# Leadership Representation and Audience Meaning Negotiation in Government Instagram Communication

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***ABSTRAK***

*Perkembangan media sosial pemerintah telah memperluas fungsi komunikasi politik dari sekadar penyampaian informasi menjadi ruang tempat makna institusional dibangun dan dinegosiasikan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana representasi kepemimpinan dibangun melalui komunikasi pemerintah di Instagram serta bagaimana respons audiens dalam komentar Instagram menegosiasikan makna yang terdapat dalam pesan institusional. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan analisis isi kualitatif interpretatif dengan menganalisis satu artefak komunikasi Instagram yang dipublikasikan oleh akun resmi Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia terkait peringatan HUT ke-81 Republik Indonesia. Analisis dilakukan terhadap elemen visual dan tekstual, strategi framing institusional, serta komentar audiens dengan menggunakan perspektif encoding/decoding. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa representasi kepemimpinan dibangun melalui kombinasi elemen visual, tekstual, dan simbolik yang menekankan visibilitas, kedekatan, serta hubungan antara pemimpin dan masyarakat. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa artefak komunikasi institusional yang dianalisis membingkai kepemimpinan melalui narasi keterlibatan publik, identitas nasional, dan hubungan sosial. Namun, komentar audiens dalam sampel penelitian menunjukkan bahwa makna tersebut tidak ditafsirkan secara seragam, yang tercermin melalui pembacaan dominan-hegemonik, negosiasi, dan oposisi. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian komunikasi politik digital dengan menunjukkan bahwa Instagram pemerintah dapat dipahami sebagai ruang negosiasi makna tempat representasi kepemimpinan diproduksi, ditafsirkan, dan diperdebatkan dalam interaksi digital.*

***Kata kunci**: media sosial pemerintah; komunikasi politik digital; representasi kepemimpinan; framing institusional; decoding audiens*

***ABSTRACT***

*The development of government social media has expanded the function of political communication from information dissemination into a space where institutional meanings are constructed and negotiated. This study examines how leadership representation is constructed through government communication on Instagram and how audience responses in Instagram comments negotiate meanings embedded within institutional messages. Employing an interpretive qualitative content analysis approach, this study examines an Instagram communication artifact from the official account of the Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia related to the 81st Anniversary of the Republic of Indonesia. The analysis focuses on visual and textual representations, institutional framing strategies, and audience comments through an encoding/decoding perspective. The findings indicate that leadership representation is constructed through visual, textual, and symbolic elements emphasizing visibility, accessibility, and citizen connection. The study further reveals that the analyzed institutional communication artifact frames leadership through narratives of public engagement, national identity, and relational connection. However, comments within the analyzed sample show that these meanings are not interpreted uniformly, as they produce dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional readings. This study contributes to digital political communication research by demonstrating that government Instagram can function as a negotiated meaning environment where leadership representations are produced, interpreted, and contested within digital interactions.*

***Keywords:*** *government social media; digital political communication; leadership representation; institutional framing; audience decoding*

## INTRODUCTION

The development of digital media has transformed contemporary political communication by reshaping how political messages are produced, circulated, and interpreted by citizens. Political communication is increasingly characterized by networked interactions in which political institutions, media platforms, and audiences participate in the production, circulation, and interpretation of political meanings. Rather than operating as a linear process of information transmission, contemporary political communication occurs within interconnected digital environments where citizens can engage with, respond to, and circulate political content (Theocharis et al., 2023; Vaccari et al., 2021). These developments indicate that digital platforms have expanded political communication beyond traditional media systems by creating new forms of participation, interaction, and audience engagement.

Within this transformation, government institutions have increasingly adopted social media as part of their public communication practices. Government social media is no longer limited to information dissemination but has developed into a communication environment that facilitates interaction, transparency, public engagement, and relationships between institutions and citizens (Mergel et al., 2019). In the Indonesian context, research demonstrates that government social media contributes to citizen engagement through mechanisms involving information access, transparency, trust, and public interaction (Ernungtyas & Boer, 2023). Furthermore, recent studies indicate that the effectiveness of government social media communication is influenced by how institutions manage digital environments, content characteristics, and interactive features to encourage public engagement (Atnan & Sembada, 2025). Therefore, government social media should be understood not merely as an administrative communication channel but also as a digital space where institutional meanings and relationships with citizens are developed.

The development of government communication through social media has become increasingly significant in Indonesia, particularly through visually oriented platforms such as Instagram. Recent studies on Indonesian government Instagram accounts demonstrate that institutional communication is shaped through content selection, visual presentation, and communication strategies that influence how citizens engage with government messages (Atnan & Sembada, 2025; Iwan et al., 2024) Government Instagram communication also provides a space where institutions construct narratives about public services, governmental roles, and relationships with citizens through visual and textual messages (Nasyaya et al., 2026). However, existing studies have largely focused on information dissemination, engagement patterns, and communication effectiveness, leaving further opportunities to examine how government institutions construct symbolic meanings and representations through Instagram communication (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017).

Instagram introduces distinctive characteristics compared with conventional government communication channels because it integrates multiple modes of communication, including images, videos, captions, symbols, and audience interactions. These multimodal characteristics allow institutions to construct narratives through the combination of visual and textual elements, where meanings emerge through representational practices. Recent studies on digital political communication demonstrate that visual strategies on Instagram contribute to the construction of political identities, public images, and symbolic representations of political actors (Ariadi et al., 2024; Pratiwi et al., 2025; Raynauld & Lalancette, 2021). In the Indonesian political context, research has shown that Instagram functions as a space where political personas and identities are constructed through visual framing, personalization strategies, and audience-oriented communication practices (Alyatalatthaf et al., 2024; Nurnisya & Kasmani, 2025). These findings indicate that Instagram should not only be examined as a distribution platform but also as a space where political meanings and representations are actively constructed.

Within this context, leadership representation becomes an important dimension of digital political communication. Leadership is communicated not only through formal authority or institutional position but also through symbolic practices that construct perceptions of leadership

qualities, relationships with citizens, and political identity. Recent research on political communication demonstrates that visual and textual strategies contribute to the construction of political images and leadership representations by shaping how political actors are presented and interpreted by audiences (Pratiwi et al., 2025; Raynauld & Lalancette, 2021). In government communication, leadership representation is particularly significant because institutional messages may communicate proximity, responsiveness, legitimacy, and relationships between leaders and citizens through visual narratives and symbolic performances (Nasyaya et al., 2026).

This issue can be observed in an Instagram video published by the official account of the Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia (@sekretariat.kabinet) during the 81st Anniversary of the Republic of Indonesia. The video presents President Prabowo Subianto interacting with citizens during a national celebration event and incorporates visual representations of public participation and narratives of national identity. As a digital communication artifact, the post provides an opportunity to examine how government institutions construct leadership representations through visual and textual elements and how audiences interpret and negotiate these meanings through digital interactions.

Previous studies have examined government social media from perspectives including citizen engagement, information dissemination, digital interaction, and communication effectiveness (Atnan & Sembada, 2025; Ernungtyas & Boer, 2023; Iwan et al., 2024). Other studies have investigated Instagram political communication by focusing on political identity, visual framing, personalization, and public image construction (Alyatalatthaf et al., 2024; Ariadi et al., 2024; Pratiwi et al., 2025; Raynauld & Lalancette, 2021). Although these studies provide important insights into government communication and political representation in digital environments, institutional communication practices and audience interpretation have often been examined separately (Theocharis et al., 2023; Vaccari et al., 2021). Further examination is needed regarding how government institutions construct leadership representations through visual-textual messages while these representations are simultaneously interpreted, negotiated, or challenged by audiences within the same Instagram communication environment.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how leadership representation is constructed through a government Instagram communication artifact and how audiences negotiate the meanings embedded within institutional messages. By examining institutional messages and audience responses as interconnected communication processes, this study contributes to digital political communication research by explaining how leadership meanings are produced, interpreted, and negotiated within government social media environments.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Government Social Media as a Digital Public Communication Environment

Government social media has become an important area within digital political communication because it represents a transformation in how public institutions communicate with citizens. Government social media is not merely a technological tool for disseminating administrative information but a digital communication environment where institutions produce messages, establish interactions, and develop relationships with public audiences (Atnan & Sembada, 2025; Mergel et al., 2019). Within this environment, communication processes are shaped not only by institutional intentions but also by how citizens interpret, respond to, and circulate government messages.

Recent studies demonstrate that government social media contributes to public communication by supporting transparency, citizen engagement, and institutional interaction. In Indonesia, Ernungtyas & Boer (2023) show that government social media plays an important role in shaping citizen trust and engagement through processes related to information access, transparency, and public interaction. Their findings indicate that digital government communication is closely connected with how citizens perceive institutional openness and responsiveness. Furthermore, Atnan & Sembada (2025) demonstrate that engagement within government social media environments is influenced by digital communication structures, content characteristics, and platform features that facilitate interaction between institutions and citizens.

These developments indicate that government social media should be examined beyond its functional role as an information channel. Recent government communication

research increasingly considers digital platforms as spaces where institutions construct meanings, establish legitimacy, and negotiate relationships with citizens (Hepp & Couldry, 2023). However, existing studies have largely emphasized engagement, communication effectiveness, and platform management, while less attention has been directed toward how government institutions construct symbolic meanings related to leadership and public identity through social media content.

**Multimodal Visual Communication in Instagram Based Political Communication**

Instagram represents a distinctive communication environment because it enables meaning construction through multiple communication modes, including images, videos, captions, symbols, visual composition, and audience interactions. Unlike conventional communication channels that primarily rely on textual information delivery, Instagram allows institutions and political actors to construct narratives through the combination of visual and textual elements (Farkas & Bene, 2021; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

The concept of multimodal communication provides an important framework for understanding how meanings are produced within digital visual environments. Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar perspective explains that visual elements contain representational, interactive, and compositional meanings that influence how social realities are constructed. Rose (2022), further emphasizes that visual analysis requires attention to the relationship between image production, visual content, and audience interpretation.

Recent studies demonstrate that Instagram has become an important platform for political meaning construction through visual narratives and symbolic communication practices (Ariadi et al., 2024; Pratiwi et al., 2025; Raynauld & Lalancette, 2021). In this context, framing processes on Instagram operate not only through textual narratives but also through visual selections, symbolic representations, and compositional choices that influence how political meanings are emphasized and interpreted (Entman, 1993; Farkas & Bene, 2021).

Further studies in Indonesia indicate that visual framing contributes to the construction of political identities and audience perceptions. Alyatalatthaf et al. (2024) demonstrate that visual elements contribute to the formation of political personas, while Nurnisya & Kasmani (2025) highlight that Instagram operates as a space where political identity, audience engagement, and public interpretation are continuously negotiated.

Within government communication, visual strategies also influence how institutions present themselves to citizens. Iwan et al. (2024) demonstrate that visual characteristics, content formats, and presentation strategies within government Instagram accounts influence audience engagement. Therefore, Instagram should be understood not merely as a distribution platform but as a multimodal communication space where institutional identities, political meanings, and relationships with citizens are constructed (Hepp & Couldry, 2023)

**Leadership Representation in Government Digital Communication**

Leadership representation refers to the process through which leadership qualities, identities, authority, and relationships with citizens are constructed through communication practices. In contemporary political communication, leadership is not only determined by formal institutional positions but also by how leaders are symbolically presented and interpreted within mediated environments.

Leadership representation is a central concept in understanding how political leaders are constructed and communicated within public discourse. Representation does not simply reflect existing realities but actively produces meanings through symbolic systems, narratives, and communication practices within mediated environments (Hall, 1997; Hepp & Couldry, 2023). In this perspective, political leadership is understood through processes of interpretation rather than through direct access to reality.

Digital platforms have expanded the ways leadership representations are produced and circulated through visual and symbolic communication practices. Through social media, institutions and political actors can communicate particular images of leadership, such as proximity, responsiveness, legitimacy, and connection with citizens (Pratiwi et al., 2025; Raynauld & Lalancette, 2021). Raynauld & Lalancette (2021) demonstrate that Instagram enables political actors to construct visual narratives that shape perceptions of identity and public image.

However, leadership representation within government communication differs from electoral political branding because government

communication involves institutional authority, public legitimacy, and relationships between institutions and citizens (Atnan & Sembada, 2025; Mergel et al., 2019). Recent research on Indonesian government Instagram communication indicates that official government accounts construct narratives related to leadership roles, institutional legitimacy, public service, and relationships with citizens through digital content practices (Nasyaya et al., 2026).

Therefore, leadership representation in government Instagram communication can be understood as the process through which institutions construct meanings of leadership through multimodal messages, symbolic representations, and mediated interactions with citizens (Hall, 1997; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

In addition to representation processes, leadership meanings within government digital communication are also constructed through framing strategies. Entman (1993) explains that framing involves the selection of particular aspects of reality and making them more salient within communication texts. Through framing processes, communicators organize meanings by defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies. In government Instagram communication, framing allows institutions to emphasize particular interpretations of leadership, public relationships, and national identity through the combination of textual narratives, visual elements, and symbolic representations.

**Audience Interpretation and Meaning Negotiation in Digital Communication**

Digital communication environments have transformed audiences from passive receivers into active participants who interpret, respond to, and circulate meanings. In social media contexts, institutional messages do not necessarily produce identical interpretations because audiences negotiate meanings based on their social experiences, political perspectives, and cultural contexts (Carpentier, 2011; Hall et al., 1980).

Hall's encoding/decoding model provides an important framework for understanding audience interpretation. Hall explains that communicators encode preferred meanings within messages, while audiences may decode these messages through dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings (Hall et al., 1980) This perspective highlights that communication outcomes are not determined solely by institutional intentions but also by the interpretative practices of audiences.

This framework is particularly relevant for government Instagram communication because audience responses provide evidence of how institutional meanings are received and negotiated within digital political environments (Theocharis et al., 2023; Vaccari et al., 2021). Therefore, audience interaction should not be understood merely as engagement measurement but also as a process of meaning negotiation and interpretive participation(Carpentier, 2011).

Recent studies on digital political communication demonstrate that citizens actively participate in political meaning-making through interaction, interpretation, and circulation of online content (Theocharis et al., 2023). Consequently, examining audience responses allows researchers to understand how leadership representations constructed by institutions are accepted, negotiated, or contested within digital communication environments (Vaccari et al., 2021).

**Previous Studies and Research Position**

Previous studies have provided significant contributions to understanding government social media, Instagram communication, political representation, and audience participation. However, these research areas have generally developed through separate analytical approaches.

Government social media studies have primarily examined institutional communication practices, citizen engagement, transparency, and platform interaction (Atnan & Sembada, 2025; Ernungtyas & Boer, 2023). These studies provide important explanations regarding how governments communicate digitally and how citizens respond to institutional messages.

Meanwhile, visual political communication studies have focused on political image construction, visual framing, personalization, and symbolic representation through digital platforms (Alyatalatthaf et al., 2024; Ariadi et al., 2024; Pratiwi et al., 2025; Raynauld & Lalancette, 2021). These studies demonstrate how visual communication contributes to the construction of political identity and public perception.

Audience studies have further examined how citizens participate in digital communication environments through interaction, interpretation, and content circulation (Theocharis et al., 2023). However, institutional message construction and audience meaning negotiation are often examined as separate processes.

Therefore, this study positions itself by integrating these perspectives to examine how government institutions construct leadership representations through multimodal Instagram communication and how audiences negotiate these meanings through digital interactions. Unlike studies that focus primarily on engagement metrics, communication strategies, or political image construction separately, this study analyzes leadership representation as a dynamic process involving institutional encoding and audience interpretation within the same government Instagram environment.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative interpretive approach with a case study design to examine how leadership representation was constructed through government Instagram communication and how audiences negotiated meanings embedded within institutional messages. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on meaning construction, symbolic representation, and audience interpretation within a specific social context rather than measuring communication effects or public opinion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design was applied because the research examined a specific digital communication artifact within its contemporary context, allowing an in-depth investigation of communication practices and meaning construction (Yin, 2018). The selected case was an Instagram video published by the official account of the Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia (@sekretariat.kabinet) during the celebration of the 81st Anniversary of the Republic of Indonesia.

The case was selected purposively because the Instagram post contained elements relevant to the research objectives, including the representation of presidential leadership, visual narratives of interaction between the President and citizens, symbolic representations of national identity, and audience responses through digital interactions. The data consisted of institutional communication materials and audience interpretation data. Institutional data included the video content, caption text, visual elements, and symbolic representations presented within the post. Audience data consisted of user comments responding to the post. Comments were selected through purposive sampling because the study required information-rich data that could provide meaningful insights into audience interpretation rather than statistical representation of the broader population (Patton & Patton, 2023). From the available interactions, 100 substantive comments were selected as the analytical sample. The sample size was considered sufficient for interpretive analysis because the selected comments represented variations in audience responses relevant to the research objectives. Comments containing only emojis, repeated expressions, greetings, or unrelated responses were excluded.

The unit of analysis for audience interpretation was individual Instagram comments rather than comment threads. Each selected comment was treated as an independent analytical unit because the study aimed to identify individual decoding positions and meaning negotiations. The 15 comment threads identified within the post were treated only as contextual structures for understanding interaction patterns and were not considered analytical units or used as the denominator for percentage calculation. When reply comments contained independent interpretations related to leadership representation, citizen relationships, or institutional messages, they were analyzed separately as individual comments. Therefore, the distribution of audience decoding categories was calculated based on the total number of analyzed comments included in the final analytical sample.

The analysis consisted of three interconnected stages. First, multimodal analysis was conducted to examine how leadership representation was constructed through visual and textual elements. Following Kress & van Leeuwen (2020) multimodal communication framework, the analysis examined representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. The analysis focused on how actors, activities, visual relationships, camera perspectives, gestures, spatial arrangements, and symbolic elements contributed to the construction of leadership meanings, citizen connection, and national identity. Second, framing analysis was applied to examine how institutional communication selected, emphasized, and organized particular interpretations of leadership. Following Entman (1993) framing framework, the analysis examined how the post defined problems, diagnosed causes, made moral judgments, and suggested remedies through visual and textual elements.

The third stage analyzed audience meaning negotiation using Hall et al. (1980) encoding/decoding framework. The coding process was conducted through three steps:

identifying the primary interpretation expressed in each comment, comparing the comment with the preferred meanings encoded within the institutional message, and classifying comments according to their decoding position. Comments were categorized as dominant-hegemonic readings when audiences accepted and reproduced the preferred meanings constructed within the post, particularly regarding leadership accessibility, citizen connection, and national identity. Negotiated readings were identified when audiences accepted certain aspects of the institutional narrative while introducing qualifications, additional perspectives, or limited criticism without fully rejecting the dominant meaning. Oppositional readings were identified when audiences challenged, rejected, or reconstructed the preferred meanings embedded within the institutional message by introducing alternative interpretations regarding leadership representation, political legitimacy, or citizen-government relationships.

To ensure interpretative consistency, each comment was evaluated based on three criteria: (1) its relationship with the meaning constructed within the institutional message; (2) whether the comment demonstrated acceptance, modification, or rejection of that meaning; and (3) its consistency with the characteristics of dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional readings. Comments with ambiguous interpretations were reviewed by considering their linguistic context, relationship with the original Instagram post, and alignment with Hall's encoding/decoding framework. This process ensured that audience decoding classifications were based on systematic analytical criteria rather than subjective interpretation. This approach is consistent with qualitative content analysis principles that emphasize systematic categorization and transparent analytical procedures (Krippendorff, 2019; Schreier, 2012).

Ethical considerations were maintained by focusing on communication patterns and meaning construction while excluding usernames and personally identifiable information from the presentation of findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines how government leadership representation is constructed through Instagram communication and how audiences negotiate the meanings embedded within institutional messages. The analysis demonstrates that government social media functions not merely as a channel for information dissemination but also as a digital communication environment where political meanings are produced, circulated, interpreted, and contested.

Based on the analysis of the Instagram communication artifact, three interconnected findings were identified. First, leadership representation was constructed through the interaction of visual, textual, and symbolic elements. Second, institutional messages employed framing strategies to emphasize particular meanings of leadership, public connection, and national identity. Third, audience responses demonstrated different decoding positions, showing that institutional meanings were accepted, negotiated, and contested within the digital environment.

These findings indicate that leadership communication on government social media is not a linear process of message transmission. Instead, meaning emerges through interaction between institutional communication strategies and audience interpretation. The following sections discuss these findings through the perspectives of representation, framing, and audience decoding.

### Constructing Leadership Representation Through Visual and Narrative Elements

The first finding demonstrates that leadership representation was constructed through the interaction of visual, textual, and symbolic elements within the Instagram communication artifact published by the official account of the Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia. The post constructed leadership meanings through the representation of direct interaction between the President and citizens, the use of national celebration narratives, and symbolic elements associated with public connection and collective identity.

The visual representation of the President's interaction with citizens became a central element in constructing meanings of proximity, accessibility, and public connection. The depiction of direct engagement positioned leadership not only as a formal institutional authority but also as a relational practice expressed through visibility, interaction, and symbolic presence. In this representation, leadership was communicated through mediated performances of closeness between political institutions and citizens. This finding is consistent with recent studies on digital political communication showing that social media enables political actors and institutions to

construct relational images of leadership through visibility, interaction, and symbolic performances (Ariadi et al., 2024; Raynauld & Lalancette, 2021).

This finding supports Hall (1997), concept of representation, which emphasizes that communication does not simply reflect an existing reality but actively constructs meaning through symbolic systems. In this context, the Instagram post should not be understood merely as a visual record of a political event. Instead, the selection of specific images, narratives, and symbolic elements contributed to the formation of a particular understanding of leadership that emphasized public engagement and relational connection.

The findings also extend previous studies on visual political communication. Grabe & Bucy (2009) explain that political images contribute to the construction of public perceptions through symbolic presentation, while Schill (2012) emphasizes the role of visual communication in shaping political meanings and identities. Recent studies further demonstrate that visual strategies within digital platforms, particularly social media, contribute to the construction of political images, institutional identities, and audience engagement (Ariadi et al., 2024; Pratiwi et al., 2025; Raynauld & Lalancette, 2021).

The multimodal characteristics of Instagram further strengthen this representational process. Unlike conventional institutional communication, Instagram integrates images, videos, captions, and audience interactions within a single communication environment. Kress & van Leeuwen (2020) argue that visual structures communicate social meanings through relationships between images, cultural contexts, and interpretation. Similarly, Rose (2022) highlights that visual materials should be examined as cultural practices shaped by processes of production, circulation, and interpretation.

The analyzed Instagram post provides the visual evidence for understanding how representational elements operate within government social media communication. Figure 1. presents the communication artifact examined in this study, highlighting the visual and textual components through which leadership meanings were constructed.




**Figure 1.** Instagram Post Analyzed in the Study
*Source: Screenshot of the Instagram post @sekretariat.kabinet (August 21, 2026, accessed August 26, 2026)*

The analysis therefore demonstrates that leadership representation on government Instagram is not located solely within individual visual or textual elements but emerges through the interaction between institutional communication strategies, symbolic practices, and audience interpretation. In this sense, leadership meaning is produced through the

relationship between how institutions construct messages and how these messages are interpreted within specific cultural contexts.

However, representation alone does not fully determine how audiences interpret leadership meanings. Although institutional communication constructs preferred interpretations, audiences remain active participants who may accept, negotiate, or challenge these meanings through their own interpretative processes (Hall et al., 1980).

Therefore, understanding government Instagram communication requires further examination of how institutional messages are organized through framing strategies and how audiences subsequently decode and negotiate these representations.

**Framing Leadership, Public Connection, and National Identity**

The second finding demonstrates that leadership representation within government Instagram communication was strengthened through institutional framing strategies. While the previous section examined how leadership meanings were constructed through visual and symbolic representations, this section focuses on how these meanings were organized, emphasized, and positioned within a broader political narrative through processes of selection and salience (Entman, 1993).

The analyzed Instagram post did not merely present a national celebration but constructed a particular interpretation of political reality through its selection of narratives, visual elements, and symbolic references (Entman, 1993). One of the most significant framing elements was the caption hook "Ironi Demo 'Prabowo Bedebah' 500 Ribu Warga Menyapa Pak Presiden." This narrative constructs a contrast between two competing meanings of leadership: political criticism represented by the phrase "Prabowo Bedebah" and public recognition represented by the statement that hundreds of thousands of citizens greeted the President. This process reflects how political communication on social media involves the construction of meaning through combinations of textual narratives, visual representations, and audience-oriented communication strategies (Theocharis et al., 2023; Vaccari et al., 2021).

Rather than presenting these elements as separate political events, the communication organized them into a narrative of contrast and reinterpretation through processes of selection and emphasis (Entman, 1993). The political tension was constructed through competing narratives of leadership, where criticism toward the President was positioned against visual representations of public recognition and interaction. Through this framing process, the communication transformed a potentially conflict-oriented political context into a narrative emphasizing proximity between leadership and society.

This finding reflects Entman (1993) concept of framing, which holds that communication involves selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more salient to promote particular interpretations. In this case, the institutional message did not merely describe an event but organized meaning by emphasizing specific aspects of political reality, particularly citizen interaction, public participation, and national togetherness. In digital communication environments, such framing processes operate through the combination of textual, visual, and symbolic elements

The framing analysis was conducted through Entman (1993) four framing dimensions: define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. Table 1 presents how these framing elements were constructed through the interaction between caption narratives, visual representations, and symbolic communication within the Instagram post. This approach is consistent with recent studies of digital political communication, which emphasize that meaning construction on social media occurs through the combination of textual, visual, and interactive elements (Theocharis et al., 2023; Vaccari et al., 2021).

**Table 1**. Framing Analysis of Government Instagram Communication

| Framing Element | Evidence from Communication Artifact | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Define Problems | The caption presents a contrast between political criticism represented by the phrase "Prabowo Bedebah" and large-scale public greeting toward the President. | Political tension is framed as a contestation of leadership meaning between critical narratives and representations of public recognition. |

| Framing Element | Evidence from Communication Artifact | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Diagnose Causes | The communication constructs political tension through the contrast between criticism toward the President and visual representations of public interaction and recognition. | The issue is framed as emerging from competing interpretations of presidential leadership, where legitimacy is negotiated between criticism and symbolic demonstrations of public connection. |
| Make Moral Judgment | Visual and narrative elements highlight unity, participation, national celebration, and interaction between the President and citizens. | Leadership is evaluated through values of accessibility, responsiveness, social connection, and collective identity. |
| Suggest Remedies | The communication emphasizes direct interaction, public visibility, and citizen engagement as central elements of leadership representation. | The message presents proximity and public engagement as symbolic strategies for strengthening relationships between political leadership and citizens |

***Source**: Author's analysis based on Entman's (1993) framing framework and Instagram communication artifact.*

The framing analysis demonstrates that institutional communication operates through processes of selection and emphasis rather than neutral representation (Entman, 1993). The post highlighted specific dimensions of the political event by emphasizing narratives of citizen connection, accessible leadership, and public recognition. This finding is consistent with recent studies on government social media, which demonstrate that digital platforms function not only as channels of information dissemination but also as spaces for constructing institutional identities and public relationships (Atnan & Sembada, 2025; Ernungtyas & Boer, 2023)

This finding supports Scheufele (1999) argument that framing operates through processes of organizing meaning and emphasizing particular interpretations within communication processes. Matthes (2009) further emphasizes that framing analysis examines how communication elements contribute to the construction of meaning within specific political and social contexts. In digital political communication, framing processes increasingly involve the interaction between textual narratives, visual representations, and platform-based forms of engagement, through which political meanings are constructed and circulated among audiences (Raynauld & Lalancette, 2021; Vaccari et al., 2021).

The findings demonstrate that framing within digital platforms operates through multimodal practices, where political meanings are constructed through the interaction of textual, visual, and symbolic elements (Farkas & Bene, 2021; Vaccari et al., 2021). Unlike traditional political communication that often relies primarily on textual narratives, government Instagram communication combines captions, images, videos, and symbolic references to construct institutional meanings and communicate relationships with citizens (Atnan & Sembada, 2025; Ernungtyas & Boer, 2023). Therefore, framing in social media environments should be understood as a process involving multiple forms of representation through which political meanings are organized and circulated among audiences (Raynauld & Lalancette, 2021).

However, institutional framing does not fully determine audience interpretation. Although the communication constructed a preferred narrative of leadership and citizen connection, these meanings remained open to acceptance, negotiation, and contestation by audiences (Hall et al., 1980). Recent studies on digital political communication further demonstrate that audiences actively participate in interpreting and circulating political meanings rather than functioning merely as passive recipients of institutional messages (Theocharis et al., 2023; Vaccari et al., 2021). Therefore, the next section examines how audiences decoded and negotiated the meanings constructed through this institutional framing process.

**Audience Decoding and Negotiation of Leadership Meaning**

The third finding indicates that the meanings constructed through government Instagram communication were not interpreted uniformly within the analyzed comment sample. Although the institutional message encoded a preferred representation of leadership through

visual and framing strategies, the analyzed responses reflected different processes of acceptance, negotiation, and contestation (Hall et al., 1980).

Following the previous analysis of institutional framing, this section examines how commenters interpreted and responded to the meanings embedded within the analyzed Instagram post. The analysis does not treat comments as direct indicators of public opinion or political support but as forms of meaning-making practices within a digital communication environment (Carpentier, 2011; Hall et al., 1980; Vaccari et al., 2021).

Using Hall et al. (1980) encoding/decoding framework, Instagram comments were categorized into three interpretive positions: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional readings. These categories describe how comments reflected different relationships with the preferred meanings encoded within the institutional message, ranging from acceptance of dominant interpretations to modification and contestation of those meanings.

Within the analyzed sample of 100 selected comments, dominant-hegemonic readings accounted for 70% of coded comments, negotiated readings for 3%, and oppositional readings for 27%. This distribution indicates that, within the analyzed sample, dominant-hegemonic readings were more frequently identified than negotiated or oppositional readings, while alternative interpretations also emerged through processes of negotiation and contestation (Hall et al., 1980).

Table 2 summarizes the decoding positions identified through the analysis of Instagram comments. The table illustrates how the analyzed comments accepted, modified, or challenged the preferred meanings of leadership constructed within the institutional communication artifact.

**Table 2.** Audience Decoding Positions in Instagram Comment Interactions

| Audience Reading Position | Percentage | Characteristics of Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Dominant-hegemonic reading | 70% | Comments that accepted and reproduced the preferred meanings encoded within the institutional message, particularly representations of leadership accessibility, citizen connection, and national unity. |
| Negotiated reading | 3% | Comments that accepted certain aspects of the institutional narrative while introducing qualifications, reservations, or limited criticism without fully rejecting the preferred meaning. |
| Oppositional reading | 27% | Comments that rejected or reversed the core preferred meaning encoded within the institutional message by interpreting leadership, political accountability, or citizen-government relations through an alternative or opposing frame. |

***Note :*** *Percentages were calculated from 100 selected comments, with each comment treated as an individual unit of analysis.*
***Source:*** *Author's analysis based on Hall et al.'s (1980) encoding/decoding framework and Instagram comment data.*

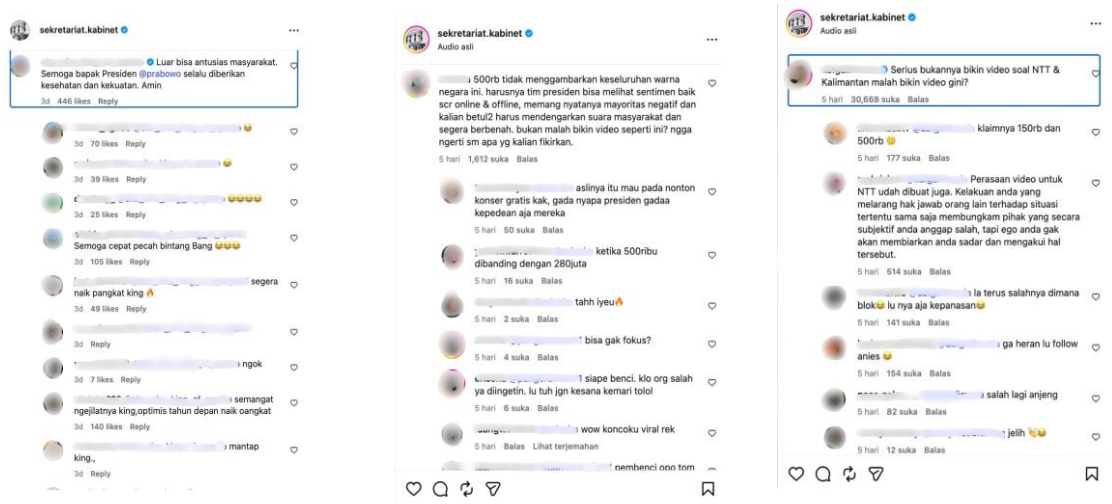
The prevalence of dominant-hegemonic readings indicates that a substantial proportion of comments within the analyzed sample aligned their interpretations with the preferred meanings constructed through institutional framing. These comments reproduced elements of the dominant narratives of leadership accessibility, public interaction, and national connection within the analyzed communication context. From Hall et al. (1980) perspective, such interpretations represent dominant decoding positions in which commenters accept and reproduce the preferred meanings encoded within a media message.

The presence of dominant readings suggests that the preferred meanings constructed through institutional framing were recognizable among a substantial proportion of comments within the analyzed sample. However, this does not indicate that the institutional meaning was universally accepted. Instead, the emergence of negotiated and oppositional readings illustrates that commenters within the analyzed sample exercised interpretive agency when engaging with political communication (Carpentier, 2011; Hall et al., 1980; Vaccari et al., 2021).

Figure 2 presents illustrative examples of Instagram comment responses representing different decoding positions identified through the analysis based on Hall et al. (1980) encoding/decoding framework. These examples

illustrate how commenters engaged with the institutional message by accepting, modifying, or challenging the preferred meanings encoded within the communication artifact..

**Figure 2**. Examples of Dominant Hegemonic, Negotiated, and Oppositional Readings in Instagram Comments




*Source: Instagram comments from the official @sekretariat.kabinet post (August 21, 2026), accessed August 26, 2026.*

The negotiated readings, although representing a smaller proportion of responses, illustrate that interpretations within the analyzed comments do not always take the form of complete acceptance or rejection. These comments partially accepted certain elements of the institutional narrative while simultaneously introducing additional perspectives, qualifications, or limited criticism without fully rejecting the preferred meaning. Such interpretations reflect Hall et al. (1980) argument that decoding processes involve complex relationships between encoded meanings and audience interpretation.

The oppositional readings further illustrate that institutional framing does not exclusively shape how political messages are interpreted within the analyzed sample. Some comments challenged the core preferred meanings of the institutional narrative by introducing alternative interpretations of leadership, political accountability, or institutional representation. These readings should not necessarily be interpreted as a complete rejection of leadership representation itself but rather as alternative interpretations that contest specific preferred meanings within the communication text (Hall et al., 1980).

This finding illustrates that the analyzed government Instagram communication artifact functioned as a contested interpretive environment. While institutional actors may construct preferred meanings through framing strategies, the analyzed comments reflected interpretive agency by reproducing, modifying, or challenging those meanings through digital interaction (Carpentier, 2011; Hall et al., 1980; Vaccari et al., 2021).

The findings contribute to discussions of digital participation by indicating that online engagement extends beyond quantitative indicators such as likes, comments, or interaction volume. Comments can be understood as interpretive practices through which political meanings are reproduced, negotiated, and contested (Carpentier, 2011; Hall et al., 1980). Jenkins (2008) argues that digital participation enables users to actively engage with media content through processes of interpretation and circulation, while (Carpentier, 2011) emphasizes that participation entails involvement in meaning-making. Recent studies on digital political communication further demonstrate that online engagement involves processes of interpretation, interaction, and circulation of political meanings among networked audiences (Theocharis et al., 2023; Vaccari et al., 2021).

Therefore, comments within the analyzed sample indicate that leadership meanings were negotiated within this digital communication context. Institutional framing may establish

preferred interpretations of leadership, but the analyzed comments reflected interpretive agency through processes of acceptance, modification, and contestation ((Carpentier, 2011; Hall et al., 1980; Vaccari et al., 2021).

## CONCLUSION

This study examined how government leadership representation is constructed through Instagram communication and how meanings embedded within institutional messages are interpreted and negotiated within audience responses. The findings indicate that the analyzed government Instagram communication artifact functioned not merely as a channel for information dissemination but also as a digital environment where political meanings were produced, interpreted, and contested.

The findings indicate that leadership representation was constructed through the interaction of visual, textual, and symbolic elements. The analyzed Instagram post represented leadership through narratives of visibility, accessibility, and connection with citizens. These representations were further shaped through institutional framing strategies that emphasized public interaction, national identity, and relational forms of leadership.

Furthermore, the analysis of comments within the selected sample indicates that institutional meanings were not interpreted uniformly. While many comments within the analyzed sample reproduced the preferred meanings embedded within the institutional message, other comments negotiated or challenged aspects of the representation. This finding highlights that commenters in digital communication environments are not merely passive recipients of government communication but participate in processes of meaning interpretation and negotiation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to digital political communication research by integrating perspectives of representation, framing, and audience decoding processes within a single digital communication artifact. The findings indicate that leadership meanings emerge through the relationship between institutional communication practices and audience interpretation. Therefore, the analyzed government Instagram communication artifact can be understood as a negotiated-meaning environment in which political representations are interpreted, negotiated, and contested.

Practically, this study suggests that government communication strategies on social media may benefit from considering not only how institutional messages are produced but also how diverse commenters may interpret them. The interactive nature of digital platforms requires institutions to recognize that public communication involves processes of interpretation and negotiation beyond the construction of the original message.

This study is limited by its focus on a single Instagram communication artifact and a selected set of Instagram comments within a particular political context. Future research may expand the analysis by examining multiple government social media platforms, comparing different political contexts, or exploring longitudinal changes in digital leadership representation.

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