



Critical Communication Theory and Social Issue Representation in Taxi Driver II

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A B S T R A C T

Drama, as a form of mass communication media, has the capacity to disseminate information, convey ideas, and influence audience behavior. *Taxi Driver*, a drama centered on the overarching themes of revenge and the pursuit of justice, presents representations of social issues through the lens of critical communication theory. This study employs critical discourse analysis based on the models developed by Norman Fairclough and Teun A. Van Dijk to examine the representation of social issues in *Taxi Driver II*, to analyze how the characters embody principles of critical communication theory, and to identify the impacts and messages conveyed to viewers. The findings of the critical discourse analysis using these two models demonstrate that the drama represents a wide range of social issues, including legal injustice, human trafficking, fraud targeting the elderly, child exploitation, cult-related fraud, medical malpractice, and illegal business operations. These social issues are articulated through scenes, character actions, dialogues, metaphors, and other narrative elements. The character Kim Do Gi emerges as an icon of the struggle for justice and exemplifies the application of critical communication theory in challenging domination and combating injustice. The narrative and characterization collectively convey messages that encourage viewers to become more attentive to their social surroundings and to cultivate a commitment to advocating for justice within society.

1. Introduction

Mass communication media encompass various forms, including newspapers, radio, drama, film, and others, which function as channels for communication and the mass dissemination of information, enabling messages to be accessed and received by a broad audience (Irwan & Purnamasari, 2022). The large-scale distribution of information grants mass media the capacity to portray social conditions and shape the opinions of readers and viewers. Among the forms of mass media that possess substantial power in representing social realities, messages, and societal phenomena are film and drama (Hall et al., 2024). As products of cultural expression, film and drama serve not only as entertainment but also as instruments for reflecting upon and critically examining social phenomena. Drama or film, often referred to as “moving pictures,” began to develop in the early nineteenth century (Nugraha et al., 2014). According to Kasih (2019), drama incorporates narrative and cinematic elements—such as scenes, dialogue, characterization, visualization, and narration—which function as tools for depicting social conditions within society. Through the actions, experiences, and situations encountered by characters, drama communicates and represents information, ideas, messages, and viewpoints directed at audiences. The representation of social conditions in drama and film contributes to the development of public awareness regarding the messages embedded within them (Gramsci, 2020).

Taxi Driver II is a television drama series originating from South Korea and serves as the continuation of its first season, Taxi Driver. The series was written by Oh Sang Ho and directed by Lee Dan, and it stars Lee Jee Hoon in the lead role as Kim Do Gi. The literal Korean title, “모범 택시 II” (Mobeom Taeksi II), includes the term “모범” (Mobeom), which in this context is interpreted as “luxury,” rendering the literal meaning “luxury taxi.” The drama addresses social conditions, social problems, and societal phenomena, which are packaged into compelling cases and storylines, earning widespread appreciation from audiences. The narrative highlights how societal systems frequently favor dominant groups while marginalizing and oppressing those who are weak, vulnerable, and less privileged. Victims portrayed in the drama typically come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and are depicted as lacking the power to resist oppressive systems. The series further illustrates the abuse of power for personal gain. By foregrounding diverse social issues alongside acts of resistance, Taxi Driver II reflects the principles of critical communication theory, making its representation of social issues a compelling subject for scholarly analysis. Social issues may be defined as situations, conditions, and problems occurring within society that are perceived as detrimental to many individuals. Such issues are associated with public dissatisfaction, social imbalance, disrupted welfare, and the failure to meet societal needs (Qomariah et al., 2024).

Taxi Driver II explicitly portrays legal injustice, exploitation, and the arbitrary exercise of power within society. By presenting these realities, the drama enables viewers to recognize that such problems genuinely exist and exert harmful effects on many lives. This reflects one of the fundamental capacities of drama as a medium capable of shaping public perceptions and stereotypes regarding particular issues (Setyowati & Sumardijjati, 2021). The representation of social issues through various dramatic elements aligned with real-world conditions inevitably generates impacts and conveys messages to audiences. The series communicates multiple social messages while fostering public awareness and sensitivity toward existing social problems, thereby positioning Taxi Driver II as a significant cultural work worthy of further scholarly examination concerning the representation of social issues. In order to understand how Taxi Driver II represents social issues, critical communication theory provides a relevant analytical framework. This theoretical perspective examines how media, including drama, reproduce or challenge existing power structures within society. Through critical communication analysis, it becomes possible to uncover how the drama articulates social messages, identify who benefits from the constructed narrative, and analyze how particular ideologies are constructed and disseminated through the series.

Critical communication theory is particularly appropriate for analyzing Taxi Driver II, as the drama embodies the core principles of this theoretical tradition within its narrative structure. Rooted in the intellectual legacy of the Frankfurt School, critical communication theory critiques domination, ideology, and inequality within social communication systems (Habermas, 1984; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947). The concept of “revenge for justice” constitutes the central theme of the series, especially given that formal legal systems are frequently depicted as failing to deliver justice for marginalized communities. The drama employs dark cinematography and intense action sequences to reinforce an atmosphere of social tension. Emotional narratives are strategically utilized to evoke viewers’ empathy toward victims and their struggles against corrupt systems. The series demonstrates elements of counter-hegemony, in which the main character functions as an agent of social change confronting oppressive structures. This narrative of resistance offers an alternative perspective to dominant ideologies that often favor elite groups. Counter-hegemony refers to efforts aimed at challenging and resisting dominant ideologies maintained by ruling groups within society. The character Kim Do Gi and the Rainbow Taxi team represent concrete manifestations of social change agents. By operating outside corrupt legal frameworks to deliver justice for victims, they illustrate that resistance against oppressive systems is both conceivable and actionable. Although numerous studies have examined the transmission of moral messages and social values through literary and mass media works, often focusing on various films and novels as research objects, no prior study has specifically analyzed the representation of social issues in Taxi Driver II from the perspective of critical communication theory. Therefore, this research seeks to analyze the representation of social issues and injustice in Taxi Driver II, to

examine how characters and scenes embody critical communication theory, and to identify the messages conveyed by the series from the audience's perspective.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, as it seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of how *Taxi Driver II* represents social issues from the perspective of critical communication theory. A qualitative approach enables the analysis of meanings embedded within the drama through the interpretation of data obtained from observation, literature review, and critical discourse analysis. This approach is grounded in a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena, particularly how *Taxi Driver II* constructs narratives that reflect social inequality, legal injustice, and resistance against oppressive systems. Accordingly, this research does not focus on numerical data; rather, it emphasizes the interpretation of symbols, dialogues, and implicit messages conveyed throughout the drama. Furthermore, this approach aligns with the critical paradigm in communication studies, which seeks to reveal how mass media—in this case, drama—functions not merely as entertainment but also as a vehicle for ideological dissemination and critique of existing social systems.

Critical communication theory was selected as the primary theoretical framework for this study. By adopting this perspective, the research highlights how power, domination, and resistance are represented in *Taxi Driver II*. In addition, the study applies critical discourse analysis (CDA), which facilitates the exploration of the structures and social contexts that shape discourse within the drama. The critical discourse analysis implemented in this research draws upon the models developed by Fairclough and Van Dijk, both of which emphasize the importance of analyzing textual dimensions (narrative and visual elements), discursive practices (how the drama is produced and distributed), and the broader social and ideological contexts underlying its production. Through this approach, the study aims to provide broader insight into how *Taxi Driver II* functions not only as a product of popular culture but also as a reflection of social inequalities within society. Moreover, this framework enables the research to examine how drama can shape public opinion and enhance awareness of the social issues portrayed.

This research is categorized as a descriptive qualitative study employing critical discourse analysis (CDA) based on the models of Norman Fairclough and Teun A. Van Dijk. Fairclough's model encompasses three dimensions: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. Meanwhile, Van Dijk's model consists of microstructure analysis, macrostructure analysis, and superstructure analysis. The application of these models aims to examine how the text of *Taxi Driver II* challenges dominant ideologies and represents social structures within its narrative. The study further investigates how dialogue, visual elements, and narrative construction communicate social messages related to critical communication theory.

Primary data were collected from the drama itself as the main object of analysis through Visual and Narrative Textual Analysis. The researcher repeatedly viewed the series to closely observe dialogue, plot development, characterization, cinematography, symbols, and the social discourses constructed within the drama. This technique was employed to disentangle both explicit and implicit meanings embedded in the audiovisual work. Data collection was also conducted through interviews to identify viewers' perspectives, subjective interpretations, and the emotional, perceptual, or cognitive impacts of the drama. Secondary data were gathered, where necessary, to support deeper analysis, including literature, academic journals, previous research, and reviews related to the drama. The population of this study consists of Korean drama viewers, while the sample includes individuals who have watched *Taxi Driver II*. The criteria for interview informants were Korean drama enthusiasts who had completed the entire series of *Taxi Driver II*.

3. Result and Discussion

The following are the results of research obtained from research processed using the application *RapidMiner*.



The results of the critical discourse analysis using the models of Norman Fairclough and Teun A. Van Dijk indicate that *Taxi Driver II* highlights a range of social issues that are not only relevant in South Korea but also applicable to other contexts, including Indonesia. The series further demonstrates representations of critical communication theory and exerts influence on its audience.






Representation of Social Issues in *Taxi Driver II*






Taxi Driver II represents various social issues as identified through the conducted critical discourse analysis. These representations were examined using textual analysis based on Fairclough's model and microstructural analysis derived from Van Dijk's framework. The issues are constructed into narrative arcs and represented through scenes, dialogues, and character expressions within the drama. The following are the social issues represented in *Taxi Driver II*:





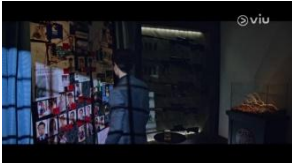



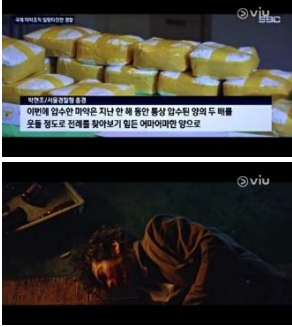
Table 1. Social Issues in Taxi Driver II

No	Social Issue	Description	Representation in the Drama
1	Legal Injustice	<p>This issue is depicted through cases of sexual harassment and the distribution of illegally recorded pornographic videos. The three perpetrators attempt to bribe law enforcement officials to secure their release; however, their plan is thwarted by Kim Do Gi.</p>	<p>Dialogue:</p> <p>Prisoner: “I heard you’re getting out on probation today. It must be nice to have privileges.”</p> <p>Perpetrator 1: “Of course. I’ve spent a lot of money.” (Episode 1, 02:56–03:04)</p> <p>Do Gi: “If you appear in court today, you’ll be released. Isn’t that too simple?” (Episode 1, 07:38–07:47)</p> <p>Expression:</p> <p>The perpetrators display no remorse.</p> 
2	Human Trafficking	<p>This issue is presented through the story of a university student who falls victim to fraudulent job recruitment and is trafficked to Vietnam, a scheme orchestrated by a police officer. The student is forced to develop gambling websites and subjected to abuse. Kim Do Gi helps free the detained workers.</p>	<p>Scene:</p> <p>Scenes depicting revenge carried out against the perpetrators.</p>  <p>Dialogue:</p> <p>Police Officer: “There’s no point in catching criminals in Korea. Why? Because they end up living better lives anyway. So what choice do I have? I have to take care of myself.” (Episode 2, 57:04–57:21)</p> <p>Scene:</p> <p>Scenes of migrant workers being abused.</p>

No	Social Issue	Description	Representation in the Drama
			 <p data-bbox="930 502 1406 566">Scenes of Kim Do Gi protecting migrant workers.</p>  <p data-bbox="1161 944 1257 970">Scene:</p> <p data-bbox="930 981 1493 1044"><i>A scene in which Lim Bok Soon attempts to end her life.</i></p>
3	Fraud Targeting the Elderly	This issue is illustrated through fraudulent schemes led by Yoon Sang Gi targeting elderly individuals who are vulnerable and lack technological literacy. The syndicate exploits their personal data and secures loans for their own benefit.	 <p data-bbox="930 1215 1493 1278"><i>The Rainbow Taxi service offering victims the option of revenge.</i></p>
			 <p data-bbox="930 1453 1430 1517">Revenge carried out against Yoo Sang Gi's syndicate</p>  <p data-bbox="1145 1857 1278 1883">Dialogue:</p> <p data-bbox="930 1893 1493 1957">Pil Seung: "The chance that people here can buy an apartment on the list is smaller than the</p>
4	Child Exploitation	This issue is depicted through Kang Pil Seung, who exploits children in an apartment credit	

No	Social Issue	Description	Representation in the Drama
		<p>fraud scheme. He detains and harms the children, who are ultimately rescued by Kim Do Gi.</p>	<p>chance of a camel passing through the eye of a needle. If you weren't born into a wealthy family, you have no opportunity.” (Episode 5, 44:00–44:12)</p> <p>Scene: Criminal acts committed by Kang Pil Seung.</p>  <p>The rescue of the detained children.</p>  <p>The condition of Kang Pil Seung.</p> 
5	Cult-Related Fraud	<p>This issue is portrayed through Oh Ju Nam, who leads a cult and brainwashes his followers to distance themselves from their families, abuses them, and persuades them to surrender their assets under the guise of offerings. Ultimately, Oh Ju Nam is deceived in the same manner by Kim Do Gi.</p>	<p>Dialogue: Seong Chul: “No one believes they're members of a cult. Exploiting their faith to serve someone's selfish intentions is the real crime here. What's worse is that it's almost impossible to make the followers realize they are victims because their belief is that strong.” (Episode 7, 28:20–28:37)</p> <p>Scene: Collection of donations from followers.</p>  <p>A staged cult scenario designed as part of the revenge plan.</p> 
6	Medical Malpractice	<p>This issue addresses doctors who prioritize profit over patient safety by exploiting legal loopholes. A physician instructs individuals without medical expertise to</p>	<p>Dialogue: Go Eun: “How can she remain calm after committing such a crime?” Do Gi: “Light punishment, minor fines, and medical licenses that are easily renewed. Ahn</p>

No	Social Issue	Description	Representation in the Drama
7	Illegal Business Operations	<p>perform surgeries and increases the number of procedures to claim government insurance funds</p> <p>This issue is portrayed through gangster activities involving organized crimes such as assault, sabotage, drug trafficking, rape, and murder. The syndicate operates multiple business lines, including nightclubs, narcotics distribution, prostitution, and human trafficking. The organization is led by a bishop and is ultimately exposed to the public by Kim Do Gi and the Rainbow Taxi team.</p>	<p>Young Sook discovered that while living as Ahn Eun Jin, and that's how she devised this scheme.” (Episode 10, 37:20–37:39)</p> <p>Do Gi: “A vast circle filled with clean sand became dangerous because of a single needle—just one needle. You are that needle.” (Episode 10, 53:40–54:27)</p> <p>Scene: The hospital's motto contrasted with malpractice protests</p>  <p>Scenes depicting revenge.</p>   <p>Scene: A special ring symbolizing gang membership.</p>  <p>Oh Ha Jun and his plan to defeat Kim Do Gi.</p>  <p>Illegal business activities carried out by the organization.</p> 

No	Social Issue	Description	Representation in the Drama
			

The social issues represented in the drama are relevant to the problems occurring in South Korea as the primary setting of the narrative; however, several of these issues are also applicable to conditions in other countries, including Indonesia. This observation aligns with Wisman (2020), who argues that social issues are contingent upon the specific conditions of a given society. A social problem in one region may not necessarily be perceived as problematic in another if it does not cause harm or disrupt social life within that particular context. The issue of legal injustice highlights various concerns, including pornography-related crimes and illegal recordings, which function as a critique of governmental systems in response to the prevalence of such offenses in Korea. Legal injustice undermines the integrity of the legal system and disrupts social stability due to the weakening of institutional authority (Firmansyah & Pangestika, 2024). Another issue addressed is human trafficking, which constitutes a violation of human rights and represents a serious crime, as it typically targets individuals who are economically, physically, or socially vulnerable (Kurniasi & Novita, 2024). The representation of human trafficking further criticizes the state's inability to provide sufficient and decent employment opportunities, as well as the lack of adequate protection for migrant workers.

The issue of child exploitation emphasizes complex problems ranging from economic disparities to data falsification. Economic inequality can tempt individuals to engage in credit fraud by exploiting children. This depiction also reflects the inadequacy of child protection mechanisms, despite every child's right to opportunities for growth and protection to ensure optimal physical, spiritual, social, and mental development (Sasongko et al., 2025). The issue of cult-related fraud represents the social reality in Korea, where numerous deviant cults constitute significant social problems. Medical malpractice is portrayed as a criminal act because it causes harm to patients, and negligence resulting in patient injury constitutes a punishable offense. Patients, as recipients of healthcare services, have the legal right to pursue claims if they become victims of medical malpractice (Langkai, 2023). The final issue presented is illegal business operations involving crimes such as drug trafficking, violence, sexual harassment, prostitution, murder, sabotage, and other offenses. According to Cho et al. (2010), a considerable number of gangsters operate in Korea, including individuals of foreign origin, rendering organized crime a significant social issue in South Korea.

Representation of Critical Communication in Taxi Driver II

Taxi Driver II presents the overarching theme of "revenge for justice" as a manifestation of critical communication within the narrative. Critical communication theory explains how communication can be utilized to challenge domination, power, and inequality within society (Fadila et al., 2024). The portrayal of various social issues related to injustice and domination further reflects the principles of critical communication theory. This perspective is consistent with Yasir (2012), who defines critical communication as a paradigm that critiques domination, injustice, and flawed systems while advocating efforts to transform them into more equitable structures.

Kim Do Gi, as the protagonist, along with the Rainbow Taxi service team, symbolizes resistance aligned with critical communication theory. Kim Do Gi and the Rainbow Taxi team consistently advocate for justice on behalf of victims and defend those who are socially marginalized. Critical communication theory upholds the values of justice and equality and promotes patriotic and emancipatory attitudes, defined as active efforts to confront injustice and discrimination (Sholahudin, 2020). The actions undertaken by Kim Do Gi and the Rainbow Taxi team in assisting victims to obtain justice and avenge wrongdoing constitute practical enactments of critical theory.

Messages and Influence of Taxi Driver II on Audiences

The results of interviews conducted with viewers of Taxi Driver as respondents indicate that audiences perceive the issues presented in the drama as consistent with real-world realities. This perception suggests that legal injustice and

other social issues have become commonplace in various regions. This finding aligns with (ADIGUNA, n.d.), who argue that film and drama serve as platforms for creators to represent social realities while highlighting and critiquing issues deemed significant. Drama possesses the capacity to influence viewers' lifestyles, thought patterns, and perspectives on social realities (Salam et al., 2012), as mass media generate cognitive, emotional, and conative effects on audiences.

Interview findings further reveal that viewers perceive the drama as conveying messages closely related to everyday social life. The depiction of injustice fosters a spirit of determination among viewers. Audiences regard the protagonist as a helpful and justice-oriented figure who provides a model for similar actions within society. The Korean drama *Taxi Driver II* features Kim Do Gi as a main character who is consistently portrayed as striving for justice through exceptional and remarkable abilities. This characterization serves as a medium through which the writer or creator communicates specific ideas to the audience. According to Putri (2022), creators invariably possess particular intentions in producing their works. Through character actions, scenes, and narrative construction, the drama conveys messages, disseminates information, and influences audience behavior. Social messages delivered through film possess significant power to shape individual style, patterns of thought, speech, and behavior (Saputri et al., 2022).

4. Conclusion

Taxi Driver II presents representations of various social issues that are highly relevant to contemporary society, including legal injustice, human trafficking, fraud targeting the elderly, child exploitation, cult-related fraud, medical malpractice, and illegal business operations. The drama also embodies the principles of critical communication theory by foregrounding societal problems and constructing characters who actively strive for justice while resisting domination and abuses of power.

The series exerts a meaningful impact on its audience by conveying messages that encourage greater social awareness and motivate viewers to participate in the pursuit of justice. Advocating for justice may begin with the courage to speak out, to demonstrate empathy, and to stand in solidarity with marginalized individuals.

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