NATIONAL NUTRITION AGENCY'S RESPONSE TO THE FREE NUTRITIOUS MEAL PROGRAM POISONING (CONTENT ANALYSIS ON BGN.GO.ID)

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Abstrak
Penelitian ini bertujuan mengungkap bagaimana Badan Gizi Nasional (BGN) mengomunikasikan langkah-langkah penanganan krisis, membangun citra tanggung jawab publik, serta menegakkan akuntabilitas kelembagaan di tengah tekanan sosial akibat kasus keracunan Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG). Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode analisis isi (*content analysis*) dan berlandaskan *Situational Crisis Communication Theory* (SCCT) dari W. Timothy Coombs. Data diambil dari 35 berita, artikel, dan *press release* dari website bgn.go.id yang memuat pernyataan resmi BGN selama September 2025. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi komunikasi krisis yang paling dominan digunakan oleh BGN adalah *justification* (34,29), diikuti *excuse* (22,86%), *reminder* (17,14%), *apology* (11,43%), *compensation* (5,71%), *ingratiation* (5,71%), dan *deny* (2,86%) sedangkan *attack the accuser, spacegoat*, dan *victimage* tidak ditemukan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi dalam pengembangan kajian komunikasi krisis sektor publik, khususnya dalam memahami pola strategi komunikasi lembaga pemerintah dalam merespons krisis program. Temuan ini juga membuka peluang bagi penelitian selanjutnya untuk mengkaji efektivitas strategi komunikasi krisis pemerintah terhadap persepsi publik melalui pendekatan komparatif maupun analisis respons masyarakat di media digital.
Kata Kunci: badan gizi nasional, makan bergizi gratis, SCCT, komunikasi krisis,

Abstract
This study aims to reveal how the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) communicated its crisis management measures, built a public responsibility image, and maintained institutional accountability amid social pressure following the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) poisoning incident. The research employs a quantitative approach using content analysis based on W. Timothy Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The data were collected from 35 news reports, articles, and press releases published on the official website bgn.go.id containing BGN's statements throughout September 2025. The findings show that the most dominant crisis communication strategy used by BGN was justification (34.29%), followed by excuse (22.86%), reminder (17.14%), apology (11.43%), compensation (5.71%), ingratiation (5.71%), and deny (2.86%), while attack the accuser, scapegoat, and victimage were not found. This study contributes to the development of public sector crisis communication studies, particularly in understanding the patterns of communication strategies employed by government institutions in responding to program-related crises. The findings also provide opportunities for future research to examine the effectiveness of government crisis communication strategies on public perception through comparative approaches or analysis of public responses on digital media..
Keywords: national nutrition agency, free nutritious meal, SCCT, crisis communication,

1. INTRODUCTION

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is one of the strategic policies initiated by President Prabowo's administration to address malnutrition, stunting, and unequal access to food among students and low-income communities. This program is expected to serve as a breakthrough effort to improve national nutritional status while simultaneously strengthening community-based food security. Since its launch in early 2025, MBG has attracted widespread public attention for its extensive coverage, reaching thousands of schools and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), and expanding its beneficiary base across various regions of Indonesia. The MBG program operates under the National Nutrition Agency (BGN), an institution committed to ensuring the nutritional well-being of the Indonesian population. The National Nutrition Agency (BGN) is a strategic governmental body established to guarantee adequate nutrition for all segments of society. The agency is dedicated to improving quality of life through the implementation of systematically designed, evidence-based, and measurable programs (bgn.go.id, 2024).

However, as the program was implemented, various reports of mass food poisoning allegedly stemming from meals provided under the MBG (Nutritious Meal Program) began to emerge, particularly in September 2025. Data released by the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) showed a sharp increase in poisoning cases that month, with several regions, including West Java, Central Java, and South Sulawesi, recording the highest incidence rates since the program's inception. According to Nanik, Deputy Head of the National Nutrition Agency, from January to September 2025, there were 70 reported poisoning incidents affecting 5,914 MBG recipients (bgn.go.id, 2025). The Center for Indonesia's Strategic Development Initiatives (CISDI) also published data showing the trend of poisoning cases from January to September 2025. As of September 25, 2025, CISDI recorded the number of affected recipients as follows: January (99 children), February (65 children), March (no cases), April (1,226 children), May (397 children), June (10 children), August (1,285 children), and the highest in September with 2,711 children affected (bbc.com, 2025). This phenomenon has drawn significant public concern and raised critical questions regarding the program's effectiveness, food quality control, and the technical preparedness of the implementing institutions.

The situation triggered diverse responses from the public, nutrition experts, health institutions, and civil society organizations. Many called for the government to temporarily suspend the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program, pending a full evaluation of its food supply, distribution, and quality control. The National Nutrition Agency (BGN) is responsible for national nutrition policy and supervision and plays a central role in this context. Globally, governments focus on crisis management, as effective handling aims to prevent and reduce losses to safety, property, stability, and public order (Xue et al., 2022). A study conducted by Afriaji (2026) shows that policy communication plays a crucial role in determining the success of the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program. The effectiveness of communication does not only depend on the delivery of information by the government but also on the extent to which various actors, such as the government, program implementers, schools, parents, and local stakeholders, work synergistically to build shared understanding and public trust in the program.

The responses, statements, and policies issued by BGN became the focal point of public attention, as they were perceived to reflect the government's responsiveness to public food safety concerns and to foster citizens' trust in national programs. The relationship between government transparency, communication effectiveness, and public trust is crucial in times of crisis, as these elements shape governmental responses and efforts to restore public confidence (Huang, 2024). Each crisis has distinct dynamics and levels of urgency depending on its impact, public perception, and the degree of stakeholder involvement. Therefore, institutional leaders are required not only to understand the nature of the crisis but also to adjust the form and intensity of their actions in accordance with the severity of the situation. Furthermore, crises demand varying levels of organizational response, requiring leaders to assess the situation and adapt their strategies accordingly to ensure appropriate crisis response (Liu et al., 2020).

The crisis has social and economic consequences, including declining public participation in government nutrition programs and pressure to suspend or overhaul current policies. This study analyzes the National Nutrition Agency's (BGN) crisis communication strategies during the MBG food poisoning cases via articles, news releases, and press statements published on bgn.go.id. In a public crisis, government institutions must respond promptly (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021), be transparent, and provide factual information to shape public perception and restore trust (Vafeiadis et al., 2020). Using media content analysis, this research examines how BGN communicated crisis management, projected responsibility, and upheld accountability under intense social pressure.

The urgency of this study lies in the importance of understanding how government institutions manage crisis communication in large-scale public programs related to public health. Effective crisis communication not only

determines the success of information management amid public pressure but also plays a crucial role in maintaining policy legitimacy and public trust in government institutions. Therefore, analyzing the crisis communication strategies of the National Nutrition Agency in response to the food poisoning cases in the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program is relevant to provide empirical insights into how governments communicate during public policy crises and to offer references for developing more effective crisis communication strategies in the future.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach and uses the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by W. Timothy Coombs (Setyowati & Purworini, 2023) to analyze strategies adopted by the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) in responding to the food poisoning incident in the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program. The study applies the theory to examine how BGN constructed its crisis communication in the digital public sphere, focusing on articles, news releases, and press statements from September 2025. This research uses a quantitative content analysis method as a systematic way to identify concepts, themes, and interrelationships within texts, while also uncovering implicit meanings and qualitative aspects to produce valid and reliable conclusions (Kurnia et al., 2022). This method was chosen for its ability to objectively examine media content and identify patterns in BGN's crisis communication strategies, as categorized in SCCT: deny, diminish, rebuild, and bolster (Coombs, 2022).

Table 1. SCCT Categories

Categories of Crisis Response Strategies
Deny Strategies
1. *Attack the Accuser:* The organization confronts or challenges the party making the accusation.
2. *Denial:* The organization rejects any involvement or responsibility in the crisis.
3. *Scapegoat:* The organization blames another party as the cause of the crisis.
Diminish Strategies
4. *Excuse:* The organization acknowledges the crisis but asserts that its cause was beyond the organization's control.
5. *Justification:* The organization accepts responsibility while emphasizing that the impact of the crisis is minimal.
Rebuild Strategies
6. *Compensation:* The organization provides restitution or corrective action to those affected by the crisis
7. *Apology:* The organization acknowledges fault and issues a formal apology.
Bolstering Strategies
8. *Reminder:* The organization reminds the public of its past achievements or positive contributions.
9. *Ingratiation:* The organization seeks to gain public sympathy by expressing concern or offering praise.
10. *Victimage:* The organization presents itself as a victim of the crisis.

Source: (Coombs, 2007)

The focus of this study is to analyze the National Nutrition Agency's (BGN) response to the food poisoning incident in the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program, as published on the agency's official website, bgn.go.id. Research data were collected from this online platform during the study period (September 2025) to identify the forms of crisis communication strategies or responses presented on BGN's official website. Based on the data collection process, a total of 62 news articles, reports, and press releases were identified as published in September. However,

not all items were included in the analysis. The researcher selected 35 publications that directly contained statements or responses from BGN regarding the MBG food poisoning case. The selection process employed a non-probability purposive sampling technique, in which news items were chosen based on the study's temporal scope and the relevance of their content to the research objectives.

The validity of the data in this study was established through content validity, ensuring that each coding category corresponded accurately to the dimensions of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Holsti's formula, which measures agreement between coders during the coding process. The results indicated 32 agreements and 3 disagreements, demonstrating high reliability and confirming the data's consistency. Furthermore, the content analysis data were processed using descriptive statistics to determine the frequency with which each crisis communication strategy was employed by the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) in media coverage. The analysis aimed to identify the dominant strategy adopted by BGN. The processed data were presented in the form of frequency levels, bar charts, and cross-tabulations to facilitate the interpretation of the research findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the response strategy of the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) in addressing the food poisoning incident related to the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) as published on its official website, bgn.go.id, during September 2025, the analysis was conducted using a quantitative content analysis approach grounded in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) framework (Haupt, 2022). This theoretical framework was employed to identify and categorize the crisis communication response strategies used by BGN in its online publications.

The first step in the data analysis process involved describing the research findings and presenting the data in a descriptive format. At this stage, the researcher analyzed data that had been previously tested for validity and reliability, then classified it into a frequency distribution to facilitate the observation of

analytical patterns. The study examined 35 news items, articles, and press releases published on BGN's official website during September 2025, all of which directly included the institution's responses to the food poisoning incident in the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG). These materials were categorized into the four main crisis response strategies proposed by W. Timothy Coombs in the SCCT framework: deny, diminish, rebuild, and bolster.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution on bgn.go.id

SCCT Category	Frequency	Percentage
Attack the Accuser	0	0%
Denial	1	2,86%
Scapegoat	0	0%
Excuse	8	22,86%
Justification	12	34,29%
Compensation	2	5,71%
Apology	4	11,43%
Reminder	6	17,14%
Ingratiation	2	5,71%
Victimage	0	0%
Total	35	100%

Source: Researcher's Data

The analysis of the 35 news items published on bgn.go.id indicates that the justification strategy was the most frequently employed crisis response strategy by the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) in addressing issues related to the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) during September 2025, accounting for 34.29% of all responses. This was followed by the excuse strategy (22.86%), the reminder strategy (17.14%), and the apology strategy (11.43%). Meanwhile, the compensation and ingratiation strategies each appeared in 5.71% of the analyzed content. In contrast, the attack, accuser, scapegoat, and victimization strategies were not found (0%) in any of the official BGN publications.

Validity

At this stage, a validity test was conducted to ensure the research instrument could accurately measure data in line with the study's objectives. The validity test evaluates the extent to which the measurement instrument comprehensively represents the concept under investigation and remains consistent with its theoretical meaning.

The type of validity employed in this study is content validity. According to Bushmakin and Cappelleri (2022), an instrument is considered valid if the data it produces accurately represent the concept or phenomenon it is intended to measure. In the process of assessing content validity, the researcher compared the instrument with established theoretical standards recognized by the scientific community. The greater the number of researchers who use and acknowledge the same measurement instrument, the higher its validity (Nuortimo et al., 2024).

This study adopts the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) developed by Timothy W. Coombs (2007) as the main theoretical framework. Based on this theory, there are ten categories of crisis response strategies that serve as the basis for measurement: attack the accuser (attacking the critic), denial (denying the crisis), scapegoat (shifting blame to another party), excuse (minimizing responsibility), justification (legitimizing the organization's actions), compensation (providing compensation to affected parties), apology (issuing an apology), reminder (emphasizing the organization's past achievements or positive aspects), ingratiation (showing concern or flattery toward stakeholders), and victimage (claiming that the organization is also a victim).

These categories served as the basis for coding news articles containing the National Nutrition Agency's crisis responses to the food poisoning incident in the Nutritious Meal Program, as published on the official website bgn.go.id during September 2025.

Reliabilty

The reliability test in this study employed intercoder reliability to ensure consistency between coders. The first coder was the researcher, while the second coder was Azizah Nurhakim. When conducting the reliability test, it is not necessary to test all data; approximately 10% of the analysis units is sufficient. The number of sample units used in this study was calculated using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{(N-1)SE^2 + PQ(N)}{(N-1)SE^2 + PQ}$$

Notes:
- N = Total number of analyzed samples
- SE = Standard Error
- PQ = Expected level of agreement

By inserting the values N = 35 (total number of news articles), P = 0.91, Q = 0.09, SE = 0.03, and Z-value = 1.65, the result of the calculation was 25.75, which was rounded to 26 news articles. This means that, out of the total 35 news articles analyzed in this study, 26 were sufficient to represent the entire dataset for the reliability test, with a 5% margin of error and an intercoder agreement of 91%. This value indicates that the reliability testing was conducted in a representative manner, and the results can be considered methodologically reliable.

Subsequently, the researcher performed the measurement, and the findings are presented as follows:

Table 3. Reliability Test

No	Date	Title	Coder I	Coder II	A/D
1	September 1, 2025	Dorong Perbaikan Operasional MBG, BGN Tindak Tegas Kelalaian SPPG	4	4	A
2	September 3, 2025	BGN dan Satgas Percepatan MBG Tingkatkan Keamanan Pangan di OKI	7	7	A
3	September 3, 2025	BGN Pastikan Penanganan Cepat Insiden MBG di Lombok Barat	6	6	A
4	September 4, 2025	BGN Atur Larangan dan Sanksi untuk Jamin Keamanan Pangan Program MBG	6	6	A
5	September 5, 2025	Tindak Lanjuti Hasil Evaluasi, Operasional SPPG Sukahurip Mulai Stabil	5	5	A
6	September 6, 2025	Terobosan MBG 2025: Anak dengan Alergi Kini Dapat Menu Gizi Khusus	8	9	D

7	September 8, 2025	BGN Catat 7.477 SPPG Operasional, Kejar Target 31.000 Unit Tahun Ini	8	8	A
8	September 8, 2025	Pemerintah Perkuat Jaminan Halal Program MBG, Wujudkan SDM Unggul dan Berdaya Saing	8	8	A
9	September 8, 2025	BGN Luncurkan Platform E-Tracking: MBG Kini Bisa Dilacak Hingga ke Sasaran	5	5	A
10	September 9, 2025	BGN Wajibkan Seluruh SPPG Miliki SLHS	5	5	A
11	September 9, 2025	BGN Wajibkan Fortifikasi di Setiap Menu MBG	5	5	A
12	September 10, 2025	Jalankan Prosedur, Kunjungan ke SPPG Harus Kantongi Izin BGN	4	4	A
13	September 10, 2025	BGN Perkuat Pengawasan SPPG untuk Menjaga Kualitas Penyelenggaraan Program MBG	5	5	A
14	September 10, 2025	Menu MBG Disesuaikan dengan Potensi Pangan Daerah	8	8	A
15	September 11, 2025	Setiap Dua Minggu, SPPG Wajib Laporkan Penggunaan Dana MBG	5	5	A
16	September 11, 2025	Gelar Kegiatan Pengarahan dan Evaluasi, BGN Beri Peringatan Keras bagi Mitra yang Bermain-main	4	4	A
17	September 15, 2025	Distribusi MBG di Purworejo: Inovasi & Kolaborasi Demi Ribuan Anak	8	8	A
18	September 15, 2025	BGN Laporkan 8.018 SPPG Sudah Beroperasi, Anggaran Terserap Capai Rp 15,7 Triliun	8	8	A
19	September 16, 2025	BGN Klarifikasi Isu Lepas Tangan soal Angket MBG di Brebes	2	2	A
20	September 16, 2025	Temuan Ulat di MBG Kabupaten Tolitoli, BGN Tekankan Pengawasan Higienitas SPPG	7	7	A
21	September 16, 2025	Temuan Ulat di MBG Kabupaten Tolitoli, BGN Tekankan Pengawasan Higienitas SPPG	4	4	A
22	September 16, 2025	Karo Kummas BGN: Transparansi Informasi Kunci Kepercayaan Publik pada Program MBG	9	9	A
23	September 18, 2025	Kasus Nasi Basi di Sekolah IT Azkiya, SPPG Akui Kelalaian dan Hentikan Sementara Distribusi MBG	4	4	A
24	September 18, 2025	Dugaan Keracunan MBG, BGN Turunkan Tim Awasi Keamanan Pangan di Banggai Kepulauan	5	5	A
26	September 19, 2025	Isu Pangan Kian Sensitif, BGN Dorong SPPG Perkuat Peran Komunikasi	4	4	A
26	September 20, 2025	BGN Pastikan Penanganan Maksimal Pasien KLB Banggai Kepulauan	7	5	D
	Total			**A=24 D= 2**	
	2M/(N1+N2) = 2(24) / (26 + 26) = 0,92 (92%)				

Source: Researcher's Data

Based on the Holsti formula, the researcher obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.92 (92%). According to established standards, a reliability test result is acceptable if the coefficient exceeds 0.70 (70%). Therefore, the coefficient of 0.92 indicates that the measurement in this study demonstrates high consistency, and the analyzed data can be regarded as reliable and suitable for subsequent analysis.
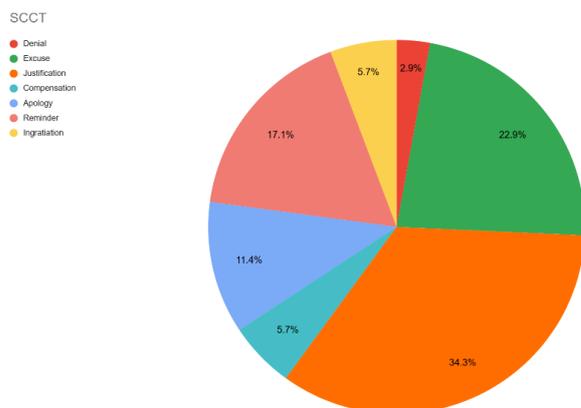
Figure 1. SCCT Diagram of bgn.go.id Source: (Researcher's Documentation)

The crisis stemming from food poisoning cases in the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program over the past few months, peaking in September 2025, has become one of the major issues in Indonesia's public health and policy discourse. The program was originally designed to improve nutritional intake among the population, particularly among schoolchildren, toddlers, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers. However, the occurrence of mass poisoning incidents in several regions has generated public concern regarding food safety and the government's accountability in implementing national programs.

As the primary governmental institution responsible for implementing the program, the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) has a significant responsibility to provide clear explanations and prompt solutions to the public. As a public institution, BGN is not only expected to address technical problems but also to manage public perception so that trust in government programs does not decline. In such circumstances, the organization's crisis communication response becomes a crucial factor in maintaining institutional legitimacy and reputation.

Based on news releases, articles, and official statements published on BGN's website (bgn.go.id), the crisis was not caused by institutional misconduct but by external factors, including field-level negligence, insufficient hygiene supervision, and weak coordination among related parties.

Main Crisis Response Strategy: Diminish

The diminish strategy aims to reduce the perceived severity of a crisis and minimize the organization's responsibility for the incident (Hegner et al., 2016). This type of crisis typically arises from unintentional mistakes or technical failures, which necessitate the use of diminish strategies (Holland et al., 2021) to clarify the causes and lessen the perception of direct institutional blame.

According to the findings, BGN employed two primary diminish strategies: excuse and justification. The excuse strategy is reflected in several statements made by BGN's spokesperson, such as:

"Insiden ini menjadi sebuah refleksi bagi BGN, terutama teman-teman di SPPG agar lebih berhati-hati dan meningkatkan pengawasan serta higienitas MBG. Kami berharap SPPG di seluruh daerah dapat selalu meningkatkan kualitas pengadaan MBG baik dari sisi pengadaan bahan baku, proses pengolahan makanan, hingga keamanan MBG saat dikonsumsi penerima manfaat," (Head of the Legal and Public Relations Bureau of BGN, Khairul Hidayati)

This statement demonstrates BGN's attempt to explain the incident by emphasizing the need for greater vigilance and supervision at the operational level. Rather than placing direct blame on any particular party, BGN frames the crisis as a collective lesson and an opportunity for improvement. Through this approach, BGN seeks to reduce perceptions of institutional fault and redirect public attention toward future corrective measures. This constitutes an excuse strategy, in which the organization acknowledges the problem but frames it as a learning experience that will be addressed through enhanced oversight and program quality improvements.

Meanwhile, the justification strategy asserts that the institution's actions were procedurally correct, thereby positioning the crisis as an operational issue that can be rectified. This can be seen in the following statements:

"Kami tidak ingin ada kompromi terhadap kebersihan dan keamanan makanan anak-anak Indonesia. SPPG yang tidak laik higienis tidak boleh beroperasi sebelum memiliki sertifikat resmi, SLHS bukan sekadar sertifikat administratif. Ini adalah jaminan bahwa

makanan yang keluar dari SPPG benar-benar aman, higienis, dan layak konsumsi," tegas Kepala Biro Hukum dan Humas Badan Gizi Nasional (BGN), Khairul Hidayati.

Both statements indicate that BGN seeks to justify its actions and policies as expressions of its responsibility to ensure the safety and quality of the MBG Program. In this context, BGN underscores that its strict measures against unhygienic SPPG facilities and its intensified supervision efforts are not mere reactions to criticism but integral to its ongoing commitment to maintaining high standards of food and nutrition safety.

By emphasizing the importance of SLHS certification and continuous monitoring, BGN attempts to shape public perception that the institution has already adhered to proper procedures and is acting in the best interests of program beneficiaries. This represents a justification strategy, as BGN does not deny the existence of a crisis but rather seeks to legitimize its response by highlighting that all measures were undertaken correctly, professionally, and in accordance with its responsibility to protect child beneficiaries.

Overall, the diminish strategy reflects BGN's efforts to preserve institutional legitimacy and credibility by foregrounding professionalism, internal evaluation, and regulatory compliance in its crisis response.

Primary Crisis Response Strategy: Rebuild

The rebuild strategy is employed when an organization acknowledges moral responsibility and seeks to repair its relationship with the public through empathy, apology, and compensation. This strategy is appropriate when the organization is perceived as being responsible for the crisis (Hegner et al., 2016). In this case, the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) consistently applied two primary approaches: apology and compensation. Organizations that issue a public apology tend to receive more favorable reputational evaluations after a crisis (Kiambi & Shafer, 2016). Several statements reflected a deep sense of remorse:

"Lalu yang paling penting dari hati saya yang terdalam, saya mohon maaf atas nama BGN, atas nama seluruh SPPG di Indonesia, saya mohon maaf…" (BGN's Deputy Head, Nanik S. Deyang)

"Kami mewakili BGN, menyampaikan permohonan maaf terkait insiden temuan ulat pada MBG di Kabupaten Tolitoli, hingga menyebabkan ketidaknyamanan pada penerima manfaat terdampak. Kami juga turut menyayangkan terjadinya hal tersebut," (Head of the Legal and Public Relations Bureau of BGN, Khairul Hidayati)

These statements demonstrate BGN's open acknowledgment of wrongdoing and its willingness to apologize to the public for the incident. Through such expressions, BGN sought to restore public trust by showing empathy and taking moral responsibility for the affected stakeholders. According to Prahl & Goh (2021), apology strategies accompanied by a commitment to corrective actions can serve as an effective response to crises.

The compensation strategy emerged through BGN's financial and logistical support for victims:

"Badan Gizi Nasional memastikan seluruh siswa yang terdampak sudah mendapatkan penanganan cepat dan kini dalam kondisi baik.." (Head of the Legal and Public Relations Bureau of BGN, Khairul Hidayati)

Through this compensatory measure, BGN demonstrated the government's concrete commitment to providing a rapid response for affected students as a form of moral and institutional accountability. This approach not only assisted in the recovery of beneficiaries but also reaffirmed BGN's seriousness in maintaining public trust and institutional credibility. However, for organizations with a generally positive reputation, compensation strategies can sometimes provoke greater public anger than apologies, as monetary restitution is perceived as inadequate to compensate for the harm suffered (Kiambi & Shafer, 2016).

The combination of apology and compensation illustrates BGN's effort to construct a moral and solution-oriented narrative, portraying the institution as proactive and responsible in managing the crisis rather than evasive or indifferent.

Secondary Crisis Response Strategy: Bolstering

The bolstering strategy complements other crisis response approaches. It is most effective when used as a supporting strategy rather than a

stand-alone tactic, as relying solely on bolstering may cause an organization to appear self-serving and more concerned with image protection than genuine public concern (Park, 2017). Empathy is important in crisis communication because it helps build understanding, allowing messages to be received more effectively by the public(Pinandhita & Saputro, 2024). Therefore, the bolstering strategy helps reinforce an organization's positive image by emphasizing empathy, contributions, and previous achievements

An example of ingratiation is reflected in the following statement:

"Kami ingin memastikan bahwa setiap anak, tanpa terkecuali, bisa menikmati manfaat dari program MBG. Tidak hanya sekadar kenyang, tetapi juga sehat, aman, dan sesuai dengan kondisi tubuh mereka," (Head of the Legal and Public Relations Bureau of BGN, Khairul Hidayati)

"Kami ingin pelaksanaan MBG berjalan transparan dan berkualitas. Karena itu, masyarakat diberi ruang untuk menyampaikan aduan maupun masukan, untuk memudahkan, kami menyediakan dua nomor yang bisa dihubungi, yakni 088293800268 (Operator 1) dan 088293800376 (Operator 2). Setiap laporan akan diverifikasi dan ditindaklanjuti sesuai mekanisme yang berlaku," (BGN's Deputy Head, Nanik S. Deyang)

These statements highlight BGN's attempt to build a positive image by emphasizing care and openness toward the public. Through its commitment to addressing children's nutritional needs and providing accessible communication channels, BGN positioned itself as a responsive and empathetic institution. This aligns with the ingratiation strategy, which seeks to gain public favor through empathy and service-oriented communication.

Meanwhile, the reminder strategy was employed to draw attention to BGN's prior achievements:

"Progres capaian Badan Gizi Nasional sampai hari ini, alhamdulillah hari ini sudah tercatat ada 8.018 Satuan Pelayanan Pemenuhan Gizi yang sudah beroperasi. Ini bertambah kurang lebih 565 dibandingkan per tanggal 8 September, minggu lalu. Dan ini sudah mencakup di 38 provinsi, di 509 kabupaten, dan juga 7.022 kecamatan" (Dadan Hindayana,

Head of the National Nutrition Agency)

This statement functioned as a counter-narrative, balancing negative public perceptions with the institution's record of success. By reminding the public of its prior accomplishments, BGN aimed to frame the incident as an isolated event that does not negate the broader achievements of the national program.

Secondary Crisis Response Strategy: Deny

The deny strategy involves rejecting allegations or shifting blame to other parties. Although inherently riskier, BGN selectively employed this approach to demonstrate firmness and clarify misinformation. The denial strategy can be observed in the statement:

"Informasi yang beredar seolah-olah BGN lepas tangan, adalah tidak benar…" (Regional Coordinator (Korwil) of BGN Brebes Regency, Arya Dewa Nugroho)

Through this statement, BGN sought to refute public accusations of negligence while correcting misconceptions within the community. This reflects a narrative clarification effort aimed at safeguarding the institution's reputation and ensuring accurate public understanding of the situation.

These findings challenge the core assumptions of Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which posits that organizations should select response strategies based on the attribution of responsibility (Link, 2021). According to Coombs, if a crisis is caused by organizational error (a preventable crisis), the most appropriate response strategy is rebuild through apology and compensation rather than diminish.

However, the data reveal that the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) predominantly employed a diminishing strategy, even though the food poisoning crisis can be objectively classified as preventable due to supervisory negligence. This indicates that the governmental organizational context operates under different dynamics from commercial organizations, which serve as the foundational basis of SCCT. Unlike private corporations with clearly defined hierarchies, public programs such as the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) involve multiple layers of governance

(central BGN, local governments, SPPG, and schools), making responsibility attribution more complex. Within this context, the use of the diminish strategy may represent a more pragmatic response, reflecting the actual complexities of program implementation.

In contrast to private companies, which can suspend or recall faulty products, government programs such as MBG must continue to operate, as they directly affect public welfare. Therefore, the justification strategy serves not only as a defensive mechanism but also as an effort to maintain public support and ensure program continuity. If BGN were to employ excessive apology strategies, it could create the impression that the MBG program is a total failure, potentially threatening its continuity.

The Dominance of Diminish Strategy: Efforts to Maintain Institutional Legitimacy

The finding that the justification strategy was the most dominant (34.29%) suggests that BGN prioritized maintaining institutional legitimacy over expressing remorse. This is consistent with Coombs' (2007) argument that public institutions tend to adopt justification strategies when crises arise from external operational factors rather than from structural deficiencies within the organization.

The high frequency of justification use indicates that BGN sought to frame the narrative that the poisoning incident was not a systemic failure of the MBG program but rather an operational lapse at the field implementation level (SPPG). By emphasizing the importance of SLHS certification and rigorous supervision, BGN attempted to construct the perception that the agency adhered to established standards, thereby reducing its attributed responsibility for the crisis.

However, the dominance of this strategy also entails potential risks. According to Hegner et al. (2016) excessive reliance on diminish strategies may lead to the perception that an organization is avoiding full responsibility and is more concerned with protecting its image than addressing victims' interests. In the context of a food safety crisis involving children, the public tends to expect a stronger acknowledgment of responsibility and concrete corrective actions rather than procedural justifications.

Rebuild Strategy: Moral and Reputational Recovery

Although the apology strategy appeared in only 11.43% of instances, the apology statement delivered by BGN Deputy Head Nanik S. Deyang demonstrated a notable acknowledgment of error, "kesalahan juga terbesar adalah pada kami, di mana kami berarti masih kurang lagi pengawasannya." This statement exemplifies an effective rebuild strategy, as it conveys empathy, moral responsibility, and a commitment to improvement. Penelitian Prahl & Goh (2021) argue that apologies accompanied by promises of corrective action can be among the most effective strategies for restoring public trust. In BGN's case, the apology was accompanied by compensation measures, such as immediate medical care for affected students, reflecting consistency between words and actions.

It is important to note that the compensation strategy appeared in only 5.71% of cases, a relatively low proportion compared to other strategies. This raises questions about BGN's seriousness in providing adequate restitution to victims. Kiambi & Shafer (2016) caution that for organizations with established reputations, insufficient compensation may trigger greater public outrage, as monetary gestures are often perceived as inadequate substitutes for children's health losses and psychological trauma. In this context, BGN's compensation strategy appears to be more symbolic (demonstrating concern) than substantive (providing adequate compensation).

Bolstering Strategy: Balancing Negative Narratives

The use of reminder (17.14%) and ingratiation (5.71%) strategies reflects BGN's attempt to balance negative narratives with positive portrayals of the MBG program. Statements highlighting the operation of 8,018 SPPGs across 38 provinces functioned as counter-narratives, suggesting that the poisoning incident was an isolated anomaly within an otherwise successful program.

This aligns with SCCT's assertion that bolstering strategies can strengthen an organization's positive image when used to complement other strategies (Park, 2017). Nevertheless, such strategies must be applied

cautiously to avoid perceptions that the organization is diverting public attention from the core issue. In the context of a food safety crisis, the public generally expects a focus on resolving the problem rather than on promoting institutional achievements.

This study has limitations because the data analyzed only come from official statements, articles, and press releases published on the BGN website and focus solely on the September 2025 period. As a result, the findings primarily reflect the institution's perspective and do not fully capture the broader dynamics of BGN's crisis communication strategies during the implementation of the MBG program. Therefore, future research could expand the data sources, for example by analyzing public responses on social media or media coverage to evaluate the effectiveness of government crisis communication strategies in building public trust.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the analysis of news articles, press releases, and official statements issued by the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) during the food poisoning crisis in the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in September 2025, this study finds that BGN employed a combination of crisis communication strategies consistent with the framework of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The most dominant strategies were diminish and rebuild, indicating that BGN attempted to reduce perceptions of institutional responsibility while simultaneously demonstrating empathy and accountability through public apologies and corrective actions. Additional strategies such as bolstering and deny were also used to balance negative narratives and reinforce the institution's credibility during the crisis.

These findings suggest that crisis communication in public programs requires strategies that not only focus on protecting institutional reputation but also emphasize rebuilding public trust. However, since this study focuses only on BGN's official communications during September 2025, future research could expand the data sources by analyzing public responses on social media or media coverage to evaluate the effectiveness of

government crisis communication strategies in shaping public perception and trust.

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