

Stakeholder Clusters and Public Misperceptions in the MBG Communication Crisis on Social Media X

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Abstract

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is a national public policy aimed at improving nutritional access for students and priority groups. However, reported food poisoning cases associated with its implementation triggered a policy communication crisis in the digital public sphere. This study maps clusters of public misperception related to the MBG food poisoning issue on social media X using Stakeholder Theory and Social Network Analysis (SNA). Public conversation data were collected through Drone Emprit Academic from August 1 to November 13, 2025, focusing on discussions of MBG food poisoning. The analysis identifies relational patterns, key actors, sentiments, emotions, and network cluster structures. Findings reveal stakeholder fragmentation into four dominant clusters: mainstream media, activists and alternative media, pro-policy buzzers, and bots. Each cluster produces and reproduces distinct forms of misperception, including perceived health risks, responsibility attribution, governance transparency, and program legitimacy. The study confirms that public misperceptions in policy crises are structurally networked rather than merely individual cognitive errors. It contributes to stakeholder-based crisis communication studies by highlighting the importance of network-cluster-based message segmentation to reduce misperception escalation and restore public trust in public policy.

Keywords: Crisis Communication; Free Nutritious Meal Program; Misperceptions; Social Media X; Social Network Analysis

Abstrak

Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) merupakan kebijakan nasional untuk meningkatkan akses gizi peserta didik dan kelompok prioritas. Namun, kasus keracunan makanan yang dikaitkan dengan implementasinya memicu krisis komunikasi kebijakan di ruang publik digital. Penelitian ini bertujuan memetakan kluster mispersepsi publik terkait kasus tersebut di media sosial X menggunakan Stakeholder Theory dan pendekatan Social Network Analysis (SNA). Data percakapan publik dihimpun melalui Drone Emprit Academic pada periode 1 Agustus–13 November 2025 dengan fokus pada isu keracunan MBG. Analisis dilakukan untuk mengidentifikasi pola relasi, aktor kunci, sentimen, emosi, dan struktur jaringan percakapan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan fragmentasi stakeholder ke dalam empat kluster dominan: media arus utama, aktivis dan media alternatif, buzzer pro-kebijakan, serta bot. Setiap kluster mereproduksi bentuk mispersepsi berbeda, mencakup persepsi risiko kesehatan, atribusi tanggung jawab, transparansi tata kelola, dan legitimasi program. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa mispersepsi dalam krisis kebijakan bersifat terstruktur secara jaringan, bukan sekadar kesalahan persepsi individual. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kajian komunikasi krisis kebijakan berbasis stakeholder dengan menekankan pentingnya segmentasi pesan berbasis kluster jaringan untuk mereduksi eskalasi mispersepsi dan memulihkan kepercayaan publik.

Kata Kunci: Analisis Jaringan Sosial; Komunikasi Krisis; Media Sosial X; Mispersepsi; Program Makan Bergizi Gratis

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INTRODUCTION

A public policy crisis emerges when the implementation of a state program generates social consequences perceived as threatening safety, justice, or legitimacy, thereby escalating public debate and weakening the government's capacity to maintain trust. From the perspective of Stakeholder Theory, policy success is determined not solely by technical effectiveness, but by the government's ability to manage relationships with various actors who possess interests and claims regarding the policy, including beneficiaries, program implementers, government institutions, the media, and advocacy groups (Freeman, 1984). In crisis situations, these stakeholder relationships become increasingly complex as moral demands, public expectations, and reputational pressures evolve simultaneously within interconnected communication spaces (Mitchell et al., 1997).

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), as a national priority program, was designed to improve nutritional quality and strengthen human capital development. However, when its implementation was linked to food poisoning cases, health risks shifted into a policy communication crisis that threatened legitimacy and public trust. Crisis communication literature emphasizes that crises evolve through dynamics of responsibility attribution, risk perception, and public emotional responses; therefore, communication strategies cannot be uniform but must consider variations in informational needs and expectations among stakeholder

groups (Coombs, 2015). In the context of public policy, failure to respond to these dynamics may reinforce distrust and prolong the crisis.

The development of social media further complicates policy crisis dynamics, as the public no longer functions as passive recipients but as active actors who produce, distribute, and interpret information within conversational networks. Repeated interactions form discursive communities and echo chambers that reinforce collective judgments, including biased or inaccurate ones. Cognitive psychology research demonstrates that misinformation and misperceptions may persist even after factual corrections are delivered, as individuals tend to retain initial narratives that fill cognitive gaps. Therefore, effective correction requires coherent and socially relevant alternative narratives rather than merely presenting new facts (Lewandowsky et al., 2012).

Several communication studies on the MBG Program have been conducted with diverse focuses and approaches. Previous research has examined MBG communication networks using Social Network Analysis (Fauziah, 2025), analyzed policy discourse on social media X through critical discourse analysis (Priyantomo, 2025), and assessed the frequency and sentiment of MBG coverage in mainstream media (Imran et al., 2025). Other studies have focused on digital communication strategies to enhance public understanding, media and netizen framing analysis (Pranandana et al., 2025), and public officials' communication strategies in responding to MBG food poisoning

cases (Rahma et al., 2025). Collectively, these studies enrich the understanding of how MBG has been communicated, framed, and perceived in the public sphere.

Nevertheless, previous studies tend to focus on messages, actors, or sentiments separately and have not systematically mapped how public misperceptions are structured and disseminated within stakeholder communication networks during a crisis. In other words, misperception has largely been treated as an individual or textual phenomenon rather than as the outcome of network relations that shape patterns of influence, fragmentation, and communicative power distribution. This gap motivates the present study, which aims to analyze the clustering of public misperceptions in the communication crisis surrounding the MBG Program on social media X by integrating Stakeholder Theory and Social Network Analysis to understand policy crisis dynamics as a relational and structurally networked communication phenomenon. The novelty of this study lies in its integration of stakeholder salience attributes with SNA-based cluster detection to demonstrate that public misperception in policy crises is not a cognitive deficit of individuals but a structurally networked outcome produced through patterned interactions among heterogeneous digital actors. Unlike prior studies that treat stakeholders, network structure, and misperception as separate objects of analysis, this study advances a relational framework that connects these dimensions into a unified

explanatory model applicable to digital public policy crises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on policy crisis communication over the past decade indicate a shift from organization-centered approaches toward relational and network-based perspectives. Crises are no longer understood merely as technical failures or managerial errors, but as dynamic communication processes involving multiple actors with diverse interests, resources, and capacities for influence (Coombs, 2015; Sellnow & Seeger, 2018). In the context of public policy, this complexity intensifies as governments must engage with fragmented publics, competing media outlets, and non-state actors who actively shape policy narratives in digital spaces (Gregory, 2003).

Stakeholders, Policy Crisis, and Perceptual Fragmentation

Research grounded in Stakeholder Theory emphasizes that perceptions of and responses to crises are strongly influenced by stakeholders' positions, interests, and salience within policy networks (Bundy et al., 2017; Mitchell et al., 1997). Empirical studies demonstrate that stakeholders with greater communicative access—such as media organizations, activist groups, and political actors—possess stronger capacities to frame crises and shape public responsibility attribution (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017; Luoma-aho & Vos, 2009). In public policy contexts, divergent interests frequently

generate fragmented interpretations of risk, crisis causation, and policy legitimacy (Christensen & Lægreid, 2020). However, most of these studies still conceptualize stakeholders as relatively static categories and have not fully explained how interactions among stakeholders generate collective patterns of misperception in digital communication spaces.

Social Media, Communication Networks, and the Production of Misperception

Digital communication literature highlights that social media function as relational arenas in which crisis meanings are constructed through repeated inter-account interactions rather than through isolated content (Bruns & Weller, 2016; Kietzmann et al., 2018). Recent research indicates that algorithms, homophily, and selective exposure foster the emergence of echo chambers and discursive communities that reinforce shared beliefs, including inaccurate ones (Cinelli et al., 2021; Del Vicario et al., 2016).

Studies on misinformation and misperception reveal that factual corrections are often ineffective because individuals and groups tend to preserve narratives that are integrated with their social identities and collective emotions (Lewandowsky et al., 2012; Van Der Meer & Jin, 2020). In policy crises, misperception concerns not only factual inaccuracies but also institutional trust and the legitimacy of decision-makers (Walter et al., 2020). Nevertheless, most existing studies analyze misperception at the individual or

content level and insufficiently explain how misperceptions are structurally produced and reproduced within inter-account communication networks. Recent scholarship has begun to address this gap. Sharma et al. (2023) demonstrate that misinformation diffusion on Twitter is shaped by community-level network topology rather than individual sharing behavior, suggesting that intervention strategies must target cluster structures rather than single nodes. Similarly, Vraga et al. (2022) find that corrective information in networked environments is most effective when delivered by actors who occupy bridging positions between communities, reinforcing the importance of network position in crisis communication design. In the context of digital crisis communication, Coombs and Holladay (2023) argue that the fragmentation of public spheres into algorithmically reinforced clusters fundamentally changes the dynamics of organizational crisis response, requiring practitioners to adopt cluster-sensitive communication architectures rather than broadcast-style messaging.

Social Network Analysis in Crisis

Communication Studies

Over the past decade, Social Network Analysis (SNA) has increasingly been employed to examine crisis communication dynamics on social media. SNA research shows that crises are often characterized by the formation of relatively distinct communication clusters,

with central actors reinforcing dominant narratives within each cluster (Guo & Saxton, 2018; Himelboim et al., 2017). Other studies find that bots and political buzzers can intensify polarization and accelerate the diffusion of particular narratives during policy crises (Keller & Klinger, 2019; Shao et al., 2018). However, the application of SNA in policy communication studies frequently focuses on mapping actors and information flows without explicitly linking network structures to the production of public misperception and communicative power relations among stakeholders.

Research Gap and Position of the Study

Based on the synthesis of previous studies, three major gaps are identified. First, policy crisis communication research tends to separate the analysis of stakeholders, misperception, and communication networks, thus failing to capture their relational interconnections. Second, public misperception is more often treated as an individual cognitive error or a content effect rather than as a collectively structured network phenomenon. Third, although SNA has been widely utilized, its integration with Stakeholder Theory in the context of public policy crises remains limited.

This study addresses these gaps by developing a conceptual framework that positions the communication crisis surrounding the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) as an arena of stakeholder interaction within a digital

communication network. The conceptual framework underlying this study proposes the following relational chain: stakeholder attributes (power, legitimacy, urgency) determine the structural positions of actors within digital communication networks; these positional configurations, shaped by homophily and algorithmic affordances, produce distinct network clusters; and each cluster, through repeated internal interaction, generates and reproduces specific forms of public misperception. In other words, misperception is conceptualized not as the starting point of crisis but as the outcome of network-mediated stakeholder dynamics. Within this framework, public misperception is understood as a relational product emerging from actors' positions, interaction intensity, and influence distribution within conversational networks on social media X. Accordingly, this study not only maps network structures but also explains how stakeholder clusters form, reinforce, and sustain misperceptions during a policy crisis.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive-analytical design with a qualitative approach strengthened by quantitative communication network analysis. This approach was chosen to conceptualize policy communication crises as relational phenomena formed through interactions among stakeholders in the digital public sphere. Stakeholder Theory provides the conceptual foundation for classifying actors

based on salience attributes, while Social Network Analysis (SNA) is applied to map relational structures, interaction patterns, and conversational clusters on social media X (Mitchell et al., 1997).

The data were derived from public conversations on social media X collected and processed using the Drone Emprit Academic platform. A set of keywords related to the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) and food poisoning issues was defined, with an observation period from August 1 to November 13, 2025. The dataset comprised approximately 47,230 tweets (posts) produced by 28,914 unique accounts during the observation period. The analytical focus centered on discussions concerning poisoning incidents, moratorium demands, governance practices, and program transparency. Drone Emprit Academic functioned as a research instrument facilitating data extraction, sentiment and emotion classification, identification of influential actors, and network and cluster mapping, consistent with prior social media-based public opinion studies (Arianto, 2020).

The unit of analysis is the network cluster of public conversations formed through inter-account interactions on social media X. Public misperception is operationally defined as narratives reflecting inaccurate or biased understandings regarding the magnitude of health risks, responsibility attribution, governance transparency, and policy legitimacy, which are repeatedly articulated and reinforced within particular discursive communities.

Stakeholders are defined as actors or groups possessing interests and claims related to the MBG program, including beneficiaries, program administrators, local governments, media organizations, activists, and pro-policy groups. Stakeholder identification considers actors' structural positions within the network, interaction intensity, and conversational content characteristics, aligned with foundational stakeholder concepts (Freeman, 1984).

Data analysis proceeded in four stages. First, thematic summaries and issue trends were examined to identify escalation periods and the broader crisis context. Second, sentiment and emotion distributions were analyzed to capture the affective dimensions accompanying the formation and diffusion of misperceptions. Third, network maps and conversational clusters were interpreted to identify major communities, central actors, and potential bridging actors based on SNA principles (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Fourth, network clusters were interpreted as stakeholder configurations by assessing power, legitimacy, and urgency attributes based on narrative roles, structural positions, and the intensity of demands expressed during the crisis (Mitchell et al., 1997).

Validity was enhanced through analytical triangulation by integrating cluster mapping results, sentiment and emotion distributions, and narrative summaries. Bot identification was conducted using Drone Emprit Academic's built-in account classification system, which flags

accounts exhibiting automated behavioral patterns such as abnormally high posting frequency, repetitive content, and absence of profile completeness indicators; this classification was supplemented by manual verification of the top-activity accounts within the identified bot cluster. Network cluster detection employed the Louvain modularity algorithm, which partitions nodes into communities by maximizing intra-cluster edge density relative to a random network baseline, as implemented within the Drone Emprit Academic SNA module. Sentiment classification was performed by the platform's lexicon-based and machine learning hybrid algorithm trained on Indonesian-language social media corpora; while the platform does not publicly disclose full algorithmic parameters, the classification approach has been validated in prior Indonesian social media research (Arianto, 2020). The study acknowledges methodological limitations, as it does not directly access raw data through the social media API and relies on the platform's classification algorithms, limiting full transparency of technical parameters. Therefore, the study's claims focus on discursive dynamics and network communication structures within the policy crisis rather than on epidemiological verification of reported food poisoning incidents.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Discussion Trends and Dominant Issues

The analysis of public conversations on social media X indicates that discourse surrounding

the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) did not develop linearly but instead exhibited fluctuating spikes in intensity corresponding with reports of food poisoning cases in various regions. Peaks in discussion typically emerged when media outlets and influential accounts linked local poisoning incidents to systemic failures in program implementation. This pattern suggests that health-related issues functioned as trigger events that expanded the scope of discourse from technical concerns to broader critiques of governance and policy legitimacy. Beyond the poisoning issue, public conversations were consistently characterized by narratives concerning poor budget absorption and allegations of fictitious kitchens. These themes signal a shift in focus from individual health risks to suspected structural irregularities in policy implementation. From a policy communication perspective, this shift is significant, as it demonstrates that public evaluation extends beyond immediate program outcomes to perceptions of accountability and administrative integrity. When poisoning incidents were portrayed as widespread and recurring, public demands evolved toward comprehensive policy evaluation and even calls for a temporary moratorium, marking an escalation from a stage of heightened alert to provisional delegitimization.

Incidents reported in specific regions, such as Sragen and Wonogiri, emerged as initial discursive nodes that were subsequently reproduced and amplified in cross-regional conversations. These cases were not framed as

isolated events but rather as symbolic representations of procedural failure, associated with weak hygiene standards, limited data transparency, and inadequate governance accountability. Within the communication network, references to these locations functioned as narrative anchors connecting localized experiences to broader national risk claims, thereby reinforcing the perception that the MBG issue was systemic rather than incidental (Drone Emprit Academic, 2025).

These findings indicate that public discussion trends during the MBG crisis were shaped by the interaction among empirical events, media framing, and the network logic of social media that accelerates issue generalization. Spikes in conversation reflect not only increased public attention but also processes of collective meaning construction, in which health concerns, budgetary issues, and governance narratives intertwined to shape perceptions of policy crisis. Thus, discussion trends and dominant issues constitute the foundational layer upon which misperceptions subsequently crystallized into more structured communication clusters.

Furthermore, the temporal pattern of these discussion spikes suggests that digital amplification mechanisms played a crucial role in accelerating crisis escalation. Once a poisoning incident was framed as evidence of systemic governance failure, the issue rapidly transcended its local context and entered a broader cycle of repetition, reinterpretation, and emotional reinforcement. This dynamic

reflects the logic of virality within networked publics, where high-salience events are algorithmically and socially prioritized, thereby compressing the time between incident, interpretation, and collective judgment. Consequently, the MBG crisis evolved not only through the accumulation of negative events but through rapid cycles of amplification that intensified perceptions of risk and institutional vulnerability before formal clarifications could stabilize public understanding.

Public Sentiment in Mainstream Media and Social Media

Sentiment analysis reveals a consistent and meaningful divergence between the tone of opinions expressed in mainstream media coverage and those circulating on social media X. Within the aggregate of mainstream media reporting, positive sentiment appears more dominant than negative sentiment. This pattern reflects a tendency to emphasize program achievements, such as the increasing number of beneficiaries, accelerated service distribution, and the geographic expansion of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG). Such emphasis suggests that mainstream media largely adopted a policy-oriented frame highlighting program continuity and governmental responsiveness to emerging issues, rather than portraying food poisoning incidents as evidence of systemic program failure (Drone Emprit Academic, 2025).

In contrast, aggregated social media conversations demonstrate a predominance of

negative sentiment. Public discourse repeatedly emphasized narratives of mass poisoning, poor kitchen hygiene, alleged budget irregularities, and calls for a moratorium or temporary suspension of the program. The dominance of negative sentiment indicates that social media functioned as a space for expressing public dissatisfaction and suspicion, where localized experiences and incidental reports were reconstructed into broader normative critiques of governance and policy legitimacy. In this context, social media did not merely reflect spontaneous reactions but actively facilitated the production of collective meanings that were more confrontational toward policy authorities.

These findings align with prior research demonstrating systematic differences between mainstream media framing and social media opinion dynamics in policy crisis contexts. Policy communication studies suggest that mainstream media tend to maintain an institutional orientation by balancing criticism with narratives of stability, particularly in relation to large-scale national government programs (Christensen & Lægreid, 2020; Entman, 2007). Conversely, research on social media highlights that digital platforms are more susceptible to the escalation of negative emotions and moralized crisis framing, as platform logics and algorithms amplify content that evokes anger, anxiety, and suspicion (Cinelli et al., 2021; Del Vicario et al., 2016).

Furthermore, this divergence in sentiment confirms earlier findings emphasizing

that crisis communication on social media evolves through affective dimensions and group identity processes rather than purely factual evaluation (Van Der Meer & Jin, 2020; Walter et al., 2020). In conversations concerning MBG, public criticism was directed not only at reported poisoning incidents as empirical events, but also at perceived state incapacity to ensure safety, transparency, and accountability. Negative sentiment thus functioned as an indicator of structural distrust rather than merely a reaction to isolated incidents.

This finding extends crisis communication literature underscoring the importance of stakeholder segmentation in designing effective communication responses. Coombs (2015) argues that crisis communication strategies must be tailored to the expectations and informational needs of distinct stakeholder groups. In the MBG case, the predominance of positive sentiment in mainstream media alongside negative sentiment on social media signals a perceptual gap between institutional communication channels and the digital public sphere. Without approaches that are sensitive to the emotional dynamics and evolving narratives within social media communities, this gap risks undermining the effectiveness of official messaging.

Therefore, the divergence in sentiment between mainstream media and social media reflects not merely differences in reporting style or opinion expression, but a fragmentation of the policy communication

space. This fragmentation constitutes a crucial context for the formation of public misperceptions, which subsequently crystallized into structured communication network clusters, as discussed in the following section.

Moreover, the coexistence of positive institutional framing and predominantly negative social media sentiment suggests the emergence of a parallel interpretive environment in which official narratives and public perceptions evolve along partially disconnected trajectories. When mainstream media emphasize stability and program continuity while social media conversations foreground risk and distrust, audiences may selectively gravitate toward the narrative space that resonates with their prior beliefs and emotional dispositions. This dynamic increases the likelihood of confirmation bias and selective exposure, reinforcing attitudinal polarization over time. In the context of the MBG crisis, such divergence did not merely reflect contrasting tones, but signaled the development of competing reality constructions, one institutional and stability-oriented, the other skeptical and risk-amplifying, thereby intensifying the challenges of restoring shared policy understanding in a fragmented digital public sphere.

Public Emotions and Attribution in Conversations

Emotion analysis of public conversations indicates that anger and fear dominated

discourse surrounding the food poisoning cases within the MBG Program. Anger was particularly evident in narratives attributing poisoning incidents to state negligence in oversight functions, weak hygiene standard operating procedures, and failures in program governance. In this context, public anger functioned as a form of moral judgment, where risks to children's health were perceived as neglect of vulnerable groups' safety. This pattern aligns with crisis communication research demonstrating that anger tends to emerge when the public attributes responsibility to institutional actors perceived to have high control over the risk (Coombs, 2015; Jin et al., 2012).

Fear, meanwhile, was prominent in conversations emphasizing uncertainty about risk and the potential escalation of victims. This emotion was especially expressed by parents and individuals identifying as program beneficiaries, who questioned the safety of MBG consumption for their children. This finding is consistent with risk communication literature asserting that perceived uncertainty and informational ambiguity intensify fear, which in turn directly affects public policy acceptance intentions (Slovic, 2000; Van Der Meer & Jin, 2020). In the MBG context, fear did not merely reflect individual anxiety but contributed to collective resistance toward program continuation when safety assurances were perceived as insufficient. Nevertheless, the analysis also identified the presence of anticipation and joy in portions of the

conversation, particularly within narratives highlighting program benefits, beneficiary testimonials, and success framing in specific regions. These positive emotions were predominantly produced and circulated by accounts affiliated with government institutions, mainstream media, or pro-policy communities. This finding reinforces the argument that crisis communication spaces on social media are competitive and fragmented, where different actors attempt to construct crisis meanings in accordance with their interests and positions within power structures (Cinelli et al., 2021; Entman, 2007).

Compared with previous research, these findings are consistent with the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which positions public emotion as a key mediator between responsibility attribution and reputational evaluation (Coombs, 2015). However, this study extends SCCT by demonstrating that in the context of large-scale national social policy, emotions influence not only organizational reputation but also policy legitimacy and program sustainability. Unlike corporate crisis studies that primarily focus on organization–consumer relationships, the present findings show that in public policy crises, emotions operate within a broader discursive arena involving state–citizen relations.

Furthermore, the results indicate that anger and fear did not emerge independently but mutually reinforced one another within certain conversational clusters, thereby

forming socially institutionalized narratives of misperception. This pattern is consistent with Del Vicario et al. (2016), who found that negative emotions enhance discursive community cohesion and increase the resilience of critical narratives against factual clarification. These findings suggest that MBG crisis communication strategies cannot rely solely on technical data dissemination but must explicitly address emotional dynamics and public responsibility attribution.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that emotional dynamics in MBG-related conversations reflect a broader contestation of policy legitimacy within the digital public sphere. Effective crisis communication is therefore determined not only by the government's ability to correct misinformation, but also by its capacity to respond to public emotions in an empathetic, transparent, and consistent manner across stakeholder communities.

In addition, the interaction between emotion and attribution in the MBG conversations suggests that emotional responses were not merely spontaneous reactions but were structured through repeated narrative framing within specific clusters. Anger became more intense when responsibility was framed as preventable negligence, while fear escalated when uncertainty was repeatedly emphasized without visible corrective action. This indicates that emotional amplification was closely tied to interpretive cues circulating in the network.

As a result, crisis escalation was shaped not only by the objective severity of the incidents but also by how responsibility and uncertainty were discursively constructed and redistributed across stakeholder communities. Consequently, managing emotional contagion in digital policy crises requires simultaneous attention to attribution framing, transparency signals, and the timing of institutional responses, as delays or defensive messaging may further solidify negative emotional cycles.

Influential Actors and Discursive Markers

Actor mapping results indicate that mainstream media accounts occupied central positions within the conversation network as primary producers of factual information regarding the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), including both implementation achievements and reports of food poisoning incidents. This role confirms the function of mainstream media as information brokers, providing initial reference points for public understanding of policy issues. However, as demonstrated in digital agenda-setting studies, dominance in information production does not automatically translate into dominance in meaning construction, since public interpretation develops simultaneously through non-institutional actors on social media (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013).

Accounts affiliated with activist groups and alternative media emerged as the second most influential actors, consistently highlighting poisoning incidents, budget concerns, and alleged governance

weaknesses. This consistency strengthens the urgency attribute within the Stakeholder Theory framework, as their narratives repeatedly pressured the government to respond more transparently to safety and accountability concerns. These findings align with prior research showing that advocacy actors and alternative media frequently function as issue amplifiers in policy crises, particularly when issues involve moral dimensions and public safety (Bennett & Checkel, 2014; Chadwick, 2017).

Meanwhile, critical personal accounts and pro-policy buzzer accounts demonstrated sharply polarized discursive dynamics. Critical personal accounts tended to articulate lived experiences, suspicions, and normative judgments, whereas pro-policy accounts mobilized defensive narratives emphasizing program benefits, statistical achievements, and the delegitimization of criticism. This pattern is consistent with research on networked polarization, which finds that partisan actors contribute to public sphere fragmentation by reinforcing narratives aligned with their respective group orientations (Barberá et al., 2015; Himelboim et al., 2017).

Discursive markers such as pro-program campaign hashtags, evaluative hashtags, and recurring keyword clusters functioned as mechanisms that grouped conversations into two principal poles: a legitimacy pole emphasizing program continuity and benefits, and a delegitimization pole demanding

evaluation, moratorium, or temporary suspension. The function of hashtags as discursive anchors strengthened the formation of like-minded communities while reducing exposure to alternative viewpoints. This finding reinforces earlier research indicating that hashtags serve not merely as topical categorization tools but also as political and policy identity symbols that facilitate echo chamber formation (Bruns & Burgess, 2015; Del Vicario et al., 2016).

Compared to previous studies on MBG policy communication that primarily emphasized media framing analysis, public sentiment, or governmental communication strategies, these findings demonstrate that the MBG communication crisis was shaped not only by message content but also by relational configurations among actors and mutually reinforcing discursive markers within the network. Thus, crisis communication cannot be understood solely as a failure of information delivery, but rather as the outcome of competitive interactions among actors possessing varying degrees of communicative power. This finding extends crisis communication scholarship by underscoring the importance of analyzing influential actors and discursive markers as components of an integrated network ecosystem rather than as isolated elements.

In addition, the interaction between influential actors and discursive markers suggests that visibility and influence were co-constructed through repeated alignment

between accounts and specific narrative symbols. Actors who consistently attached themselves to particular hashtags or keyword clusters were more likely to sustain engagement and mobilize supportive networks, thereby increasing their perceived authority within their respective poles. This dynamic indicates that influence in the MBG crisis was not derived solely from institutional credibility or follower counts, but from the strategic coupling of identity, emotion, and symbolic markers within networked conversations. As a result, discursive power operated performatively, actors became influential not only because of who they were, but because of how effectively they embedded their messages within resonant narrative repertoires circulating across the network.

Network Mapping and Conversation Clusters

Conversation network mapping using Social Network Analysis (SNA) demonstrates that the communication crisis surrounding the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) unfolded within a fragmented ecosystem structured into four dominant clusters, each characterized by distinct narrative orientations and interests. The presence of bot and pro-policy buzzer clusters as separate entities indicates that policy communication dynamics were shaped not only by human actors but also by semi-automated actors functioning as amplifiers of message intensity.

The bot cluster consistently amplified narratives emphasizing the program's potential, achievements, and sustainability, functioning as

narrative stabilizers that maintained the visibility of policy-legitimizing discourse. This finding aligns with prior research demonstrating that automated accounts are frequently deployed to reinforce specific agendas in policy debates and political crises—not necessarily to generate new discourse, but to increase the reach and frequency of existing messages (Ferrara et al., 2016).

The pro-policy buzzer cluster exhibited a complementary yet distinct function compared to bots. While bots operated primarily at a quantitative level through repetition and distribution, buzzers engaged at a discursive level by producing normative defenses, testimonials, and counterattacks against criticism. This pattern is consistent with findings in digital political communication research, which describe buzzers as interpretive agents who strategically reframe issues to align with particular political or policy interests (Bradshaw & Howard, 2017). Within the MBG crisis context, buzzers not only defended the program but also contributed to polarization by reinforcing symbolic boundaries between supporters and critics.

The mainstream media cluster occupied a structurally central position in the network, acting as an initiator of discourse and a cross-cluster reference source. However, this centrality proved ambivalent. On the one hand, mainstream media functioned as a source of factual legitimacy cited by various groups; on the other hand, the findings suggest that mainstream outlets did not fully control the

direction of discourse, as their narratives were rapidly reinterpreted and politicized by other clusters. This condition reinforces arguments regarding the weakening of centralized gatekeeping and the strengthening of networked gatekeeping in the digital media ecosystem (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013), whereby policy meanings are constructed through inter-cluster interactions rather than determined linearly by institutional media.

The activist and alternative media cluster emerged as a hub of normative critique, focusing on governance quality, hygienic standards, transparency, and state accountability. This cluster articulated moral and public safety claims that directly challenged the legitimacy of the policy, including calls for temporary suspension of the program. This role aligns with prior research indicating that in public policy crises, advocacy actors often function as moral entrepreneurs who define the boundaries between ethically acceptable and unacceptable policies (Bennett & Checkel, 2014; Entman, 2007).

The structurally distinct yet interactively connected clusters confirm that the public in the MBG crisis was not homogeneous, but rather organized as stakeholder networks with differing claims, interests, and communicative resources. This finding strengthens the stakeholder network perspective articulated by Timothy J. Rowley (1997), which posits that stakeholder influence on policy is shaped not only by direct relationships with government actors but also by their positionality and

interconnections within broader networks. Compared to previous studies on MBG communication that primarily emphasized message content or single actors, this study expands existing understanding by demonstrating that the MBG communication crisis emerged from relational configurations among clusters that simultaneously produced legitimacy and delegitimization dynamics.

Beyond identifying cluster roles, the network structure also reveals asymmetrical patterns of influence reflected in variations in centrality, density, and cross-cluster bridging. The mainstream media cluster exhibited high degree centrality, indicating its function as a primary reference hub, while activist networks demonstrated stronger internal density, suggesting cohesive narrative reinforcement within the cluster. Meanwhile, bot and buzzer clusters showed strategic positioning that amplified specific narratives across structural gaps, increasing message visibility without necessarily fostering deliberative exchange. This configuration indicates that information circulation during the MBG crisis was driven less by open dialogue and more by competitive narrative amplification. Consequently, the crisis evolved not simply through the spread of information, but through structurally mediated interactions in which influence depended on network position, coordination capacity, and discursive intensity.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to map the clustering of public

misperceptions in the communication crisis surrounding the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) on social media X by integrating Stakeholder Theory and Social Network Analysis (SNA). The findings demonstrate that public misperceptions related to MBG food poisoning cases were neither sporadic nor purely individual phenomena, but rather structured within conversational networks forming stakeholder clusters characterized by distinct narrative orientations, emotional dynamics, and legitimacy claims. Accordingly, the MBG communication crisis cannot be understood merely as a failure of information delivery or insufficient technical clarification; instead, it represents a relational problem shaped by the distribution of communicative power among actors within the digital media ecosystem.

Network mapping results reveal that mainstream media, activist and alternative media groups, pro-policy buzzers, and bots played differentiated yet mutually influential roles in shaping misperception dynamics. Each cluster produced and reproduced specific interpretations regarding health risks, responsibility attribution, governance transparency, and policy legitimacy. These findings confirm that policy communication crises evolve through public fragmentation and meaning polarization, rendering uniform communication strategies insufficient to address such complexity.

Based on these findings, this study recommends that the government and MBG program administrators adopt a stakeholder

cluster-based crisis communication approach. Communication strategies should be designed in a segmented manner by considering network characteristics, dominant emotions, and principal claims within each cluster, rather than focusing solely on technical clarification. Strengthening data transparency and narrative accountability is also essential to address legitimacy demands emerging from critical clusters, while reducing reliance on message amplification by non-organic actors that may exacerbate polarization.

For mainstream media, these findings encourage a more reflective role in policy crises, not only as information disseminators but also as discursive balancers capable of proportionally connecting diverse public claims. For scholars and policy communication designers, this study underscores the importance of integrating network analysis with stakeholder perspectives in examining policy crises in the social media era. Future research is recommended to combine digital network analysis with ethnographic data or in-depth interviews to enrich understanding of how misperceptions are formed and negotiated at the level of public experience.

Additionally, this study contributes theoretically by demonstrating that the integration of Stakeholder Theory and Social Network Analysis provides a more comprehensive lens for understanding contemporary policy communication crises in digital environments. Rather than treating misperception as a cognitive deficit at the individual level, this approach conceptualizes it

as a networked and relational outcome emerging from patterned interactions among heterogeneous actors. In terms of novelty, this study advances existing scholarship in three specific ways: (1) it operationalizes misperception as a cluster-level, structurally networked phenomenon rather than an individual or content-level attribute; (2) it integrates stakeholder salience theory with network cluster analysis to explain how communicative power differentials produce distinct misperception types within each cluster; and (3) it provides an empirically grounded framework for cluster-sensitive crisis communication strategy that extends Coombs' SCCT by incorporating network topology as a structural moderator of crisis response effectiveness. Practically, this implies that effective crisis management in the social media era requires not only message correction, but also strategic engagement with network structures, power asymmetries, and narrative competition. By foregrounding the relational architecture of digital discourse, this study offers a framework that may be applied beyond the MBG case to other public policy controversies characterized by fragmentation, automation, and polarized stakeholder networks.

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