

# REPRESENTATION OF CAPITALISM AND MATERIALISM IN JESSIE J'S PRICE TAG: A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract

*This research seeks to examine how capitalism and materialism are represented in the lyrics of Jessie J's song Price Tag from a Marxist point of view. The study centers on the portrayal of money domination as a manifestation of capitalist practice and on materialism as an element of commodification in contemporary society. The research applies a qualitative method using a descriptive-interpretative approach. The data consist of words, phrases, and sentences taken from the lyrics of Price Tag and are interpreted through Marxist literary criticism. Data were collected through documentation and library research, while the analysis followed the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, covering data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that Price Tag expresses criticism of the power of money and the culture of materialism within capitalist society. The lyrics illustrate how capitalism forms social consciousness, causing money and consumption to become dominant standards for measuring happiness and social status. The song also reveals commodification, a process that changes social relationships into economic relations grounded in exchange value. Through comparison, this research shows that Price Tag differs from many contemporary popular songs that tend to glorify luxury and materialistic lifestyles. Through cause-and-effect analysis, the study also demonstrates that capitalism encourages consumerist habits, artificial needs, and social alienation. Therefore, this study confirms that song lyrics can operate as a medium of social criticism against capitalist ideology in modern popular culture.*

**Keywords:** Capitalism; Materialism; Marxism; Song lyrics; Social criticism

## Introduction

Literature plays a significant role in human life as a space for expression, reflection, and criticism of social reality. Through literary works, writers can communicate ideas, emotions, and life perspectives that are often difficult to express directly in daily life. Literature also serves as a medium for moral and social learning because it contains values that can influence how society views

literature becomes a form of resistance to inequality within society. Criticism functions as a strong communicative instrument for expressing new thoughts, assessing older ideas, and encouraging social transformation (Ridwan1, 2025). For this reason, literature should not be understood merely as entertainment, but also as a form of communication that can shape individual thought patterns and social awareness.

various phenomena. Social criticism in

Furthermore, literature functions as a mirror of social conditions within a certain period. Literary texts are able to record social, cultural, and economic dynamics surrounding the author. From a Marxist perspective, Karl Marx views literature as part of important social institutions, similar to religion, politics, science, and education, all of which are integral to social life. Therefore, literature develops in line with the socio-economic conditions of society (Anisa Febriari1, 2020). Accordingly, analyzing literary works is important for understanding the connection between a text and the social context around it. Literature may be regarded as a social document that carries profound meanings about human life.

In modern society, consumer culture has become a phenomenon with strong influence over social life. Consumer culture is understood as consumer behavior that changes continuously from day to day. It refers to the culture of consumption and mass production based on economic systems, shaping perceptions, values, desires, and personal identity. Economic growth, demographic shifts, and new technology influence the scope and scale of consumer culture (Hanif, 2014). Consumption itself is a social phenomenon inseparable from human life because it is part of fulfilling basic needs, with shopping often becoming the first step of the consumption process (Taufiq Djalal1 et al., 2022). However, consumerism has developed beyond need fulfillment and has become a mindset in which individuals purchase goods not because they need them, but

because purchasing itself brings satisfaction (Kusumawati et al., 2022). In the digital era, consumerism is intensified by Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and influencer-based marketing, both of which stimulate excessive consumption and produce false needs (Faiza et al., 2025). This situation further strengthens socio-economic hierarchy and normalizes consumption as a marker of status in modern life (Sitepu, 2025).

One modern literary form worth examining is song lyrics, particularly Jessie J's Price Tag. This song is a popular cultural product that contains not only aesthetic value but also a strong social message. Its lyrics address materialism in modern society, where happiness is frequently measured by material possession. The song criticizes the increasing tendency toward materialistic orientation and highlights values such as happiness, love, authenticity, and human connection (Yuli Rohmiyati et al., 2025). In addition, it demonstrates how music can function as an effective medium for communicating social values and ideologies in everyday life (Zahrotuhayaty & Novari, 2024).

Price Tag is selected as the object of analysis because it is highly relevant to current social conditions, especially consumerist culture and global capitalism. The lyrics criticize a way of life that places excessive focus on money and social status. In Marxist thought, capitalism tends to reduce human purpose and social relations to exchanges of commodities and money

(Zahrotuhayaty & Novari, 2024). The song also contains anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist, alienation, and collective-value themes (Zahrotuhayaty & Novari, 2024). Moreover, it reflects criticism of exploitation, labor conditions, and the reification of social relations in the capitalist system (Zahrotuhayaty & Novari, 2024). Other findings indicate that the song strengthens the relevance of Marxist theory in contemporary popular culture and encourages discussion about social justice and human dignity (Zahrotuhayaty & Novari, 2024).

Although a number of previous studies have examined Jessie J's Price Tag as criticism of materialism and consumer culture, most of them have focused mainly on moral messages and general social criticism. Studies that specifically explore the representation of money's dominance as a capitalist practice and materialism as part of the commodification process through a Marxist lens remain limited. Therefore, this research aims to investigate more deeply how the lyrics of Price Tag represent capitalism and materialism as criticism of modern society.

On an individual level, literary works such as Price Tag can raise listeners' critical awareness of the importance of living more simply and avoiding the trap of materialism. Lyrics such as "we just wanna make the world dance, forget about the price tag" present a vision of society that prioritizes happiness, unity, and emotional bonds over financial interest (Yuli Rohmiyati et al., 2025). The song also encourages a shift from material wealth toward

emotional well-being and more meaningful social relationships (Yuli Rohmiyati et al., 2025).

On a social level, this song helps develop collective awareness of the negative consequences of consumerist culture. As a form of popular culture, music plays an important role in inserting social ideas into everyday life, including anti-capitalist ideas that continue to be relevant in modern society (Zahrotuhayaty & Novari, 2024). The song also shows that literary works may function as a means of challenging consumerist culture and promoting more meaningful human relationships (Yuli Rohmiyati et al., 2025).

The theoretical basis of this study is the Marxist approach in literary studies. Marxism views literary works as products of social and economic conditions and as reflections of power relations within capitalism. In this framework, capitalism is understood as a system that produces exploitation, alienation, and social inequality (Zahrotuhayaty & Novari, 2024). Consequently, the Marxist approach does not only examine the textual content but also considers how dominant ideology is created, maintained, and resisted through literature.

This study also applies a social criticism approach in literature, which aims to reveal social problems and reflect on the condition of society (Ridwan1, 2025). Thus, the study does not merely analyze textual meaning linguistically, but also examines the social context behind the text.

Based on this background, the study focuses on how Jessie J's Price Tag represents criticism of money's dominance as a form of capitalist practice from a Marxist perspective, as well as how materialism is portrayed as part of commodification in capitalist society.

This research is expected to contribute to the development of literary studies, especially the analysis of song lyrics as a modern literary form. In relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the study is connected to SDG 12 on Responsible Consumption and Production. This relevance appears in the criticism found in Price Tag toward consumerist culture and materialistic lifestyles in modern society. Through its lyrics, the song encourages society not to make money and material ownership the main measures of happiness or social status. Therefore, the study is expected to raise public awareness so that people respond to consumption more wisely and value simple, meaningful aspects of life.

### Research and Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a descriptive-interpretative approach based on Marxist literary criticism. The qualitative approach is used because the research focuses on understanding meanings contained in song lyrics as a literary text. Creswell (2014) explains that qualitative research is intended to explore and understand meanings derived from social or human problems. In this case, Jessie J's Price Tag is interpreted as a

symbolic representation of materialism and consumer culture in modern society. The descriptive approach is applied to explain meanings systematically, while the interpretative approach is used to interpret social messages and ideologies in the lyrics through a Marxist perspective.

The data of this study consist of words, phrases, and sentences found in the lyrics of Price Tag. The primary data source is the officially published lyric text. The song is selected because it is relevant to materialism, capitalism, and consumer culture and because it is a popular literary product with wide social influence. To support the analysis, the researcher selected several lyric excerpts that represent the main themes of the research, including "It's not about the money, money, money," "We just wanna make the world dance," and "Forget about the price tag." These excerpts were chosen because they carry strong symbolic meanings related to criticism of materialistic orientation and capitalist values in modern life.

The data collection techniques used are documentation and library research. Documentation was conducted by collecting and recording the lyrics as the primary object of analysis. Library research was carried out by reviewing relevant sources, including books, academic journals, and theories related to Marxist literary criticism, capitalism, materialism, commodification, and social criticism in literature. According to Sugiyono (2017), documentation study is a data collection technique that gathers data from documents relevant to

the research. These two techniques enable the researcher to obtain valid data and support the analysis theoretically.

The data analysis applies the qualitative analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), combined with the analytical stages suggested by Creswell(2014). The first stage is data collection, which involves identifying and gathering lyric parts relevant to the research focus. The second stage is data condensation, namely simplifying and focusing the data by selecting lyrics that contain significant meanings related to capitalism, materialism, commodification, and social criticism. The third stage is data presentation through systematic narrative description. The final stage is drawing and verifying conclusions to ensure the validity and consistency of the interpretation.

Following Creswell's analytical procedure, the researcher also organized the data, conducted close reading of the lyrics, coded symbolic meanings, grouped the themes, and interpreted the data in depth. The coding process focused on identifying representations of capitalist ideology, consumer culture, materialism, commodification, and resistance to a money-centered social orientation. By combining these analytical approaches, the study is expected to produce a critical and comprehensive interpretation of the latent meanings in the lyrics of Price Tag.

## Result and Discussion

### A. Introduction

This study analyzes Jessie J's Price Tag as a cultural text that contains social criticism of the capitalist system. Using Marxist theory, the analysis concentrates on three main dimensions: the representation of money's dominance, materialism as a form of commodification, and the formation of false consciousness through capitalist ideology. The findings are organized into three themes that answer the research questions directly, supported by lyric excerpts as primary data and relevant literature as secondary support.

#### 1. The Dominance of Money in the Lyrics of Price Tag as Criticism of Capitalism

The analysis of Price Tag shows that the song consistently presents money as a dominant force that displaces more fundamental human values. This can be seen in the lyric "Seems like everybody's got a price, I wonder how they sleep at night," which critically observes a society that has accepted the logic of commodification as normal. Similarly, "It's not about the money, money, money" clearly expresses resistance to the dominance of material values that have shaped collective consciousness. The systematic identification of lyrics related to the dominance of money is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** Identification of Lyrics Related to the Dominance of Money

No	Lyric Excerpt	Critical Representation	Relevance to Marxism
1	"Everybody's got a price"	Commodification of people and social relationships	Social relations are transformed into economic relations
2	"It's not about the money"	Rejection of capital logic as the center of value	Dominance of exchange value
3	"Forget about the price tag"	A call to deconstruct materialistic values	Criticism of commodity fetishism
4	"Why is everybody So obsessed?"	Criticism of collective material obsession	Capitalism shapes social consciousness

**Source:** Researcher's analysis of the lyrics of Price Tag (Jessie J, 2011)

Within Marxist theory, the dominance of money reflected in these lyrics is not simply an economic matter. It also shows how capitalism works as a system that exceeds the economic sphere and shapes individual social and cultural consciousness. The orientation toward wealth accumulation produces a mindset

that places material value at the center of life and affects how people understand themselves and build social relations (Dewi, 2025). This is the condition criticized in Price Tag: a society that has internalized capitalist logic so deeply that it forgets life contains dimensions far more meaningful than price and exchange value.

Compared to popular songs that celebrate wealth and luxury as signs of success, as often found in commercial hip-hop and aspirational pop music, Price Tag takes the opposite ideological position. Rather than affirming capitalist logic, the song openly questions and refuses it. This ideological difference is significant because both types of songs use the same medium: popular music consumed by mass audiences. Thus, Price Tag is more than a song with a positive message; it is a cultural text that represents resistance to capitalist ideology, which reduces human relationships to economic relations based on commodity exchange (Zahrotuhayaty & Novari, 2024).

Moreover, the dominance of money under capitalism creates effects that go beyond the unequal distribution of wealth. According to Karl Marx, capitalism makes workers lose the meaning of their labor because work no longer becomes a form of self-expression but merely a means of earning wages. Labor is controlled by capital owners, so its purpose and meaning no longer come from the workers themselves. This condition produces alienation, in which the production process harms individuals and broader social structures

(Hendrawan, 2017). Alienation that begins in labor relations eventually spreads to many dimensions of social life, including how people interpret happiness, friendship, and even love, all of which become influenced by the logic of price and exchange value.

The issue criticized in Price Tag corresponds to Marx's view that capitalism is a social structure marked by inequality. The exploitation of surplus value, alienation, and class conflict are not separate issues but inevitable results of a system in which the bourgeoisie owns the means of production and creates systematic domination over the proletariat (Pratama, 2025). The lyric "seems like everybody's got a price" reflects this situation accurately, suggesting that everyone appears to have accepted capitalist logic as unavoidable and even unquestionable.

An important point is how Price Tag presents ideological resistance through a pop music format that is accessible and enjoyable. The song criticizes consumerist capitalism, which tends to commodify relationships between individuals. By rejecting money as the source of happiness, the lyrics highlight modern society's obsession with material value (Zahrotuhayaty & Novari, 2024). The strength of music lies in its ability to reach listeners who may never read Marxist theory but can still sense that something is wrong when the modern world treats money as the highest measure of value. From the researchers' perspective, this is what makes Price Tag more than an ordinary pop song: it becomes social criticism delivered through the democratic

language of melody and memorable lyrics.

In general, this theme shows that money's dominance in Price Tag is not merely a simple moral statement that "money is not everything." Instead, it is a structured representation of Marxist criticism of capitalism. Capitalism is viewed as a system that not only controls economic structures but also shapes individual social consciousness until material values appear natural (Dewi, 2025). By repeatedly using the phrase "forget about the price tag" as the song's central call, Jessie J indirectly encourages listeners to question and free themselves from capitalist consciousness that has become deeply embedded in daily life.

## **2. Materialism and Commodification in the Lyrics of Price Tag from a Marxist Perspective**

The lyrics of Price Tag also demonstrate how materialism functions as part of commodification in capitalist society. This is shown in lyric excerpts such as "Ain't about the cha-ching cha-ching, ain't about the ba-bling ba-bling" and "We just wanna make the world dance, forget about the price tag," both of which reject excessive consumer culture. Lyrics related to materialism and commodification are identified in Table 2.

**Tabel 2** Identification of Lyrics Related to Materialism and Commodification

No.	Lyric Excerpt	Critical Representation	Relevance to Marxism
1	"Ain't about the cha-ching"	Rejection of money's dominance as the centre of life values.	Critique of commodity fetishism, in which money is assumed to possess intrinsic value
2	"It's not about the money"	Rejection of capitalist logic that makes money the primary standard of value.	Dominance of exchange value in capitalism
3	"Forget about the price tag"	A call to dismantle materialistic values	Criticism of commodity fetishism
4	"Why is everybody so obsessed?"	Criticism of collective material obsession	Capitalism shapes social consciousness
5	"we need to take it back in time, when music made us all unite"	Criticism of the changing function of music from social expression to commodity	Commodification of culture under capitalism
6	"we just wanna make the world dance"	Emphasis on happiness and togetherness as primary values.	Affirmation of use value as an alternative to exchange value

Source: Researcher's analysis of the lyrics of Price Tag (Jessie J, 2011)

Materialism in capitalist society is not only about owning goods; it is also connected to how people understand happiness and social status through consumption. Consumerist culture grows because capitalism encourages people to keep buying and using products as markers of social identity. In modern capitalism, consumer culture shapes individuals through their consumption practices and economic capacity, making consumption a sign of social status (Sitepu, 2025). As a result, consumption is no longer driven solely by need but also by the desire for social recognition.

This condition is consistent with the lyric "Why is everybody so obsessed?" which depicts modern society as being preoccupied with money, image, and popularity. From a Marxist perspective, this reveals commodification, the process through which human values are converted into economic values. Capitalist society eventually evaluates happiness and success based on material ownership rather than social relations or humanistic values.

Modern capitalism also constructs a consumer society that turns individuals into parts of a commodity system. Consumerist society creates pseudo-needs that keep individuals consuming in order to follow social standards produced by capitalism (Permana, 2015). This is connected to the lyric "Ain't about the cha-ching, cha-ching," which criticizes a society overly oriented toward money and luxury. The song affirms that human life

should not be centered on material things.

The distinction between use value and exchange value is also clearly present in Price Tag. In pre-capitalist societies, goods were used mainly to satisfy human needs. In capitalist society, however, goods are produced and consumed largely for economic profit and social status. Through the lyric “We just wanna make the world dance, forget about the price tag,” Jessie J places happiness and togetherness above material gain.

Modern consumer culture encourages individuals to use fashion consumption as a representation of self-image, cultural affiliation, and social status. Among urban youth, consumption is often driven by symbolic motives and the influence of social media rather than purely functional needs (Anita Nur Diana, 2025). Capitalism then shapes society’s mindset so that people continuously pursue consumption as part of a modern lifestyle. Therefore, “Forget about the price tag” can be read as resistance to the culture of materialism and commodification within the capitalist system.

Through Price Tag, Jessie J does not only convey a moral message about living simply; she also offers social criticism of capitalist society, where money and consumption are placed too strongly at the center of human life.

## B. Implications

This study has theoretical and practical implications for literary studies and popular culture. Theoretically, it

strengthens the relevance of Marxist theory in analyzing modern literary works, particularly song lyrics as representations of social criticism toward capitalism, materialism, and commodification. It also shows that popular music is not merely entertainment but can be interpreted as a cultural text representing social ideology in modern society.

Practically, the study is expected to increase public awareness, especially among young people, of the effects of consumerist culture and materialistic dominance in everyday life. Through the social criticism contained in Price Tag, society is encouraged to be more critical of a life orientation that is too focused on money, social status, and material consumption. In addition, this study can serve as a reference for learning literature, popular culture, and social criticism in educational contexts.

## Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the lyrics of Jessie J’s Price Tag can be concluded to represent criticism of capitalism and materialist culture in modern society. From a Marxist perspective, the song positions money as a symbol of capitalist domination that affects how society views happiness, social status, and interpersonal relations. Lyrics such as “It’s not about the money” and “Forget about the price tag” represent rejection of a life orientation centered on material value and excessive consumption.

The study also finds that materialism in Price Tag is connected to commodification, a process that turns

social values into economic values. Capitalism encourages people to make consumption a symbol of identity and social recognition, causing human relations to become increasingly shaped by the logic of exchange value. Through comparison, this study shows that Price Tag differs from some popular music that presents luxury as a sign of success. Through cause-and-effect analysis, the research finds that capitalist culture contributes to consumerist behavior and social alienation in modern life. Overall, this study affirms that song lyrics are not only entertainment but also a medium of social criticism that can represent social reality and ideology. The study is expected to expand modern literary studies, especially the analysis of song lyrics through Marxist theory, and to strengthen public awareness of the impacts of consumerist culture and materialism.

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