economic power, but have taken on new forms and methods known as "hybrid warfare." This type of warfare blends military and non-military elements, such as media technologies, propaganda, cyberattacks, and more. With the rapid development of digital space and its technologies, its considerable reach, and its capacity to accommodate a large number of users, a public sphere has emerged where individuals exchange opinions, debate, and interact with world events. This has led to the exploitation of these platforms to shape and direct public opinion, particularly in times of war and crisis. In our time, image dictates the course of regimes in power and constitutes the primary driving force of their existence.

With the development of artificial intelligence and the expansion of its applications, particularly in conflicts and wars, due to its ability to mislead, falsify information, and its speed in data processing, judgment, and machine learning, further conceptual changes have emerged in the nature of conflicts, shifting from classic military warfare to hybrid warfare, culminating in what is now called "fifth generation warfare" (5GW). American researcher Daniel H. Abbott argues that this type of warfare relies on subtle mechanisms that influence perception and consciousness, drawing inspiration from Clarke's third law. He considers it a sufficiently advanced technique, indistinguishable from magic, to constitute an information and perception war, where human consciousness is subtly targeted to the point of blurring the lines between friend and foe (Abbott, 2010). In this context, previous scientific literature indicates that influencers are a product of this digital space, acting as agents within the equation of digital influence and awareness. This is explained by their ability to guide and

shape public opinion on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and others (Castel, 2012).

In this regard, this study examines the role of the digital influencer and digital awareness as a method and tool for user protection. It also offers a conceptual introduction to the notions of awareness, social media platforms, the characteristics of their digital influence, and fifth-generation warfare, as well as related concepts. The main problem of this research thus boils down to a fundamental question: what are the manifestations of digital awareness? Are social media platforms part of the stakes of fifth-generation warfare?

This central question raises several sub-questions, which we will address as follows:

1. What is the conceptual basis of the following terms: (digital awareness, influencer, fifth-generation warfare)?

2. What are the characteristics of the digital influence of social media platforms?

3. How does Jean Baudrillard's concept of fifth-generation warfare manifest itself?

2. Enter The Importance and Objectives of the Study:

The importance of this study lies in understanding the effects of awareness campaigns in digital content and their influence on users' decision-making and beliefs within cyberspace. This study also attempts to conceptually frame fifth-generation warfare, awareness campaigns, and influencers. Its significance lies in its attempt to establish a philosophical and sociological foundation for the concept of fifth-generation warfare by linking it to Jean Baudrillard's paradigm and its theories concerning artificial reality.

3.Methodology:

This study adopts the critical analytical method, considered one of the most suitable approaches for studying and analyzing concepts and theories. This method allows for the uncovering of implicit meanings and communicative mechanisms. Furthermore, through this

approach, we aim to move beyond the superficial linguistic level of discourse towards analyzing its pragmatic functions and its persuasive and argumentative dimensions within the context of its actual use. The study also employs qualitative discourse analysis by observing utterances, meanings, and their connotations.

4.Key Concepts of the Study:

a. **Digital Awareness:**

Paolo Freire defines awareness as "the process of developing critical awareness in individuals regarding the political, social, and economic reality in which they live" (Freire, 2000, p. 45). Freire views awareness discourse as an intellectual process aimed at empowering users with critical tools and mechanisms. This broadens the recipient's horizons while limiting the dominance of the discourse or content, confining it to the realm of support and provision (development). This is confirmed by the Algerian researcher Abdel Rahman Azzi, who defines awareness as "a communicative activity aimed at raising the level of perception and knowledge regarding a specific issue" (Azzi, 2010, p. 87). Since awareness, according to scientific literature, is a mechanism for raising the level of knowledge and perception, this knowledge, according to Rogers, "occurs when an individual (or decision-making unit) is exposed to a particular innovation and gains some understanding of how it works" (Rogers, 2003, p. 169). Here, Rogers sees awareness as a functional process aimed at persuading the user or individual. To adopt an innovation or a particular idea, and this leads us to epistemological differences between Vieri and Rogers. We observe that the former sees awareness as a preliminary step leading the recipient to the process of critique, while the latter sees it as a functional and constructive tool that contributes to disseminating information and the ability to persuade others to adopt the innovation.

As for digital awareness, it is operationally defined as: a communicative discourse that

carries a set of mechanisms, concepts, and knowledge disseminated through social media platforms, either to raise levels of understanding and knowledge and develop critical thinking skills, .(2019) .الزين, عبد الحق, بن قدور, & حورية or to manipulate public opinion and distort reality, especially in the context of fifth-generation warfare, where knowledge and information are fundamental and the subject of conflict.

b. **Who is a digital influencer?**

The digital environment has produced a set of new communicative elements and characteristics that have contributed to the democratization of use and expression, such as social media platforms, which have reshaped social groups composed of virtual identities that communicate, interact, and produce content that is published continuously and at an accelerating rate. In this regard, the concept of the digital influencer has emerged, and the term "social influencers" has been adopted.Ezzine, A. (2026). The term "beauty influencers" refers to individuals with a large following on social media. Influencers are essentially ordinary social media users who have gained trust by sharing their opinions about products on social platforms, thus amassing a significant following. Many of these followers view influencers' posts daily, and they are often targeted by companies to promote products.

Influencers first emerged in the early 2000s, and their activity has since evolved from a home-based hobby into a lucrative, full-time career. Influencer marketing has become so appealing that, as the sector has grown, an increasing number of social media users are now aspiring to become influencers. Today, influencers are also leveraging their popularity and media presence to advance their careers in traditional media such as film and television. Influencers are categorized according to their follower count, and can be divided into micro, meso, and macro influencers (Yatish, Weng, & All, 2025). We looked at this new concept epistemologically, and we found its beginnings in the field of media and communication

sciences. It began with the research of Paul Lazarsfeld and his discovery of public opinion leaders as a form of media influence between the medium and the public. He discovered that these individuals identify with the public and interact in public spaces in a more interactive way, and they have a tremendous ability to influence the public's orientations and beliefs. However, it is not possible to assert a correspondence or a direct connection between the two concepts.

c. The Concept of Fifth-Generation (5G) Warfare:

Since the end of the Cold War between the American and Soviet blocs, experts and strategists have observed profound changes in the concept of "war." The reasons for this shift stem from several key considerations, most notably: material and human losses, the importance of public opinion and media conflict, and technological advancements. The latter has been a significant factor in transforming the concept of war, as information has become a crucial element in winning wars. Whoever possesses the most information can exert control without needing to mobilize armies and military equipment. With the emergence of communication platforms and the digital society, the true war has become about the ability to control human perception and win the information war. (Duggin, 2007)

We can observe that modern warfare and conflict patterns are less concerned with direct military confrontation and instead focus on modern methods and concepts such as: proxy warfare, perception engineering, big data, artificial intelligence, digital influencers, and algorithms.

The theory of generations of warfare, formulated by William S. Lind and others, has provided an explanatory framework for the historical transformations of military conflict. As warfare evolved from traditional entrenchment in the first generation to intense firepower in the second, then to rapid maneuver in the third, and finally to fourth-generation and asymmetric warfare (Lind & All, 1989), and within the context of contemporary

technological and digital development, new conceptions of conflict emerged known as fifth-generation warfare. These conceptions were discussed by Daniel H. Abbott in his book *The Handbook of Fifth-Generation Warfare*, where the focus shifted to influencing perception, awareness, and the information and cyber domains, rather than traditional military confrontation (Abbott, 2010). This concept suffers from a clear lack of a precise, globally agreed-upon definition, given its novelty and its overlap with other complex and difficult-to-distinguish concepts. However, the fifth-generation concept can generally be summarized as the generation that utilizes unconventional tools in warfare, such as social media platforms, algorithms, artificial intelligence, digital public opinion manipulation, and others.

5.Characteristics of Digital Influence on Social Media Platforms

The rapid pace of technological advancements in the field of media and communication studies has brought about a radical shift at the theoretical, methodological, and even practical levels for researchers. At the level of the elements of the communication process, profound changes have occurred. The audience has become a user of technology, forming a virtual identity within the digital community, interacting within it, influencing and being influenced by it. This has also generated a range of psychological and social effects, reviving the idea of Ezzine, A. (2026).the direct influence model and the allure of media content, as well as the model of critique and the dominance of these technologies. However, methodological and epistemological caution remains necessary when applying classical approaches to the digital environment. (Laayadi, 2021).

6. Characteristics of Digital Influence:

Discussing the characteristics of influence in the digital environment remains multifaceted and highly complex, given the novelty of this space, the dynamism and fluidity of its technologies, and the rapid pace of its development. This has created difficulties and

obstacles for researchers in framing its concepts and defining the characteristics of its influence. However, some researchers have highlighted several key elements, including the following:

7.The Emptiness of Place and the Displacement of Time

In contemporary/virtual society, communication methods have been replaced by others similar in content. For example, handwritten letters have been replaced by emails, and family and social gatherings by chat, which seems impossible to stop. Neither time nor place has any significant impact anymore. Physical presence is no longer a prerequisite for interacting with society (Ali Farah, 2014, p. 227). Hartmut Rosa raises a number of forms of social acceleration, represented by processes directed towards the fields of transportation, communication, and production, which fall under the umbrella of technological acceleration. He draws our attention to an important issue related to the anthropology of space. The acceleration has affected the spatiotemporal system of society, or rather, it has affected our imagination about the organization of space and time. In the age of globalization and the digital age, we can propose the idea of "the destruction of space" or the end of space as it was known in our imagination (Ben Sghir, 2023).

Moreover, the ability of this space to produce a huge amount of images, reels, and live scenes, organized and coordinated through algorithms, which try to keep the user for as much time as possible within this virtual environment, ultimately leads him to lose his sense of time and the place in which he lives. In this context, the thinker Taha Abdel Rahman confirms this matter, saying: "Since the images that the viewer receives are so numerous and so fast, they must harm the strength of his senses and the production of his imagination. The succession of scenes that affect his sight causes his sense of them to weaken little by little. The media may compete with their technologies and renewed products in providing the viewer with images that arouse him the most, exceeding the extreme emotions and feelings

that occur in people's lives." And yet his eyes soon get used to it, and he is no longer affected by seeing it. His memory may retain nothing of it but pale shadows, for the spectator's feeling has a limit beyond which it stops. With addiction to it, the feeling must erode and fade away" (Taha, 2017).

Therefore, we believe that the duality experienced by social media users between the real and virtual worlds has caused them anxiety regarding time and space, and an inability to organize them due to a significant loss of their sense of time and place while navigating the digital space. This creates an existential crisis because of the lack of a clear boundary between the virtual and the real, raising several questions, including: Where does real space disappear to when we enter the digital space? How does time move in this environment? And where is this new space leading us? These questions remain open as long as the development of this digital space outpaces the output of scientific research in this field.

The Independence of the Receiver: Models of the communication process in the era of analog technology—television, radio, and print media—have somewhat neglected the receiver to varying degrees. They have consistently treated the receiver as less important than the other elements of the communication process (sender, message, and medium). This is due to several considerations related to the context, historical circumstances, and the concepts associated with and explaining this phenomenon, such as... The viewer, the receiver, the listener/reader—perhaps one of the most prominent and well-known concepts used to express the concept of the recipient is the public. On this basis, "the concept of the public, for example, has not gained consensus among researchers because it is a social construct and a point of contention among media and communication theories. For instance, the magic bullet theory and critical theory describe the public as passive and static, susceptible to

manipulation and deception; while the uses and gratifications theory sees it as active, capable of discerning what benefits it and efficient in selecting media content that fulfills its desires and needs. In other words, the process of socially constructing the media audience, as undertaken by media and communication theories, has presented the public in multiple forms, some of which coexist. These include the image of the believer, the deceived, the gullible, the skeptic, the critic, and the aware. Some consider the public as a customer or even a commodity, while others see it as a citizen committed to societal issues" (Laayadi, 2021, p. 3). However, it is noteworthy that the concept of the public has undergone a profound change in Its conceptual structure has changed in the present time, as we live within what is called the digital environment and its associated platforms and digital spaces. All the contradictory descriptions established by the early classical models, which established the dependency of the receiver and made him the weakest element in the communication chain, have been merged. The receiver has now become a sender and producer of the message, and a key player in the communication process. Perhaps the most prominent concept that can be explored in this space is the concept of the user, in which all communicative acts are integrated, such as: sending, receiving, producing, controlling, etc.

Its conceptual structure has changed in the present time, as we live within what is called the digital environment and its associated platforms and digital spaces. As a result of this new reality, particularly in light of the transformations affecting technological tools, Denis McQuail argues that the digital audience has ceased to play its traditional role as a passive listener, consumer, recipient, or target. Instead, the concept of the audience will encompass one of the following roles: researcher, consultant/expert, browser, accuser, interlocutor, or participant. New, innovative technologies, with their ability to record, store, and replay all media, have increased the flexibility of media use and helped make it freely available to the public, liberating them from the management and control of media

institutions (Tong, 2022, p. 23).

8. The Paradoxical Logic of the Digital Environment:

This digital space has spawned numerous platforms and online spaces, such as social media sites, search engines, and various applications and artificial intelligence technologies. These, in turn, have brought about profound changes in many practices, creating a set of behavioral patterns and social relationships that have been described as paradoxical or contradictory (oxymoron).

Paraconsistent logic is a branch of non-classical logic that allows for contradictions within a set of information without leading to a logical collapse (i.e., without inferring anything about everything). In other words, statements A and A can exist in the same database or set of premises, yet the system does not collapse into nonsense (Zalta & Nodelman, 2022). Paraconsistent logic emerged as a reaction to classical logic, which holds that any contradiction leads to a collapse of meaning or logical structure. However, the paraconsistent logic underlying the digital environment does not necessarily lead to a collapse of logical structure. This network is simultaneously private and public, open and closed, local and global, enabling synchronous and asynchronous or delayed communication, free and restricted, bringing individuals together to form groups and dismantle them, encouraging the individual to live "alone among people" and reinforcing the individual's narcissism to live "in and out of themselves at the same time." These seemingly contradictory practices constitute a new meaning that characterizes the internet. Therefore, reflecting on this... The media and communication practices that take place on and through the network require abandoning the mental framework inherited from the past and adopting a strategy that seeks understanding according to the logic of contradictory thinking (Al-Ayadi, 2023). Contradiction and contradiction in this space can be interpreted as one of the outputs of

postmodernism, which seeks to demolish everything that is fixed, such as basic mental axioms such as the principle of non-contradiction, and the concept of the paradigm or guiding model (Kohn, 2012). Also, the intertwined logic of this environment, where it has gathered and integrated previous means and technological techniques, may justify this contradictory logic.

Fifth-generation warfare from Jean Baudrillard's perspective: Fifth-generation warfare embodies a profound shift in the structure of contemporary wars, where confrontation is no longer viewed through the lens of classical military power, but rather is managed within complex organizational and structural spaces where technological, media, and psychological tools intertwine. This type of warfare relies on weakening the adversary from within by targeting its social, cultural, and psychological structure, instead of engaging in direct confrontations that may be costly in terms of economic power. In this context, digital influence emerges as one of the most important methods used, as digital platforms are invested in disseminating biased narratives, creating alternative perceptions, and directing the collective behavior of public opinion. This serves the interests of dominant powers in their ongoing conflicts. It's not limited to spreading misinformation; it extends to constructing distorted information environments that make it difficult for individuals to distinguish between truth and fabrication. This leads to an erosion of trust in official institutions and creates a state of sharp polarization within society. In this regard, Baudrillard, in his book *The Artificial and the Artificial*, and previously in his important work *The Gulf War*, focused on a central concept: hyperreality. Baudrillard attributes the disappearance of reality to the absence of a relationship between signifier and signified. This occurs as a result of the increased effectiveness of the media, which has transformed all of social life and all of reality into an image presented by the media. What the media presents is not reality as it is, nor is it an image of it. Rather, it is an image generated by the media from another image,

which itself is generated by it. This means that all the signification presented by the media, and consequently the meaning of reality, has no reference point other than itself. Signification (meaning), on the other hand, presupposes a relationship between signifier and signified, between a symbol and what it symbolizes. When a symbol is self-sufficient and its own reference point, what it signifies becomes... This symbol is outside of reality; thus, reality disappears and appears above-reality. (Baudrillard, 2008, p. 17)

9. CONCLUSION

Through this philosophical and critical sociological approach, Jean Baudrillard attempts to deconstruct the structure of reality in the age of the image and new media. His analysis is based on the concept of hyperreality, or the disappearance of reality, in the language of Saussurean linguistics (signifier/signified). In the pre-modern media era, the image or "symbol" expressed tangible, objective reality. However, in the age of new media's dominance over the details of individuals' daily lives, this has led to a separation of reality from the symbol or image, or, in Baudrillard's terms, a separation of the signifier from the signified. The media has manipulated the distance between (signifier/reality) and (signified/meaning). New media is no longer a mere transmitter of truth, or even a distorter of it; rather, its power has reached the point of producing a new symbolic reality, which he calls "hyperreality" (Ali Farah, 2014). In this regard, Baudrillard's thesis can be considered a practical application of the concept of fifth-generation warfare (G5), as it has been transferred from the field of critical philosophy to the field of security and strategy. Previous generations of wars relied on physical force and military might, while fifth-generation wars rely on human cognitive power and the dominance of images and symbols imbued with political ideology, directing public opinion through the endless flow of images and information in times of war. The forces active in these modern wars seek to falsify and

fabricate reality through the parallel space created by social media platforms and their features, from algorithms to artificial intelligence generation, where infinite meanings and symbols are created that separate peoples from their socio-political reality, thus generating and shaping a different symbolic reality. Ultimately, war is meaning and symbol according to the linguistic perspective, and whoever controls the shaping of meaning wins.

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