

## SOCIAL CRITICISM AS DIGITAL POLITICAL DISCOURSE: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF BINTANG EMON'S YOUTUBE STAND-UP COMEDY

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### Abstract

*This study examines the construction of social criticism in Bintang Emon's YouTube stand-up comedy, framing it as a distinct form of digital political discourse. While previous studies have extensively explored humor and satire in political communication, there remains a notable lack of systematic analysis regarding the semiotic mechanisms through which stand-up comedy generates political meaning within highly participatory digital environments. To address this significant empirical and theoretical gap, this study integrates Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotic model with perspectives drawn from political satire and the digital public sphere. The research employs qualitative semiotic analysis of a highly popular 12-minute performance, systematically identifying the representamen, object, and interpretant across dominant patterns of sign construction. The findings reveal four principal semiotic mechanisms: analogy exposing structural incongruities, irony and indexical signs highlighting institutional accountability gaps, metaphorical delegitimization of political authority, and moral satire targeting symbolic manipulation and corruption. Collectively, these interconnected mechanisms demonstrate that humor operates not merely as fleeting entertainment, but as a rigorously structured system of political signification. Theoretically, this study clarifies how indirect criticism acquires persuasive force through symbolic mediation within the digital public sphere. It significantly advances political communication scholarship by conceptualizing stand-up comedy as a dynamic arena of political meaning production, deeply shaped by interpretative plurality and rapid digital circulation dynamics.*

*Keywords: social criticism, stand-up comedy, bintang emon, semiotika charles sanders peirce, digital public sphere*

### INTRODUCTION

In the Indonesian context, humor goes beyond mere entertainment and serves as a crucial mechanism for social critique, collective resilience, and community bonding. Historically, comedic expressions have provided crucial coping strategies during periods of hardship while reducing broader social friction (Diningsih et al., 2019). Beyond conflict resolution, culturally specific jokes, such as Javanese humor, solidify communal identities (Suryaningtyas & Setyaningsih, 2018), reflecting the deeply rooted nature of comedic wit (Yue et al., 2016). In contemporary media,

television programming utilizes comedy to mediate socio-political awareness (Zundullah & Sari, 2023), though it occasionally risks inadvertently perpetuating cultural violence (Surahmat et al., 2024). Meanwhile, in the digital political arena, platforms like Instagram have become sanctuaries for satire, fostering public debate, enabling direct challenges to authority (Nugraha, 2024), and tackling systemic inequalities (Sihombing & Lestari, 2022).

Scholars have long recognized humor's efficacy in social critique. Because the comedic experience functions as an emotion-like occurrence driven by cognitive processes (Abrahams, 2020), it serves as a highly potent vehicle for conveying criticism indirectly (Krissandi & Setiawan, 2018) which can effectively initiate public discourse and engagement in struggles for social justice (Cameron, 2015 as cited in Saxena & Ofori-Parku, 2024). Political satire, a particularly robust variation of this (Bhargava & Singhal, 2023), has a rich history of undermining established authorities. For instance, the Jakarta-based comedy troupe Warkop famously lampooned the socio-political climate of the New Order era through veiled critique (Pamungkas, 2017). These dynamics illustrate humor's unique capacity to navigate restrictive power structures without sacrificing audience engagement.

Today, this critical capacity has largely migrated to digital ecosystems. Stand-up comedy, once confined to live club circuits, has evolved into a "ubiquitous art" (Lintott, 2020, as cited in Li & Guo, 2024) across global streaming and social media. As a discursive arena, stand-up comedy offers a platform for performers to highlight marginalized truths, critique social hierarchies, and encourage civic engagement. This shift is accelerated by the participatory architecture of platforms like YouTube, a new medium that provides a forum for forming meaningful and positive relationships (Rohlinger, 2019) blurring the boundaries between creators and audiences, and empowering users to actively shape political discourse. Furthermore, from a cognitive perspective, new media requires innovation to create content that directly influences how people use media (Suryandari, 2021).

Within this participatory infrastructure, the "Somasi" segment on Deddy Corbuzier's YouTube channel has emerged as a prominent hub for socio-political commentary in Indonesia, regularly featuring stand-up comedians who weave social critique into their sets. A key figure in this space is Gusti Muhammad Abdurrahman Bintang Mahaputra, or Bintang Emon, whose delivery is noted for its fearless engagement with polarizing issues. His May 29, 2022 set, "Bintang Emon, Pejabat Rasa Ojol !!" garnered millions of views and sparked extensive online discourse. Bintang Emon's routine exemplifies how stand-up comedy functions as digital political discourse. While provoking collective amusement laughing "with" the audience rather than "at" them (Abrahams, 2020) it simultaneously delivers

biting critiques of institutional flaws. However, this form of commentary remains highly contested; despite being anchored in undeniable social realities, such satirical acts often provoke online hostility and severe backlash, underscoring the volatility of digital free speech.

Although existing literature has extensively explored humor as cultural heritage and a tool for public engagement, significant analytical gaps remain. Current media scholarship predominantly focuses on platform mechanics, audience reception, or broad cultural impacts. Consequently, the granular semiotic construction of social critique specifically how signs, meanings, and interpretations operate within Indonesia's digital political sphere has been largely overlooked. Furthermore, while the democratic implications of political satire are frequently discussed, there is a lack of theoretical synthesis between semiotic analysis, critical political communication, and the digital public sphere. Micro-level interactions of verbal and non-verbal cues in stand-up routines lack adequate grounding in relation to larger power structures. Specifically, no prior studies have applied Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model to meticulously analyze Bintang Emon's performances, nor fully unpacked how digitally mediated satire simultaneously fosters critical engagement and online resistance.

To address these gaps, this research aims to dissect the semiotic construction of social criticism in Bintang Emon's YouTube stand-up performance. By systematically mapping the representamen, object, and interpretant within his routine, this study contextualizes its findings within broader paradigms of political communication. Ultimately, it seeks to advance the theoretical foundations of Indonesian political satire and expand the application of semiotic analysis in contemporary digital media studies.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Political Satire and Comedy as Social Critique***

Communicative acts designed to question, challenge, or expose socio-political inequalities are fundamentally understood as social critique. Rather than merely functioning as a reactive response to societal anomalies, this critique operates as a deliberate discursive strategy aimed at raising public awareness (Pratama et al., 2023). Within this spectrum of critical engagement, political satire has emerged as a highly effective mechanism. Functioning as a "comic public sphere" (Bhargava & Singhal, 2023), satire articulates political opposition through the lens of accessible entertainment. Unlike straightforward political analysis, satirical works employ parody, hyperbole, and irony to expose the hypocrisies inherent in power structures, allowing dissenting voices to penetrate public consciousness even under restrictive socio-political conditions.

As a distinct mode of this satirical tradition, stand-up comedy has progressively evolved from a performance-based entertainment format (Papana, 2016) into a powerful channel for social resistance and political commentary (Fahad & Mustafa, 2024). Viewed through the lens of critical political communication, the comedy stage transforms into an arena for symbolic negotiation of power dynamics. Performers actively employ specific rhetorical devices, from analogies and punchlines to irony and acting (Siregar & Tamsil, 2022) to demystify complex political realities. However, existing research largely focuses on macro-level audience reception and social impact, often neglecting the granular semiotic construction of these comedic acts. Consequently, a significant empirical gap remains regarding how signs and meanings are specifically constructed to translate everyday grievances into incisive political commentary, a theoretical omission that is particularly prominent in the Indonesian research landscape.

### ***The Digital Public Sphere and Connected Political Discourse***

The transition of stand-up comedy from live, local stages to online platforms fundamentally alters its communicative nature, placing these performances within the digital public sphere. Shifting from a unidirectional mass media model, the contemporary communication ecology is defined by decentralized infrastructures and virtual networks and communities (Gane & Beer, 2009). Within this landscape, platforms like YouTube function as contested modern public arenas where political meaning is not simply consumed but constantly negotiated, challenged, and redefined by audiences acting simultaneously as creators and consumers of content.

While this networked environment democratizes the airing of grievances and expands civic engagement, it inadvertently gives rise to structural conflicts. The digital public sphere is a paradoxical space; the same technological capabilities that empower legitimate comedic critique also accelerate the spread of organized resistance, interpretive plurality, and the manipulation of public opinion. Analyzing digital stand-up comedy, therefore, requires recognizing that these performances are not static digital artifacts, but rather dynamic social structures deeply influenced by ongoing connectivity, audience participation, and underlying power dynamics.

### ***Semiotics as an Analytical Bridge***

To decode how stand-up comedy operates within this complex digital ecosystem, this study employs Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory as a systematic analytical framework. Peirce conceptualizes meaning-making as a triadic relation between the representamen (*the sign itself*), the object (the social reality it refers

to), and the interpretant (*the meaning produced*). In the context of stand-up comedy, semiotics is highly pertinent because humor inherently operates implicitly; direct political critique is frequently eschewed in favor of symbolic constructions that demand active audience decoding.

Applying Peirce's framework enables a rigorous examination of how both verbal expressions (e.g., intonation, comedic analogies) and non-verbal cues (e.g., gestures, facial expressions) function collectively to construct nuanced political meanings. It provides the methodological tools necessary to trace how specific signs forge interpretive frames that trigger public reflection, agreement, or resistance. Despite its analytical power, the application of semiotics in dissecting Indonesian digital political satire remains sparse, highlighting a critical need to investigate how semiotic structures intersect with participatory digital culture.

### ***Synthesis and Theoretical Positioning***

Current scholarly debates surrounding Indonesian political comedy have largely focused on its pragmatic and socio-cultural impacts. For example, previous empirical studies have examined stand-up comedy through the lens of critical discourse analysis and pragmatic roasting (e.g., Sihombing & Lestari, 2022 ; Surahmat et al., 2024), which largely highlight how comedians negotiate cultural boundaries and navigate critiques of public figures. While these studies provide valuable insights into the overarching narrative of Indonesian comedy, their methodologies differ from the micro-analytical focus necessary to understand digital visual and verbal signification. They tend to prioritize textual analysis or audience reception over a systematic analysis of multimodal signs. Consequently, to fulfill this study's research objective of uncovering the precise semiotic mechanisms of Bintang Emon's critique, it is crucial to shift the methodological lens. Using Peirce's semiotic model, this study directly addresses this discrepancy, going beyond general discourse analysis to systematically map the triadic relationships (representamen, object, interpretant) that construct political meaning in the digital environment.

Synthesizing the aforementioned perspectives, this study explicitly positions stand-up comedy not merely as a sociocultural artifact, but as a mode of critical political communication operating within the digital public sphere. Within this integrated framework, semiotics serves as a micro-level analytical instrument to uncover the granular construction of satirical critique, detailing how comedic signs outline complex socio-political inequalities. Simultaneously, digital public sphere theory provides a macro-level context, explaining how these semiotically constructed meanings circulate, gain visibility, and are debated within the networked environment. By integrating semiotics, political satire, and digital communication,

this study bridges the gap between micro-level sign construction and macro-level political discourse, offering a comprehensive understanding of how humor functions as a structured political signifying system in contemporary digital democracy.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Paradigm and Approach***

This research adopts a constructivist paradigm, which posits that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed through interactions, language, and shared interpretations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Constructivism is highly relevant for this study as it seeks to explore how social criticism in Bintang Emon's stand-up comedy is dynamically constructed by the comedian and interpreted by the audience. To operationalize this paradigm, the study employs a qualitative approach using qualitative semiotic analysis based on Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic framework (*Representamen, Object, and Interpretant*).

Furthermore, to contextualize the digital setting, this study integrates (Burgess & Green, 2018) framework of YouTube as a participatory culture. This dual theoretical lens ensures that the methodology aligns with the research objectives: analyzing micro-level semiotic signs while understanding their macro-level reception within YouTube's unique interactive ecosystem.

### ***Data Collection and Selection***

The primary data consists of a specific stand-up comedy video titled "Bintang Emon, Pejabat Rasa Ojol!!" published on Deddy Corbuzier's YouTube channel. This video was selected using purposive sampling due to its dense socio-political commentary and highly significant public engagement (accumulating over 7.8 million views). The data collection involved systematic observation and transcription of the 12-minute performance. Secondary data were gathered through document analysis of the top audience comments and relevant online news articles to contextualize the participatory culture and the specific socio-political issues referenced in the video.

### ***Data Analysis and Coding Procedure***

To address the methodological rigor required for qualitative media analysis, the data analysis follows a systematic semiotic coding procedure. The process integrates Peirce's semiotic framework with established qualitative coding practices (Saldaña, 2021) and visual methodology guidelines for digital media (Rose, 2016). The coding procedure was executed in three distinct, structured phases:

1. **Defining Units of Analysis:** The primary unit of analysis was defined as a "comedic sequence." In the context of stand-up comedy, a sequence consists of a setup (the premise) and a punchline (the comedic twist or climax). The

video was segmented into distinct sequences, and only those containing overt socio-political references (e.g., institutional critique, corruption, public policy) were selected for in-depth semiotic coding.

2. Identification of Verbal and Non-Verbal Signs: Within each selected unit of analysis, signs were systematically identified and transcribed into a qualitative coding matrix. Verbal signs were coded by extracting specific linguistic choices, analogies, punchlines, and voice intonations from the transcript. Concurrently, non-verbal signs were identified through visual observation and coded by noting specific facial expressions, body gestures, and act-outs (theatrical enactments) that accompanied the verbal delivery.
3. Coding Representamen-Object-Interpretant Relations: The identified signs were then analyzed using Peirce's triadic relations:
  - ✓ *Representamen (The Sign)*: The combination of the coded verbal and non-verbal cues functioning together to deliver a joke.
  - ✓ *Object (The Referent)*: The representamen was analytically mapped to its corresponding external socio-political reality (e.g., a specific government policy, an ongoing corruption scandal, or bureaucratic behavior).
  - ✓ *Interpretant (The Meaning)*: The interpretant was coded by evaluating how the convergence of the representamen and the object constructed a specific political critique (such as moral satire or delegitimization of authority). To prevent subjective bias and ensure methodological validity, this interpretant analysis was cross-referenced with audience comments, reflecting the participatory interpretation of the digital public sphere (Burgess & Green, 2018).

To enhance the methodological transparency and replicability of this study, Table 1 provides concrete illustrations of the semiotic coding process applied to selected comedic sequences from the performance. Following the three-phase procedure outlined above, the table demonstrates how specific verbal and non-verbal cues acting as the representamen are systematically mapped to their corresponding external socio-political referents, or the object. The convergence of these elements highlights how the interpretant the specific political critique or meaning is constructed and decoded within the digital public sphere. These examples reflect the analytical rigor utilized to systematically evaluate the entire 12-minute performance.

**Table 1. Example of Semiotic Coding Application based on Peirce's Triadic Model**

Scene / Comedic Sequence	Representamen (Sign)	Object (Referenced Reality)	Interpretant (Constructed Meaning)
<b>Analogy comparing football players who "kick the ball" with authorities who metaphorically "kick" citizens.</b>	Linguistic repetition of the word "kick".	Allegations of excessive force by state institutions.	Subtle exposure of institutional violence through semantic displacement.
<b>Discussion of the term "individual" frequently used in official statements to separate personal misconduct from institutional accountability.</b>	Explicit verbal agreement with the term, delivered with tonal contrast.	Institutional strategies of deflecting systemic responsibility.	Sarcasm revealing skepticism toward the narrative of isolated wrongdoing.
<b>Comparison between national leadership and an online motorcycle taxi driver, specifically a "number two driver" whose contribution remains unclear to passengers.</b>	The driver metaphor.	Perceived passivity or invisibility of political leadership.	Symbolic delegitimization.

### ***Trustworthiness***

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of this qualitative inquiry, the study adheres to the criteria proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985), adapted for digital research:

1. **Credibility:** Achieved through prolonged engagement with the digital artifact (repeated viewing and detailed transcribing of the video) and data triangulation (comparing the researcher's semiotic interpretation of the video with audience comments and secondary news sources).
2. **Transferability:** Provided through "thick descriptions" of the coding context, comedic sequences, and findings, allowing readers to assess the applicability of these semiotic mechanisms to other digital political comedy settings.
3. **Dependability:** Ensured by documenting a clear, step-by-step coding matrix and systematic research procedure, allowing for potential peer review or methodological replication.
4. **Confirmability:** Maintained through reflexive journaling during the coding process to document interpretive decisions, ensuring that the findings are

fundamentally grounded in the empirical data rather than the researcher's personal bias.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

The study adheres strictly to digital research ethics. Audience comments utilized for data triangulation were anonymized to protect user privacy. Furthermore, because the research involves the public analysis of available digital content (following YouTube's public domain terms), the study focuses entirely on the discursive and semiotic content of the performance, requiring no direct interaction with human subjects.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis reveals that Bintang Emon's stand-up performance constructs social criticism through a structured pattern of verbal and non-verbal signs. Rather than functioning merely as entertainment, the performance operates as a semiotic system in which political meaning is produced through the interaction between representamen (the comedic signifier), object (the underlying socio-political reality), and interpretant (the audience's cognitive and ideological inference), following Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model.

Across the 12-minute performance, criticism is not delivered through direct accusation but through symbolic reconstruction of political phenomena using analogy, irony, and metaphor. These semiotic strategies transform complex political issues into everyday narratives that are cognitively accessible to audiences. The effectiveness of the criticism lies precisely in its indirectness: humor becomes the medium through which power relations are reframed, questioned, and subtly destabilized.

From a political communication perspective, this semiotic construction reflects the characteristics of political satire, where critique is embedded within comic discourse. The interpretant generated by the audience does not stop at laughter but extends toward recognition of institutional contradictions, moral inconsistencies, and power imbalances. In this sense, the stand-up performance functions as a micro-level site of political meaning production within Indonesia's digital public sphere.

To systematically unpack these dynamics, the ensuing analysis is categorized into dominant semiotic patterns identified across the performance: (1) analogy as symbolic critique of institutional authority, (2) irony and indexical signs exposing systemic responsibility, (3) metaphorical delegitimization of political leadership, and (4) moral satire targeting corruption and symbolic manipulation. Each pattern

demonstrates how verbal and non-verbal signs operate together to construct layered political meanings.

### ***Analogy as Symbolic Political Critique***

One of the dominant semiotic strategies employed in the performance is the use of everyday analogy to construct symbolic political critique. A prominent example appears in the comparison between a police officer serving as Chairman of the national football association and a hypothetical scenario in which a football player becomes Chief of Police. In Peirce's framework, the analogy functions as the representamen, while the object refers to the perceived incongruity between professional expertise and institutional authority. The interpretation generated through this comparison is the recognition of institutional irrationality and politicized appointments.

This analogy operates as a symbolic sign rather than an iconic one, because its meaning depends on shared socio-political understanding rather than visual resemblance. The humor emerges from incongruity, yet the deeper interpretive layer reveals a critique of structural governance practices. By framing the issue through a familiar football context, the comedian reduces the distance between elite political decisions and everyday experience, enabling the audience to cognitively process institutional critique without direct confrontation.

A similar semiotic mechanism appears in the analogy comparing football players who "kick the ball" with authorities who metaphorically "kick" citizens. Here, the representamen lies in the linguistic repetition of the word "kick," while the object refers to allegations of excessive force by state institutions. The interpretant constructed through this wordplay is not merely amusement but subtle exposure of institutional violence. The humor works through semantic displacement, transforming a neutral sports term into a politically charged metaphor.

From the perspective of political satire, these analogical constructions function as tools of symbolic delegitimization. Rather than directly accusing institutions of misconduct, the performance reframes authority through ridicule, thereby destabilizing its seriousness. This strategy aligns with the notion of satire as a communicative form that challenges power indirectly. The analogies thus operate as semiotic bridges, connecting everyday language with political critique, and positioning stand-up comedy as a discursive space where authority can be questioned without overt hostility.

Importantly, the reliance on analogy also indicates that meaning production is collaborative. The interpretant depends on the audience's socio-political literacy.

Without shared contextual knowledge, the symbolic critique would collapse into mere wordplay. This demonstrates how semiotic construction in political comedy requires active audience participation, reinforcing the performative and dialogic nature of digital satire.

### ***Institutional Responsibility and Accountability***

Beyond analogy, the performance employs irony and indexical signs to expose patterns of institutional responsibility avoidance. A notable example appears in the discussion of the term “individual” frequently used in official statements to separate personal misconduct from institutional accountability. In this instance, the representamen lies in the explicit verbal agreement with the term, while the object refers to institutional strategies of deflecting systemic responsibility. The interpretant generated through tonal contrast and contextual delivery is sarcasm revealing skepticism toward the narrative of isolated wrongdoing.

Unlike symbolic analogy, this mechanism operates indexically. The sign points beyond itself to a broader socio-political practice familiar to the audience. The ironic tone does not explicitly accuse the institution but signals a mismatch between official discourse and public perception. The interpretant therefore emerges through contextual recognition: the audience understands the criticism not because it is directly stated, but because it is socially implied.

A similar semiotic structure appears in the critique of the argument that public criticism must always be accompanied by solutions. The representamen is anchored in the rhetorical questioning of this demand, while the object concerns the democratic legitimacy of citizens’ voices. The interpretant constructed through this exchange affirms criticism as a participatory right rather than a technocratic obligation. Here, humor functions as a reframing device: it shifts the discourse from defensive institutional logic to democratic principle.

The discussion of cooking oil scarcity further demonstrates how everyday scenarios are used as indexical signs pointing to systemic governance issues. The act of “wanting to fry crackers” becomes the representamen, while the object refers to economic policy failures and suspected collusion between political and business actors. The interpretant transforms a mundane domestic activity into a symbol of policy-level dysfunction. By grounding structural critique in domestic imagery, the performance amplifies relatability while maintaining political sharpness.

These examples illustrate how irony in stand-up comedy functions not as mere stylistic decoration but as a semiotic strategy of indirect accusation. The criticism does not rely on empirical evidence presentation; instead, it leverages shared social experience to activate interpretive awareness. From a critical political

communication perspective, this approach reveals how public distrust toward institutional narratives can be articulated through humor without overt confrontation.

Collectively, these indexical and ironic constructions expose tensions between official discourse and lived reality. The semiotic process demonstrates that meaning is not embedded solely in linguistic content but emerges through contextual alignment between performer, audience, and socio-political environment. In the digital public sphere, such ironic signs gain extended circulation, enabling institutional critique to persist beyond the immediate performance context.

### ***Metaphorical Delegitimization of Political Leadership***

Another dominant semiotic pattern in the performance is the use of metaphor to symbolically delegitimize political leadership. Unlike analogy that exposes structural incongruity, metaphor in this context reconstructs political authority through symbolic substitution. A clear example is the comparison between national leadership and an online motorcycle taxi driver, particularly the reference to a “number two driver” whose contribution remains unclear to passengers. Within Peirce’s triadic model, the representamen lies in the driver metaphor, the object refers to perceived passivity or invisibility of political leadership, and the interpretant constructed by the audience is symbolic delegitimization.

The effectiveness of this metaphor depends on everyday familiarity. Ride-hailing services are part of contemporary urban life, making the comparison cognitively accessible. By translating executive authority into a service-based role, the performance shifts the hierarchical distance between citizens and leaders. Authority is reframed not as sacred or untouchable, but as functionally accountable to public expectation. This semiotic reframing reduces symbolic power and opens space for evaluative judgment.

A similar mechanism operates in the depiction of a “minister of all affairs,” where leadership is metaphorically portrayed as overextending beyond institutional boundaries. Here, the representamen is anchored in the exaggeration of multi-role performance, while the object refers to concentration of visibility or dominance within cabinet dynamics. The interpretant is ambivalence: admiration for efficiency may coexist with suspicion of imbalance. The metaphor thus performs a dual function both recognition and critique demonstrating the layered nature of political satire.

The reference to former leadership figures who continue to exert influence after formal retirement further reinforces this pattern. Through metaphorical imagery

suggesting that a “retired driver” still arranges routes, the performance signals concerns about shadow power and informal authority. In semiotic terms, the sign operates symbolically, requiring contextual knowledge of political lineage and influence networks. The interpretant that emerges is not direct accusation but insinuation of continuity of power beyond constitutional boundaries.

From the perspective of critical political communication, these metaphors function as tools of symbolic negotiation. Delegitimization here does not involve factual indictment but discursive reframing. By relocating political authority into everyday metaphors, the performance disrupts the aura of invulnerability often associated with leadership. Humor becomes a vehicle for recalibrating power perception.

Importantly, metaphorical delegitimization also illustrates the tension inherent in digital satire. Because meaning relies heavily on contextual inference, different audiences may generate divergent interpretants. Supporters may perceive harmless humor, while critics may interpret subversion. This multiplicity of interpretants explains why such performances can simultaneously generate engagement and resistance within the digital public sphere.

### ***Moral Satire, Corruption, and Symbolic Manipulation***

The final dominant semiotic pattern concerns moral satire directed at corruption and symbolic manipulation of public morality. In several segments, the performance addresses corruption cases involving religious symbolism, the performative display of piety during legal proceedings, and the strategic use of state facilities for personal image-building. These critiques demonstrate how humor can expose contradictions between moral rhetoric and political practice.

One salient example involves reference to corruption associated with sacred religious texts. In semiotic terms, the representamen lies in the invocation of the Qur’an as a moral symbol, the object refers to corruption within state institutions, and the interpretant constructed by the audience is moral dissonance. The humor does not trivialize religion; rather, it highlights the irony of invoking sacred authority in contexts marked by ethical violation. This semiotic tension between sacred symbol and corrupt practice intensifies the critical force of the satire.

Similarly, the critique of officials adopting religious attire during corruption trials operates through symbolic exposure of moral performance. The representamen consists of visible markers of religiosity, while the object concerns strategic image management. The interpretant produced is skepticism toward performative morality. Here, satire functions as a mechanism for distinguishing authentic ethical conduct from symbolic manipulation.

The reference to misuse of state facilities, such as security escorts or official travel framed as work visits, further illustrates how signs of authority can be appropriated for personal advantage. These signs, uniforms escorts, and official ceremonies carry institutional legitimacy. When humor reframes them as instruments of excess or self-promotion, the interpretant shifts from respect to critique. Authority becomes decentered through symbolic inversion.

The satire extends to political image construction, including the phenomenon of officials prominently displaying their photographs in celebratory events involving athletes. In this case, the representamen is the oversized portrait, the object is political opportunism, the interpretant emerges as recognition of image appropriation. The humor exposes how public achievements are re-signified to reinforce political branding.

The critique of artists entering politics operates within the same semiotic logic. Popularity functions as the representamen, legislative competence as the object, and the interpretant emerges as doubt regarding qualification. By staging the tension between entertainment visibility with political responsibility, the performance questions the conflation of fame and governance capability. Collectively, these examples demonstrate how moral satire operates as critical exposure. Sacred symbols, institutional signs, and political imagery are stripped of unquestioned authority and repositioned within a field of public evaluation. From the standpoint of critical political communication, this process reveals how humor can function as a counter-hegemonic discourse, exposing inconsistencies between normative claims and institutional behavior.

At the same time, the moral intensity of these critiques helps explain the emergence of resistance in digital spaces. When satire touches sacred values or entrenched political interests, interpretants become polarized. Supporters may interpret the performance as necessary accountability, while opponents may perceive disrespect or subversion. This multiplicity of interpretation confirms that semiotic constructions in digital satire are not neutral; they participate actively in contestations over moral and political legitimacy within the digital public sphere.

### ***Stand-Up Comedy as Digital Political Discourse***

The four dominant semiotic patterns identified in this study analogy, irony and indexical signaling, metaphorical delegitimization, and moral satire collectively demonstrate that Bintang Emon's stand-up performance operates as a structured form of digital political discourse rather than incidental humor. Each pattern

reflects a distinct semiotic strategy, yet all converge in transforming everyday language into a vehicle for political meaning-making.

First, analogy functions to expose structural incongruities between institutional ideals and political realities. Second, irony and indexical signs highlight gaps between official narratives and lived experience. Third, metaphorical delegitimization symbolically repositions political authority within an evaluative public framework. Fourth, moral satire reveals tensions between sacred symbolism and ethical conduct. Together, these mechanisms form a layered semiotic architecture that enables indirect yet powerful critique.

From the perspective of political satire theory, the findings confirm that humor can mediate public opinion formation by lowering defensive barriers while maintaining critical intensity. Rather than attacking institutions directly, the performance invites audiences to reinterpret political events through accessible symbolic forms. This aligns with the understanding of satire as a discursive practice that destabilizes dominant narratives through exaggeration, inversion, and symbolic substitution.

Within the framework of the digital public sphere, the performance gains additional significance. Distributed through YouTube, the satire is not confined to a live audience but circulates within algorithmic infrastructures that amplify engagement, commentary, and reinterpretation. The interpretant therefore extends beyond immediate laughter to include online discussion, polarization, and ideological contestation. Meaning is continuously renegotiated through digital interaction. Importantly, the analysis addresses the research gap identified earlier: previous studies often examined humor descriptively or treated satire as a general communicative phenomenon without systematically mapping its semiotic mechanisms in relation to political communication theory. By integrating Peirce's triadic model with concepts from political satire and critical political communication, this study demonstrates how stand-up comedy can be analytically dissected as a structured system of political signification.

The findings also extend existing scholarship by showing that semiotic processes in digital satire are inherently multi-layered and context-dependent. The interpretant is not singular; it varies according to audience ideology, political alignment, and religious sensitivity. This explains why the same performance can simultaneously generate solidarity, controversy, and backlash. Thus, digital satire should be understood not merely as expression, but as a site of contestation over legitimacy and moral authority.

In sum, Bintang Emon's performance exemplifies how stand-up comedy in Indonesia's digital environment operates as a hybrid communicative practice where entertainment, critique, and participatory discourse intersect within a single semiotic event. The humor does not dilute political meaning; rather, it reorganizes it into forms that are socially shareable, cognitively accessible, and discursively potent.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that Bintang Emon's stand-up performance transcends mere entertainment, functioning instead as a potent form of digital political discourse. Through the application of Peirce's triadic model, the analysis reveals how analogy, irony, metaphor, and moral satire operate as interconnected sign systems, strategically transforming complex political realities into accessible symbolic critiques.

Theoretically, this research advances political communication scholarship by synthesizing semiotic analysis with critical perspectives on political satire. Rather than treating humor as a purely descriptive cultural artifact, this study conceptualizes stand-up comedy as a rigorously structured system of political signification. By elucidating how indirect critique acquires persuasive force through symbolic mediation and contextual inference, this work strengthens the analytical bridge between micro-level semiotics and macro-level political communication.

Methodologically, the study affirms the analytical utility of Peirce's triadic framework for dissecting digital political discourse. By systematically mapping the representamen, object, and interpretant, it provides a robust and replicable analytical blueprint for future research on mediated satire, political memes, and other modalities of digital expression. Furthermore, the inherent multiplicity of the interpretant underscores the necessity of incorporating empirical audience reception and platform affordances into future investigations to fully grasp interpretive variability.

On a practical level, this study underscores the vital role of comedians as informal, yet highly influential, actors within democratic deliberation. By distilling opaque political complexities into relatable symbolic narratives, stand-up performers actively cultivate civic engagement and critical public consciousness. Simultaneously, the plurality of interpretants generated in digital networked environments explains the dual capacity of satire to foster civic solidarity while occasionally igniting polarization. This duality perfectly mirrors the contested nature of moral authority and political legitimacy in contemporary democracies.

To build upon these findings, future scholarship should pursue comparative case studies across diverse socio-political contexts. Additionally, integrating empirical audience reception studies and examining the precise impact of algorithmic amplification will be crucial to further situating digital satire within the broader ecology of media, technology, and public discourse.

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