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The Influence of Public Perception and Implementation of the MBG Program on the Image of the Prabowo–Gibran Government

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Abstract

This study measures the influence of public perception and the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) on the image of the Prabowo–Gibran administration in Berau Regency. In political communication, the MBG program is viewed not only in terms of its implementation but also in how it is perceived by the public and communicated by the government. This study is motivated by the existence of both pros and cons regarding the new leadership and the challenges faced by the new government's image, particularly in programs that have not yet been fully realized, especially in areas such as Berau Regency, which is geographically quite distant from the centre of government. The objective of this study is to measure the influence of public perception and the implementation of the MBG program on the government's image. The study employs a quantitative approach using a survey. The sample consists of 100 respondents selected through stratified random sampling in Berau Regency. The results indicate that public perception does not significantly influence the government's image. Conversely, the MBG program partially has a strong influence. However, when tested simultaneously, both contribute significantly to forming a positive image of the government. These findings indicate that

narratives and strategic communication regarding programs that have not yet been fully implemented can still influence the government's image. In Political PR, these results highlight the importance of effective political communication and make theoretical and practical contributions to the development of political communication strategies.

Keywords: *MBG's Program, government image, political communication, political public relations, public perceptions.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengukur pengaruh persepsi publik dan Program Makanan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) terhadap citra pemerintahan Prabowo–Gibran di Kabupaten Berau. Dalam komunikasi politik, program MBG tidak hanya dilihat dari segi implementasinya, tetapi juga dari cara publik memandangnya dan bagaimana pemerintah mengomunikasikannya. Penelitian ini didorong oleh adanya pro dan kontra terkait kepemimpinan baru dan tantangan yang dihadapi citra pemerintah baru, terutama dalam program-program yang belum sepenuhnya terealisasi, khususnya di daerah seperti Kabupaten Berau yang secara geografis cukup jauh dari pusat pemerintahan. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengukur pengaruh persepsi publik dan implementasi program MBG terhadap citra pemerintah. Metode yang digunakan adalah kuantitatif dengan metode survei. Sampel terdiri dari 100 responden yang dipilih melalui sampling acak berstrata di Kabupaten Berau. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa persepsi publik tidak memiliki pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap citra pemerintah. Sebaliknya, program MBG secara parsial memiliki pengaruh yang kuat. Namun, ketika diuji secara bersamaan, keduanya berkontribusi secara signifikan dalam membentuk citra positif pemerintah. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa narasi dan komunikasi strategis mengenai program yang belum sepenuhnya diimplementasikan masih dapat mempengaruhi citra pemerintah. Dalam PR Politik, hasil ini menyoroti pentingnya komunikasi politik yang efektif dan memberikan kontribusi teoretis dan praktis bagi pengembangan strategi komunikasi politik.

Kata Kunci: *Citra Pemerintah, Komunikasi Politik, Program MBG, Public Relations Politik, Persepsi Publik*

A. Introduction

The 2024–2029 presidential and vice-presidential elections in Indonesia resulted in the victory of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as officially announced by the General Elections Commission (Feisal, 2023). Efforts to win the general election in 2024 are focused on the presidential and vice presidential elections, which are considered more attractive than the legislative elections (Santana Kurnia et al., 2025). Although the electoral process has concluded and the new government has been inaugurated, public discourse concerning the legitimacy, priorities, and direction of the administration's policies continues to develop across social, political, and economic domains. Particular attention has been paid to national strategic programs promoted during the campaign, particularly those related to human resource development as a foundation for the *Indonesia Emas 2045* vision.

Within this long-term development framework, the Free Nutritious Meals Program (*Makan Bergizi Gratis*—MBG) is positioned as a key policy initiative under *Astacita*, the eight strategic missions of the Prabowo–Gibran administration. Specifically, MBG forms part of the fourth mission, which focuses on strengthening human resources through education, health, and the empowerment of vulnerable groups (Wisnubroto, 2024). The program is framed as both a social intervention to improve nutritional outcomes among school-age children and adolescents and a long-term investment aimed at fostering a healthy and competitive future generation (Alif, 2024).

Currently, the media still extensively reports on health issues, including the issue of stunting. Based on research results regarding priority issues, it can be illustrated that news coverage in digital media in Indonesia still emphasizes the issue of Digital Transformation, followed by the sustainable energy transition, while the issue of Global Health Architecture is the last to be reported by online media in Indonesia (B Arnold Simangunsong et al., 2023). The relevance of the MBG program is reinforced by persistent national health challenges, particularly stunting. Despite extensive media coverage of health-related issues, including nutrition and stunting, disparities remain evident between policy objectives and on-the-ground realities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2025), more than 150 million children globally suffer from stunting. In Indonesia, the 2024 Indonesian Nutrition Status Survey (SSGI) recorded a stunting prevalence of 19.8% (Puspasari et al., 2025). At the regional level, Berau Regency presents a more alarming trend, with stunting rates increasing from 21.26% in 2023 to 23% in 2024 (Warseto, 2024). These figures indicate that policy interventions have not yet achieved optimal effectiveness, particularly in non-metropolitan regions characterized by geographical constraints and socio-economic disparities.

Although the MBG program represents an innovative policy response, its planned implementation has raised public concerns, especially regarding budget allocation. The government's decision to set the program cost at Rp10,000 per child per day, reduced from the initially proposed Rp15,000, has sparked doubts about its adequacy in meeting balanced nutritional standards, particularly in remote regions with high food prices and logistical challenges, such as Berau Regency (Intan, 2024).

These concerns highlight the importance of public perception in shaping policy legitimacy and government image.

Existing scholarship on political communication and political public relations widely acknowledges public perception as a key determinant of government image and political legitimacy (Cooper, 2023; Doyon, 2024). However, much of this literature conceptualizes perception as a largely linear construct, often detached from direct policy experience. Legitimacy theory and symmetric two-way communication emphasize trust and interaction, yet they tend to understate the extent to which concrete policy references shape public meaning-making, particularly in peripheral regions.

At the same time, studies on mediatization and performative politics stress the growing role of symbolic communication, media narratives, and visual representations in constructing political reality (Maurer, 2023; Szepanski, 2024). While influential, these approaches are predominantly grounded in metropolitan contexts. The encoding/decoding framework further positions citizens as active interpreters whose perceptions are conditioned by social context and relevance to basic needs (Hall, 2021; Stevens, 2024). Nevertheless, the intersection of public perception, social policy communication, and basic-needs-oriented programs in non-metropolitan settings remains underexplored.

Previous studies show that public perceptions of social policy are shaped by perceived performance, information clarity, and alignment with local needs (Luhmann, 2022; Romyeni et al., 2018; Widodo et al., 2020) as well as by digital political communication (Darlius et al., 2024). However, they rarely examine how such perceptions are formed in remote areas with limited access to information or how they affect the government's image beyond urban and youth-centered audiences (Fardiansyah & Euis Komalawati, 2024). This study addresses this gap by situating public perception in a peripheral context and explicitly linking it to social policy communication and government image.

Addressing this gap, the present study examines public perceptions of the MBG program in Berau Regency, a region characterized by geographical challenges, limited infrastructure, and high living costs. This study contributes novel insights by focusing on (1) a remote research setting with distinct socio-economic conditions, (2) community expectations and initial perceptions prior to full policy implementation, and (3) a quantitative assessment of the simultaneous influence of public perceptions and perceived program implementation on the image of the Prabowo–Gibran administration.

Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) analyze the influence of public perceptions of the MBG program on the government's image; (2) assess the effect of perceived program implementation on the government's image; and (3) examine the combined influence of public perceptions and program implementation on the overall image of the administration.

The findings are expected to enrich the literature on political communication and public perception in Indonesia, particularly in the context of social policy implementation in remote areas. Practically, this study provides insights for policymakers to develop more context-sensitive communication strategies and to

ensure that flagship programs such as MBG function not merely as symbolic policies but as effective interventions that align with community needs and expectations.

B. Methods

This study employs a quantitative approach, using a survey, to examine the influence of Public Perception (X_1) and MBG Program Implementation (X_2) on Government Image (Y) in Berau Regency. A quantitative approach was selected because it enables the collection of objective, measurable data for statistical analysis. Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, allowing systematic measurement of public understanding, attitudes, and trust toward the MBG Program.

The research population is the entire population of Berau Regency ($N = 280,998$). The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula, with a 10% margin of error, yielding 100 respondents. The selection of a 10% margin of error aligns with common practice in social research, where a margin of error of 5–10% is widely applied in preliminary or exploratory studies (Sugiyono, 2019). This decision also accounted for the geographically dispersed population and the practical constraints of data collection in a non-metropolitan region with limited infrastructure. In political perception research conducted in such contexts, methodological feasibility is often prioritized over high statistical precision (Neuman, 2014).

Stratified random sampling was applied based on the 13 sub-districts in Berau Regency to ensure proportional representation. The research instrument consisted of 59 closed-ended statements measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The statements were developed from theoretical indicators of Public Perception (X_1), MBG Program Implementation (X_2), and Government Image (Y). The initial instrument included 68 items. Nine items were removed after pilot testing because the MBG Program had not been implemented in Berau Regency.

The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms to accommodate respondents' dispersed geographic locations and to enhance data collection efficiency. The instrument was tested for validity using Pearson correlation and for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha, with all variables demonstrating acceptable reliability ($\alpha > 0.7$). Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS software. After meeting the feasibility requirements, multiple linear regression was used to examine both the simultaneous (F-test) and partial (t-test) effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable, as well as the coefficient of determination (R^2).

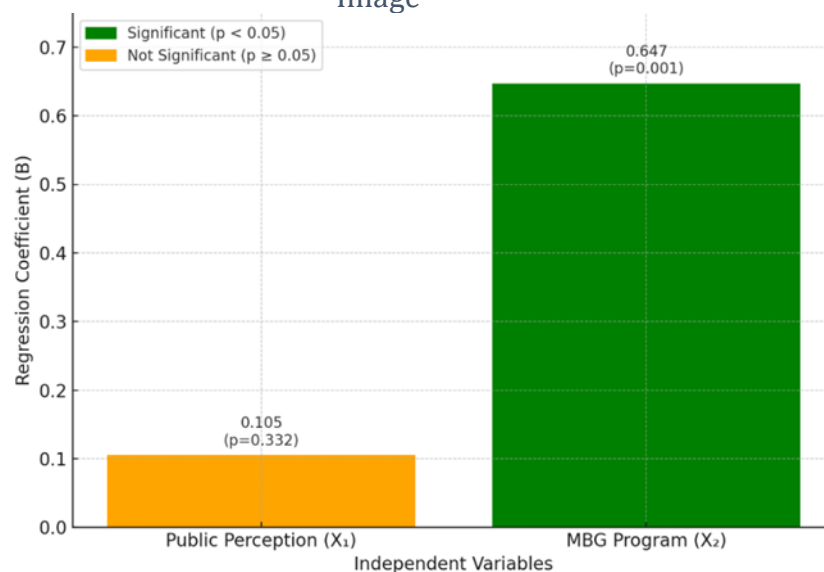
This study adhered to ethical research standards. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and all respondents were informed about the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained, and no personally identifiable information was collected to ensure anonymity and data protection.

C. Results and Discussion

This study examines the influence of public perception and the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) on the government's

image in Berau Regency, using the frameworks of political communication, political public relations, and public perception. This approach positions policy programs not merely as technical interventions oriented toward meeting the basic needs of the community, but also as instruments of communication and political image-building that play a strategic role in shaping public opinion and support. The research context is unique because the MBG program has not yet been fully implemented in Berau Regency; therefore, public perception at this stage is highly dependent on exposure to information, media framing, central government communication strategies, and message reinforcement by local political actors. Political communication shapes how society understands social and political realities (Moy & Neumann, 2024). In other words, what is being tested is not only the policy's technical outcomes but also the results of the accompanying political communication process. The findings of this study reveal a complex interplay between public perception, program narratives, and government image. By focusing on the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) and public perception in Berau, this research offers insights into how policy formulation and symbolic communication influence political legitimacy and public trust.

Figure 1 Multiple Linear Regression Coefficients Impact on Government Image

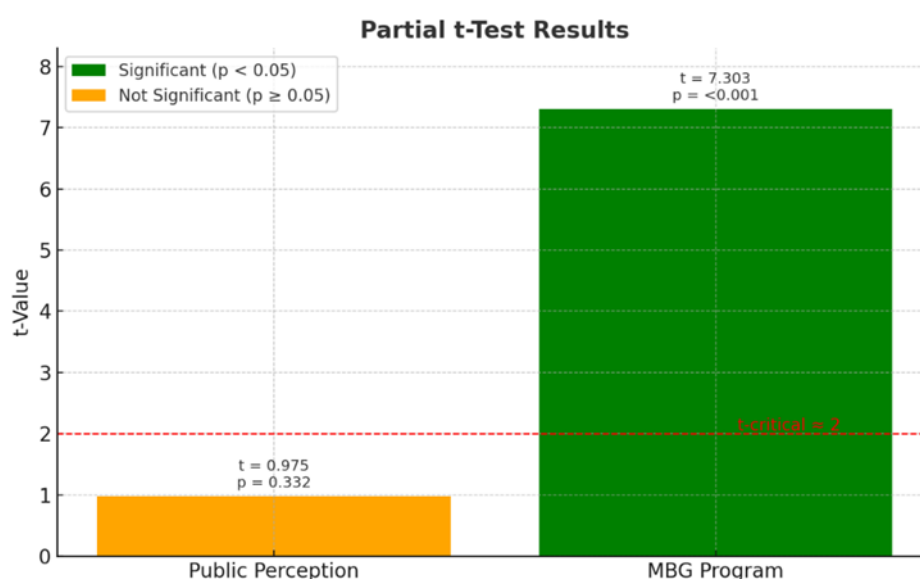


The results of multiple linear regression tests show that the Public Perception variable (X_1) does not have a significant effect on the image of the Prabowo–Gibran administration. Thus, the hypothesis that public perception significantly affects the government's image is rejected. This finding statistically rejects the first partial hypothesis, which posits that public perception affects the central government's image. Theoretically, public perception is an important indicator of government image. Political legitimacy theory and the symmetrical two-way communication model (Cooper, 2023) argue that public attitudes, understanding, and evaluations of government policies form the foundation of a

strong government image. Therefore, the absence of a significant influence of Public Perception on the Prabowo–Gibran Government Image is an unexpected finding that warrants further in-depth study.

The lack of program implementation in the Berau region likely leaves public perceptions of the government still general and abstract, not yet tied to concrete experiences. In other words, public perceptions have not yet been directly stimulated by concrete policies such as the MBG, so changes in public perception variables are not strong enough to statistically influence government image variables.

Figure 2 Partial *t*-Test Results



The partial test results indicate that the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) variable has a significant effect on the government's image. Thus, the hypothesis regarding the implementation of the MBG Program having a significant effect on the government's image is accepted. Implementing the MBG Program can directly enhance the public's positive perception of the government, particularly under the Prabowo-Gibran administration.

Theoretically, this finding can be explained by the concept of government image as an output of policy interactions and public perceptions. Government image is shaped by perceived policy performance and the government's ability to respond to the public's concrete needs (Place, 2023). The MBG Program is a policy that targets the most basic needs, namely nutritional fulfillment, which, in many contexts, serves as the earliest indicator of the government's commitment to and concern for its people. Because it addresses daily well-being, this program directly enhances political legitimacy and public trust in the government, particularly when the public perceives and experiences its tangible benefits.

Furthermore, the basic needs approach to human development states that the fulfilment of fundamental rights such as food, education, and health is a key indicator in the public's assessment of government quality (Stevens, 2024). Therefore, when the state is present through programs such as MBG, which directly affect the quality of life of children and low-income families, the government's image will improve, as it is perceived as present and responsible for the welfare of its citizens.

The MBG program had not been implemented at the time of the study. The significant influence of the MBG program on the government's image, as shown by the partial test results, is not solely the result of the community's direct experience with the program; it also stems from narratives constructed through the media, political speeches, and strategically packaged symbolic communication. In other words, the community's positive perception of MBG in Berau is more influenced by expectations and hopes for the program than by its actual implementation.

Political PR in this context functions as an effective policy-framing mechanism that shapes the narrative that the government is not only symbolically present but also genuinely committed to meeting the basic needs of the people. The political PR approach used in the MBG program leverages digital media and emotional content, such as visuals of children enjoying healthy food in other regions, to build an affective connection with the public. This narrative reinforces the government's image as a protector of the nation's future and an agent of social justice (Luttrell & Wallace, 2025), even though the program's benefits have not yet materialized in Berau.

Based on the Simultaneous Test, the calculated F value is 116.592 with a significance level < 0.001 , which is smaller than the general significance threshold ($\alpha = 0.05$). This indicates that simultaneously, the Public Perception (X1) and MBG Program (X2) variables significantly influence the Government Image (Y) variable. Thus, the hypothesis that the implementation of the MBG Program significantly influences the Government Image is accepted. These results indicate that when Public Perception and the MBG Program are considered together, both collectively explain significant variation in the Government Image of Prabowo-Gibran in Berau Regency. Although only the MBG Program was found to have a significant effect when considered separately, the simultaneous consideration of public perception of the government and the presence of MBG policy discourse can produce a positive image of the Prabowo-Gibran administration. This is noteworthy, particularly since, at the time of the study, the MBG Program had not yet been implemented in Berau Regency. In other words, public perceptions of the government's image are shaped not only by direct experience but also by symbolic representations, media narratives, and expectations regarding the program.

Theoretically, these findings are consistent with contemporary political communication models that emphasize that the image of the government is shaped by the dynamic interaction between implemented policies and the public's perception of them. As explained in encoding/decoding theory, the public does not simply receive messages passively but actively interprets policies based on their social experiences, political affiliations, and cultural contexts (Hall, 2021)

Effective political communication can connect messages with the reality of the audience's lives (Wolfsfeld, 2022). The MBG program is a concrete form of political messages communicated through mass and social media. It is reinterpreted (decoded) by the public in various local contexts, including urban, rural, and coastal areas in Berau Regency. Both positive and negative perceptions contribute to shaping the government's image.

The combination of perceptions and programs can strengthen or weaken the government's image (Maurer, 2023). Attention to social media was expected to be positively and strongly related to the perception of the government (Ernungtyas & Boer, 2023). The intensity of media coverage and the style of program presentation shape public opinion, ultimately reinforcing support for or criticism of the government. If the media continues to portray the MBG Program positively, public perceptions, even if not entirely based on direct experience, can be driven toward the positive, ultimately enhancing the government's overall image.

This finding also indicates that, in the context of performative politics, the reality of a program is inseparable from how it is communicated and received by the public (Szepanski, 2024). This means that the success of political communication is not only measured by how well the program is implemented, but also by how public perceptions are constructed through the media, social interactions, and direct experiences. The combination of perceptions and the program can evoke public emotional reactions such as pride, emotion, or even anger (Massumi, 2021). These emotions play an important role in shaping perceptions and ultimately supporting or weakening the government's image (Demertzis, 2023).

Research findings confirm that political communication and political PR play a significant role in shaping the government's image, even before policies are implemented. Political PR is no longer limited to managing messages during campaigns but has become an ongoing process in building legitimacy, trust, and emotional connections between the government and the public (Strömbäck et al., 2022). The MBG program is framed by political PR as a symbol of support for the underprivileged, emphasizing aspects of social justice and concern for the future of Indonesian children.

Although this program has not yet been implemented in Berau, narratives about MBG have spread widely through national and social media, as well as official speeches. The public's perception of a policy is often shaped more by how it is communicated than by how it is implemented (Maurer, 2023). Visual and emotional messages, such as images of children receiving free meals, function as symbolic constructs that foster positive perceptions of the government, even though the people of Berau have not yet experienced them directly. This reinforces the explanation that perceptions and expectations formed through communication can be strong enough to influence the collective image of the government.

This study makes an important contribution to strengthening and expanding theories of political communication, political public relations (Political PR), and public perception, particularly in the context of social policy implementation in Indonesia's new government. The research findings indicate that the Public Perception variable does not have a statistically significant effect on Government

Image. This contributes theoretically to the understanding that general public perceptions, not based on direct experience and not tied to specific policies, are insufficiently strong to shape the government's image. This finding expands the application of political legitimacy theory and symmetrical two-way communication (Cooper, 2023), emphasizing the importance of empirical experience in strengthening the effectiveness of perceptions in shaping legitimacy and image. Although the MBG Program has not yet been implemented in Berau, the research results indicate that the program variable significantly influences government image. This indicates that political PR plays a role in building an image through effective framing mechanisms, even before policies are implemented. Drawing on policy framing theory and affective communication, this study reinforces the argument that symbolic narratives, visual content, and strategic communication through media can shape public expectations and impact collective perceptions, even in the absence of direct on-the-ground experience.

This study validates the idea that media representations and political communication more often shape the reality of policies in the digital age than the implementation of the policies themselves (Maurer, 2023; Szepanski, 2024). The media not only conveys information but also shapes and manipulates narratives that influence public focus and support specific policies (Satria & Qodir, 2024), as seen in the MBG Program. This expands the scope of mediatization theory and performative politics, particularly in the context of communities far from the central government, such as Berau Regency. The government's image is not solely the result of substantive policies but also of symbolic politics communicated through emotional and visual content.

Simultaneous tests show that Public Perception and the MBG Program together significantly influence the Government's Image, although perception does not have a partial effect. This indicates that perceptions only effectively shape image when paired with concrete policy representations, even if the policy has not yet been implemented. This reinforces the encoding/decoding theory, which states that audiences actively construct meaning based on their social context, and that perceptions become relevant when there are symbolic or actual stimuli that can be socially interpreted (Hall, 2021)

Image is no longer shaped by ideological narratives or macro successes, but is more determined by programs that directly address the basic needs of society (Stevens, 2024), and how those programs are packaged and communicated by the government. In this case, MBG as a social policy has been interpreted by the public not only as a technical program but also as a symbol of the state's presence. Therefore, this study integrates the concept of basic needs with contemporary political communication practices, demonstrating how the two reinforce one another in shaping societal perceptions and images.

Based on research findings on the influence of public perception and the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) on the government's image in Berau Regency, several practical implications for the central government, local government, and political communicators warrant consideration. The findings show that the public judges the government more based on actual implementation than rhetoric or

political promises. Therefore, the most urgent practical step is to implement the MBG Program in Berau Regency concretely. The absence of implementation renders public perception abstract and powerless to independently form a positive image.

The narrative of the MBG Program communicated through national media has created public expectations. However, it is not yet fully trusted because it does not align with the reality on the ground. The government and political communication teams need to avoid symbolic political PR strategies and instead build political communication on empirical evidence, especially in areas such as Berau. Engaging local figures and conveying messages through community channels can foster a sense of ownership.

The people of Berau tend to assess the government's image based on perceived benefits, particularly improvements in children's nutritional status. The success of PR and the implementation of the MBG Program should not be measured solely by the number of aid recipients. However, they should be oriented toward changes in quality of life, such as a reduction in stunting and improvements in the health status of vulnerable groups. This is important to ensure that public trust in the government is not based solely on expectations but also on objectively measurable results.

Concrete indicators of the steps taken to address challenges are important considerations for the public. Therefore, when challenges arise in the implementation of the MBG Program, the government should openly communicate the corrective measures to the public. This transparency can strengthen the perception that the government is accountable, ultimately enhancing institutional image.

Berau Regency, situated in a geographically remote area, necessitates a distinct political PR strategy compared to central areas. The central government and political communication teams need to shift the political PR approach from a one-way (top-down) model to a two-way, dialogic, and participatory approach that involves village officials, teachers, and traditional leaders in the socialization of the MBG Program. The finding that perceptions and programs simultaneously have a significant impact on the government's image underscores that a positive image will be formed only when tangible, measurable policies accompany public perceptions. Therefore, political communication strategies should be accompanied by the implementation of tangible policies in the field.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research findings, particularly regarding the insignificance of the Public Perception variable in predicting the Prabowo–Gibran Government Image, the results of this study were compared with those of several previous studies. Some previous studies have found that conceptual variables, such as perception or system quality, do not always have a direct influence on trust or government image. A study conducted by Fadrial et al. (2024) showed that the quality of e-government services does not directly influence individuals' perceptions of local government. This aligns with the study's findings, which indicate that general public perceptions, not based on direct experience, do not significantly affect the image of the Prabowo–Gibran administration. Another study by Widodo et al. (2020) also found that out of the three variables studied

(good governance, culture, and performance), only actual performance significantly influenced public satisfaction, which ultimately affected trust in the government. This supports the finding that concrete factors (such as the implementation of the MBG program) have a greater impact on the government's image than general perceptions.

Several other studies highlight the strong role of public perception in shaping political opinions or images, such as the research conducted by Darlius and friends, which explains how political memes can shape public perception of presidential candidates (Darlius et al., 2024). This study concludes that public perception can be formed even in the absence of direct experience, through social media and symbolic public expressions. Another study conducted by Fardiansyah and Euis also shows that Prabowo-Gibran's communication strategy on social media has a significant influence on the formation of perceptions and support from young voters (Fardiansyah & Euis Komalawati, 2024). This shows that in specific contexts, digitally constructed perceptions can have a substantial impact on the image.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that government image is more strongly shaped by perceived policy substance than by rhetorical promises. Therefore, the most critical step for the government is the concrete implementation of the MBG program in Berau Regency. Symbolic narratives must be aligned with on-the-ground realities to maintain credibility. Political communication strategies should shift toward participatory and dialogic approaches that involve local actors, such as village officials, teachers, and community leaders, particularly in geographically remote regions.

Finally, this study has several limitations. Its quantitative design does not capture deeper subjective meanings or narratives underlying public perceptions, and social desirability bias may affect responses. Additionally, the government's image is influenced by factors beyond MBG, including economic conditions and public service performance. These limitations suggest the need for future mixed-method or qualitative studies to provide richer contextual understanding, particularly after the full implementation of the MBG program in Berau Regency.

D. Conclusion

The statistical findings from this quantitative study provide not only an empirical depiction of public perception and government image in Berau Regency but also reinforce the theoretical understanding that political perceptions and images are constructed through a communication process intertwined with public experience. The people of Berau currently hold largely abstract perceptions, as the MBG Program has not yet been implemented in the region. Although general perceptions of government performance are favorable, the absence of direct program experience renders these perceptions speculative and insufficiently strong to statistically influence perceptions of government image. This underscores the importance of concrete experience in solidifying public perceptions that contribute to a credible government image.

Despite the program's non-implementation, narratives, symbols, and strategically framed communications about MBG disseminated through media

channels have successfully shaped positive public expectations. The public evaluates the government's image based on anticipated program benefits, particularly those related to nutritional improvements and support for disadvantaged populations. This demonstrates the effectiveness of political public relations and media framing in shaping public perceptions even before policy implementation. The study shows that government image emerges from a combination of general perceptions and strong policy narratives. Even in the absence of direct experience, media representation and strategic political communication can shape collective perceptions, provided they are emotionally resonant and carefully framed. These findings support the theoretical proposition that in contemporary political contexts, especially in the digital age, public perceptions and government image are determined not only by substantive policies but also by how policies are communicated, framed, and interpreted by the public.

From a practical perspective, policymakers and political communicators should ensure that strategic messaging is aligned with concrete implementation. The MBG Program should be fully operationalized in Berau to translate expectations into real experiences that strengthen public trust. Communication strategies should also be participatory and locally adapted, engaging community leaders, educators, and village officials to foster ownership and credibility. Emotional and visual messaging must complement tangible policy actions to reinforce legitimacy and institutional image.

This study has several limitations. Its quantitative approach captures the scope and statistical relationships of perception and government image but does not explore the deeper qualitative aspects, such as personal narratives or contextual interpretations of the program. The absence of expectation data collected through qualitative interviews limits a more comprehensive understanding of how public hopes, assumptions, and anticipatory evaluations shape perceptions prior to policy implementation. Additionally, government image may be influenced by multiple factors beyond MBG, including economic conditions, public service quality, and broader political developments. Future research could adopt mixed-methods designs or qualitative case studies to examine these dynamics more comprehensively, particularly after the full implementation of the MBG Program, to understand how direct experience interacts with media narratives in shaping government image.

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