

Social Criticism and Existential Meaning in the Song Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa? by Hindia

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ABSTRACT

Songs often serve as a medium of communication that conveys social criticism and existential reflection on contemporary society. This study aims to reveal the existential meaning and form of social critique in the lyrics of Hindia's song "Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?" using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method emphasizing the process of semiosis among the representamen, object, and interpretant within each verse. Data were obtained through textual analysis and observation of the song's social context. The findings show that the song contains signs representing emotional exhaustion, identity confusion, and critique of the productivity culture that pressures young generations. Through Peirce's triadic relation, the meaning formed is not merely an individual complaint but an existential awareness of modern life's absurdity. In conclusion, "Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?" functions as a cultural text voicing self-reflection and resistance against capitalist values. This study extends semiotic research in music by highlighting the existential dimension as part of contemporary social criticism.

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INTRODUCTION

Music, particularly song lyrics, plays an important role as a medium that both reflects and expresses social and personal anxieties in the modern era. In Indonesia, Hindia occupies a unique position as a musician whose works consistently portray the unease of the younger generation in an honest and relevant manner. One of his most prominent works, "*Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?*"; serves as a strong representation of the phenomenon of existential crisis, psychological exhaustion, and cynical attitudes toward contemporary work culture. The popularity of this song indicates a collective need to articulate such feelings, thus positioning it as a cultural artifact worthy of academic study.

The appeal of the song's lyrics lies not only in their thematic relevance but also in the way Hindia constructs messages through poetic and communicative language structures. A sequence of words that appears simple actually contains a complex and multilayered system of signs, designed to evoke particular emotional and intellectual responses from listeners.

Therefore, the main research questions emerge as follows: how meanings of emptiness and social criticism are constructed in the lyrics of this song, and what communication strategies are employed by Hindia to convey his message effectively. A literal analytical approach is insufficient to fully explain these dynamics of meaning.

To uncover the layers of meaning and communicative mechanisms embedded in the lyrics, this study adopts a qualitative approach using Peircean semiotics as its analytical framework. The triadic model consisting of representamen, object, and interpretant is used as the primary analytical tool to understand the system of signs that shapes the overall meaning of the song. This study focuses on revealing denotative and connotative meanings that represent existential crisis, as well as analyzing Hindia's communication strategies through the classification of signs into icons, indexes, and symbols. Thus, this research is expected to explain how the lyrics of "*Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?*" construct a message that is strong, relevant, and meaningful for its listeners.

The results of this analysis show that the meanings constructed in Hindia's song "*Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?*" do not stand alone, but resonate with several findings from previous studies on the social function of popular music. These findings are in line with the view that music can function as a medium of emotional communication between artists and listeners. In Hindia's context, this communication expands into a form of social dialogue that generates reflective awareness of modern life phenomena (Cahya and Sukendro, 2022).

From a semiotic perspective, this study also reinforces the view that music not only conveys a message but also carries a mission, where the mission itself represents the delivery of information to society about surrounding events that need to be recognized by listeners. Therefore, music is often used as a tool of resistance, revealing social realities and injustice (Moses, 2022). If in the song "*Realita*" the connotative meaning is related to criticism of the realities of young people's romantic relationships today, then in Hindia's song this meaning shifts toward existential reflection on productivity pressure and the search for life's meaning. The process of semiosis that occurs shows how representamina such as "tired" or "empty" transform into interpretants in the form of awareness of the absurdity of everyday life.

On the other hand, the results of this study differ from the focus of Harnia's research, which emphasizes meanings of love and personal relationships. In her study, Harnia explains that the denotative meaning of the song lyrics "*Tak Sekedar Cinta*" is the strength of love that the songwriter hopes to receive from their partner. Meanwhile, the connotative meaning contained in the lyrics reflects the songwriter's desire for their partner to maintain love through loyalty (Harnia et al., 2021). Similarly, Ratnadhita's research shows the depiction of love in the song "*Kupu Kupu Cinta*" as a force that affects the body, such as a rapid heartbeat, while providing emotional strength and sincerity without the need for many words. Through symbols such as blushing cheeks, a pounding heart, and speaking butterflies, the song conveys the message that true love is not only felt through words but also through deep feelings and real actions (Ratnadhita et al., 2025).

In contrast to these three studies, the present research positions music as a space for social criticism that voices the exhaustion and alienation of the younger generation toward social systems that demand continuous productivity. Thus, this study expands the dimension

of music semiotics from romantic or cultural interpretations toward existential and reflective meanings.

This emphasis on the existential dimension also intersects with the findings of Nirmala Risman's research on identity crisis in the song "*What Was I Made For?*" by Billie Eilish. The lyrics of Billie Eilish's song "*What Was I Made For?*" address existential questions related to life choices, where the repeatedly sung line "what was I made for?" illustrates deep instability regarding one's purpose in the world and the meaning of life. This reflects an identity crisis, in which Billie previously experienced an idealized and vibrant life but later realized that it was not real, as her traits had been shaped by external influences from society (Putri, 2025). This similarity indicates that the phenomenon raised by Hindia through his song lyrics is not merely a local issue, but also part of a global narrative of existential exhaustion in the modern era.

By relating the results of this study to various previous works, it can be concluded that popular music has a dual function: as a means of personal expression and as a space for critique of social structures. This affirms that Peircean semiotic analysis is not only capable of reading signs linguistically, but also of opening broader insights into the process of social meaning production within contemporary Indonesian music.

METHODS

This study is grounded in semiotic theory, which examines signs, how they function, and the processes through which meaning is generated from interactions among signs. In the context of song lyric analysis, semiotics serves as an effective approach for uncovering implicit meanings behind seemingly simple word arrangements. Song lyrics do not function merely as literal texts, but as complex systems of signs in which each element has the potential to produce both denotative and connotative meanings. Through a semiotic approach, researchers can explore the messages and ideologies embedded in musical works, including how meaning is constructed, communicated, and interpreted by listeners.

The semiotic model employed in this study is based on the triadic framework proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce. According to Peirce, a sign emerges from a dynamic relationship among three core components: the representamen, the object, and the interpretant. The representamen refers to the physical form of the sign, such as words or phrases in song lyrics. The object denotes the reality or concept to which the sign refers, while the interpretant represents the meaning or effect produced in the mind of the interpreter through engagement with the sign (Ersyad, 2021). This framework enables researchers to understand how meaning is actively constructed through the interaction between text, reality, and audience perception. The relationship among the representamen, object, and interpretant can be visualized as illustrated in Figure 1.

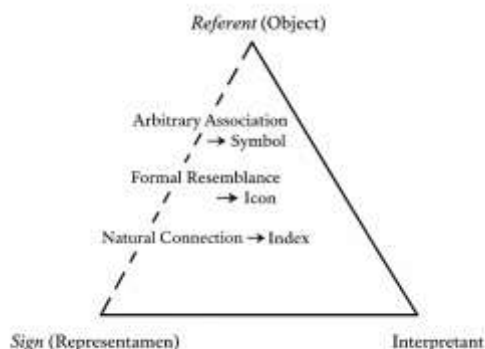


Figure 1. Charles Sanders Peirce’s Triadic Model

Illustrates the relationship between the representamen, object, and interpretant in the process of meaning formation (semiosis).

In the context of the song “Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?”, the representamen can be identified through the use of diction and poetic phrases that are characteristic of Hindia’s lyrical style. The object represented in the lyrics encompasses abstract ideas such as existential crises, social pressure, and the search for meaning in life, which are often perceived as futile. Through the relationship between these two elements, an interpretant emerges in the form of understanding, reflection, and emotional experiences perceived by the listener. Consequently, the meaning of the song is not singular but is constructed through an active and subjective interpretive process. To clarify the function and relationships among the three core elements in Peirce’s semiotic model, Table 1 presents a summary of the conceptual descriptions of each element along with examples drawn from the lyrics of “Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?”

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of Song Lyrics Based on Peirce’s Triadic Model

Element	Academic Description	Examples from Song Lyrics
Representamen	The observable form of a sign, such as words, phrases, sounds, or images, that directs the interpreter’s attention to something beyond itself.	The diction “ <i>tired,</i> ” “ <i>empty,</i> ” and “ <i>for validation,</i> ” which depict the emotional and social conditions of the lyrical persona.
Object	The reality, idea, or experience referred to by the sign. The object serves as the source of meaning indicated by the representamen.	Social pressure, productivity culture, and existential emptiness in modern life.
Interpretant	The meaning or mental effect formed in the interpreter’s mind when relating the representamen to its object.	Listeners interpret the song as a social critique and an existential reflection on urban life.

In addition, Peirce classifies signs into three main types: icon, index, and symbol. These three categories form the analytical basis for examining Hindia’s communication strategies. A symbol is a sign whose meaning relies on social and cultural conventions, such as words

used in language. An index refers to a sign that has a causal or factual relationship with its object, for example expressions that indicate particular emotions or conditions. An icon, on the other hand, represents its object through resemblance, such as metaphors or imagery that create visual and emotional associations. By analyzing these three types of signs, this study seeks to reveal how Hindia's song lyrics employ language and imagery to convey social and emotional messages effectively.

Peirce's semiotic analysis is closely related to the study of communication strategies. The choice of diction, figurative language, and lyrical structure constitutes a deliberate communicative strategy designed to elicit specific effects on listeners. Through Peirce's framework, this study examines how Hindia consciously constructs a system of signs capable of evoking emotional responses, empathy, and critical reflection on modern life. Thus, the semiotic approach adopted in this research does not merely focus on the linguistic meaning of the lyrics, but also on how meaning is constructed and interpreted within the context of popular music communication.

The Peircean semiotic approach has also been widely applied in studies of Indonesian popular music texts. Rohmah, through an analysis of Islamic communication messages in the song "*Ruang Rindu*," demonstrates representations of the search for meaning in life, feelings of loss, and hope for certainty within spiritual relationships. The lyrics of "*Ruang Rindu*" portray longing and a profound search for meaning in a spiritual relationship with God, depicting an individual's journey toward inner peace and closeness to the Creator amid doubt and silence (Rohmah, 2025).

Meanwhile, Gerung et al. examined the lyrics of "*Darah Juang dan Pembebasan*" and found that student resistance is interpreted as a form of resistance carried out by intellectual groups, a theme that is represented throughout the song's lyrics (Gerung et al., 2023). The findings of these studies reinforce the view that Peirce's semiotic theory is highly relevant for analyzing song lyrics as cultural texts rich in social and moral meanings. In the context of this study, Peirce's triadic model is employed to trace the process of existential meaning construction in the lyrics of "*Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?*" by Hindia, which reflect the inner struggles of young people facing productivity pressures and the search for meaning in life.

Data Sources and Data Collection Techniques

This study uses primary data in the form of the song lyrics "*Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?*" performed by Hindia and included in the album *Menari dengan Bayangan*, released in 2019. The lyrics were obtained from official digital platforms such as Spotify and Hindia's official YouTube channel to ensure textual authenticity and accuracy. The use of official sources was intended to maintain data validity and to avoid misinterpretation caused by textual variations from unverified internet sources.

Data collection was conducted through documentation and transcription techniques. The researcher repeatedly listened to the song to manually transcribe each line of the lyrics, followed by cross-verification with texts available on official platforms and credible lyric websites such as Genius.com. This source triangulation process was carried out to ensure data reliability and to prevent discrepancies between the text and the meanings analyzed. The validated transcription then served as the primary corpus for the semiotic analysis.

The unit of analysis includes words, phrases, clauses, and sentences across the entire song lyrics. As this study aims to achieve a holistic understanding of meaning, no sampling technique was applied. The entire text was analyzed to identify meanings and communication strategies embedded within it. Each segment of the lyrics was systematically coded to ensure that all sign elements were adequately addressed in the analytical process using Peirce's framework.

Charles Sanders Peirce's Semiotic Analysis Approach

This study adopts a qualitative interpretative approach by applying Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotic model. The analysis was conducted through an in-depth reading of the entire song lyrics to identify the relationships among the representamen (linguistic signs), object (referential meaning), and interpretant (audience interpretation). This approach enables the researcher to move beyond literal meanings and uncover connotative and ideological layers underlying the linguistic structure.

The analytical stages began with the coding of words or phrases that held thematic relevance. Each element was identified as a representamen and then linked to its referential object, such as concepts of emptiness, social pressure, or critiques of productivity culture. From these relationships, the researcher interpreted possible interpretants, including feelings of anxiety, empathy, or self-reflection experienced by listeners. This analysis helps map how lyrics function as a communication medium that stimulates both emotional and intellectual responses.

After completing the triadic mapping, the next step involved classifying signs into Peirce's three categories: icon, index, and symbol. Symbols were analyzed through word choices that reflect cultural conventions. Indices were identified in phrases indicating cause-and-effect relationships, such as the link between routine and exhaustion. Icons were found through the use of metaphors and poetic imagery that resemble real-life experiences. Through this analysis, the study seeks to uncover Hindia's communication strategies in constructing meaning and stimulating reflective responses among audiences.

Interpretation and Data Synthesis Process

The final stage of analysis involved developing an interpretative synthesis that integrated the results of triadic mapping and sign classification. Data from each stage were comprehensively analyzed to identify key themes, such as critiques of productivity culture, existential fatigue, and the search for meaning in life. This synthesis aimed to formulate a holistic meaning that not only explains the lyrical content but also interprets the worldview and ideology embedded within it.

Subsequently, the analytical findings were situated within a contemporary socio-cultural context. This step was undertaken to understand how the themes in "*Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?*" resonate with the realities faced by younger generations under the pressures of modern life. Through a social hermeneutic approach, this study positions song lyrics as reflections of broader social conditions and as a medium of critical communication capable of influencing audience awareness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identification of Representamen and Object in the Lyrics of “Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?”

The results of the semiotic analysis of the lyrics of “Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?” reveal several key representamens that play an important role in constructing the overall meaning. Opening phrases such as “Bangun pagi, hadapi dunia lagi” and the repeated title “Untuk apa?” function as primary signs (representamens) that depict modern life routines. The objects of these signs are the realities of everyday life that are mechanical, repetitive, and lacking in personal meaning. Through simple diction, Hindia successfully projects the psychological condition of urban society experiencing boredom and a loss of direction in daily routines, making this experience universal for many listeners.

In addition to portraying routine, the analysis also identifies representamens that refer to social and professional pressure, such as the diction “demi validasi,” “gengsi,” and “cicilan.” These signs represent a socio-economic system that demands individuals to remain productive in pursuit of recognition and financial stability. The objects referred to are not merely economic phenomena, but social structures that pressure individuals to continuously compete and seek external legitimacy. Thus, Hindia does not merely depict reality, but also presents a critique of work culture that tends to be materialistic and mentally exhausting.

The analysis further identifies representamens that signify the narrator’s emotional condition through words such as “hampa,” “lelah,” and “kosong.” These signs refer to objects in the form of psychological exhaustion or burnout that arises from life pressures and the loss of existential meaning. The relationship between the form of the sign and emotional reality demonstrates a direct connection between productivity-oriented modern life and its psychological impact. These lyrics create a deeply introspective impression, emphasizing the human dimension behind the structural pressures experienced by the narrator.

More philosophically, the rhetorical question “Untuk apa?” becomes the central representamen in the overall lyrical structure. This sign does not only question routine or economic pressure, but also represents a more fundamental search for the meaning of life. The object of this sign is existential reflection on the purpose of human existence amid the absurdity of modern life. Through the repetition of this question, Hindia invites listeners to interpret for themselves the meaning of activities and achievements that have long been considered important, making the song rich in philosophical and contemplative dimensions.

Analysis of Interpretant: Meaning-Making of Existential Crisis and Social Pressure

The relationship between representamen and object in the song lyrics produces various interpretants that reflect listeners’ interpretations of existential issues. The phrase “bangun pagi, hadapi dunia lagi,” which depicts a meaningless routine, generates interpretants in the form of boredom, despair, and deep questioning of life direction. Listeners do not merely understand the meaning literally, but also feel the emotional fatigue conveyed. The lyric becomes a mirror of the listeners’ own existential experiences, creating a strong and personal reflective effect.

Words such as “demi validasi” and “gengsi” generate interpretants in the form of critical awareness and feelings of alienation from a social system that prioritizes external recognition. Through these signs, listeners realize that they, like the narrator, may also be trapped in social

mechanisms that force individuals to seek legitimacy from others' judgments. The resulting interpretant is not only empathy, but also cynicism toward work culture and competitive lifestyles that sacrifice mental health for social image.

Furthermore, the use of emotional representaments such as "lelah" and "hampa" creates interpretants in the form of empathy and emotional connection. Listeners are able to feel the same exhaustion because such experiences are universal within modern society. The lyrics build emotional solidarity among listeners who experience similar pressures, transforming the song from merely an artistic work into a shared reflective space for young generations to express their collective fatigue.

The peak interpretant of the entire sign structure in this song is the impulse toward introspection. Through the repetition of the question "Untuk apa?", Hindia deliberately provokes listeners to rethink their life purposes and the meaning of productivity they pursue. The song does not provide definite answers, but instead allows listeners to interpret meanings relevant to their own life contexts. Thus, the communication strategy is participatory, encouraging audiences to engage cognitively and emotionally in the process of meaning seeking.

Communication Strategies through Symbols, Indexes, and Icons

The analysis shows that Hindia strategically employs all three types of signs within Peircean semiotics, symbols, indexes, and icons, to convey his message. The most dominant type of sign is the symbol, as seen in the use of diction such as "gengsi," "cicilan," and "validasi." These signs are conventional and socially understood as representations of modern life pressures. Through these symbols, Hindia communicates criticism of materialistic culture and social demands in a way that is easily recognized by listeners, allowing complex messages to be delivered through familiar language.

In addition to symbols, Hindia also utilizes indexes to demonstrate cause-and-effect relationships between social situations and emotional conditions. Phrases such as "bangun pagi, hadapi dunia lagi" function as indexes indicating relentless routine, while words such as "lelah" and "kosong" indicate the consequences of social and professional pressure. These indexes strengthen realism in the lyrics, creating an authentic impression that the narrator's feelings reflect real experiences of modern individuals. In this way, Hindia constructs a narrative that is not only descriptive, but also representative of social reality.

The use of icons appears in the form of metaphors and poetic imagery that add depth to the song's meaning. Life depicted as a mechanical routine resembling a soulless machine serves as an icon representing dehumanization within modern social systems. Through icons, abstract concepts such as emptiness and alienation become more concrete and easier for listeners to visualize. This strategy enriches the aesthetic experience while reinforcing the philosophical message of the song.

The synergy between symbols, indexes, and icons creates complex and mutually reinforcing layers of meaning. Symbols provide the social framework, indexes indicate tangible emotional relationships, and icons deepen understanding through imaginative imagery. Their combination makes Hindia's communication strategy effective in conveying

multidimensional messages that simultaneously engage listeners' rationality, emotions, and imagination.

Synthesis of Holistic Meaning: Critique of Productivity Culture and the Search for Life Meaning

Based on the triadic analysis and classification of signs, the holistic meaning of "Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?" can be understood as a critique of the productivity culture that dominates modern life. The interaction between symbols such as "cicilan" and "gengsi," indexes depicting exhaustion such as "lelah" and "hampa," and icons portraying mechanical routines collectively forms a narrative about cycles of purposeless work. The song rejects the notion that productivity and busyness are synonymous with success or happiness, instead revealing the irony behind systems that demand continuous work devoid of personal meaning.

Moreover, the meanings contained in the lyrics also function as a critique of capitalist economic systems that trap individuals in cycles of consumption and social validation. The diction "gengsi" and "cicilan" symbolizes dependence on materialistic values that lead to alienation from the self. Hindia's communication strategy successfully highlights the irony that financial achievement and social recognition do not necessarily correlate with inner fulfillment. Thus, the song exposes the paradox between external success and internal emptiness.

At a philosophical level, the song raises fundamental questions about the essence of human life. The repeated phrase "Untuk apa?" becomes a symbol of the existential crisis faced by younger generations, challenging conventional concepts of success and happiness. The song does not attempt to provide definitive answers, but instead opens space for personal reflection, allowing each listener to discover their own life meaning. In this way, the work functions not only as social critique, but also as a meditative medium for self-discovery amid modern cultural pressures.

Socially, the song reflects the collective psychological condition of younger generations experiencing mental fatigue and cynicism toward hustle culture. The themes raised by Hindia strongly resonate with audiences because they are rooted in real everyday experiences. The communication strategy that combines culturally relevant symbols with authentic emotional indexes successfully creates a sense of closeness and emotional validation. The song not only criticizes social systems, but also offers an empathetic space for listeners to recognize that their anxieties are part of a shared experience.

Effectiveness of Communication Strategies in Evoking Audience Reflection

The effectiveness of Hindia's communication strategy is evident in its success in stimulating personal reflection among audiences through a non-dogmatic rhetorical approach. The rhetorical question "Untuk apa?" functions as an introspective catalyst that compels listeners to contemplate the meaning of their own activities. The repetition of this question creates a mantra-like effect that disturbs consciousness, transforming the act of listening into an internal dialogue between listeners and themselves. This strategy positions audiences not as passive recipients of messages, but as active subjects in the process of meaning construction.

Furthermore, communication effectiveness is also seen in the use of symbols closely tied to the everyday realities of younger generations, such as "validasi," "gengsi," and "cicilan."

These symbols create strong contextual connections because they represent real pressures faced by listeners. In this way, Hindia successfully delivers social criticism without appearing didactic. The song does not blame individuals, but instead invites audiences to understand that feelings of exhaustion and entrapment within social systems are human conditions worthy of awareness and reflection.

Another strength of Hindia's communication strategy lies in his ability to employ emotional indexical signs to emphasize the relationship between causes (social pressure) and effects (emotional emptiness). This creates deep empathy and emotional attachment between the narrator and the audience. Listeners feel understood and validated because their experiences are portrayed honestly and realistically. This strategy reinforces Hindia's presence as a cultural communicator who conveys social messages through empathy rather than moralization.

The peak effectiveness of Hindia's communication lies in the non-prescriptive nature of his lyrics. Instead of offering solutions or advice, he presents open-ended questions that stimulate critical reflection. This approach grants listeners the freedom to interpret and discover meanings according to their own life contexts. Consequently, the song functions not only as social critique, but also as an existential dialogue space that empowers audiences to think, feel, and understand themselves more deeply.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the song *Untuk Apa/Untuk Apa?* by Hindia functions as a powerful medium of social criticism and existential reflection within contemporary popular music. Through a semiotic analysis grounded in Peircean theory, the lyrics are shown to construct meaning through interconnected signs that represent routine life, social pressure, and emotional exhaustion. These signs do not operate in isolation, but interact to form a coherent narrative that questions dominant values surrounding productivity, success, and social validation in modern society. The findings demonstrate that Hindia strategically employs symbols, indexes, and icons to communicate complex ideas in an accessible and emotionally resonant manner. Symbols related to social status and economic obligation reflect shared cultural experiences, while indexical signs reveal the emotional consequences of living under constant pressure. Iconic imagery further deepens meaning by translating abstract existential concerns into concrete and relatable representations. Together, these elements enable the song to articulate collective feelings of fatigue, alienation, and uncertainty experienced by many young people. Beyond individual expression, the song creates a reflective space that invites listeners to engage in introspection and reinterpret their own life purposes. Rather than offering prescriptive solutions, the lyrics encourage personal meaning making through open-ended questioning. This approach positions the song as both an artistic expression and a form of cultural dialogue that resonates with broader social realities. Overall, the study affirms the relevance of semiotic analysis in revealing how popular music functions as a site of social critique and existential inquiry in contemporary Indonesian culture.

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