

## THE PRICE OF EMPATHY IN LYRICS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF HINDIA'S SONG 'HARGA SATU PIL'

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### Abstract

This study analyzes Hindia's song "*Harga Satu Pil*" through Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to uncover how its lyrics articulate social anxiety surrounding mental health, inequality, and declining empathy. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the analysis focuses on Fairclough's three dimensions while maintaining attention to textual detail. The lyrics reveal sharp rhetorical strategies such as the metaphor "*harga satu pil lebih murah dari empati*" which not only question the value society assigns to mental well-being but also expose contradictions in the nation's moral ideals. These linguistic choices invite listeners to reflect on the distance between proclaimed social values and lived realities. The discursive practice of the song shows how audiences actively circulate, reinterpret, and internalize these critiques through digital and cultural spaces. At the level of social practice, the song operates as a form of cultural intervention, encouraging public awareness and subtly challenging systems that marginalize vulnerable groups. Overall, "*Harga Satu Pil*" demonstrates how contemporary music can function as both social critique and a catalyst for collective consciousness.

**Keywords:** empathy, song "*harga satu pil*", critical discourse, hindia



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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout life, individuals inevitably face a series of challenges, pressures, and emotional struggles that shape the human experience (Shafer, 2025). These tensions often drive people to seek expressive forms that can articulate their inner states (Figoli et al., 2025). Music becomes one such medium its lyrics functioning not merely as aesthetic embellishments but as textual spaces where social and psychological realities are voiced and negotiated (Thinh, 2025). In this sense, song lyrics operate as communicative expressions that mirror the lived dynamics of individuals and communities.

Beyond entertainment, music also serves as a socio-cultural discourse that carries values, ideologies, and collective anxieties (Ramezanzadeh & Ebadi, 2025). Recent scholarship shows that song lyrics can be understood as cultural texts embedded in power relations and social meaning making processes (Ermanto et al., 2025). Studies in contemporary discourse analysis also highlight how digital music consumption encourages reinterpretation and circulation of messages, making songs influential mediums for socio political commentary(Xie et al., 2025). These perspectives help situate music within broader discourse studies, where language is regarded as a dynamic cultural practice capable of shaping public consciousness.

Classical literary theorists such as Sudjiman and Semi describe lyrics as poetic forms that foreground personal emotion, affirming their equivalence to poetry in terms of expressiveness and symbolic density (Jegstad et al., 2025). More recent perspectives, however, emphasize the discursive potential of lyrics: their intertextuality, multimodality, and ability to engage audiences in critical dialogue (Mahmoudi-Dehaki & Nasr-Esfahani, 2025). Contemporary studies argue that lyrics function as ideological constructs that reflect socio cultural tensions, particularly in contexts involving identity, inequality, and mental health (H. Li & Kostka, 2025). By synthesizing these viewpoints, this study positions song lyrics not only as literary artifacts but also as discursive events texts that operate within broader technological, cultural, and political contexts (Silveira et al., 2025). This theoretical foundation aligns directly with Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, which connects linguistic structure with the social forces that shape and reproduce meaning.

In the context of social critique, songs that portray human vulnerability often foreground themes of anxiety, imbalance, and alienation (Yu et al., 2025). Hindia's "*Harga Satu Pil*" stands out as a contemporary example that captures these tensions through intimate yet socially resonant storytelling (C. Wu et al., 2025). While many musicians address issues of mental health, this song is distinctive in its linguistic framing particularly its metaphorical assertion that *empathy has become a purchasable commodity*. Recent research notes that metaphors in music frequently serve to expose contradictions in societal values and articulate critique toward neoliberal, individualistic cultural environments (Dang, 2025). This rhetorical move positions the listener within a critique of social structures where emotional suffering is commodified, consumed, or trivialized in public discourse.

Hindia's broader artistic trajectory marked by explorations of existential pressure, fractured relationships, and socio-psychological burdens has been examined within contemporary media and cultural studies (Hossain, 2025). However, rather than merely describing his tendencies, this study approaches his lyrics as discursive constructions shaped by and contributing to public conversations on empathy, structural inequality, and mental health stigma (Kiyanfar et al., 2025). This approach is supported by recent work showing that popular music serves not only as reflective commentary but also as a catalyst for collective emotional awareness.

By applying Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, this research examines how meaning is produced on three interconnected levels: (1) the linguistic features of the lyrics, (2) discursive practices surrounding the song's creation, distribution, and reception, and (3) broader social practices including ideologies and power relations that shape the song's message. Through this lens, the study seeks to uncover how "*Harga Satu Pil*" articulates a

narrative of social critique and how such narrative contributes to the formation of collective awareness in a society grappling with emotional distress and diminishing empathy.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using Norman Fairclough's three dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary analytical framework (Landless et al., 2025). This methodological choice is grounded in the assumption that song lyrics function not only as artistic expressions but also as discursive sites where power relations and ideological meanings are embedded (Hu & Jiang, 2025). Fairclough's model is particularly suitable because it integrates linguistic observation with socio-cultural interpretation, allowing this study to trace how metaphors, evaluative language, and rhetorical structures in "*Harga Satu Pil*" articulate broader ideological tensions surrounding mental health and social empathy.

The primary data of this research consists of the official lyrics of the song, which were collected through documentation techniques by transcribing and cross-checking them with verified digital sources (Nurbayani et al., 2025). Supporting data include academic literature, media interviews, and publicly available audience interpretations that help contextualize the discourse (Guo, 2025). To maintain methodological transparency, the analytical procedures were operationalized into several concrete steps. First, textual analysis was conducted by coding linguistic elements such as metaphorical phrases, rhetorical questions, evaluative adjectives, and patterns of repetition. These elements were categorized based on established CDA linguistic indicators such as representation, relational meaning, and identity construction to ensure analytical consistency. Second, interpretation of discourse practice examined how the song is produced, circulated, and consumed, including the role of digital platforms and interpretive communities in shaping meaning (Zhao & Wotipka, 2025). Third, explanation of social practice connected the textual findings to broader social structures by identifying ideological themes related to mental health inequality, stigma, and tensions surrounding national values.

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, source triangulation was applied by comparing official lyrical texts, scholarly discussions, and audience interpretations found in online forums (Liao & Chan, 2025). When differing interpretations appeared, they were addressed through a reflexive analysis process evaluating each interpretation's evidential grounding, discursive relevance, and alignment with Fairclough's categories (P. Wu et al., 2025). Although audience comments were used as contextual data, they were not treated as representative samples; instead, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to select interpretations that explicitly discuss empathy, social pressure, or mental health stigma. Interpretive reliability was supported through repeated coding and peer-checking against the coding framework.

Data presentation follows recognized qualitative reporting standards, emphasizing clarity of thematic patterns, transparency of analytical decisions, and coherence between linguistic findings and ideological interpretation. Through this methodological structure, the study ensures that the analysis of "*Harga Satu Pil*" is not merely descriptive but systematically grounded in CDA scholarship.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Text Dimension

In the textual dimension, the analysis draws directly on Fairclough's categories *vocabulary*, *grammar*, *transitivity*, *modality*, and *intertextuality* to understand how linguistic choices encode social critique. This approach ensures that interpretations are grounded not in emotional inference but in observable textual structures.

From a vocabulary perspective, the lyrics of "*Harga Satu Pil*" rely heavily on repeated rhetorical questions such as:

“How much does one pill cost?”  
“How much is empathy worth?”  
“How much is the third principle?”

In CDA, repetition functions as a strategy of *foregrounding*, signaling that these issues are unresolved tensions within society (Cook, 2025). The question format also creates a modality of uncertainty not to express literal confusion, but to criticize the absence of moral clarity in social life. This rhetorical pattern produces discursive pressure without requiring psychological assumptions about the listener. Grammatically, these questions omit social agents who might be responsible for the “pricing” of empathy or national values (Sun et al., 2025). This absence is a transitivity choice that shifts attention away from individuals and toward systemic critique. By obscuring agency, the text subtly frames empathy loss and inequality as structural rather than personal failures.

The metaphors “evidence,” “ransom price,” and “may I tread the ground” reveal further ideological positioning. “Evidence” reflects the objectification of marginalized individuals within legal systems a linguistic realization of institutional power. “Ransom price” exposes the tension between material and moral economies, while “treading the ground” signals a desire for existential grounding after moral disorientation. The recurring phrase “I don’t know” introduces a modality of self-limitation. Rather than indicating apathy, this uncertainty highlights the speaker’s awareness of being situated within larger social systems beyond individual control.

Altogether, the lyrical structure operates not merely as aesthetic expression but as a discursive device (Hati, 2025). Through its vocabulary, grammar, and metaphorical density, the text constructs a critique of eroding empathy, shifting value systems, and embedded social inequalities.

## 2. Discourse Practice Dimension

Fairclough’s discourse practice dimension emphasizes how texts are produced, circulated, and consumed. This section clarifies those processes with concrete indicators of how the song’s discourse gains traction in the public sphere.

### a. Production: Ideological Positioning in the Creative Process

The song was produced during a period of heightened public engagement with mental health issues in Indonesia (Thomas & Tibbert, 2025). Hindia is recognized for his reflective and socially aware lyrical style, positioning himself as a *critical storyteller* rather than a purely commercial musician. The inclusion of Clara Friska Adinda’s vocals introduces a polyphonic quality an intertextual layering that symbolizes shared responsibility and collective emotional experience.

### b. Circulation: Digital Networks as Gatekeepers of Meaning

The song’s distribution across Spotify, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram embeds it within what CDA scholars describe as *algorithmic discourse circulation* (Basch et al., 2025). These platforms act as both technological and ideological gatekeepers, amplifying narratives based on visibility, engagement, and trending patterns. This mechanism enables the lyrics to gain social legitimacy far beyond traditional broadcast channels.

### c. Consumption: Audience as Co Producers of Meaning

Listeners engage with the song through reflective posts, YouTube comments, TikTok interpretations, and reaction videos (F. Li & Ullah, 2025). Rather than treating these reactions as representative of general public sentiment, this study applies *purposive sampling* to select interpretations directly related to empathy, stigma, and inequality. Within CDA, this illustrates how audiences participate in *negotiated discourse*, reproducing, challenging, or extending the song’s meanings through digital interaction. By examining these processes, the analysis moves

beyond description and shows how the song's discourse is actively produced, circulated, contested, and reappropriated in Indonesia's digital cultural sphere.

### **3. Social Practice Dimension (Revised, Humanized & Ideologically Linked)**

In the social practice dimension, the song is understood as part of broader ideological struggles within society (Alni et al., 2024). The analysis focuses on how the lyrics reflect and intervene in structural conditions, using CDA concepts such as hegemony, resistance, and ideological contestation.

#### **a. Inequality in Access to Mental Health Services**

The implied contrast between "one pill" and the cost of therapy critiques capitalist logics embedded within healthcare. The text's erasure of agency emphasizes that the problem is systemic, not personal a hallmark of critical discourse.

#### **b. Stigma Toward Psychological Disorders**

The question "How much is empathy worth?" challenges dominant cultural norms that prioritize productivity over emotional well being. In CDA, this represents an ideological confrontation between humanistic values and market driven expectations.

#### **c. Critique of National Ideology Implementation**

Referencing the third principle of Pancasila introduces a layer of ideological intertextuality. The critique targets how national values are often applied selectively, excluding individuals who do not conform to prevailing expectations.

#### **d. Privilege Awareness and Moral Responsibility**

Lines such as "your life is not as fortunate as mine" reveal a reflexive ideological stance an acknowledgment of privilege that resists the power structures benefiting the speaker.

#### **e. Integration Across Dimensions**

When textual, discursive, and social elements are viewed together, "*Harga Satu Pil*" emerges as a cultural artifact that both reflects and shapes Indonesian social consciousness. Its linguistic devices embed critique; its digital circulation amplifies discourse; and its social interpretations mobilize empathy and collective awareness. Thus, the song serves as a powerful example of how music can function as a medium of ideological negotiation, social reflection, and cultural resistance in contemporary society.

A critical discourse analysis of the song "*Harga Satu Pil*" shows that this musical work is not simply an aesthetic product, but rather a complex representation of the interaction between language, ideology, and social structures that shape the collective consciousness of contemporary society. Through three main dimensions the text dimension, the discursive practice dimension, and the social practice dimension the song both reflects and shapes the social reality in which it emerged.

#### **a. Textual Integration**

At the textual level, Hindia constructs a simple yet meaningful lyrical structure through repetition and rhetorical questions such as "How much does one pill cost?", "How much does empathy cost?", and "How much does the third principle cost?". This linguistic structure serves not to seek literal answers, but rather to provoke critical awareness in listeners regarding the crisis of humanitarian values and empathy in modern society. The choice of reflective and sarcastic diction creates an emotional contrast between personal pain and social satire. Thus, the song's lyrics function as moral discourse and social critique, not merely personal expression.

#### **b. Integration of Production, Circulation, and Consumption Dimensions**

In terms of production, this song was produced in an Indonesian social context that is increasingly open to discussing mental health issues and the empathy crisis, particularly among urban youth. Hindia, with its intellectual and reflective image, uses music as a medium for social criticism and awareness. The collaboration with a female vocalist (Clara Friska Adinda)

adds a dialogic layer that enriches perspectives and illustrates the importance of togetherness in addressing mental and social issues.

In terms of circulation, the use of digital platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, and other social media platforms makes this song part of the digital cultural ecosystem (Coşkun et al., 2014). Through algorithmic systems and sharing mechanisms, the song is disseminated not only economically but also ideologically, shaping a public conversation involving interpretation, commentary, and re-expression.

Meanwhile, at the consumption level, listeners transform into producers of meaning. Audience responses emerging in various digital spaces demonstrate that the song's meaning continues to evolve dynamically through discussions, creative content, and social campaigns. Listeners are no longer passive participants, but social actors who contribute to expanding the reach of the ideas and empathy contained in the song. This demonstrates that Hindia's discourse successfully transcends the boundaries between work and audience, between text and social action.

#### c. Integration of the Dimensions of Social Practice

In the dimension of social practice, "*Harga Satu Pil*" both reflects and intervenes in social structures experiencing a crisis of humanitarian values. This song highlights social inequality, particularly in access to mental health, and challenges the hegemony of capitalist values that commodify empathy. By raising the question "How much does one pill cost?", Hindia symbolically reveals the paradox of modern society, which seeks to heal social wounds with instant solutions, without addressing the root of the problem: the loss of caring between individuals.

Furthermore, this song also challenges the cultural power structures that normalize mental suffering and suppress the discourse of empathy. In a digital context, this song becomes a form of symbolic resistance that utilizes mass media to create an alternative dialogue space for the younger generation. Thus, this song not only reflects existing social conditions but also plays an active role as an agent of change in shaping new awareness about the importance of empathy, solidarity, and mental health.

#### d. Integration of Meaning: Song as Social Discourse and Cultural Artifact

When these three dimensions are combined, it becomes clear that "*Harga Satu Pil*" is a holistic and interconnected form of discourse practice. The textual structure constructs a powerful moral and emotional message; the production and circulation processes ensure that this message reaches a broad social space; and its social practices demonstrate how this message influences collective consciousness.

This song functions as a living cultural artifact; it does not stop at the aesthetic level but continues to move within social, ideological, and emotional networks. It represents a new discourse on empathy and mental health within an Indonesian society adapting to a digital reality and a moral crisis.

Thus, a critical discourse analysis of "*Harga Satu Pil*" demonstrates that music can be an effective medium for reading and critiquing social systems. Through a combination of language, sound, and social context, this song presents a form of social communication that raises awareness, strengthens solidarity, and encourages the reconstruction of human values in modern Indonesian society.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a critical discourse analysis of Hindia's song "*Harga Satu Pil*," it can be concluded that the song functions as a social discourse that challenges the crisis of empathy and humanitarian awareness in modern Indonesian society. At the textual level, the repetitive and rhetorical structure of the lyrics presents a symbolic critique of the commodification of empathy, the degradation of social values, and the often-ignored issue of

mental health. The language used reflects the tension between individual emotional needs and social pressures stemming from the capitalist system and digital culture.

In terms of production, circulation, and consumption, the song demonstrates that music is not simply a work of art but also a cultural product that actively shapes and is shaped by its social context. Its production process is rooted in awareness of mental health issues; its circulation is expanded through the digital ecosystem; and public consumption of the song creates a new interpretive space where listeners play a role as producers of meaning. This confirms music's role as a participatory medium that enables social dialogue and the formation of empathetic communities in the digital space.

Meanwhile, in terms of social practice, this song becomes a symbolic practice that challenges the ideological power structures in society namely, a social system that values humans based on productivity, not humanity. Through its implicit critique of the nation's economic, moral, and spiritual values, "*Harga Satu Pil*" invites listeners to reflect on the values of humanity, solidarity, and empathy that should be the foundation of communal life.

Overall, "*Harga Satu Pil*" demonstrates that music can function as a tool for interpreting social reality and a vehicle for ideological transformation. It is not only a medium for emotional expression but also a symbolic vehicle for resistance against the dehumanization of modern culture. Thus, this song emphasizes music's role as an agent of social change, capable of raising critical awareness and fostering collective empathy in an increasingly fragmented society.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project Administration; Validation;

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Writing Review and Editing.

Author 5: Research data collector

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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