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Online civic engagement on X surrounding Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meals Program

The transformation of digital public spaces shifts public policy meaning to social media as a participatory discursive arena. This study examines online debates surrounding Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) on platform X, reflecting ideological contestation in digital citizenship practices. Utilising a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, this research combines Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modelling with Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse 646,376 tweets collected between January 1 and March 31, 2025. The LDA results identify four main topics: policy and budget criticism; poisoning issues and child nutrition quality; affirmative program support; and technical implementation. The CDA analysis reveals that at the textual level, MBG is framed as a moral-political issue, an economic instrument, and a child protection issue, driving civic polarisation. At the discursive practice level, meaning is dynamically negotiated through institutional texts and citizen participation responsive to empirical events. Socioculturally, the discourse is event-driven, mediated by X's algorithm, and reflects an ideological battle over state roles, accountability, and citizenship. The findings confirm that public policy legitimacy is actively shaped through online civic engagement within digital public spaces.

Keywords: online civic engagement; public policy; Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG); Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)

Introduction

The development of digital technology has changed how people interact with and participate in public policy processes. Social media, particularly platforms like X (formerly Twitter), has become a new public space where digital citizens can voice their opinions, criticise, or support government policies (Lee, 2022; Mulyono et al., 2023). One policy that has attracted public attention is the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG, *Makan Bergizi Gratis),* which aims to improve the community's nutritional

quality, especially for children. The program not only became the subject of discussion in formal spaces but also sparked intensive conversations on social media, where digital citizens were actively engaged. This phenomenon demonstrates the existence of online civic engagement, an important part of the dynamics of modern democracy.

Online civic engagement is citizen participation in the public policy process through digital platforms (Mulyono et al., 2022; Skoric et al., 2015; Warren et al., 2014). On social media X, digital citizens are not only passive recipients of information but also actively form opinions, engage in debate, and influence policy narratives (Yu, 2016). The Free Nutritious Meal Program, as one of the public policies with a direct impact on society, is often discussed. Since its inception, this policy has elicited a range of citizen responses, from support and criticism to debates over effectiveness, fairness in distribution, and its implications for public policy governance. The dynamics of the discourse show that social media X serves as an arena for digital citizenship, enabling digital citizens to actively shape the meaning and legitimacy of policies.

On the other hand, social media is also an arena where various interests and perspectives meet, thus strengthening its role as a space for public deliberation (Habermas, 1996; Hardiman, 2009), where arguments, interests, and normative claims are openly negotiated. The presence of social media as a new medium (McQuail, 2010) expands opportunities for citizens to express their views freely and engage in various forms of political activism that conventional media previously found difficult to facilitate. As a new medium, social media has several advantages, including its ability to expand access to important information through more open means, accelerate and expand the distribution of information, and provide an alternative space to uncover and document a wide range of public issues beyond the scope of mainstream media and civil society organisations (Joseph, 2012). In addition, social media also strengthens the

power of user messages to spread through network mechanisms and digital interactions. In this context, social media X not only functions as a channel for policy communication but also as a digital deliberative space that forms the process of meaning, legitimacy, and contestation of public policy.

From the perspectives of deliberative democracy and public policy analysis, policy is understood not only as a state administrative decision but also as the outcome of a process ideally responsive to society's demands and aspirations (Dye,2017; Easton, 1968). The argumentative approach in policy analysis emphasises the importance of dialogue and the exchange of arguments between state actors and citizens as the basis for policy legitimacy (Fischer & Forester, 2002), which in the context of digital society is increasingly mediated by online platforms and social media (OECD, 2020).

However, the question arises whether the involvement of digital citizens really drives a more participatory and deliberative policy process or rather reinforces the dynamics of echo chambers and opinion polarisation. Studies on digital communication show that the selectivity of information and the algorithmic structure of online platforms tend to limit exposure to diverse perspectives, thereby reinforcing the homogeneity of views and the fragmentation of public discourse (Flaxman et al., 2016; Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2007). This condition can shift the space of public deliberation into a more emotional, polarised arena of contestation, ultimately weakening the quality of citizen participation in the public policy process (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015).

Although studies have highlighted the role of social media in driving political participation and civic engagement online, most studies still focus on quantitative aspects of participation, such as engagement rates, interaction intensity, and social networking patterns. This approach often does not delve deeply into how meaning,

ideology, and power relations are constructed through language and discourse in public policy discourse on social media. In fact, in the context of sensitive and far-reaching policies such as the Free Nutritious Meal Program, the process of shaping public opinion is not only determined by how much citizen participation is, but also by how those policies are framed, debated, and negotiated discursively in the digital public space (Fairclough, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

In addition, public policy discourse on social media does not take place in a neutral space. The power dynamics among state actors, political elites, the media, influencers, and ordinary citizens also shape the direction and intensity of the debate. In this context, social media X becomes an arena where various actors with different symbolic resources compete to define the meaning of policies, build legitimacy, or even legitimise public policy through certain discourse strategies (van Dijk, 2008). Therefore, understanding online civic engagement is not enough to directly measure engagement; it is also necessary to examine how language, narratives, and representations are used to frame ideological interests and positions in policy discourse.

Furthermore, the study of the Free Nutritious Meal Program so far tends to be dominated by normative policy analysis and implementive evaluation, such as budget aspects (CELIOS, 2024), target recipients (CISDI, 2024), and nutritional impacts. There is still relatively limited research that treats this policy as the object of digital public discourse and examines how citizens interpret, respond to, and produce its meaning through interactions on social media. These limitations open space for research to explore public policy not only as a policy product but also as a living, debated discursive practice in the digital public space.

Methods

This study uses mixed methods to obtain comprehensive, valid, and reliable data

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design chosen is sequential explanatory, where the first stage uses a quantitative method (topic modelling with the Latent Dirichlet Allocation/LDA technique) to measure the condition of online civic engagement in Indonesia, and the second stage uses a qualitative method (Critical Discourse Analysis/CDA) to deepen and confirm quantitative findings. This research also adopts a transformative strategy aligned with the CDA paradigm, aims to examine issues of power and injustice, and positions researchers as advocacy agents (Aranda et al., 2021).

Quantitative methods are used for descriptive, comparative, and associative analysis of online civic engagement, while qualitative methods confirm, expand, and reinforce quantitative findings. This approach allows researchers not only to measure phenomena statistically but also to understand the meaning and power relationships behind the evolving discourse.

Participants

This study uses big data distributed on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), so it does not assign participants in the conventional sense. The research analysis unit consists of uploads and user interactions related to the Free Nutritious Eating Program's discourse. Data collection was carried out through a data crawling process in the period from January 1 to March 31, 2025, using three main keywords, namely "free lunch", "free nutritious meals", and "mbg", which were determined based on the results of initial observations on issues that digital citizens predominantly discussed.

The data-crawling process is carried out using a third-party application, namely netray.id, and the resulting data is stored in Tab-Separated Values (TSV) format. The data collection yields 646,376 rows, with 214,248 for the keyword "mbg", 196,655 for "free nutritious meals", 193,000 for "free lunch", and the rest are combinations of the three keywords. The details of the data obtained are as follows: The dataset used in this

study has been archived in the Zenodo research data repository and is publicly accessible at https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23352477.

Table 1. Results of Data Crawling on Social Media X

No	Keywords	Jumlah Data
1	mbg	214248
2	makan bergizi gratis	196655
3	makan siang gratis	193000
4	makan bergizi gratis, mbg	34411
5	makan siang gratis, makan bergizi gratis, mbg	4025
6	mbg, makan bergizi gratis	2205
7	makan siang gratis, mbg	1228
8	makan siang gratis, makan bergizi gratis	466
9	mbg, makan siang gratis	91
10	makan bergizi gratis, makan siang gratis	35
11	makan bergizi gratis, mbg, makan siang gratis	4
12	mbg, makan siang gratis, makan bergizi gratis	3
13	makan bergizi gratis, makan siang gratis, mbg	3
14	makan siang gratis, mbg, makan bergizi gratis	2
	Total	646.376

Location and Time of the Study

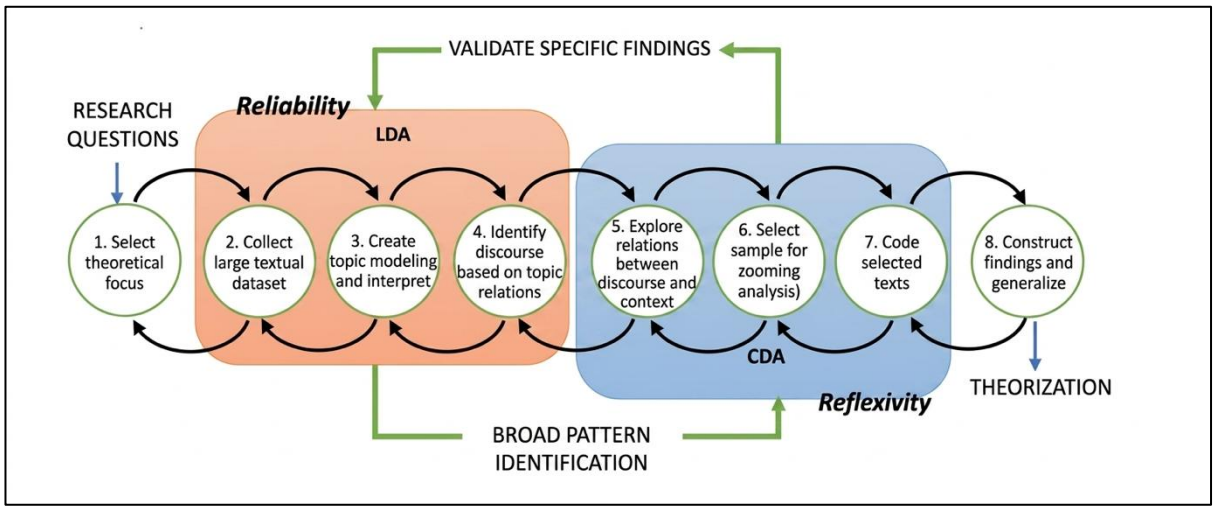
This research was carried out in the digital space, specifically on social media X, with no location limit; only tweets located in Indonesia were included. The research and data collection time starts from January-March 2025.

Research procedure

This study uses a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) with a transformative strategy, combining quantitative and qualitative methods in an ordered sequence. In the first stage, the research applied quantitative analysis using machine learning-based topic modelling to identify thematic patterns and structures in a large-scale text corpus. The model used is Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), a generative probabilistic model effective for summarising, grouping, and mapping dominant topics in unstructured text data (Blei, 2012; Blei et al., 2003). The LDA procedure includes: 1) data preprocessing (deduplication removal, cleaning, lower case, tokenisation, and stopwords removal); 2) dictionary and corpus formation, training and evaluation of the model using perplexity and coherence score values, and 3) ending with visualisation of results through word cloud and t-SNE.

In the second stage, the research uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with the Norman Fairclough framework to analyse in depth how meaning, ideology, and power relations are constructed in public policy discourse on social media. Fairclough's approach places discourse in three dimensions of analysis, namely text, discursive practice, and social practice, thus allowing researchers to examine the involvement of digital citizens not only from linguistic aspects, but also from the context of discourse production, distribution, and consumption. Through CDA, this study reveals how policy representation, the position of actors, and the dynamics of policy participation and contestation are mediated by social media features such as direct mention, hashtags, and digital interactivity (Eriyanto, 2011; Fairclough, 2015; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Sukmayadi et al., 2019).

Figure 1. Research Procedure



Research and Discussion Results

Results of Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) Analysis

The LDA process began by processing data obtained from the crawling process in the period January 1-March 31, 2025, comprising 646,376 tweets, through the preprocessing stage, which included the elimination of duplicates, lowercase conversion, tokenisation, and stopword removal, followed by the formation of a dictionary and corpus. The processed data was then analysed using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) via model training with five topic counts.

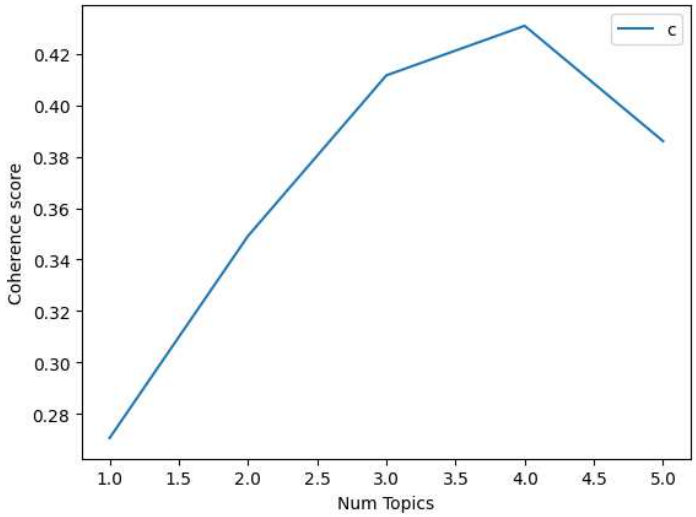
Table 2. Model Evaluation

5 Topic	
Num Topics	Coherence value score
1	0.2707
2	0.3492
3	0.4115
4	0.4308
5	0.386
Training Time	
1 hour 39 minutes 59 seconds	
Evaluation	

Perplexity: -8.372990810006678 Coherence Score: 0.4307876282059432

The evaluation results showed that the four-topic model produced the highest coherence value of 0.4308 and a perplexity value of –8.3729, with a training time of 1 hour 39 minutes 59 seconds. The visualisation of the coherence value shows that once the number of topics exceeds 4, the coherence value decreases consistently. Therefore, based on the results of the model evaluation, it was determined that four topics are the optimal number of topics in mapping the discourse of the Free Nutritious Eating Program (MBG), and the four topics are used as the basis for the formation of the final model and visualisation of the results of LDA analysis.

Figure 2. Coherence Score of topic modelling results



Based on LDA topic modelling (Figure 2), four main topics that shape the discourse of digital citizens related to the Free Nutritious Eating Program on social media X are identified, representing the thematic grouping of the overall tweets analysed. The four topics reflect the dominant and repetitive discourse patterns in public conversations, resulting in a systematic mapping of issues, narratives, and the orientation of digital citizens' attitudes towards these policies.

Using topic modelling with Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), the 10 most relevant terms were identified for each of the 4 topics based on their probability of occurrence in the data corpus, as shown in the following table.

Table 3

Weighting of Each Topic

Topic	Weight
Model LDA Topic 1	0.034*"siang" + 0.028*"program" + 0.019*"rakyat" + 0.018*"negara" + "0.013*"pendidikan" + 0.012*"anggaran" + 0.009*"korupsi" + 0.009*"mending" + "0.007*"pejabat" + 0.007*"pemerintah"
Model LDA Topic 2	0.105*"anak" + 0.085*"keracunan" + 0.033*"sekolah" + 0.030*"orang" + "0.017*"banget" + 0.010*"layak" + 0.009*"bawa" + 0.009*"gizi" + 0.009*"abis" + 0.008*"stunting"
Model LDA Topic 3	0.096*"program" + 0.064*"bergizi" + 0.034*"ekonomi" + 0.032*"indonesia" + "0.029*"lokal" + 0.025*"generasi" + 0.024*"dukung" + 0.023*"prabowo" + "0.022*"umkm" + 0.020*"pangan"
Model LDA Topic 4	0.043*"siang" + 0.028*"siswa" + 0.026*"polri" + 0.024*"makanan" + "0.021*"kupang" + 0.018*"program" + 0.014*"menu" + 0.014*"sppg" + "0.014*"sekolah" + 0.014*"bergizi"

The first term on each topic represents the word with the highest probability weight, followed by the subsequent terms with decreasing weight. To clarify the distribution and dominance of terms within each topic, the results of this modelling are then visualised as a word cloud as follows.

Figure 3. Wordcloud All Topics

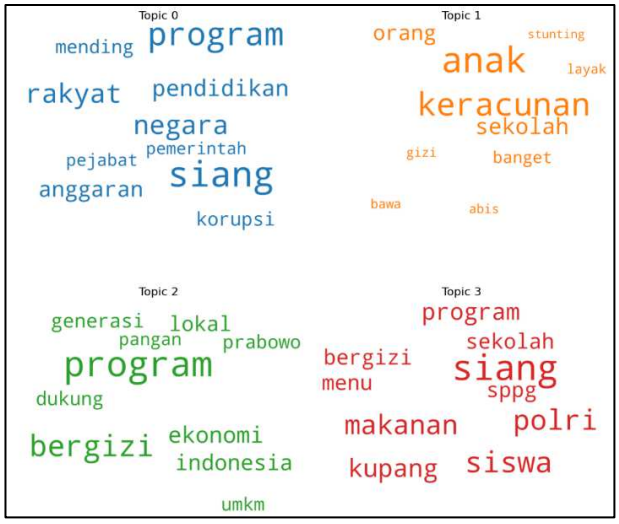
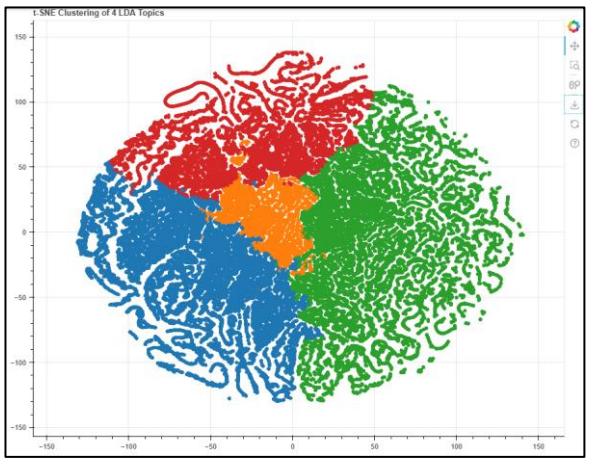


Figure 3 shows a wordcloud visualisation of the ten most dominant terms across the four main topics (Topic 0–3) in the LDA modelling results, where word size represents the probability of occurrence in each topic. In Topic 1, the word "noon" has the highest probability of 0.034, more dominant than the words "program" (0.028), "people" (0.019), and "state" (0.018), which indicates that the discourse of policy criticism is mostly centered on the term "lunch" as a symbol of policy, before then expanding to the issues of programs, state-people relations, education, budget, and corruption. In Topic 2, the word "child" emerged as the most dominant term with a very high probability, at 0.105, followed by "poisoning" (0.085), "school" (0.033), and "people" (0.030), which confirms that the discourse on this topic focuses strongly on the issue of school children and health risks, while terms such as "nutrition" (0.009) and "stunting" (0.008) play a role as a reinforcing narrative of health and nutritional quality.

In Topic 3, the word "program" has the highest weight of 0.096, followed by "nutritious" (0.064), "economic" (0.034), and "indonesian" (0.032), which reflects the affirmative discourse on the MBG policy as a national program associated with economic development, local empowerment, and political support, as seen from the emergence of the terms "prabowo" (0.023) and "MSMEs" (0.022). Meanwhile, in Topic 4, the word "noon" again became the term with the highest probability of 0.043, surpassing "students" (0.028), "police" (0.026), and "food" (0.024), which shows that this topic is oriented towards the technical implementation aspects of the school lunch program, the involvement of the apparatus, as well as the local context such as "kupang" (0.021). Overall, the differences in probability weights across the four topics indicate a range of discourse focus, from policy criticism and children's health concerns to economic development support and technical evaluation of program implementation.

When visualised using t-Distributed Stochastic Neighbour Embedding (t-SNE), an unsupervised, non-linear technique used for dimension reduction, data exploration, and high-dimensional data visualisation, all four topics can be displayed as shown in the following image.

Figure 4. t-SNE visualisation



Color Description:

Topic 1:- Topic 2: - Topic 3: - Topic 4: -

Figure V of the t-SNE visualisation shows the distribution of tweets mapped by the thematic proximity of the results of the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) analysis. Each dot represents one tweet, while the colour shows the four main topics of the Free Nutritious Eating Program discourse on social media X during the January-March 2025 period. The t-SNE visualisation shows a relatively clear separation of clusters across the four LDA modelling topics, while also highlighting the semantic wedge at the centre of the discourse. The blue cluster (Topic 1) is concentrated in the bottom left and forms a dense group, indicating the consistency of the discourse on the criticism of state policies and budgets. The orange colour (Topic 2) is in the middle area. It intersects with other clusters, indicating the role of child health issues and poisoning as a meeting point of discourse that connects criticism and support. Green (Topic 3) is widespread on the right, reflecting variation in narratives of support for local programs and economies, as

well as greater heterogeneity of themes. Meanwhile, red (Topic 4) is concentrated at the top, indicating a focus on technical implementation and the involvement of officials with close relationships to critical and health issues. Overall, this pattern confirms that the MBG discourse is structured into distinct but interconnected thematic clusters, with health and implementation issues serving as the connecting axis between the critical and affirmative poles.

When the word cloud and t-SNE visualisation are compared comprehensively, it becomes clear that the discourse of digital citizens regarding the Free Nutritious Meal Program falls into two major poles. The affirmative (positive) pole is mainly represented by Topic 3, which supports policies and emphasises local economic impacts, such as MSME empowerment and program contributions to regional economic development. The discourse at this pole tends to frame the program as a strategic policy that is not only oriented towards the fulfilment of nutrition, but also as an instrument of broader social and economic development.

On the other hand, the critical (negative) poles are represented by Topic 1, Topic 2, and part of Topic 4, which highlight various problems in policy implementation, ranging from the issue of budget management and potential corruption, food safety and children's health, to the technical aspects of program implementation in schools. Although they differ in their critical focus, these topics intersect with health issues and the implementation of school-level programs, serving as a "meeting point" between policy proponents and critics. These findings are reinforced by t-SNE visualisations that show the existence of central regions—especially in Topic 2—that connect criticism and support clusters. This indicates that the dimension of child health and safety is the centre of common concern that unites the spectrum of digital citizens' opinions, as well as an arena for negotiating meaning in public policy discourse.

Table 4. Interpretation of LDA Results

Topics	Key Keywords	Topic Labels	Main Meanings and Issues	Sentiment
1	"siang", "program", "rakyat", "negara", "pendidikan", "anggaran", "korupsi", "mending", "pejabat", "pemerintah"	Criticism of State Policies and Budgets	Public criticism of budget management, corruption issues, and policy effectiveness.	Negatives
2	"anak", "keracunan", "sekolah", "orang", "banget", "layak", "bawa", "gizi", "abis", "stunting"	Issues of Poisoning and Nutritional Quality of School Children	Public concern for food safety and the health of school children.	Negatives
3	"program", "bergizi", "ekonomi", "indonesia", "lokal", "generasi", "dukung", "prabowo", "umkm", "pangan"	Support for Local Programs and Economies	Affirmative support for programs and their relation to local economic empowerment.	Positive
4	"siang", "siswa", "polri", "makanan", "kupang", "program", "menu", "sppg", "sekolah", "bergizi"	Technical Implementation and Apparatus Involvement	Discourse on technical implementation, supervision, and regional context in the program.	Neutral–Negative

Based on the integration of Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) results, word cloud visualisation, and t-SNE cluster mapping, it can be concluded that the digital citizens' discourse on the Free Nutritious Meal Program is divided into four main topics that span a diverse spectrum of public attitudes and concerns. The first topic reflects criticism of the state budget's policies and management, dominated by negative sentiment and highlighting issues of accountability, policy effectiveness, and concerns about corruption. The second topic focuses on the issue of poisoning and the nutritional

quality of schoolchildren, and it is also negative in tone, showing that the dimensions of children's health and safety are the main concerns for digital citizens in assessing the program's implementation.

On the other hand, the third topic represents a positive flow in public discourse, emphasising support for programs and their links to local economic development, MSME empowerment, and food security. The positive sentiment that dominates this topic indicates public expectations of the program as an instrument of social and economic policy. Meanwhile, the fourth topic highlights aspects of technical implementation and the apparatus's involvement, including the local context of program implementation, which tend to be neutral to negative and often intersect with discourse on criticism and health concerns.

Overall, these findings confirm that public discourse on the Free Nutritious Meal Program is not homogeneous, but rather constitutes a space for contesting policy meanings that bring together support and criticism within a single digital discourse ecosystem. The t-SNE visualisation shows the semantic linkage between topics, especially health issues and the implementation of programs in schools, which serves as a meeting point for discourse between affirmative and critical currents. Thus, online civic engagement in this case not only reflects the level of citizen participation, but also the dynamics of negotiating meaning, legitimacy, and public trust in social policies in the social media era.

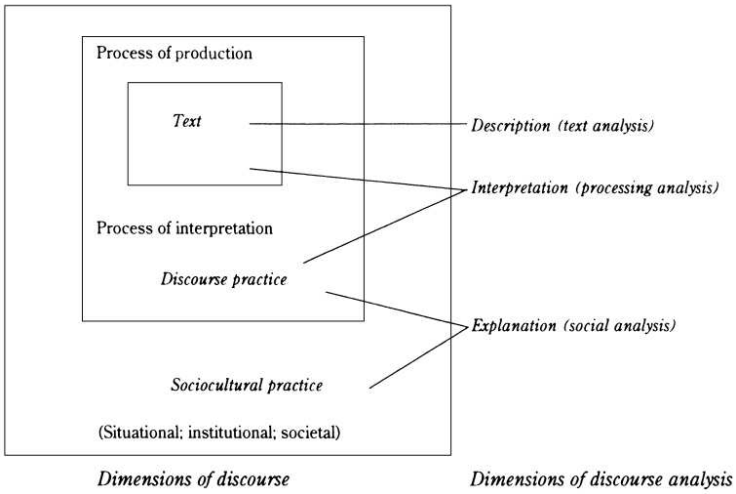
Results of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Fairclough's discourse analysis system has three main dimensions that simultaneously see discourse as: both oral and written texts, including visual images; discourse production practices, text consumption, and distribution; and sociocultural

practices (Fairclough, 2013). For this reason, the explanation of critical discourse analysis will follow the dimensions developed by Fairclough.

Figure 5 . Dimensions of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis

(Fairclough, 2013)



Textual Analysis (Descriptive)

The first stage in Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is textual (descriptive) analysis, which views text as a representation of reality that contains ideological content. Therefore, texts are analysed linguistically by examining vocabulary, meaning, sentence structure, and coherence and cohesiveness to reveal the way a reality is framed (Munfarida, 2014) In this study, the text of the LDA topic modeling was analysed through the choice of words, terms, and metaphors used, because these elements reflect certain meanings, attitudes, and actions in public policy discourse (Haryatmoko, 2015)

Text analysis is carried out descriptively, without first associating it with external context, focusing on three main elements: representation, relation, and identity. These three elements are used to understand how policies, actors, and social positions

are constructed in discourse, as well as to serve as a basis for analysis at the next stage of discursive practice and social practice.

(1) Representation

In the perspective of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, representation refers to the way texts display events, actors, and social relations that simultaneously reflect and shape power relations (Fairclough, 2013). The results of LDA topic modelling show that the discourse of the Free Nutritious Eating Program (MBG) is represented in diverse ways through four main topics. Topic 1 (Criticism of State Policies and Budgets) portrays the state and government as irrational, extravagant, and corruption-prone actors, while positioning the people as more rational and moral. The choice of diction, such as "program", "budget", "corruption", "state", and "people", builds a delegitimising discourse that questions policy accountability and credibility of public financial management. In this representation, digital citizens appear as supervisory agents who assess and reprimand power, so that the digital space functions as an alternative arena of social control over the state (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2007)

Unlike Topic 1, which is politically and economically oriented, Topic 2 (Issues of Poisoning and Nutritional Quality of School Children) is a moralistic, emotional discourse that places children at the centre. Children are positioned as a vulnerable group as well as a symbol of the nation's future, threatened by the systemic failure of the state. Diction such as "poisoning", "nutrition", "deserved", and "stunting" form a discourse of moral panic, where the MBG policy is no longer understood as an instrument of welfare, but as a potential threat to the safety and basic rights of children. The state in this topic is represented as a negligent and dangerous actor. At the same time, digital citizens take on the role of moral guardians (affective publics)

(Papacharissi, 2015) who demand the state's protection and responsibility toward the younger generation.

Instead, Topic 3 (Support for Local Programs and Economies) presents an affirmative representation of MBG, portraying the state as a visionary, people-oriented development actor. Words such as "program", "nutritious", "economic", "local", "MSMEs", and "generation" convey the MBG policy as a long-term investment in the quality of human resources and as a driver of the people's economy. This support is often personified through the figure of the president, so the program is represented as a symbol of national leadership and welfare nationalism. Meanwhile, Topic 4 (Technical Implementation and Involvement of Apparatus) represents the policy praxis phase, focusing on "noon", "students", "school", "menu", and "Polri". The state is no longer ideologically debated; it is judged by the performance of its implementation in the field. Digital citizens in this topic position themselves as social auditors who supervise the effectiveness and security of program implementation in line with the concept of social accountability and monitory democracy, which places citizens as supervisors of state performance through digital media (Castells, 2009), while the state is represented as a policy implementer who must prove its claims through real practice. Overall, the four topics show that the representation of MBG in the digital space moves from delegitimisation and moral panic to affirmative legitimacy and implementive evaluation, reflecting the dynamics of power relations between the state and citizens in social policy discourse.

(2) Relationship

Relationship analysis examines how participants are presented and connected in the text, with media understood as a social arena where various groups interact, influence each other, and compete for public acceptance (Fairclough, 2013) Social

media X as a new media, puts the boundaries between the creator of the text and the audience blurred because users can simultaneously produce, disseminate, and interpret messages (Papacharissi, 2015). Therefore, the relationship analysis in this study mainly focuses on the relationship between text makers (account owners/digital citizens) and public/government participants, namely how digital citizens position themselves towards the state and how the state is represented as a partner, object of criticism, or policy implementer in digital conversations.

In Topic 1, citizen-government relations are morally and politically oppositional: digital citizens take the position of public assessors and supervisors (civic audit) who rebuke the state from the bottom up, while the government is treated as an object of criticism, seen as losing rationality, integrity, and accountability. In Topic 2, relations shift to protective and moral demands: citizens, especially parents and education observers, position themselves as protectors of vulnerable children, while the state is portrayed as failing to fulfil its moral obligations to ensure food security and nutritional rights. These two topics both show the reversal of discursive authority, in which citizens are no longer passive recipients of policy but actively demand responsibility and set moral standards for the state.

Instead, Topic 3 presents collaborative and legitimative relationships: digital citizens act as legitimacy reinforcers, build vertical solidarity with the state, and interpret support for MBG as part of development projects and national pride, often personified through leadership figures. Meanwhile, Topic 4 shows a coordinating and evaluative relationship, where the state is positioned as an administrative implementer who must prove policy claims through practice in the field, while digital citizens appear as social auditors who assess the realism, security, and effectiveness of implementation; The involvement of the National Police strengthens the impression of supervision that is

still top-down, but still triggers a two-way relationship because the public openly supervises the implementation. Overall, the four topics show the spectrum of citizen-state relations in the digital era, ranging from opposition to moral protection, to legitimative collaboration, to technical evaluation. This marks that discursive power is no longer completely top-down, but rather negotiated publicly through language interactions on social media (Fairclough, 2015; Jungherr et al., 2019).

(3) Identity

Identity analysis focuses on how the creator of the text constructs and positions himself and other actors within the discourse (Fairclough, 2013) The identity referred to in this study is not personal, but a collective identity formed from hundreds of thousands of digital citizen uploads. The identity is understood as the result of the generalisation of meaning across topics, built through consistent patterns of language, attitudes, and social positions. Therefore, identity analysis cannot be separated from the outcomes of representation and relationship analysis, because identity arises from how actors represent reality and establish relationships with other actors in digital public discourse.

In Topics 1 and 2, the identity of digital citizens is constructed as a critical and protective moral actor. In Topic 1, citizens appear as the moral auditors of the state, i.e. rational subjects who assess policies based on public ethics and budget efficiency. At the same time, the government is represented as an unaccountable actor and loses moral legitimacy. In Topic 2, the identity of citizens shifts to become the moral guardians and protectors of the younger generation, especially schoolchildren, who are positioned as symbols of the nation's future and victims of state negligence. In both cases, the state is portrayed negatively: as a negligent party that fails to protect basic rights and must be publicly reprimanded. The identity of digital citizens has evolved from mere media

users to active citizens who exercise social control and moral advocacy in the digital space.

In contrast, Topic 3 and Topic 4 display a more affirmative and evaluative identity. In Topic 3, digital citizens construct themselves as patriotic and participatory citizens who support the state as a development actor, with the government portrayed as the protector of welfare and the driver of the local economy. Meanwhile, in Topic 4, the identity of citizens shifts to social supervisors or citizen auditors who assess policy implementation technically and empirically in the field. The government and its apparatus are positioned as formal implementers that must be supervised, while schools and students serve as a testing ground for the success of policy. Overall, identity analysis shows that MBG discourse shapes a spectrum of digital citizenship identities, from critics, protectors, supporters, to watchdogs, that affirm that social media serves as a space for the construction of new citizenship identities, where state legitimacy and citizen roles are negotiated openly and dynamically.

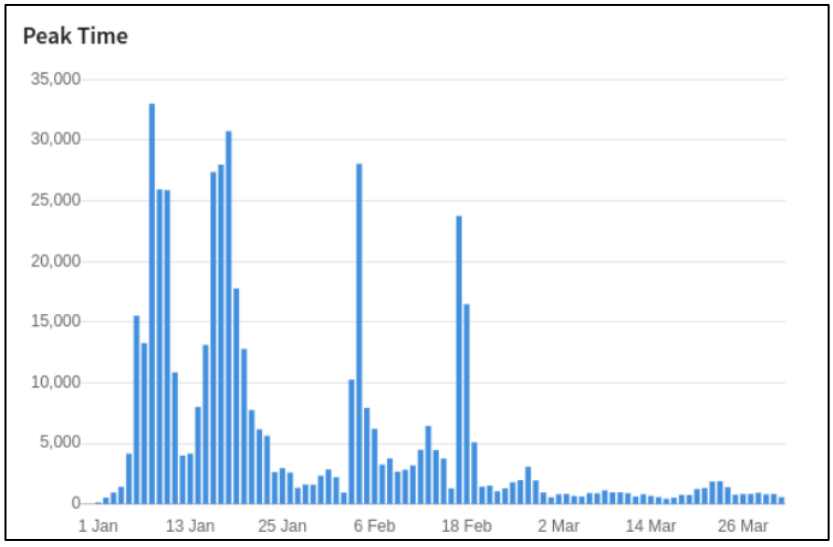
Discourse Practice Analysis (Interpretive)

The second dimension in Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is discourse practice, which focuses on how discourse is produced, distributed, and consumed in a particular social context (Fairclough, 2015) Context interpretation includes situational context, which is related to the institutional and social order of text production, as well as intertextual context, which is the history of the relationship between discourses that form the assumptions and framework of the meaning of a text (Fairclough, 2015)

(1) Situational Context

The situational context analysis aims to understand the social, political, and communicative conditions surrounding the emergence of the Free Nutritious Eating Program (MBG) discourse on social media X. The official launch of this program by President Prabowo Subianto on January 6, 2025, became one of the most prominent social policy moments at the beginning of his administration. This event is not only administrative but also political and symbolic, as it marks the government's commitment to nutrition, education, and people's welfare. At the beginning of the post-2024 government transition, MBG was perceived as a strategic populist policy that both continued the previous government's vision and transformed the new government's social orientation. National and international media reports that emphasise the program's coverage of more than 83 million beneficiaries (reuters.com, 2025) strengthen the framing of MBG as a major policy that directly touches people's daily lives.

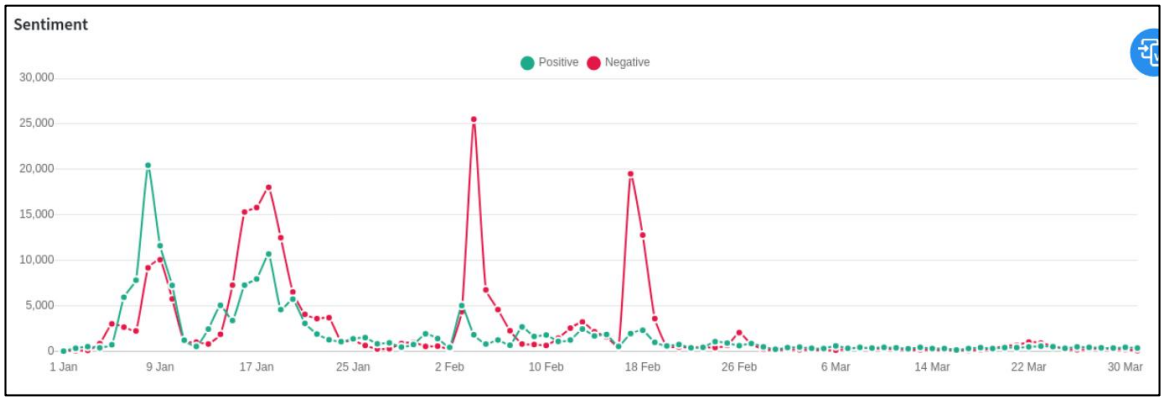
Figure 6. The peak time of the Free Nutritious Eating (MBG) discourse on Twitter.



The public's initial response to the launch of MBG quickly migrated online, fueling intense discourse. The peak time graph of the conversation shows a sharp spike on January 9, 2025, just three days after the official launch, which correlates with the massive media coverage and the spread of launch videos on social media. In this phase,

digital conversations reached more than 30,000 uploads per day and began to show the initial polarisation between supporters and policy critics. Sentiment analysis shows that during January 6–9, 2025, positive sentiment dominated the conversation, reflecting public euphoria over the program's launch. Mainstream media reporting with an optimistic tone plays an important role in shaping MBG's image as a national-scale social policy oriented towards the public interest.

Figure 7. Sentiment Analysis of Digital Citizens on the MBG Program



However, the dynamics of public sentiment have changed significantly as empirical events have developed. On January 17 and February 2, 2025, sentiment analysis graphs showed a spike in negative sentiment following news of food poisoning incidents at some schools. This condition indicates that the MBG discourse is highly sensitive to field implementation issues and can quickly shift from a symbol of success to an object of social criticism. The surge in negative sentiment reappeared on February 18–20, 2025, as criticism of the budget and the program's effectiveness increased across various media channels, marking a shift in the discourse's meaning from a narrative of nutrition and development to moral criticism of governance. Meanwhile, in March 2025, the graph shows a drastic decline in conversation volume, indicating public saturation and declining relevance of MBG issues in the digital space. Overall, these dynamics suggest that MBG discourse is shaped by the interaction among policy

momentum, empirical events, and media framing, which collectively influence fluctuations in sentiment and the direction of digital citizen participation.

In this dynamic, the participation of digital citizens shows a variety of communication characters, ranging from moral and legitimative support to rational and satirical criticism. Most tweets contain elements of public rationality that question fiscal feasibility, readiness for implementation, and the consistency of policies with political promises. In contrast, others use emotional language to affirm the ideological positions of pros and cons. The presence of media accounts, buzzers, and political influencers also strengthens the intensity and direction of discourse, making social media not only a deliberative space for citizen participation (Habermas, 1996; Hardiman, 2009; Prasetyo, 2012)but also an arena for ideological contestation where the meaning of policies is negotiated openly and dynamically.

(2) Intertextual Context

The intertextual analysis highlights how the discourse of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in the digital space interacts with other texts, including official government speeches, ministry releases, media reports, and digital citizen narratives. In Fairclough's (2013) perspective, intertextuality shows that texts do not stand alone but are part of a network of meanings that influence one another. MBG's discourse began with institutional texts such as presidential statements and official government communications, which were then reproduced by international and national media with diverse viewpoints. In the digital space, citizens reinterpret these texts through tweet quotes, comments, memes, and hashtags, so that social media functions as a space for the reproduction and rearticulation of policy meanings.

From an intertextual perspective, the dynamics of public sentiment show a close relationship between the production of institutional texts and the reproduction of

meaning by digital citizens. The surge in positive sentiment in early January reflects the successful reproduction of the official narrative by the media and the public, while the increase in negative sentiment in February (Figure 7) indicates a process of recontextualisation, when media texts are reinterpreted into political and moral criticism of policies (Pfurtscheller, 2022) Narrative tensions are also evident in the different framing of the media: the international media emphasizes humanitarian aspects and fiscal challenges, the national media highlights pride and technical readiness, while on social media the discourse shifts to political debates about populism, budgets, and policy effectiveness. Hashtag patterns such as #MakanBergiziGratis, #ProgramPrabowo, #Stunting, and #AnggaranNegara show the overlap of health, economic, and political discourses, which serve as both a meeting point and an arena for negotiating meaning.

Furthermore, digital citizens not only respond to texts but also creatively and reflectively reshape policy messages through satire, metaphors, and symbolic criticism, thereby reflecting the process of ideological struggle (Sevignani, 2022) in public discourse. This practice shows that the meaning of the MBG policy is no longer monopolised by the state but is negotiated dialogically among the government, media, and society within a discursive ecosystem. Thus, the practice of MBG discourse marks a shift in policy legitimacy from purely institutional to discursive legitimacy (Van Hulst et al., 2025), that is, legitimacy built through communication, participation, and public recognition in an open and dynamic digital space.

Sociocultural Analysis (Explanative)

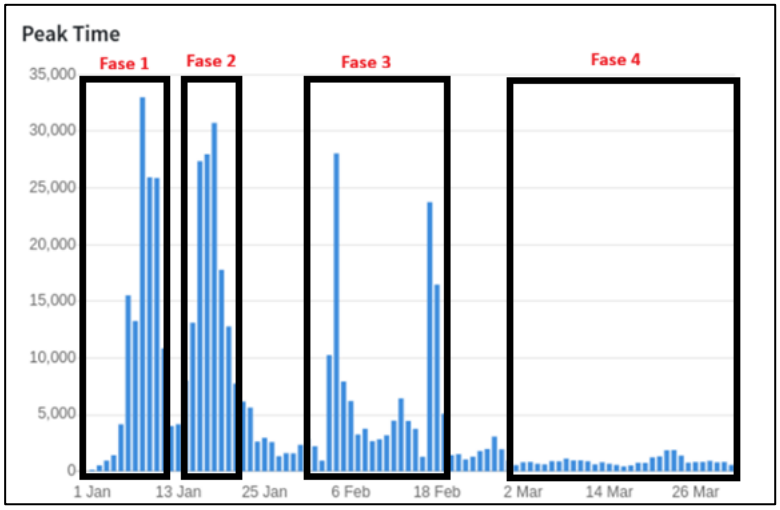
Sociocultural analysis situates discourse within social practices that are shaped by and shape social structures through the power relations that operate within them (Fairclough, 2013) In this dimension, the relationship between text and context is analysed by examining how social change is represented and mediated by the media at

the level of broader institutions, situations, and social orders. This analysis highlights the determination of discourse by power structures and their reproductive effects, both in maintaining and changing social structures, thus showing that texts not only reflect social realities but also play an active role in the struggle for meaning and power in the digital public space (Haryatmoko, 2015).

(1) Situational Level

A situational analysis of the social practice dimension emphasises how socio-political conditions and contexts shape the meaning of an event in discourse (Fairclough, 2013). This analysis focuses on the national situation behind the emergence and development of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) discourse, which was officially launched by President Prabowo Subianto on January 6, 2025 as an implementation of the Prabowo-Gibran government's political promise (CISDI, 2024) In the context of the 2024 post-election, the launch of MBG is not only understood as a social policy, but also as a symbol of consolidating political legitimacy and an initial test of public trust in the effectiveness of the new government, as reported by national and international media.

Figure *8.* 4 phases Peak Time of Free Nutritious Eating (MBG) discourse on Twitter



The situational dynamics of MBG's discourse are reflected in the peak time pattern and sentiment analysis that shows four main phases of digital conversations, namely public euphoria on January 6–9, 2025 (Phase 1), a surge in criticism due to food poisoning cases on January 17–20 (Phase 2), the peak of debates related to budgeting and distribution supervision on February 2–18 (Phase 3), and discourse saturation in March 2025 when the volume of conversations decreases drastically (Phase 4). This pattern emphasises that MBG discourse is event-driven, following social events and media reports, so that the meaning of policy is shaped not only by the substance of the program, but also by the context of digital communication (Castells, 2009)

(2) Level Institusional

At the institutional level, the analysis focuses on how institutions produce and frame events from their perspectives and priorities. Institutions, especially the state, have significant influence on shaping media discourse through their symbolic authority and legitimacy, thereby increasing public trust (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). In the discourse of the Free Nutritious Eating Program (MBG), the government, through the Coordinating Ministry for PMK, the Ministry of Finance. Bappenas serves as the main producer of institutional texts that emphasise the goals of nutrition and human development. National media such as Detik, Kompas, and CNBC Indonesia act as intermediaries that spread the narrative, while international media such as Reuters and AP News add a global dimension by highlighting the scale of the program for approximately 83 million beneficiaries (reuters.com, 2025)

Beyond the formal institutions of the state and the media, digital citizens on platform X are forming new, participatory communicative institutions in which the public serves as co-producers of policy meaning. The results of the LDA's analysis

show four main topics, topic 1 criticism of policies and budgets, topic 2 issues of child poisoning and nutrition, topic 3 support for the local economy, and topic 4 technical implementation and involvement of officials, which emphasizes that the meaning of policies is not monopolized by the government, but is generated through cross-institutional interaction between bureaucracy, media, and citizens. However, the production of this discourse is also influenced by the logic of the digital platform-media economy, where engagement algorithms prioritise controversial content, leading critical narratives to gain greater exposure than official government communications and triggering a reversal of discursive power in the formation of public opinion.

(3) Social Level

The social level highlights how economic, political, cultural, and social structures condition the direction of media-mediated discourse (Fairclough, 2013). Social analysis links the discourse of the Free Nutritious Eating Program (MBG) to the broader social and ideological structure in Indonesian society. Ideologically, MBG represents a combination of political populism and welfare nationalism, in which the state presents itself as a protector of the people by fulfilling basic needs such as nutrition and education. However, in the digital space, the narrative interacts with the reality of social inequality, thereby giving rise to citizen criticism (topics 1 and 2) of corruption, budgetary issues, and the quality of implementation as a form of moral resistance to the state elite.

MBG's discourse is also intertwined with cultural values such as cooperation, empathy for children, and public morality, which makes support and criticism both understood as expressions of social responsibility. In the global context, MBG aligns with the SDGs agenda, especially in food security and human development. Socioculturally, the MBG discourse is formed through the interaction of three main

layers, namely situational (political momentum and news), institutional (production of meaning by the government, media, and digital citizens), and social (the arena of ideological struggle about the role of the state and citizen participation in social welfare).

Conclusion

This study examined public discourse around the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) on social media X using a mixed-methods approach combining LDA topic modelling with Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Based on 646,376 tweets collected from January to March 2025, the LDA analysis identified four dominant topics: (1) criticism of state policy and budget management; (2) concerns over food poisoning incidents and the nutritional quality of schoolchildren; (3) affirmative support for the program and its local economic impact; and (4) technical evaluation of program implementation and the involvement of officials. The issue of child health and safety emerged as the central point of intersection between the critical and affirmative poles of public discourse.

At the textual level of the CDA, MBG was framed simultaneously as a moral-political issue, a protective instrument for children, a potential threat to child welfare, an instrument of economic development, and an object of implementation evaluation. At the level of discursive practice, the meaning of MBG was dynamically produced and negotiated through interactions among institutional texts, media reports, and citizen participation, all of which were highly responsive to empirical events in the field. At the sociocultural level, the discourse was shown to be event-driven, shaped by the algorithmic logic of platform X, and constitutive of an ideological contest over the role of the state, public accountability, and the meaning of citizenship in the digital age.

Overall, the findings confirm that the legitimacy of public policy in the digital era is no longer solely determined by institutional authority. Rather, it is constructed through the practice of online civic engagement in the digital public space, where citizens transform from passive recipients into active agents, functioning as moral critics, policy supporters, and social auditors, who collectively negotiate the meaning, trustworthiness, and legitimacy of social policies through language and interaction on social media.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Ethics statement

Ethics, Consent to Participate, and Consent to Publish declarations: not applicable.

Clinical trial number

Clinical trial number: not applicable.

Data availability statement

The dataset supporting the findings of this study is publicly available in Zenodo, an open-access research data repository, at https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23352477. The dataset consists of publicly available posts on X related to Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meals Program and was collected using Netray, a social media monitoring and analytics platform.

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