

THE CONSTRUCTION OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE REGARDING THE FREE NUTRITIOUS MEALS PROGRAM ON THE @MENUEMBEGEJELEK ACCOUNT ON THE X PLATFORM

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Abstract

The Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) is an Indonesian government public policy that has elicited diverse responses in the digital public sphere, particularly on the X platform. This study aims to analyze the discourse construction of criticism directed at the MBG Program on the @menuembegejelek account using Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis, which encompasses the dimensions of text, discursive practices, and social practices. The study employs a descriptive-interpretive qualitative approach by examining seven posts published between February and June 2026, which were purposively selected based on their relevance to the research focus. Data were collected through digital observation, documentation, and literature review. The results show that, in the textual dimension, criticism is constructed through evaluative diction, metaphors, satire, irony, visual humor, rhetorical questions, modality, and intertextuality, which represent the MBG as a policy governance issue. In the discursive practices dimension, criticism is built through the recontextualization of news, government institution videos, memes, and user comments, thereby generating new meanings. In the social practice dimension, the critical discourse represents the ideologies of accountability, meritocracy, evidence-based policy, social welfare, and participatory democracy, which are used to question the legitimacy and implementation of the MBG Program.

Keyword: Critical Discourse Analysis, digital discourse, Free Nutritious Meals Program, X platform, social media

PENDAHULUAN

The Indonesian government has prioritized strengthening the quality of human resources as part of its national development agenda toward the “Golden Indonesia 2045” vision. One program linked to this agenda is the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG), which is positioned as a nutritional intervention for vulnerable groups, particularly students, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and toddlers. In the

context of human development, the issue of nutrition is critical because it relates to health outcomes, learning capacity, and the long-term readiness of the younger generation (National, 2025).

Conceptually, the MBG Program is designed to address several dimensions of well-being simultaneously. From an educational perspective, adequate nutritional intake is expected to support students' concentration and learning ability; from a socioeconomic perspective, the program aims to involve local supply chain actors such as farmers, livestock breeders, fishermen, and micro-entrepreneurs. However, the broad scope of the program's objectives has also drawn public scrutiny, particularly following social media posts regarding the appropriateness of the menu, food safety, and distribution. DataReportal (2025) notes that as of January 2025, there were 143 million social media user accounts in Indonesia, equivalent to 50.2% of the total population. This figure underscores that social media has become a vital space for the public to access information, express opinions, and respond to social issues. In the context of the MBG Program, social media is not merely a platform for disseminating information but also an arena where the public constructs evaluations, critiques, and interpretations of the program's implementation.

Social media essentially functions not only as a channel for conveying information but also as a space for the production of discourse. Every post, comment, image, or user response can be part of a discursive practice that carries specific perspectives and interests. In the context of the MBG Program, the government's official narrative is confronted by counter-narratives produced by the public based on their experiences and perceptions. Such discursive battles unfold openly and involve numerous actors, making social media a critical point for understanding how a public policy issue is socially constructed.

Among various platforms, X (formerly Twitter) occupies a unique position as a digital public sphere. X's open, fast-paced, and real-time nature, along with the use of hashtags that can rapidly expand an issue's reach, makes it a dynamic arena for public discussion including in response to policies such as the MBG Program. Through features such as reposts, quote posts, and replies, posts regarding food conditions, menu suitability, distribution delays, and responses to the program's implementation can shape a critical discourse that does not always align with the government's official narrative.

The issue driving this research is the gap between the narrative of the MBG Program as a national nutrition program and the critical discourse emerging on the X platform. The government tends to present the MBG Program through narratives focusing on its objectives, the scope of beneficiaries, and its commitment to improving nutrition, while public accounts such as @menuembegejelek generate discourse highlighting allegations of substandard food, menus deemed unsatisfactory, and issues related to distribution and program safety. This gap cannot be fully understood merely

by counting the number of posts or analyzing positive and negative sentiment, as it involves the construction of meaning, the contest over legitimacy, and power dynamics between institutional narratives and public voices.

In this digital public sphere, the @menuembegejelek account acts as a producer of discourse that consistently raises issues surrounding the MBG Program through photo and video documentation of the condition of the meals received by beneficiaries. These posts have garnered widespread attention from netizens, thereby helping to shape a specific image and narrative regarding the program's implementation. This phenomenon demonstrates how a single social media account can play a significant role in shaping collective opinion toward a policy, while also illustrating how public discourse can be produced outside formal power structures.

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is relevant because it allows researchers to examine how texts, discursive practices, and sociocultural contexts work together to shape critical discourse. Fairclough (1995) asserts that discourse is not merely a reflection of social reality, but a social practice that helps shape and reproduce that reality itself. A number of previous studies have applied CD or similar approaches to social media discourse (Bouvier, 2022; Khosravi-Nik, 2022; Hidayat, Imran, & Ramadhan, 2025), but studies focusing on non-institutional accounts as producers of critical discourse regarding national nutrition policies on the X platform remain limited. Based on this overview, the research question is How is critical discourse regarding the Free Nutritious Meals Program constructed on the @menuembegejelek account on the X platform? This study aims to analyze the construction of this critical discourse through Fairclough's three dimensions, while also uncovering the power relations and social contexts underlying the formation of this discourse.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-interpretive research design. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study does not aim to statistically measure the effectiveness of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG), but rather to deeply understand the meaning, structure, and context of the digital discourse developing on the @menuembegejelek account on the X platform. As Creswell (2014) noted, qualitative research allows researchers to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to a social issue in a holistic and contextual manner. The descriptive-interpretive approach is used to both describe and interpret the characteristics of critical discourse regarding the MBG Program based on Norman Fairclough's AWK framework.

The object of the study is the digital discourse regarding the MBG Program constructed on the @menuembegejelek account, while the subjects are the account itself as the primary producer of the discourse and the X users who respond to its posts. The study does not focus on users' personal identities but rather on the texts, visuals,

and discursive patterns that emerge in the digital space. The primary data consists of posts from the @menuembegejelek account containing text, photos, videos, screenshots, and captions related to the MBG Program.

The research corpus was selected purposefully, taking into account the relevance of the content to the research focus. A systematic search was conducted using X's Advanced Search feature to filter posts from February through June 2026a period reflecting a significant surge in public criticism of the program's implementation. All posts were then reviewed based on their alignment with the research focus; only posts that directly addressed the MBG Program and contained linguistic or visual elements suitable for analysis were selected. Through this process, seven posts were identified as the corpus. The selection of the corpus was based on the depth of information, relevance, and richness of discursive elements, rather than solely on the number of available posts.

Data collection techniques included non-participatory digital observation of posts, captions, visuals, comments, reposts, and quote posts; documentation to preserve the corpus along with its context to ensure data traceability; and a literature review to examine relevant literature on AWK, digital discourse, X social media, and the MBG Program. Objectivity was maintained not as a completely value-free stance, but as an effort to ensure transparency, consistency, and traceability in the analysis process, by clearly defining corpus selection criteria and distinguishing primary data from supporting data.

Data analysis employs Norman Fairclough's AWK model, which encompasses three interrelated dimensions analyzed simultaneously. The textual dimension (description) examines word choice, grammatical structure, modality, metaphors, rhetoric, and visual elements. The dimension of discursive practice (interpretation) examines the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption, including dissemination mechanisms such as reposts, quote posts, hashtags, as well as interdiscursivity and intertextuality. The sociocultural practice dimension (explanation) situates discourse within a broader social, cultural, and political context to reveal the power relations and ideologies reproduced through discourse. The analysis distinguishes between data description, researcher interpretation, and supporting context to ensure the focus remains on how discourse is shaped and interpreted, rather than on judging the rightness or wrongness of the posts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Research Object and Subject

Platform X is a microblogging platform that positions users not merely as a passive audience, but as active participants who help produce, distribute, and interpret information. Features such as timelines, trending topics, replies, quote tweets, and hashtags enhance users' social participation and digital literacy (Jurnal Cahaya Edukasi,

2025). In the context of the MBG Program, every comment, reply, repost, and discussion becomes part of the process of constructing meaning around the program; public understanding is shaped not only by official government information but also by the narratives, experiences, critiques, and interpretations that emerge among users.

The @menuembegejelek account is the subject of this study as an account that consistently positions itself as a producer of critical discourse regarding the MBG Program. This account became active in December 2025, coinciding with the rollout of the program nationwide. In less than three months, the account obtained verified status in February 2026, and at the time of this study, it had 54,231 followers and 4,584 posts. The high frequency of content production, combined with a substantial number of followers, indicates that this account has successfully built an active community of readers while positioning itself as a focal point in digital discussions surrounding the MBG.

From Fairclough’s AWK perspective, the existence of the @menuembegejelek account represents a significant non-institutional discourse phenomenon in shaping public policy. Unlike official institutions such as the National Nutrition Agency, which produce formal and structured discourse, this account generates content based on personal experiences and community participation often conveyed through photos, videos, or comments laced with sarcasm and irony. Even the account name itself carries expressive value in its word choice (Fairclough, 1989): naming is not merely a label, but an expression of an ideological position and an evaluative commitment toward the subject being discussed.

Table 1. Seven Analyzed Posts from @menuembegejelek

Label	Summary of Content	Theme of Criticism
P1	Debunking the narrative of sabotage used to justify the failure of the MBG program’s implementation	Institutional impunity in the accountability of the MBG Program
P2	Reproducing a TVRI video on MBG distribution via muddy roads in Cianjur	Errors in the prioritization of MBG policy
P3	Highlighting the distribution of J.CO donuts during the Eid al-Fitr holiday, along with comments from beneficiary children	Exploitation of poverty as a loophole in policy
P4	Responding to the incident of a reckless MBG distribution driver in Kebumen	Safety threats resulting from human resources management

Label	Summary of Content	Theme of Criticism
P5	The “donkey–lion” meme responds to an official’s arrogant speech in the face of public criticism	Symbolic inversion of power through political memes
P6	Answering a follower’s question regarding the targeting of MBG beneficiaries	Inaccurate targeting due to policies lacking a data foundation
P7	Calling for the prosecution of SPPG for the poisoning incident and the waste of MBG funds	Criminalization as a strategy for critiquing institutional accountability

Source: Compiled by the researcher (2026)

The discussion in each post follows Fairclough’s three dimensions of AWK the text dimension (description), the discursive practice dimension (interpretation), and the social practice dimension (explanation), which are applied sequentially and then synthesized thematically.

Text Dimension: Linguistic Strategies of Critical Construction

In the text dimension, the @menuembegejelek account consistently establishes a critical stance through evaluative linguistic strategies. In P1, for example, the text is structured in two layers: a quote representing MBG’s defense narrative (“Don’t blame the program... BGN isn’t at fault, the president isn’t at fault. Someone must be sabotaging it...”), and the discourse producer’s response in the form of a rhetorical question (“If you already know the program is vulnerable to sabotage... why force it to keep going??”). This two-layered structure demonstrates a practice of manifest intertextualitythe explicit inclusion of another text’s voice to establish a dialogic relationship between discourses (Fairclough, 1992).

The repetition of the word “blame” and the construction “BGN isn’t to blame, the president isn’t to blame” reveal a pattern of transitivity that removes the main institution as the agent causing the problem, while simultaneously distributing responsibility in a hierarchical manner to lower-level implementers. According to Fairclough (1989), the representation of agents in grammatical structures determines how an event is understood and to whom responsibility is attributed. The phrase “There must be someone sabotaging it” indicates a high degree of certainty, creating the impression that the suspicion of sabotage is a fact that requires no proof (Fairclough, 2003). The account’s rebuttal then shifts the focus from the issue of sabotage to the policy decision to continue the program.

A similar pattern emerges in other posts, though with variations in strategy. P2 subverts the meaning of a state-run media video (TVRI) through delegitimizing language

that questions the priorities of development. P3 uses a moral construction (“exploiting the gaps in the life experiences of poor schoolchildren”) to shift criticism from administrative issues toward issues of social justice. P4 framed the distribution incident as an issue of human resource management and safety risks. P5 and P6 utilized visual humor, memes, and irony to perform a symbolic inversion of power, while P7 used calls for criminal prosecution as a rhetorical strategy to assert institutional accountability. Overall, these linguistic elements are not used randomly but serve to frame the MBG Program as a policy with fundamental problems, while shifting the focus from individuals to the system and from implementers to policymakers.

The Dimension of Discursive Practice: Production, Recontextualization, and Distribution of Discourse

In the dimension of discursive practice, the production of critical discourse on the @menuembegejelek account is built through three main, mutually complementary strategies: capitalizing on the momentum of emerging issues (P1, P4, P7), recontextualizing texts and multimodal sources from other parties (P2, P3, P6), and collaborative production with the audience (P5). Mass media news, government institution videos, memes, user comments, and screenshots of conversations are repositioned within new contexts, thereby generating meanings that differ from their original contexts. This demonstrates that discourse production on social media occurs dialogically through the interaction of various texts, rather than through the creation of standalone texts.

In terms of distribution, a pattern emerged showing that posts based on visual representations and humor (P5, P6) tended to receive significantly higher levels of engagement compared to posts based on lengthy verbal arguments (P1, P2, P3). This pattern aligns with the characteristics of participatory culture outlined by Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013), in which media users no longer function solely as consumers of information but also as producers of meaning through activities such as sharing, commenting, and reframing messages. The repost and quote post features demonstrate that the X platform serves as a space for both the reproduction and negotiation of meaning regarding public policy.

However, these patterns also reveal the fundamental limitations of user accounts as producers of non-institutional critical discourse. Reliance on the logic of virality and the platform’s algorithmic distribution patterns means that criticism tends to target the actors who are easiest to identify and visualize namely, the SPPG and field officers rather than those who bear the greatest structural responsibility. As boyd (2011) emphasized regarding networked publics, technological affordances encourage content targeting concrete subjects to gain greater amplification, while criticism of abstract actors such as top policymakers struggles to gain commensurate discursive traction. This dynamic of spreadability risks reducing the complexity of policy to the personification of blame (Jenkins et al., 2013).

Sociocultural Practice Dimension: Power Relations, Ideology, and Social Implications

In the sociocultural practice dimension, the critiques constructed in the seven posts represent broader power relations, ideologies, and social implications. The discussion is organized thematically into two groups: the discourse on institutional accountability and power relations (P1, P2, P3, P4, P7) and the discourse on the symbolism and ideology of popular sovereignty (P5, P6). From Fairclough's (2003) perspective, language is a social practice that not only represents reality but also constructs and maintains power relations.

In the first group, the narrative "someone must have sabotaged it" (P1) is understood as an ideological construction that diverts public attention from evaluating the decision-making process toward external factors. The @menuembegejelek account denaturalizes this construction through a rhetorical question attempt to reveal that what appears to be common sense is, in fact, the result of ideological construction. This post represents a clash between the ideology of institutional impunity and the ideology of policy accountability. Similar patterns emerge in P2, which questions the priorities of development; P3, which constructs an ideology based on social rights by positioning children as a vulnerable group; P4, which highlights human resource management; and P7, which demands accountability through the discourse of criminalization.

In the second group, P5 and P6 utilize symbolism and humor to subvert the power dynamics between the state and its citizens. Memes and irony are employed to delegitimize the arrogance of power while affirming the ideologies of participatory democracy and popular sovereignty. Overall, criticism is constructed through the ideologies of state accountability, meritocracy, evidence-based policy, social welfare, and participatory democracy, which are used to question the legitimacy of policies deemed not to have fully considered the needs of the public or the principles of good governance.

Findings in this dimension show that policy legitimacy in the digital age is no longer determined solely by the government as the producer of messages, but also by the public's ability to reconstruct meaning through participatory spaces (Jenkins et al., 2013). Videos originally produced to demonstrate the government's commitment have instead become visual evidence used by the public to question the rationality of policies. Nevertheless, the discourse constructed by these accounts also has limitations because it tends to oversimplify the complexity of policy implementation, which involves institutional, governance, oversight, and cross-actor coordination aspects. Thus, social media functions not merely as a communication channel but as an arena for shaping the legitimacy and accountability of public policy.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the criticism constructed by the @menuembegejelek account against the Free Nutritious Meals Program is not only directed at food quality

or technical implementation but also constructs criticism of policy logic, government governance, power relations, and state accountability. At the textual level, the account consistently employs negative-toned language, metaphors, irony, satire, visual humor, rhetorical questions, high-certainty modality, and intertextuality to frame the Free Nutritious Meals Program as a policy with fundamental flaws, while shifting the focus from individuals to the system and from implementers to policymakers.

In the dimension of discursive practice, the account not only produces content independently but also curates, reinterprets, and recontextualizes various existing discourse sources to generate new meanings. Distribution practices through reposts, quote posts, and high user engagement demonstrate that Platform X functions as a space for both the reproduction and negotiation of meaning. In the dimension of social practices, criticism is constructed through ideologies of state accountability, meritocracy, evidence-based policy, social welfare, and participatory democracy which are used to question the legitimacy of policies while simultaneously denaturalizing narratives that frame sabotage, individual error, or the ingratitude of beneficiaries as the primary explanations.

Overall, this study confirms that the @menuembegejelek account uses the X platform not merely as a means of expressing opinions, but as a space for producing critical discourse on public policy. These findings indicate that social media has evolved into a crucial arena in the formation of public discourse, where the public no longer merely receives information but actively produces, interprets, and critiques government policies. Future research is encouraged to broaden its scope by analyzing other accounts with differing discursive positions, as well as to combine AWK with approaches such as sentiment analysis, social network analysis, or digital ethnography to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how public opinion regarding policies is formed on social media.

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