

Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis of the Representation of Social Criticism on the Instagram Account @Freakind.Media

Syaiful Halim, Hadi Anwar Mutha

Communication Science Study Program, Faculty of Law and Social Studies, Mathla'ul Anwar University Banten

syaiful.halim@unmabanten.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: October 2023 Accepted: October 2023 Published: October 2023	The development of social media has transformed public communication patterns and created new spaces for individuals to express opinions, share perspectives, and deliver social criticism regarding various social, political, and economic issues. Instagram has emerged as one of the most influential platforms for communicating social criticism through creative and widely accessible visual content. One account that consistently produces critical content is the Instagram account @freakind.media. This study aims to analyze the representation of social criticism in the content published by @freakind.media using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Employing a qualitative research method, data were collected through observation and documentation of selected Instagram posts published between April 1 and April 25, 2025. The analysis was conducted using Barthes' three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings reveal that the content of @freakind.media utilizes visual signs, symbols, illustrations, and satirical narratives to represent criticism of contemporary social, political, and economic issues. At the denotative level, the posts depict actual events and public phenomena. At the connotative level, visual elements construct meanings associated with criticism, satire, and resistance toward social inequalities. At the mythological level, the content reproduces broader understandings of power relations, social injustice, and the role of citizens in monitoring public policies. This study demonstrates that Instagram functions not only as a platform for entertainment and information sharing but also as a space for meaning production and the articulation of social criticism within the digital communication environment.
Keywords: Roland Barthes Semiotics, Social Criticism, Instagram, Social Media, Digital Communication	

INTRODUCTION

The development of communication and information technology has brought significant changes in the way people produce, consume, and distribute information. The digital transformation that has occurred in the last two decades has shifted the communication pattern from conventional media to internet-based media that is more interactive, participatory, and real-time. The presence of social media as the main product of the development of digital technology has created a new communication space that allows individuals not only to be recipients of information, but also to act as producers and distributors of messages. In this context, social media is an important part of modern society's life because it is able to facilitate social interaction,

information exchange, public opinion formation, and social and political advocacy activities.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a set of internet-based applications built on the foundation of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Through social media, the public has a wider opportunity to express their aspirations, criticisms, and views on various social phenomena that occur in the surrounding environment. This condition makes social media a digital public space that has a strategic role in shaping social, political, and cultural discourse. Castells (2013) calls this phenomenon "networked communication", which is a form of network-based communication that allows individuals to be directly connected in the process of producing and distributing information without relying on mainstream media institutions.

One of the social media platforms that has a great influence in shaping public opinion is Instagram. Initially, Instagram was known as a photo and video sharing medium that was oriented towards the visual aspect. However, as the features develop and the number of users continues to increase, Instagram has evolved into a communication medium that is used for various purposes, ranging from business promotion, social campaigns, and public education to conveying social and political criticism. Based on the DataReportal report (2024), the number of active Instagram users in Indonesia reaches more than 104 million users, making it one of the most popular social media platforms in Indonesia. The high number of users makes Instagram an effective medium in disseminating information and influencing public perception of various issues that develop in society.

In a democratic society, social criticism is an important part of the process of social control over various policies, power practices, and social phenomena that are considered incompatible with the values of justice. Social criticism can be understood as a form of public expression in response to various problems that occur in the social, political, and economic environment. Social criticism functions as a means of reflection, evaluation, and supervision of the social reality that develops in society. In the digital age, social criticism is no longer conveyed through conventional media such as newspapers or formal discussion forums, but also through various social media platforms that allow messages to be conveyed more quickly, broadly, and interactively.

Social media provides space for the emergence of various forms of social criticism that are creatively packaged through text, images, videos, illustrations, and memes. One form of visual communication that is widely used in conveying social criticism is digital memes. Memes not only serve as an entertainment medium but also as an effective means of communication to convey messages critical of various social and political issues. The use of humor, satire, and visual symbols in memes allows the message of criticism to be more easily received by the audience without losing the substance of the message to be conveyed. Therefore, memes and other visual content are becoming important instruments in the practice of political and social communication in the digital age.

One of the Instagram accounts that consistently uses visual content as a means of social criticism is the @freakind.media account. This account is known to actively produce various content in the form of illustrations, memes, and visual narratives that raise social, political, and economic issues that are currently of public concern. Through satire, humor, and a creative visualization approach, the account conveys criticism of various social phenomena that occur in Indonesia. Published content not only presents information about an event but also establishes a certain interpretation of social reality through the use of symbols, signs, and visual narratives that are full of meaning.

From a communication science perspective, visual content published on social media can be understood as a sign system that contains various layers of meaning. The meaning contained in an image or illustration is not only literal but also influenced by the social, cultural, and ideological context behind it. Therefore, an analytical approach is needed that is able to uncover the hidden meanings behind the visual cues used in social media content. One relevant approach to studying such phenomena is Roland Barthes' semiotics.

Roland Barthes developed a theory of semiotics, which held that signs have more than one level of meaning. Barthes differentiated the meaning of signs into three levels, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation is the literal meaning that appears directly on a sign, while connotation refers to additional meanings that are influenced by social and cultural values. Myth is a broader system of meaning related to certain ideologies, beliefs, and perspectives that develop in society (Barthes, 1977). Through Barthes' semiotic approach, visual cues in social media content can be analyzed in greater depth to understand how social messages and criticism are constructed and represented to audiences.

Research on social criticism in digital media has been done before. Aini and Rahmawati (2022) found that political memes on Instagram can be an effective medium in conveying social criticism through the use of symbols and visual signs that build a certain meaning. Gumilar's research (2021) shows that Instagram has developed into an alternative space for people to conduct critical discussions on various public issues. Meanwhile, Fitriani (2020) explained that digital memes not only function as entertainment but also have the ability to form people's collective awareness of social and political issues. However, research that specifically examines the representation of social criticism on the Instagram account @freakind.media through the perspective of Roland Barthes' semiotics is still relatively limited.

Based on these conditions, this research has urgency to be carried out because it seeks to reveal how social criticism is represented through visual cues used in the uploads of the @freakind.media Instagram account. This research not only focuses on the meaning that is directly visible but also seeks to identify the connotative and mythical meanings that are constructed through symbols, illustrations, and visual narratives used in the content. Thus, this research is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the practice of social criticism in digital media and how social media functions as a space for the production of meaning and the formation of public opinion in the era of digital communication.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the representation of social criticism in the uploads of the @freakind.media Instagram account using the semiotic approach of Roland Barthes. The focus of the research is directed at identifying the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings contained in the visual content of the account as a form of representation of criticism of various social, political, and economic issues that develop in society. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of the study of digital communication and media semiotics, as well as provide an overview of the role of social media as a means of conveying social criticism in contemporary society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media as a Space for Social Criticism

The development of digital technology has changed people's communication patterns from being originally dependent on conventional media to being internet-based. One of the manifestations of these changes is the increasing use of social media as a means of communication, information exchange, and the formation of public opinion. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as an internet-based application built on the foundation of Web 2.0 that allows the creation and exchange of *user-generated content*.

In the context of contemporary communication, social media not only functions as a means of personal interaction but also develops into a digital public space that allows people to express their views, criticisms, and aspirations on various social and political issues. Castells (2013) calls this phenomenon networked communication, which is a form of network-based communication that allows individuals to actively participate in the formation of public discourse. Through social media, people have a greater opportunity to criticize policies, voice social injustice, and build collective awareness of various public issues.

Instagram is one of the social media platforms that has a strong visual character. Various forms of visual communication, such as photos, illustrations, digital posters, and memes, can be used to convey complex messages in a concise and engaging manner. These characteristics make Instagram an effective medium to convey social criticism to a wide audience.

Representation in Digital Media

Representation is the process of forming and conveying meaning through the use of signs, symbols, language, and images. According to Hall (1997), representation is not just a reflection of reality, but an active process in constructing social reality through a certain system of meaning. Thus, the media not only conveys information but also shapes the way people understand and interpret the world around them.

In digital media, representation becomes increasingly dynamic because users not only play the role of consumers of information, but also as content producers. Social media allows individuals and groups to create alternative narratives about social

and political issues that are developing in society. Through various visual forms, representation can be used to convey criticism, strengthen collective identity, or challenge established dominant discourses.

The representation of social criticism is often manifested through the use of symbols, metaphors, satire, and irony that allow critical messages to be conveyed indirectly. Therefore, representational analysis is important to understand how social and political meaning is constructed in digital media content.

Social Criticism in Digital Culture

Social criticism is a form of response to various inequalities, deviations, and abuses of power that occur in society. Social criticism serves as a means of reflection, social control, and an effort to encourage change towards more just conditions. In the digital era, social criticism is no longer only conveyed through conventional mass media, but also through various social media platforms.

Social media provides a wide space for the public to express criticism of various public issues. One form of social criticism that is popular in digital culture is memes. Memes are a form of visual communication that combines images, text, humor, and cultural symbols to convey a specific message. According to Shifman (2014), internet memes are digital cultural artifacts that are able to spread ideas, opinions, and criticism quickly through the process of reproduction and distribution by internet users.

In addition to memes, social criticism in digital media is also often conveyed through satire and humor. The use of humor allows the message of criticism to be received more easily by the audience without reducing the substance of the message to be conveyed. Thus, memes and satire are effective communication instruments in building public awareness of various social and political issues.

Semiotics Roland Barthes

This study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory as the main analytical framework. Barthes (1972) developed the concept of semiotics, which views signs as a system of meaning that works on several levels. According to Barthes, a sign can be analyzed through three layers of meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth.

Denotative meaning is the literal meaning or meaning that appears directly on a sign. At this level, analysis focuses on what is objectively visible in an image or text. Meanwhile, connotative meanings refer to additional meanings that arise due to the influence of certain cultural values, social experiences, and ideologies owned by society.

In addition to denotations and connotations, Barthes introduced the concept of myth. Myth is a second-level meaning system that functions to naturalize cultural and ideological values so that they appear to be natural and natural. In the context of the media, myths play a role in shaping the way society understands social and political reality through certain representations.

Barthes' semiotic approach is relevant to analyzing visual content on social media because it is able to uncover the hidden meanings behind images, symbols, text,

and other visual elements. Through the analysis of denotations, connotations, and myths, this study seeks to understand how the Instagram account @freakind.media represents social criticism through the visual uploads it publishes.

Previous Research

Some previous research has shown that Roland Barthes' semiotic approach is effectively used to examine the representation of social criticism in digital media. Aini and Rahmawati (2022) found that political memes on Instagram are able to convey social criticism through the use of visual signs that contain denotative and connotative meanings. The research shows that memes not only serve as entertainment but also as a means of conveying social and political messages.

Gumilar (2021) shows that Instagram has developed into an alternative space for people to build critical discussions on various social and political issues. Meanwhile, Fitriani (2020) concluded that digital memes have the ability to form collective awareness and influence the audience's perception of ongoing social realities.

Although various studies have examined memes and social criticism on social media, studies that specifically examined the representation of social criticism on the Instagram account @freakind.media are still limited. In fact, the account consistently produces visual content with satirical nuances that raise various social, political, and economic issues in Indonesia. Therefore, this research was conducted to fill this gap by analyzing how social criticism is represented through denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings in @freakind.media Instagram account uploads.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method to examine the representation of social criticism in the uploads of the @freakind.media Instagram account. The qualitative approach was chosen because the research aims to understand the meaning contained in visual signs, as well as uncover the social and ideological constructions represented through digital content.

The research paradigm used is a critical paradigm. This paradigm views the media as an arena for the production of meaning that is not neutral but is influenced by certain power relations, ideologies, and social interests. Therefore, the research not only identifies the meanings that emerge in visual content but also examines how social criticism is constructed and conveyed to audiences through digital media.

Data Objects and Sources

The object of the research is the Instagram account @freakind.media, which consistently publishes visual content in the form of memes, illustrations, and digital posters that raise social, political, and economic issues in Indonesia.

The research data is in the form of @freakind.media account uploads published in the period 1-30 April 2025. The selection of the sample was carried out purposively by considering three main criteria: (1) containing criticism of social, political, or

economic issues; (2) having a high level of engagement, shown through the number of likes and comments; and (3) representing the main theme of the research. Based on these criteria, 5-10 uploads were selected as units of analysis.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through documentation techniques and literature studies. The documentation technique is carried out by archiving uploads that are the object of research, including images, visual text, captions, and other symbolic elements contained in the content. Meanwhile, literature studies are carried out by examining books, scientific articles, journals, and previous research related to semiotics, social media, representation, and social criticism.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using Roland Barthes' semiotic model, which includes three levels of meaning.

- 1) *Denotation*, which is identifying the literal meaning or direct meaning of the visual cues that appear in the upload.
- 2) *Connotation*, which is the interpretation of the cultural, social, and ideological meanings attached to the sign.
- 3) *Myth*, which is to reveal naturalized narratives, ideologies, or social constructions through visual representation.

The analysis process is carried out through several stages: (1) collection and selection of visual data; (2) identification of signs elements in the form of images, colors, symbols, and text; (3) analysis of denotative meaning; (4) interpretation of connotative meanings based on social and political contexts; (5) identification of myths or ideologies reproduced through content; and (6) the preparation of interpretations regarding the representation of social criticism in the @freakind.media account.

Data Validity

To increase the credibility of the research, theoretical triangulation was used by comparing the results of Barthes' semiotic interpretation with the relevant studies of media representation, social criticism, and digital communication. In addition, the analysis is carried out systematically and repeatedly to ensure the consistency of interpretation of the visual data studied.

RESEARCH RESULTS

This study analyzed eight Instagram @freakind.media account uploads published during the April 2025 period. The analysis was carried out using Roland Barthes' semiotics through three levels of meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. Based on the results of the analysis, it was found that all uploads contained representations of social and political criticism conveyed through visual symbols, satire, irony, and the use of popular culture.

In general, the theme of criticism can be grouped into three main categories, namely criticism of political power, criticism of state institutions, and criticism of government policies and programs.

Criticism of Political Power

The results of the analysis showed that some of the posts represented criticism of the practice of power and political leadership. In Donald Trump's upload, in which he is visualized wearing an Indonesian peci, it is found that the use of local cultural symbols are used to criticize the discourse on extending the presidential term. The peci symbol not only serves as an attribute of clothing but also as a marker that connects the political phenomenon of the United States with the Indonesian political experience.

A similar finding was found in an upload comparing Grok AI with the Vice President of Indonesia. The futuristic robot visuals and political figures shown as wrestlers form the opposition between technological rationality and political perperitvity. Through these symbols, uploads represent criticism of the effectiveness of political leadership in the digital era.

In addition, the post about the "only sun" statement featuring Jokowi and Prabowo wearing sunflower costumes shows criticism of power relations and political imagery. The use of the sunflower symbol produces a satirical impression that lowers the formal image of political figures into objects of humor and satire.

Criticism of State Institutions

The second category found was criticism of state institutions, especially law enforcement and military officials. In the upload about the case of the murder of a Banjarbaru journalist by members of the Indonesian Navy, the visualization of the perpetrator as a dog became a symbol of barbarism and the loss of human values. The symbol shows a form of public anger against sexual violence and murder.

Meanwhile, an upload about police members who are still receiving salaries despite being murder suspects features a police figure with the addition of a red horn symbol. The symbol represents moral deviation and criticism of the weak accountability of police institutions. The results of the analysis show that visuals are used to emphasize the inequality between the justice expected by the community and the bureaucratic practices that take place.

Criticism of Government Policies and Programs

The next findings show that there is criticism of government policies and programs. In an upload about the dismissal of the Iranian Vice President, the @freakind.media account used comparisons between countries to highlight the ethical issues of public officials. The symbol of the state flag and the narrative of dismissal of officials are used to build criticism of the weak political accountability mechanism.

In the upload about Esemka's car, the symbols of Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy are used to represent something that has lost its relevance. The results of the analysis show that the visual criticizes the national car narrative that is considered incompatible with the real reality of the industry.

In addition, the upload about the closure of MBG's kitchen due to payment arrears took advantage of the merging of Prabowo's face with the body of the character Denis from the Adit Sopo Jarwo series. This visual produces a satirical meaning that shows the incompatibility between the image of a strong leader and the reality of social problems that occur in society.

Patterns of Use of Visual Symbols

Based on all the data analyzed, a consistent pattern of use of visual symbols was found in @freakind.media content. These symbols come from various popular cultural sources, such as cartoon characters, internet memes, public figures, national symbols, and animal figures.

The use of popular cultural symbols serves to simplify complex socio-political issues to make them easier to understand by social media audiences. In addition, the use of humor, irony, and satire is the main strategy in conveying criticism without losing the substance of the message to be conveyed.

Summary of Research Results

The results of the study showed that all the uploads analyzed contained representations of social and political criticism through three layers of Roland Barthes' semiotic meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. The criticism that emerged focused on the issue of political power, accountability of state institutions, ethics of public officials, and government policies. Through the use of visual symbols, satire, and popular culture, the @freakind.media account builds a critical narrative that can be accepted and understood by social media audiences, especially the younger generation.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to uncover the representation of social and political criticism in the uploads of the @freakind.media Instagram account using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Based on the results of the analysis of the eight selected uploads, it was found that the @freakind.media account not only functions as a medium for conveying information but also as a space for the production of meaning that utilizes visual symbols, satire, irony, and popular culture to criticize various social and political problems that occur in society.

Representation of Social and Political Criticism through Visual Media

The results of the study show that social and political criticism in @freakind.media uploads is conveyed through a combination of visual elements and text that complement each other. The use of cartoon characters, public figures,

cultural symbols, and popular objects is an effective communication strategy to convey critical messages to social media audiences.

These findings show that visual media not only function as a means of entertainment but also as a medium of political communication that is able to build critical public awareness. Through satirical and provocative visuals, the @freakind.media account tries to invite the audience to question the social reality that has been considered normal or taken for granted.

This is in line with Barthes' view that visual signs are never neutral. Each image, symbol, color, or text contains a meaning shaped by a specific social and cultural context. Therefore, the content produced by @freakind.media can be understood as a form of representation of social reality that has been constructed to convey criticism of various phenomena that occur in society.

The Meaning of Denotations, Connotations, and Myths in @freakind.media Content

Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis shows that all uploads studied have three layers of meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotation level, content displays visual objects that can be observed directly, such as political figures, state officials, vehicles, and cartoon characters. However, the real meaning doesn't stop at that level. At the level of connotation, these objects acquire new meanings through the process of symbolization. For example, the peci worn by Donald Trump no longer only serves as a head covering, but also as a symbol that connects the political issues of the United States with the Indonesian political experience. Likewise, the use of Denis, Mermaid Man, Barnacle Boy, and the red horn symbol gives additional meaning in the form of satire against certain figures or institutions.

Meanwhile, at the mythical level, there are efforts to dismantle the various dominant narratives that develop in society. The myth of a leader who is always on the side of the people, an apparatus that is synonymous with justice, or a national project that is considered a symbol of the nation's progress, is questioned again through the visual representation presented. Thus, the @freakind.media account not only conveys criticism of certain events, but also of the ideology and social system behind them.

This finding is in accordance with Barthes' concept, which states that myth is a second-level system of meaning that functions to legitimize certain values, ideologies, and interests in social life. Through the satirical visuals produced, the @freakind.media account seeks to deconstruct these myths so that they are no longer accepted as something natural.

Alternative Media as a Space of Resistance to Dominant Narratives

Based on the results of the research, @freakind.media accounts can be understood as a form of alternative media that presents a different narrative from mainstream media. The various uploads analyzed showed a tendency to raise issues related to abuse of power, legal injustice, violence against vulnerable groups, and public policy failures.

Through a freer communication style, this account conveys criticism in a language that is close to the younger generation, namely using memes, humor, irony, and popular culture. The strategy allows complex political messages to be more easily understood and accepted by social media audiences.

From the perspective of a critical paradigm, these findings suggest that social media can be an arena of symbolic resistance to power domination. Criticism conveyed through satirical visuals is a form of resistance to the official narrative that is often built by state institutions and conventional media. In other words, the @freakind.media account not only produces entertainment content but also performs a social function as a space for public criticism.

Criticism of Power and Political Accountability

The most dominant theme in the research results was criticism of political power and accountability of public officials. Several uploads directly highlight the issue of power extension, dynastic politics, political imagery, and the weak responsibility of officials for public problems. The use of satirical symbols such as Donald Trump with a peci, Gibran, who is compared to Grok AI, and Prabowo, who is visualized as Denis' character, shows that there is an attempt to collapse the ideal image that has been attached to the leader figure. The visual builds a narrative that power should not be seen as something sacred and immune to criticism. In the context of democracy, this kind of criticism has an important function because it can encourage the public to more actively supervise and evaluate the performance of leaders. The findings of the study show that the @freakind.media account uses visual media as a social control tool that highlights various issues that are considered to have escaped the public's attention.

Criticism of State Institutions and Law Enforcement

In addition to criticism of political actors, this study also found criticism directed at state institutions, especially the police and military. The upload about the murder case of a Banjarbaru journalist and a police member who still receives a salary despite being a suspect shows how the @freakind.media account questions the integrity and accountability of law enforcement institutions. The use of the symbol of the dog and the red horn is a form of visual expression that shows public anger at the injustice felt by the community. These symbols show that criticism is not only directed at individual perpetrators, but also at systems that are considered to allow impunity to occur. These findings show that social media has become a space for people to express dissatisfaction with state institutions. In conditions when public trust in institutions is declining, alternative media such as @freakind.media are present as channels to voice criticism and build public opinion.

Satire and Humor as Critical Communication Strategies

One of the main characteristics of @freakind.media's uploads is the use of satire and humor as communication strategies. Almost all of the uploads analyzed used elements of comedy, irony, and parody to convey a message that was actually serious.

The use of humor makes criticism easier to accept by the audience because it is not delivered directly and confrontationally. On the other hand, satire allows content creators to convey sharp criticism of figures, institutions, or policies without losing visual appeal.

These findings show that in the era of social media, political criticism is no longer conveyed through formal forms of communication, but through popular culture that is closer to people's daily lives. Thus, memes and satirical visuals can be understood as a form of contemporary political communication that is effective in building public critical awareness.

The Relevance of Findings to Critical Paradigms

The results of this study strengthen the assumption of the critical paradigm used as the basis of the research. The critical paradigm views that social reality is shaped by certain power and interest relations. Through its uploads, @freakind.media seeks to expose various forms of domination, inequality, and abuse of power that occur in social and political life.

The content analyzed shows that the meaning constructed is not only intended to inform about an event, but also invites the audience to question the power structure behind the event. Therefore, the social criticism featured in this account can be understood as a form of critical awareness of social reality that is considered unfair.

Overall, the results of the study show that the Instagram account @freakind.media utilizes visual media as an effective instrument of social and political criticism. Through symbolism, satire, humor, and popular culture, the account builds an alternative narrative that challenges various myths and dominant ideologies, while encouraging the formation of critical awareness among social media users.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the representation of social criticism in the visual content of the Instagram account @freakind.media using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Based on the results of the analysis of the eight uploads selected as the object of the research, it can be concluded that the @freakind.media account consistently uses visual media as a means to convey social and political criticism of various phenomena that occur in society.

Semiotic analysis shows that each upload contains three layers of meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotation level, the content features various public figures, popular cultural symbols, illustrations, and texts related to actual social and political issues. At the connotation level, these symbols are used to build a message of criticism through humor, satire, irony, and visual parody. Meanwhile, at the mythical level, these uploads reveal various ideologies and narratives that develop in society, as well as deconstruct myths about power, leadership, justice, nationalism, and the role of state institutions.

The findings of the study show that the representation of social criticism in the @freakind.media account focuses on several main issues, namely abuse of power,

dynastic politics, weak accountability of public officials, violence by state officials, legal injustice, and various policies that are considered not to be in favor of the community. The criticism is conveyed through visuals that are communicative and easy to understand by social media audiences, especially the younger generation, so that the message conveyed is not only informative but also persuasive.

In addition, this study shows that @freakind.media accounts act as alternative media that present a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse that develops in the mainstream media. Through the use of visual satire and popular cultural symbols, this account has succeeded in building a discussion space that encourages people to be more critical in understanding various social and political issues that occur in Indonesia.

Thus, it can be concluded that the representation of social criticism in the Instagram account @freakind.media is built through the use of visual signs that are full of meaning and ideology. Roland Barthes' semiotic approach has proven to be able to reveal the hidden meanings behind the visual content, so this study shows that social media not only functions as a means of entertainment and information dissemination, but also as an effective medium of social criticism in building public awareness and participation in the digital era.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aini, N., & Rahmawati, D. (2022). Representation of social criticism in political memes on Instagram. *Journal of Digital Communication*, 5(2), 115–128.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies* (A. Lavers, Trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana Press.
- Castells, M. (2013). *Communication Power* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- DataReportal. (2024). *Digital 2024: Indonesia*. Retrieved from <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-indonesia>
- Fitriani, R. (2020). Digital memes as a medium of social criticism in the era of digital communication. *Indonesian Journal of Communication Sciences*, 8(1), 45–58.
- Gumilar, A. (2021). Instagram as an alternative space for the formation of public opinion and social criticism. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 4(2), 89–103.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68.
- Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in Digital Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Sugiyono. (2023). *Qualitative Research Methods*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Moleong, L. J. (2021). *Qualitative Research Methodology (Revised Edition)*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Kriyantono, R. (2020). *Practical Techniques of Communication Research: Accompanied by practical examples of Media Research, Public Relations, Advertising, Organizational Communication, Marketing Communication*. Jakarta: Kencana.