

THE CONSTRUCTION OF POLITICAL SATIRE ON THE UNITED STATES–IRAN CONFLICT IN TIKTOK VIDEO CONTENT

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Abstract

The escalation of the geopolitical conflict between the United States and Iran has contributed to global economic instability, including rising inflation and increases in the prices of essential commodities in Indonesia. In response to these pressures, members of the public have increasingly used TikTok to express their concerns through political satire. This study aims to analyze political satire narratives on TikTok concerning the impact of the United States–Iran conflict on Indonesia. Employing a qualitative approach based on Rodney H. Jones’s Digital Discourse Analysis framework, this study examines textual elements, context, actions and interactions, as well as ideology and power embedded in digital content. The findings indicate that content creators employ humor and multimodal texts to simplify complex geopolitical issues into an accessible form of politainment. Participatory audience interactions contribute to the formation of collaborative discourse, in which satirical content ideologically functions as a form of social catharsis and a psychological defense mechanism for the public amid economic pressures, while simultaneously serving as an indirect form of criticism. The study further demonstrates that social media transforms elite-oriented representations of geopolitical issues into a collaborative form of popular culture that supports collective psychological resilience in digital spaces.

Keywords: Digital Discourse, Political Satire, Politainment, TikTok

INTRODUCTION

Global geopolitical developments in early 2026 were marked by escalating tensions between the United States and Iran. The conflict reached its peak in February 2026 following the failure of diplomatic negotiations over Iran's nuclear program, which had exceeded internationally accepted security thresholds (Sartika, 2026). This geopolitical escalation significantly affected Indonesia's economy, leading to rising prices of fuel, raw materials, and other essential commodities. In response to these economic pressures, Indonesian citizens increasingly turned to TikTok as a platform for expressing their concerns through political satire. As one of the fastest-growing communication and publication platforms in the digital era, social media offers unrestricted access across time and space, enabling users to communicate and share information more conveniently. Consequently, social media has become an integral part of everyday life. In Indonesia, the most widely used platforms include YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Alma Damayanti et al., 2022).

The rapid development of social media has fundamentally transformed the way people access information and express their perspectives on various issues, including politics and international affairs. TikTok has evolved beyond an entertainment platform into a public discussion space where users communicate opinions through diverse forms

of creative content. Its distinctive features, including short-form videos, trending audio, and an algorithm capable of rapidly disseminating content, have established TikTok as a powerful medium for shaping public discourse in digital spaces (Barbara & Achmad, 2025). One of the most widely discussed topics on TikTok during early 2026 concerned the impact of the United States–Iran conflict on Indonesian society. The conflict was frequently associated with various economic challenges experienced by the public, including increases in fuel prices, plastic products, and basic necessities. As a result, many TikTok creators addressed these issues through humor, parody, and political satire, making complex geopolitical issues more accessible and engaging for audiences (Putri et al., 2022).

This phenomenon demonstrates that humor on social media serves purposes beyond entertainment. Beneath its comedic elements, humorous content often conveys implicit social and political criticism. Satire has emerged as one of the most effective forms of communication because it enables criticism to be delivered indirectly without employing confrontational language (Luthfiyyah et al., 2025). Satirical content therefore functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium through which the public expresses concerns about ongoing social and political conditions.

The presentation of political issues through entertainment formats reflects the emergence of politainment, a phenomenon that integrates politics with entertainment within digital media. This approach makes political issues more relatable to the general public by presenting them through accessible language, popular trends, and visually appealing content. Consequently, users are no longer merely passive recipients of information but actively participate in constructing meaning through comments, likes, shares, and the creation of similar content (Kulau, 2024).

This study specifically examines how political satire narratives are constructed through digital communication practices on TikTok, particularly in the context of international geopolitical issues. Accordingly, this research aims to analyze political satire narratives in TikTok content discussing the impact of the United States–Iran conflict on Indonesia by employing Rodney H. Jones's Digital Discourse Analysis framework. This analytical approach facilitates an understanding of how textual elements, context, actions and interactions, as well as ideology and power collectively shape meaning within digital environments. The findings are expected to contribute to the advancement of digital communication studies, particularly in understanding political satire as a form of public expression in responding to global issues through social media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Satire

Political satire is a form of criticism directed at public figures, government policies, or political situations through the use of humor, irony, and sarcasm. This form of communication enables criticism to be conveyed in a lighter yet meaningful manner while maintaining its critical substance (Putri et al., 2022). Through political satire, individuals are able to highlight political issues without expressing criticism in a direct or confrontational way. Political satire can be found in various forms of media, including memes, cartoons, comedy videos, songs, and social media posts (Simatupang & Sukendro, 2025). It is typically communicated indirectly by employing humorous or exaggerated language to express dissatisfaction with public policies or the behavior of government officials (Shuyen et al., 2024). Consequently, political satire plays an important role as a medium for freedom

of expression and social criticism. It encourages individuals to voice their opinions, foster critical thinking, and stimulate public discussion on societal issues. Nevertheless, satire should be employed responsibly to avoid becoming defamatory or generating public misunderstanding (Fanani, 2025).

Politainment

Politainment is a combination of the terms politics and entertainment, referring to a form of political communication presented through entertainment-oriented formats, thereby blurring the boundaries between politics and popular entertainment (Pratiwi, 2024). The integration of politics and entertainment can be understood from two perspectives. First, political entertainment refers to the incorporation of political issues into entertainment programs by the entertainment industry. Second, entertainment politics describes how political figures utilize their popularity or collaborate with celebrities and social media influencers through entertainment programs across mainstream and digital media as part of their political marketing strategies to strengthen public support (Satriawan et al., 2024). As a communication strategy, politainment has become increasingly prevalent in media representations of political issues. Rather than focusing on in-depth policy discussions, it emphasizes personal narratives, emotional engagement, and visually appealing presentations, making political issues more accessible and attractive to broader audiences (Cahyani, 2026).

Digital Discourse Analysis

Digital Discourse Analysis originated from studies of everyday interaction as a methodological approach to examining communication. Initially, it focused on spoken interactions conducted face-to-face or via telephone before expanding to encompass various forms of digitally mediated communication through online platforms and instant messaging applications (Rohmawati et al., 2024). According to Rodney H. Jones, Digital Discourse Analysis is an analytical approach used to understand how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and shaped by digital technologies within online interactions (Jones, 2020).

Rodney H. Jones proposes four principal dimensions for analyzing political satire narratives concerning the impact of the United States–Iran conflict on TikTok. These dimensions serve as the analytical framework adopted in this study.

1. Text

The textual dimension focuses on linguistic choices, writing style, sentence structure, symbols, emojis, images, and other visual elements appearing within digital media. These elements communicate meaning not only through language but also through the manner in which messages are designed and presented. Accordingly, the textual dimension facilitates an understanding of the intended message, the organization of discourse, and the meanings generated for audiences and social media users (Wicaksono, 2023).

2. Context

According to Rodney H. Jones, the contextual dimension emphasizes that meaning in digital discourse cannot be interpreted solely through textual content. Instead, it must be understood by considering the surrounding circumstances, including the time and place of communication, the digital platform employed, and the broader sociocultural background. This dimension encompasses when and where a message is produced, who

creates and receives it, and the social conditions influencing its interpretation. Within digital environments, users' cultural practices and communication habits also shape meaning, allowing identical posts or comments to generate different interpretations across different communities (Nabila, 2025).

3. Actions and Interactions

The dimension of actions and interactions explains that digital discourse consists not only of textual communication but also of the actions performed by users and the interactions established among them within digital spaces. User actions include creating posts, commenting, liking, sharing, or providing other forms of responses intended to inform, challenge, support, or encourage participation. Meanwhile, interaction refers to the ways users respond to one another, develop conversations, and establish social relationships through digital media. Consequently, this dimension highlights that digital messages represent not merely textual expressions but also components of broader social activities involving multiple participants (Jones et al., 2015).

4. Ideology and Power

The ideology and power dimension argues that digital discourse is never entirely neutral. Behind seemingly ordinary messages often lie particular values, interests, and forms of influence. This dimension examines which actors possess the greatest influence within digital conversations, whose voices become dominant, and how digital messages shape public perceptions of social and political issues. Furthermore, it explores how digital media can be utilized to maintain, challenge, or disseminate specific forms of ideology and power. Through this perspective, posts, comments, and other forms of digital content are understood not merely as information but also as instruments capable of influencing public opinion (Khasanah & Febriyanti, 2026).

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm to examine how meanings and social realities are constructed by social media users through digital content. A qualitative approach was employed because the study seeks to explore political satire discourse in digital media in depth by examining the relationships among text, discursive practices, and the broader sociocultural context (Hamdan, 2019). The primary analytical method used is Digital Discourse Analysis, developed by Rodney H. Jones. This approach was selected because of its comprehensive ability to examine digital discourse not merely as written text but as a form of social practice mediated by digital technologies.

The research data consist of five TikTok videos featuring political satire related to the impact of the 2026 United States–Iran conflict. The videos were selected using purposive sampling based on their level of virality, audience engagement (measured by the number of likes, shares, and comments), and the relevance of their critical content to Indonesia's economic conditions. Data were analyzed systematically by examining the selected content through the four multimodal dimensions proposed by Rodney H. Jones, namely **text, context, actions and interactions**, and **ideology and power**, which constitute the core analytical framework of Digital Discourse Analysis (Said Shalman Asswat & Dyva, 2026).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines political satire narratives in TikTok content addressing the impact of the United States–Iran conflict by employing Rodney H. Jones's Digital Discourse Analysis framework. This approach conceptualizes digital discourse as a form of social practice constructed through language use, communicative activities, and interactions among users within digital environments. To analyze the selected content, the study applies the four principal dimensions of Digital Discourse Analysis, namely text, context, actions and interactions, and ideology and power.

Textual Analysis



Figure 1. First TikTok Content from the @tokosembakoabifa Account

Source: TikTok @tokosembakoabifa, 2026

The first TikTok content posted by the account @tokosembakoabifa features an overlay text reading "THE SOLUTION TO RISING PLASTIC PRICES", displayed in uppercase letters at the beginning of the video. The overlay serves as the opening element of the content and is followed by visuals of a shopkeeper using discarded plastic bottles as an alternative to plastic bags for packaging customers' purchases. In addition to the overlay text, the video portrays the creator's relaxed facial expressions and the packaging process in a humorous manner. By drawing upon a topical issue that had attracted widespread public attention and transforming it into entertaining yet critical content, the video effectively employs political satire. This satirical presentation enhances audience engagement by combining humor with implicit social criticism, making the content highly effective within the social media environment.

Figure 2. TikTok Content from the @indobizworkinghours Account



The second TikTok content, posted by the account @indobizworkinghours, begins with the overlay text "Magic Spell for WNI", displayed against the backdrop of a fuel station. This is followed by the phrase "Expensive Petroleum," a wordplay derived from the spell Expelliarmus in the Harry Potter film series, accompanied by news footage reporting the increase in fuel prices. Furthermore, the caption

"PERTAMAX MAHAL" ("Expensive Pertamina") reinforces the central theme of the content by emphasizing the rising cost of fuel, which is associated with the impact of the United States–Iran conflict. The use of wordplay, references to popular culture, and humor constitutes the primary elements through which the satirical narrative is constructed, enabling the content to communicate implicit social and political criticism in an engaging and accessible manner.



Figure 3. Third TikTok Content from the @mangucuppppp Account

The third TikTok content, posted by the account @mangucuppppp, opens with the overlay text, "The Condition of Traders Today After Learning That Plastic Prices Have Increased Dramatically," immediately directing the audience's attention to the issue of rising plastic prices as a consequence of the United States–Iran conflict. This introductory text establishes the context by indicating that the video portrays the challenges faced by traders due to escalating raw material costs. The accompanying caption, "It's not just a price increase anymore it has a whole new price ☹️," employs hyperbole and irony to emphasize the severity of the increase in plastic prices. This choice of wording reinforces the humorous tone while simultaneously conveying implicit criticism of the deteriorating economic conditions that have increasingly burdened the public.

Visually, the video depicts a man wearing a green apron while holding a stack of plastic bags, displaying a confused and speechless expression. This visual representation symbolizes the shock and helplessness experienced by traders in coping with rising operational costs resulting from the sharp increase in plastic prices. Rather than portraying the United States–Iran conflict directly, the creator illustrates its consequences through situations that closely reflect the everyday experiences of ordinary people. The integration of overlay text, caption, and visual elements demonstrates how criticism is communicated through humor and irony, thereby constructing a political satire narrative. A serious economic issue is transformed into light-hearted entertainment, making it more accessible and relatable to TikTok users. These findings reflect the characteristics of politainment, in which political and economic issues are presented through entertainment-oriented content to capture audience attention. From the perspective of Rodney H. Jones's Digital Discourse Analysis, the textual and visual elements operate multimodally to construct meaning, while humor functions as a communicative strategy through which the creator conveys social criticism regarding the impact of geopolitical conflict on everyday life.



Figure 4. Fourth TikTok Content from the @huahahaha98 Account

The fourth content features an overlay text consisting of two parts. The first part lists several commodities that have become scarce, including plastic, cooking oil, and UHT milk, followed by the statement, "Turns out I'm even rarer there's only one of me in the world." This shift from discussing the scarcity of essential goods to self-deprecating humor creates the irony that forms the core of the satirical narrative. Through this wordplay, the creator implicitly criticizes the scarcity of goods and escalating prices without directing the criticism toward any specific individual or institution. The use of humor illustrates how serious economic issues are transformed into light-hearted and engaging content that is easily received by TikTok users (Sitohang, 2024).

Visually, the content depicts a man sitting in front of a laptop with a blank expression, appearing deep in thought. The juxtaposition of a serious facial expression with humorous textual elements reinforces the satirical message by portraying public anxiety over the scarcity of raw materials associated with the consequences of the



United States–Iran conflict. These findings demonstrate that meaning is constructed through the multimodal integration of textual and visual elements, enabling social criticism to be conveyed implicitly while maintaining its entertainment value, as conceptualized in Rodney H. Jones's Digital Discourse Analysis framework.

Figure 5. Fifth TikTok Content from the @adureceh Account

The fifth content adopts the "At Least" trend, which has gained popularity on TikTok as a medium for expressing political criticism through humor and satire. Each participant presents an argument beginning with the phrase "at least" to compare their situation with conditions perceived as more favorable. Statements such as "At least when the rupiah weakened, I didn't perform stand-up comedy at an official event," "At least I know that tofu and tempeh are still imported," and "At least when

"I make a blunder, I don't hire buzzers" satirize various economic and political issues, including the depreciation of the Indonesian rupiah, dependence on imported commodities, government slogans perceived as ineffective in addressing public concerns, and the use of political buzzers to shape public opinion. These criticisms are communicated through wordplay, irony, and humor, making them more accessible and acceptable to audiences. Consequently, the "At Least" trend functions not only as entertainment but also as an effective medium for constructing political satire narratives.

From a visual perspective, the content portrays a woman dressed in black whose mouth is sealed with adhesive tape and whose body is tied with rope after expressing criticism. The adhesive tape and rope symbolize the suppression of freedom of expression, while the final scene, in which another character is carried away after delivering criticism, employs hyperbole to create a comedic effect. The combination of dialogue, visual symbolism, and humor demonstrates how criticism of political conditions is packaged within a light-hearted entertainment format. This multimodal presentation reinforces the characteristics of politainment, in which serious political discourse is transformed into entertaining content while preserving its critical message. Viewed through Rodney H. Jones's Digital Discourse Analysis, the interaction between linguistic expressions, visual symbols, and cultural references collectively constructs meanings that encourage audiences to interpret political and economic realities through satire.

Contextual Analysis

The contextual analysis demonstrates that TikTok functions not only as an entertainment platform but also as a digital space where users produce, disseminate, and construct meanings regarding the impact of the United States–Iran conflict. The five analyzed videos associate this geopolitical conflict with issues that directly affect Indonesian society, including rising fuel prices, the depreciation of the Indonesian rupiah, and increasing prices of plastic products and other raw materials. Through the use of humor, parody, irony, and popular TikTok trends, complex political issues are transformed into more accessible narratives that are easily understood by audiences. This mode of presentation reflects the defining characteristics of politainment, in which political issues are integrated with entertainment to communicate social criticism in an engaging manner (Kulau, 2024).

The five content creators act as meaning-makers by connecting global events with the everyday experiences of Indonesian society through the integration of textual, audio, visual, and popular cultural elements. TikTok users are not merely passive viewers but active participants who contribute to meaning-making through comments, responses, and discussions, thereby fostering a shared understanding of the conflict's consequences. The dissemination of these videos is further amplified by TikTok's **For You Page (FYP)** algorithm, which enables political satire narratives to reach broader audiences and encourages the emergence of digital discourse surrounding the issue. From Rodney H. Jones's perspective, the context of these five videos is constructed through the interaction between platform technology, participatory culture, and prevailing social conditions. Consequently, meanings concerning the impact of the conflict are generated not only from the content itself but also through the processes of production,

dissemination, and user interaction within digital environments. TikTok therefore functions as a digital space in which global geopolitical issues are reconstructed into experiences that resonate with the everyday lives of the public through narratives of political satire and politainment.

Interaction and Action Analysis

The analysis of actions and interactions reveals that TikTok users function not merely as passive viewers but as active participants in constructing political discourse within digital environments. Based on the five analyzed videos, the comment sections serve as interactive spaces where audiences express opinions, share personal experiences, voice criticism, and offer interpretations regarding the impact of the United States–Iran conflict. These diverse responses demonstrate that political and economic issues presented through satire and politainment encourage public participation in the collective construction of meaning.

Interactions among users also illustrate the emergence of collaborative discussions concerning the conflict's implications for everyday life. Audience members exchange experiences related to rising prices of essential commodities, shortages of goods, and even environmental issues associated with increased plastic consumption. The reciprocal nature of these comment exchanges indicates that meaning is constructed not only by content creators but also collaboratively developed by users through the sharing of information and personal experiences. This finding suggests that TikTok's comment section functions as a digital public sphere in which collective understandings of social and political issues are negotiated and constructed.

Furthermore, humor and satire operate as forms of social action through which users express criticism of economic conditions and government policies. Comments such as "Everything is getting more expensive except salaries," "We should be more understanding toward the government," and "My humor is as weak as the rupiah" demonstrate that criticism is more frequently communicated through irony and linguistic playfulness than through direct confrontation. These findings support Rodney H. Jones's argument that digital interaction constitutes a social practice through which users collectively produce, disseminate, and negotiate meaning. Accordingly, TikTok's comment section serves not only as a space for responding to content but also as an arena for the reproduction of political discourse through digital humor.

Ideology and Power Analysis

The ideology and power dimension of Rodney H. Jones's Digital Discourse Analysis suggests that meaning is shaped not only by the content of messages but also by the processes through which discourse is produced, disseminated, and interpreted within digital environments. Across the five analyzed videos, TikTok functions as a platform through which creators communicate criticism of the consequences of the United States–Iran conflict by employing humor, irony, and parody. Presenting political issues in the form of politainment makes complex topics more accessible while simultaneously encouraging audiences to participate through comments, likes, and shares. Consequently, the resulting discourse serves not only as entertainment but also as a mechanism through which the public interprets political and economic issues.

The ideological construction reflected in the five videos emphasizes the public's right to criticize policies and power structures perceived to have adverse effects on

everyday life. Criticism concerning rising fuel prices, shortages of raw materials, the depreciation of the Indonesian rupiah, and other economic challenges is conveyed through satire, making it more acceptable and relatable to TikTok users. Rather than relying on formal media institutions, such criticism is communicated through creative digital content that incorporates popular trends, cultural references, and the distinctive characteristics of the platform. This finding indicates that ideology is constructed through the interaction between creators, audiences, and platform technologies in shaping meanings concerning the relationship between society and power.

The power relations represented in the analyzed content also demonstrate a shift from traditional political institutions toward participatory engagement by social media users. Both creators and audiences actively construct, disseminate, and interpret political messages through TikTok's interactive features, suggesting that the production of political discourse is no longer monopolized by political elites or mainstream media. Through the practice of politainment, TikTok becomes a site for negotiating meaning, where criticism of authority is embedded within entertaining content capable of attracting widespread public attention. These findings indicate that political authority in digital environments is increasingly constructed through the dynamic interaction among creators, audiences, and platform algorithms, all of which collectively influence the formation of public opinion.

CONCLUSION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Conclusion

This study concludes that digital political satire and the phenomenon of politainment on TikTok have evolved beyond mere forms of entertainment into significant mechanisms of social catharsis and decentralized digital public spheres. Through the application of Rodney H. Jones's **Digital Discourse Analysis** framework, the findings demonstrate that users employ humor, irony, and visual creativity to interpret complex geopolitical issues, construct deeper meanings, and articulate criticism of the economic burdens experienced by society. The participatory culture facilitated by TikTok's algorithm successfully translates distant global issues into localized everyday experiences while transforming the platform's comment sections into spaces for collective political participation capable of challenging conventional structures of power and traditional authorities in shaping public opinion. These findings indicate a fundamental transformation in the contemporary landscape of political communication, in which political agency is increasingly exercised by social media users rather than being exclusively controlled by institutional actors.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions that provided support, guidance, and valuable feedback throughout the completion of this research. Special appreciation is extended to the academic supervisors of the Communication Studies Program, Faculty of Social, Cultural, and Political Sciences, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur, for their invaluable guidance, constructive criticism, and insightful suggestions during the research process. The authors also gratefully acknowledge all parties who contributed to this study, either directly or indirectly. This article is derived from an undergraduate thesis submitted in partial

fulfillment of the requirements for the **Bachelor of Communication Science** degree at Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur.

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