

**YouTube audience sentiment and discourse on the Watchdoc documentary “*Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis*” (No Free Lunch)**

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| ARTICLE INFO                                                                                                   | ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| <p><i>Keywords:</i><br/>sentiment analysis<br/>discourse analysis<br/>framing<br/>documentary film<br/>MBG</p> | <p>This study examines audience sentiment and discursive responses to the framing of Indonesia’s Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program in the Watchdoc documentary <i>Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis</i> (No Free Lunch) on YouTube. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, it analyzed a corpus of 1,551 comments and replies through the IndoBERT language model, complemented by systematic manual validation and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to identify audience narrative positions. The findings reveal a strong predominance of negative sentiment (83.24%), with the government emerging as the primary discursive target (67.70%). Furthermore, 89.23% of participants supported the documentary’s critical framing, while legitimation (44.87%) was the dominant communicative function, reflecting users’ efforts to reinforce the documentary’s evidentiary and argumentative claims. The study concludes that the documentary effectively performed an agenda-setting function by transforming the state’s benevolent welfare narrative into a site of material grievance and institutional distrust. This research contributes to the literature by integrating IndoBERT with culturally sensitive manual validation to address sarcasm and code-switching in Indonesian digital discourse and by introducing the concept of the negotiated legitimation zone to explain the political ambivalence of audiences in emerging democracies.</p> |

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## Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed the public sphere by shifting political deliberation from traditional venues to networked platforms, where communication is simultaneously more open, fragmented, and unevenly mediated (Habermas, 1989; Dahlberg, 2007). Within this new environment, social media serves as a central site for political meaning-making, contestation, and the circulation of counter-discourses, particularly among actors who challenge dominant narratives (Fraser, 1990; Loader & Mercea, 2011; Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018). YouTube, in particular, occupies a distinctive position by accommodating both long- and short-form audiovisual content and enabling audience interaction through comment sections, which serve as immediate spaces for civic response and debate (Lange, 2007; Burgess & Green, 2018; Dahlgren, 2009). Compared to text-centric platforms, YouTube's multimodal format amplifies the persuasive power of political content by integrating narration, visuals, affect, and evidence, thereby shaping audience interpretation and discussion of public issues (Kalogeropoulos, et al., 2019; Thelwall, 2018).

Within the digital public sphere, documentary film continues to serve as a powerful mode of political communication by presenting claims about reality and organizing them into framing devices that define problems, assign causality, evaluate morality, and suggest policy solutions (Nichols, 2010; Entman, 1993; Corner, 2002). Framing theory posits that media frames and audience frames operate in tandem, highlighting the importance of examining both how a documentary constructs a policy issue and how audiences receive, reproduce, or resist that construction (Scheufele, 1999). In online environments, particularly on YouTube, the circulation of documentaries

accelerates the dissemination of political frames and expands the scale of public response, rendering comment sections valuable for analyzing civic interpretation and disagreement (Sunstein, 2017). Accordingly, this study conceptualizes documentary film not merely as informational media but as a framing actor that intervenes in ongoing policy debates.

The Indonesian's Free Nutritious Meal (re: MBG or *Makan Bergizi Gratis*) program offers a salient context for this analysis. Introduced as a flagship policy of the Prabowo Subianto administration in January 2025, the program has been promoted as a strategy to reduce child malnutrition, address stunting, and strengthen human capital. However, it has also attracted criticism regarding fiscal priorities, institutional suitability, and implementation risks (Aspinall & Miedner, 2019). Critics have highlighted the diversion of public funds from more urgent sectors such as education and health, repeated food poisoning incidents among students, the ongoing precariousness of honorary teacher in 3T regions, rising property taxes affecting lower-income households, the contradiction between increased legislator salaries and declining farmer welfare, and the problematic involvement of TNI and Polri in civilian food distribution (Lim, 2017; Ford & Pepinsky, 2014). These tensions indicate that the policy may generate symbolic legitimacy for the state while failing to resolve, and in some cases exacerbating, the social problems it purports to address, including sIn this context, Watchdoc Documentary's *Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis* (*No Free Lunch*) appeared on YouTube as a significant example of civic journalism and policy critique.

In line with Watchdoc's broader investigative tradition, the film constructs a critical frame that challenges the official depiction of MBG as a costless public good and instead highlights its concealed social and fiscal costs (Nichols, 2010; Plantinga,

1997). The documentary contends that the program is not genuinely free, as it displaces more urgent public needs, including student health and safety, educational rights, teacher welfare, farmer livelihoods, and the appropriate allocation of state resources. Furthermore, it suggests that the anticipated benefits for public health, particularly reductions in stunting, are not clearly realized in practice. Thus, *Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis* (No Free Lunch) serves as a discursive intervention that reframes MBG as a contested policy rather than an uncontested welfare achievement.

While framing, documentary communication, and digital audience engagement have each been extensively studied, their intersection remains underexplored, particularly in empirical research utilizing YouTube comment data (Brantner, Lobinger, & Wedstein, 2011; Lim, 2013; González-Bailón & Paltoglou, 2015). This gap is especially significant in Indonesia, where independent documentary production increasingly contributes to public debate and YouTube has become a prominent arena for policy discussion.

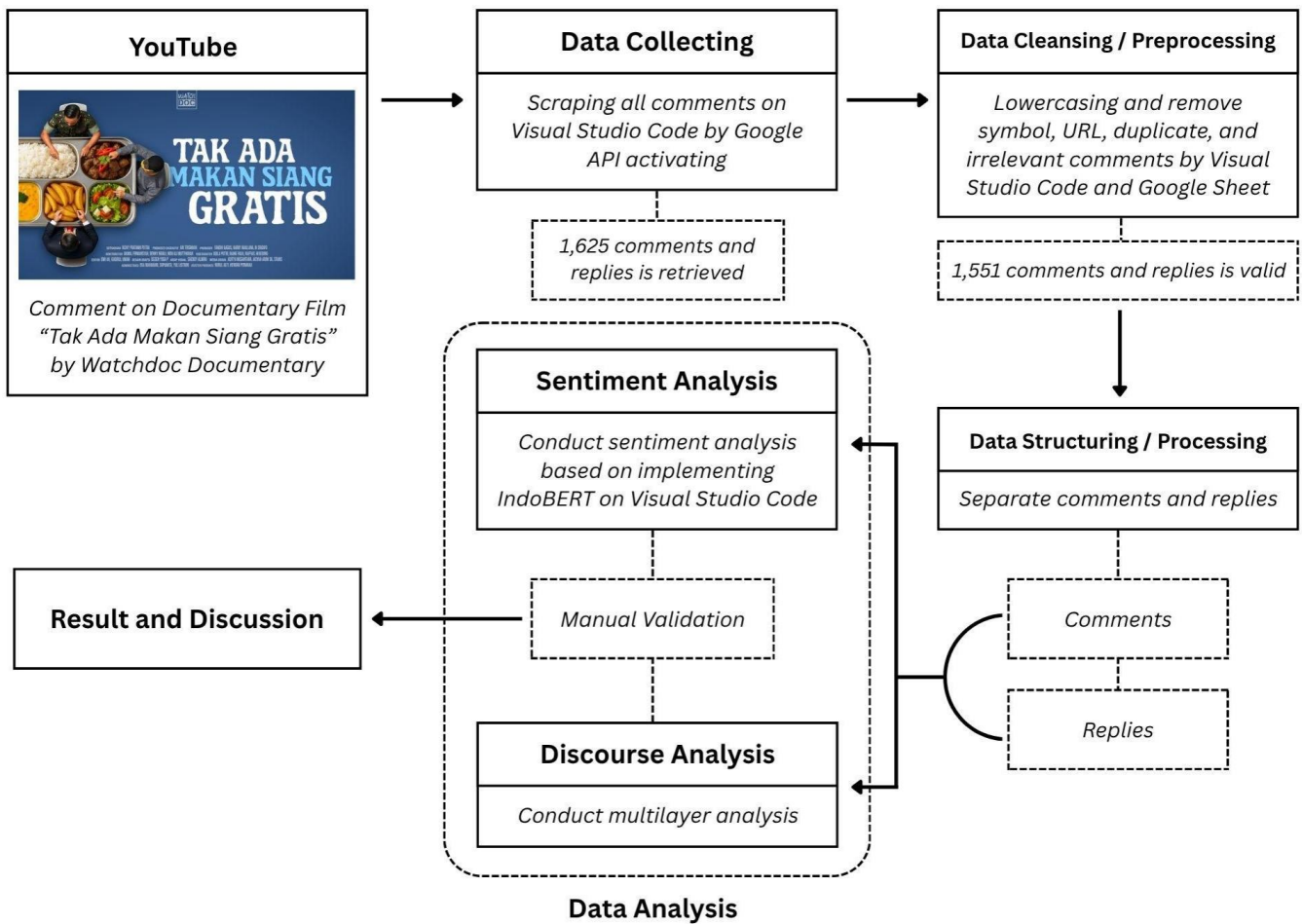
To address this gap, the present study examines *Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis* (No Free Lunch) through three research questions: the distribution of audience sentiment in response to the documentary on YouTube, the discursive patterns characterizing audience reactions to its framing strategies, and whether these responses indicate legitimation or resistance toward its critique of the MBG program. By integrating framing theory, sentiment analysis, and audience discourse analysis, this study seeks to provide a more empirically grounded understanding of how documentary film shapes political interpretation in Indonesia's digital public sphere (Liu, 2012; Pang & Lee, 2008; Koto et al., 2020; van Dijk, 2008; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011).

## Method

This study employed an interpretive qualitative paradigm complemented by selected quantitative procedures within an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The interpretive orientation was appropriate because the study sought to understand how audiences constructed, negotiated, and contested political meaning through discursive engagement on YouTube, a process that is fundamentally hermeneutic rather than variable-driven one (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Within this framework, qualitative analysis provided the primary interpretive lens, while quantitative sentiment analysis functioned instrumentally to map the overall affective distribution of audience responses, thereby guiding and grounding subsequent interpretation (Tashakkori, Johnson, & Teddlie, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Importantly, this study did not focus on the documentary content itself, but on the audience comments and replies as discursive reactions, which were systematically classified and analyzed to identify patterns of response to the film's framing. This approach recognized that sentiment alone cannot capture the full meaning of discourse, which must be interpreted in relation to its argumentative structure, its positioning toward the documentary's frames, and its role within interactive comment dynamics (Bruns & Burgess, 2015).

The data corpus consisted of 1,551 user-generated comments and replies on the YouTube upload of *Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis* (No Free Lunch) by Watchdoc Documentary which was scrapped on May 5, 2026. Therefore, the comments analyzed were limited to the first comment up to the comments uploaded on the same date. These comments constituted a naturalistic dataset produced without researcher intervention, preserving ecological validity (Thelwall, 2018).

## Schema 1. Research Stages



Source: compiled by the author based on the research method flow

Data were collected through Python-based web scraping in Visual Studio Code, covering both top-level comments and nested replies, as reply threads often contain richer discursive exchanges such as debate and counterargument (Dyner, 2014). The dataset spanned from the initial upload to a defined cutoff capturing peak engagement and was stored in structured tabular format for systematic analysis. In line with ethical standards, only publicly accessible data were used and no personally identifiable information beyond usernames was retained and displayed (Association of Internet Researchers, 2019).

Sentiment analysis was conducted using IndoBERT, a transformer-based language model trained on Indonesian corpora (Koto et al., 2020). Its selection was justified by its linguistic sensitivity to Bahasa Indonesia, its bidirectional architecture enabling contextual interpretation, and its demonstrated superior performance in Indonesian sentiment classification tasks (Devlin et al., 2019; Wongso, Setiawan, & Suhartono, 2023). Implemented via the Hugging Face Transformers library in Python, the model classified each comment and reply into positive, negative, or neutral categories. The resulting sentiment distribution was



then analyzed descriptively to establish the aggregate affective tendencies of the audience discourse.

To ensure reliability, automated classifications were subjected to manual validation, particularly addressing challenges posed by code-switching, informal language, and pragmatic features such as sarcasm and irony (Muaz, Santoso, & Purwarianti, 2019; Davidov, Tsur, & Rappoport, 2010). Corrections were made where necessary through contextual interpretation, following best practices in computational social science to enhance construct validity (Grimmer, Roberts, & Stewart, 2022). Beyond sentiment, the study conducted a multilayer discursive analysis grounded in critical and socio-cognitive discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010). The analysis focused on how comments were directed, how they positioned themselves in relation to the documentary's framing, their communicative functions, and the interactional dynamics within reply threads. These dimensions enabled the identification of patterns such as frame adoption, negotiation, or resistance, as well as agreement, disagreement, and polarization within user interactions (Scheufele, 1999; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011).

Finally, the findings from sentiment and discursive analyses were integrated to interpret how the documentary's political framing was received and contested within the digital public sphere (González-Bailón & Paltoglou, 2015). The original Indonesian-language data were translated into English using AI-assisted tools, including Gemini and Grammarly Pro, strictly for linguistic and stylistic refinement (Google DeepMind, 2024; Grammarly, 2024). All translations were subsequently reviewed by the researcher to ensure conceptual accuracy and disciplinary appropriateness. The use of AI was limited to translation and editing, with all analytical

processes conducted independently, in line with current standards for transparent and responsible AI use in academic research (Nature, 2023).

## Results and Discussion

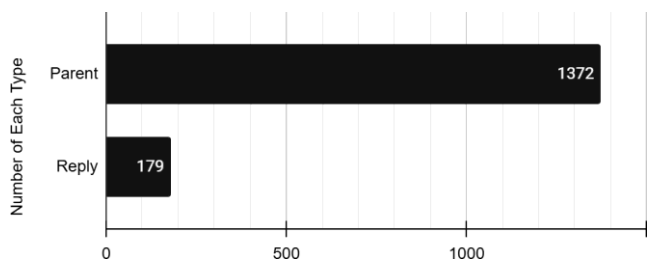
Prior to the analysis, the raw comment corpus retrieved from the YouTube upload of *Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis (No Free Lunch)* underwent a multi-stage filtration and validation process that shaped the final analytical dataset. YouTube's platform-level filtering mechanisms constitute the first layer of this process: the platform automatically suppresses comments flagged as spam and places comments containing profanity or hyperlinks in a held-for-review queue, where they remain inaccessible through the public application programming interface (API) even as they continue to be counted in the publicly displayed comment total. This discrepancy is compounded by YouTube's use of an eventual consistency database architecture, in which the visible comment count represents a periodically updated approximation rather than a real-time absolute figure. As a consequence of these platform-structural constraints, only 85.3% of the total comment count displayed on the documentary's YouTube page was retrievable and deemed eligible for initial analysis.

This gap does not constitute a methodological limitation bearing on the validity of the findings, as the excluded data are system-filtered content structurally inaccessible to research and not selectively omitted by the researcher.

Following manual validation, the usable corpus was further reduced to 81.42% of retrieved comments. The excluded cases comprised data duplicates, semantically null entries such as single-character strings, content entirely unrelated to

the documentary, promotional material for online gambling platforms, and self-correction replies in which a user re-posted an amended version of their own comment to fix a typographical error rather than using the platform's native edit function. The comment section was further characterized by a predominance of individual opinion expression over discursive exchange, consistent with the expressive rather than deliberative dynamics frequently observed in political YouTube commentary.

*Comment structure: Parents and replies*



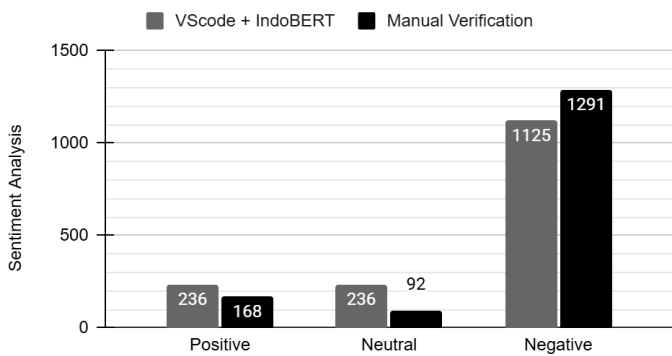
**Figure 1. Number of Parents and Replies**

Source: fieldwork data processed by the author on Google Sheet

The distribution of parent comments and replies within the validated corpus demonstrates a highly asymmetric interactional structure (see Figure 1). Parent comments comprised 1,372 entries, representing 88.46% of the corpus, whereas reply comments accounted for only 179 entries, or 11.54%. This disparity suggests that the comment section of *Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis (No Free Lunch)* primarily served as a venue for individual stance expression rather than sustained inter-user argumentation. The limited volume of reply activity indicates an environment dominated by users who supported the documentary’s critical framing.

Dissenting comments were consistently met with coordinated opposition from users endorsing the film’s narrative, and individuals posting counter-framing remarks typically did not continue the exchange after receiving counterresponses. This led to the premature closure of threads with potential for substantive argumentative contestation. Such a pattern aligns with echo chamber dynamics, wherein audience homophily and platform-level algorithmic selection predispose politically engaged documentary audiences toward discursive reinforcement rather than deliberative pluralism.

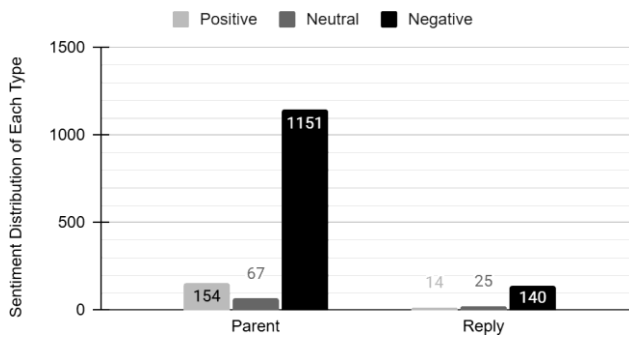
*Sentiment distribution and manual validation*



**Figure 2. Distinction of Sentiment Analysis based on VScore + IndoBERT and Manual Verification**

Source: fieldwork data processed by the author on Google Sheet

A significant divergence emerged between the automation classification results and manual highlighting, with important methodological implications (see Figure 2). The initial automated output indicated notable proportions of neutral and positive sentiment. However, manual validation identified three primary sources of classification error. First, some comments



**Figure 3. Sentiment Distribution by Parents and Replies**

Source: fieldwork data processed by the author on Google Sheet

were written in languages other than standard Bahasa Indonesia, such as regional vernaculars, Malay in the Malaysian register, and English, for which IndoBERT's pre-training offers inconsistent coverage. Second, sarcastic and ironic comments, common in Indonesian social media political discourse, were systematically misclassified as positive because their lexical content did not explicitly convey negativity, despite their pragmatic negativity.

Third, standard pre-processing procedures, including lowercase conversion and punctuation removal, inadvertently eliminated affective markers typical of Indonesian internet writing. All-uppercase lettering and exclamation marks serve as prosodic signals of confrontation, indignation, and emotional intensity; their removal rendered affectively charged comments prosodically neutral to the classifier. After manual correction, misclassified positive and neutral entries were reassigned to the negative category.

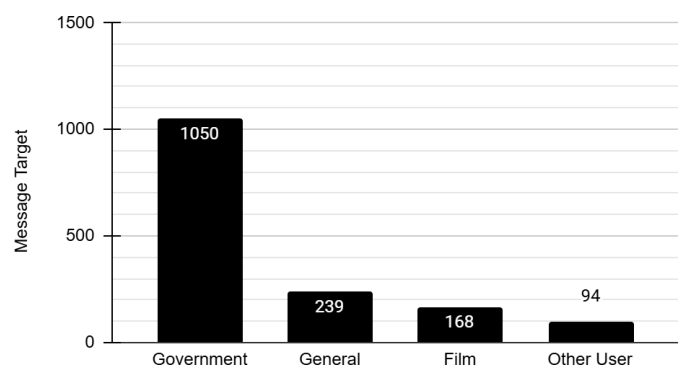
The validated distribution demonstrates that negative sentiment is overwhelmingly dominant, comprising 83.24% of all comments. Positive and neutral sentiment together account for the remaining 16.76%. This result requires interpretive nuance:

sentiment polarity reflects the affective orientation of the language but does not directly indicate audience support for or opposition to the documentary's narrative 6.

The predominance of negative sentiment primarily reflects emotional responses directed at the policies and actors criticized in the film, particularly the MBG program and the government, rather than disapproval of the documentary itself. When analyzed by comment type (see Figure 3), negative sentiment is observed in 83.89% of parent comments and 78.21% of replies, maintaining the overall pattern. The slightly lower proportion in replies suggests greater affective heterogeneity in inter-user exchanges. For subsequent analyses, parent comments and replies are treated as a unified corpus, as the relevant analytical distinctions pertain to discursive content, target, and position rather than comment type.

### *Discursive targets of audience commentary*

The multilayer discursive analysis reveals a distinct hierarchy of discursive targets (see Figure 4). The government emerges as the primary target, receiving 1,050 comments, which constitutes 67.70% of the corpus. This predominance aligns



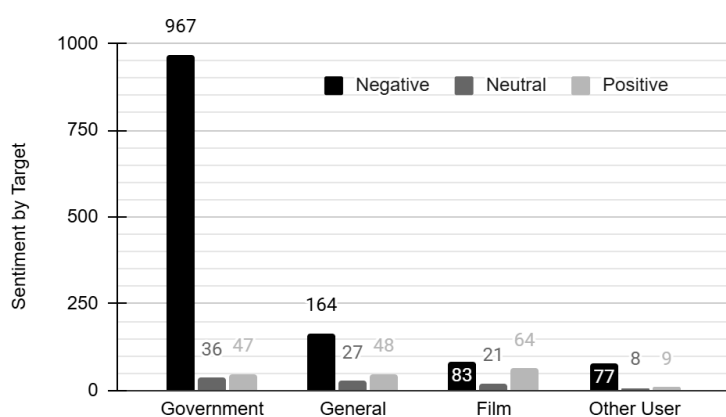
**Figure 4. Target of Comments and Replies as a Message**

Source: fieldwork data processed by the author on Google Sheet

with the documentary's framing strategy, which assigns responsibility for the negative outcomes of the MBG program—including fiscal misallocation, inadequate educational provision, health and safety failures, and institutional anomalies resulting from TNI and Polri involvement in food distribution—to governmental decision-making.

The General category, which includes comments directed at the Indonesian public rather than specific institutional actors, accounts for 239 comments (15.41%) and serves a broadly civic (normative) function and acts functionally. The documentary itself is the focus of 168 comments or 10.83%, reflecting both appreciation for its investigative efforts and critical evaluations of its content. The Other User category, consisting of direct inter-user addresses typically found in reply threads, comprises 94 comments or 6.06%. Importantly, not all replies in the Other User category are interpersonally focused; many use the reply format to reinforce the documentary's critique of the government rather than to engage in interpersonal dispute.

### *Narrative position: Support, opposition, and neutrality*



**Figure 5. Sentiment Distribution by Target**

*Source: fieldwork data processed by the author on Google Sheet*

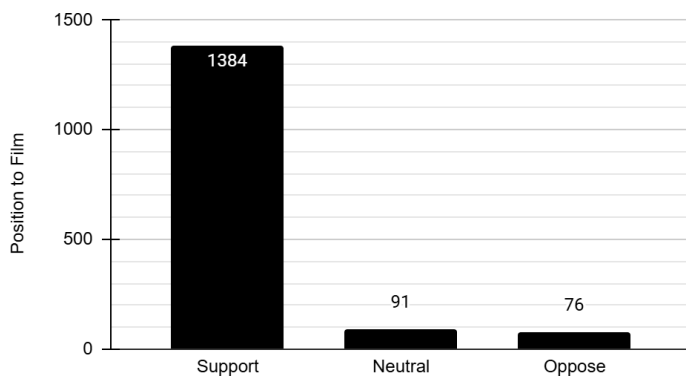
Analysis of sentiment by target indicates that negative affect is most intensely concentrated in government-directed comments (see Figure 5). Among the 1,050 government-targeted comments, 967 (92.10%) were negative, while positive and neutral sentiments accounted for 4.48% and 3.42%, respectively. The General category displayed a more distributed sentiment profile, with 68.62% negative, 20.10% positive, and 11.30% neutral, which reflects the broader civic orientation of this discursive address.

Film-directed comments exhibited the most balanced distribution, with 49.40% negative, 38.10% positive, and 12.50% neutral, consistent with a category that includes both critical appraisal and audience appreciation. Comments targeting Other Users were 81.91% negative, 9.57% positive, and 8.51% neutral, indicating the confrontational interpersonal dynamics of dissent management within the comment section.

The narrative position analysis demonstrates a strong alignment between the corpus and the documentary's critical framing (see Figure 6). Among the 1,551 validated comments, 1,384 (89.23%) expressed support for the film's narrative, 91 (5.87%) were neutral, and 76 (4.90%) were oppositional.

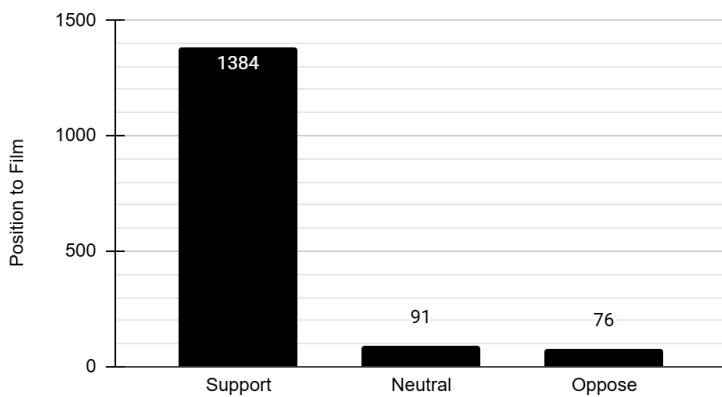
Disaggregation by discursive target (see Figure 7) indicates that support is highest among government-directed comments at 95.14%, with 3.04% oppositional and 1.82% neutral. This distribution establishes government critique as the predominant discursive stance within this category. In the General category, 79.08% of comments were supportive, while neutrality (17.15%) exceeded opposition (3.77%), indicating greater ambivalence in broader civic commentary. Film-directed comments were





**Figure 6. Position to Film in General**

Source: fieldwork data processed by the author on Google Sheet

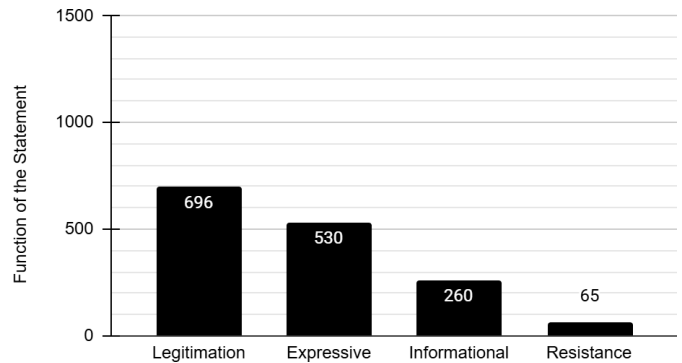


**Figure 7. Position to Film Distribution by Target**

Source: fieldwork data processed by the author on Google Sheet

81.55% supportive, 14.28% oppositional, and 4.17% neutral, reflecting the expected evaluative diversity when assessing the documentary as a text. For Other User-targeted comments, 62.77% were supportive, 9.57% oppositional, and 27.66% neutral, a pattern consistent with the relational complexity of direct inter-user exchanges.

### *Communicative function and discursive orientation*



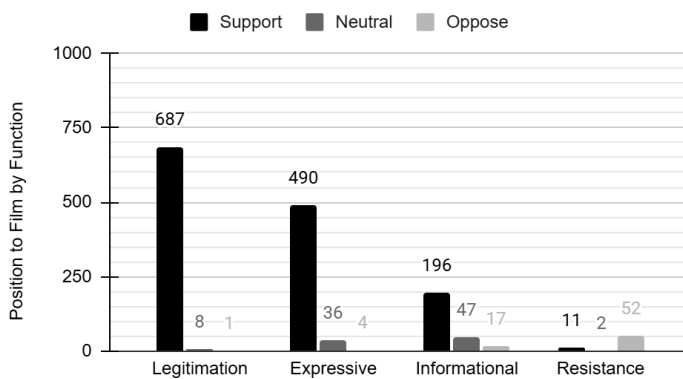
**Figure 8. Function of Comments and Replies as a statement**

Source: fieldwork data processed by the author on Google Sheet

The communicative function analysis demonstrates the diverse motivational structure of the comment corpus (see Figure 8). Legitimation is the largest functional category, comprising 696 comments or 44.87%, where users reinforced the documentary's evidentiary and argumentative claims. The expressive category, which includes comments primarily articulating emotional responses without a dominant argumentative or informational structure, accounts for 530 comments or 34.17%.

Informational comments, in which users supplemented the documentary's content with additional factual claims, personal testimony, or contextual knowledge, comprise 260 entries or 16.76%. Resistance comments, where users challenged or rejected the documentary's narrative, account for only 65 comments or 4.19%, indicating a marginal presence of counter-framing within the corpus.

Cross-tabulation of communicative function with narrative position (see Figure



**Figure 9. Position to Film Distribution by Function**

Source: fieldwork data processed by the author on Google Sheet

9) reveals complexities that challenge any simplistic mapping of function onto position. In the legitimation category, 687 comments (98.71%) were supportive, 8 (1.15%) were neutral, and 1 was oppositional, confirming the coherence of this category. Among expressive comments, 490 or 92.83% were supportive, 36 or 6.79% neutral, and 4 oppositional, indicating that affectively charged commentary was predominantly

aligned with the documentary's frame. The informational category exhibited greater heterogeneity: 196 (75.38%) supportive, 47 (18.08%) neutral, and 17 (6.54%) oppositional, suggesting that informational engagement introduced evaluative distance from the documentary's narrative.

The resistance category, although dominated by oppositional entries at 52 or 80.00%, also included 11 supportive comments (16.92%) and 2 neutral comments, indicating that resistance as a communicative strategy did not always equate to complete narrative opposition. A majority of the commentary consisted of users contesting specific claims or representations within the film while maintaining broader alignment with its critical stance toward the MBG program. These results collectively demonstrate that the relationship between communicative function and narrative position is probabilistic and contextually mediated rather than categorical, and that the discursive landscape of *Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis (No Free Lunch)* comment section is characterized by layered, heterogeneous,

**Table 1. Full Version of Distribution in %**

| Target Message | Position to Film | Function of the Statement |            |               |            |
|----------------|------------------|---------------------------|------------|---------------|------------|
|                |                  | Legitimation              | Expressive | Informational | Resistance |
| Government     | Support          | 36.62%                    | 16.57%     | 10.70%        | 0.52%      |
|                | Oppose           |                           | 0.19%      | 0.90%         | 0.97%      |
|                | Neutral          | 0.19%                     |            | 1.03%         |            |
| Film           | Support          | 3.09%                     | 4.90%      | 0.84%         |            |
|                | Neutral          |                           |            | 0.06%         | 1.48%      |
|                | Oppose           |                           | 0.06%      | 0.32%         | 0.06%      |
| General        | Support          | 2.58%                     | 8.77%      | 0.77%         | 0.06%      |
|                | Oppose           | 0.06%                     |            | 0.13%         | 0.39%      |
|                | Neutral          | 0.13%                     | 1.61%      | 0.90%         |            |
| Other user     | Support          | 2.00%                     | 1.35%      | 0.32%         | 0.13%      |
|                | Neutral          |                           | 0.06%      |               | 0.52%      |
|                | Oppose           | 0.19%                     | 0.64%      | 0.77%         | 0.06%      |

Source: fieldwork data processed by the author on Google Sheet

and strategically motivated audience engagement in which the film's political framing is predominantly but not uniformly legitimized.

The sentiment distribution identified in this study (see Table 1) reveals a significant concentration of audience commentary directed at the Government cluster, establishing governmental actors as the primary focus in public responses to *Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis* (*No Free Lunch*). This trend aligns with the documentary's agenda-setting function, as the film constructs a critical narrative that directs audience attention toward the state as the main actor accountable for the outcomes of the MBG program.

According to agenda-setting theory, media actively shape which topics audiences consider important rather than merely reflecting reality (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The evidence presented confirms that the documentary's framing effectively transferred its critical agenda into the YouTube comment discourse (Möller et al., 2019). More broadly, the film advances the argument that no justification, regardless of its strength, warrants the continuation of the MBG program given the magnitude of its socioeconomic and institutional externalities. The documentary employs a narrative logic that traces a domino effect from food poisoning incidents to budget reallocations, teacher welfare decline, and local economic disruption, a logic that audiences clearly absorbed and reproduced in their responses. A structural limitation inherent to this dataset must be acknowledged. At the time of data collection, *Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis* (*No Free Lunch*) had received 466,425 views on YouTube, yet commenters represented only about 0.0041% of the total viewership. While this disparity does not diminish the analytical value of the comment corpus, it highlights that the study captures the

discourse of a self-selecting, actively engaged subset rather than a representative sample of the entire audience. Existing research demonstrates that most social media users are passive consumers or "lurkers" who do not contribute to public discourse, and that active commenters often represent more extreme or strongly held viewpoints (Bail, 2022; Möller et al., 2019). Consequently, the findings are limited to this active engagement layer, and broader interpretive claims should be approached with appropriate caution.

Within the active comment space, negative sentiment was quantitatively dominant. It is essential to distinguish between substantive critique and affective expression. Many negatively coded comments consisted of invective directed at the government or at voters who supported the Prabowo-Gibran presidential ticket in the 2024 election, reflecting what research on politically charged online content identifies as reactive engagement driven by emotional intensity rather than deliberative reasoning (Mall et al., 2024). Substantive negative discourses clustered around several interrelated themes.

First, audiences condemned the government's use of low percentage figures to contextualize mass food poisoning cases, interpreting this as a dehumanizing reduction of human lives to data points. Second, audiences challenged the legitimacy of the "gratis" label by highlighting the program's costs within the national budget (APBN), tax obligations, and contested sectoral reallocations, including reductions in education and health allocations. Third, commenters expressed suspicion about the concentration of SPPG kitchen management among politically affiliated elites, framing MBG as a vehicle for resource capture by oligarchic networks rather than genuine grassroots economic empowerment. Fourth, petty traders, school canteen operators, and

small agricultural producers articulated material grievances, such as price inflation for basic commodities driven by bulk procurement for MBG supply chains. Fifth, a recurring interpretive frame cast MBG as an electoral patronage strategy targeting the 2029 presidential cycle, consistent with analyses of how governments in emerging democracies use redistributive social programs to manufacture political loyalty (Sorensen, 2024). Collectively, these discursive strands constitute what this study identifies as a resistance formation, in which audiences actively contest the legitimacy of governmental framing rather than passively accepting it (Entman, 1993).

Although positive and neutral sentiments were less prevalent, their content is analytically significant. Positive comments did not uniformly endorse the MBG program but instead reflected a nuanced civic orientation. Audiences advocated for political literacy, praised the documentary as a tool for civic education, expressed solidarity with victims and underpaid honorary teacher, and suggested constructive improvements to program implementation. Neutral comments offered technical suggestions for documentary editing, proposed institutional oversight mechanisms involving bodies such as BPK and KPK, and posed clarifying questions. Collectively, these sentiments indicate an audience that engages in deliberation rather than mere reaction, supporting the argument that politically charged media content can stimulate substantive civic engagement when perceived as credible and relevant (Möller et al., 2019).

A particularly analytically productive segment of the comment corpus comprises responses that presented counter-arguments to the documentary's framing while maintaining the government as the primary referent. These comments

form what this study terms a negotiated legitimization zone: audiences acknowledged documented implementation failures, such as food poisoning incidents and delivery irregularities, yet continued to support the program's foundational policy rationale. Within this zone, several discursive strategies emerged. Audiences distinguished between program design and execution failure, attributing shortcomings to vendor misconduct or local government negligence rather than central policy flaws. Others emphasized the employment multiplier generated by SPPG kitchens, averaging 18 to 25 workers per unit, as evidence of genuine economic value creation.

Some rationalized the involvement of security apparatus in MBG logistics as administrative pragmatism rather than militarization of civil affairs. These patterns align with political communication research indicating that populist social policy programs retain legitimacy among beneficiaries even when implementation is flawed, provided the program's symbolic promise of state care remains intact (Sorensen, 2024). The data thus reveal a discursive space where audiences simultaneously recognize specific failures and grant normative legitimacy to the policy direction, resulting in an ongoing negotiation between legitimization and resistance.

Counter-framing directed at the documentary itself was comparatively marginal. Attempts to delegitimize *Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis* (No Free Lunch) as propagandistic, externally funded, or methodologically selective did emerge, but these claims were largely unsupported by verifiable evidence and relied on assertion rather than substantive rebuttal. Allegations of data manipulation and accusations that the film exploited peripheral cases without acknowledging program successes elsewhere reflect a broader pattern in which



audiences resistant to critical media content employ source delegitimization strategies instead of engaging with the evidentiary basis of the critique (Mall et al., 2024). The relative weakness of these counter-framings, compared to the volume and specificity of the critical discourse, suggests that the documentary succeeded in anchoring the terms of debate within its own framing, a hallmark of effective agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Taken together, the discursive patterns identified in this study reveal a fundamental collision between a top-down governmental narrative of benevolent investment in human capital and a bottom-up formation of material grievance, institutional distrust, and demands for democratic accountability. *Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis (No Free Lunch)* functioned not only as a documentary but also as a platform for consolidating oppositional public opinion, generating emotional resonance, catalyzing civic action such as crowdfunding initiatives for affected individuals, and prompting collective calls for broader dissemination of its critique. The predominance of resistance-oriented discourse over legitimation-oriented discourse in the active comment corpus indicates that, at least among the engaged viewing public, the documentary's framing strategy achieved its critical purpose. Whether this effect translates into broader political consequences remains an open empirical question, as the comment stratum analyzed here represents only the most visible segment of the documentary's total audience.

## Conclusion

The validated sentiment distribution demonstrates a strong dominance of negative affect, accounting for % of the total

corpus. The government was the primary discursive target, accounting for 67.70% of all comments, of which 92.10% were negative. This concentration indicates that the documentary's agenda-setting was effective. By attributing the MBG program's failures to governmental decision-making, *Tak Ada Makan Siang Gratis (No Free Lunch)* directed the audience's affective and argumentative responses toward the state as the main object of accountability. The very low comment-to-view ratio of approximately 0.0041% highlights a methodological limitation: the corpus reflects only the most publicly expressive segment of a much larger, predominantly passive audience, and the findings pertain specifically to this active subset.

The discursive patterns observed in the corpus is diverse and not solely reactive. Legitimation was the largest communicative function at 44.87%, indicating that most audience discourse reinforced and extended the documentary's evidentiary and argumentative claims. Expressive comments, comprising 34.17%, reflected the intensity of civic affect generated by the film, especially regarding narrative elements such as food poisoning incidents, the fiscal paradox of the “*gratis*” (free) label, the welfare of honorary teacher, and suspected patronage in SPPG kitchen management. These discursive clusters represent structured cognitive responses to specific framing devices in the film, showing that audiences acted as active interpreters who extended, elaborated, and contested the film's frames within the comment space. The informational category, at 16.76%, demonstrates the epistemic ambition of some audience members, who supplemented the film's critique with additional evidence, personal testimony, or comparative references. Resistance, at 4.19%, was marginal, and within this category,

many comments contested specific claims rather than rejecting the film's overall critical orientation.

The preponderance of evidence indicates that the dominant audience response constitutes resistance toward the MBG program's governmental framing rather than legitimation of it. For the third research question, the evidence shows that the dominant audience response was resistance to the MBG program's governmental framing rather than its legitimation. Of the validated comments, 89.23% supported the documentary's narrative, with support rates of 95.14% among government-directed comments and 81.55% among film-directed comments. Resistance-oriented responses, such as those labelling the documentary as propaganda or defending the MBG program as coherent policy, were both quantitatively rare and qualitatively weak, relying on assertion rather than evidence.

The analysis also identifies a significant minority, termed the negotiated legitimation zone, where audiences recognize implementation failures but maintain normative support for the MBG program's foundational rationale. This zone represents a discursively productive site of political ambivalence, where systemic critique and policy endorsement coexist, resulting in partial rather than total delegitimation of governmental authority. on, by demonstrating that documentary film operating in a digital public sphere does not merely transfer frames to audiences but activates layered socio-cognitive responses in which frames are negotiated, weaponized, and sometimes deflected by audiences depending on their prior political dispositions and material experiences.

This dynamic is consistent with Scheufele's model of individual-level framing effects but reveals that, in politically charged social media environments, frame setting and

audience feedback operates at an accelerated pace and are mutually constitutive. Second, the study contributes to the digital public sphere literature by providing empirical evidence that Habermasian deliberative norms remain largely unrealized in YouTube political commentary, where expressive and legitimation functions dominate over informational exchange, and the structural asymmetry between active and passive audiences renders visible comment discourse an imperfect but irreplaceable proxy for politically engaged public opinion. Third, by combining IndoBERT-based sentiment classification with systematic manual validation, this study advances methodological standards for computational discourse analysis in non-Western, linguistically heterogeneous settings, demonstrating that automated tools require culturally sensitive correction to adequately capture sarcasm, code-switching, and affective prosody in Indonesian-language corpora.

Finally, the concept of the negotiated legitimation zone, developed here inductively from the data, offers a generative analytical category for future research on how citizens in emerging democracies respond to critical documentary journalism: neither as uniform resisters nor as passive legitimators, but as discursively active agents navigating the tension between systemic critique and the pragmatic politics of institutional dependence.

This documentary film achieved the central aim of effective political documentary by transforming a policy debate into a site of civic reckoning. The YouTube comment corpus serves as a durable public record of how citizens interpreted, contested, and ultimately rejected the state's framing of a flagship social program. This study has aimed to make that record accessible with empirical precision and theoretical depth.

## Declaration of Ownership

This article is the author's original work.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

## Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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