

# Reception of the Audience Towards the Message Content in The Song Petrus Megatruh Soundsystem

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## ABSTRACT

### Keyword

Audience Reception  
Message Content  
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This study analyzes audience reception of the song "Petrus" by Megatruh Soundsystem, focusing on how listeners understand, respond to, and interpret its message. Using a qualitative approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with 10 listeners from diverse backgrounds. The analysis applied Hall's audience reception theory. Findings reveal significant variation in audience reception. Most respondents view "Petrus" as a reminder of Indonesia's New Order era, specifically the "PETRUS" actions that allegedly caused numerous deaths. They expressed empathy for the victims and condemned the regime's brutality. Conversely, some listeners reacted with skepticism or rejection, questioning the song's objectivity and viewing it as political propaganda. Others admitted to not delving deeply into the lyrics or understanding the historical context, instead focusing on the music and melody. Overall, the study highlights the complexity of audience reception, showing that interpretations of the song "Petrus" by Megatruh Soundsystem range from historical and empathetic to skeptical and indifferent.

## 1. Introduction

A song is a work of art that can be enjoyed by every layer of society, without exception. Each lyric in a song carries specific messages from its creator to be conveyed to the audience. Songs are a powerful form of art in delivering social, political, and cultural messages. Often, songs embed profound messages reflected in the lyrics, melody, and use of musical elements. These songs can influence listeners in various ways, creating diverse perceptions based on their background, experience, and views (Glasper, 2017).

Social critique songs are used by musicians to voice discontent with policies in a country. Musicians typically create these songs based on the concerns they observe and feel in their surroundings. Most social critique songs are directed at those in power who are perceived to be failing in their duties. The emergence of social critique songs comes with risks for the musicians. In Indonesia, such songs have existed since before independence. Muhammad Arief, a renowned Using artist from Banyuwangi, created "Gendjer-Gendjer" in 1942. The song criticized the Japanese occupiers for causing hunger among Indonesians, forcing them to eat "gendjer," a plant typically used as animal feed and considered a pest.

The song regained popularity when Lilis Suryani and Bing Slamet performed it in 1966. It became propaganda for the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and was featured in the 1998 film "Pengkhiranatan G30/S PKI," associating it with the PKI's campaign and struggle against the establishment. After the fall of the PKI, the song was banned.

Speaking of social critique songs, Iwan Fals is a prominent figure who boldly criticized the government. In 1984, he created "Serenade," sung with Ritta Rubby, honoring those oppressed by poverty. Known as the people's representative, Iwan Fals voiced the concerns of the marginalized. His fan base, familiar with poverty, injustice, and unemployment, grew over his 20-year career. In the same year, his song "Mbak Tini" caused controversy, as it was seen as an insult to President Suharto.

Iwan Fals faced imprisonment threats and bans during the New Order era for songs like "Surat Buat Wakil Rakyat," "Ambulance Zig Zag," "Sore Tugu Pancoran," "Tikus-Tikus Kantor," and "Bento."

Songs can also address relevant social, political, and cultural issues. In Indonesia, "Gugur Bunga" by Ismail Marzuki is a classic example of a song highlighting historical and nationalistic issues. Conversely, punk or hip-hop genres often tackle social issues like inequality, justice, and resistance to authority (Rose, 2014).

Songs have a unique ability to serve as an effective medium for criticizing government policies. Lyrics are often used as a powerful means of expressing social and political critique against government policies considered controversial or harmful to society. For instance, in the United States, songs like "Ohio" by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young and "Masters of War" by Bob Dylan exemplify how artists can critique government policies, such as the Vietnam War, through music. These lyrics act as calls for change and raise awareness of significant political issues (Eyerman, 1998).

In academic literature, the concept of using songs as a means of critiquing government policies has been extensively studied. Numerous studies examine how song lyrics reflect public sentiment and views on government actions and how these songs influence public opinion and political participation (Street, 2013).

Megatruh Soundsystem is a band that has achieved remarkable success through the writing and release of several high-quality songs. Their latest album, "Roots Reggae & Revolusi," released in 2023, marks the pinnacle of their success. This album features standout tracks like "Petrus," "Reggae Radio," "Sammaratanna Hellallah," "Let's Join, Let's Sing and Dance," "Nuh Bread Sound," and "Balada Jelata," showcasing their skill in creating original and meaningful reggae music.

"Roots Reggae & Revolusi" is notable for its harmonious blend of reggae elements and strong revolutionary messages. Through their lyrics, the group effectively voices ideas of freedom and social change. "Petrus" offers a more introspective atmosphere with deep melodies and thought-provoking lyrics, while "Reggae Radio" reflects their love for reggae music and its potential to be a voice for change.

In "Sammaratanna Hellallah," Megatruh Soundsystem explores themes of spirituality and harmony, creating a deep and captivating ambiance. "Let's Join, Let's Sing and Dance" exudes energy, inviting listeners to unite, sing, and dance together in joy. "Nuh Bread Sound" addresses hunger and social inequality, and "Balada Jelata" contemplates the simplicity of life with a distinctive reggae touch.

Through their ability to convey meaningful messages via reggae music, Megatruh Soundsystem has established themselves as a significant contributor to the quality of reggae music. With their album "Roots Reggae & Revolusi" and their creative works, Megatruh Soundsystem continues to leave an inspiring and motivating mark on music fans.

The song "Petrus," with its Ska Punk rhythm, evokes nostalgia and recalls the New Order era in Indonesia. Under Suharto's leadership, the New Order was characterized by equitable development, long-term development plans like Repelita, food self-sufficiency, and the ABRI Masuk Desa policy. However, alongside these achievements were dark shadows, including widespread corruption, collusion, nepotism, and mass killings during several grim incidents.

The song carries a profound meaning, with lyrics revealing Indonesia's dark historical events. By recalling the tragic events of that time, including the "PETRUS" actions that resulted in hundreds of deaths, the song serves as a reminder of the bloodshed during Suharto's era. Jogja was the first center of the "PETRUS" operations, and to this day, the identities of the perpetrators behind these coordinated brutal actions remain a mystery, adding a deep element of mystery to the song's narrative.

Audience reception analysis is a relevant method for understanding audience opinions regarding the message content of a song. In this context, audience reception analysis refers to studies that document and analyze how audiences interpret, respond to, and make meaning of the messages conveyed in a song (Livingstone, 2015). This includes various aspects such as how the audience identifies the message's meaning, the extent to which they feel connected to the message, and how the message influences or triggers their feelings and views (Morley, 1980). By using this method,

researchers can gain deep insights into how a song affects its audience and how the messages within the song are interpreted by them.

In studying audience reception of the song "Petrus," researchers can reveal how this song influences audience understanding, responses, and perceptions of the New Order era and its historical events. Through reception analysis, researchers can explore how the song offers a critical perspective on Indonesia's controversial history and how the audience responds to and interprets the implicit messages in the lyrics. Additionally, this research can help understand how music, as an artistic medium, can be used to reflect historical events and raise social awareness.

The purpose of this study is to analyze audience reception of the message content in the song "Petrus" by Megatruh Soundsystem.

## 2. Method

This study is a qualitative research utilizing the audience reception analysis method. Qualitative research aims to deeply explain phenomena through extensive data collection (Kriyantono, 2010: 56). The method used in this research is audience reception analysis. According to Street, this method views the audience as active participants in constructing and interpreting the meaning of what they read, hear, and see, within their cultural context. Media content is understood as part of a process where common sense is constructed through interpretations derived from images and text. The meaning of media texts is not transparent but is a product of audience interpretation. The assumption is that the media serve merely as conveyors of information, acting as facilitators, filters, and meaning-makers. Media now have the task of bringing their audience into a broader world of meaning, not limited to the time and place of an event (Street, 2001: 95).

The audience reception analysis approach is used to uncover the message or meaning of the content in the song "Petrus," as received by the audience. The audience in reception analysis consists of individuals from various backgrounds, and it considers them as having an active role in interpreting the messages of a discourse. Therefore, the messages received by each individual vary. The informants in this study are 10 listeners of the song "Petrus" from diverse backgrounds, including students, lecturers, activists, workers, musicians, and others. Data for this research were collected using in-depth interviews to gather audience reception of the song's message.

The data analysis technique involved selecting informants, conducting in-depth interviews with the chosen informants, and then analyzing the descriptions using Hall's Audience Reception Theory categorization.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1. Dominant Reception of the Message in the Song "Petrus" by Megatruh Soundsystem

A dominant audience reception occurs when the audience fully accepts and aligns with the meaning intended by the message creator, decoding the message according to the given codes. In the case of the song "Petrus" by Megatruh Soundsystem, some audience members with hegemonic reception internalize the message conveyed by the lyrics and music without questioning or rejecting it. They understand and agree with the critique of the mysterious killings during the New Order era, viewing it as a legitimate form of resistance against state injustice and oppression. These listeners are fully aligned with the songwriter's intent to enlighten society about historical truths that are often hidden or ignored. They appreciate the music not only as entertainment but also as a means of education and political awareness.

Additionally, hegemonic audiences interpret the symbols and codes in the song "Petrus" as intended by the creators. For example, they understand the historical and cultural references used in the lyrics and emotionally respond to the music's tone and atmosphere that support the critical narrative. They absorb the moral and political messages without resistance, believing that revealing historical truths is essential to preventing the repetition of similar tragedies in the future. This dominant reception indicates that the audience is not merely a passive receiver but an active agent in understanding and disseminating the meaning they receive, hoping to inspire broader social change.

In the context of dominant reception of the song "Petrus," most audiences tend to accept and interpret the song's message in line with the creator's intentions and views. Listeners with dominant reception see the song as a sharp social critique of the mysterious killings during the New Order era, known as the Petrus (Mysterious Shootings) operation. They appreciate Megatruh Soundsystem's bravery in addressing this sensitive issue, viewing it as an important effort to remind society of the human rights abuses that occurred and the importance of justice and historical transparency. These dominant listeners agree with the narrative presented in the song, that the state must be held accountable for the repressive actions taken against its citizens.

Moreover, audiences with dominant reception of this song tend to see art as an effective tool for raising political and social awareness. They recognize the power of music in conveying messages that might be difficult to accept if delivered through other media. In this case, the song "Petrus" is considered successful in using the medium of music to highlight important issues that may have been forgotten or deliberately ignored by the mainstream. This dominant response also reflects a deep understanding of Indonesia's historical and socio-political context and a willingness to confront and discuss the dark past for the sake of a more just and democratic nation's progress.

### **3.2. Negotiated Reception of the Message in the Song "Petrus" by Megatruh Soundsystem**

In negotiated reception, the audience tends to take a middle position between fully accepting and outright rejecting the intended meaning by the message creator. They understand and acknowledge some of the codes and messages conveyed but also modify or negotiate these meanings according to their personal and social contexts. In the case of the song "Petrus" by Megatruh Soundsystem, an audience with a negotiated reception agrees with the critique of the mysterious killings during the New Order era but also has critical views on how the message is delivered or the impact of revisiting such traumatic events.

For instance, an audience with negotiated reception may agree that it is important to remember and acknowledge the human rights abuses that occurred, but they might also feel that the song is too provocative or does not present a balanced picture. They appreciate Megatruh Soundsystem's effort to open discussions about Indonesia's dark history but believe that there might be more constructive or sensitive ways to encourage society to reflect on the past. In this case, the audience negotiates the message by considering their own values, such as social harmony or the need to move forward without continually reopening old wounds.

Moreover, an audience with negotiated reception also considers the current political and social context when interpreting "Petrus." They understand the urgency of the message in its historical context but also weigh its political implications in the present day. For example, they agree with the criticism of authoritarian governance but worry that excessively highlighting this issue could provoke tensions or polarization in an already complex and diverse society. Here, they negotiate the message by balancing the need to remember history with the importance of maintaining social stability.

Ultimately, an audience with negotiated reception shows that media message interpretation is never entirely black and white. They recognize the complexity of the message being conveyed and adjust their interpretation based on their experiences, knowledge, and personal values. This reflects how audiences actively engage with media, blending the meaning offered by the message creators with their own perspectives to create an understanding that resonates with their life context. In the context of the song "Petrus," this means that the audience is not merely passively listening and accepting the message but is also critically thinking and forming meanings that are relevant and beneficial to them personally and socially.

### **3.3. Oppositional (Counter Hegemonic) Reception of the Message in the Song "Petrus" by Megatruh Soundsystem**

Oppositional (counter hegemonic) audiences reject the meaning given by the message creator and form their own interpretation of the message. In oppositional reception, audiences outright refuse the meaning provided by the message creator and choose to determine their own views in interpreting the message. They often perceive the conveyed message as a form of domination or manipulation that needs to be challenged.

In the context of the song "Petrus" by Megatruh Soundsystem, audiences with oppositional reception reject the narrative and historical interpretation presented in the song, considering it a deviation from the truth they believe in.

Audiences with oppositional reception may feel that the song "Petrus" paints an overly negative picture of the New Order era, which they see as having positive aspects not acknowledged in the song. They argue that the focus on human rights abuses highlighted by the song overlooks other contributions of that period to the country's stability and development. In this view, they reject the song's critical message and form an alternative narrative that emphasizes the positive aspects of the debated regime.

Furthermore, oppositional audiences perceive that the song "Petrus" risks reigniting social trauma and dividing society by reopening old wounds that should be left to heal. They believe that Megatruh Soundsystem's approach to criticizing history is too aggressive or insensitive to the current social context. In this regard, they reject the song's message on the grounds that there are wiser and more constructive ways to address history and national reconciliation.

Oppositional audiences also reject the meaning of the song "Petrus" from different political perspectives. They feel that the narrative conveyed by the song contains hidden agendas or political biases that contradict their views. For example, they accuse Megatruh Soundsystem of exploiting history for certain political gains or allege that the song merely emphasizes certain narratives without allowing for broader and more diverse interpretations. In this scenario, they not only reject the message but also criticize the intent and credibility of the message creators.

Ultimately, oppositional reception demonstrates that audiences have the power to actively oppose and redefine media messages. They do not simply accept the given message but also challenge and reconstruct the meaning based on their own perspectives. In the case of the song "Petrus," this means that audiences not only listen to the critique presented in the song but also reject and develop alternative narratives that they deem more fitting with their understanding and beliefs about history and socio-political reality.

Audiences with oppositional reception also draw on their personal or collective experiences to reject the meaning conveyed in the song "Petrus." For example, they view the song as a one-sided judgment that fails to consider the complexities of the situations they have experienced. In this regard, they form their own views emphasizing the importance of respecting various historical viewpoints and individual experiences, rejecting a single narrative they see as limiting or misleading.

Thus, oppositional reception is not only passive but also active and productive, where audiences develop and promote their own views in response to the messages they reject. This affirms that media reception is a dynamic process in which audiences actively participate in shaping meaning, altering the messages they receive according to their own understanding and beliefs.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study explores the audience reception of the song "Petrus" by Megatruh Soundsystem, revealing how audiences interpret and respond to the message conveyed through various musical codes and lyrics. The analysis indicates three main patterns of reception: dominant (hegemonic), negotiated, and oppositional (counter hegemonic).

Audiences with dominant reception fully embrace the intended meaning of the song creators, internalizing the criticism of the mysterious killings during the New Order era and viewing it as a crucial effort to remind society of past human rights abuses. They appreciate Megatruh Soundsystem's courage in delivering this message and wholeheartedly support the narrative, considering it a significant step towards justice and historical reconciliation.

On the other hand, audiences with negotiated reception take a middle path, partially accepting the message of the song but adapting it to their own personal and social contexts. They may agree on the importance of remembering dark history but feel that the delivery or impact of the song needs further consideration. They blend their own understanding with the meaning offered by the song, creating interpretations that resonate more closely with their values and realities.



Audiences with oppositional reception reject the meaning provided by the message creators, forming their own views that often contradict the song's narrative. They may see the song as a deviation from the truth or as unconstructive provocation. They develop alternative narratives and may use their personal or collective experiences to challenge the conveyed message, often articulating their rejection through creative actions or public discussions.

In conclusion, audience reception of the song "Petrus" varies greatly, reflecting diverse interpretations and responses influenced by individuals' backgrounds, experiences, and values. This research confirms that audiences are active agents in the media reception process, not only passively receiving messages but also actively involved in meaning-making through their own perspectives and contexts.

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