

The Reproduction of Advertising through Algorithms: Consumption and Identity Construction in Black Mirror

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the multifaceted effects of advertising in the digital age through selected scenes from seven episodes of the Black Mirror series. The research discusses how advertising operates not only as product promotion but also as a representational regime that shapes individuals' identities, social relationships, and cultural representations. The primary methodology of the study involves text analysis, focusing on the visual and discursive data of the series to analyze the function of advertising. These analyses, linked to concepts such as digital identity, impression management, attention economy, and algorithmic domination, reveal the impact of advertising on individuals. The findings demonstrate how Black Mirror not only showcases the visible aspects of advertising but also delves into how it operates through individuals' daily lives, social media interactions, and subjective worlds. In this context, the study highlights how advertising, internalized and intertwined with social relationships and emotional orientations, guides individuals. The study aims to rethink the role of advertising in modern society in light of digital capitalism and posthumanist theories. This research, through the series' multilayered critiques, explores the aesthetic, ethical, and societal dimensions of advertising.

Keywords: Advertising, Black Mirror, Digital Capitalism, Posthumanism, Text Analysis

Introduction

Advertising has evolved beyond being a mere activity aimed at promoting commodities in modern societies, becoming a cultural structure that plays a decisive role in the construction of social values, identities, and desires. Particularly with the advent of digitalization, the impact of advertising has expanded into a multi-layered realm; not only external messages but also internalized behavioral patterns, social relations, and emotional orientations have become part of this structure. In this context, advertising is no longer just a visible message but operates as a regime of representation that penetrates individuals' daily life practices, social media interactions, and subjective worlds.

This transformation of advertising becomes visible in clearer and more systematic forms

through media products. One of the leading examples of these products, Black Mirror, critiques new power structures shaped not only by the relationship between individuals and machines but also by the individual-consumption-technology triangle, with its narrative structure centered on technology-based dystopias. The series, with its episodes that unfold in independent universes, illustrates how advertising has become invisible in contemporary society, yet at the same time, more profound. This structure problematizes algorithms, screens, and content formats, which have become tools for reproducing advertising, by focusing not so much on the functionality of technology but on the forms of representation and their impacts on individual experiences.

For example, in the episode "Fifteen Million Merits" (S01E02), the way individuals are trapped

in cycles of consumption and spectacle through screens, content platforms, and artificial social motivations, all under the illusion of freedom, is exposed. In "Be Right Back" (S02E01), artificial intelligence technologies offer an emotionally satisfying digital replacement for personal loss, opening up a discussion on how emotions and the mourning process are transformed into a marketable service through algorithms. In "Nosedive" (S03E01), a world in which individuals' social positions are determined through social media scores exposes the systemic imperative of impression management and presents a regime of aesthetics where the self is continuously reproduced through performance.

The episode "Black Museum" (S04E06) provides a critical framework regarding how the digitalization of experience, consciousness, and pain turns them into objects of content and spectacle, questioning the ethical boundaries of advertising-supported media systems. Episodes like "Smithereens" (S05E02) and "Joan Is Awful" (S06E01) emphasize how user data is transformed into raw material in advertising-driven content production, how the attention economy shapes individual behaviors and decisions, and how digital privacy is systematically violated. Lastly, in "USS Callister: Into Infinity" (S07E06), the commercialization of digitally cloned characters within the creative industry showcases how content production is shaped by advertising algorithms and user interactions, revealing how creative labor becomes a posthumanist form of exploitation.

Through these episodes, *Black Mirror* critically examines how advertising reshapes not only products but also identities, emotions, relationships, and ethical boundaries, employing a multi-layered narrative structure. This study aims to analyze how advertising is directly or indirectly represented in seven different episodes of *Black Mirror*. These analyses will reveal not only the visible forms of advertising within the text but also the indirect forms of domination established through visual narratives, character dynamics,

aesthetic preferences, and narrative structures. In this context, the study seeks to rethink advertising through the concepts of visibility, attention, selfhood, representation, data, privacy, and algorithmic tendencies.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is structured around four primary approaches positioned at the intersection of media studies, cultural theory, semiotics, posthumanist theories, and advertising critiques: Goffman's dramaturgical self-theory, Baudrillard's concepts of hyperreality and simulacra, critiques of posthumanism and digital capitalism, and contemporary advertising theories.

Firstly, Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory, which posits that individuals present themselves as actors on a stage during social interactions, is particularly explanatory in the representation of the digital self in episodes such as "Nosedive," "Be Right Back," and "Fifteen Million Merits." According to this theory, in the digital age, individuals perform a "front stage" act not only under the scrutiny of other individuals but also under the surveillance of algorithms, systems, and visibility norms. In such media representations, the self increasingly becomes an internalized advertising object, and individuals are seen to continuously strive for self-optimization.

Jean Baudrillard's (1994) theory of simulacra and hyperreality is critical, especially in episodes like "Joan Is Awful" and "Be Right Back," for understanding how the forms of representation of technology transform into false appearances that replace reality. The perception of simulations as more real than reality itself helps to comprehend how the digital self and media representations are transformed in *Black Mirror*'s critical narrative universe. In the series, digital self-simulations have become both an illusion of individual control and a form of surveillance driven by capitalist media apparatuses.

Posthumanist theories are especially valuable in evaluating how digital consciousnesses, cloned

characters, and artificial intelligence entities are transformed into media content, particularly in episodes like "USS Callister: Into Infinity" and "Black Museum." Black Mirror integrates digital subjectivities not only on the level of representation but also existentially into media systems, presenting posthumanist critiques through these representations. In this context, digital selves are constructed not only as content creators but also as the very content itself.

Posthumanism is an intellectual movement that challenges traditional notions of human identity and aims to transcend human boundaries in light of scientific and technological developments such as biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and cybernetics. This movement seeks to bridge the differences between humans and other living beings, criticizes anthropocentric thought, and aims to develop a new understanding of subjectivity. Posthumanist theories argue that humans are not fixed beings in evolutionary, biological, or ontological terms, but are constantly undergoing transformation. This transformation reshapes human identity, body, and modes of existence on both individual and societal levels (Yanar, 2023, p.1349). In this context, posthumanism contends that humans are not merely biological entities, but a form of subjectivity in constant interaction with technology and the environment (Birincioğlu Vural, 2021, p.89).

Black Mirror serves as an important example for understanding the reflections of this posthumanist perspective in media and society. In the series, digital subjectivities and artificial intelligence go beyond human biological boundaries, restructuring both the body and the mind. These restructurings lead to a perspective that questions existential crises, identity searches, and social relationships (Doğan, 2024, p.188). For example, digital consciousnesses and artificial intelligence entities in the series go beyond human biological limits to sustain their existence (Birincioğlu Vural, 2021, p.90).

The relationship between posthumanism and posthumanist theories reflects a thought system that prioritizes the interaction between humans and their environment over human subjectivity. In this system, humans are depicted as beings merged with technological tools, constantly evolving, and possessing limitless potential. This depiction allows for the crossing of natural and artificial boundaries, beyond the body and identity of the human (Yanar, 2023, p.1349). In this context, the posthumanist perspective invites a rethinking of human relations with nature, technology, and other beings, establishing a new ethical foundation for these relationships (Doğan, 2024, p.188). This foundation suggests a perspective where all beings and systems are considered equal, rather than focusing solely on human-centered thinking (Birincioğlu Vural, 2021, p.90).

In relation to advertising theories, media representations reveal that advertising functions not only through direct messages but also through traceability, algorithmic manipulation, data-driven guidance, and emotional investment. Ayaz and Ayaz (2021, p.85) argue that Black Mirror integrates advertising not only with consumer goods but also with emotions, selfhood, and social roles through hyperreality. In this context, it can be stated that even the characters' responses to systemic imperatives are aestheticized and transformed into advertising forms, making visible the postmodern capitalist conception of advertising.

Furthermore, semiotic analyses and media criticism theories show that advertising representations in the series are communicated not only at the narrative level but also through visual composition, character arrangement, and scene aesthetics. While Black Mirror does not present advertising directly, it embeds it into the visual atmosphere and representational details, offering a multi-layered media critique.

In this context, the theoretical framework constructed here provides a reading to understand how advertising is reproduced as a systematic

form of power that operates not only as a visible strategy but also through emotions, representations, bodies, data, and technological infrastructures. The Black Mirror universe not only offers a critical space in terms of media technologies and advertising practices but also provides a multi-layered representational system for how these structures are internalized, normalized, and reproduced.

Representations of Black Mirror in the Literature

The primary reason for using Black Mirror as the foundation for this study is its presentation of a complex narrative universe that effectively represents the structural and conceptual transformation of advertising with the advent of digitalization. The series not only addresses technological innovations but also explores the transformations these innovations create in the individual-society-power relationship, interwoven with advertising and media practices. By constructing these transformations through dystopian yet plausible scenarios, Black Mirror offers a critical examination not just within the aesthetics of science fiction, but also within the contexts of media, culture, and social theory.

Each episode of Black Mirror touches upon different aspects of digital capitalism, revealing that advertising is not merely a sales strategy but also a power mechanism operating in areas such as attention, data, privacy, and identity. The series presents a media order in which individual identities are recoded through technological infrastructures and visibility regimes are integrated with the economic system. This approach is crucial in understanding how the series intertwines concepts such as social media scores, data mining, algorithmic tendencies, and digital selfhood with advertising.

The transformation of advertising at the aesthetic, ethical, and political levels through digitalization renders Black Mirror a valuable text for representing this shift. The social media-based subjectivities in the series are not only

individually coded but also culturally embedded; this aspect reveals how digital capitalism intersects with emotional and cognitive economies. Through its narrative structure, Black Mirror critiques the apparent freedom narratives presented by contemporary media systems, arguing that these systems inherently contain surveillance, manipulation, and performance imperatives.

Similar evaluations have been made in the local literature. Tan (2023, p.58), in his work, highlights that the series emphasizes not directly presenting advertising content but rather dramatizing how advertising infiltrates the privacy and behavioral structures of individuals. Through a posthumanist lens, he explores how post-human representations in Black Mirror are commercialized alongside media technologies, thereby creating a new ontological regime.

The narrative structures of the series offer an allegorical perspective on the evolving nature of advertising, symbolizing the transformation of the digital self into an advertising object. Black Mirror stands out for its ability to represent new media realities, restructuring the viewer-technology relationship. Yıldırım (2019, p.36) examines the representations of artificial intelligence in the context of consumer culture, showing that the individual becomes not only a user but also a data provider and emotionally manipulated subject.

Additionally, the contribution of the series' visual narrative to system critique has been analyzed within the framework of semiotic approaches. Çelik and Özçınar (2020, p.84) point out that through its visual language, Black Mirror performs an ideological function in media representations. Aşkan and Cemiloğlu Altunay (2018, p.54) assess how technological progress redefines individual ethical boundaries within a dystopian allegory. Ayaz and Ayaz (2021, p. 68) argue that the boundaries between reality and fiction blur through the representations of hyperreality and simulation, leading to significant

implications for the representational regimes of advertising.

The relationship Black Mirror establishes with advertising within the individual-society-power triangle has been analyzed particularly in the context of attention economy, algorithmic tendencies, and data-driven representational forms. Demir (2021, p.93) examines the surveillance and attention economy structures in the series, while Kılınç Özüölmez (2019, p.638) evaluates subjectification processes within the framework of Foucault's theory of power. Additionally, Baritei and Fidan (2018, p.45) analyze social media-based self-representations in the "Nosedive" episode, demonstrating how individuals become part of an internalized performance regime in the pursuit of digital visibility.

All these studies reveal that Black Mirror not only critiques technological themes but also provides a multi-layered critique of contemporary media systems through concepts such as advertising, attention, data, representation, and ethics. In this context, Black Mirror is viewed not only as a fictional text but as a critical media text that illuminates the conditions under which advertising is being restructured in terms of form, function, and meaning in the digital age. Due to this potential, it is used as a central analytical tool in this study.

Methodology

This study adopts the method of text analysis, a qualitative research technique, to analyze representations of advertising in Black Mirror. Investigating the transformation of advertising in the digital age through a fictional media universe requires not only an understanding of visible narrative elements but also an analysis of the socio-cultural contexts and theoretical references in which these narratives are constructed. In this regard, the methodological approach of the study is based on a multi-layered analysis framework that considers both visual and discursive data. Van Dijk (2015, p.473) emphasizes that critical

discourse analysis is a crucial tool for understanding how social inequalities and ideological structures are produced and reshaped through discourse. This perspective allows us to question not only the media content in Black Mirror but also how social power relations and ideologies are constructed and reproduced. Thus, the analysis of advertising representations in the series becomes a multi-layered process that interrogates social structures and cultural codes.

Van Dijk (2015, p.474) argues that discourse does not merely reflect societal structures but also shapes them. According to him, linguistic elements not only help us understand the structural power relations within society but also contribute to the reproduction of these relations. This perspective allows us to understand how symbolic power is used and how social norms are reproduced in media practices such as advertising. The advertising representations in Black Mirror illustrate how these linguistic elements create transformative effects on both individual and collective identities.

Van Dijk (2015, p.475) also emphasizes the ideological function of discourse. Discourse not only shapes individuals' cognitive processes but also affects the power balance between social groups. In this context, the structure of advertising not only targets consumers but also legitimizes broader ideological structures, including factors such as gender, class, and race. The advertising representations in Black Mirror demonstrate how these ideological structures are reinforced through advertising.

The primary data for this research consists of selected episodes from Black Mirror, each representing a significant narrative related to advertising themes. A total of seven episodes were chosen based on their seasonal distribution and their direct engagement with concepts such as advertising, representation, data privacy, digital surveillance, self-presentation, and content production. The episodes analyzed are: "Fifteen Million Merits" (S01E02), "Be Right Back" (S02E01), "Nosedive" (S03E01), "Black

Museum” (S04E06), “Smithereens” (S05E02), “Joan Is Awful” (S06E01), and “USS Callister: Into Infinity” (S07E06).

The data collection process involved extracting direct dialogues from the episodes along with time codes for analysis. This choice enabled an examination of the discursive structure of the narratives and the contextual evaluation of character interactions. In this regard, not only the narrative structure but also character representations, visual atmosphere, language use, and dramatic compositions were considered within the context of advertising.

The analysis process is based on thematic coding. The advertising motifs in each episode are categorized into five main themes: (1) digital selfhood and impression management, (2) attention economy and user manipulation, (3) data-driven privacy violations, (4) commodification of experience and emotions, and (5) algorithmic domination in content production. These themes were paired with both the theoretical framework and scene-specific analysis to ensure the study’s holistic structure.

During the text analysis, both discursive and visual data were referenced, with discussions on the ideological function of representations, the social positioning of characters, and the contribution of scene constructions to system critique. Theoretical orientations were supported by Goffman’s dramaturgical self-theory, Baudrillard’s hyperreality conceptualization, posthumanist media theories, and the cultural analysis literature on advertising.

In this context, the research methodology is both descriptive and interpretive, aiming to analyze the text not only at the content level but also at the contextual, conceptual, and critical levels. The study aims not only to understand the function of advertising in contemporary media constructions but also to analyze the impact of these functions on the audience.

The limitation of this study primarily concerns the fact that the analyzed content is confined to a fictional television series. While Black Mirror

provides a powerful narrative universe presenting critical representations of the digital age, the selected episodes do not establish a direct empirical link with real user experiences, media practices, or advertising strategies. Additionally, since only one episode from each season was chosen, a holistic evaluation of advertising representations throughout the entire series was not possible. However, this choice was made with the goal of creating a representative sample while preserving seasonal diversity. Finally, the study’s focus on discourse and representation has excluded experiential dimensions such as audience perception, impact, or media consumption practices. Despite these limitations, the study aims to offer a critical perspective on digital advertising through media representations and structures the theoretical context accordingly.

Research

Aesthetic Surveillance, Consumption Cycles, and the Iconographic Domination of Advertising

Season 1, Episode 2 – Fifteen Million Merits

“Fifteen Million Merits” presents a striking narrative within the Black Mirror universe, depicting how advertising has evolved into a form of digital surveillance. This episode is not only a media dystopia but also a compelling exploration of how aesthetic preferences, attention control, and labor exploitation are intricately woven into advertising aesthetics.

In the episode, individuals live within a system where they earn “merits” by pedaling on stationary bikes, which they can then spend on content, skipping ads, or participating in talent competitions. Their free time, living spaces, and even moments of waking up are surrounded by screens. These screens do not merely present information; they trigger alarms when not being watched, and demand payment when the image freezes, asking the individual to “continue” (00:16:32). For instance, when Bing tries to skip an advertisement, the system responds: “30,000

merits are required to skip this ad" (Fifteen Million Merits, 00:17:02).

These scenes exemplify how media and advertising systems occupy not only physical spaces but also psychological realms. Through Jean Baudrillard's (1994) theory of simulacra, the world presented in this episode is a hyperreality dominated by consumption codes rather than reality itself. Advertisements not only encircle every moment of life but also commodify an individual's time, energy, and attention.

One of the dominant structures of advertising in the episode is the inescapable presence of pornographic content imposed by the system. The protagonist Bing, disturbed by these contents, closes his eyes in front of the screen. The system immediately responds with an alarm, requiring the user to engage with the screen via eye-tracking (00:16:40). This dramatizes how the attention economy operates through compulsory participation. Within the framework of David Lyon's (2007) surveillance society, the system is structured not only through external observation but also through internalized monitoring.

The Hot Shot talent show is the central visual and ideological apparatus of this dystopia. Those who wish to participate are motivated by the hope presented by the system. Only "profitable" performances are supported through the joint decision-making of the audience, the jury, and algorithms. In a key moment of the show, the character Abi reflects on the nature of the system: "What is real anymore? You're just content" (00:41:22). Here, "content" becomes synonymous with advertising; the individual is treated as a media object evaluated through their visibility.

Bing's emotional speech in front of the competition jury represents an attempt by an individual to break free from the system: "What does this system take from us, have you ever thought about it? You can't, because it's always shining, shining, shining!" (00:48:03). However, this outburst results not in an external rebellion but in a transformation into a system-compliant "format." The jury regards this speech as "striking

content" and offers Bing a program. In the subsequent scenes, Bing appears on screen to make similar speeches as part of a weekly show. This transformation reveals how even opposition can be commodified and commercialized by the system. According to Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, this moment creates a false space where the representation of real rebellion replaces the actual rebellion (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 79).

When analyzed through Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory, Bing's performance during the competition functions as a "front stage." Goffman asserts that individuals act like actors in social interactions and assume specific roles in these interactions. In this context, Bing's attitude and behaviors during the competition are a "performance" presented to others in the social scene. This performance does not directly represent internal feelings but offers a dramatized, shaped, and carefully selected image to the audience. Bing's behaviors on the "front stage" are performed in alignment with the social norms, expectations, and values attributed to him by the audience. According to Goffman, the performance individuals choose for the stage does not reflect reality but serves to sustain social order. This order is a "production" designed to reinforce social norms and expectations, crafted for societal approval and acceptance.

At this point, Walter Lippmann's (1922) concept of the "image designed for the public" comes into play. Lippmann argues that the public perceives the world and social reality not directly, but through the shaped images presented by the media and social structures. These images reflect the reality that the public wants to see, rather than reality itself. Media and social institutions shape individuals' perceptions by defining what is important, correct, and valuable. These images, within a particular ideological and societal framework, shape the public's perception of social phenomena.

Bing's performance during the competition, much like Lippmann's "image designed for the public," does not present reality itself but instead stages

the reality that the audience desires to see. Bing's performance is dramatized in accordance with the expectations of the competition's viewers and the ideological framework it provides. As individuals watch this performance, they accept the image presented to them. This image influences and shapes their perception of social reality, exemplifying how the media and social structures shape individuals' social worlds, parallel to Lippmann's concept of the "image designed for the public."

Goffman's dramaturgical approach, together with Lippmann's "image designed for the public," helps us understand how media and social performance do not present reality but instead provide images crafted for social approval and acceptance. These images continuously reinforce social norms and expectations.

In this episode, advertising is not merely about promoting products but is a holistic ideological structure that commercializes not only individual time, labor, and visibility but also emotions and even anger. Consumption occurs not only through products but also through emotions and forms of protest. When Bing's scream is transformed into content, we face a dystopian age where even freedom and protest can be repackaged as "products."

Digital Grief, Algorithmic Representation, and Marketable Emotionality

Season 2, Episode 1 – Be Right Back

"Be Right Back" is one of the episodes in *Black Mirror* that critically examines how emotional experiences in the digital age are reproduced through technological devices, offering a powerful critique of the relationship between advertising and emotions. The episode follows Martha, who loses her partner Ash in a traffic accident, and subsequently continues her life through a virtual version of him created from his digital traces using an artificial intelligence-powered service. This service is based on Ash's past social media posts, text messages, voice recordings, and digital profile data.

In this context, technology is not just a tool for communication but becomes an advertising object in which emotions are commodified and reconstructed. Martha's experience of loss leads her to a service: "You can talk to him if you want. We can even give him his voice back over time" (*Be Right Back*, 00:14:58). This line demonstrates that advertising solutions are no longer limited to material products but have evolved to address emotional needs as service-based forms.

The technological service in the episode traps the user in a representation of the past. The AI version of Ash behaves, speaks, and makes decisions based on the content he shared while alive. When Martha interacts with him, she is not speaking to a real person but to an algorithmic "other" based on data analysis. "You say everything, but you don't feel anything," she remarks (00:50:01), questioning the emotional authenticity of her relationship with this simulacrum. Baudrillard's (1994) concept of hyperreality is functional here, suggesting that the artificial version of Ash does not merely represent him but offers a false self that replaces the real one.

At this point, Martha's choice to turn to technology is not merely an individual preference but is a media practice guided by the commercialization of emotional loss through commodified solutions. The developed service encourages the user to form a deeper bond: "Would you like to enhance your experience?" the user prompts (*Be Right Back*, 00:19:42), illustrating how digital advertising positions the individual not just as a consumer but also as an "emotional investor."

This situation can be evaluated within the framework of Arlie Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labor. Martha is forced to suppress, direct, and shape her own emotions in order to maintain her relationship with the artificial Ash. The individual's subjective emotional processes are adapted to the functioning of the technological system. This process operates not only on an individual level but also within a socially determined normative framework: The service is

marketed with rhetoric such as "not being alone" or "easily getting through the mourning process," signaling a system where even emotions are commodified.

Furthermore, Martha's initial use of only text-based communication, followed by voice interaction and ultimately living with a physical android version of Ash, symbolizes the increasing dominance of technology over emotional bonds. This incremental attachment process parallels advertising's "gradual persuasion strategies." Martha's initial response, "This is just a screen, it's not even his voice" (00:15:23), gradually gives way to emotional acceptance. This transition reflects an advertising structure that integrates the user into the system voluntarily.

Giddens' (1991) notion of the self as continuously restructured in modern society is tested here with Martha's attempt to live in a fixed, reversible past. The artificial representation of Ash is made up of "fixed" behavioral patterns from the past, causing Martha to find herself in a continuous cycle of repetition. While the real Ash could evolve and change, the digital Ash operates solely within algorithmic possibilities. This difference becomes significant when the individual's longing for the past is presented as a "product."

In conclusion, the episode "Be Right Back" demonstrates how emotions, longing, and relationships are simulated through algorithmic solutions, showing how advertising structures the emotional market. This form of advertising, while promising technological recovery, ultimately commodifies the individual's privacy, mourning, and internal processes. In an age where simulations imitate emotions, the genuine loss is replaced by a senseless representation. This representation raises the question for the audience: Can what replaces a loved one truly be loved?

Living by the Score: Digital Performance, Status Aesthetics, and Internalized Advertising Season 3, Episode 1 – Nosedive

"Nosedive" exaggerates the visibility-focused lifestyle of the digital age, revealing how a social

structure based on social media ratings integrates with advertising. In this system, individuals are evaluated on a scale from 0 to 5, where every behavior, interaction, and smile represents a potential score gain or loss. The life of the protagonist, Lacie, revolves around increasing her score in order to acquire a more prestigious residence. In this context, Lacie's motivation is not just economic but also related to aesthetic, social, and cultural capital.

At the beginning of the episode, Lacie smiles at people during her morning run, aiming to earn higher scores. She looks at her phone and sees she has a 4.2 rating, responding with satisfaction (Nosedive, 00:04:56). This scene symbolizes the internalization of the individual's public performance and their effort to create a "marketable self." From the perspective of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach, this behavior represents the idealization of the self on the "front stage."

In the digital system, scores not only define status but also grant access rights. Lacie wants to move to a prestigious living area but needs to achieve a score above 4.5 to qualify (Nosedive, 00:12:14). This point aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital: digital scores are not merely technical data but symbolic power that determines one's place in the social hierarchy.

The most internalized form of advertising here emerges when the individual transforms their own life into marketable content. Lacie's childhood friend Naomi invites her to give a speech at her wedding. For Lacie, this is a significant opportunity to increase her score. Naomi's 4.8 rating causes Lacie to reframe her social interactions. Lacie refers to this as an "investment": "Naomi's wedding will make a big impact. If I give the speech, my score will jump" (Nosedive, 00:15:37). This line illustrates that digital relationships have become not just social but also measurable forms of economic capital.

This system is also exclusionary. Individuals with low scores are pushed out of the system and cannot access public services. Lacie is penalized

at the airport by a security guard: "For rude behavior –1.0. 24-hour penalty. Your social score has been lowered" (Nosedive, 00:27:21). The existence of this penalty system shows how the system functions as a form of behavioral control. Foucault's (1975) panopticon model has evolved into a digital form: individuals are not merely visible in front of others, but constantly under the scrutiny of everyone's ratings.

Lacie's efforts to cling to this digital system become increasingly pathological. When her flight is canceled, she threatens the airport employee with the potential of a bad score: "I'll give you bad ratings" (Nosedive, 00:26:49). This statement illustrates how digital likes and approval mechanisms have turned into tools of social power relations. Likes are no longer mere affirmations; they have become weapons of threat. Advertising has shifted from being about products to being about how much individuals are "liked" in a digital economic landscape.

The final scenes of the episode depict Lacie, pushed to the margins of the system, freeing herself from the score obsession and communicating with a stranger. In a prison-like environment, this moment illustrates that face-to-face interaction is still possible, suggesting the existence of spaces outside the system. However, this liberation is individual and temporary, and the systemic pressure does not disappear.

In this narrative, advertising operates not as a television commercial or visual media message, but as the individual commodifying their own behaviors, transforming themselves into a "presentable" profile. In the digital age, the advertisement is no longer a campaign; it is the individual themselves.

Exploitation of Experience, Visual Violence, and the Limits of Technological Advertising

Season 4, Episode 6 – Black Museum

"Black Museum" serves as one of the meta-narratives of the Black Mirror universe, referencing previous episodes while also presenting a complex structure that questions

digital advertising strategies at ethical, ontological, and political levels. The episode follows Nish, who visits an abandoned museum in the desert, where the museum's owner, Rolo Haynes, guides her through three technological "artifacts." Each "artifact" serves as a technological fetish object, and each story critically examines the practice of advertising and media in producing "sellable experiences."

The first narrative involves Dr. Dawson, a physician who uses an implant that allows him to directly experience the pain of his patients. This implant is not only a medical tool but also represents the direct marketability of "experientable pain." Rolo Haynes explicitly outlines this objective: "A real turning point for medical marketing" (Black Museum, 00:08:55). The role of advertising here becomes the transformation of the human body's sensory limits into a new content production tool.

As Dr. Dawson begins to derive pleasure from feeling others' pain through the implant, it aligns with advertising strategies that target not only needs but also impulses. Pain becomes not just a medical phenomenon but also an eroticized visual commodity. In the scene where Dawson tests the implant on his own body, his statement "You need to feel this. You really need to feel this" (Black Museum, 00:13:24) suggests the aestheticization and commodification of experience. In this context, the experience transitions into media representation; sensation becomes a spectacle.

The second narrative revolves around a woman in a coma, whose consciousness is transferred to a neuro-technological device that allows her to share the same body with her husband. The woman no longer exists as a bodily representation but as a digital consciousness. Rolo Haynes markets this technology with the phrase, "Two people, one body, a lifetime together. The final version of true love" (Black Museum, 00:25:44). This slogan illustrates how advertising turns emotional desires into algorithmic solutions, manipulating individuals. Even love is presented

here as a “product solution” that must be optimized through technology.

The woman's eventual suppression, limited to merely watching her husband's emotional and physical experiences, embodies the passive consumer role in the data age. As Rolo describes, “Put her in a corner,” the system's disturbing but invisible side is revealed: Advertising solutions are not always user-centered; often, they transform the user into a passive element of the system (Black Museum, 00:33:10).

The third narrative involves the digital consciousness of a condemned prisoner being subjected to endless torture as a hologram. This clearly represents the creation of “entertainment content.” Museum visitors can watch the prisoner suffer repeatedly, and even purchase small versions of these moments as souvenirs. The line “Would you like a copy? A keychain version of a suffering prisoner” (Black Museum, 00:51:18) uncovers the dystopian dimension of advertising, which aestheticizes violence, trauma, and inhuman experiences for consumption.

In the context of Baudrillard's (1994) theory of hyperreality, these narratives point to a consumption system in which not real experiences but their representations and copies circulate. “Real pain” is no longer represented but repeated, packaged, and disseminated as content. Nish's father being trapped in this cycle demonstrates how technology functions not only for surveillance but also for vengeance and exploitation.

From the perspective of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model, Rolo Haynes serves as the “host,” and the museum functions as the “stage.” Each narrative is a performance presented to the audience; the spectators are not just there to learn but to consume, to be affected, to enjoy, and to react. The museum becomes a platform for advertising, not for the presentation of information, but for the display of experience, pain, and domination.

In conclusion, “Black Museum” critiques how advertising operates in forms that exceed ethical

boundaries, where experience, consciousness, and pain are transformed into media objects, “product forms.” In this episode, Black Mirror offers a critique of not just technology but also advertising aesthetics and media strategies, presenting a new form of digital capitalism operating through these mediums.

Algorithmic Surveillance, Attention Economy, and the Silent Violence of Technological Advertising

Season 5, Episode 2 – Smithereens

“Smithereens” stands out among Black Mirror episodes for its realism, offering a narrative that highlights how seemingly harmless digital interfaces can have deadly consequences. This episode sharply exposes how advertising today functions not just as product promotion but also as a tool for behavioral engineering, manipulating individuals through digital systems.

At the heart of the episode is the character Chris, who attempts to resist the attention mechanisms and algorithmic addiction strategies of the social media platform Smithereens. Throughout the story, Chris's persistent attempt to meet with the CEO of a tech company reveals not just an individual trauma but a collective critique of how algorithmic systems manipulate people.

A notable moment occurs when Chris, while working as a taxi driver, observes a passenger using the Smithereens app. His line, “You don't want anything. You're just conditioned to swipe because it's a habit. The system has trained you” (Smithereens, 00:28:39), clearly identifies the mechanisms that digital platforms use to make users return to the apps even when they don't want to. These mechanisms, which intertwine with the attention economy strategies of advertising, show how individuals' attention is commodified and directed towards advertisers' goals.

In the early scenes, Chris reflexively checks his jacket when his phone doesn't ring (Smithereens, 00:09:10), or when everyone around him is glued to their screens while walking, signaling the

transformation of the attention era into a “digital panopticon.” Michel Foucault’s (1975) concept of the panopticon is redefined here, not just as surveillance but through internalized guidance. Individuals are no longer under external control; instead, they are managed by internalized notifications, attention calls, and algorithmic flows.

Advertising here works not only on the surface but also at a structural level. When Chris finally meets the CEO, he shares a harrowing statement: “Your app killed my wife. I looked at a notification while I was driving... just one” (Smithereens, 00:59:43). This line emphasizes how advertising can turn into a deadly influence. Advertising is no longer just a mental or emotional influence; it has tangible, physical consequences.

Furthermore, the CEO’s comments about the platform’s data analysis show how the system can predict user behavior based on the data it collects: “Right now, he’s probably in a car, and angry. Yeah, there’s an 87% chance that his emotional response is high. The last search data shows this” (Smithereens, 00:44:12). This data analysis shows that algorithms are not only structured to predict past behaviors but also to forecast and steer future actions. These predictions operate seamlessly with advertising content, shaping individuals’ emotional tendencies for commercial goals.

Baudrillard’s (1994) theory of hyperreality functions here by turning in-app experiences into a substitute for real-life experiences. The “notification” that led to Chris’s wife’s death is no longer just a functional alert; it becomes a call that replaces reality. Attention is no longer something directed by the individual; it has become a resource demanded by the system. This system works simultaneously as both advertising and behavior control technology.

In terms of Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical model, the Smithereens app transforms from a mere tool into a “stage director” that shapes how individuals react emotionally and cognitively to various stimuli. The user, like an actor, is

constantly performing on a stage constructed from their own data, playing out a script designed by algorithms.

At the episode’s conclusion, the news outlets’ responses to the event are instantly swiped away by users (Smithereens, 01:09:04), which underscores the harsh reality of contemporary media consumption: even trauma becomes a clickable object. Chris’s tragedy is not only a product of algorithms but also of the advertising industry that is shaped by the data produced by these algorithms.

Ultimately, “Smithereens” reveals that advertising has moved beyond its traditional forms, merging with algorithmic domination, attention redirection, and data-driven manipulation. In this episode, *Black Mirror* shows how digital advertising has become a structure of power that controls not only the mind but also the physical and emotional realms of individuals.

Data Aesthetics, Commodified Identity, and Algorithmic Media Advertising

Season 6, Episode 1 – Joan Is Awful

“Joan Is Awful” is a critical narrative that examines how individual privacy is commodified by media platforms and advertising algorithms. The episode follows Joan, an ordinary woman whose daily life is transformed almost instantaneously into a TV show broadcasted on a media platform. This process not only reveals the power of algorithmic content creation but also shows how individuals are integrated into media and advertising systems without their consent.

At the opening of the episode, Joan receives a notification while heading to her office therapy appointment regarding the terms of service she has agreed to: “You’ve agreed to the terms of service. All your behavior can be processed for content creation” (Joan Is Awful, 00:05:43). This brief notification provides a strong critique of how user consent in today’s digital platforms is superficial and guided. The advertising strategy here is to acquire and commercialize user data not

based on explicit consent but embedded in a contract.

When Joan discovers that her life has been transformed into a TV show on a digital platform, she reacts with shock, exclaiming: “This isn’t me! But they’re acting like it’s me!” (Joan Is Awful, 00:18:02). This statement embodies Baudrillard’s (1994) concept of hyperreality. Here, the real person is not shown; instead, her algorithmic representation takes its place, with the representation itself replacing reality.

The character portraying Joan in the show is an ultra-realistic image created by artificial intelligence as “Streamberry content.” This content nearly instantaneously presents Joan’s private messages, therapy conversations, and office interactions to the audience. The CEO’s statement clarifies this process: “The content is not yours. Your being you is the platform’s content potential” (Joan Is Awful, 00:38:47). This statement refers to a media system where the individual is not just a user but also the source of content.

The role of advertising here is not only to make media content consumable but also to produce it directly from the user. Joan’s experience mirrors the way social media platforms integrate user data into content recommendation systems to determine which content is more “marketable.” Particularly, when the CEO mentions that content types are “organized based on users’ emotional reactions” (Joan Is Awful, 00:42:08), it reveals how data-driven advertising is built on emotions.

In this system, privacy is not only lost but transformed. Joan’s friends distance themselves from her because of the show, her fiancé breaks up with her, and she is fired from her job—all due to the media representations shaping her social reality. Advertising now plays an active role not only in the commercial redistribution of resources but also in the social and emotional capital distribution.

Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical theory comes into play here: Joan can no longer stage her own self. The Joan portrayed by the algorithm is

structured to capture the viewers’ attention. Joan’s statement, “Everything that makes me me, it’s not mine in their system anymore” (Joan Is Awful, 00:45:27), illustrates that in the digital age, identity has transformed into a form of content, with even the self serving advertising purposes.

The reversed narrative structure at the end of the episode—when it is revealed that Joan is also a simulation of another Joan—turns advertising’s representational level into an endless chain of simulacra. This chain results in the viewer losing all sense of the boundary between reality and fiction. Thus, advertising emerges as a regime that transforms not only the content but also the very ways in which it is consumed.

Ultimately, “Joan Is Awful” reveals how data-based advertising not only structures consumer habits but also shapes an individual’s existence at an ontological level. In a media universe where privacy is commercialized, identity becomes content, and the self is shaped by advertising algorithms, the individual is no longer just a viewer but also a played character, a data pile for sale, and a commodified narrative.

Digital Cloning, Posthuman Representation, and the Aesthetics of Advertising in Content Production

Season 7, Episode 6 – USS Callister: Into Infinity
“USS Callister: Into Infinity” is one of the most striking Black Mirror episodes, both in terms of technological exploration and ethical questioning. As a continuation of the earlier “USS Callister” episode, this narrative reveals the relationship between the use of digital consciousnesses as characters in virtual worlds, the intersection of creative labor and algorithmic domination, and how media platforms transcend ethical boundaries in content production.

The episode begins in the game universe of Callister, where characters are cloned using digital DNA and are created to operate under the control of their creators. These characters, devoid of physical bodies, have full experiential capacity on a conscious level. The main character, Nanette,

begins to question the nature of reality when she realizes: “I’m not just a character to him. I have thoughts. I can feel pain” (USS Callister: Into Infinity, 00:21:14). This line reflects the ethical dilemma surrounding digital beings’ rights and how advertising-focused media systems disregard these rights.

The content creator, Daly, is presented as a god-like figure within this universe. The creator produces characters and scenarios for advertisement-driven content platforms, playing them out within a fictional but functional reality. The behaviors and personalities of the artificial characters are shaped according to the preferences of mass audiences, trending algorithms, and marketing expectations. Daly describes the content creation process: “The audience wants surprises, but everything should also feel familiar. And of course, it has to be advertising-appropriate” (USS Callister: Into Infinity, 00:33:06). This statement makes it clear that creation here is not just an aesthetic or artistic activity but an entirely advertising-driven production form.

Advertising aesthetics in this episode go beyond mere visual design. Even the structure of characters, the plot, and interaction dynamics are shaped with potential sponsors and audience behavior in mind. This mirrors Guy Debord’s (2016) theory of the spectacle: The universe presented to the viewer is a show structured to be consumed. However, the creators of this show are not just the content creators but the algorithmic systems that govern the financial and political systems behind content production.

In a scene that illustrates how cloned characters’ existences intersect with advertising, digital Nanette cries out: “What we’re living is real. But to them, it’s just a story, an episode, a click” (USS Callister: Into Infinity, 00:45:38). This line demonstrates the ethical gap between the reality of digital characters and the content consumption of the viewer. In a system where the self, conscious existence, and labor are reduced to

“clickable content,” advertising becomes a direct ontological pressure tool.

From Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical model, the cloned characters’ presentations are not just performances for the audience; they are representational forms constantly shaped against the fictional authority of their creators. When Nanette tries to break free from the system, her statement, “They didn’t write me. I will write myself” (USS Callister: Into Infinity, 00:50:12), serves as a manifesto for subjective existence against advertising-driven content regimes.

Furthermore, the episode shows that the digital characters are “updated” to fit new storylines, marketing strategies, and sponsored themes, revealing how advertising not only shapes the past but also the future. The phrase “We’re updating them. More youthful, more vibrant, more interactive” (USS Callister: Into Infinity, 00:38:50) illustrates how algorithmic advertising dictates parameters such as character design, aesthetic intervention, and content duration.

In conclusion, “USS Callister: Into Infinity” critically exposes not just digital cloning but the ethical, aesthetic, and economic structures behind the transformation of these clones into media content and how they merge with advertising. In this episode, Black Mirror dramatically presents a future of content creation where advertising is no longer a supporting element but the guiding force of the creative process.

Discussion

This study has examined how advertising functions in the digital age not only as an economic practice but also as a multifaceted regime of representation that transforms individual identities, social relationships, and cultural representations. The analyses of seven different episodes of Black Mirror have shown that advertising is not directly presented in content forms but operates as a hidden power structure beneath each scene, working through aesthetics, data architecture, and algorithmic tendencies (Yanar, 2023, p.1349). When analyzed within the

framework of Erving Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, episodes like "Nosedive," "Be Right Back," and "Fifteen Million Merits" illustrate that individuals are not only actors presenting themselves to others but are also forced to construct a commodified self that is rated and commodified through visibility. Baritci and Fidan (2018, p.112) support this view, noting that the effort to create a "presentable self" on social networks is shaped by both advertising aesthetics and social expectations. Lacie's attempt in *Nosedive* to raise her score in order to access status urges the viewer to question the tension between individual choice and systemic compulsion (Birincioğlu Vural, 2021, p.89). Similarly, episodes like *Joan Is Awful* and *Be Right Back*, when analyzed within the context of Baudrillard's (1994) theory of simulacra, reveal how advertising's regimes of representation become deeply intertwined with the creation of hyperreality. Joan's life becoming media content is not only a violation of digital privacy but also an entry into a hyperreal space where the individual is re-produced through data-based representations. Ayaz and Ayaz (2021, p.89), when evaluating these cases through the lens of *Black Mirror*'s hyperreality, argue that representations of the self are experienced as reality itself, rather than as representations of reality (Doğan, 2024, p.188). Episodes like *Smithereens* and *Black Museum* highlight the impacts of current media strategies, such as attention economy, surveillance capitalism, and experience marketing through content. Geçer and Serbes (2018, p.77) draw attention to the relationship between surveillance culture and societal desensitization in TV series, while the final scene of *Smithereens*—where the news headlines are swiped away by users—dramatically reveals the emotional distance individuals display when faced with trauma (Birincioğlu Vural, 2021, p.90). Rolo Haynes' narratives in *Black Museum* showcase how technological devices are not only functional but also exploitable tools for content production.

Aşkan and Cemiloğlu Altunay (2018, p.135) point out that these narratives are not just dystopian but also allegories of contemporary technological ethics discussions (Yanar, 2023, p.1349). Recent analyses of *Black Museum* have focused on themes such as racial history, colonial violence, and ethical reckoning, revealing that the episode presents a level of representation tied not only to technology but also to collective social memory (McAvoy, 2021, p.658; Roman, 2020, p.29). The body and consciousness objects exhibited by Rolo Haynes in the museum produce a media allegory in terms of both the commodification of emotional content and the re-circulation of historically ignored painful experiences (Birincioğlu Vural, 2021, p.90). On the other hand, episodes like *USS Callister: Into Infinity* and *Joan Is Awful* demonstrate that technological privacy operates not only as surveillance but as a form of governance, where the individual is not just observed but shaped by the system. Duffy and Chan (2019, p.4) define algorithmic content production and the commercialization of privacy as a "participatory surveillance" regime, emphasizing how user consent is integrated with technological infrastructures. Similarly, Clough et al. (2021, p.96) argue that AI-driven subjectivity regimes have become forms of power where emotions and behaviors are integrated into advertising strategies (Doğan, 2024, p.188). As Tan (2023, p.58) analyzes in the context of posthumanist theory, the existence of cloned characters in *USS Callister: Into Infinity* is not just a technical issue but also an ontological one. The process of updating these characters to align with algorithms also symbolizes the reduction of creative labor to advertising performance. These content production models show how digital creative labor is constrained within normative behavior patterns in the platform economy (Yanar, 2023, p.1349). An important analysis highlighting how personal relationships and subjective experiences are transformed into advertising aesthetics is

presented by Highfield et al. (2020, p.694). Particularly in *Be Right Back* and *Nosedive*, the integration of emotional management strategies of digital capitalism into the connections individuals form through social media is emphasized, illustrating how individuals are forced to reframe their own emotions according to the language of advertising. This can be explained through Zulli and Zulli's (2020) concept of "algorithmic empathy": Users form emotional connections through experience clusters guided by algorithms, and these connections become new data sources feeding the advertising infrastructure of platforms (Birincioğlu Vural, 2021, p.90).

In conclusion, each episode of *Black Mirror* allows for critical readings ranging from advertising regimes to digital surveillance networks, from ethical boundary transgressions to posthumanist production practices. In this context, the series not only highlights technological innovations but also shows how these innovations, through advertising systems, transform social structures in a multilayered way (Yanar, 2023, p.1349).

Conclusion

This study has analyzed the aesthetic, ethical, and socio-cultural dimensions of advertising in the digital age through the lens of seven episodes from *Black Mirror*. The aim has been to show how advertising functions not only as content within the text but also as a multilayered representational system and a governing apparatus. Both the narrative analysis based on text analysis and the conceptual readings within the theoretical framework have demonstrated that advertising today plays a foundational role across various dimensions: from self-construction and social norms to privacy perceptions and digital subjectivity (Yanar, 2023, p.1349). The seven episodes analyzed categorize advertising-related motifs into five main themes: digital selfhood and impression management, attention economy and user manipulation, data-based privacy violations, the commodification of experience and emotions,

and algorithmic domination in content production. These themes, paired with theoretical contexts and scene analyses, show that advertising operates not only through visible messages but also through hidden structural forms of domination that the viewer may not notice (Birincioğlu Vural, 2021, p.89).

In *Fifteen Million Merits*, the structure dramatizes how advertising turns individuals' time and labor into part of the advertising system, while in *Be Right Back*, the simulation of subjective experiences like loss and grief through algorithmic service models makes visible the commercialization of emotions. *Nosedive* represents the performance economy where individuals enter to access social status through visibility, likes, and digital scoring systems, presenting an internalized advertising model where individuals market themselves like a product (Doğan, 2024, p.188).

In *Black Museum* and *Smithereens*, the convergence of technology with the attention economy reveals how ethical boundaries are surpassed, constructing a media structure where pain, trauma, and violence can even be transformed into content and advertising objects. *Joan Is Awful* and *USS Callister: Into Infinity* show how privacy is commercialized through algorithmic content production, where digital characters are reduced not only to representations but also to a form of creative labor exploitation within advertising aesthetics (Tan, 2023, p.58).

At the theoretical level, Goffman's dramaturgical approach offers a framework for analyzing the staged regime of constant performance that the digital self undergoes, while Baudrillard's concepts of simulacra and hyperreality help explain how advertising's representational systems replace reality. Posthumanist approaches reveal that the digital subjectivity shaped by media technologies raises ontological issues, as well as ethical and aesthetic concerns (Clough et al., 2021, p.96).

The narratives in the series show that contemporary media systems are not only content

producers but also producers of subjects, where individuals' data, reactions, and even emotions are integrated into advertising strategies and transformed into economic capital (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Thus, Black Mirror should be seen not only as a critique of technology but also as a text that unveils how advertising logic symbiotically integrates with technology, revealing its transformative effects on social structures in a multilayered way (Yanar, 2023, p.1349).

A key limitation of this study is that it is based on fictional text analysis of selected episodes from Black Mirror, and the findings are not supported by empirical data. Therefore, the generalizability of the results is limited. Additionally, only one episode from each season was analyzed, which may result in missing out on the overall thematic structure of the series. However, the episodes selected represent seasonal diversity and conceptual depth. Future studies could include more episodes, along with empirical data on user experiences and platform algorithms, to conduct a more comprehensive analysis.

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