



Crisis Communication Strategy and Image Restoration for the MBG Program through a Change in BGN Leadership

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Abstract

The Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program has faced a crisis of public trust due to implementation and governance issues, highlighting the need for an effective crisis communication strategy to restore the program's legitimacy. This study aims to analyze the crisis communication strategy of the Indonesian government in restoring the MBG program's image through the leadership transition at the BGN. The study employed a qualitative approach using directed qualitative content analysis of 30 news articles published by Kompas.id between May 12, 2026 and July 7, 2026. The analysis was conducted using SCCT and IRT frameworks. The findings indicate that the government framed the MBG crisis as a preventable crisis, leading to the dominance of the 'rebuild' strategy within SCCT and 'corrective action' within IRT. These strategies were implemented through the replacement of the BGN leadership, governance reforms, strengthened oversight, policy revisions, and law enforcement support. They were further reinforced by 'bolstering', which re-emphasized the MBG program's strategic objectives. This study's novelty lies in integrating SCCT and IRT to explain leadership transition as a form of non-verbal crisis communication in the context of public policy. The findings highlight the importance of integrating crisis communication, governance reform, and policy transparency to rebuild public trust in strategic government programs.

Program Makanan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) telah menghadapi krisis kepercayaan publik akibat masalah pelaksanaan dan tata kelola, yang menyoroti perlunya strategi komunikasi krisis yang efektif untuk memulihkan legitimasi program tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi komunikasi krisis pemerintah Indonesia dalam memulihkan citra program MBG melalui transisi kepemimpinan di BGN. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan analisis konten kualitatif terarah terhadap 30 artikel berita yang diterbitkan oleh Kompas.id antara 12 Mei 2026 dan 7 Juli 2026. Analisis dilakukan menggunakan kerangka kerja SCCT dan IRT. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pemerintah memandang krisis MBG sebagai krisis yang dapat dicegah, sehingga strategi 'rebuild' mendominasi dalam kerangka SCCT dan 'tindakan korektif' dalam kerangka IRT. Strategi-strategi ini diimplementasikan melalui pergantian kepemimpinan BGN, reformasi tata kelola, penguatan pengawasan, revisi kebijakan, dan dukungan penegakan hukum. Strategi-strategi tersebut diperkuat lebih lanjut oleh 'penguatan', yang kembali menekankan tujuan strategis program MBG. Keunikan penelitian ini terletak pada integrasi SCCT dan IRT untuk menjelaskan transisi kepemimpinan sebagai bentuk komunikasi krisis non-verbal dalam konteks kebijakan publik. Temuan ini menyoroti pentingnya

mengintegrasikan komunikasi krisis, reformasi tata kelola, dan transparansi kebijakan untuk memulihkan kepercayaan publik terhadap program-program strategis pemerintah.

A. INTRODUCTION

The Free Nutritious Meals program (MBG) is one of the most strategic national policies during President Prabowo Subianto's administration. It aims to improve the nutritional status of the population, reduce poverty rates, and build long-term human capital. This policy was introduced in response to Indonesia's persistently high prevalence of stunting. According to data from the Indonesian Nutrition Status Survey, the prevalence of stunting still stands at 19.8%, which is estimated to equate to around 24 million children aged 0–59 months suffering from growth impairment (Desiana, 2025). Through the establishment of the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) under Presidential Regulation No. 3 of 2024, the government is endeavoring to consolidate all resources to ensure adequate nutrition for schoolchildren, young children, and pregnant and breastfeeding women.

The success of the MBG program depends not only on the size of the state budget but also on the effectiveness of development communication that bridges the gap between policy and implementation on the ground (Ritonga & Sazali, 2025). Furthermore, the success of the MBG's implementation is largely determined by transparent, contextual, collaborative, and capable of building public trust in government programs (Afriaji, 2026).

Despite its strategic objectives, the implementation of the MBG program has faced various challenges from the outset. Since the program's inception, there have been numerous reports of mass food poisoning incidents affecting schoolchildren who are beneficiaries of the MBG program, one of which was the poisoning incident in Kupang in July 2025, which resulted in dozens of children having to be rushed to hospital (Desiana, 2025). Conversely, weak coordination and communication among stakeholders, limited nutritional literacy among the public, and sub-optimal dissemination of information to the public can lead to misunderstandings regarding government policy (Afriaji, 2026).

These implementation issues escalated into a communication crisis as various negative narratives regarding the MBG program increasingly dominated the digital sphere. The food poisoning incident dominated discussions about the MBG program on social media rather than information about the program's objectives, compounded

by the minimal role played by government communications—which should have been the primary actor in public discourse (Sulafasyah & Arianto, 2026). This is reinforced by findings indicating that government communication via the Instagram account @pco.ri has not been sufficiently responsive to negative public comments, meaning that critical sentiment toward the MBG program continues to grow (Yuniarti & Andriza, 2026). From the perspective of policy communication theory, this situation highlights weak coordination across levels of government and the absence of a ‘single source of truth’ that should serve as a reference for all parties (Afriaji, 2026).

The rise in various issues surrounding the implementation of the MBG Program—ranging from cases of food poisoning, the suspension of operations at a number of Nutrition Provision Service Units (SPPGs), criticism of the program’s governance, and allegations of malpractice in the management of partnerships—has triggered a communications crisis that has led to a decline in public trust in the National Nutrition Agency (BGN). This situation indicates that the problems faced by the government are no longer limited to policy implementation but have also developed into an issue of institutional reputation that requires a strategic communication response. In the middle of these circumstances, President Prabowo Subianto dismissed the Head of the National Nutrition Agency, Dadan Hindayana, on June 2, 2026, and appointed Nanik Sudaryati Deyang as his successor. This decision was taken before the Attorney General’s Office named Dadan Hindayana as a suspect in an alleged corruption offence relating to the management of the MBG program.

A leader’s symbolic actions, including the replacement of public officials—in this context, the replacement of the Head of the National Nutrition Agency—form part of a crisis communication strategy to maintain legitimacy, rebuild public trust, and demonstrate that the government remains in control of the unfolding situation (Fawaz, 2026). Swift, transparent, and accurate communication is a key factor in restoring public trust in government institutions (Rozi & Al-Mujtahid, 2026).

This phenomenon is of particular interest for analysis through the lens of crisis communication. Crisis communication is a strategic process aimed at conveying information swiftly, accurately, transparently, and consistently to restore public trust in an organization facing a crisis (Rozi & Al-Mujtahid, 2026). In the context of government, crisis communication serves not only to provide clarification but also to uphold policies’ legitimacy and maintain public trust in state institutions. Thus, political crisis communication is not only directed at responding to public criticism but

also serves as an instrument in building and maintaining the brand image of the leadership (Fawaz, 2026).

This study employs SCCT and IRT as its analytical framework. The SCCT emphasizes the importance of aligning communication strategies with the public's level of attribution of responsibility toward the organization experiencing the crisis (Coombs, 2020). For organizations facing a crisis where the public attributes a high level of responsibility, a '*rebuild*' strategy will be more effective than a 'deny' strategy (Ghea Aurelia Ardy Ugahari & Riski Apriliani, 2025).

Furthermore, in analyzing how the government rebuilds the MBG program's image, this study also uses the IRT developed by Benoit. IRT can serve as a framework to explain various reputation recovery strategies following an organizational crisis. These strategies include denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (Coombs, 2020). IRT identifies five broad categories of strategies for restoring a damaged reputation: *denial*, *evasion of responsibility*, *reducing offensiveness*, *corrective action*, and mortification (Coombs, 2020).

In practice, government organizations in Indonesia tend to use the strategies of *corrective action*, *defeasibility*, *good intentions*, and *bolstering* more frequently when managing crises, as was the case with the 2024 data breach at the Temporary National Data center (PDNS) (Febriandy & Wahyutama, 2025). Conversely, the strategies of '*denial*' and '*Mortification*' are relatively rarely used by the government as they are deemed to have political consequences for its image; consequently, the government tends to avoid making explicit apologies even while facing a reputational crisis (Yogie Alwatan, 2023).

In addition to the modern crisis communication perspective, this study employs Islamic communication ethics. In Islam, communication must prioritize the principles of *qaulan sadidan*, *qaulan ma'rufa*, *qaulan maysura*, and *qaulan layyinan*, ensuring that the information conveyed is honest, courteous, easy to understand, and responsible (Najmuddin Azhar et al., 2023). Crisis communication grounded in Islamic values can strengthen an organization's credibility when facing negative issues, particularly in the digital age, which is rife with disinformation (Islam et al., 2025)

Several previous studies have examined government communication regarding the Free Nutritious Meals program (MBG) from various perspectives. Fawaz's (2026) study highlighted President Prabowo's communication strategies in maintaining

public trust amid the controversy surrounding the MBG Program's implementation. Meanwhile, Afriaji (2026) examined the role of government policy communication in building public legitimacy for the program. Sulafasyah and Arianto (2026) analyzed the dynamics of communication regarding the MBG food poisoning case through social media networks as a space for the formation of public opinion. These three studies indicate that communication issues within the MBG program have received academic attention, whether from the perspectives of political communication, policy communication, or digital communication.

Nevertheless, these studies have not specifically addressed the government's crisis communication strategies following the MBG program's implementation crisis, which was marked by a change in leadership at the BGN. Furthermore, previous studies have tended to focus on efforts to build policy legitimacy, manage public opinion, or analyze communication dynamics on social media; consequently, they have not comprehensively integrated an analysis of crisis response strategies and organizational reputation recovery strategies.

Given these gaps, this study offers a novel approach by analyzing the government's crisis communication strategies during the leadership change at the National Nutrition Agency using an integrated framework of SCCT and IRT. The integration of these two theories enables this study not only to identify the crisis response strategies implemented by the government but also to analyze the forms of image repair strategies constructed in media coverage. By employing content analysis of Kompas.id's coverage during the crisis surrounding the implementation of the MBG program, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of research on public sector crisis communication, while also enriching the literature on government reputation recovery strategies in the face of policy crises.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design with an interpretative approach to understand the government's crisis communication strategies in improving the Free Nutritious Meals program (MBG)'s image. The qualitative approach was chosen as it enables the researcher to interpret the meaning embedded in the government's communication narratives in depth, based on the crisis's social, political, and policy contexts. This approach not only identifies the content of the government's communication messages but also explains how these

messages are constructed to safeguard the government's reputation and restore public trust.

Qualitative content analysis using a *directed content analysis* approach is employed. This approach was chosen because the study uses a pre-established theoretical framework as the basis for the coding process, namely SCCT and IRT. *Directed content analysis* is used when research aims to validate or develop existing theories through a categorization process based on theoretical concepts while allowing for the emergence of new categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Qualitative content analysis enables the researcher to systematically identify, categorize, and interpret communication patterns found in textual data, thereby explaining the meaning of communication constructed by actors within an event.

The primary instrument in this study is the researcher (*the 'human instrument'*), who is responsible for collecting, coding, grouping, and interpreting the data. To ensure consistency in the analysis process, a *coding sheet* structured according to SCCT and image repair theory categories was used. The SCCT categories include 'deny', 'diminish', 'rebuild' and 'bolstering', while the IRT categories refer to the 14 image repair sub-strategies developed by Benoit (1995), enabling each data unit to be systematically classified according to the theoretical indicators used in the study.

The research data comprised 30 news articles published by the online media outlet Kompas.id between May 12, 2026, and July 7, 2026. Kompas.id was selected through purposive sampling because it is a national media outlet with high credibility that comprehensively covers public policy. This timeframe represents the escalation phase of the crisis surrounding the Free Nutritious Meals program (MBG), characterized by increasing public criticism, the government's evaluation of the program's implementation, the replacement of the Head of the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) and the temporary suspension of thousands of Nutrition fulfillment Service Units (SPPG). Data collection was carried out using a documentation technique, involving a search for news articles using the keywords 'Free Nutritious Meals Program', 'Head of the BGN', 'BGN Evaluation', 'National Nutrition Agency', and 'SPPG'. The articles were then screened so that only those containing official government statements regarding the crisis handling were selected as units of analysis.

Data analysis was carried out following the stages of qualitative content analysis, namely *preparation*, *organization* and *reporting* (Elo et al., 2014). During the *preparation* stage, all news articles were read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive

understanding of the crisis communication context. The next stage was organization, which involved identifying units of meaning—such as sentences, quotations or narratives—that indicated the government’s communication response to the crisis, followed by an *initial coding* process based on categories from the SCCT and IRT. Each data unit was classified according to the relevant category and then grouped based on shared characteristics to identify patterns in the government’s communication strategies. The frequency of occurrence of each category is also calculated to reinforce the interpretation of dominant communication strategy trends without being intended as a statistical analysis.

This approach is consistent with the characteristics of *qualitative content analysis*, which combines the process of interpreting meaning with the identification of patterns in the occurrence of categories within textual data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The final stage, namely reporting, was carried out by interpreting the results of the categorization to explain the patterns of the government’s crisis communication, the most dominant image-recovery strategies employed, and their contribution to efforts to restore the government’s reputation and maintain public trust in the Free Nutritious Meals program (MBG).

This study employed trustworthiness criteria comprising credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to ensure data validity (Elo et al., 2014). The research’s credibility was maintained through repeated data review and the application of coding categories based on the SCCT and IRT frameworks. *Dependability* was ensured by systematically documenting the entire process of data collection, coding, and analysis, while confirmability was maintained by ensuring that all interpretations were based on empirical data found in the analyzed news reports. *Transferability* is achieved through the detailed presentation of the research context, the characteristics of the data sources, and the stages of analysis, enabling the study to be replicated in similar crisis communication contexts. Transparency at every stage of the analysis, including preparation, organization, and reporting, is a key aspect in ensuring research quality (Elo et al., 2014).

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals that the government implemented various crisis communication strategies to restore the image of the Free Nutritious Meals program (MBG) during a governance crisis triggered by allegations of corruption and various

program implementation issues. Based on a content analysis of 30 news articles from Kompas.id from May 12 to July 7, 2026, it was found that the government's communication strategies were dominated by *corrective actions*, manifested through a change in leadership at the National Nutrition Agency (BGN), a reorganization of governance and the budget, policy revisions, and support for the law enforcement process. Furthermore, the government implemented an image-bolstering strategy by re-emphasizing the primary objectives of the MBG as a program for improving nutrition and tackling stunting. These findings indicate that the MBG program's crisis arising from *governance breakdowns*, integrity issues or internal oversight failures is categorized unequivocally as a 'preventable/intentional crisis. In this type of crisis, the public attributes full responsibility to the government (Liaghatvarz et al., 2026).

Table 1. Kompas.id News Corpus on the Government's Crisis Communication Strategy to Improve the Image of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program, May 12-July 7, 2026

ID	Date	Title
K1	May 12, 2026	16 Months into the MBG Program, KSP Still Finds SPPG Kitchens Not Meeting Standards
K2	May 25, 2026	BGN Claims to Focus on Allocated Budget Management
K3	May 25, 2026	BGN Requests Assistance from the National Police to Tackle SPPG Points Buying and Selling
K4	June 2, 2026	President Prabowo Removes BGN Head Dadan Hindayana
K5	June 2, 2026	Prabowo Removes the Head of the BGN; the Public Hopes MBG Will Be Overhauled
K6	June 3, 2026	Dadan's Removal as Head of BGN Said to Have Been Planned; SPPG Point Trading Allegations
K7	June 3, 2026	Dadan Hindayana Implied in Alleged Corruption in MBG Governance
K8	June 3, 2026	Minister of State Secretary: Raid on BGN Provides an Opportunity to Improve MBG Governance
K9	June 3, 2026	Reasons for the Attorney General's Office Detaining Dadan Hindayana and Two Other Former BGN Heads
K10	June 3, 2026	Formula Milk Distribution Policy Revised, BGN: Avoiding Ambiguity
K11	June 3, 2026	Nanik S Deyang Faces Major Responsibility to Improve MBG Governance

K12	June 4, 2026	Cisdi Says BGN Head Replacement Offers No Guarantees; Nanik S Deyang: Focus on Improving Quality
K13	June 4, 2026	The Attorney General's Office Has Been Investigating Alleged Corruption at MBG Since Early 2026; Viral Criticism Is Also Being Scrutinized
K14	June 5, 2026	Four Policy maneuvers by Nanik, BGN Head: Can They Save MBG?
K15	June 7, 2026	Investigation Continues: Attorney General's Office Hunts for New Suspects in the BGN Corruption Case
K16	June 8, 2026	Nanik S Deyang Appointed as the Head of BGN
K17	June 11, 2026	The MBG Budget and Governance Overhaul
K18	June 12, 2026	Restoring MBG to Tackle 'Stunting'
K19	June 14, 2026	In response to the demands of protesters, the government claims to be implementing the second phase of economic reforms
K20	June 16, 2026	The Trillion-Rupiah Budget and the Shadow of Corruption at BGN
K21	June 16, 2026	MBG Efficiency Measures: A Cut of 8 Million Beneficiaries
K22	June 17, 2026	Controversy over the Temporary Suspension of the MBG Program During School Holidays
K23	June 18, 2026	MBG and SPPG Incentives Suspended for 18 School vacation Days
K24	June 18, 2026	The Attorney General's Office Names One New Suspect, Reveals the Modus Operandi for the Sale and Purchase of MBG Kitchen Units
K25	June 18, 2026	Schools Closed, MBG Kitchen Closes Operations
K26	June 19, 2026	Minister Yusril Receives Student Representatives: Their Concerns Will Be Reported to the President
K27	June 21, 2026	Vice President Gibran Vows to Champion MBG in the 3T Regions
K28	June 26, 2026	MBG Budget Cut from Rp 335 Trillion to Rp 268 Trillion
K29	July 6, 2026	New MBG Scheme finalized Ahead of the Start of the School Year
K30	July 7, 2026	After Three Months Without a Response, BGN Follows Up on KPK's Recommendations Regarding the MBG Program

1. Government's Crisis Communication in Restoring the Image of the MBG Program

An analysis of 30 news articles from Kompas.id, which were coded in relation to the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program, yielded 202 analysis points, which were subsequently categorized according to the four instruments of the SCCT: bolstering, denial, rebuild and diminish. All of these analysis points constitute arguments and action plans from government bodies, the police through the MBG task force, the KPK, and the DPR, reflecting the arena of public crisis communication.



Figure 1. Analysis of the Government's Crisis Communication in Improving the Image of the MBG Program

These statements were analyzed using the SCCT approach and revealed that the government's crisis communication strategy was dominated by the 'rebuild' strategy at 68.32%, followed by 'bolstering' at 21.29%, 'diminish' at 6.44% and 'denial' in 8 instances (3.96%). The dominance of this strategy aligns with the ' ' framework of the SCCT, which calls for managing political turbulence crises through active responses. The 'rebuild' strategy is chosen as an effective strategy, both theoretically and practically, to restore trust in economic and public institutions through concrete actions (action-oriented rebuild) (Liaghatvarz et al., 2026). The dominance of the 'rebuild' strategy indicates that government communication is more oriented toward

restoring public trust through concrete actions than defensive strategies, which focus on organizational learning processes (Schneider, 2024).

Based on these findings, the nature of the crisis identified in media coverage of the MBG program can be categorized as a *'preventable crisis'*—that is, a crisis stemming from internal organizational issues, such as weak governance, allegations of corruption, the buying and selling of SPPG allocation points and weaknesses in program implementation oversight. Theoretically, the characteristics of this internal crisis give rise to a very high level of public blame attributed to the institution (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2021). Within the SCCT framework, organizations employ a *'rebuild'* strategy focused on restoring trust through a commitment to rectifying the situation and concrete actions for crises categorized as *'preventable'* (Ghea Aurelia Ardy Ugahari & Riski Apriliani, 2025).

In the context of the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) program, the *'rebuild'* strategy is evident through the government's communication regarding the replacement of the head of the BGN, support for legal proceedings, restructuring of governance and the budget, policy revisions, and follow-up on recommendations from the KPK. Adopting these concrete measures demonstrates that internal procedure reform is the most effective instrument for restoring public trust during a public sector crisis (Choi et al., 2025). These actions were communicated as a manifestation of the government's commitment to improving the MBG management system to maintain leadership during the institutional crisis.

Furthermore, the *'bolstering'* strategy, which accounted for 21%, indicates that the government sought to refocus public attention on the program's primary objectives following the implementation of various improvement measures. This move to redirect public focus served as a strategy to reframe mass media policy issues. Meanwhile, the *'diminish'* strategy was observed in only 6.44% of cases, primarily when the government provided explanations regarding budgetary efficiency, the temporary suspension of the program during school holidays, and operational policy adjustments. This limited use of the *'diminish'* strategy demonstrates the caution of the government in merely providing contextual clarification without diminishing the organization's level of accountability. As for *'denial'*, this was the least frequently used strategy (3.96%), generally taking the form of an assertion that alleged irregularities were the actions of individuals and did not reflect the MBG program as a whole. This

minimal use of 'denial' served to clarify the limits of institutional authority to isolate the issue from the main system (Fidyariska & Indrashwara, 2026).

Overall, the data distribution indicates that the government's crisis communication places greater emphasis on *the 'rebuild' strategy*, reinforced by 'bolstering', whilst 'diminish' and 'denial' are used only to a limited extent. This strategic constellation agrees with the literature review on crisis communication trends in the digital age, which demands transparent and adaptive responses (Prasetio, 2025). These findings indicate that the government has chosen to rebuild the legitimacy of the MBG program through institutional reform and improved governance, in line with the SCCT's recommendations for managing *preventable crises* to professionalize public communication.

2. Government Strategy for Restoring the Image of the MBG Program

Analysis of 202 data points shows that the government's image-repair strategies in response to the Free Nutritious Meals program (MBG) crisis were dominated by *corrective action* (66.83%), followed by *bolstering* (12.87%), transcendence (7.92%), *simple denial* and *differentiation* (3.96%), *mortification* (1.98%), and minimization (1.49%), while 'good intentions' and 'defeasibility' each accounted for only one finding (0.50%). The strategies of '*shifting the blame*', '*provocation*', '*compensation*', '*attacking the accuser*', and '*accident*' were not identified in the government's communications. The categorization of these image restoration tactics is based on the IRT framework.

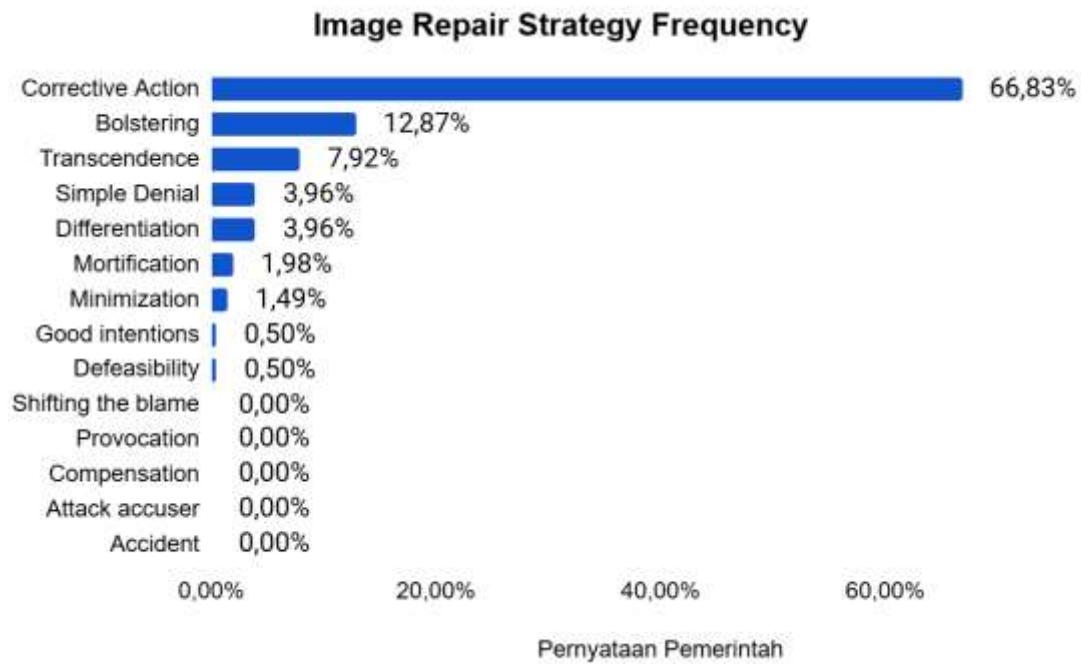


Figure 2. Analysis of MBG Image Restoration Strategies Using the Image Restoration Theory Approach

The predominance of the ‘*corrective action*’ strategy indicates that the government prefers to restore its image through public-observable corrective measures rather than building its image through rhetoric alone (Febriandy & Wahyutama, 2025). This strategy was implemented through a national audit of the SPPG, the temporary closure of kitchens failing to meet standards, the imposition of sanctions for violations, coordination with the National Police and the Attorney General’s Office in law enforcement, the replacement of the Head of the National Nutrition Agency (BGN), the reorganization of the agency’s governance structure, the revision of various technical policies, budgetary efficiency measures, improvements to the distribution system, strengthened oversight, and follow-up on recommendations from the KPK. The adoption of these comprehensive procedural improvements and concrete actions has proven to be the most effective restoration instrument in rebuilding public trust following a public sector crisis (Choi et al., 2025).

In addition, the government has introduced a new scheme for implementing the MBG, refocused the beneficiary groups, strengthened inter-ministerial coordination, and improved the data management system as part of its efforts to prevent the recurrence of the same problems. The implementation of these corrective measures based on systemic improvements agrees with the organizational *learning framework*

for mitigating public dissatisfaction (Schneider, 2024). These findings demonstrate concrete solutions to the crisis, whereby the government sought to demonstrate its commitment to addressing the root causes of the crisis through audits, system improvements, and policy changes.

The *'bolstering'* strategy was the second most frequently used strategy, accounting for 26 findings (12.87%). The government sought to remind the public of the MBG program's strategic benefits in terms of improving nutrition, preventing stunting, developing human resources, ensuring equitable development even in 3T regions and driving the local economy. This reaffirmation of the institution's achievements and positive values serves to counterbalance the public's negative perceptions of the crisis's impact (Jiang et al., 2025). The government also emphasized that leadership changes and evaluation processes would not disrupt the program's continuity, thereby reassuring the public that the MBG's primary objectives would remain intact.

The *'transcendence'* strategy appeared in 16 findings (7.92%) by placing the crisis within a broader context. The government did not merely address the issue of alleged irregularities but also linked the MBG to the national development agenda, economic reform, improving the quality of human resources, tackling *stunting*, strengthening food security, and the efficient management of public finances. Placing the crisis within the framework of these broader national objectives acts as a *reputational* buffer to reunify public opinion (Rachmawati et al., 2026). Through this approach, the government sought to direct public attention toward the strategic value of the program rather than focusing solely on the ongoing governance issues.

The *'simple denial'* and *'differentiation'* strategies were each identified in 8 findings (3.96%). *Simple denial* was used sparingly to correct information deemed factually inaccurate, such as claims regarding the suspension of the MBG Program, the mass distribution of infant formula, or allegations of involvement by specific officials prior to the existence of sufficient legal evidence. These small-scale factual clarifications are important for stemming disinformation spread within a fragmented media landscape (Li, 2025). Meanwhile, *differentiation* is used to distinguish between issues that occur and the substance of the policy; for example, emphasizing that the suspension only applies to the construction of new SPPGs, rather than a complete halt to the program, or explaining that the provision of infant formula is only carried out under specific medical conditions, thereby differing from the narrative circulating in

the public sphere. This differentiation tactic isolates technical issues from the main policy framework so that the crisis does not systematically undermine the legitimacy of the program (Jenia Fidyariska & Cipta Indrashwara, 2026).

The '*mortification*' strategy appeared in only 4 findings (1.98%), primarily through acknowledgment of shortcomings in adherence to operational standards and governance, as well as appreciation for public criticism and feedback. This limited acknowledgment reflects a tendency among non-profit and public institutions to avoid explicit apologies to minimize legal exposure (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2021). However, the government did not issue an explicit apology, but rather emphasized the need for organizational reform.

The minimization strategy was found in only 3 instances (1.49%), namely, when the government explained that budget adjustments or changes to program distribution would not reduce the quality of food or compromise the primary objectives of the MBG. This explanation was intended to rationalize operational constraints without diminishing the organization's level of accountability. This strategy was used to mitigate the negative perceptions of the public regarding the impact of efficiency measures.

Meanwhile, the 'good intentions' and 'defeasibility' strategies each appeared only once (0.50%). The government emphasized that the refocusing of beneficiaries was carried out based on scientific recommendations to improve the effectiveness of nutrition interventions, while the 'defeasibility' strategy was used when the government stated that allegations of misconduct by individuals were still pending the outcome of an investigation and therefore no conclusions could yet be drawn. Conclusions were postponed until the legal process was completed, reflecting a cautious approach to crisis communication within the government sector (Kim & Liu, 2012).

Interestingly, this study found no evidence of the use of the strategies of *shifting the blame*, *provocation*, *compensation*, *attacking the accuser*, or framing *the crisis as an accident*. The absence of these five strategies indicates that the government did not choose to blame other parties, attack its critics, or treat the crisis as an accident beyond its control. This non-confrontational stance shields the organization from the risk of a '*backfire* effect', which could intensify criticism in digital media (Prasetio, 2025). Instead, the government has focused on building communication centered on governance reforms and corrective measures as the primary means of restoring the

Free Nutritious Meals Program's image. These findings indicate that the government's image-restoration strategy is more restorative than defensive, meaning that policy changes, strengthened oversight, and ongoing institutional reforms restore the program's image.

Discussion

1. Government Views the MBG Crisis as a Preventable Crisis

This finding is evident from the predominance of the 'rebuild' strategy in the SCCT, indicating that the government recognizes that the crisis stems from internal governance weaknesses, such as alleged corruption, weak oversight of the SPPG and breaches of operational standards. These conditions place the government at a high level of responsibility attribution, necessitating a communication strategy focused on restoring public trust through concrete actions.

2. Reputation Recovery Achieved Through Corrective Action

The government has focused more on communicating various reform measures than providing clarifications or justifications. These measures include replacing the leadership of the National Nutrition Agency (BGN), a national audit of the SPPG, reorganizing governance and the budget, policy revisions, refocusing beneficiary groups, strengthening the oversight system, and follow-up on the KPK's recommendations. The predominance of a CAS indicates that the government is rebuilding the program's legitimacy through institutional reform.

3. Government Communication Aimed at Restoring Public Focus on the Objectives of the MBG Program

Following the implementation of various corrective measures, the government employed bolstering and transcendence strategies by reaffirming that the MBG is a strategic program aimed at improving public nutrition, reducing stunting rates, enhancing the quality of human resources, and extending the ' ' of services to 3T regions. This strategy separates public perceptions of governance issues from the long-term benefits of the program.

4. Governments Avoid Defensive Communication Strategies

The research findings indicate that strategies such as simple denial, minimization, and defeasibility were used only to a limited extent, whereas shifting the blame, attacking the accuser, compensation, provocation, and accident were not observed. This suggests that the government chose not to blame other parties or attack

emerging criticism, but rather emphasized accountability through organizational reform and system improvements. Thus, the research results demonstrate an alignment between SCCT and IRT, whereby the 'rebuild' strategy is realized through corrective action as the primary approach to restore the image of the Free Nutritious Meals program.

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the government's crisis communication strategy to restore the image of the Free Nutritious Meals program (MBG) through a change in leadership at the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) was dominated by the 'rebuild' strategy within *the Situational Crisis Communication Theory* (SCCT) and 'corrective action' within *the IRT*. These findings address the research objective that the government views the MBG crisis as a preventable crisis; consequently, the communication response is directed toward concrete actions through leadership changes, governance reforms, audits and strengthened oversight of the SPPG, policy revisions, and support for law enforcement processes. These strategies were subsequently reinforced through '*bolstering*' and '*transcendence*' by reaffirming the MBG's strategic benefits as a program for improving nutrition and human resource development. These findings demonstrate that the integration of SCCT and IRT explains that the restoration of the government's image during a PPC is more effectively achieved through alignment between communication and institutional reform than through defensive strategies.

The implications of this research emphasize that the government's crisis communication must be developed in an integrated manner with governance reforms, information transparency, and accountability mechanisms to restore and maintain public trust in national strategic policies. Therefore, the government must make corrective actions an integral part of its crisis communication strategy, rather than merely providing clarifications to the public. This study is limited to an analysis of Kompas.id's news coverage during a specific crisis period; consequently, further research is recommended to utilize a more diverse range of data sources, such as social media, government documents and interviews with stakeholders, while combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to assess the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies on levels of public trust.

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