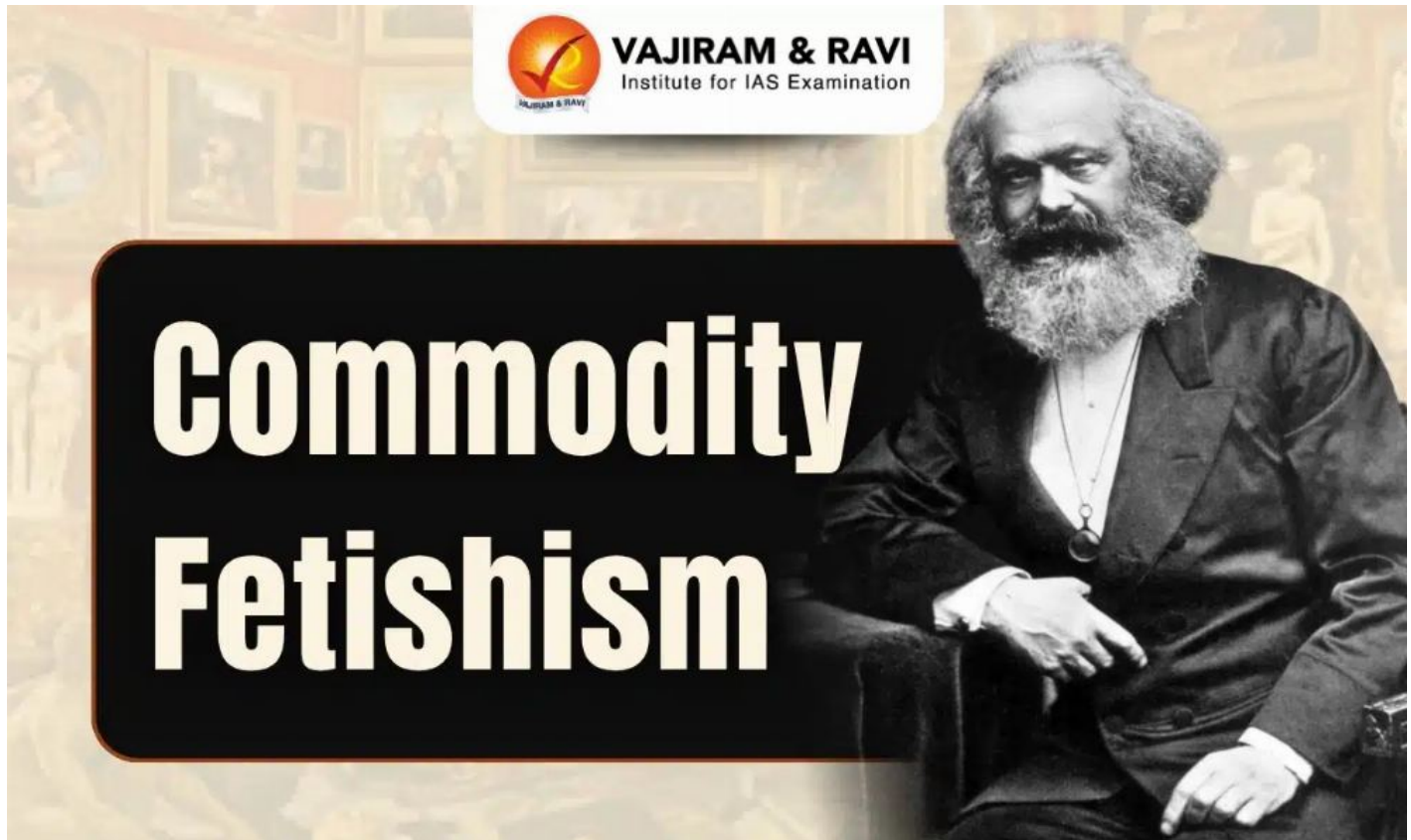


Commodity Fetishism, Meaning, Examples, Impacts, Criticism

June 27, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



Commodity Fetishism is a concept **developed by Karl Marx** in his **famous book Capital (Das Kapital)**, Volume I (1867). It explains how, under capitalism, people begin to see commodities as valuable objects in themselves, while forgetting the workers and social relationships involved in producing them.

In simple words, people focus on the product, its brand, and its price rather than on the labour, resources, and production process behind it.

Commodity Fetishism Meaning

Commodity Fetishism refers to the tendency to treat commodities as if they possess value on their own, independent of the labour used to produce them.

According to Karl Marx, every commodity has two forms of value:

- **Use Value** – The practical usefulness of a commodity.
- **Exchange Value** – The value of the commodity in the market, usually expressed through its price.

Marx argued that under capitalism, exchange value becomes more important than use value. As a result, commodities appear to possess value on their own, even though their value actually comes from human labour. This creates an illusion that commodities are valuable because of their own qualities rather than because workers produced them.

Commodity Fetishism Contemporary Examples

Commodity Fetishism is highly visible in today's economy.

- Luxury brands are often purchased for prestige rather than functional superiority.
- Consumers eagerly buy the latest smartphones without considering the workers or global supply chains involved in their production.
- Fast fashion encourages people to purchase inexpensive clothing while ignoring poor labour conditions in garment factories.
- Gold and diamonds derive much of their value from social perception and status rather than practical utility.
- Products promoted by celebrities and social media influencers often become desirable because of their symbolic value rather than their actual usefulness.

Impact of Commodity Fetishism

Commodity Fetishism has significant economic, social, and environmental consequences by shaping the way people consume and perceive commodities.

- **Promotes excessive consumerism:** People increasingly purchase goods to display status, lifestyle, or identity rather than to satisfy genuine needs.
- **Conceals labour exploitation:** Consumers often remain unaware of poor wages, unsafe working conditions, child labour, and exploitation involved in producing commodities.
- **Weakens human relationships:** Social status and personal identity become closely associated with material possessions instead of human values and relationships.
- **Deepens economic inequality:** The profits generated from commodities are concentrated among owners of capital, while workers receive only a small share of the value they create.
- **Encourages environmental degradation:** Rising consumer demand leads to overproduction, excessive use of natural resources, pollution, and increasing waste, particularly electronic and plastic waste.
- **Strengthens capitalist markets:** Greater focus on brands, prices, and market value shifts attention away from production processes and reinforces capitalist systems.
- **Creates artificial wants:** Advertising and marketing encourage consumers to desire products that are not essential, leading to unnecessary consumption.
- **Reduces appreciation of producers:** Farmers, artisans, factory workers, and other producers receive little recognition despite being the real creators of commodities.

Criticism

Critics argue that modern consumers are more aware of how products are made because of the internet, social media, and greater transparency in supply chains.

They also point out that the value of a commodity depends not only on labour but also on technology, innovation, quality, branding, and consumer preferences.

Moreover, the growing popularity of Fair Trade, organic products, and sustainable consumption shows that many consumers today do consider labour rights and environmental concerns while making purchasing decisions.

Thus, while Marx's concept remains relevant, it may not fully explain consumer behaviour in the modern **digital economy**.

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/commodity-fetishism/>

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