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# Digital Health Advocacy: Exploring Instagram's Role in Promoting Public Support for Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Excise

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## Abstract

The Instagram account @fyindonesians has emerged as a response to the rising consumption of Sugar-Sweetened Beverages (SSBs) in Indonesia and the lack of comprehensive regulatory instruments to address it. This study examines how @fyindonesians contributes to building public support for implementing an SSB tax as a health policy intervention. Using a qualitative case study design, the analysis is grounded in the Theory of Interactive Media Effects. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, complemented by content analysis via the Fanpage Karma application and validated through triangulation. The results indicate that @fyindonesians actively shapes social understanding of health issues through the platform's interactive affordances, utilizing both cue- and action-route mechanisms. The cue route directs initial audience attention through engaging visuals, social metrics, and consistent content style. In contrast, the action route fosters deeper cognitive engagement via interactive features, gradual information processing, and reflection on consumption behavior. These mechanisms jointly enhance user engagement, cultivate positive health attitudes, and encourage support for SSB excise.

**Keywords:** Instagram, Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Excise, Health AdvocacyKeyword: Instagram, Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Excise, Health Advocacy

#### Introduction

Sugar-Sweetened Beverages (SSBs) are drinks that contain added sugars such as corn syrup, fructose, and sucrose (Te et al., 2019). SSBs form is referred to as Packaged Sweetened Beverages. These products include, but are not limited to, carbonated beverages, energy drinks, packaged cider, isotonic drinks, herbal and vitamin beverages, flavored milk, packaged tea and coffee, sweetened condensed milk, and syrup (Gita Kusnadi et al., 2022).

Consumption of SSBs is increasing and has become a global phenomenon (Sartika et al., 2022). For instance, packaged tea drinks contain 22–25 grams of sugar per serving, while a single bottle of Coca-Cola contains 27 grams of sugar (Susanty & Hartanto, 2022). Even

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products with relatively lower sugar content, such as packaged jasmine tea, isotonic drinks, and packaged coffee lattes, contribute significantly to daily sugar intake. They can account for more than half of the recommended daily sugar limit of 50 grams (Ministry of Health, 2019).

Data from the Indonesian Health Survey (2023) indicate that 47.5% of the population aged ≥3 years consume sweetened beverages more than once per day, while another 43.3% consume them 1–6 times per week. Furthermore, Susenas 2024 data show that 68.1% of households in Indonesia consume at least one type of SSB per week, with an average consumption of approximately 29.44 liters, or around 21 packs.

Despite this high consumption, Indonesia currently lacks systematic regulations to control SSB intake (Sartika et al., 2022). Existing efforts are limited to the Ministry of Health and BPOM regulations, which primarily focus on limiting individual sugar consumption (Fanda et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance has proposed implementing the SSB excise from 2016 to 2025. However, economic uncertainties have delayed its enactment.

Evidence from other countries shows that SSB excise can effectively reduce consumption. In Thailand, the tiered excise implemented between 2017 and 2019 reduced consumption by 2.5%. In the Philippines, an excise of 6–12 pesos per liter decreased consumption by up to 8.7% in the first month. In Malaysia, a 40-cent-per-liter excise introduced in 2019 initially reduced consumption by 9.3%. The government later revised the tariff to 0.90 ringgit per liter, adjusting the sugar content threshold to improve policy effectiveness (Gita Kusnadi et al., 2022). Studies also show a significant association between SSBs excise implementation and the prevalence of health problems such as obesity, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and dental caries. These findings support recommendations for policymakers to adopt SSB excise policies (Risky Kusuma Hartono & Fitria Aryani Susanti, 2025).

This paradox highlights a gap between the urgent need to control SSB consumption and the slow governmental response. It emphasizes the importance of health advocacy strategies to strengthen public support for implementing SSB excise taxes. Social media has proven to be an effective medium for health policy advocacy. Studies indicate that digital media interventions can increase public awareness and expand support for policy initiatives (Jackson et al., 2021). Therefore, health advocacy through social media platforms has the potential to bridge policy gaps and accelerate the implementation of SSB excise in Indonesia.

This is exemplified by the advocacy initiatives conducted by CISDI through the @fyindonesians account. In this study, CISDI has utilized several social media platforms to raise awareness about Packaged SSBs consumption, including Instagram, Twitter, and previously Facebook. The effectiveness of each platform varies. The @fyindonesians Twitter account has a relatively small number of followers and interactions, while Facebook has been inactive since 2022. Instagram has emerged as the most active and effective medium for disseminating campaign messages.

Currently, @fyindonesians Instagram account has become the main platform for education and advocacy regarding the consumption of sweetened beverages. At the beginning of the emergence of this issue through the @fyindonesians Instagram account, which was for the period of August 28, 2021 to November 2021, the number of followers @fyindonesians only 4,734 people. As of September 25, 2025, the number of followers of this account has increased to 27,600 people. This growth indicates an expansion in the reach of health advocacy messages.

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Currently, the @fyindonesians Instagram account is the leading platform for education and advocacy on the consumption of sweetened beverages. At the beginning of this issue, when it emerged on the @fyindonesians Instagram account, the number of @fyindonesians followers from August 28, 2021, to November 2021 was only 4,734. As of September 25, 2025, this account's follower count has increased to 27,600. This growth indicates an expansion in the reach of health advocacy messages.

Follower growth is also associated with higher engagement with the account's content. The engagement rate reflects how effectively the account attracts audience attention through posts, videos, and reels (Figure 1). Notably, engagement rates peaked in September, which coincides with increased public discussion of excise issues. This timing aligns with the annual deliberation of the State Revenue and Expenditure Budget Draft (RAPBN), during which excise policies, including SSB excise, receive heightened media and public attention.

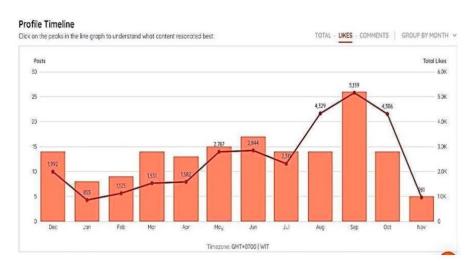


Figure 1. Instagram Account Engagement Rate @fyindonesians January-August 2023 Period (Source: FYI)

Therefore, this phenomenon warrants scientific examination, particularly regarding the role of the Instagram account @fyindonesians in increasing public awareness of the risks of consuming sugar-sweetened beverages. This role is also closely associated with fostering public support for implementing the SSB excise policy, which aims to reduce consumption levels. Advocacy has been shown to strongly influence audience attitudes and behaviors (Dillard & Ye, 2008). Thus, this study is not only relevant within the field of health communication but also provides valuable insights into how digital communication practices can strengthen the legitimacy of public policy.

Research on the use of social media for health campaigns has been extensive, as social media platforms can reach broad, diverse audiences, providing a fertile context for examining the effects of health campaign messages (Shi et al., 2018). Despite this, many previous studies have predominantly focused on assessing the effectiveness and reach of these messages in promoting health behaviors among target audiences. For example, Mackert et al. (2020), in their study Development of a Health Communication Campaign to Promote the Texas Prescription Monitoring Program, demonstrated that health promotion campaigns are most effective when the organizing institution emphasizes key messages that are central to the campaign materials.

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Similarly, Te et al. (2019), in Exploring Social Media Campaigns Against Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Consumption: A Systematic Search, underscored the importance of strategically distributing campaign messages to influence audience behavior regarding sugar-sweetened beverage consumption. These studies collectively highlight that both message content and dissemination strategies play a critical role in the success of social media-based health campaigns.

However, previous studies have often overlooked the interactive dynamics inherent in digital spaces. The defining characteristic of social media lies in its capacity to facilitate interaction, debate, and the collective construction of meaning among users (Sundar et al., 2015). As Dillard et al. (2018) show in Anti-Sugar Sweetened Beverage Messages Elicit Reactance: Effects on Attitudes and Policy, public responses to anti-sugar-sweetened beverage campaigns are shaped not only by exposure to messages but also through discursive processes such as commenting, resharing, debating, and negotiating meaning among users. These interactions allow campaign messages to be reinterpreted, discussed, or even opposed, highlighting that reactance is not merely an individual response but also a social phenomenon emerging within digital interactions.

Accordingly, this study does not treat social media as a one-way communication medium, measured solely by engagement metrics or message effectiveness. Within the framework of Interactive Media Theory, media are understood not merely as channels of communication but as tools that actively shape interactions. From this perspective, the present study examines how the Instagram account @fyindonesians mediates and frames communication about the implementation of the sweetened beverage excise policy. In particular, it examines how narratives and interactions on the platform shape public understanding, attitudes, and support for excise policies, while also revealing the dynamics of meaning negotiation between account managers and users (Littlejohn et al., 2021).

## Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Rachmat Kriyantono, 2014; Creswell, 2018). The researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection, focusing on participants' meanings and experiences. This method allows examination of how Instagram promotes excise duty on packaged sweetened beverages.

The research employed in this study is a single-case study. According to Fidel (1984), case studies, as a scientific research method, are field investigations designed to examine phenomena as they naturally occur, with minimal intervention by the researcher. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive, holistic understanding of the case under investigation and to generate theoretical propositions related to the studied phenomenon. The case examined in this study is the advocacy of excise on sugar-sweetened beverages through the @fyindonesians Instagram account. This account advocates to the public on the urgency of implementing excise duties on sweetened beverages to reduce consumption. Advocacy efforts conducted through this account are analyzed in depth using the case study method.

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews and the Fanpage Karma application. Interviews were conducted with the project lead of @fyindonesians and selected

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followers of the Instagram account to gain an in-depth understanding of communication processes, meaning-making, and interaction dynamics within the context of the sugarsweetened beverage excise campaign. To ensure validity, source triangulation was employed. Data analysis involved data reduction, thematic grouping, and interpretation to draw conclusions aligned with the research objectives.

### **Discussion**

Digital platforms such as Instagram facilitate the construction of social meaning around advocacy issues. Based on the Interactive Media Effects Theory (Sundar, Jia, Waddell, & Huang), media should be understood not merely as a channel for interaction but as a tool that actively shapes interactions. Interactivity is the primary affordance of modern communication technologies, explaining the strong psychological appeal of digital media (Littlejohn et al., 2021).

In this study, the @fyindonesians Instagram account serves as an actor that constructs social meaning regarding sugar-sweetened beverage excise advocacy through its features and interaction logic. These interactivity affordances influence how users engage with content, perceive messages, and form attitudes. Campaign messages disseminated through the account

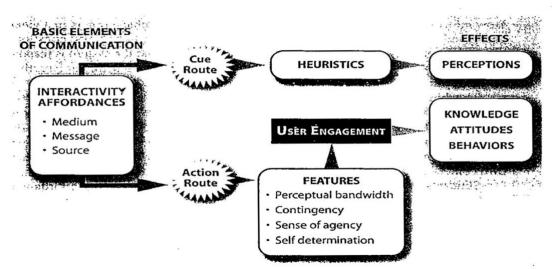


Figure 2. Theory of Interactive Media Effects

not only provide information but also activate platform features that enhance audience participation, interaction, and meaning-making (Figure 6).

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In the context of this study, the @fyindonesians Instagram account can be conceptualized as a medium that leverages interactivity affordances through three fundamental elements of communication: medium, message, and source, as illustrated on the left side of the figure above. These three elements play a critical role in operationalizing the affordances:

## • Medium

Instagram, as a medium, provides the technical means for users to interact. For example, the feed, stories, reels, and DM features allow users to receive information, respond to content, and participate in digital conversations. Within the affordance framework, the platform offers actions that facilitate interaction between the @fyindonesians account and its followers. This is evident in audience responses to real videos depicting the consumption of sweetened beverages: despite an intention to maintain a healthy lifestyle, viewers are still prompted to consume readily available products in various retail outlets. These responses illustrate how media interactivity mediates audience perceptions and attitudes toward health-related issues (Figure 3).





Figure 3. Screenshot of Instagram Account @fyindonesians June 22, 2023 • Message

Content published by the @fyindonesians account, whether in text, images, videos, or infographics, is a curated message intended to attract attention, convey information, or form an opinion. The narrative of the message presented on the Instagram account @fyindonesians was obtained using the Fanpage Karma application, which helps identify popular messages with high engagement on the account. From the messages shared during the period January 1, 2022-June 30, 2023, with a total of 248 content uploads, prominent or

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popular messages were found on the @fyindonesians Instagram account. In this study, the message of the campaign is classified as follows:

### Generation Z Prefers to Consume Sweetened Drinks Over Mineral Water

In this study, CISDI campaign messages were found to describe provided information on the consumption habits of sweetened beverages among Indonesians. For example, the content shared on May 19, 2023, illustrates that Indonesians more often choose bottled sweetened drinks than drinking water. This content download has the highest number of likes among all @fyindonesians content downloads, with 27691 likes, and the total number of likes reaches 27725.



Figure 4. Instagram Account Content (afyindonesians 19 May 2023

The message above shows that the Instagram account @fyindonesians aims to inform its audience about the habits of people who prefer sweetened drinks to water. The post attempts to describe the Indonesian habit of consuming sweetened drinks while shopping by using the analogy of a scene from the popular drama Grey's Anatomy.

## Beverages Labeled as 'Healthy' Often Have Substantial Sugar Content

In addition to describing the reality of consumption of sweetened drinks, the narrative on @fyindeonsians's Instagram account focuses on educating about the sugar content of sweetened drinks freely available on the market. The content about sugar content in beverage products is a message widely shared on @fyindonesians's Instagram account. This is done so that Generation Z is aware of the sugar content in each serving of SSB products. For example, an Instagram post on January 31, 2023, had the highest reaction regarding information on the sugar content in sugary drinks. This content upload has a total of 1188 likes, with a total of 1284 views, and is presented in the form of an interesting infographic.

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Figure 5. Sugar Content in Milk (Screenshot of Instagram Post @fyindonesians January 31, 2023)

# Young People at Risk of Diabetes

In addition to discussing the consumption habits of sweetened drinks and education on sugar content information in sweetened beverages, the narrative on @fyindonesians's Instagram account also emphasizes information about the impact that will occur when sweetened drinks are consumed in excess This can be seen in a campaign message post January 25, 2023, where it is informed that the risk of type 2 diabetes does not only target the elderly and the elderly, but currently it has targeted the younger generation or this upload has a total of 2480 likes with a total of 2502 engangement and is presented in a comic narrative.



Figure 6. Diabetes Targets Young People (Instagram Screenshot @fyindonesians January 25, 2023)

## The Urgency of Implementing Excise on SSBs

In this study, it was found that the narrative conveyed by CISDI through Instagram @fyindonesians also informed solutions in controlling the consumption of sweetened beverages among Indonesian people. The solution presented in this campaign is to urge the government to implement excise rates on Packaged Sweetened Beverage products immediately. In an August 29, 2023, upload, @fyindonesians's Instagram account said the government was still lagging in implementing the sweetened beverage excise. This upload has 541 likes and 557 views, featuring a picture of Jennie Blackpink.

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Figure 7. The Urgency of Implementing Excise on Sweetened Beverages (Screenshot of Instagram Account @fyindonesians August 29, 2023)

The narrative of the Instagram account @fyindonesians illustrates how health issues are constructed through a combination of text, visuals, and persuasive communication styles. Through this narrative, the account establishes a systematic communication flow, beginning with the depiction of relevant social phenomena, followed by education about the consumption of sweetened beverages, and culminating in policy advocacy to control their consumption. This is as expressed by the project lead of the Forum for Young Indonesians (FYI).

"... One of my main responsibilities is to curate interesting and informative content to share with our account followers. I choose relevant, educational, and persuasive uploads ranging from education to advocacy so that the message conveyed is not only informative, but also motivates followers to be actively involved." (Calista, project lead @fyindonesians, August 15, 2024)

## • Source

Accounts @fyindonesians serve as sources of information with certain credibility and characteristics, such as expertise in health information or a friendly, communicative style. Intercativity affordances allow users to rate and respond to these sources through interactions, such as commenting, tagging friends, or sharing content, thereby strengthening two-way communication. This is as seen in (figure 7), where the followers tagged their colleagues also to find out information related to sweetened beverage education. In addition, these affordances create an essential evaluation process in the advocacy of sweetened beverages. This is as revealed by the project lead of the Forum For Young Indonesia, who comments that user interaction can be an indicator of the extent to which content is considered credible and relevant, while likes and shares indicate the level of acceptance and dissemination of information.

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Image 2. Instagram Account Screenshot @fyindonesians December 7, 2023)

The Theory of Interactive Media Effects framework emphasizes that the medium, message, and source function as interactivity affordances that direct the process of audience interpretation. The interactivity on Instagram account @fyindonesians affects how the audience receives and responds to sweetened beverage advocacy information through two main mechanisms: the cue route and the action route. In more detail, it will be explained in the following view:

## **Cue route: Early Cognitive Signals**

Affordances of interactive media on the cue route trigger the audience's initial perception through visual cues and social indicators. On @fyindonesians's Instagram account, this is evident in the combination of attractive visual elements, social metrics, and a consistent visual style familiar to the younger generation. The use of infographics, drama snippets, and and visual appeal (figures 4figures 4-7) as heuristic cues, so that the audience can assess the content quickly without the need for deep thinking. Uploads related to the excise advocacy of sugary drinks (figure 7), for example, which are presented in bright colors and with concise information that mimic the appearance of popular Korean idols, increase the likelihood that the audience will immediately notice and remember the advocacy message.

Additionally, social metrics such as likes, comments, and shares serve as social proof, with audiences interpreting content's popularity as an indicator of credibility and relevance. Popular content tends to be noticed, read, and shared more, so these affordances not only shape individual perceptions but also align audiences with the platform's social norms. Consistency of visual style, from color patterns, typography, to layout, adds a dimension of familiarity that makes it easier for audiences to associate content with everyday digital experiences, effectively enhancing initial engagement. This is as revealed by Annisa in the following interview

"... I remember that time there were many *Barbie* movies. The message conveyed uses the *Barbie movie icon*, but the context remains on the line of discussion of the importance of awareness and control of consumption patterns of sweetened beverages. This trick made me interested in reading this information because it is very interesting and informative compared to having to read complicated scientific journals related to

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the advocacy of excise on sugary drinks." (Annisa, followers of the Instagram account @fyindonesians, August 11, 2024)

In this context, affordances along the cue route not only display content but also provide an initial perceptual framework for the audience. This framework further prepares the audience to conduct more in-depth message processing through more active interaction channels related to sweetened beverage advocacy.

# **Action route: Cognitive Interaction Pathway**

Through the action route, users engage more actively with interactive features such as liking, commenting, or sharing content. This path also includes actions such as gradually reading information, understanding data on sugar content, and sharing and commenting on posts. On @fyindonesians's Instagram account, this is evident in the gradual presentation of content through carousels or stories, which allow the audience to systematically read and digest information on sugar-sweetened beverage excise advocacy. Some content is also accompanied by reflective questions or invitations to discussion, for example, asking the audience to raise awareness about the urgency of implementing the sweetened beverage excise, which encourages the evaluation of personal behavior.

These aspects reflect the characteristics of the features in the TIME model, namely: perceptual bandwidth, with clear and easy-to-understand visuals; contingency, in the form of logical relationships between information; sense of agency, which is the audience's ability to reflect and reassess their consumption habits; and self-determination, the internal drive to make more conscious drink choices.

In this case, affordances through the action route not only reinforce initial perceptions but also facilitate deeper cognitive engagement, which, within the framework of TIME, has the potential to influence the audience's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. In the context of sugary beverage excise advocacy, affordances through this action route play an essential role in increasing audience engagement, strengthening their understanding of health issues, and facilitating support for excise policies, so that the cognitive interactions that occur can lead to changes in attitudes and behaviors that support public health advocacy. This condition fosters more intense engagement, which not only shapes perception but also contributes to the development of specific knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral tendencies.

Through these two paths, both the cue path and the action path, both affect user engagement and ultimately produce a media effect. This engagement is reflected in the user's active interaction with the content, such as reading, sharing, or commenting on related information. The results indicate that increased user engagement contributes to the formation of positive attitudes towards health issues. In addition, this involvement encourages the public's support for health policies, including the implementation of an excise duty on sugary drinks. More specifically, users who are actively involved tend to recommend implementing an excise tax on sugary drinks as a strategy to control consumption.

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### Conclusion

This study shows that social media, especially @fyindonesians Instagram accounts, plays a role in health advocacy aimed at controlling the consumption of Packaged Sweetened Beverages in Indonesia. This account not only conveys educational information on consumption habits, sugar content, and health risks, but also encourages public support for implementing the SSB excise policy through persuasive narratives combined with engaging, interactive visual content.

The results of the study revealed that the interactivity offered by the Instagram platform, through affordances such as feeds, reels, stories, comments, and sharing features, operates along two main processing paths: the cue route and the action route. Cue routes help shape audiences' initial perceptions through visual cues, social metrics, and consistent content style. In contrast, action routes facilitate deeper cognitive engagement, such as gradually reading information, reassessing consumption habits, and sharing or commenting on content. These two pathways synergistically increase user engagement, form a positive attitude towards health issues, and encourage public support for the sugary beverage excise policy.

Thus, this study confirms that social media is not just a one-way communication channel but an interactive platform that can shape public understanding, attitudes, and behavior. The use of structured, interactive communication strategies on Instagram has proven effective as an instrument of public health advocacy, strengthening the legitimacy and public support for the implementation of Indonesia's SSB excise policy.

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