

DIGITAL-BASED COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN MANAGING STAKEHOLDERS AND RESOURCES: A CASE STUDY OF STUDENT EVENT

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamics of digital-based collaborative communication strategies in the context of student event management, taking the UMB Talks 2024 event at Universitas Mercu Buana as a focused case study. Adopting a descriptive qualitative approach, the research investigates how student-led committees organize internal structures, maintain stakeholder relations, and strategically utilize digital platforms to coordinate complex project-based activities. Data collection involved in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and comprehensive document analysis, engaging student leaders, faculty supervisors, and invited speakers as primary informants.

The findings reveal that digital tools such as WhatsApp and Google Drive significantly enhance the efficiency and responsiveness of communication within a non-permanent organizational setting. These platforms facilitate not only streamlined coordination and documentation but also support transparent decision-making processes and promote active participation from all committee members. Such communication practices reflect the core tenets of Jürgen Habermas’s theory of communicative action, characterized by mutual understanding, rational deliberation, and consensus-oriented interactions.

Moreover, the study formulates a conceptual model of digital collaborative communication, emphasizing structural flexibility, technological adaptability, and deliberative engagement. This model underscores the interplay between social structures and technological affordances, suggesting that effective communication in student-led projects is both a managerial and pedagogical act. The model advances theoretical insights into strategic communication in academic settings and offers practical implications for enhancing project-based learning, particularly in the realm of digital event management. Overall, the study contributes to the growing discourse on the role of communication strategy in empowering student agency, fostering organizational resilience, and reinforcing democratic values within higher education institutions.

Keywords: Digital Communication, Student Event, Stakeholder Engagement, Collaborative Strategy, Higher Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has profoundly transformed communication practices across all sectors, including the educational domain. In the university setting, student organizations are increasingly leveraging digital tools to organize, coordinate, and evaluate both academic and non-academic initiatives. This evolution has led to a paradigmatic shift in organizational communication, from centralized, top-down instruction models to more decentralized, participatory, and technologically mediated approaches. Within this context, communication is no longer merely instrumental but is also strategic, collaborative, and anchored in values of transparency and engagement.

University student events such as talk shows, conferences, and exhibitions have become critical arenas where students exercise leadership, teamwork, and communication competencies. Traditionally managed through face-to-face coordination and print-based communication, these events are now largely facilitated by digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Google Drive, Instagram, and Google Meet. These platforms enable more agile forms of coordination, wider dissemination of information, and real-time feedback mechanisms that are essential in managing event complexity under limited resources. However, the scholarly inquiry on how these technologies are integrated into student-led organizational practices remains insufficient—particularly in relation to how digital communication strategies support project planning, stakeholder interaction, and internal decision-making.

This study is motivated by such a gap and is framed within the context of *UMB Talks 2024*, a flagship academic event initiated and managed by students at the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Universitas Mercu Buana. Through this event, students not only gained practical experience in event management but also engaged in a process of collaborative communication involving multiple stakeholders—ranging from academic mentors and invited speakers to institutional partners and fellow students. The event therefore provides an ideal case study for analyzing how digital-based collaborative communication strategies are operationalized in educational settings.

To explore this phenomenon, the study draws upon Jürgen Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*, which emphasizes the role of rational discourse, mutual understanding, and communicative rationality as the basis for social coordination. Habermas's framework is particularly relevant in this context because it allows for an examination of communication not only as a functional tool but also as a medium for building consensus, trust, and legitimacy within a democratic framework. The theory supports the analytical lens through which the coordination dynamics, digital adaptation, and stakeholder inclusion in *UMB Talks 2024* can be understood.

In addition, the theoretical perspective of strategic communication (Hallahan et al., 2007) is employed to dissect how student organizers planned and executed their communication strategies. Unlike routine communication practices, strategic communication involves goal-oriented, audience-sensitive, and integrative efforts to influence attitudes and behaviors. Within the setting of a student-organized event, strategic communication must address multiple fronts: internal team alignment, audience engagement, stakeholder negotiation, and media visibility. When coupled with digital tools, these strategies acquire new dimensions of reach, speed, and customization. The objectives of this research are threefold:

1. To analyze digital communication patterns among event organizers and stakeholders involved in *UMB Talks 2024*;
2. To identify key challenges in communication processes and explore how the organizing team demonstrated resilience in response to these challenges; and
3. To formulate a conceptual model of digital-based collaborative communication applicable to student-led events.

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive approach using case study methodology. Data collection includes in-depth interviews with committee members and mentors, participatory observation during planning and implementation, and document analysis of digital archives such as group chats, digital posters, and evaluation reports. Through triangulation of these methods,

the study ensures depth, credibility, and contextual relevance in understanding the communicative behaviors and strategies involved.

Ultimately, this research aspires to contribute to both theoretical and practical domains. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on collaborative communication in youth-led organizational settings, combining classical sociological theory with contemporary communication technology usage. Practically, it offers a conceptual model that can guide future student projects in optimizing digital communication, stakeholder management, and reflective collaboration. The research findings are also aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on *Quality Education*, particularly in fostering skills for active citizenship, digital literacy, and collaborative leadership through project-based learning.

In sum, this study highlights the importance of digital communication not merely as an operational aid but as the substantive core of educational collaboration and innovation. The *UMB Talks 2024* serves not only as an academic milestone for the students involved but also as a rich empirical terrain for investigating how communication, technology, and democratic practice converge in the contemporary university experience.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine digital communication strategies in managing stakeholders and resources during the student-organized event UMB Talks 2024. This approach was chosen for its strength in exploring social phenomena within natural contexts and for capturing the dynamics of meaning, interpretation, and interaction among actors involved (Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2015).

2.1 Research Design

The research adopted a case study design (Yin, 2018) to explore the collaborative communication practices of a student event committee, particularly focusing on how digital tools were utilized in organizational processes. The selected case, UMB Talks 2024, involved student leaders, faculty advisors, and external speakers as primary actors. The research was grounded in Communicative Action Theory (Habermas, 1984) which frames communication not only as instrumental but also as a space for rational discourse and mutual understanding.

2.2 Data Collection

Primary data were collected through:

1. In-depth interviews with purposively selected informants:
 - 1) The event chairperson (student)
 - 2) The academic advisor (faculty)
 - 3) A guest speaker (external stakeholder)
2. Participant observation, conducted during team meetings, digital coordination (via WhatsApp, Google Meet), and documentation reviews (e.g., proposals, promotional content).
3. Online survey using Google Forms to validate perceptions of digital communication effectiveness.

All informants were selected based on stakeholder mapping criteria (Freeman, 1984), which consider their influence, legitimacy, and urgency in the context of the event.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006), allowing the identification of key patterns and categories such as: digital communication flow, stakeholder roles, deliberative decision-making, and resilience in communication. The analysis was conducted through coding of transcripts, triangulation with observational and documentary data, and synthesis into conceptual categories.

2.4 Validity and Reliability

To ensure credibility, this study applied triangulation across sources and methods, member checking with key informants, and peer debriefing to maintain analytical rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research also contextualized findings using updated references from journal publications and conference proceedings related to strategic communication, digital tools in education, and collaborative event management.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Communication Structure and Stakeholder Interaction in Student Events

The organization of UMB Talks 2024 displayed a multilayered communication system that integrated formal and informal patterns. The committee operated under a dynamic structure facilitating vertical (chairperson to division leaders), horizontal (across divisions), and diagonal (committee to external stakeholders such as sponsors and speakers) communication channels. This triangulated approach ensured that task delegation, information exchange, and evaluation flowed seamlessly throughout the planning and implementation phases. These findings align with Miller's (2015) theory on organizational communication, which underscores the significance of clear roles and information circulation in achieving collective functionality.

Digital media played a pivotal role in sustaining this structure. Platforms such as WhatsApp enabled real-time instructions, while Google Drive and Google Docs provided centralized repositories for shared resources, agendas, and event blueprints. The use of synchronous and asynchronous communication tools not only improved coordination but also democratized participation by allowing all members to contribute irrespective of time and location constraints.

3.2 Strategic Communication Through Digital Platforms

As theorized by Hallahan et al. (2007), strategic communication extends beyond the transactional act of sending messages to encompass purposive planning, audience engagement, and symbolic value creation. Within UMB Talks, the strategic use of digital platforms served to bridge logistical operations with branding and stakeholder management. Communication became a tool for visibility and credibility, especially in interactions with guest speakers and potential sponsors.

The use of Google Docs for collaborative script drafting, WhatsApp for urgent decision-making, and Canva for promotional design signifies a convergence of media within strategic frames. The event's chairperson, Fahreza, noted that virtual coordination "accelerated decision-making and minimized logistic burden," reinforcing the efficiency of multi-platform integration in youth-led communication strategy.

3.3 Deliberative Practices and Emancipatory Communication

Applying Habermas's (1984) Theory of Communicative Action, the research identifies elements of deliberation and consensus-building throughout the committee's decision-making processes. Rather than relying on top-down directives, the organizing team practiced horizontal deliberation, or *musyawarah*, where ideas were debated, validated, and refined collectively. As

Rafly, a division coordinator, explained, “decisions were reached through dialogue, not instructions.”

Such dialogical practices are emblematic of communicative rationality—where interaction is governed by mutual understanding rather than instrumental goals. This substantiates Habermas's four validity claims—truth, sincerity, appropriateness, and comprehensibility—within a student-led event framework. The emphasis on communicative ethics also enhanced team cohesion and reduced conflict.

3.4 Challenges and Resilience in Communication Practices

While digital tools empowered the team, several constraints were encountered, including last-minute speaker cancellations, limited budgets, and coordination gaps with third-party collaborators. However, the committee demonstrated resilience through what Garmelia et al. (2022) termed “adaptive communicative capacity.” This entailed immediate use of WhatsApp voice notes, impromptu video calls, and reconfiguration of roles to address emerging issues.

For instance, unclear budgeting flows were clarified through cross-divisional consultations, and cancellations were addressed by mobilizing standby speakers. This agile response framework highlights not only digital fluency but also collective responsibility in navigating uncertainty—key attributes in communication resilience literature.

3.5 Collective Learning and Digital Literacy

Beyond event execution, UMB Talks functioned as a laboratory for experiential learning. Committee members honed digital literacy skills, including document collaboration, content scheduling, and stakeholder negotiation—competencies that align with Project-Based Learning (PjBL) models in higher education. These outcomes substantiate claims by Adisty and Yanti (2024) that student-led projects cultivate employability through hands-on media and communication tasks.

Moreover, digital tools operated not just as enablers of communication, but also as epistemic instruments through which students constructed knowledge, organized workflows, and practiced reflective leadership. This integration of cognitive and practical domains reinforces the potential of event-based pedagogy in digital-era education.

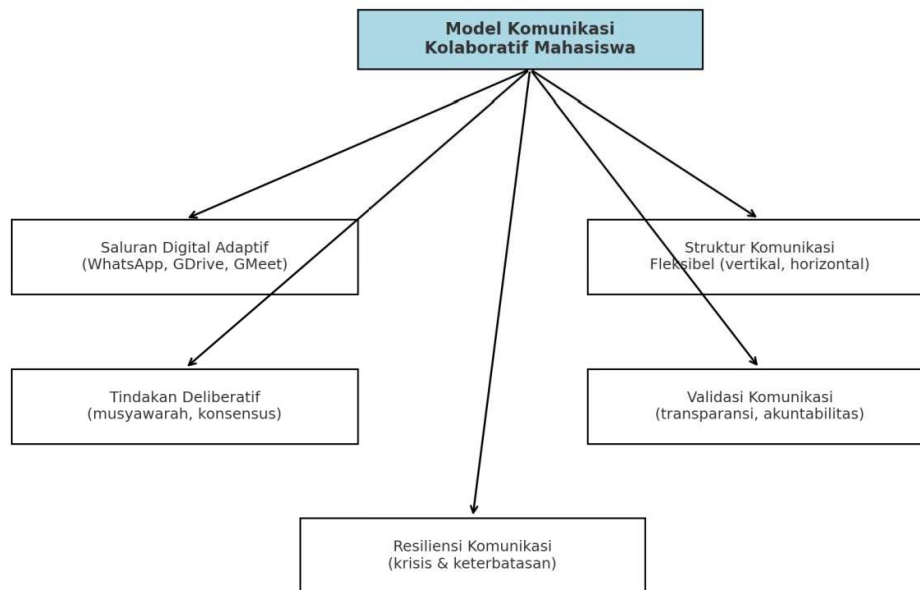
3.6 A Conceptual Model of Collaborative Digital Communication

Synthesizing the empirical findings and theoretical frameworks, this study proposes a conceptual model of digital-based collaborative communication in student event management. The model (see **Figure 1**) comprises five interrelated components:

1. **Adaptive Digital Channels** – including WhatsApp, Google Drive, and GMeet, enabling real-time and asynchronous communication;
2. **Flexible Communication Structure** – supporting vertical, horizontal, and diagonal flows;
3. **Deliberative Decision-Making** – ensuring inclusivity and mutual agreement;
4. **Communication Validity and Ethics** – grounded in transparency, sincerity, and clarity;
5. **Crisis Response Mechanism** – a reflexive system for rapid issue resolution.

This model offers theoretical novelty and practical utility for replicating structured-yet-adaptive communication practices in other student-led or youth-led initiatives. It aligns with contemporary imperatives of digital fluency, participatory governance, and project-based learning environments. Future iterations of this model could incorporate AI-assisted coordination tools or expand its application to inter-organizational collaboration within university networks.

Diagram Model Strategi Komunikasi Kolaboratif Mahasiswa



This model illustrates the synergy between technology, social structures, and democratic values as genuinely practiced by students in the organization of collective activities. In this context, communication is not merely a supporting tool but constitutes the very substance of collaborative practices and learning processes. As a synthesis of empirical findings and theoretical analysis, this study formulates a conceptual model that describes how collaborative communication strategies are implemented by student organizations in project-based event management. The model is constructed through the integration of field practices with frameworks of strategic communication, digital communication, and the principles of communicative action. The following visualization illustrates the key components that constitute a resilient, adaptive, and reflective student digital communication system—capable of addressing resource constraints and fostering multi-stakeholder synergy.

3.7 Future Development Opportunities

The proposed conceptual model of collaborative digital communication in student-led events presents significant potential for further development—both in academic scholarship and institutional practice. One of the most immediate opportunities lies in the formalization of this model into a modular training framework that supports student learning beyond the scope of individual events. Drawing from the model’s five integrated components—adaptive digital channels, flexible communication structures, deliberative processes, communicative ethics, and crisis response mechanisms—educational institutions can design simulation-based learning modules to train students in digital communication management.

These modules may include case-based scenarios, platform-specific technical exercises, and real-time collaborative challenges that mirror the complexity of actual student event coordination. By embedding these practices into the formal curriculum of communication studies, public relations, or organizational behavior, higher education institutions can enhance project-based learning (PjBL) in line with 21st-century skills, particularly digital fluency, collaborative leadership, and participatory problem-solving.

Furthermore, the model's practical implications extend to curriculum design at the program level. Communication faculties—particularly those offering concentrations in event management, digital strategy, or community relations—can adopt this model as a pedagogical framework. It supports the construction of interdisciplinary learning outcomes that integrate theory (e.g., Habermas' communicative action, strategic communication), methods (e.g., stakeholder mapping, content coordination), and reflective practices (e.g., deliberative evaluation, collaborative ethics). Through this integration, the model becomes a living curriculum tool that aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education), emphasizing experiential and socially relevant learning.

In addition to academic scaling, the model unlocks new possibilities for stakeholder ecosystem expansion. One notable direction is the strategic involvement of alumni, industry mentors, and civil society partners in the co-creation of student projects. These external actors can provide experiential knowledge, professional networks, and feedback mechanisms that contextualize student learning within broader societal dynamics. For instance, alumni who are now professionals in media, event industries, or NGO sectors can be invited as advisors or collaborative partners, bridging the academic-to-professional transition.

Moreover, institutional collaborations—both inter-departmental and inter-university—can leverage the model to foster co-hosted events that simulate cross-organizational communication. Such initiatives not only enhance the scalability of student leadership practices but also prepare students for real-world interprofessional coordination in increasingly complex digital work environments.

In the future, the model could be refined by incorporating emerging technologies such as AI-assisted scheduling, virtual collaboration platforms (e.g., Miro, Notion), and learning analytics to evaluate communication competencies. Research-wise, longitudinal studies could be conducted to assess how repeated exposure to collaborative digital event management impacts students' critical thinking, communication resilience, and civic engagement over time.

In sum, this model is not only an analytical output of the UMB Talks 2024 case study but also a generative framework that invites continuous iteration. It bridges theory and practice, connects institutional learning with real-world demands, and offers a roadmap for shaping more democratic, responsive, and innovative communication cultures among youth in higher education.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the implementation of digital-based collaborative communication strategies in managing stakeholder relationships and internal resources during the UMB Talks 2024 student event. The findings reveal that student-led project organizations are capable of forming adaptive, participatory communication structures using digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Google Drive. These tools facilitated coordination, accelerated decision-making, and helped manage resource constraints effectively.

Through thematic analysis and the application of Habermas' theory of communicative action, the research demonstrates that the student organization practiced deliberative communication, supported mutual understanding, and encouraged inclusive decision-making. The developed communication model reflects a synergy between technology, social structure, and democratic values, indicating that communication was not merely an instrument but the very foundation of collaboration and collective learning.

Despite limitations such as resource gaps and time constraints, the event committee displayed communicative resilience, showing potential for future project-based initiatives. Further development of this model may involve broader testing across varied student organizations and deeper integration with digital literacy training, enabling more scalable applications in academic and organizational contexts.

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