

PUBLIC TRUST AND DIGITAL GOVERNANCE: SOCIAL MEDIA SENTIMENT ON INDONESIA'S FREE NUTRITIOUS MEAL PROGRAM

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Abstract

This study examines public sentiment, communication governance, and policy implementation of Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program, focusing on Surabaya as a national pilot area. Using a mixed-method approach, the research combines social media sentiment analysis and qualitative interviews. A total of 476,859 social media conversations collected between February and March 2025 were analyzed using the BERT model. The findings show that 52.4% of responses were negative, 32.3% neutral, and 15.2% positive. Negative sentiments mainly relate to delayed wage payments, food safety concerns, and transparency issues, indicating communication gaps and declining public trust. Meanwhile, positive sentiments emphasize support for improving children's nutrition, family welfare, and social equity. The implementation of MBG in Surabaya reflects a centralized yet participatory governance model. Coordination between the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) and local governments is essential but constrained by limited resources and uneven kitchen readiness. Schools and parents demonstrate strong support for the program. Additionally, the Simanis Application supports monitoring and evaluation, reflecting the adoption of digital governance principles that enhance transparency and accountability. Overall, effective communication, coordination, and community participation are crucial for strengthening public trust and ensuring the sustainability of the MBG program.

Keywords: *Public Trust, Social Media Analysis, Digital Governance, MBG*

INTRODUCTION

The Free Nutritious Lunch Policy, also known as *Makan Bergizi Gratis* (MBG), implemented by the Indonesian Government, represents a strategic step toward improving public nutrition and reducing stunting rates. This program is designed to provide free nutritious meals to vulnerable groups such as schoolchildren, toddlers, and low-income families, with the aim of enhancing long-term health outcomes and food security. Similar programmatic approaches in other countries have shown that well-designed and effectively managed school meal programs can positively impact children's nutritional status and academic performance (Abadi et al., 2025). In today's digital era, social media has become a primary platform for disseminating public information as well as a space for citizens to express opinions and debate public policies. Social media content analysis allows researchers to identify public sentiment, dominant issues, and potential misinformation that may influence the legitimacy and acceptance of policy programs. Recent studies on sentiment analysis in the Indonesian context highlight the growing adoption of transformer-based models (e.g., BERT/IndoBERT) and hybrid methods to address the code-mixed and contextual nature of the Indonesian language, making social media analysis increasingly reliable for capturing the nuances of public opinion (Ma'aly et al., 2024). From a methodological perspective, social media analysis is understood as a systematic and structured approach to collecting, managing, and analyzing digital data derived from various social media platforms. This approach encompasses data collection processes through mechanisms such as Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), RSS feeds, and web parsing techniques, with the collected data subsequently stored in both structured and unstructured databases. The processed data are then examined using multiple analytical approaches, including opinion and sentiment analysis, topic and trend analysis, as well as social network analysis to identify interaction patterns and information diffusion. The analytical methods applied may include statistical

analysis, sentiment analysis, content analysis, and trend analysis, either independently or in combination, to generate a comprehensive understanding of public opinion dynamics in the digital sphere (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). This methodological framework is particularly relevant to the study of the Free Nutritious Lunch (MBG) policy, as it enables systematic evaluation of public perceptions, dominant issues, and societal responses to government policy communication based on large-scale digital data. The urgency of this study stems from the fact that the government's mode of communication and the public's reception and interpretation of policy messages in the digital sphere directly affect the success of the Free Nutritious Lunch (MBG) program. Recent cases, such as food safety incidents and viral public discussions on social media, underscore the importance of evaluating policy communication and public responses in real time to ensure acceptance and sustainability of the program (Maulana & Arroyan, 2025). Furthermore, studies on collaborative governance and the challenges of implementing nutrition programs highlight several critical issues, including budget limitations, supply chain complexity, food quality management, and inter-agency coordination (Octawijaya et al., 2023; Pambudi, 2025). Prior research has demonstrated that while legislative and policy support exists, on-the-ground success largely depends on effective communication, stakeholder engagement, and continuous monitoring of public responses across digital platforms (Bailey & Okoduwa, 2025).

Big-data-based quantitative methods (e.g., collection of comments from X/Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube) and sentiment analysis using BERT/IndoBERT models or hybrid architectures have proven effective in classifying public opinion (positive, neutral, negative) and conducting aspect-based sentiment analysis to identify specific issues (food quality, budget transparency, food safety). Recent studies recommend fine-tuning transformer models on local Indonesian corpora and/or employing hybrid approaches to improve analytical accuracy (C.-H. Lin & Nuha, 2023). On the qualitative side, in-depth interviews with stakeholders (local governments, program implementers, health/nutrition workers, school principals, and parents/beneficiaries) remain essential for capturing perceptions, implementation experiences, operational barriers, and local interpretations that are not always visible in quantitative analyses. Mixed-method studies integrating quantitative (social media) and qualitative (interviews) findings, such as Subekti et al. (2025), emphasize the role of social media disinformation and its implications for public discourse—an issue highly relevant to the MBG program.

Theoretically, this study broadens policy communication perspectives in the digital era by positioning social media as a key arena for shaping public opinion. It strengthens policy communication theory by showing how digital government strategies influence public perception and policy legitimacy, emphasizing that program effectiveness depends not only on policy design but also on the quality of digital interaction and narrative construction. Grounded in strong theoretical and methodological foundations and supported by empirical evidence from recent international and national studies, this research aims to: (1) identify public sentiment toward the MBG policy on social media; (2) analyze the key issues and topics emerging from online discussions; (3) assess the effectiveness of government communication on digital platforms; (4) explore stakeholder and beneficiary perspectives through in-depth interviews; and (5) formulate strategic recommendations to enhance communication, increase public acceptance, and ensure program sustainability. The quantitative approach will rely on social media data collection (via NoLimit Indonesia) and sentiment analysis using BERT/IndoBERT algorithms (supported by methodological literature), while the qualitative approach will employ interviews with key informants to provide contextual insights on implementation and local interpretation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Digital Governance dan E-Governance (Era Kebijakan Digital)

Digital Governance is an evolution of e-government, involving the use of digital technologies to accelerate public service delivery, expand citizen participation, and enhance transparency and accountability. Recent research shows that digital governance is more than merely the digitalization of services; it brings about structural changes in governance (Z. Lin & Yaakop, 2024). In the context of Indonesia, the implementation of digital governance supports the improvement of effectiveness, transparency, and public participation through electronic-based systems; however, it faces challenges related to human resources and system integration (Murdhani, 2025).

2. In Policy Communication in the Digital Era

The digital era, policy communication is no longer one-way; the public simultaneously acts as message producers who influence the broader interpretation of policies. The article Yue & Yu (2025) emphasizes that social media is not merely a channel for disseminating messages, but also an interactive discussion space where the structure of interaction networks shapes public perceptions and opinions toward policies. The study calls for a paradigm shift from passively responding to public sentiment to practicing emotional governance, a proactive

policy communication strategy that seeks to understand public emotions and build emotional resonance within policy messages (Yue & Yu, 2025) .

3. Social Media, Public Opinion, and Patterns of Digital Discourse

Social media analytics has evolved into an essential tool in the study of public opinion and policy communication. It is now widely recognized as a valid data source for understanding public opinion in a broad, real-time, and diverse manner. Meta-analyses in public policy studies further indicate that social media is not merely a communication tool, but also a key component in shaping the public agenda within the policy-making cycle (Salahudin et al., 2023).

METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of public opinion on social media regarding the Free Nutritious Lunch Policy for Schoolchildren (Makan Bergizi Gratis / MBG). In the quantitative phase, social media data were collected through web scraping from X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram using the keyword “Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG)” during the period February 1, 2025, to March 31, 2025. The data were extracted and managed using NoLimit Indonesia. Sentiment analysis was performed using the BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers) algorithm to classify public sentiments (positive, negative, and neutral) and identify dominant discussion themes. The results were visualized through tables and graphs to clearly illustrate public opinion patterns. For data protection and research ethics, all X user accounts were anonymized by replacing usernames with three “X” letters (e.g., @user → @xxx) to ensure user privacy and confidentiality. In the qualitative phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in Surabaya City, including representatives from the Education Office, the City Government, the Department of Communication and Information, and schools that directly benefit from the MBG program. To uphold confidentiality, only the names of institutions were disclosed, without revealing individual identities. Finally, triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of government communication strategies and to formulate policy recommendations for enhancing public engagement, transparency, and communication performance in future social policy programs.

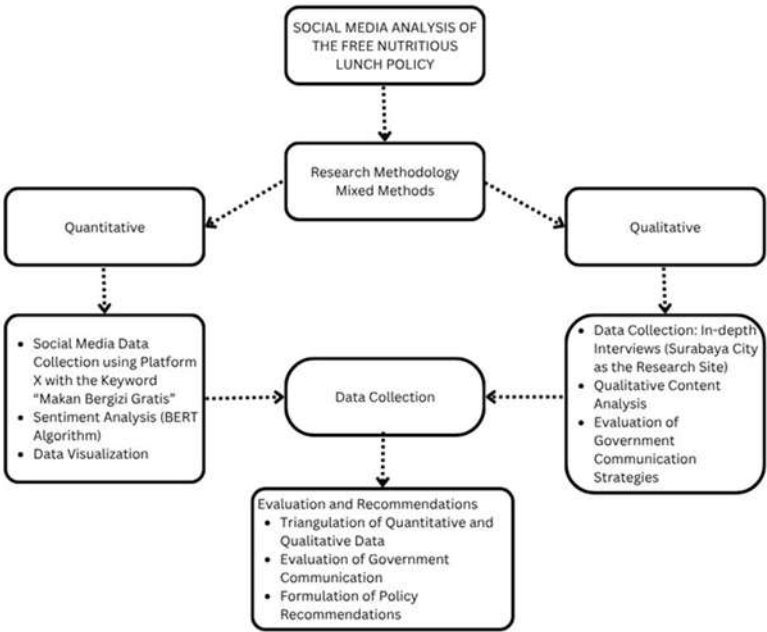


Figure 1. Presents the Presents the research flow of this study
Source: Processed by the research team

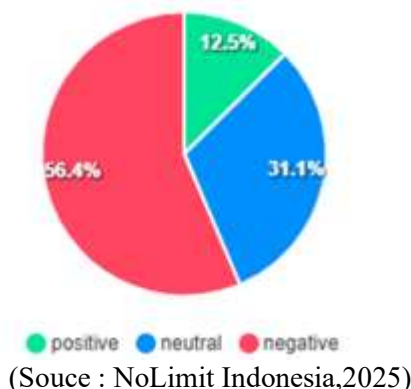
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall Sentiment Result

This study presents results from quantitative and qualitative analyses of public perceptions of Indonesia’s Free Nutritious Lunch (MBG) policy. Quantitatively, public comments on Twitter from February 1 to March 31, 2025,

were collected using the keyword “Makan Bergizi Gratis,” and sentiment analysis with the BERT algorithm classified opinions as positive, negative, or neutral while identifying key discussion topics.

Figure 2. Diagram shows negative, neutral, and positive sentiment.



The graph shows (Figure 3) social media conversation trends from early February to the end of March, tracking conversation volume (blue line) and unique speakers (green line). Conversations peaked at 79,324 in early February, dropped sharply in the second week, and slightly rose to 69,757 in the third week of March, likely reflecting heightened public attention due to policy announcements, media coverage, or statements by public figures. For example, four issues sparked public attention on account X, @xxxldyustiadi, with 58,700 likes and 86,200 engagements. These four issues were:

1. Education and Health as support programs
2. Late payment of MBG employee wages. There was a poisoning case, but a bald buzzer intervened.
3. The 3kg LPG subsidy was delayed, leaving residents struggling to find it, and some even died.
4. Private gasoline supplies ran out for weeks

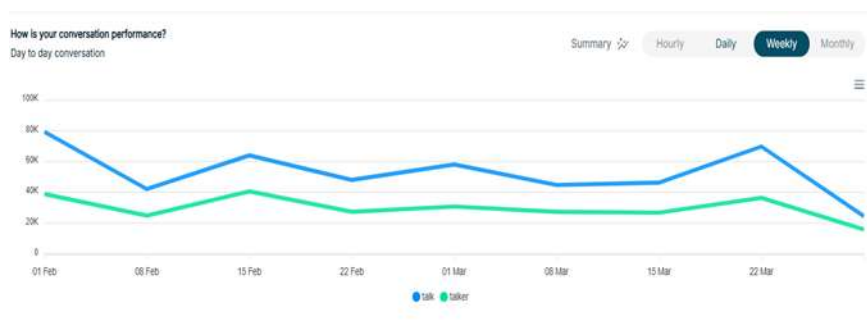


Figure 3. Conversation Performance
(Source : NoLimit Indonesia,2025)

Negative Sentiments in Conversations About MBG

A quantitative analysis of 434,674 social media comments on the MBG policy found 245,259 (56.4%) expressed negative sentiment, highlighting public concern and dissatisfaction. Key issues include wage/payment problems and food poisoning, underscoring the need for responsive communication and targeted interventions. The main negative sentiments identified are as follows:

No	Grup	Like	Share	Engagement
1	Wages/Salaries/Payments	2,2B	792M	3B
2	Poisoning	1,6B	757M	2B
3	Reject MBG	1,1M	493,3K	1,6M
4	Budget	668,5K	284,4K	953,2K
5	Spoiled Food	427K	199,6 K	626,6K
6	School Canteen	383,6K	177,5K	561,1K
7	MBG Menu	34,4K	10,1K	44,5K

Table 1. Negative Sentiment Mapping
(Data processed by the research team, Source: Nolimit Indonesia, 2025)

A quantitative analysis of 434,674 social media comments on the MBG policy found 245,259 (56.4%) expressed negative sentiment, highlighting public concern and dissatisfaction. Negative sentiment reflects dissatisfaction or complaints (Febryanti et al., 2025). Social media analysis on Twitter shows that negative perceptions dominate discussions about the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program, mainly related to seven issues: wages, food safety, program rejection, budget, spoiled food, school canteens, and MBG menus. First, the issue of wages/salaries emerged as the category with the greatest negative sentiment. This reflects public concerns about the unfairness in the distribution of program benefits, particularly for support staff such as cooks, catering providers, and distribution staff who are considered not to receive adequate compensation. This inequality is perceived to weaken the legitimacy of the program because it directly impacts the welfare of implementers in the field. Delays in payments to MBG food provider partners also have a negative impact on social media (Fauziah, 2025). Food poisoning is a major source of negative sentiment, raising concerns about student health and safety. Both actual cases and perceived risks have significantly affected public trust in the MBG program, with social media discussions highlighting its negative impacts and triggering a communication crisis (Fauziah, 2025).

Third, there are issues of resistance to the MBG program, emerging as forms of both political and social opposition. This resistance is not merely about technical implementation but rather reflects ideological debates over the urgency, effectiveness, and policy orientation. This indicates that the MBG has the potential to be politicized, particularly within the context of national and local political contests. Moreover, most of the public has shown limited acceptance of the MBG program (Noviyanti & Putra, 2025) and communities in Papua have also expressed rejection. The next issue, the budget, has also become a focus of criticism. The large allocation of funds for the MBG program is perceived by the public as prone to inefficiency and misuse. Criticism is directed at the possibility that such substantial funds could be better allocated to other sectors such as education, infrastructure, or health. Therefore, fiscal transparency and accountability are key demands. Spoiled food reflects weak distribution governance and limited quality control, while menu issues though smaller in volume impact student perceptions when variations fail to meet nutritional needs or tastes. Additionally, the MBG program risks conflict with school canteen vendors whose livelihoods depend on food sales, leading netizens to view the policy as non-inclusive if local interests are not accommodated.

Positive Sentiment in MBG Conversations

An analysis of public conversations regarding the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program showed 72,584 positive comments, or approximately 15.2% of the total 434,674 conversations. This positive sentiment generally reflects public appreciation for the program's objectives, which are considered capable of supporting schoolchildren's nutritional needs, easing families' economic burdens, and strengthening the state's role in ensuring the welfare of the younger generation. It also refers to tweets expressing support for or acceptance of the policy, or favorable evaluations of the policy (Zulfikar et al., 2023). The positive issues discussed are as follows:

No	Grup	Like	Share	Engagement
1	Support for papua MBG	20,6 M	4,8 M	25,4 M
2	World Attention	20,6 M	4,8 M	25,4 M
3	For Indonesia	16,9 M	3,9 M	20,8 M

Table 2. Positive Sentiment Mapping
(Data processed by the research team, Source: Nolimit Indonesia, 2025)

The data in table 2 shows that positive public sentiment toward the Free Nutritional Meals Program (MBG) is very high. The categories "Support Papua MBG" and "World Attention" both recorded 20.6 million likes, 4.8 million shares, and 25.4 million engagements, while "For Indonesia" received 16.9 million likes, 3.9 million shares, and 20.8 million engagements. This dominance of positive sentiment confirms the social legitimacy of the MBG as a policy relevant to nutritional needs and social justice. Greater support for the Papua category demonstrates the importance of framing marginalized regions, aligning with the findings of (Lawelai & Sadat, 2022), who found that most of the public opinion on the Papua policy was positive. Meanwhile, the World Attention category indicates that the public views MBG as a program that also impacts Indonesia's global image, in line with international studies that show a link between positive public perception and trust in the government (Zuercher et al., 2024). In another study Zuercher et al., (2024) emphasized that a positive image of the quality and nutritional value of the school meal program increases long-term community support and expands participation. This confirms that public legitimacy of MBG is not only a local phenomenon, but also aligns with global patterns where positive public perception is key to

the success of government nutrition programs Several recent national studies, such as Iqbal et al. (2025), also show a similar pattern: public support for the Free Lunch Program tends to be positive, although with concerns about food distribution and quality. Meanwhile Amara et al. (2025), through their public sentiment analysis of the Free Lunch Program study, found that public opinion via social media was largely positive, but implementation and distribution issues persisted. The analysis indicates that positive sentiment constituted the dominant public response, although neutral and negative sentiments were also identified. These findings are supported by Wildan Arif (2025) also supports that the Free Lunch Program policy received public appreciation via Twitter. Meanwhile, the Indonesian Political Indicators survey noted that 77.6% of respondents supported the free nutritious meal program before its full implementation, indicating strong social legitimacy (Kamil & Pratama, 2024). The Free Lunch Program is perceived by society as a strategic initiative that contributes not only to improving children’s nutrition but also to promoting social justice and enhancing Indonesia’s global reputation

Neutral Sentiment in MBG Conversations

Public discourse on the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) policy on social media is not only dominated by positive and negative sentiments but also shows a significant portion of neutral sentiment, reflecting the public’s cautious and observant attitude. The category “MBG Has Not Been Discussed Yet” recorded the highest engagement of 46.5 million, indicating strong attention without emotional reactions. Meanwhile, “The Free Meal Program I Want” (14.3 million) reflects public expectations for the ideal form of the program, “Food Waste” (10.5 million) highlights concern about potential food wastage, and “BPOM Finds Cases of Spoiled Vegetables” (6.7 million) shows public awareness of food safety issues without forming strong negative perceptions.

No	Grup	Like	Share	Engagement
1	MBG has not been discussed yet	41,4 M	5,2 M	48,5 M
2	Three Free Meal Program I Want	11,7 M	2,6 M	14,3 M
3	Food Waste	8,7 M	1,7 M	10,5 M
4	BPOM Finds Cases of Spoiled Vegetables	5,4 M	1,3 M	6,7 M

Table 3. Neutral Sentiment Mapping
(Data processed by the research team, Source: Nolimit Indonesia, 2025)

Based on the data above, public discourse on the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) policy on social media shows that not all discussions are positive or negative. Instead, there is a significant portion of neutral sentiment, reflecting the public’s tendency to wait and observe the policy’s development. The category “MBG Has Not Been Discussed Yet” recorded the highest engagement at 46.5 million, indicating strong public attention without emotional reactions or significant debate. Meanwhile, “The Free Meal Program I Want” reached 14.3 million engagements, reflecting public hopes and preferences regarding the ideal form of the program’s implementation. In addition, the topic “Food Waste” with 10.5 million engagements shows public concern about potential food wastage, though discussions remain rational and informative rather than direct criticism of the policy. Similarly, “BPOM Finds Cases of Spoiled Vegetables” with 6.7 million engagements reflects public awareness of food safety issues without generating broad negative perceptions. Overall, these findings indicate that public discussions around MBG remain neutral and informative, as people tend to observe, await concrete implementation, and evaluate the policy based on factual developments. This situation provides an opportunity for the government to strengthen transparent and educational public communication so that neutral sentiment can be guided toward positive support for the program’s implementation

City Regional Government Communication On Social Media

Instagram and YouTube accounts at both the school level and the Surabaya City Education Office have been used to communicate the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) policy. Interview evidence from the Surabaya City Education Office, SD Negeri Karah 1, and SMP Negeri 36 Surabaya indicates a decentralized communication pattern, where schools function not only as implementers but also as communicators. This configuration is consistent with recent findings that local-government social media becomes more effective when it simultaneously serves information needs and citizen-facing service/participation functions, which then shapes satisfaction and compliance-related outcomes (Chen et al., 2024)

Every social media post from both the Surabaya City Education Office and individual schools is monitored by the Surabaya City Department of Communication and Information (Diskominfo). For public complaints and

citizen feedback, the Sapawarga application is used as the main channel (Interview with the Surabaya City Education Office). This mirrors contemporary digital participation research showing that complaint/feedback tools and e-participation platforms can strengthen two-way flows (citizen → government), but their accountability value depends on whether they also support transparency and monitoring information for users (Shin et al., 2024). The study identified challenges in information dissemination related to the MBG program. Since its implementation in January 2025, Diskominfo has not had access to contact information for formally designated spokespersons or authoritative sources responsible for communicating MBG related information to the media (Interview with Diskominfo). Within the context of government communication on social media, the absence of clearly institutionalized communicative authority can undermine message coherence and weaken strategic consistency across platforms. This issue is further exacerbated in multi-actor communication environments, where multiple institutions such as government agencies and individual schools simultaneously generate and disseminate policy-related content, increasing the risk of fragmented messaging and reduced public-service orientation (Reveillac & Boomgaarden, 2025).

Furthermore, the research revealed a strong demand for transparency from parents, particularly regarding the publication of daily MBG menus (Interview with parents of SDN Karah 1 Surabaya students). This demand can be read as a trust mechanism: recent experimental evidence suggests that being informed that government discloses information, especially performance-related disclosure, can increase public trust, but the effect varies by citizens' prior attitudes toward transparency. In the MBG case, parents' insistence on routine menu disclosure indicates that transparency is not "nice to have," but a credibility condition for ongoing support (Ripamonti, 2024). Finally, these dynamics should be situated within wider research on social media and institutional trust in the region: social media can both enable engagement and simultaneously intensify skepticism toward formal institutions depending on how citizens use these platforms and how institutions respond. This reinforces why responsiveness (via Sapawarga) and routine transparency (menus, nutritional standards, sourcing) matter as trust-stabilizing practices in day-to-day policy implementation communication (Parr, 2025). Overall, the findings demonstrate that policy communication extends beyond the mere transmission of technical information and is intrinsically connected to the cultivation of public trust in the government's commitment to the effective implementation of the MBG policy. Consistent with recent scholarship, government communication on social media requires a careful balance between public service delivery, citizen engagement, and platform-specific dynamics. In this context, coordination across institutions, the presence of clearly defined spokespersons, and sustained transparency emerge as critical components of communicative legitimacy (Reveillac & DePaula, 2025).

Implementation of MBG in Surabaya City

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program in Surabaya began with a socialization campaign in July 2024 as part of the policy preparation phase under the leadership of Minister Nadiem Makarim. The program was designated as a national pilot project in four regions, including Surabaya and Bogor, with its official launch held on July 24, 2024, through a partnership with Gojek Gotopedia's CSR initiative. During the launch event, several high-ranking government officials were present, including the Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia, Mr. Prabowo Subianto, accompanied by the Governor of East Java, Mrs. Khofifah Indar Parawansa, the East Java Regional Police Chief, and representatives from the Surabaya City Government. The visit took place at SDN Kelampis Ngasem 1 Surabaya, which served as the symbolic site marking the beginning of the MBG program's regional implementation and outreach activities.

Based on interviews with the Surabaya City Education Office, the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program in Surabaya underwent an institutional restructuring in January 2025, when the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) was appointed as the main authority responsible for managing all program activities nationwide. Prior to the enforcement of this policy, on January 14, 2025, representatives from BGN visited Surabaya to conduct coordination and formally hand over the implementation responsibilities. At the initial stage, the MBG program in Surabaya was implemented in two pilot districts, Wonokromo and Rungkut. The local implementation was supported by the East Java Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG), which provided technical guidance and ensured the smooth execution of the policy in the field. These findings indicate an institutional transition process and the strengthening of vertical coordination between the central and local governments in implementing the national nutrition policy (Interview with the Surabaya City Education Office).

No	Level	Number of Institutions	Number of student
1	Kindergarten	10	617

2	Elementary School	16	6.873
3	Junior High School	7	4.695
4	Senior High School	6	5.214
5	Vocational High school	3	1.438
6	Special school	1	91
Total		43	18.928

Table 4. Number of students at schools benefiting from the MBG.

Source: Surabaya City Education Office (August,2025)

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program in Surabaya City is still uneven, influenced by the central BGN's decision and the readiness of MBG kitchens (Surabaya City Education Office, 09-08-2025). This aligns with, Febryanti et al. (2025) who found that the program's initial implementation in Malang Regency was based on regional surveys, with SDN 3 Kepanjen chosen for its proximity to the public kitchen and its students' lower-middle economic background. Field observations in SD Negeri Karah 1 and SMP Negeri 36 Surabaya revealed positive responses; SD Karah 1 had previously run a parent-managed lunch program, and both schools through principals, parents, and MBG coordinators expressed satisfaction and enthusiasm toward the MBG initiative.

In the perspective of George C. Edward III's policy implementation theory, the success of policy implementation is determined by four main variables: communication, resources, disposition of implementers, and bureaucratic structure. Based on field findings, the aspect of communication between the central and local governments has been conducted through a coordination mechanism, yet it has not been fully effective due to differing understandings in the technical implementation at the field level. In terms of resources, the readiness of facilities such as MBG kitchens and implementing personnel is a crucial factor influencing the successful distribution of nutritious meals in schools. The disposition of implementers shows a positive tendency, as indicated by the enthusiasm of school principals, parents, and MBG coordinators in schools such as SD Negeri Karah 1 and SMP Negeri 36 Surabaya, who view the program as a positive policy supporting students' nutritional well-being. Meanwhile, the bureaucratic structure aspect reflects ongoing institutional adaptation, particularly with the establishment of the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) as the main authority, which aims to strengthen vertical coordination across levels of government. Overall, the implementation of the MBG program in Surabaya illustrates the institutional transition dynamics and the strengthening of interactor coordination within the framework of national public policy. According to Edward III's model, the main challenges lie in the synchronization of policy communication, availability of supporting resources, and reinforcement of implementers' commitment at the local level. Thus, the success of the MBG implementation in Surabaya depends not only on the central government's policy design but also on the adaptive capacity of local governments in managing an effective and equitable implementation process for all students.

Governance

To understand the technical implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) policy, researchers interviewed program managers at SD Negeri 1 Karah, Surabaya City, and SMP Negeri 36, Surabaya City, and observed the implementation governance. In an in-depth interview with the Principal of SD Negeri 1 Karah and the MBG Coordinator of SMP Negeri 36, they stated, "We have prepared a TEAM for field implementation, starting from the arrival of the SPPG until the distribution to students." This statement was reinforced by the Surabaya City Education Office, which explained, "The kitchen sends meals according to the number of beneficiary students recorded in each kitchen. The first delivery session is conducted at 8:30 a.m. for the schools scheduled for that session. After that, a second delivery session takes place at 12:00 p.m. for schools that were not covered in the first round. Thus, the first delivery is made, followed by the second. We have also instructed schools to develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for handling beneficiaries; each school has its own standard SOP."

In addition, the Health Office has established specific standards, namely that MBG meals must be consumed no later than four hours after being cooked, and a team from the Health Office conducts weekly inspections of the cleanliness of the SPPG kitchens.



Figure 4. Field implementation and distribution of free nutritious lunches (MBG)
(Documentation in SMPN 36 Surabaya City)

From the perspective of governance theory, the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) policy in Surabaya City represents a model of centralized governance with strong vertical coordination under the authority of the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) as the primary institution fully responsible for the formulation and execution of the policy. In this governance framework, local government agencies such as the Surabaya City Education Office and the Health Office function as technical implementers and administrative intermediaries, ensuring that national directives are carried out in accordance with established operational standards. Although the policy is centralized in nature, its implementation practices reflect the principles of good governance, including intergovernmental coordination, transparency, and accountability. This is demonstrated through an integrated working mechanism among BGN as the national policymaker, the Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG) as the technical executor of meal distribution, and local governments and schools as the receiving and supervisory entities. For instance, the development of school-level Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), the quality supervision conducted by the Health Office, and the delivery scheduling system managed by the Education Office illustrate a well-structured multi-actor coordination within BGN’s overarching responsibility. These findings are consistent with Suprpto et al. (2025), who highlight that MBG’s success depends on effective vertical coordination and clear authority distribution between central and local governments. The Surabaya case illustrates an adaptive hierarchical governance model—nationally directed by BGN but reliant on communication synchronization, resource availability, and local governments’ adaptive capacity to ensure transparent and equitable implementation.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Based on the research team's documentation and field observations, as presented in the following table:

Supporting Factors	Inhibiting factors
Central Government Policy	Human resources
Local Government	Governance
Policy	MBG Menu

Table 5. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for MBG Implementation.
Source: Processed by the Research Team, 2025

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program in Surabaya City is supported by several enabling factors, including policy legitimacy from the central government, support from local authorities, and a collaborative commitment across institutions. These elements strengthen public trust and ensure that operational standards for food distribution are properly maintained at the school level. However, several inhibiting factors continue to affect the program’s overall effectiveness, particularly those related to human resources, governance mechanisms, and menu management. In terms of human resources, the limited number and technical capacity of field implementers often influence both the timeliness of meal distribution and the quality of the food served. Regarding governance, inter-agency coordination remains a challenge, especially in communication between the National Nutrition Agency (BGN), the Education Office, and participating schools. Another significant challenge lies in menu management. As highlighted by Widyasari et al. (2025) menu variety and its alignment with children’s nutritional needs are frequently debated among schools and parents. A lack of variety is perceived to reduce student consumption, while certain ingredients are questioned for their cultural appropriateness and local acceptability.

Therefore, strengthening human resource capacity, improving governance coordination mechanisms, and enhancing community and parental participation in menu planning adapted to the local context are strategic measures to reduce resistance and improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the MBG program in Surabaya.

Evaluation

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program in Surabaya City reflects the local government's adoption of a digital governance approach in public policy monitoring and evaluation. The Simanis Application functions as an integrated digital supervision and reporting system that enables teachers and MBG coordinators at schools to submit real-time reports, complaints, and incident updates directly to the authorities. This centralized digital mechanism enhances transparency, accelerates decision-making processes, and supports systematic problem resolution during program implementation. In parallel, coordination among implementing actors is strengthened through WhatsApp communication groups, which operate as an informal yet effective platform for daily evaluation, information exchange, and rapid response to operational issues. Field findings further indicate that the Surabaya City Health Office has expressed interest in accessing the Simanis Application to reinforce monitoring capacities and ensure compliance with hygiene and food safety standards, highlighting the potential of digital tools to improve inter-agency collaboration and accountability in nutrition policy implementation.

This digital monitoring model aligns with the perspective of Schultz & Ruel-Bergeron (2021), who emphasize that effective school nutrition programs require comprehensive monitoring systems that include clear indicators, structured reporting mechanisms, and feedback loops to sustain quality implementation. Similarly, Tauhidah et al. (2021) highlight that the success of school nutrition policies relies on multi-component interventions that incorporate digital tools and community participation. In Surabaya's case, the involvement of the City Health Office, which has expressed interest in gaining access to the Simanis platform, further reinforces the monitoring of hygiene and food safety standards consistent with Yunita & Murdani (2023), who found that food hygiene and sanitation monitoring in school environments is a critical factor in maintaining student health and ensuring the sustainability of healthy meal initiatives. Conceptually, this evaluation practice reflects the core principles of good governance, particularly transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. By leveraging digital infrastructure, the local government has shortened bureaucratic chains and improved the effectiveness of coordination among various policy actors from the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) as the national authority to schools and local health offices. Consequently, the Simanis-based evaluation mechanism functions not only as an administrative control tool but also as a collaborative and participatory governance instrument, ensuring that the MBG policy implementation remains adaptive, transparent, and equitable for all school participants.

CONCLUSION

This study examined public sentiment, communication governance, and implementation of Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) policy, with a specific focus on Surabaya City as one of the national pilot areas. Using a mixed-method approach combining sentiment analysis and qualitative interviews, the research revealed that public perceptions toward MBG were predominantly negative (52.4%), followed by neutral (32.3%) and positive (15.2%) sentiments. Negative sentiments largely stemmed from concerns over delayed wage payments, food poisoning cases, and doubts about budget transparency, indicating a communication gap and trust deficit between the government and the public. Conversely, positive sentiments reflected appreciation for the MBG program's objectives in improving children's nutrition, reducing family economic burdens, and promoting social equity. Neutral sentiments demonstrated a wait-and-see attitude, highlighting opportunities for the government to direct public perception through transparent, educational, and responsive communication. The implementation of MBG in Surabaya illustrated both the strengths and challenges of a centralized yet participatory governance model.

Coordination between the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) and local agencies particularly the Education and Health Offices, was essential but occasionally hindered by limited resources, communication inconsistencies, and uneven kitchen readiness. Nonetheless, schools, parents, and local coordinators displayed strong enthusiasm and adaptive capacity in executing the program. Evaluation practices in Surabaya have integrated principles of digital governance through the Simanis Application, enabling real-time monitoring, reporting, and inter-agency coordination. This system has improved policy responsiveness, transparency, and accountability. Overall, the study concludes that the success of the MBG program depends not only on policy design at the national level but also on effective communication, governance coordination, and community participation at the local level. Strengthening human resource capacity, ensuring food safety, and maintaining transparent information flow are key to sustaining public trust and enhancing the program's long-term effectiveness.

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