

## Public Reception of *Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG)* Program on Social Media

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines public acceptance of the *Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG)* program on social media through a qualitative content analysis of 100 comments purposively collected from Instagram, Twitter/X, and YouTube (between March 2025-March 2026). Manual sentiment analysis classified comments into positive, negative, and neutral categories, followed by thematic analysis to identify dominant discourse patterns. Grounded in Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw) and Framing Theory (Entman), findings reveal that negative sentiment dominates public discourse, characterized by institutional distrust, budget accountability concerns, potential corruption, unequal distribution, and program sustainability. Twitter/X exhibited the most critical discursive character reflecting its deliberative nature, while YouTube demonstrated a more balanced sentiment distribution. Positive comments reflect appreciation for the program's nutritional objectives, particularly in addressing stunting. This negative dominance signals a credibility gap in government communication. Transparent, two-way, and evidence-based communication strategies are therefore imperative to shift public perception and strengthen trust in MBG implementation.

**Keywords:** *Public Acceptance, Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG), Sentiment Analysis, Social Media, Content Analysis*

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## INTRODUCTION

Nutritional policy has long been recognized as a critical instrument in human capital development, particularly in developing nations where malnutrition and stunting continue to pose significant structural challenges. In Indonesia, the national stunting rate remained at 21.5% as of 2024, surpassing the regional average among developing countries in Southeast Asia (Ministry of Health, 2024), thereby underscoring the urgency of large-scale, government-driven nutritional interventions. It is within this context that the *Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG)* program was introduced as a flagship initiative of the administration of President Prabowo Subianto, commencing implementation in January 2025. The program targets students from early childhood education (PAUD) through senior secondary school (SMA), as well as pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and children under five, with a budget allocation of IDR 71 trillion for the fiscal year 2025, rendering it one of the largest

policy-based nutritional intervention programs ever designed by the Indonesian government. From its campaign period through its implementation phase, MBG has generated highly intensive public discourse across various social media platforms (Mukarom et al., 2025).

The intensity of this public discourse is inseparable from the transformative role that social media now plays in shaping societal responses to government policy. According to We Are Social and Hootsuite (2024), active social media users in Indonesia number 139 million, establishing digital platforms as the primary arena for public opinion formation. Unlike the era of conventional, unidirectional mass media, social media enables citizens to function simultaneously as producers and consumers of messages, thereby generating a dynamic and often unpredictable ecosystem of public deliberation (Nasrullah, 2017). In this environment, public reactions to policies such as MBG are no longer confined to formal channels; they proliferate across comment sections, threads, and video responses in ways that are rapid, affectively charged, and highly consequential for program legitimacy. This renders the systematic analysis of social media commentary a vital empirical instrument for understanding and measuring public acceptance of government programs.

A growing body of scholarship has begun to examine public sentiment toward government programs on social media, consistently demonstrating that such sentiment tends to be complex and non-linear. In the Indonesian context, Sidauruk et al. (2024) found that public comments regarding the Prabowo-Gibran Free Lunch program on Instagram were deeply ambivalent, marked by a tension between expectations of nutritional benefit and skepticism over the state's fiscal capacity. Anggriyani and Fakhriza (2024), who analyzed 1,028 tweets on Twitter/X, found that negative sentiment was dominant at 44.84%, followed by positive at 32.39% and neutral at 22.76%. Mukarom et al. (2025), employing an aspect-based sentiment analysis of the MBG program on Twitter/X using Duncan's effectiveness framework, further identified that aspects related to program implementation attracted the highest volume of critical commentary. Taken together, these findings consistently indicate that large-scale social policies tend to encounter stronger discursive resistance in digital spaces than in conventional mainstream media.

This pattern is not unique to the Indonesian setting. At the international level, Dang et al. (2025) demonstrated that policy uncertainty and insufficient transparency were strongly correlated with the dominance of negative sentiment among Chinese netizens responding to COVID-19 policies on Weibo. Molenaar et al. (2024), in a systematic review of sentiment analysis pertaining to food and nutrition on social media, confirmed that government food programs that are not communicated effectively tend to generate negative public perceptions irrespective of their substantive merits. Ma et al. (2024) further argued that public acceptance of programs involving institutional trust is strongly mediated by sentiment attribution, that is, the degree to which the public associates the program with the government's intentions, capabilities, and accountability record. Collectively, these international findings reinforce the conclusion that the communication dimension of policy implementation is as consequential as its technical and logistical dimensions.

Despite the growing scholarly attention to public sentiment toward the MBG program, several significant research gaps remain. First, the majority of existing studies rely on automated computational approaches, including Naïve Bayes, Support Vector Machines (SVM), and Natural Language Processing (NLP), which, while scalable, risk obscuring the contextual nuances of the Indonesian language, which is particularly rich in connotation, irony, and sarcasm (Laia et al., 2025; Azhari & Parjito, 2024). Second, studies grounded in communication science that integrate thematic analysis with public policy communication theory remain scarce. Third, and critically, no study has yet explicitly integrated multiple platforms, specifically Instagram, Twitter/X, and YouTube, within a single analytical framework, thereby precluding a comprehensive, cross-platform understanding of sentiment patterns. These gaps are consequential: as Entman (1993) and McCombs and Shaw (1972) have argued, failures in policy communication can generate public resistance that impedes program implementation well before its intended benefits reach the population.

It is in response to these gaps that the present study is situated. This study addresses two research questions: (1) How is public acceptance of the MBG program manifested on social media? and (2) What are the prevailing sentiment orientations, namely positive, negative, or neutral, among the public toward the program? Through a qualitative content analysis employing manual sentiment analysis of 100 comments drawn from Instagram, Twitter/X, and YouTube (March 2025–March 2026), this study seeks to contribute theoretically to the development of public policy communication scholarship in the digital era. Simultaneously, it aims to provide evidence-based, practical recommendations for the government in designing more transparent, responsive, and effective communication strategies for the MBG program.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis. Qualitative content analysis was selected for its capacity to reveal meanings, discourse patterns, and sentiment orientations embedded within social media texts in a deep and contextually grounded manner (Krippendorff, 2018). The data analysis technique employed is manual sentiment analysis, whereby comments are classified into three categories, namely positive, negative, and neutral, based on a coding guide (codebook) systematically developed prior to data collection.

The research population comprised all public comments posted on social media platforms concerning the MBG program during the period from March 2025 to March 2026. Purposive sampling was employed using the following criteria: (1) comments must have been posted by public accounts and not by bots or spam accounts; (2) comments must explicitly reference the MBG program; and (3) comments must be fully readable and comprehensible in context. Based on these criteria, 100 comments were designated as the unit of analysis, comprising 40 from Instagram, 35 from Twitter/X, and 25 from YouTube. The selection of these three platforms was informed by their dominance in public discourse concerning government policy in Indonesia (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2024).

Data were collected through manual searches using the keywords “MBG”, “Makan Bergizi Gratis”, and “makan gratis sekolah” (free school meals) on posts with high levels of interaction (>500 likes, retweets, or reposts) within the March 2025–March 2026 data collection period. Comments meeting the inclusion criteria were transcribed verbatim into a coding sheet containing the following columns: sequential number, platform, date of upload, comment content, and sentiment classification. The codebook incorporated operational definitions for each of the three sentiment categories, along with representative example comments for each category, to ensure consistency in the coding process.

Manual sentiment analysis was independently conducted by two trained coders. Classification was guided by the following criteria: (1) Negative, referring to comments expressing criticism, rejection, concern, distrust, or disappointment regarding the MBG program; (2) Positive, referring to comments expressing support, appreciation, positive expectations, or agreement with the program; and (3) Neutral, referring to comments that are informational in character, contain factual inquiries, or do not express a clear sentiment orientation. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied the four strategies proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): (1) credibility, through source triangulation across three different platforms and inter-coder discussion to reach consensus on ambiguous cases; (2) transferability, through thick description of context, enabling readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other contexts; (3) dependability, through consistent documentation of the coding procedures using a codebook agreed upon prior to data collection; and (4) confirmability, through an analytical audit trail comprising complete documentation of all classification processes, subject to review (Krippendorff, 2018). Discrepancies in inter-coder interpretation were resolved through consensus discussion until mutual agreement was reached. Following the completion of classification, the data were analyzed thematically to identify discourse patterns and dominant themes within each sentiment category.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESEARCH RESULT**

Based on thematic analysis of 100 comments drawn from three social media platforms, it was found that negative sentiment dominates public discourse concerning the MBG program. The results of the content analysis are presented in three sections: overall dominant sentiment orientation, platform-specific discourse characteristics, and the themes constituting each sentiment category.

**Table 1. Dominant Sentiment Orientations in Public Comments Regarding the MBG Program**

No.	Sentiment Category	Discourse Characteristics	Discourse Tendency
1	Negative	Most frequently identified in the corpus	Dominant: discourse is dominated by criticism, suspicion, and rejection
2	Positive	Significantly identified in the corpus	Significant: encompasses appreciation, support, and positive expectations
3	Neutral	Present in a portion of the corpus	Present: informational in nature, indicating an information gap
<b>Total</b>		All units of analysis	Entire corpus

Source: Primary Research Data (2025–2026)

Table 1 demonstrates that negative sentiment constitutes the dominant discourse orientation in public comments, characterized by expressions of criticism, institutional suspicion, and distrust. Positive sentiment is significantly present, carrying narratives of hope and support for the program's objectives, while neutral comments indicate the existence of an information gap among members of the public that has yet to be adequately addressed by government communication.

**Table 2. Sentiment Discourse Characteristics by Social Media Platform**

No.	Platform	Total	Negative	Positive	Neutral
1	Instagram	40	Dominant	Significant	Present
2	Twitter/X	35	Highly Dominant	Present	Minimal
3	YouTube	25	Dominant	8 (32%)	8 (32%)
<b>Total</b>		All units of analysis	Dominant (cross-platform)	Significant (cross-platform)	Present (cross-platform)

Source: Primary Research Data (2025–2026)

Table 2 demonstrates that the character of discourse varies across platforms. Twitter/X exhibits the most critical discursive ecosystem, with comments that tend to be direct, sharp, and argumentative, reflecting the deliberative public culture that is characteristic of the platform. Instagram exhibits a more expressive and emotionally charged form of negative discourse, while YouTube demonstrates the most balanced distribution of discourse, with a more prominent presence of neutral sentiment compared to the other two platforms, indicative of a more diverse audience willing to seek out information. Overall, all three platforms display a consistent pattern, namely the dominance of negative sentiment, confirming that public concerns regarding the MBG program transcend any single platform.

**Table 3. Dominant Themes by Sentiment Category**

No.	Category	Dominant Theme	Example Comment
1	Negative	Doubts over effectiveness & budget waste	"Public funds are going to be squandered on a gimmick program with no clear benefit"
2	Negative	Concerns over corruption and misconduct	"Every government program ends up being corrupted, don't trust it"
3	Negative	Criticism of food quality and unequal distribution	"In my village there's nothing yet, only kids in the city are benefiting"
4	Positive	Support for a pro-people social program	"Great program, Indonesian children need proper nutrition for their future"
5	Positive	Appreciation for government efforts	"At least the government cares about the nutrition of the younger generation"
6	Neutral	Technical questions and requests for information	"When does it start? Which elementary school can my child get it from?"

Source: Primary Research Data (2025–2026)

Table 3 summarizes the dominant themes within each category. Within negative sentiment, the three most prominent themes are: skepticism regarding the program's effectiveness and allegations of budget waste; concerns about corruption and misconduct; and criticism of food quality and inequitable distribution. Within positive sentiment, the themes that emerge are support for the pro-people social program and appreciation for the government's efforts to address stunting. Neutral comments are dominated by technical questions and requests for information, indicating an information gap among the public.

## DISCUSSION

### The Dominance of Negative Sentiment from an Agenda Setting Perspective

The finding of dominant negative sentiment constitutes a strong signal of a public trust deficit regarding the MBG program. Within the framework of Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), social media, most notably Twitter/X, has effectively positioned issues of budget accountability, corruption potential, and unequal distribution as the dominant agenda in public discourse on MBG. When these negative issues become the primary agenda, public perception is collectively shaped by those critical frames. This finding is consistent with the results of Anggriyani and Fakhriza (2024), who identified negative sentiment as the dominant orientation in their analysis of tweets concerning the free meal program, as well as with Dang et al. (2025), who demonstrated that government policies that lack transparent communication tend to generate predominantly negative emotions on social media.

### **Negative Framing and the Construction of Public Perception**

Thematic analysis reveals that negative comments are dominated by a frame of institutional suspicion, that is, a distrust of the government's capacity and intentions in implementing the program. This frame aligns with Entman's Framing Theory (1993), which posits that the manner in which a problem is defined, its causes are identified, and moral evaluations are rendered will determine how audiences process and respond to an issue. In the context of MBG, the public tends to frame the program through the lens of a historical experience with corruption and the inefficiency of social programs in Indonesia, a schema of collective memory that constructs a structural skepticism toward large-scale government programs.

The most pronounced dominance of negative sentiment on Twitter/X compared to other platforms reflects the characteristic discursive ecosystem of that platform, which is more conducive to critical expression and public deliberation (Nasrullah, 2017). Sari et al. (2026), in their study of MBG news framing, found that the construction of reality surrounding the program in digital media is heavily influenced by the news sources and perspectives selected, which are subsequently adopted and reinforced by social media users through processes of discourse reproduction. This indicates that the framing employed by online news media generates a significant cascading effect on the formation of sentiment in social media.

### **Implications for Public Policy Communication**

The findings of this study carry significant strategic implications. First, the dominance of negative sentiment suggests that the MBG program's communication strategy, which has thus far focused primarily on publicizing achievements, has been insufficient to address public concerns. Ma et al. (2024) demonstrated that public acceptance of government programs is highly dependent on sentiment attribution, specifically the degree to which the public perceives the government as a competent, sincere, and accountable actor. Second, the presence of neutral comments containing technical questions indicates an information gap that should be addressable through more proactive and informative government communication.

In public policy communication scholarship, Entman (1993) reminds us that the effectiveness of a policy in the public sphere is determined not solely by its substance, but by how that policy is framed and communicated to its audience. A program that is substantively sound yet communicated through frames that fail to address public concerns will continue to generate discursive resistance. It is therefore imperative that the government develop two-way communication strategies that enable direct dialogue with the public on social media, provide periodic and transparent implementation data, and offer rapid, fact-based responses to critical issues as they emerge in the digital sphere.

### **Cross-Platform Discourse Dynamics and the Indonesian Digital Ecosystem**

The differences in discourse character across platforms identified in this study reflect how the architecture and culture of each social media platform shapes the manner

in which the public expresses its attitudes toward government policy. Twitter/X, with its character limit and strong culture of mentions and retweets, encourages the expression of opinions that are concise yet sharp and direct. This platform has historically served as the primary arena for public deliberation in Indonesia, particularly among politically literate and policy-engaged user segments (Nasrullah, 2017). This accounts for why negative discourse on Twitter/X tends to be more argumentatively structured, addressing substantive issues such as fiscal accountability and distributional justice, rather than constituting mere emotional expression.

Instagram, on the other hand, accommodates a more visual and emotional form of discourse. Negative comments on Instagram tend to be more affectively expressive, employing colloquial language and emoticons. This can be explained through the concept of social media affordances as developed in digital communication scholarship: each platform offers distinct technical capabilities and social norms that indirectly shape the type of messages produced by its users (Nasrullah, 2017). This finding aligns with Nasrullah's (2017) concept of digital communication, which holds that each platform possesses its own communicative "grammar" that influences not only the style but also the substance of the discourse produced by its users. YouTube, meanwhile, exhibits a greater degree of balanced orientation because comments on that platform tend to be lengthier, more reflective, and often respond directly to video content, resulting in a higher frequency of neutral, informationally oriented comments compared to the other two platforms.

The consistent dominance of negative sentiment across all three platforms simultaneously constitutes a theoretically significant finding. It suggests that public concerns are not merely a platform-specific phenomenon, but rather reflect an attitude more deeply embedded at the level of public trust in governmental institutions more broadly. Laia et al. (2025) and Azhari & Parjito (2024), employing computational approaches on larger datasets, also identified similar patterns, confirming that, across both methods and platforms, critical discourse toward the MBG program is consistent and does not represent a methodological artifact.

### **Public Trust, Collective Memory, and the Challenges of Policy Communication**

The findings of this study reveal a dimension that extends beyond mere negative sentiment toward a single program, namely the issue of a public trust crisis regarding the state's capacity and integrity in managing large-scale social programs. The dominant themes in negative discourse, encompassing corruption, budget waste, and unequal distribution, are not concerns that emerged from a vacuum. They are rooted in the Indonesian public's collective memory of numerous social assistance programs that, in the past, experienced leakages, misallocation, or premature termination before producing tangible impact. From a communication perspective, Nasrullah (2017) explains that social media does not merely function as a channel for message dissemination, but also as an arena for the reconstruction of collective memory, wherein society's historical experiences with governmental institutions are continuously reproduced, reinforced, and disseminated through mechanisms of sharing and inter-user commentary. This is what renders negative sentiment

toward the MBG program not merely a spontaneous reaction, but an expression of a communication schema deeply embedded in the public consciousness.

From this perspective, the principal challenge confronting the MBG program is not merely a technical matter of implementation, but rather one of trust restoration, which requires a far more strategic and systematic communicative approach. Triana (2024), in a framing analysis of MBG coverage in online media, found that the dominant frames employed by media in reporting on the program tend to reinforce a frame of skepticism rather than one of hope. This pattern reveals a kind of vicious cycle among media framing, public sentiment, and program credibility: media amplifies public concerns, the public adopts and reinforces such framing on social media, and the government struggles to construct a convincing counter-narrative.

The presence of considerably significant positive sentiment in the findings offers a degree of analytical optimism. Comments expressing appreciation for the program's intentions and hope for its impact on stunting indicate that a foundational basis for the MBG program's social legitimacy does in fact exist. This suggests that the problem lies not in the program's objectives, but in a credibility deficit of the communicator in conveying them. In the tradition of persuasion communication, source credibility, which encompasses the dimensions of competence, trustworthiness, and good intent, constitutes an essential precondition for the effectiveness of a message (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). When the public doubts the government's credibility as a communicator, positive messages regarding the MBG program will be unable to penetrate the cognitive resistance that has already formed. Bridging this gap requires more than an information campaign; it necessitates consistency between the narratives communicated and concrete, publicly verifiable evidence on the ground.

The most pressing practical implication of these findings is the need for a paradigm transformation in government policy communication, shifting from a one-way transmission model toward a symmetrical two-way communication model. In organizational communication and public relations scholarship, the symmetrical two-way communication model positions dialogue, mutual understanding, and message adaptation as the core of the relationship between institutions and their publics (Nasrullah, 2017). Concretely, the government must maintain an active presence in the digital spaces where the public discusses MBG: responding to criticisms with transparent data, presenting periodic and easily accessible implementation reports, and engaging local community figures as intermediary communicators who bridge central policy with grassroots realities. Such a communicative transformation will not only strengthen public acceptance of the MBG program, but also lay the foundation for a broader and more enduring recovery of public trust in governmental institutions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has successfully addressed both of the research questions posed. First, public acceptance of the MBG program on social media is predominantly negative, characterized by sentiments of suspicion, skepticism, and institutional distrust regarding

program implementation. This acceptance is shaped by social media discourse constructions that position issues of budget accountability, corruption potential, and unequal distribution as the dominant agenda. Second, prevailing public sentiment tendencies demonstrate a consistent dominance of negative orientation across all three platforms. Twitter/X exhibits the most intense critical discourse, while YouTube demonstrates the most balanced discourse distribution, with a more prominent presence of neutral orientation.

The dominance of negative sentiment does not merely reflect an outright rejection of the program. Rather, it more profoundly reflects a communication and trust deficit that the government must urgently address. The presence of considerably significant positive sentiment indicates that the foundation for public acceptance remains and can be strengthened through communication strategies that are more transparent, responsive, and grounded in verifiable evidence in the field. The government needs to adopt an active two-way communication approach on social media, not merely broadcasting information in one direction, but proactively responding to criticism, presenting implementation data openly, and building a consistent narrative of trust. Future research is encouraged to examine changes in sentiment longitudinally as the MBG program's implementation evolves, and to explore the factors driving a shift from negative sentiment toward more positive public acceptance.

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