THE CONSTRUCTION OF STUNTING ISSUES IN SOCIAL MEDIA: ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC ISSUES IN DIGITAL HEALTH CAMPAIGNS IN INDONESIA

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article history: E-ISSN: 2541-5263 P-ISSN: 1411-4380 ![CC BY-SA] *This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license*	*In the digital era, social media has evolved into a dominant public space that shapes discourse, mobilizes participation, and influences public perception—especially in health communication. This study examines how the issue of stunting is socially constructed in Indonesia's digital space and how public health campaigns on social media influence public perception and engagement. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), complemented by Entman's framing theory and light quantitative trend analysis, this research analyzes the narratives, symbols, and interactions surrounding stunting-related digital campaigns such as #CegahStunting and #BapakAsuhAnakStunting The findings reveal that stunting is framed as a collective moral issue tied to the nation's future, with families—especially parents—portrayed as central actors in its prevention. Social media content constructs this issue through persuasive language, hashtags, visual storytelling, and the strategic use of influential public figures and institutions. Framing elements such as problem identification, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendations are found to be consistently applied in constructing public meaning and shaping behavior. Public engagement manifests through digital activism, content sharing, and the emergence of grassroots health communities. However, the study also identifies counter-narratives criticizing the moralistic framing that disproportionately blames families while overlooking structural inequalities This research contributes to the discourse on health communication and public engagement by highlighting the dual function of social media as both a platform for education and a contested space for narrative negotiation. It offers practical implications for more inclusive, participatory, and context-sensitive digital health campaigns in Indonesia's multisectoral stunting reduction strategy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, developments in information and communication technology have revolutionized the way people interact and access information. In Indonesia, this digital transformation is reflected in the significant increase in the number of internet and social media users. According to a 2024 report by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 221.56 million, with a penetration rate of 79.5% of the total population. Meanwhile, data from We Are Social shows that in January 2025, there were 143 million active social media users in Indonesia, equivalent to 50.2% of the total population. Social media has evolved into a virtual public space that allows individuals to share information, discuss, and form opinions in real time. This concept aligns with Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere, which states that the public sphere is an arena where citizens can gather to freely and rationally discuss important issues. In the digital context, social media serves as an extension of this public sphere, enabling broader and more inclusive participation in social and political discourse.

The shift from traditional mass media to social media as the primary source of information has changed the dynamics of public communication. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have become not only entertainment but also important tools for information dissemination and social mobilization. This phenomenon creates both opportunities and challenges in information management, particularly regarding public health issues. In the context of health issues such as stunting, social media plays a dual role. On the one hand, these platforms enable the widespread and rapid dissemination of educational information and awareness campaigns. On the other hand, social media can also be a channel for the spread of misinformation that can hinder efforts to address health issues. Therefore, it is important to understand how the issue of stunting is constructed and discussed in the digital public sphere, as well as its impact on public perceptions and behavior. Stunting is a condition of growth failure in toddlers due to chronic malnutrition and repeated infections, characterized by length or height below the standards set by the Ministry of Health. This condition often occurs from conception to the age of two, known as the First 1,000 Days of Life (HPK). Stunting not only impacts a child's physical growth but also impacts cognitive development, increases the risk of degenerative diseases in adulthood, and reduces individual productivity.

Data from the Indonesian Nutritional Status Survey (SSGI) shows that the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia decreased from 24.4% in 2021 to 21.6% in

2022. However, this figure remains high, placing Indonesia among the countries with a significant stunting burden in the world. The Indonesian government has designated stunting as a national priority health issue. Through Presidential Regulation Number 72 of 2021 concerning the Acceleration of Stunting Reduction, the target is set to reduce stunting prevalence to 14% by 2024. To achieve this target, the government implemented the National Strategy for Accelerating Stunting Reduction (Stranas Stunting) which includes five main pillars, namely (1) National and Regional Leadership Commitment and Vision, namely Increasing commitment and leadership at all levels of government to support the acceleration of stunting reduction. (2) National Campaign and Behavior Change Communication, namely Increasing public awareness and understanding of stunting and encouraging behavioral change through national campaigns. (3) Convergence of Central, Regional, and Village Programs, namely Integrating various programs and activities at all levels of government to ensure effective and efficient interventions. (4) Food and Nutrition Security, namely Increasing access and availability of nutritious food for the community, especially for pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and toddlers. (5) Monitoring and Evaluation, namely Conducting regular monitoring and evaluation to assess the progress and effectiveness of the stunting reduction program.

Stunting is not only a health issue but also impacts the quality of human resources (HR) and national development. Children who experience stunting are at risk of lower cognitive abilities, decreased productivity, and lower incomes in adulthood. These impacts contribute to an intergenerational cycle of poverty and hamper the country's economic growth. Therefore, addressing stunting requires a multisectoral approach involving various stakeholders, including the government, the private sector, civil society organizations, and the general public. Social media, as a broad and rapid communication platform, has great potential to support stunting reduction campaigns through information dissemination, education, and community mobilization.

In today's digital era, social media has become a key platform for disseminating information and shaping public opinion. Stunting prevention campaigns in Indonesia have made extensive use of social media, with initiatives such as #CegahStunting and #BapakAsuhAnakStunting aimed at raising public awareness about the importance of stunting prevention. These campaigns leverage the power of social media to reach a broader and more diverse audience and to encourage active community participation in stunting prevention efforts. The role of public figures, influencers, civil servants (ASN), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in this campaign is significant. They contribute to disseminating accurate information and building a positive narrative about the importance of stunting prevention. According to research conducted by Girsang (2020), influencers have the ability to reach groups difficult to reach through formal approaches, such as adolescents and young adults, through more personalized and authentic

communication. This is reinforced by findings from Kulmala, Mesiranta, & Tuominen (2012), who stated that selecting influencers who match their personal style and possess high credibility is crucial for conveying effective campaign messages.

The use of social media in stunting prevention campaigns also faces challenges, particularly related to the spread of misinformation. The spread of inaccurate or unverified information can cause confusion and hinder stunting prevention efforts. According to Kompasiana (2024), the spread of misinformation on nutrition is often driven by traditional beliefs and the influence of social media, leading many parents in Indonesia to rely on unverified information. This can lead to misunderstandings that contribute to stunting in children. Furthermore, active public participation in stunting prevention campaigns through social media demonstrates a high level of engagement with this issue. The public is not only a recipient of information but also plays a role as a disseminator of information and an agent of change in their communities.

In Indonesia, several studies have highlighted a similar phenomenon. Research by Handayani et al. (2022) revealed that during the pandemic, the majority of public health discussions on social media centered on vaccine effectiveness, social restrictions, and health protocols. Similarly, a survey by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (2022) showed that the most widespread disinformation in the health sector still related to COVID-19 and alternative medicine, rather than stunting or malnutrition. Therefore, it can be concluded that current research on social media and health in Indonesia tends to focus on short-term crisis responses, such as pandemics or mass immunization campaigns. Meanwhile, studies that deeply analyze the social construction of long-term health issues like stunting are still very limited. Yet, stunting is a strategic issue with systemic impacts on the quality of human resources and national development.

This research aims to answer key questions regarding how the issue of stunting is constructed in the digital space, and how health campaign narratives on social media shape public perception and engagement. In this context, social media is positioned not merely as a communication medium, but as a social arena where the formation of reality, discourse, and collective action occurs actively and dynamically.

This research aims not only to provide a phenomenological description but also to offer a critical analysis of the dynamics of the production and distribution of meaning about stunting in the digital era. By combining content analysis, discourse studies, and digital interaction perspectives, it is hoped that the results of this study will provide theoretical contributions to media and public health studies, as well as practical contributions in designing more effective and participatory digital campaigns for stunting reduction in Indonesia.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, employing Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. This approach was chosen to explore the narratives formed within digital campaigns related to stunting, as well as the power relations and social meanings embedded in the language and symbols used. To complement the qualitative approach, this study also adopted a light quantitative approach through an analysis of trends and frequencies of hashtags related to stunting campaigns, such as #CegahStunting and #BapakAsuhAnakStunting. This analysis aimed to describe the dynamics of stunting exposure on social media and identify the momentum of increasing public attention to the issue. This study used a combination of primary and secondary data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the construction of stunting issues in social media. Primary data were obtained from social media content, namely posts originating from platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Facebook containing the hashtags #CegahStunting, #BapakAsuhAnakStunting, and other hashtags relevant to digital stunting prevention campaigns. Data collection was conducted over a specific time period, from January to April 2025, with the aim of capturing the dynamics of narratives, campaign popularity, and public engagement temporally.

Meanwhile, secondary data included official campaign reports from the Ministry of Health and the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN), online media articles, and documentation of digital health promotion activities from government agencies and non-governmental organizations. This secondary data served to provide policy context and institutional agendas behind the observed digital campaigns. Data collection was conducted through manual scraping of content that met relevance criteria, using specific keywords and hashtags. This process was aided by keyword monitoring and content curation techniques, which involve selecting and filtering content based on popularity indicators (number of views, likes, shares, and comments), audience engagement, and the relevance of the content to the focus of the stunting issue. With this approach, researchers obtained not only textual insights but also simple quantitative trends that illustrate the exposure of stunting issues in the digital public sphere.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Several previous studies have shown that narratives in digital campaigns have significant power to influence public attitudes and actions. For example, research by Kurniasari and Indriani (2021) shows that health campaigns on social media can significantly raise public awareness, especially when delivered by figures with symbolic closeness to the community (such as housewives, civil servants, or local

celebrities). Meanwhile, according to Suryani et al. (2023), participatory and community-based digital campaigns are more effective in building emotional engagement and collective action on child nutrition issues.

According to research by Mutaqin et al. (2024), social media has significant potential to raise awareness, support child health education, and influence public behavior in stunting prevention efforts. However, to maximize this potential, effective communication strategies are needed, including information verification, the use of targeting algorithms, social media education, and collaboration with influential influencers. Thus, social media plays a crucial role in stunting prevention campaigns in Indonesia. Through collaboration between the government, public figures, influencers, civil servants, NGOs, and the public, along with appropriate communication strategies, social media can be an effective tool for disseminating accurate information and encouraging positive behavioral change in stunting prevention efforts.

The development of social media as a public discourse space has attracted the attention of many researchers, particularly in the health sector. Several previous studies have shown that social media has become a dominant platform for the dissemination of health information—both valid and misleading. Research such as that conducted by Wang et al. (2019) and Kouzy et al. (2020) shows that during the COVID-19 pandemic, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok have become primary channels for the dissemination of medical information and health campaigns. The primary focus of these studies is on the spread of hoaxes, conspiracies, and public responses to vaccination.

This section presents research findings divided into two main objectives: (1) Explaining how the issue of stunting is constructed in the digital space; and (2) Analyzing how health campaign narratives on social media shape public perception and engagement. The analysis was conducted using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Entman's framing analysis, complemented by light quantitative trends. The construction of the stunting issue in social media occurs through three main dimensions. In the text dimension, the use of persuasive language and symbols such as the hashtag #CegahStunting constructs a moral message that stunting is the responsibility of parents, especially fathers. This creates a collective narrative that families are at the forefront of stunting prevention. In the discursive practice dimension, digital campaigns are not only carried out by official institutions such as the Ministry of Health and the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN), but are also strengthened by influencers and civil servants who also disseminate the campaign narrative. This process demonstrates that social media has become an arena for legitimizing discourse, where actors with symbolic authority play a significant role in shaping public opinion.

In the social practice dimension, the stunting narrative is presented as a threat to future generations, not simply a child nutrition issue. This framing makes the

issue of stunting a national interest requiring collective involvement from all levels of society. However, these findings also raise concerns about the potential stigmatization of poor groups or parents perceived as failing to meet ideal standards of parenting.

The campaign generally follows a moralistic structure that touches on social responsibility, particularly in the context of family and parenting. The problem identification element, which portrays stunting as a threat to the nation's future, positions the issue within the broader framework of national development, creating a sense of urgency and collective action in addressing it. At the causal attribution stage, the campaign narrative often associates stunting with inappropriate parenting practices, a lack of nutritional knowledge, and inactivity in utilizing basic health services such as integrated health posts (Posyandu). While this approach aims to encourage family empowerment, it also has the potential to stigmatize poor families or those living in areas with limited access to health services.

The moral evaluation element suggests that indifference is positioned as part of the problem. Strong moral messages like these can raise social awareness, but they also trigger counter-narratives, particularly from community groups who feel blamed by the campaign narrative. Meanwhile, treatment recommendations in digital campaigns generally emphasize the importance of education, child growth monitoring, and community initiatives such as the 'Foster Parents' program. This has been shown to encourage various forms of public engagement, such as re-sharing content, reproducing it in local languages, and even the formation of digital communities like the 'Digital Nutrition Post'. This phenomenon demonstrates the narrative's success in building culturally contextualized digital-based public participation. However, to be more inclusive and socially just, future campaign framing needs to take into greater consideration structural dimensions such as poverty, health service inequalities, and gender burdens, so as not to oversimplify the issue and blame the victim.

Narratives packaged with moral symbols (such as "great fathers," "golden generation," "family responsibility") influence the public's understanding of who is responsible for stunting, thus reinforcing the perception that: (1) stunting is a moral and social issue, not just a medical one, and (2) families (especially mothers and fathers) are the primary actors in prevention. Engagement is reflected in: (1) Increased digital interaction (a surge in likes and retweets during the national nutrition campaign), (2) Active participation (localized re-content, the formation of communities such as the Digital Nutrition Post), (3) Responses and counter-narratives from citizens who believe the campaign's framing still blames the victims (poor families).

In understanding how the issue of stunting is constructed on social media, the theory of the social construction of reality by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) is a highly relevant approach. Through their work "The Social

Construction of Reality," Berger and Luckmann explain that social reality is not formed objectively and permanently, but rather is constructed through a process of social interaction and the continuous institutionalization of meaning by society.

According to this theory, there are three important processes in social construction: (1) Externalization, namely the process by which individuals express their experiences and ideas to the outside world (e.g., in the form of posts, tweets, campaign videos). (2) Objectivation, which is when the results of the expression are widely accepted by society and begin to be considered as an objective reality (for example, the meaning that stunting is a 'curse of poverty' or 'parents' responsibility'). (3) Internalization, which is when individuals or groups accept the social construction as truth and adopt it in their way of thinking and behaving (for example, society begins to follow new parenting patterns after seeing educational content from influencers).

In the context of social media, this theory is increasingly relevant. Platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Facebook have become social arenas where individuals, governments, influencers, and organizations interact, disseminate meaning, and shape collective perceptions about issues. Social media is not only a channel for information, but also a space for the production of meaning and the legitimacy of truth. The reality of stunting as a health issue, poverty issue, or social responsibility issue does not come from data alone, but from narratives constructed and consumed through social media.

Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) suggests that the media shapes meaning by highlighting specific aspects of an issue. In the case of stunting, the framing employed by governments, NGOs, or influencers on social media determines how the public interprets the causes, impacts, and solutions to stunting. For example, the narratives "stunting is a family responsibility" or "stunting due to poverty" shape different moral and social perceptions. Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) suggests that the media influences what issues the public deems important. When the issue of stunting frequently appears on timelines with the support of popular hashtags, social media plays a role in raising the priority of the issue on the public agenda. This helps increase public awareness and political pressure to accelerate stunting management. Next is the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974), which explains that media users actively choose content according to their needs, such as education, social affiliation, or entertainment. In the context of stunting, informative and engaging social media content (e.g., educational videos based on real stories) tends to be more easily accessed and shared by the public, thus expanding the reach of the campaign. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), this theory helps understand how attitudes, social norms, and individual perceptions of control influence behavioral intentions. In stunting prevention campaigns, social media can shape positive attitudes towards healthy parenting, create new social norms (e.g., paternal involvement), and increase people's confidence that they are capable of making

behavioral changes. Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 1962), this theory explains how innovations (new ideas or practices) spread in society. Social media accelerates the dissemination of innovative information on stunting prevention, such as exclusive breastfeeding or balanced nutrition, through the role of opinion leaders (influencers, religious figures, civil servants) and digital networks.

Studies on the social construction of health issues on social media are also relatively rare. Most research focuses on quantitative aspects such as engagement rates, the spread of hashtags (#CegahStunting, #BapakAsuhAnakStunting), or search trends. Meanwhile, qualitative and analytical approaches exploring how narratives, symbols, actors, and public opinion are shaped on social media regarding stunting as a public issue are scarce.

According to Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of the social construction of reality, social reality is shaped through symbolic interactions that are repeated and legitimized by society. In the context of social media, this construction is created through digital content, user interactions, and the intervention of institutional actors (government, NGOs, influencers). The issue of stunting, when understood within this framework, is not simply about child nutrition and health data, but also a public issue socially negotiated in the digital space. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap in the literature by analyzing how the issue of stunting is constructed as public discourse on Indonesian social media. The primary focus is on the narratives, symbols, actors, and interaction dynamics that shape the public's collective perception of stunting. This study is not only relevant to health communication literature but also crucial for long-term public communication policy and health advocacy.

These findings demonstrate the existence of an effective "digital momentum" in increasing exposure to stunting issues in public awareness. The dramatic increase in interactions during National Nutrition Week demonstrates that digital campaigns can leverage national moments to leverage public attention. The high level of interaction on the hashtag #CegahStunting also strengthens social media's position as an agenda setter (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) on stunting issues. When a hashtag is widely used and shared by strategic accounts, the narrative gains central space in digital public discourse. However, despite high exposure, not all engagement is substantive. Comment analysis shows that some users simply follow trends without truly understanding the message, while others raise criticisms of narratives that marginalize poor families. This highlights the importance of quantitatively high engagement, which does not always translate qualitatively.

The emergence of community-based campaigns such as "Pos Gizi Digital" demonstrates that the public is not merely a passive audience but also plays a role as a narrative producer. This is a more participatory form of engagement that should be encouraged in future digital campaigns. This research aims to understand how the issue of stunting is constructed in the digital space and analyze

how health campaign narratives on social media shape public perception and engagement. Based on Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Entman's framing analysis, and supported by light quantitative data in the form of hashtag trends, it was found that social media plays a strategic role in constructing and disseminating health narratives that influence public opinion and action.

First, the issue of stunting is constructed as a collective problem closely related to the future of the nation. Campaign narratives spread through social media, such as #CegahStunting and #BapakAsuhAnakStunting, consistently convey the message that families—especially parents—have the primary responsibility for preventing stunting. Through symbolization, word choice, visualizations of thin children, and the use of public figures, social media creates a strong social construct that stunting is a moral issue requiring a collaborative response. Second, the health campaign narratives have been shown to significantly shape public perception. The framing employed by campaign actors successfully directs public opinion toward identifying the problem, its causes, moral judgments, and solutions. Public perception of stunting has evolved from a mere nutritional issue to a social and national issue. Public engagement manifests itself in digital activism, such as sharing content, recreating narratives with local styles, and even establishing digital communities based on nutrition education. However, constructs that overemphasize family responsibilities risk simplifying the issue and generating counter-narratives, particularly from groups who feel stigmatized due to structural poverty. Therefore, social media campaigns cannot solely emphasize the role of individuals or families but must be balanced with an understanding of the broader social, economic, and policy context.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, several strategic recommendations are addressed to various parties involved in campaigns and addressing stunting issues through social media. First, for the government and health institutions, the campaign narrative should be developed with a more multidimensional approach, not only emphasizing family responsibilities but also emphasizing the important role of the state, primary health care services, and social environmental conditions in supporting stunting prevention efforts. The government is advised to involve public figures and influencers who have social and cultural ties with the target group to make the campaign message more contextual and easily accepted. Furthermore, it is necessary to expand the campaign into regional languages and utilize a local community-based approach to make information reach more inclusive and increase broader public engagement.

Second, for campaign social media managers, it is important to develop educational content that is sensitive to social diversity and does not marginalize certain groups, such as low-income families. The campaign narrative should be

built by combining an emotionally powerful visual narrative approach with the delivery of valid factual data, so that it can both inspire and educate the audience. Furthermore, communication through social media needs to be two-way and participatory, not limited to one-way outreach, but rather fostering meaningful dialogue and feedback with the community.

Third, researchers and academics need to conduct further research using a quantitative, big data-based approach to objectively measure the impact of campaign narrative exposure on changes in public behavior. Research can also be developed into sentiment analysis or digital ethnography to more deeply capture the dynamics of public perception and response to the construction of health issues in the digital space.

Fourth, for citizens and digital communities, it is crucial to build critical awareness in responding to the various health campaign narratives circulating. The public needs to actively filter information, not accept every message at face value, and utilize digital spaces to voice real experiences and needs. Family-based digital communities, especially those driven by young mothers, have the potential to be strategic partners in disseminating relevant educational content based on everyday experiences and easily accepted by the surrounding community. Through this synergy between parties, stunting prevention campaigns on social media are expected to not only reach more people but also shape narratives that are fair, inclusive, and have a real impact on social change.

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