



Evolving Metalcore: Music Standardization and Commodification in Bad Omens and Bring Me The Horizon

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Abstract

This research aims to analyse the musical characteristics and lyrical themes of Bring Me The Horizon (BMTH) and Bad Omens to explore the cultural values shaped through the commodification of metalcore music, drawing on Adorno's theory of the culture industry. This research uses mixed-methods approach by examining the duration of unclean and clean vocals, as well as the lyrical themes from both bands' debut and latest albums, to identify forms of standardization. In addition, the commodification analysis incorporates audience reactions, concert ticket sales, and streaming data. The findings reveal a transition from the creative freedom of the early years to more standardized works, marked by a reduction in unclean vocal techniques, less frequent use of blast beats, and a greater emphasis on smoother melodies. This study also identifies elements of pseudo-individualization, where both bands create a sense of uniqueness while adhering to market trends to appeal to a broader audience. These findings highlight how standardization and pseudo-individualization function not only as marketing tools but also as bridges to integrate metalcore music into the mainstream market and attract new listeners.

INTRODUCTION

Metalcore emerged as a form of contemporary metal music following the globalization of metal in the 1990s (Weinstein, 2015). As a product of a predominantly middle-class fanbase, metalcore often addresses sociopolitical issues and mental health, reflecting the lives of middle-class metalheads (Leighton, 2021). Its lyrics are typically personal and more straightforward than those of heavy metal, bridging the expectations of working-class and middle-class metal fans (ibid).

As a “related genre” to heavy metal, metalcore is often associated with metal but is frequently “contested or dismissed as a ‘true’ metal genre” (Hillier, 2020). The genre originated with bands like Machine Head and Biohazard in the United States, which combined thrash metal with hardcore punk, eventually evolving into a more metal-oriented sound (Weinstein, 2011). However, metalcore is also criticized as a form of “commercialized metal” (Weinstein, 2015).

Within this context, Bad Omens and Bring Me The Horizon (BMTH) have emerged as prominent metalcore bands, attracting attention both for their commercial success and the debates surrounding their genre classification.

Bring Me The Horizon (BMTH), formed in Sheffield, England, in 2004, debuted with their album *Count Your Blessings* in 2006 (Nurfaizi et al., 2022). Bad Omens, originating in Richmond, Virginia, began in 2013 as a solo project by vocalist Noah Sebastian, releasing their self-titled debut album *Bad Omens* on August 19, 2016 (The Buzz, 2016).

Second, Bad Omens represents modern metalcore that aligns with industry standards, particularly evident in albums like *The Death of Peace of Mind*. The band stands out for blending metalcore elements with pop and electronic influences to reach a wider audience. Their evolution reflects the challenges new metalcore bands face in adapting to market demands to achieve commercial success.

Third, these bands exhibit contrasting backgrounds and approaches to music but share a common experience of standardization in their careers. BMTH, as a more senior band, illustrates a journey from raw deathcore roots to a mainstream-oriented sound, while Bad Omens began their career with a more melodic approach that adhered to contemporary metalcore trends.

Lastly, both bands enjoy large global fanbases and have significantly influenced modern metalcore trends. Their albums have received numerous awards, their global tour tickets often sell out, and their streaming numbers are massive. This study aims to provide insights into how these bands navigate the tension between artistic creativity and industry pressures in the metalcore genre.

This study aims to analyze the musical and lyrical characteristics of these bands to explore the cultural values shaped during the commodification process of metalcore music, employing Adorno’s theory of the culture industry.

Adorno: Commodity Art and Autonomous Art

Art is a form of culture that serves as a medium for social reflection, enabling

artists to portray beauty, progress, and even critique social conditions through their creations. Artistic works are expressions that are free and pure. However, when artists create art for the sake of industry, they become subject to the interests of those in power, namely the capital owners (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972, as cited in Yudha, 2023). Adorno argues that art "no longer seeks to express the world but merely becomes an affirmative form or a common convention that provides compensation for individuals who conform and obey various social rules, allowing them a brief escape from reality" (Boucher, as cited in Andjani, 2022). Thus, "cultural industry products offer denial, replace pain, provide joy, and discipline their consumers" (Horkheimer and Adorno, as cited in Andjani, 2022). Moreover, capital owners build modes of production consisting of technology, media, and other infrastructure. The media industry, as part of this economic system, operates under the principle of maximizing profits while minimizing costs (Doyle, 2016, as cited in Yudha, 2023).

Adorno categorizes cultural products expressed in modern society into two opposing poles: a) Commodity Art and b) Autonomous Art (Paddison, as cited in Andjani, 2022). a) Commodity Art refers to art that "uncritically accepts its function within the dominant relations of production in society" (ibid). b) Autonomous Art, on the other hand, is art that "rejects these dominant relations of production and adopts a critical stance towards artistic material within its structure." As a result, this form of art necessitates critical and reflective interpretation and reception (ibid).

Adorno argued that authentic works of art resonate with the external world through their sublimated material, which aligns with the unique characteristics of their creators (Andjani, 2022). Autonomous art strives to maintain artistic freedom despite intense commercial and societal pressures.

Adorno's Theory of Standardization

In popular music, Adorno proposed that standardization is an inevitable result of the commodification of music, and all forms of mass culture exist merely to "pacify" audiences or listeners. According to Adorno, aesthetic or political fidelity is reserved for what he termed "serious music" (as cited in Moore, 2012). He emphasized that music standardization arises because of its transformation into a commodity, rendering everything so uniform that preferences are dictated by personal factors—such as the listener's background or the circumstances in which the music is heard—rather than by differences in quality or uniqueness (Adorno, 2002, as cited in Moore, 2012).

In his essay *On Popular Music*, Adorno argued that songs that sound similar might feature individual components but are ultimately "interchangeable" (1941, as cited in Moore, 2012). This interchangeability allows capitalism to minimize production costs by formulaically duplicating hit songs: "When a particular song achieves great success, hundreds of others emerge, imitating the successful song. Hits, genres, and the 'ratios' between their most successful elements are replicated, culminating in the crystallization of standards. In today's centralized conditions, these standards become

‘frozen’” (Adorno, 2002, as cited in Moore, 2012). In other words, these standards become rigidly standardized, leading to homogenization in music.

Adorno also attributed the generic quality of popular music to the recording industry, stating: “Large-scale economic concentration institutionalizes standardization and makes it a necessity” (Adorno, 2002, as cited in Moore, 2012). However, the music industry must maintain the illusion that “its stars achieved success based on their merit and that consumers freely chose to enjoy the songs marketed to them,” a concept Adorno referred to as “pseudo-individualization” (ibid). Pseudo-individualization can be observed not only in the creation of celebrities but also in individual songs, where superficial differences—such as a song’s “hook” or even moments of improvisation in jazz—serve to disguise the systematic standardization of popular music (ibid).

Today, algorithms on social media platforms have become tools for enforcing standardization by determining which content becomes viral or popular (Yudha, 2023). These algorithms rank posts or keywords, recommend content or ads, and analyze user behavior to identify trends (ibid). Content creators can exploit these algorithms or pay for advertisements to ensure their accounts and posts gain more visibility (Petrescu & Krishen, 2020, as cited in Yudha, 2023). This has created a new form of standardization, one that is “viral-ready,” encouraging the production of short songs with catchy melodies that are easy to remember. As a result, contemporary metalcore songs increasingly conform to market-driven patterns.

METHOD

Due to data limitations, the researchers used mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data is typically “open-ended, without predetermined responses,” while quantitative data “involves closed responses” (Creswell, 2014). This method was employed with one data set helping to explain the other (ibid). This approach was important due to the limited primary data, particularly for the analysis of Bad Omens, which required the researchers to manually process data through secondary methods.

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out by analyzing the musical structure and commodification, audience reception, or any awards received. The data collected included the following: Early Era: The albums analyzed were the debut albums of each band, *Count Your Blessings* (2006) from Bring Me The Horizon and *Bad Omens* (2016) from Bad Omens. Commercialization Era: The albums analyzed were the latest releases, specifically the *POST HUMAN* series, *Survival Horror* (2020) and *NeX GEn* (2024) from Bring Me The Horizon, and *The Death of Peace of Mind* (2022) from Bad Omens.

Data Analysis

The collected data were then analyzed to identify patterns reflecting standardization in vocal techniques, musical structure, lyrical themes, and visual imagery. The researchers interpreted the relationship between these data points and the elements of commodification in the modern music industry.

Scope and Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis of musical structure was based on a technical approach and did not include direct interviews with musicians due to limited access to such interviews or music production documents.

Second, audience reception was analyzed through streaming data and media reviews, which may not capture all fan perspectives. This approach was chosen because it can represent music consumption trends in the digital era, where streaming has become a key indicator of music popularity compared to physical sales. In addition, media reviews offer a critical perspective on how the music was received globally. Both approaches were used to explore how the works of Bring Me The Horizon and Bad Omens reflect standardization in the music industry.

Third, the albums analyzed represent the chosen eras —early and commercialization — because of significant changes in the musical journey of Bring Me The Horizon and Bad Omens. This selection was based on major changes such as shifts in musical style, production techniques, and lyrical themes. This approach ensured that the analysis remained focused on the main dynamics in the careers of both bands, without expanding into their entire discographies, which might have been less relevant to the study's goals.

1. Early Era

The early era of Bring Me the Horizon began with their debut album *Count Your Blessings* (2006), while Bad Omens released their self-titled debut album *Bad Omens* (2016).

The tracks on *Count Your Blessings* (2006) prominently featured elements of deathcore. In a numerical analysis by Kevin Loo in 2020, the album was noted for its distinctive characteristics, such as "distortion, very fast guitar play, blast beats — a drumming technique that plays an essential role in creating intensity through fast drum strikes (Herbst and Mynett, 2023) — growls, misogyny, and self-hatred." This album is also the shortest in Bring Me the Horizon's discography, with only 200 lines of lyrics (Loo, 2020). The vocal techniques employed by Oliver Sykes, the lead vocalist, in this album included "low guttural screams and high-pitched 'goblin-style' shrieks," with lyrics "deliberately made unintelligible" (ibid), and the album was entirely dominated by these deathcore vocal techniques (ibid).

Meanwhile, Bad Omens' self-titled debut album, released in 2016, utilized a modern metalcore formula, following a structure of intro-verse-chorus-verse-breakdown-refrain. The researchers conducted a numerical analysis on unclean vocals (screaming techniques), clean vocals (singing with melody, though there is still fry in Noah's voice), and

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

spoken/whispered vocals. The results are as shown in the table below:

Table 1. Vocal Techniques in Bad Omens' Self-Titled Album, Bad Omens

Track No.	Song Title	Length	Unclean (seconds/lines)	Clean (seconds/lines)	Spoken/Whisper	Total	% Unclean	% Clean
1	Glass Houses	4:00	62	97	12	171	36,26%	56,73%
2	Exit Wounds	3:26	55	100	0	155	35,48%	64,52%
3	The Worst in Me	3:49	26	157	0	183	14,21%	85,79%
4	Feral	4:05	11	141	0	152	7,24%	92,76%
5	Enough, Enough Now	4:05	107	81	3	191	56,02%	42,41%
6	Malice	3:00	138	23	0	159	86,53%	14,47%
7	Hedonist	2:07	80	0	8	88	90,91%	0,00%
8	Broken Youth	3:14	109	94	0	203	53,69%	46,31%
9	Crawl	4:07	6	108	0	114	5,26%	94,74%
10	The Letdown	4:06	71	77	0	148	47,97%	52,03%
11	Reprise (The Sound of the End)	3:21	82	23	14	119	68,91%	19,33%
12	The Fountain	3:59	11	97	0	108	10,19%	89,81%
Total							42,64%	54,91%

(2016)

As shown in the table, clean vocals dominated, accounting for 54.91%, while unclean vocals made up 42.64%. This indicates that there was still some experimentation within the album.

In the early era, Bad Omens often received comparisons to Bring Me the Horizon. For example, the lyrics of the song *Glass Houses* — "*You stabbed me in the back/but not deep enough*" — were seen as mocking Bring Me the Horizon's lyrics in *True Friends Stab You in the Front* (Van Duser, 2016). Despite being newcomers, Sumerian Records, their label, included them in the *10 Years in The Black* tour to celebrate a decade of Sumerian Records, alongside Asking Alexandria, I See Stars, and others, on October 26, 2016. This tour led to a significant increase in streams and positive reviews for the album, and eventually, they became headliners at the 2017 Vans Warped Tour (Senandika Zine, 2024). Regarding their debut album being compared to Bring Me the Horizon's *Sempiternal* (2013), Bad Omens stated that while they were flattered, they were frustrated because their work and

creativity were being compared to just one album by one artist, despite the influence of many other artists on their music (Alt Press, 2016).

For Bring Me the Horizon, the response to their debut album was mixed. There were positive reviews, but negative ones were also common, such as Punk News (n.d.), which gave it a 1-star rating out of 5, calling it "cringe-worthy." Stewart Mason from AllMusic (n.d.) even stated, "The screeching and whiny vocals are the most prominent — and most irritating — feature of Bring Me the Horizon's sound."

2. Commercial Era: Standardization and Commodification

The criticism of *Count Your Blessings* as a "cringe-worthy" album created pressure for Bring Me The Horizon to change their sound. The band members later realized that their debut album had poor quality. Three years later, Lee Malia, the guitarist, criticized the first album and promised that their next work would be better (HARDTIMES.CA, 2008). Bring Me The Horizon then changed their sound because Jordan Fish, the keyboardist and producer, felt that the band had outgrown deathcore, as it no longer matched the tastes and feelings of the band members (Wiederhorn, 2015).

Over several albums, the deathcore elements in Bring Me The Horizon's music disappeared, replaced by a stronger emphasis on metalcore. The band increasingly explored electronic and pop elements, incorporating synthesizers and electronic samples. In a vlog documenting the creation of one of their songs, Jordan Fish was described by Oli Sykes as someone who prioritized "quantity over quality." Jordan responded, "That's what our fans want. If you ask them whether they want BMTH to release

a song every six months or just give them the same old stuff, they'd say, 'Give us anything'" (2020). This pursuit of quantity led to the standardization of their music, as it was produced within shorter time frames.

In the *Post Human* album series, numerical analysis by Kevin Loo (2020) revealed that clean vocal techniques, characterized by melodic singing without vocal strain (vocal fry), became predominant, as shown in Figure 1.

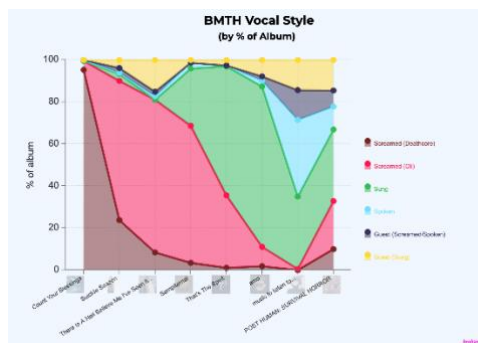


Figure 1. Vocal Styles in BMTH Albums
(Source: Kevin Loo, accessed on November 22, 2024)

According to Figure 1, unclean vocal styles, such as deathcore screams or higher-pitched screams with vocal strain but clear lyrics, became significantly less prominent compared to their debut album. Clean vocal techniques accounted for 30%-60% of the *Post Human* series albums, while deathcore screams were reduced to just 10%, and regular screams to 30%. This shift illustrates the standardization in their newer releases, minimizing the use of screams and leaning towards a pop-oriented sound that aligns with fan expectations.

Furthermore, metal elements like blast beats and incomprehensible vocal lyrics were absent in these albums (Loo, 2020). The band also collaborated with pop artists such as YUNGBLUD, Aurora, Lil Uzi Vert, and Japanese metalcore girl

band BABYMETAL. The lyrical themes shifted toward social awareness, the pandemic, and modern despair, reflecting an adjustment to the expectations of a broader audience.

Due to the *Post Human* releases, the band received several accolades, such as the Alternative/Rock Act award at the BRIT Awards in 2024 (Carter, 2024). Their latest album, *POST HUMAN: NeX GEn*, released in May 2024, earned the BRIT Billion Award in October 2024 for surpassing one billion streams in the UK (Carter, 2024).



Figure 2. Bad Omens Band (Source: Strife Magazine:
<https://www.strifemag.com/tag/bring-me-the-horizon-bad-omens/>)

Their concerts have been highly popular. For instance, their 2023 concert in Indonesia sold out, leading to the addition of a second date (Tempo, 2023). However, the first show ended in chaos when it was halted midway due to stage safety concerns (Anggie, 2023). Similarly, tickets for their *NX_GN WRLD TOUR* in the UK and Ireland were also sold out (Storlie, 2024).

On the other hand, the success of Bad Omens during the *Vans Warped Tour* demonstrated how audience reception could accelerate the adoption of more commercial elements. The band's 2022 album, *The Death of Peace of Mind*, showcased a similar standardization process, integrating electronic and pop elements such as synthesizers, electronic

samples, and voice modifiers. Although Noah Sebastian admitted in an interview with Kerrang that their earlier albums were "safe" and resembled other bands, he described their latest album as their "most original and best work" (Senandika Zine, 2024). The lyrical themes in this album leaned heavily toward romance, making it more accessible to a general audience. However, one track, *Artificial Suicide*, stood out with its critique of digital society

The findings revealed that clean singing vocals dominated *The Death of Peace of Mind*, comprising 89.81% of the album, while unclean vocals accounted for only 10.19%. Compared to their debut album, which featured 42.64% unclean vocals, this album showed a significant decrease in the use of scream techniques. Many tracks lacked unclean vocals altogether, and blast beats were only present in one song, *IDWT\$*. Like Bring Me The Horizon, this highlights a level of standardization in the album aimed at reducing screams, making the sound more polished, pop-oriented, and market-friendly.

The songs in the album have been described as offering a "cinematic experience" (Senandika Zine, 2024). Noah Sebastian's vocal style no longer employs guttural techniques but instead features a "warmer" and softer tone that "builds climactically into screams" (ibid). In addition, Noah acknowledged drawing inspiration from pop musicians Billie Eilish and her brother Finneas, citing them as a "model for a music-making partnership" with Bad Omens guitarist Joakim Karlsson. He also noted influence from pop artist The Weeknd (Enis, 2023).

The Death of Peace of Mind was well-received by audiences and significantly expanded the band's fan base. For example, on TikTok, clips using

the song *Just Pretend* appeared in over 70,000 videos (Enis, 2023). The album also won Best Album at the Heavy Music Awards 2023 (Heavy Music Awards, 2023), and the track *Just Pretend* earned a Gold certification from the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) (Senandika Zine, 2024).

Their U.S. tour achieved an 80% ticket sellout rate (Sebastian in Enis, 2023), and their 2025 Australian tour, titled "*Goodbye, Friend*," has already seen many tickets sold out (LiveNation, n.d.). Even the VIP Upgrade tickets, which include signed posters, VIP access, and early entry to merchandise shopping, have sold out as well.

CONCLUSION

both BMTH and Bad Omens exhibit a similar pattern: an initial phase of creative exploration that gradually became commodified through a reduction in unclean vocal techniques, a diminishing presence of metal elements like blast beats, and a stronger emphasis on melody and smoother music—indicating a trend toward standardization in their musical output.

There is an element of pseudo-individualization in the music of both Bad Omens and BMTH. While they project an image of uniqueness through their musical styles—such as BMTH claiming to have abandoned their early deathcore sound or Noah Sebastian of Bad Omens describing *The Death of Peace of Mind* as "an original and their best album" (Senandika Zine, 2024)—these claims can be interpreted as a form of pseudo-individualization. This phenomenon occurs when musical changes are shaped by genre trends and market demands, balancing mass appeal with an illusion of uniqueness. This

strategy has successfully broadened their fan bases: while traditional audiences may criticize these shifts, mainstream listeners often view them as innovative moves. This demonstrates how pseudo-individualization serves not only as a marketing tool but also as a bridge to reach a wider market.

In the context of cultural producers (intellectuals or artists) under capitalism, both bands serve as creators capable of producing cultural ideas and practices [...], inspiring societal expression, ideas, and reflection, and creating works of art (Yudha, 2023). However, Adorno argues that cultural producers can experience alienation as they must conform to market preferences, thereby limiting their ability to refine or express their creativity (ibid). As workers, they face alienation by being obligated to create work in adherence to contracts or profit-driven business agreements (ibid).

This reflects how music, as an art form, has increasingly transformed into a commodity produced for financial gain, often losing its original meaning. Social media platforms exacerbate this trend by prioritizing songs that are viral and easily consumable, often focusing on short durations and catchy choruses.

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