

Commodification of Human Body and Consciousness in Black Mirror Season 7, Episode 1, Common People

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Abstract: This research analyzed Black Mirror season 7 series, episode 1 entitled Common People, using Vincent Mosco's concept of commodification. A qualitative method is used in this research. There are 44 data found. The data were coded into three categories: audience commodification (21 data), content commodification (18 data), and labour commodification (5 data). The findings indicated that audience commodification was the most dominant form. The data showed that both the body and consciousness of the user are absorbed into commercial systems. The user's body is turned into a source of energy and a channel for advertisement, while the user's consciousness offered for advertising and something controlled through subscriptions. The company intended to turn the audience into a commodity. Therefore, Black Mirror season 7 series, episode 1 entitled Common People delivers a strong critique of the growing commercialization of human body and consciousness in the technological development.

Keywords: Commodification, Vincent Mosco, Black Mirror

INTRODUCTION

As digital technology continues to develop, it increasingly reveals how the human body and consciousness are becoming commodified. For example, Brain-Machine Interfaces (BMIs), from Neuralink, demonstrated that neural signals becoming tradable goods as Reilly (2020) described as brain functions becoming a form of commercial exchange. Next, Waisberg, Ong & Lee (2024) observed that the ethical risks involved, highlighting that Neuralink threatens neural privacy by exploiting brain data as an economic asset. These results highlight alarming new trends where the body and consciousness become commodities in the digital economy. Therefore, it is essential to engage in a critical examination of how technology commodifies human life. This concern has also been increasingly reflected in recent films.

In Cultural Studies, films are regarded as medium of social commentary, particularly in its capacity to challenge the political-economic forces that shape individuals' personal experiences. Kellner (1995) said that media culture is the dominant culture today; it has replaced the forms of high culture as the center of cultural attention and impact for large numbers of people...moreover media culture has become a dominant force of socialization, with media images and celebrities replacing families, schools and churches as arbitors of taste, value and thought, producing new models of identification and resonant images of style, fashion and behaviour. This perspective underscores that film as one of the media culture recently serves not merely as entertainment but also as an analytical framework to revealing how capitalism permeates individual life.

The commodification of the human subject within popular media has similarly become a central concern across numerous scholar publications. Christoper Parr (2022) analyzed through Frederic Jameson's concept of the political unconscious to critique the

commodification of the biological body in the 2014 adaptation of *RoboCop*. His research employed genre theory and textual analysis. The research revealed a clear dichotomy: although the narrative appeared to promote humanist values, its visual aesthetics convey a markedly anti-humanist orientation. The protagonist is rendered as a manipulable commodity—taken apart and reconstructed—in a way that mirrors the logic of capitalist production. As a result, the research showed that the film exposed the ideological tension between human agency and technological domination, ultimately emphasizing how human life becomes reduced to a mere product within the framework of digital capitalism.

The next research is Rinjani's research (2025) which she applied Stuart Hall's representation theory alongside Jawad's BCI ethical framework to analyze the *Black Mirror* episode 'Crocodile'. The research centered on the *Recaller*, a memory-reading device, interpreting it as a symbolic articulation of societal anxieties surrounding control, surveillance, and the erosion of privacy. By employing content and discourse analysis, she demonstrated how the episode established a reality where the privacy of memory is abolished, forcing characters into impossible moral dilemmas. Mia's actions are read as an expression of broader anxieties about technological excess and the breakdown of ethical norms. Her research concluded that, when left unchecked, such technological intrusion pose a significant threat to human agency, dignity and the overall integrity of ethical life.

The third previous research, Chan (2023) examined *Black Mirror*'s 'Nosedive' through symbolic interactionist perspectives, incorporating Erving Goffman's presentation of self and George Herbert Mead's social construction of the self. The research revealed that the rating system transformed identity into a performance for consumption. Lacie's behavior exemplified this shift, where the pursuit of ratings—viewed here as a symbolic capital—governs status and access to resources. The research highlighted how quantification of social approval distorted authenticity and compelled conformity, serving as a warning against the psychological toll of digital stratification.

Therefore, examining the commodification of body and consciousness is essential for broadening audiences' awareness of the issue emerging today. Through *Common People* in *Black Mirror*, Season 7 episode 1, this research explores the commodification of the body and consciousness and its connection to broader concerns surrounding contemporary technological developments.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Vincent Mosco's conceptualization of the commodity forms within the media, as cited in Fuchs (2024) offered a foundational framework for analyzing the political economy of communication. Mosco (as cited in Fuchs, 2024) defined commodification as the transformative process wherein objects possessing use value—valued for their ability to satisfy human needs—are converted into marketable products possessing exchange value. In this state, the primary goal of production shifts from social utility to capital accumulation and sales interests.

According to Mosco (as cited in Fuchs, 2024) that process manifests in three specific forms within the media sphere. The first form is the commodification of content, where media companies generate revenue by directly selling media products and intellectual property to consumers. The second form is the commodification of audiences. In this model, particularly within advertising-funded media, content is often provided for free to attract viewers. However, these audiences are then packaged and sold to advertisers, effectively turning the audience itself into a commodity. The third form is the commodification of labour. This perspective highlights the structural reality of capitalism where individuals are compelled to sell their labour power to survive. Within

communication industries, this results in media workers becoming wage labourers whose working conditions are shaded by the market's drive for profit. Together, these three forms illustrate how media industries systematically integrate content, users, and workers into the logic of the market.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a descriptive qualitative method because the findings were presented in written form. Besides, the researcher gathered and interpreted the data directly since qualitative research depends on the researcher's active involvement. Creswell (2014) explained that the researcher becomes the primary instrument in a qualitative study, and he also stated that the findings appear in descriptive forms such as words or images instead of numbers. This method was appropriate because the research examined how *Black Mirror* Season 7 Episode 1, *Common People* represents the commodification of the human body and consciousness.

The data source of this research was *Black Mirror* Season 7 Episode 1, entitled *Common People* which was accessed through Netflix. In collecting data, the researcher took several steps. First, the researcher watched the episode to understand the story as a whole. Second, the researcher watched it again and focused on dialogues that showed forms of commodification. Third, the researcher wrote selected dialogues that were relevant to Mosco's ideas about the commodification of content, audiences, and labour. Fourth, the researcher rechecked the episode to confirm that the selected data were correct. Fifth, the researcher organized all data in a table so the findings became clear and structured.

After the data were collected, the researcher analyzed them using the concept of commodification advocated by Mosco. The analysis examined how the episode showed the transformation of the human body and consciousness into something that could be exchanged or valued in a market-like system. The research then ended with conclusions that were based on the results of the analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The table below presented 44 excerpts of dialogue that showed how the story reflected Vincent Mosco's three forms of commodification. Each quote is placed into one of three categories: audience commodification (21 data), content commodification (18 data), or labour commodification (5 data).

Table 1. Data Findings

No .	Data	Category
1	“...desperate people go on here, and the audience pays them to do some dark shit”	Audience Commodification
2	“I’m supporting the gig economy.”	Audience Commodification
3	“There’s like a...electronic whistling in my head...you want coffee? ... Yes, please...have you tried Espresso Grande? The beans are roasted slow and long for a richer, smoother taste.”	Audience Commodification
4	“Oh, yeah, that’s a commercial message”	Audience Commodification

5	“So you’re using my brain to power the server?”	Audience Commodification
6	“While you’re in Sleep Mode, our servers are harnessing your spare processing capabilities to help with overall workload.”	Audience Commodification
7	“you can kind of think of it as like giving back to the grid.”	Audience Commodification
8	“so you’re running ads through me?”	Audience Commodification
9	“you must be in one of our test cells.”	Audience Commodification
10	“Not all the customers appreciate the messages.”	Audience Commodification
11	“They are designed to be contextually relevant to the situation you’re in. So they will stand out less in a conversation.”	Audience Commodification
12	“All you need to do...Is upgrade to Rivermind Plus”	Audience Commodification
13	“If you were still on Common... you would be looking at sleeping...up to 16 hours a night, and with ads?”	Audience Commodification
14	“...I’d be happy to drop you back down a tier or you could move up to our exciting new tier.”	Audience Commodification
15	“...you can use skills and attributes sourced from other Rivermind users”	Audience Commodification
16	“...Lux is a real VIP package”	Audience Commodification
17	“How will we pay for Rivermind Plus? I can’t start running ads again.”	Audience Commodification
18	“Don’t make us use the baby money.”	Audience Commodification
19	“...I’m taking extra shifts, and there’s stuff that we can cut back on”	Audience Commodification
20	“I had a bit more left over from my overtime and stuff, so I just made an upgrade”	Audience Commodification
21	“And when you do, we will reinstate your full subscription.”	Audience Commodification
22	“... this guy is gonna drink his own piss.”	Content Commodification
23	“I just threw some coin at this loser on Dum Dummies...”	Content Commodification
24	“We take an imprint of the affected part of her neural structure and we clone it onto our main frame.”	Content Commodification
25	“We make a backup of part of her brain on our computer.”	Content Commodification
26	“...the Rivermind system transmits cognitive function from the backup on the cloud-based server allowing her to live her life.”	Content Commodification
27	“I am living proof.”	Content Commodification
28	“...She has to physically stay within the coverage range. It kind of like cell service.”	Content Commodification
29	“the surgery is free and then for the streaming, we run a subscription model, and it’s 300 dollars a month.”	Content Commodification
30	“It’s because you passed outside the coverage area”	Content Commodification

31	“yes, if you upgrade, then absolutely you can travel.”	Content Commodification
32	“...Rivermind Lux. it heightens your senses. Meaning sights, sounds, flavors, even the feeling of this breeze.”	Content Commodification
33	“...all physical sensation are simply more sensational than ever.”	Content Commodification
34	“Take control of your mood with the RiverMind app.”	Content Commodification
35	“So if you don’t choose to subscribe to the full-time package, we actually have temporary boosters for like a few hours or few days...so maybe if you have a special occasion, Amanda?”	Content Commodification
36	“That’s 12 hours of Rivermind Lux. You’re gonna have a very good time.”	Content Commodification
37	“I put the app on your phone and you just dial up your pleasure.”	Content Commodification
38	“Pregnancy costs extra... it’s a lot for your brain to process when you’re pregnant. so it’s 90\$ a month.”	Content Commodification
39	“I’m just gonna slide your Serenity up to max”	Content Commodification
40	“She’s gonna sleep more every night... it’s one of the ways that we help the demand on our servers.”	Labour Commodification
41	“I’m sure I will just get another job. At Uber, Postmates, or whatever.”	Labour Commodification
42	“It’s a private buyer. it’s Dum Dummies, but it’s a specialist thing.”	Labour Commodification
43	“how about for 90\$, I’ll put ... mousetrap on my tongue.”	Labour Commodification
44	“You told me you weren’t gonna do any more tooth stuff.”	Labour Commodification

Discussion

Audience Commodification

Audience commodification in the episode showed that the platform treats users as economic resources instead of human subjects. According to Mosco’s explanation (as cited in Fuchs, 2024) that audiences are sold to advertisers and that users themselves become commodities. The data above revealed that both the human body and consciousness are objects of extraction because the system uses physical states and mental processes to produce marketable value. For example, this dialogue— “While you’re in Sleep Mode, our servers are harnessing your spare processing capabilities to help with overall workload”, showed that the user’s body becomes an energy source. The body did not rest for personal benefit but the platform used user’s body and brain activity during sleep to power its operations. The biological rhythms of the body become a resource that replaces traditional server infrastructure. This means the body have exchange value. It is no longer only a living organism with use value.

Audience commodification also targeted consciousness. This dialogue, “so you’re running ads through me?”, showed that the conscious mind becomes a space for advertisement delivery. Ads do not appear on screens because they appear inside the mental flow of the user as seen in this dialogue “There’s like a...electronic whistling in my head...”. Advertisers paid for access to the internal cognitive environment of the audience. Moreover, the following dialogues strengthened this statement as it stated, “Oh, yeah, that’s a commercial message”, and “They are designed to be contextually relevant to the situation you’re in. So, they will stand out less in a conversation”. This meant that consciousness

became a target for subtle manipulation. The company shaped ads to blend into thought patterns. The user's consciousness becomes a commodity that supports targeted advertising.

Moreover, the body becomes an advertising medium because altered sensations push the user toward corporate goods. The body becomes the billboard and the message board. For example, "you want a coffee? Yes, please...have you tried Expresso Grande? The beans are roasted slow and long for a richer, smoother taste", through the dialogue consciousness became continuously monetized. Data 13 stated, "If you were still on Common... you would be looking at sleeping... up to 16 hours a night, and with ads?", this showed that the platform treated consciousness states as a marketable good. The company made the user had the short waking moments more profitable by placing more ads in them. At the same, the user's body is controlled through forced sleep. Those actions showed the company treated both the body and consciousness shaped for market purposes.

Audience commodification also affected user's financial behavior, which connected to bodily needs as we see in these dialogues, "Don't make us use the baby money." and "How will we pay for Rivermind Plus? I can't start running ads again". Those demonstrated economic pressure created by the platform. The family must adjust their physical survival needs to pay for access to their own mental and bodily functions. Besides, consciousness becomes a subscription. Users must pay to protect their mental space from commercial invasion.

Overall, audience commodification in *Common People*, Black Mirror Season 7 episode1 demonstrated that both the human body and the human consciousness become integrated into market logic. The body becomes energy infrastructure and sensory advertising space. The consciousness becomes an advertising marketplace and a subscription field.

Content commodification

In the episode, the content commodification is not limited to entertainment products. The content also includes bodily functions, cognitive backups, sensory upgrades, and emotional states. This follows Mosco's argument (as cited in Fuchs, 2024) that commodification transforms use value into exchange value, in this episode both body and consciousness are produced as commercial content. In this dialogue, "We take an imprint of the affected part of her neural structure and we clone it onto our main frame." This example showed that user's consciousness becomes a piece of content that can be recorded, copied, and installed. The mind became digital material that has commercial value. These dialogues supported the idea as it stated, "...the Rivermind system transmits cognitive function from the backup on the cloud-based server allowing her to live her life" and "the surgery is free and then for the streaming, we run a subscription model, and it's 300 dollars a month", here brain activity turned into a media file—a commercial good, belongs to the company.

Content commodification also includes the conversion of bodily functions into products. Data 32 stated, "Rivermind Lux. it heightens your senses. Meaning sights, sounds, flavors, even the feeling of this breeze". The new upgrade choice showed that the human body became a site of premium content. Sensory experience is not natural because it is mediated through paid enhancements. Data 33 added, "all physical sensation are simply more sensational than ever". Sensation becomes content. The platform produces bodily intensity as a commercial offering.

Moreover, emotion and physical pleasure become adjustable content products. As seen in this dialogue, "Take control of your mood with the RiverMind app". Consciousness

is redesigned into purchasable experiences, as the dialogue said “I put the app on your phone and you just dial up your pleasure”. This depicted that emotions can be bought and manipulated. Consciousness becomes an emotional package controlled through interface design.

Generally, content commodification transformed both body and consciousness into structured products. The body becomes a sensory platform. Consciousness becomes a coded file, an emotional package, and a streaming service. The episode demonstrated the total integration of human existence into commercial content frameworks.

Labour commodification

Labour commodification occurred when individuals must sell their labour power in order to survive, which is part of Mosco's theory. In the episode, labour is deeply connected to both the body and consciousness. In the episode, the labour commodification seen through bodily sacrifice. In this dialogue, “I'm sure I will just get another job. At Uber, Postmates, or whatever”, the user must sell their labour to any gig platform in order to keep paying for Rivermind. The body becomes a tool for producing income through long hours of physical effort. Rivermind got benefits from this process as the user's labour directly supports the platform's profit. Furthermore, data 43 stated, “how about for 90\$, I'll put ... mousetrap on my tongue”, this showed that the body became a tool for labour performance. Physical pain became labour output. Data 44 also confirmed this statement as it stated, “You told me you weren't gonna do any more tooth stuff” the user's suffering body became a commodity to produce exchange value. The user used the body to produce spectacles that generate income in the platform Dum Dummies to pay the Rivermind subscription.

Labour commodification also included indirect labour through user's consciousness. Data 40 stated, “She's gonna sleep more every night... it's one of the ways that we help the demand on our servers”. Sleep became labour. User's consciousness aimed to be a part of computational labour when sleeping. Sleep no longer belongs to the user. It serves the platform's operational needs. Those evidences supported Mosco's idea (as cited in Fuchs, 2024) that labourers are shaped by the market's drive for profit.

So, labour commodification in the episode depicted that the body becomes a performance tool and economic survival to pay the subscription, while consciousness becomes a computational engine to maintain the system needs. This strongly supports Mosco's claim (as cited in Fuchs, 2024) that labour becomes a commodity under capitalism because the worker must sell bodily functions and mental capacities to survive.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This research depicted that *Black Mirror* season 7 series, episode 1 entitled *Common People* strongly represents Mosco's three types of commodification. There are 44 data found. First, audience commodification (21 data) showed user's body and consciousness commodified extremely as a tool for profit accumulation of the platform. The body becomes a source of energy and a space for delivering ads. The consciousness becomes a place where ads are sold and something controlled through subscriptions. Second, content commodification (18 data) turned both the body and consciousness into packaged products. The body functions like a tool for sensing and reacting, while consciousness becomes a set of files, emotions, and streamable material. Everything of human life aspects are treated as commercial content. Third, labour commodification (5 data) that Rivermind users needed to sell their labour power to pay for the service. The body became a performance tool in gig work and the physical challenge platform, while consciousness became a computational

asset by controlling the user's sleep. Human body and consciousness become a labour-performance loop.

In conclusion, the episode showed a future where technology does not only assist human life but it also absorbs human life into economic systems. Technology becomes a tool that extracts value from the body and the mind. This raises concerns because advanced platforms may blur the line between support and exploitation. The episode warns that technology can create dependence and economic pressure when profit becomes the main goal.

For future research, it can explore how commodification develops differently across other episodes or digital platforms to compare patterns of control and exploitation. Moreover, further research could examine how emotions or intimate experiences are turned into economic value in real-life apps.

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