

Stand-Up Comedy as a Medium of Government Criticism Communication Through a Netnographic Study of Netizens' Responses to *Mensrea* by Pandji Pragiwaksono

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Abstract

This study examines how digital audiences receive, interpret, and reconstruct governmental criticism in Pandji Pragiwaksono's *Mens Rea* stand-up comedy performance within the digital public sphere. Using a qualitative netnographic approach, the study analyzed naturally occurring audience responses on Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok during one month following the publication of *Mens Rea*. The unit of analysis comprised individual social media comments containing substantive responses to the governmental and socio-political criticism presented in the performance, with reply threads examined contextually. Data were purposively selected based on relevance and information richness and analyzed thematically through iterative coding. The findings reveal a predominantly affirmative audience reception, alongside negotiated and oppositional interpretations. Rather than merely agreeing or disagreeing, users reinforced, expanded, contextualized, and occasionally contested the criticism by connecting it with political conditions, personal experiences, and public concerns. These interactions also facilitated the legitimization and circulation of political criticism, indicating that meaning-making occurred horizontally among users as well as between comedian and audience. Differences across platforms further suggest that reception is shaped by their distinct communicative characteristics. Drawing on Public Sphere Theory and Audience Reception Theory, the study positions social media as an alternative digital public sphere where political meanings are constructed, negotiated, and circulated. The study contributes to political communication and popular culture research by emphasizing individual audience responses and their interactional contexts as key sites of digital political meaning-making.

Keywords: stand-up comedy; governmental criticism; netnography; audience reception; digital public sphere; social media.

INTRODUCTION

The growing penetration of digital media in Indonesia has significantly expanded the space for public communication and political discourse. According to DataReportal's *Digital 2026: Indonesia* report, Indonesia had approximately 230 million internet users in October 2025, representing 80.5% of the country's population. During the same period, the country recorded approximately 180 million social media user identities, equivalent to 62.9% of the total population. YouTube alone had an estimated advertising reach of 151 million users in Indonesia in late 2025. These figures demonstrate the substantial role of digital platforms in shaping contemporary patterns of communication and public interaction in Indonesia. (Dewi & Rusadi, 2023).

The development of digital media has significantly transformed patterns of political communication within the public sphere. (Wahyuningsih et al., 2023). Social media no longer functions merely as a channel for information dissemination, but has evolved into a discursive space in which citizens express attitudes, opinions, and criticism toward public policies and political actors. In this context, governmental criticism no longer emerges solely through formal channels such as mass media or institutional political forums, but also through non-conventional forms of popular culture (DeFilippis et al., 2022).

One form of popular culture that has increasingly emerged as a medium for social and political criticism is stand-up comedy. Stand-up comedy functions not only as entertainment, but also as a vehicle for conveying critical messages through humor, satire, and irony. (Leonardo & Junaidi, 2020). Through this approach, the criticism delivered tends to be more readily accepted by the public, as it is presented in an accessible yet substantive manner and is capable of reaching a broad audience, particularly younger generations (Alfianto & Lobodally, 2020).

In the Indonesian context, Pandji Pragiwaksono is one of the stand-up comedians who consistently incorporates political issues and government policies as central material in his performances. Through *Mensrea*, Pandji openly articulates criticism of the government and political elites by explicitly naming influential figures in the public sphere. (Leonardo & Junaidi, 2020). This bold approach positions *Mensrea* not merely as a comedy performance, but as a political communication event that stimulates public discourse (Laali & Moazami, 2017).

Interestingly, the *Mensrea* performance does not remain confined to the stage, but extends into the digital sphere through uploads on social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. Within this space, the public particularly netizens respond through comments, reactions, and various forms of digital interaction. Social media thus functions as an extension of the public sphere, enabling audiences to move beyond passive spectatorship and become active participants in responding to the political criticism conveyed (Rega et al., 2023).

Preliminary observations indicate that netizens' responses to *Mensrea* are predominantly characterized by support for the criticism articulated by Pandji Pragiwaksono. Such support is expressed not only through explicit approval, but also through the reinforcement of critical narratives in the form of argumentative, reflective, and politically oriented comments. This phenomenon suggests a broader public acceptance of governmental criticism conveyed through entertainment-based media, while simultaneously indicating a shift in the ways citizens participate in political discourse (Powers et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, academic studies on political criticism within stand-up comedy in Indonesia remain relatively limited. (Leonardo & Junaidi, 2020) Most existing research has primarily focused on political communication through mainstream mass media, digital activism, or social movements on social media platforms. Studies that specifically examine stand-up comedy as a space for governmental criticism while analyzing netizens' responses as active audiences are still scarce, particularly those employing a netnographic approach (Fahad & Mustafa, 2024).

The research gap addressed in this study lies in the limited number of studies that integrate three key aspects simultaneously: stand-up comedy as a medium of political criticism, social media as a digital public sphere, and netizens' responses as a form of non-formal political participation. Much of the existing literature tends to focus primarily on analyzing the content of criticism delivered by comedians, without sufficiently examining how the public interprets, responds to, and reproduces such criticism within digital spaces (Leonardo & Junaidi, 2020).

Previous studies have established that stand-up comedy can function as a medium of political and social criticism, particularly through humor, satire, and the representation of political issues in comedic performances. Other studies on digital political communication have also demonstrated that social media provides a space for citizens to express political opinions and participate in public discourse. However, these two strands of research have largely been examined separately. Studies of stand-up comedy tend to focus on the content, rhetorical strategies, or political messages embedded in comedic performances, while studies of social media political communication tend to examine political discussion without specifically considering stand-up comedy as the initial source of political criticism. Consequently, there remains insufficient understanding of what happens after political criticism is delivered through stand-up comedy: how digital audiences interpret the criticism, whether they accept or contest its meaning, and how they reproduce, reinforce, or contextualize the criticism through social media interactions. (Widyansari, 2014)

This gap is particularly evident in the context of *Mensrea*, a stand-up comedy performance by Pandji Pragiwaksono that explicitly addresses government policies and political elites. Existing discussions of political comedy provide an

understanding of comedy as a form of political expression, but they do not sufficiently explain how audiences construct meaning from such criticism within digitally mediated interactions. More specifically, the responses of Indonesian netizens to *Mensrea* across YouTube and Instagram have not been adequately examined as a process of political meaning-making in which audiences actively negotiate and circulate the messages conveyed by a comedian. Therefore, the empirical gap addressed by this study is the absence of an audience-centered analysis of how government criticism delivered through stand-up comedy is received, interpreted, and reproduced through social media interactions.

To fill this gap, the present study employs a netnographic approach to systematically observe and analyze netizens' responses to *Mensrea* on YouTube and Instagram. Rather than treating social media comments merely as indicators of audience approval or disapproval, this study analyzes them as forms of audience participation through which political meanings are constructed, negotiated, and circulated. Netnography enables the study to examine interaction patterns, recurring narratives, argumentative responses, and contextual interpretations emerging from the online community (Candidatu & Leurs, 2025). In this way, the study moves beyond analyzing political criticism as a message contained within a comedy performance and instead investigates the subsequent process through which audiences give meaning to and reproduce that criticism in the digital public sphere.

The theoretical gap is also addressed through the integration of public sphere theory and audience reception theory. Public sphere theory explains how social media can provide a space for citizens to articulate criticism and participate in political discourse beyond formal political institutions. However, this perspective alone does not sufficiently explain how individual audiences interpret and assign meaning to political messages (King, 2017). Conversely, audience reception theory provides a framework for understanding how audiences actively interpret media messages, but does not by itself fully explain how these interpretations contribute to broader public discourse. By bringing the two perspectives together, this study examines both dimensions: social media as a space for public political discourse and netizens as active audiences who interpret, negotiate, and reproduce political criticism. This integrated perspective constitutes a distinct analytical contribution of the study (El-Kholei & Yassein, 2022).

Accordingly, this study fills an empirical and theoretical gap by connecting political comedy, digital audience reception, and the digital public sphere in a single analytical framework. Its specific contribution lies in examining how government criticism originating from a stand-up comedy performance is transformed through audience interaction on social media. The study therefore contributes to political communication and cultural communication by demonstrating that the political significance of stand-up comedy does not end with the delivery of the comedian's

message, but continues through the ways in which digital audiences accept, negotiate, expand, and circulate that criticism within the digital public sphere.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using netnography to examine how netizens respond to and construct meanings around governmental criticism conveyed in Pandji Pragiwaksono's *Mensrea*. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on the meanings, interpretations, arguments, and interaction patterns expressed by audiences rather than measuring responses statistically. Netnography was selected because the research examines naturally occurring interactions among social media users in digital environments (Cresswell, 2022).

The primary data consist of publicly available comments and responses from netizens on Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok related to Pandji Pragiwaksono's *Mensrea*. These platforms were selected because they provide spaces in which audiences can respond to, discuss, reinterpret, and circulate political messages presented through popular culture (Bai et al., 2022). The observation period covered one month following the publication of *Mensrea*. During this period, the researcher monitored relevant content and discussions across Instagram, X, and TikTok and collected comments that were related to the research focus. The one-month observation period was selected to capture audience responses during the initial circulation and discussion of the performance, when public reactions were still actively developing across social media platforms.

The unit of analysis was an individual comment or response that contained substantive relevance to the political criticism presented in *Mensrea*. Where relevant, comment threads and replies were also considered in order to understand the interactional context in which particular interpretations were constructed. The study employed purposive sampling. Comments were selected based on their relevance to the research questions rather than according to a predetermined numerical quota. The researcher selectively sampled comments from Instagram, X, and TikTok that provided meaningful evidence of audience reception and interpretation of the governmental criticism conveyed in *Mensrea*.

The sampling process did not rely exclusively on top comments, the highest-engagement comments, or chronological selection. Instead, comments were selected when they demonstrated substantive engagement with the political issues or criticism presented in the performance. This included comments expressing agreement or disagreement, reinforcing the criticism, providing additional political context, challenging the comedian's arguments, negotiating the meaning of the criticism, or relating the criticism to users' broader social and political experiences.

The number of comments was not predetermined at the beginning of the study. Data collection continued throughout the one-month observation period, with the final dataset determined by the information richness and relevance of the comments to the research questions. Comments that were identified as spam, advertisements, duplicated content, irrelevant discussions, or comments without substantive relevance to the political issues addressed in *Mensrea* were excluded.

The data collection followed the principles of netnographic observation by examining naturally occurring communication within social media environments. The researcher acted as a non-participant observer and did not initiate discussions, respond to users, or intervene in the conversations being observed. The data collection process consisted of four stages. First, the researcher identified posts, videos, and other publicly available content related to *Mensrea* on Instagram, X, and TikTok. Second, the researcher monitored comments and relevant reply threads throughout the one-month observation period. Third, comments were screened according to their relevance to the research questions and the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Fourth, selected comments were documented and organized into a qualitative research dataset for analysis.

In applying netnography, the researcher did not treat comments as isolated statements. The analysis also considered the interactional context surrounding comments, including replies, agreements, disagreements, recurring arguments, and the ways in which users reinforced, challenged, expanded, or contextualized the political criticism presented in *Mensrea*.

The collected data were analyzed thematically through an iterative coding process. First, the researcher repeatedly read the collected comments to become familiar with the dataset. Second, initial codes were assigned to statements that contained relevant meanings or patterns. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader categories. Fourth, these categories were compared across Instagram, X, and TikTok to identify recurring patterns of audience reception. Finally, the categories were synthesized into broader themes that addressed the research questions (Ottlewski, 2021).

The coding process focused on several analytical dimensions, including (1) acceptance and support of governmental criticism, (2) reinforcement or repetition of criticism, (3) expansion and contextualization of criticism, (4) disagreement or rejection, (5) negotiation or reinterpretation of meaning, and (6) political reflection and personal experience. These categories were not treated as rigid classifications; they were refined during the analytical process when new patterns emerged from the data.

Each selected comment was assigned an anonymized identification code according to its platform, such as IG-001 for Instagram, X-001 for X, and TT-001 for TikTok. The coding record included the comment, platform, date of publication

where available, initial code, analytical category, and emerging theme. This procedure enabled the researcher to trace the development of analytical themes back to the original empirical data.

Netnography was implemented through several principles. First, the study adopted a naturalistic approach by examining comments that emerged organically within existing social media discussions rather than generating responses through interviews or questionnaires. Second, the researcher maintained a non-participant observational position and did not interfere with users' interactions. Third, the study adopted a contextual approach by considering comments within their relevant discussion threads and platform environments. Fourth, the analysis focused on the meaning-making practices of online audiences, examining how users collectively reinforced, contested, negotiated, and circulated political interpretations.

The cross-platform design also allowed the researcher to compare how similar political criticism was received and discussed in different digital environments. Differences and similarities in audience responses across Instagram, X, and TikTok were considered as part of the analytical process rather than treating social media comments as a homogeneous form of audience response.

Because the study uses publicly accessible social media interactions, ethical considerations were applied throughout the research process. Usernames, profile photographs, account identifiers, and other personally identifiable information were not included in the presentation of the findings. When comments were quoted for analytical purposes, identifying information was removed or anonymized.

The trustworthiness of the research was maintained through systematic documentation of the observation period, sampling criteria, data screening, coding procedures, and analytical decisions. Credibility was strengthened through observation across three social media platforms and comparison of recurring patterns across the dataset. Dependability was supported by maintaining a clear record of the research procedures, while confirmability was addressed by grounding interpretations in the collected empirical data rather than in predetermined assumptions (Eke et al., 2025).

Through this procedure, the study applies netnography not merely as a method for collecting social media comments, but as an interpretive approach for understanding naturally occurring digital interactions and the processes through which audiences construct, negotiate, and circulate meanings surrounding governmental criticism in *Mensrea*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that netizens' responses to Pandji Pragiwaksono's *Mens Rea* generally demonstrate an affirmative tendency toward the governmental criticism and socio-political issues presented through the

performance. Such support is expressed not only through brief statements of agreement or appreciation, but also through comments containing arguments, social reflections, and attempts to connect the comedic material with broader political conditions. This finding suggests that audiences do not remain merely as consumers of entertainment but actively participate in constructing and extending the political meanings emerging from the performance.

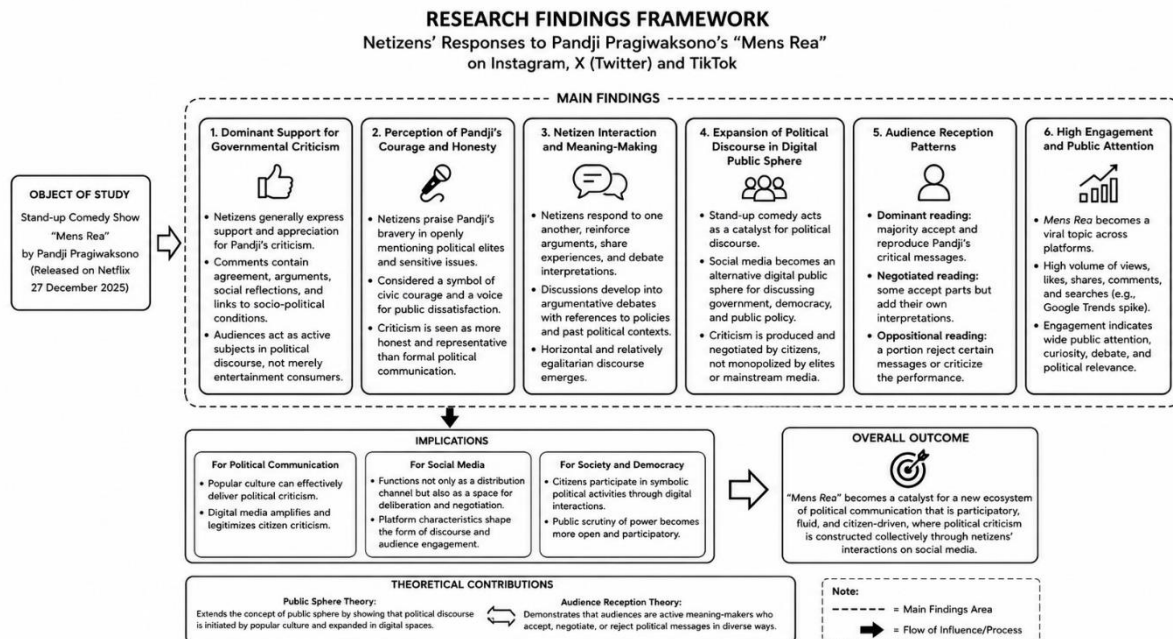


Figure 1. Research Findings Framework

These findings should be understood within the context of the increasing public attention surrounding *Mens Rea* after its release on Netflix on December 27, 2025. Media reports indicate that the performance became a major topic of public discussion in early January 2026 and generated diverse responses, including both support and criticism. Pandji himself acknowledged that he had anticipated that some audiences would appreciate the performance while others would dislike it, while he considered the positive responses to be greater than the negative ones. *Mens Rea* attracted particular attention because its material openly addressed socio-political issues, the condition of Indonesian democracy, the behavior of public officials, and political figures who are often considered sensitive to discuss open. This context demonstrates that *Mens Rea* developed beyond the boundaries of an entertainment performance and became an object of public discourse that was subsequently extended through social media.

Audience Acceptance of Governmental Criticism through Humor

The first finding demonstrates that a dominant pattern in the analyzed responses is the acceptance of governmental criticism presented by Pandji. Netizens not only expressed appreciation for Pandji's willingness to address political issues,

but also considered the material relevant to broader social and political conditions. Such responses demonstrate that criticism delivered through humor can receive public acceptance because it is communicated through an informal and accessible form that is closer to everyday audience experiences. (Putranto et al., 2025).

This finding is consistent with (Wahyuningsih et al., 2023), who demonstrate that communication through popular media can encourage audiences to participate in processes of meaning-making. However, the present study extends this perspective by demonstrating that audience engagement with political criticism does not stop at message acceptance. Instead, it develops through comments, arguments, and the contextualization of comedic material within broader socio-political issues.

The finding also supports (Leonardo & Junaidi, 2020), who view stand-up comedy as a medium capable of communicating social criticism. Humor allows complex issues to be presented through a popular and less formal communication format. In *Mens Rea*, humor and satire therefore function as communication strategies that allow criticism of government and political actors to enter broader public conversations.

Thus, the effectiveness of political criticism in stand-up comedy is not determined solely by the comedian's ability to articulate criticism, but also by the audience's ability to connect the message with realities they understand. Audiences contribute to the legitimacy of criticism when they perceive the message as relevant to the social and political conditions they experience or observe.

Pandji's Courage and the Legitimization of Political Criticism

The second finding concerns netizens' perceptions of Pandji's courage in openly addressing government and political actors. Several responses interpret this openness as a form of civic courage in articulating public concerns, particularly because *Mens Rea* explicitly addresses political issues and the behavior of actors associated with political power.

Media coverage of *Mens Rea* similarly demonstrates that Pandji is perceived as using comedy to communicate criticism that may be difficult to express through formal political communication. One public comment quoted in media coverage praised Pandji for his ability to select appropriate words to describe Indonesia's political situation, while another response suggested that the performance successfully translated complex political issues into a form that could be more easily understood by the public. (Leonardo & Junaidi, 2020)

Who positions popular culture as a space for articulating social criticism. However, the present study contributes an additional dimension by shifting attention from the comedian as the sole producer of political criticism toward the audience's role in legitimizing that criticism. Pandji's courage becomes socially

meaningful not simply because he delivers criticism, but because audiences respond to, reinforce, and reproduce the criticism within digital spaces.

Accordingly, the legitimacy of criticism in the context of *Mens Rea* is not derived exclusively from the communicator. It is also constructed collectively by audiences. When netizens repeat, strengthen, or connect Pandji's criticism with their own experiences, they contribute to expanding the reach and social legitimacy of the political message.

Netizen Interaction as a Process of Meaning-Making

The findings further demonstrate that netizens' responses do not occur solely at the individual level. In several interactions, users respond to other users' comments, reinforce particular arguments, add personal experiences, or debate interpretations of *Mens Rea*. Therefore, meaning-making occurs not only between Pandji and his audience but also horizontally among audience members.

This finding is important because it demonstrates that social media functions not merely as a space for reacting to content, but also as an environment in which audiences produce and negotiate meaning. Political criticism initially delivered by Pandji through the performance can develop into broader discussions when other users contribute additional experiences, information, and perspectives.

This finding supports (Pureklolon, 2021), who argues that digital spaces can facilitate political discourse through interactions among users. Nevertheless, the present study extends this discussion by demonstrating that political discourse can be triggered by popular cultural products. In the case of *Mens Rea*, stand-up comedy serves as the initial stimulus, while social media provides the space in which audiences extend discussions surrounding the political issues embedded within the performance.

The finding is also consistent with (Alam, 2021), who discuss the expansion of political communication through digital media. However, this study demonstrates that such expansion does not occur merely because political messages can circulate rapidly. It also occurs because audiences actively interpret, reproduce, and contextualize those messages.

***Mens Rea* as a Catalyst for a Digital Public Sphere**

From the perspective of Public Sphere Theory, the interactions identified in this study demonstrate that social media can function as an alternative digital public sphere in which citizens discuss issues related to government, democracy, public policy, and political actors. Within this context, *Mens Rea* functions as a catalyst for discourse, while Instagram, X, and TikTok provide spaces in which audiences respond to and develop the issues raised by the performance.

This finding extends the concept of the public sphere by demonstrating that political discourse does not necessarily originate from political institutions,

mainstream news media, or formal forums. Popular cultural products can also become catalysts for political discussion. When criticism presented in a comedy performance is subsequently discussed, debated, and contextualized by audiences, the boundaries between entertainment communication and political communication become increasingly fluid.

However, the findings do not imply that social media automatically constitutes an ideal deliberative public sphere. The interactions observed may also involve disagreement, polarization, and emotional responses. Furthermore, the algorithmic structures of social media platforms can influence which comments and narratives receive greater visibility. Therefore, this study conceptualizes social media more cautiously as an alternative digital public sphere that facilitates political discourse while remaining subject to structural and technological limitations.

The diversity of responses to *Mens Rea* further supports this interpretation. Media coverage indicates that the performance generated both supportive and critical responses. Therefore, the digital space surrounding *Mens Rea* does not function solely as a mechanism for legitimizing Pandji's criticism, but also as an arena in which such criticism is questioned, negotiated, and contested.

Audience Reception: Dominant, Negotiated, and Oppositional Readings

When examined through Audience Reception Theory, the findings demonstrate that netizens engage in processes of acceptance, negotiation, and rejection of the messages conveyed by Pandji. The initial findings of this study reveal a dominant tendency toward acceptance of governmental criticism. Netizens do not merely express agreement but also reproduce and extend the criticism through broader social and political narratives.

This pattern can be understood as a dominant reading, in which audiences accept the primary interpretive framework offered by the communicator. In the context of *Mens Rea*, netizens who consider Pandji's criticism relevant to Indonesia's political conditions demonstrate acceptance of the central critical message and reinforce it through their own comments.

Nevertheless, the presence of negative responses indicates that audience reception is not homogeneous. Some viewers question the strong political emphasis of the performance or criticize particular aspects of the material. Such responses may represent negotiated readings or, depending on the extent of rejection, oppositional readings.

Therefore, the findings provide a more complex understanding than simply categorizing netizens as either supportive or unsupportive of *Mens Rea*. Audiences occupy different interpretive positions. Some accept the critical message in accordance with the intended framework, some accept certain aspects while

imposing their own qualifications, and others reject particular messages presented in the performance.

Platform-Specific Characteristics of Digital Responses

Observation of Instagram, X, and TikTok further indicates that responses to *Mens Rea* occur within different platform environments. Instagram tends to facilitate appreciation, reactions, and comments surrounding specific content excerpts. X provides greater space for argumentative and politically oriented discussions, while TikTok facilitates rapid circulation of short excerpts and user responses through its highly participatory format.

These differences demonstrate that audience reception is influenced not only by the content of a message but also by the characteristics of the platform through which the message is consumed and discussed. In other words, the digital public sphere is platform-dependent. The same political message may generate different forms of audience engagement depending on the communication environment in which it circulates.

This finding contributes to previous studies that tend to conceptualize social media as a relatively homogeneous digital environment. In the case of *Mens Rea*, platform characteristics shape how political criticism is produced, received, negotiated, and circulated among audiences.

Engagement and the Social Legitimization of Political Criticism

The high level of public attention surrounding *Mens Rea* further reinforces its position as an object of political discourse in digital spaces. Media reports indicate a significant increase in searches related to *Mens Rea* on Google Trends, including searches for “Mens Rea Full,” “Mens Rea arti,” and “Panji Mens Rea.” Radar Surabaya reported that searches for the topic *Mens Rea* increased by approximately 2,150% on January 6, 2026, at 1:55 p.m. local time

This level of public attention indicates that *Mens Rea* attracted interest beyond the context of the comedy performance itself. Audiences did not merely watch the performance but also searched for information concerning its meaning, content, and broader context. Engagement can therefore be understood as an indicator that the performance successfully entered the public attention cycle.

Nevertheless, engagement should not automatically be interpreted as political support. High levels of interaction can emerge from agreement, criticism, curiosity, controversy, or debate. Accordingly, this study distinguishes between content popularity and message reception. Popularity indicates the extent of public attention toward *Mens Rea*, whereas the netnographic analysis explains how that attention is translated into particular attitudes and meanings by netizens.

Theoretical Synthesis and Contribution

Overall, the findings demonstrate a relationship between stand-up comedy, social media, and the construction of political discourse. *Mens Rea* functions as an initial stimulus that brings political criticism into popular culture, while social media enables that criticism to be accepted, reinforced, debated, and negotiated by audiences.

The contribution to Public Sphere Theory lies in demonstrating that popular culture can serve as an entry point for political discourse within digital spaces. Stand-up comedy is therefore not merely an entertainment medium but can function as a catalyst for discussions concerning government, democracy, and political actors. Social media subsequently expands this discourse through horizontal interactions among users.

Meanwhile, the contribution to Audience Reception Theory lies in demonstrating that audiences are not passive recipients of political criticism. Netizens engage in meaning-making by connecting the messages of *Mens Rea* with their own experiences, knowledge, and perceptions of socio-political conditions. Although the dominant pattern in the findings indicates support for Pandji's criticism, the existence of negotiated and oppositional responses demonstrates that audiences maintain diverse interpretive positions.

By integrating these two theoretical perspectives, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of political communication through popular culture. Public Sphere Theory explains how social media provides a space for political criticism and discourse, while Audience Reception Theory explains how audiences interpret, negotiate, accept, or reject the messages circulating within that space.

Accordingly, the novelty of this study does not lie solely in examining *Mens Rea* as an object of analysis, but in positioning netizens' responses as the primary locus through which the meaning and legitimacy of political criticism are constructed. Unlike studies that primarily focus on the content of political messages in stand-up comedy or on the comedian as the central actor, this study demonstrates that the strength of political criticism is also constructed through audience interaction in digital spaces. Criticism delivered from the stage acquires broader social meaning when it is accepted, reproduced, contextualized, or contested by netizens.

Therefore, *Mens Rea* can be understood not merely as a stand-up comedy performance containing governmental criticism, but as a catalyst for a digital political communication ecosystem, in which the comedian functions as the message producer, social media operates as an alternative public sphere, and netizens act as active participants who determine how political messages are interpreted, accepted, contested, and circulated.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that stand-up comedy can no longer be understood merely as a form of entertainment, but rather as a space for governmental criticism that holds significant political communication dimensions in the digital media era. Through the *Mensrea* performance, Pandji Pragiwaksono successfully articulates criticism of public policies and political actors by employing humor and satire as strategic modes of communication. Such criticism does not remain confined to the stage; instead, it extends and develops within social media environments through active and participatory engagement from netizens

This study's findings reveal that netizens' responses to *Mensrea* on YouTube and Instagram are predominantly characterized by supportive attitudes toward the governmental criticism conveyed. Netizens do not merely express symbolic approval, but also engage in deeper processes of meaning-making through reflective and argumentative comments. This demonstrates that audiences function as active subjects who participate in constructing and reproducing discourses of political criticism within the digital public sphere

From the perspective of public sphere theory, the findings of this study indicate an expansion of the arena of political discourse into the realms of popular culture and social media. Social media functions as an alternative public sphere that enables citizens to express criticism, construct public opinion, and engage in political deliberation beyond formal mechanisms. In this context, stand-up comedy serves as a catalyst for discourse, while netizens act as agents who reinforce the legitimacy of criticism through their digital participation

Meanwhile, through the lens of audience reception theory, this study shows that the critical messages conveyed in *Mensrea* receive a dominant reading among the majority of audiences. Audiences not only understand the criticism in accordance with the interpretive framework intended by the communicator, but also relate it to their social experiences and the political conditions they encounter. This reception process underscores that the meaning of political criticism is dynamically constructed through the interaction between the message, social context, and audience experience

Overall, this study provides a theoretical contribution by enriching scholarship on political communication and popular culture, particularly in understanding the role of stand-up comedy as a medium for governmental criticism in digital spaces. The study also underscores the importance of netizens' responses as indicators of social legitimacy for political criticism conveyed through non-formal media. Accordingly, governmental criticism is not produced solely by individual actors, but is collectively constructed through digital communication practices.

This study is subject to limitations related to the scope of data, which is confined to two social media platforms and a single stand-up comedy performance. Therefore, future research is encouraged to broaden the scope of analysis by comparing other stand-up comedy performances or examining different digital platforms in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of political criticism within popular culture. Nevertheless, this study is expected to serve as an initial reference for understanding contemporary political communication practices that are increasingly intertwined with popular culture and social media.

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