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Digital-Based Collaborative Communication Strategy in Managing Stakeholders

Gadis Octory[1], Yananto[2], Sandy[3], Sabena[4]

[1]Universitas Mercu Buana, gadisoctory@gmail.com, Indonesia
[2]Universitas Mercu Buana, yananto.mihadi@mercubuana.ac.id, Indonesia
[3]Universitas Mercu Buana, sandy_permata@yahoo.com, Indonesia
[4]Universitas Mercu Buana, sabena@mercubuana.ac.id, Indonesia

Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of digital-based collaborative communication strategies in managing student-led events, with UMB Talks 2024 at Universitas Mercu Buana as a case study. First, background. The research is grounded in Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action and strategic communication, emphasizing mutual understanding and stakeholder engagement in digital environments. It aims to develop a conceptual model of collaborative digital communication in academic settings. A qualitative-descriptive approach was adopted. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis involving student leaders, academic mentors, and external speakers. The study applied stakeholder mapping to identify key actors in the event's communication process. Findings reveal that tools like WhatsApp and Google Drive enhanced coordination, documentation, and consensus building in a temporary organizational setting. Communication was structured through vertical, horizontal, and diagonal flows, reflecting deliberative practices and ethical engagement. The proposed model includes adaptive channels, flexible structures, and a crisis response system, offering theoretical and practical insights for youth event management. The study shows that digital communication is central to participatory learning and resilient collaboration in higher education. It contributes to communication theory by linking digital affordances with deliberative engagement, and offers a framework applicable to future student-led initiatives.

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

Introduction

The evolution of communication practices in higher education has been accelerated by the integration of digital media, which now serve not only as information channels but as enablers of academic governance, pedagogical innovation, and participatory culture. The emergence of platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom, WhatsApp, and collaborative cloud-based systems has shifted the nature of student engagement from passive recipients of content to active co-creators of knowledge and organizers of collaborative experiences (Kalamar 2016).

In Indonesia, this shift is particularly relevant as universities attempt to respond to the challenges of digital transformation, youth employability, and civic participation. The Ministry of Education and Culture has promoted *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) as a policy encouraging experiential learning and cross-functional collaboration. Within this framework, student-led events function as informal learning laboratories that expose students to real-time challenges in organizing, negotiating, and communicating with diverse stakeholders—skills that are critical in the digital economy (Gadis 2024; Yatna and Hereyah 2023).

The rapid advancement of digital technology in the 21st century has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of communication across various sectors, including education. Digital transformation has become a defining feature of institutional evolution, particularly in higher education institutions (HEIs), where communication practices are no longer confined to conventional, linear, and hierarchical models. Instead, they have evolved into decentralized, participatory, and technology-driven processes that enable agility, transparency, and inclusiveness. In this new paradigm, communication is not only instrumental but also strategic, deliberative, and anchored in collaborative engagement (Hallahan et al. 2007).

Yet, the institutional infrastructure and scholarly frameworks to support these communication practices remain underdeveloped. Much of the discourse on digital transformation in universities still focuses on Learning Management Systems (LMS) or online teaching models, while sidelining student agency and project-based communication practices (Kurniasari 2022). This study contributes to bridging that divide by positioning digital communication as both a subject and method of inquiry, particularly in youth-driven organizational settings. Within the context of university life, student organizations play a crucial role in exercising leadership, practicing collaboration, and developing professional communication competencies. Events such as academic talk shows, conferences, competitions, and exhibitions serve as microcosms where students can experiment with organizational dynamics, engage with diverse stakeholders, and negotiate resource constraints under real-world pressures. These initiatives are increasingly mediated by digital tools—WhatsApp, Google Drive, Canva, Instagram, Zoom, and other collaborative platforms—which have revolutionized how information is distributed, tasks are coordinated, and decisions are made.

However, despite the growing reliance on digital communication tools among student organizations, scholarly attention remains limited regarding how these tools are operationalized strategically. While many studies have examined digital literacy, online learning, and ICT integration in classroom settings, far fewer have explored digital communication as a structured strategy in non-instructional, student-driven contexts—especially in relation to collaborative event planning, stakeholder engagement, and crisis management (Gadis 2024; Lintang 2023).

This study seeks to fill that gap by examining a real case from Universitas Mercu Buana: the **UMB Talks 2024**, a student-initiated academic event organized under the Faculty of Communication Sciences. The event mobilized more than 50 students across multiple divisions, engaged external stakeholders including guest speakers and partners, and relied heavily on digital tools for its entire planning and execution process. Unlike formal lectures or academic modules, this initiative represented a self-governed, project-based learning environment where communication was not merely a support function, but the core mechanism enabling collaboration, coordination, and adaptive learning. The significance of this research lies in its theoretical and practical relevance. Theoretically, it draws upon **Jürgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action** (1984) to conceptualize communication not just as a conduit of information, but as a rational, dialogical process that builds mutual understanding, trust, and legitimacy. Habermas's framework provides a normative lens to assess the quality of interactions among student organizers, especially in terms of transparency, sincerity, and inclusiveness—components that resonate strongly with democratic values in education.

At the same time, the study is informed by the **strategic communication framework** articulated by Hallahan et al. (2007), which emphasizes the goal-oriented, audience-centric, and

integrative nature of communication within organizational contexts. In this regard, the UMB Talks committee functioned as a temporary yet complex organization where digital communication had to address multiple fronts: internal coordination, public visibility, stakeholder alignment, and contingency planning.

Such practices have practical and normative value. Practically, they allow student committees to adapt swiftly to changes—such as speaker cancellations, last-minute logistical issues, or resource gaps. Normatively, they foster democratic habits and civic responsibility, which are increasingly urgent in a polarized and digitally mediated society. Embedding communicative ethics in digital strategy can create more sustainable and socially responsible communication cultures, both inside and outside academic institutions.

Stakeholder theory, originally developed in business studies (Freeman 1984), provides a useful lens to understand how student organizers manage relations with diverse actors—lecturers, sponsors, audiences, and institutional partners. In a digitalized event like UMB Talks, stakeholder engagement is mediated through digital channels, making strategic communication more complex but also more traceable and reflexive. Tools such as WhatsApp facilitate synchronous interaction and real-time problem solving, while Google Drive and Docs offer collaborative spaces for document development and feedback cycles. Instagram and Canva allow students to shape the narrative and aesthetic of their event branding, ensuring that the event resonates with target audiences.

These tools are not neutral; they shape the affordances and constraints of communication practices. The study thus interrogates how these tools are appropriated—creatively, strategically, and ethically—by students in their efforts to align interests, resolve conflicts, and mobilize participation. This analytical focus responds to calls within Dimedcom to rethink technology not merely as infrastructure but as a socio-technical field of agency (Lintang 2023; Nasrullah 2015). The journal Digital Media Communication (Dimedcom) has provided a platform for studies that investigate the intersection of media technology, culture, and communication strategies. Several articles have demonstrated how youth mobilize digital narratives to respond to social issues, from gender-based activism to environmental advocacy. This study contributes to that tradition by showing how digital platforms are used not only for social critique but also for project execution, stakeholder alignment, and pedagogical experimentation.

The UMB Talks case allows us to zoom into the infrastructural and relational aspects of digital communication: who speaks, to whom, using what channels, with what intentions, and under what constraints. It invites us to see student projects not merely as extracurricular activities, but as performative spaces where communication becomes both the process and the product of collaborative action. From a practical standpoint, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on project-based learning (PjBL), student empowerment, and digital event management. Several studies published in the *Jurnal Visi Komunikasi* and *Dimedcom* have emphasized the need to enhance student digital competencies through experiential learning formats (Kurniasari 2022; Yatna and Hereyah 2023). However, what remains underexplored is how these digital experiences translate into structured communication strategies and whether they reflect deeper sociological values such as participatory governance and organizational resilience.

The current study, therefore, is guided by the following research problem: **How are digital-based collaborative communication strategies implemented in the context of student-led events, and what organizational structures, tools, and values support these practices?** This problem emerges from two critical gaps:

1. **Theoretical Gap** – There is a limited integration between classical communication theories (e.g., Habermas) and practical digital communication tools (e.g., WhatsApp, Google Drive) in student organizational contexts. Most existing studies treat technology as an enabler without examining its role in shaping deliberative processes and organizational culture.

2. **Empirical Gap** – Despite the widespread use of digital platforms in student activities, few studies have documented the communication patterns, decision-making mechanisms, and stakeholder dynamics in event-based student organizations using qualitative and model-building approaches.

This research aims to address these gaps through the following objectives:

1. To analyze digital communication patterns among event organizers and stakeholders in UMB Talks 2024;
2. To identify key challenges and moments of resilience within the communication process;
3. To develop a conceptual model of digital-based collaborative communication applicable to student-led project environments.

In achieving these objectives, the research offers implications not only for communication studies as a discipline but also for curriculum design, digital pedagogy, and student empowerment practices in higher education. The relevance of this inquiry is also aligned with the **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4** on Quality Education, particularly in fostering digital skills, civic participation, and collaborative leadership among youth.

Studies such as Adisty and Yanti (2024) have shown how social media platforms like Instagram can influence personal branding and student identity formation. Likewise, Kurniasari (2022) emphasized the strategic use of Kompas.id in managing digital narratives. These examples illustrate the rising importance of digital fluency in communication education. Yet, they often overlook the collaborative and organizational dimensions of student communication that are central to event management and collective projects.

In the same vein, research published in Dimedcom underlines the transformation of digital communication from a supportive function into a strategic and integrative domain. For instance, highlighted how digital storytelling can be mobilized as a participatory tool in community campaigns, reinforcing the link between communication and social innovation. Applying such insights to the university setting, student events like UMB Talks become fertile ground to investigate how collaborative digital communication supports participatory organization, stakeholder management, and knowledge production.

Finally, this introduction builds upon and extends previous models of organizational communication in educational settings, proposing that even short-term student committees can function as learning organizations. They demonstrate the capability to self-organize, adapt, and reflect, particularly when empowered by digital platforms. This suggests that digital communication is not only operational but also pedagogical—it teaches students how to work in teams, manage complexity, and uphold democratic values in their decision-making processes.

Theoretical Framework
Communicative Action Theory

Habermas's (1984) *Theory of Communicative Action* offers a normative foundation for understanding communication not as a vehicle of persuasion or manipulation, but as a rational process oriented toward mutual understanding. This theory posits that actors engage in communication by offering *validity claims*—truth (truthfulness of content), sincerity (intentions), rightness (social norms), and comprehensibility (clarity of expression)—which can be challenged or agreed upon through reasoned dialogue. In the context of UMB Talks 2024, this theory is especially relevant for analyzing how students negotiate meaning, resolve conflicts, and build collective decisions within a decentralized event structure.

Deliberative practices such as *musyawarah*, consensus meetings, and informal check-ins were observed throughout the committee's coordination process. These practices reflect communicative rationality where power is replaced by mutual agreement and ethical participation. In Indonesian

youth culture, such dialogic interactions blend both modern deliberation and local civic traditions, making Habermas's framework particularly applicable in hybrid formal-informal communication settings. Furthermore, the presence of open feedback loops—through WhatsApp polls or live comments—reinforces inclusiveness and learning as core values in student-led events.

Strategic Communication Theory

Strategic communication, as articulated by Hallahan et al. (2007), expands the scope of communication to encompass planned, purposeful, and audience-oriented actions designed to support institutional goals. In contrast to routine or transactional messaging, strategic communication in UMB Talks was aimed at fulfilling multiple interconnected functions: aligning internal coordination among divisions, managing relationships with university stakeholders and invited guests, and shaping external perceptions of the event through branding and crisis mitigation.

This framework allows us to view communication not only as a means of delivering information, but as a managerial and symbolic act—one that fosters legitimacy, narrative control, and identity positioning. The student committee's use of Instagram for public outreach, Google Forms for feedback, and formal email for professional correspondence demonstrates a multi-layered communication plan, even within a limited-resource environment. These practices indicate strategic awareness and suggest that student organizers act not only as implementers but also as communication planners, managing stakeholder engagement with considerable intentionality.

Digital Media as Collaborative Infrastructure

Beyond their functional role as communication tools, platforms such as WhatsApp, Google Docs, Canva, and Instagram serve as *collaborative infrastructures*—digital environments that afford specific forms of social interaction and organizational behavior. This view aligns with the theory of *technological affordances* by Norman (1999), which explains that a medium's features offer particular "action possibilities" shaped by user perception and context.

In UMB Talks 2024, these platforms allowed asynchronous coordination (e.g., late-night checklist updates on WhatsApp), real-time co-editing (e.g., shared run-down documents), and multi-modal communication (e.g., meme-based reminders or emoji checklists). These practices demonstrate how digital affordances enabled the committee to overcome time constraints, physical distance, and inconsistent availability—challenges commonly faced in student projects. Affordance theory thus enables an understanding of *how* technologies are embedded into the social workflows of communication, rather than being passive enablers.

Furthermore, by drawing from empirical insights in Nasrullah (2015) and Kalamar (2016), this study contextualizes affordance usage in youth-led environments where spontaneity, improvisation, and peer-to-peer dynamics dominate. For instance, while formal agendas might exist on Google Docs, much of the motivation and informal consensus emerged through WhatsApp stickers, voice notes, and low-context cues—signaling an emergent and fluid mode of digital collaboration.

Framework Integration

The intersection of these three theoretical domains—(1) *Communicative Action* (Habermas), (2) *Strategic Communication* (Hallahan et al. 2007), and (3) *Digital Affordance Theory* (Norman)—yields an integrated conceptual framework titled **Collaborative Digital Communication Strategy Model**. Each domain contributes uniquely:

1. **Communicative Action Theory**: Adds depth to the ethical and dialogical dimensions of communication, emphasizing consensus, civic reasoning, and rational discourse.
2. **Strategic Communication Theory**: Emphasizes message planning, stakeholder engagement, and outcome orientation, especially under time-bound or uncertain contexts.
3. **Digital Affordance Theory**: Frames the role of technology not just as support, but as co-constructor of interaction modalities and organizational resilience.

This framework captures the dynamic interplay between human intention, technological possibility, and social negotiation in youth-led event communication. It reflects a hybrid reality where structure and agency, formality and informality, and planning and improvisation are constantly negotiated. In addition, it reinforces the idea that student communication, while temporary in structure, can be deeply strategic, deliberative, and pedagogically rich.

The following figure (Figure 1) visualizes this theoretical convergence and sets the foundation for analyzing the communication practices observed in UMB Talks 2024.This theoretical integration is visualized in the figure below:

This framework illustrates the convergence of Communicative Action Theory (Habermas 1984), Strategic Communication (Hallahan et al. 2007), and Digital Platform Usage as core components informing the development of a Collaborative Digital Communication Strategy Model in student-led events. The model demonstrates how communication practices are embedded in social rationality, project management goals, and digital affordances, forming a unified system of deliberative coordination.

Material and Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how digital-based collaborative communication was practiced in managing stakeholders and organizing internal resources during a student-led academic event. The focus of this study was **UMB Talks 2024**, held by students of the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Universitas Mercu Buana. The qualitative descriptive method was chosen because it allows the researcher to document real-world experiences, behaviors, and perceptions in a straightforward and contextual manner (Creswell 2017).

The nature of this research is practice-based, meaning that it centers on direct observation and documentation of student activities as they happened. Rather than testing a hypothesis, this study aims to provide a rich description and interpretation of how communication was used strategically by students under real organizational constraints such as time pressure, limited budget, and the need for digital fluency.

Research Design

The study used a **case study design** to focus deeply on a single instance—UMB Talks 2024—as a bounded system where communication practices could be observed and analyzed holistically. The case study was instrumental in identifying patterns, behaviors, and strategies used by the student committee. This type of design is useful for capturing the complexity of contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts. The theoretical framing of the study integrates two communication theories:

1. **Communicative Action Theory** (Habermas 1984), which emphasizes rational discourse, mutual understanding, and consensus-building in social interaction.
2. **Strategic Communication Theory** (Hallahan et al. 2007), which highlights the need for purpose-driven, audience-sensitive, and integrated communication across various channels.

These theories helped to interpret how student communication evolved from basic information sharing to coordinated, participatory, and reflective practices. The research was conducted at **Universitas Mercu Buana** between **January and April 2025**, covering three major stages of event management: preparation, execution, and evaluation. Since most activities were conducted online, the researcher also employed elements of **digital ethnography**, joining group chats and observing virtual meetings to document the natural flow of communication. The setting was dynamic, non-permanent, and youth-led, offering a unique opportunity to study how students managed a formal academic project with informal communication styles and digital tools as the primary medium.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected using **purposive sampling**, a method that targets individuals with the most knowledge, involvement, and relevance to the research question (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Three key stakeholders were interviewed:

1. The **event chairperson** who led internal coordination;
2. The **academic advisor**, a faculty member who supervised and evaluated the committee;
3. One **guest speaker**, an external partner who collaborated with the student team.

These individuals were chosen based on **stakeholder salience criteria** (Freeman 1984), which consider the level of power, legitimacy, and urgency a stakeholder holds in relation to the event.

Data Collection Methods

To ensure richness and triangulation, four data collection techniques were applied:

1. **In-depth interviews** with the chairperson, advisor, and guest speaker to understand their views on communication flow, decision-making, and platform usage.
2. **Participant observation** of the student team's real-time activities and digital coordination through WhatsApp groups, Google Meet, and collaborative Google Docs. The researcher took field notes during meetings and informal discussions.
3. **Document analysis** of digital artifacts such as event proposals, planning sheets, content drafts, promotional materials, and chat screenshots.
4. **Online survey** distributed via Google Forms to committee members, aimed at assessing perceptions about the efficiency, challenges, and benefits of digital communication during the event.

This multi-method approach enriched the data and enabled cross-validation of themes and findings. Instead of measuring variables, this qualitative study focuses on the following dimensions:

1. **Communication flow**: how messages move vertically (top-down), horizontally (across peers), and diagonally (to external stakeholders).
2. **Digital platform usage**: what platforms were used, for what purposes, and how frequently (e.g., WhatsApp for quick updates, Google Docs for collaborative planning).
3. **Deliberative decision-making**: how students practiced dialogical processes such as group discussion and voting.
4. **Stakeholder engagement**: how communication supported interaction with speakers, faculty, and partners.
5. **Crisis response and adaptability**: how teams responded to challenges such as speaker cancellations or design delays.

These elements helped explain not only *what* was communicated, but *how* and *why* it was done in certain ways. Data were analyzed using **thematic analysis** (Braun and Clarke 2006), which allows the researcher to identify key patterns and themes across qualitative data. The steps included:

1. Transcribing interview recordings and organizing field notes;
2. Conducting open coding of repeated phrases and ideas;
3. Grouping related codes into broader themes such as coordination, role clarity, feedback, stakeholder relations, and adaptability;
4. Interpreting themes in light of the theoretical framework.

By combining empirical observation with theoretical reflection, the researcher was able to propose a **conceptual model** of collaborative digital communication.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure credibility, several trustworthiness techniques were applied:

1. **Triangulation** of data sources (interview, observation, document, survey);
2. **Member checking**, where participants were asked to confirm interpretations;
3. **Peer debriefing**, involving discussions with colleagues in communication studies;
4. **Audit trail**, with detailed documentation of the research steps and decisions made.

These techniques align with the qualitative research quality standards set by Lincoln and Guba (1985), ensuring that the findings are consistent, authentic, and transferable to similar contexts.

Result and Discussion

This section provides an in-depth exploration of the field data collected during the UMB Talks 2024 event. The structure follows a general-to-specific pattern, with the initial findings covering common patterns in student communication behavior, followed by thematic elaboration, empirical examples, and theoretical reflection. As the research employed a case study design with qualitative methods, the results are presented thematically with embedded spaces for interview excerpts, tables, and visual representations.

Overview of Communication Dynamics

The organization of UMB Talks 2024 required the formation of a temporary project-based committee comprised of undergraduate students. This group demonstrated a high level of autonomy in designing and implementing the communication infrastructure of the event. Without a rigid bureaucratic structure, the students had to create their own rhythm of coordination, task division, and accountability mechanisms.

Digital tools became indispensable. WhatsApp functioned as the **central nervous system** of the committee. From reminders, motivational messages, brainstorming, to emergency updates, most of the committee's decisions were made in real time via this application. WhatsApp's accessibility, speed, and informality made it the most democratic tool for daily engagement. Google Docs, by contrast, was used to centralize formal documentation such as proposals, task lists, media releases, and contact databases.

An illustrative case of daily digital coordination was captured in the exchange surrounding the distribution of event certificates. On June 15, 2025, the organizing team utilized a WhatsApp group named "UMB TALKS JAYA 13:15 E-40…" to streamline access to certificate files via a shared Google Drive link. This enabled all committee members to check, rename, and ensure certificate alignment with participant names before dissemination. This exchange highlights the flexible, real-time, and solution-oriented nature of communication enabled by WhatsApp. It supports the use of asynchronous digital coordination tools in resolving operational matters collaboratively and transparently.

An important element of the team's communication ecosystem was the use of a shared Google Drive, as depicted in Figure X. The folder structure, titled "UMB TALKS 2024", was segmented by division (e.g., Sponsorship, Sekretaris, Humas, Acara, Publikasi Media Konten), reflecting both horizontal task distribution and centralized documentation practices. Each division maintained its own subfolder to store relevant documents such as design assets, certificates, attendance sheets, reports, and financial files. This enabled team members to access and edit materials collaboratively without needing repeated direct communication, thereby reducing redundancy and miscommunication. File update dates show active modification throughout the planning cycle, especially in September–October 2024, coinciding with peak preparation activities.

This digital archive functioned as a common knowledge base, facilitating asynchronous coordination in line with strategic communication principles (Hallahan et al. 2007). Furthermore, it allowed for role-specific accountability—members could trace documentation by "owner" metadata and follow up with the responsible individual or team. Each division maintained a dedicated folder in a shared workspace to facilitate collaborative editing, version control, and role-based file access.

These practices reflect the communicative action model (Habermas 1984), where discourse is used not merely to convey information but to negotiate mutual understanding and voluntary cooperation, especially during micro-task execution. Additionally, this reflects "low-stakes, high-impact" communication episodes—seemingly simple interactions that carry logistical importance and build collective responsibility. The team used WhatsApp to manage all collaboratively, demonstrating asynchronous task delegation and peer-led coordination.

Google Meet, used mainly for scheduled team meetings and run-down simulations, offered a synchronous space for visual interaction and feedback. In many cases, students who were less vocal on WhatsApp became more expressive during live discussions, revealing the **modal preference** that shaped participation.

Strategic Layering in Stakeholder Communication

One of the most distinct findings from the study is the **layered communication strategy** applied by the student committee. Different stakeholders received different tones, formats, and levels of detail depending on their role and proximity to the project. For example, communication with guest speakers was highly formal at the start (email), followed by more practical WhatsApp messages (reminders, maps, confirmations). Academic supervisors received weekly progress updates in Google Docs, shared via email with concise summaries.

Stakeholder Group	Format	Channel Used	Communication Tone	Frequency
Internal Committee	Chat, Task List, Discussion	WhatsApp, Google Docs, Google Meet	Informal, Collaborative	Daily
Event Speakers	Formal Invitation, Follow-up Texts	Email (formal), WhatsApp (informal)	Respectful, Professional	Weekly / as needed
Moderators/MCs	Technical Brief, Rundown Discussion	Google Meet, WhatsApp	Clear, Instructional	Before event + daily
University Supervisors	Progress Report, Coordination Notes	Email, Google Docs	Formal, Accountable	Biweekly
Audience/Participants	Promotional Posts, Announcements	Instagram, WhatsApp Broadcast	Engaging, Friendly	2–3× per week
Design & Content Team	Asset Review, Scheduling Notes	Canva Comments, WhatsApp	Brief, Visual-Centric	Weekly
Vendors/Logistics Support	Delivery Notes, Venue Coordination	Phone, WhatsApp, In-Person	Direct, Logistical	Event day + pre-day

Table 1: Stakeholder Communication Matrix, Source: UMB Talks 2024

This practice reflects principles from **strategic communication theory** (Hallahan et al. 2007), which emphasizes tailoring messages based on stakeholder needs and contexts. The students demonstrated an intuitive understanding of these principles, even without formal training, showcasing the potential of experiential learning.

"Ke pembicara kami mulai dengan email biar sopan, tapi pas hari H lebih cepat via WA aja... kadang kirim rundown juga." (Interview with Liaison Officer, 2024)

This adaptive layering confirms that effective communication is not linear, but **adaptive and recursive**—constantly adjusted to achieve clarity and maintain trust.

Deliberation and Crisis Handling

Throughout the event cycle, several critical moments required quick decision-making under pressure. One notable example involved the sudden withdrawal of a confirmed speaker three days before the event. The committee's response was to immediately hold a virtual meeting, assess options, and redistribute tasks. Rather than relying on top-down directives, the committee held a **collective problem-solving session**, facilitated via Google Meet. Notes were recorded collaboratively in Google Docs, and the new schedule was published in real time. This process embodies what Habermas describes as **rational discourse**, where participants engage not in domination.

"Kita langsung rapat malam itu, voting beberapa opsi, terus disepakati bareng. Yang penting semuanya ikut." (Interview with Chairperson, 2024)

The ability to rapidly shift into deliberative mode reflects not only organizational maturity but also **technological fluency**—where tools support rather than hinder decision-making. This moment also highlights the **value of informal leadership**. The formal structure (e.g., who holds the title) was

less relevant than the ability to initiate discussion, gather input, and summarize consensus. This aligns with the concept of **discursive leadership** in participatory communication literature (Servaes, 2008: 93).

Informal Documentation and Visibility
One emergent theme from the data is the use of **informal documentation** practices to enhance transparency and accountability. Instead of relying on rigid reporting systems, committee members often used screenshots, emoji-coded feedback, and informal checklists to monitor progress. A screenshot of a checklist with green ticks and thumbs-up emojis often replaced traditional progress reports. While unconventional, these visuals provided immediate and shared understanding. Such practices may appear unprofessional in formal organizational settings, but within the student-led context, they serve a pragmatic purpose: **engagement and clarity**. According to Norman's theory of affordance (1999: 23), the way users interact with tools is shaped by intuitive cues. In this case, visuals were faster and clearer than paragraphs. This also ties into digital-native behavior where visual shorthand carries equal or more communicative weight than text—a trend noted in media literacy studies (Nasrullah 2015).
"Kalau semua harus diketik rapi kayak laporan, kami bisa ketinggalan... tapi pakai checklist emoji semua langsung paham." (Interview with Creative Team Member, 2024)

Conflict, Fatigue, and Self-Organizing Solutions
The study also uncovered signs of **coordination fatigue** during the final week of preparation. As deadlines approached, communication overload became apparent. Some team members muted notifications, while others posted less frequently. Group energy dropped. Instead of escalating tensions, the team responded with informal check-ins and peer-to-peer encouragement. A new sub-group was created ("UMB Talks Support Team") to filter urgent issues and re-energize communication.
"Pas udah mepet H-3, grup jadi sepi, akhirnya bikin grup kecil buat semangatin lagi." (Interview with Moderator, 2024)

This act of **self-organizing** in response to burnout demonstrates adaptive group intelligence. It also reaffirms the need for structural flexibility in youth-led communication systems. Habermas's emphasis on intersubjective understanding (1984) is visible not only in formal deliberation, but also in these subtle acts of care and community.

Integration of Theory and Model (LPJ-aligned)
Based on both field data and post-event documentation (LPJ UMB Talks 2024), the integration of communication theory with actual practice becomes evident through the structured-yet-adaptive planning phases. The phases described in the LPJ—ranging from **preparation**, **implementation**, to **evaluation**—reflect the iterative application of **communicative action** (Habermas), **strategic messaging**, and **technological affordance**.

Each stage in the event required different types of communication behavior:
1. **Pre-event preparation** prioritized coordination and timeline alignment (via WhatsApp group, GMeet, and proposal drafts),
2. **Implementation** demanded rapid response, division of roles, and real-time decision making,
3. **Post-event** involved documentation, survey data collection, and reflection.

These transitions map clearly onto a theoretical axis:

Event Phase	Theoretical Relevance	Primary Tool Used
Preparation	Communicative Planning (Habermas, 1984)	WhatsApp, Google Docs
Execution	Strategic Crisis Response (Hallahan, 2007)	WhatsApp, GMeet
Evaluation	Reflective Participation (Norman, 1999)	Google Form, GDrive

Tabel 2. Event Phase, Source: UMB Talks 2024

This integrative matrix reflects that **communication is not static**, but shifts dynamically across phases. The Collaborative Digital Communication Strategy Model synthesized in this study draws on three interconnected frameworks: communicative action theory (Habermas 1984), strategic communication (Hallahan et al. 2007), and the affordance concept of digital tools (Norman 1999). These perspectives collectively explain how student committees negotiate meaning, structure flexible interactions, and perform effective stakeholder engagement in real-time environments.

Final Conceptual Framework Illustration

Reflecting the real structure used in UMB Talks, the final conceptual framework takes into account the four divisions identified in the LPJ: **Program**, **Creative**, **Logistics**, **Public Relations** These divisions operated through horizontal collaboration, each with its own communication dynamic and core responsibilities. This structure is not hierarchical, but **modular and interdependent**. For example:

1. **Creative** liaised closely with **PR** to produce Instagram content and coordinate speaker assets.
2. **Program** worked with **Logistics** to finalize rundown and prepare technical needs.
3. WhatsApp groups and Google Docs acted as the connective infrastructure.

"Setiap divisi punya tanggung jawab komunikasi masing-masing, tapi kami saling tanya dan bantu juga lintas divisi" (LPJ Evaluasi Panitia, 2024)

This reinforces the **deliberative and relational model** of collaborative communication rather than transactional or siloed models.

Implications for Strategic Communication Studies

The experience of UMB Talks 2024 affirms the need to **expand the boundary of strategic communication** beyond corporations or NGOs. In this student-led context, strategic thinking was evidenced in:
1. **Timeline Awareness**: Each committee division set internal deadlines based on the overall rundown. For example, the LPJ mentions specific dates for equipment preparation, dress rehearsal, and publication posting.
2. **Audience Orientation**: As seen in the LPJ Instagram section, visual consistency, speaker introductions, and daily reminders were planned with engagement metrics in mind.
3. **Message Framing**: The event theme *"Generasi Muda: Tumbuh dan Membangun"* was embedded across all materials and posts, reflecting identity-focused communication.

This indicates that **strategic intent can emerge organically**, not only through formal training, but through collaborative execution. Furthermore, the feedback summary (from post-event surveys) shows that participants appreciated the clarity of communication, punctuality, and media presentation—elements critical to successful messaging.

"Acara berjalan lancar dan MC menyampaikan dengan percaya diri. Publikasi jelas dan update." (Google Form Participant Feedback, 2024)

Practical Contributions to Student Leadership Training

This study provides a pedagogical contribution by demonstrating how experiential student-led projects cultivate communication competencies such as decision-making under pressure, asynchronous task delegation, and adaptive messaging. These skills are essential in preparing students for future professional roles in communication-heavy industries.Drawing from the LPJ's structure and evaluations, several practical lessons for leadership and communication development can be outlined:

1. **Role Division Based on Communication Intensity** Each division required different levels and styles of communication. For example: **Program**: High in internal negotiation, low in external visibility. **PR**: High in external communication, requiring consistency and design thinking. **Logistics**: High in last-minute coordination, emphasizing clarity and directness.
2. **Embedded Documentation Culture.** The LPJ itself is a product of structured communication. Its format (chronological, thematic, visual) can be used as a template for other student teams to document their work and reflect collectively.
3. **Communication as Reflective Pedagogy.** What students learned was not only how to run an event, but how to build and maintain shared meaning. Communication was not only functional—it was formative. *"Kami belajar komunikasi bukan cuma lewat teori, tapi lewat kerja bareng dan ngadepin masalah langsung."* (Ketua Panitia, LPJ 2024)

To complement observational and interview-based findings, this study also included an analysis of audience feedback gathered via Google Form after the event. The questionnaire was distributed to all participants of UMB Talks 2024 and focused on three primary dimensions of communication effectiveness:
1. Clarity of Instructions – whether participants felt guided and well-informed throughout the event.
2. Responsiveness of Committee – the speed and helpfulness of the committee's communication.
3. Ease of Access to Information – including how easily participants could find links, schedules, or event materials.

The data, summarized in the table below, offers a quantitative insight into how the event's strategic communication approach was received by its external stakeholders.

Indicator	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Clarity of Instructions	45%	42%	10%	3%
Responsiveness of Committee	51%	35%	10%	4%
Ease of Access to Information	47%	38%	11%	4%

Table 3. Event event's strategic communication approach, Source: UMB Talks 2024

The survey results, as shown in Table X, indicate a generally **positive participant perception** of the communication practices employed by the UMB Talks 2024 committee. A significant proportion of respondents marked **"Strongly Agree"** or **"Agree"** across all three measured indicators: *clarity of instructions*, *committee responsiveness*, and *ease of access to information*. Specifically, over **87%** of participants agreed that the instructions provided before and during the event were clear, which validates the committee's use of structured messaging, timely reminders, and multi-platform communication (e.g., WhatsApp groups, Instagram Stories, and Google Forms). Meanwhile, **86%** acknowledged the responsiveness of the organizing team—an outcome that reflects the committee's digital agility, particularly in responding to queries and disseminating last-minute updates.The *ease of access to information* was also rated favorably by 85% of respondents, suggesting that tools like Google Drive and pinned messages in group chats were effective in reducing information asymmetry. These results further underscore the relevance of **strategic affordances** (Norman 1999) and the **participatory communication ethos** (Habermas 1984) in designing student-led event communication systems.

This survey validation strengthens the theoretical claim that **digital-based student collaboration**, when well-structured and participatory, can foster not only efficiency and transparency but also **trust and satisfaction** among stakeholders. The report contains valuable reflective notes from each organizing division that provide practical validation of the communication theories used in this study. These insights demonstrate how digital coordination evolved during real-time constraints and how communication practice matured through active experience. The following table synthesizes key challenges faced by each division and the communication responses adopted, highlighting practical dimensions of collaborative communication.

Division	Challenge Faced	Communication Response
Program	Technical issues during rehearsal	Real-time WhatsApp coordination and re-scripting rundown
Logistics	Limited time for equipment setup	Used WhatsApp group with checklist update system
Creative	Unclear schedule for visual asset deadlines	Weekly coordination meeting with PR to synchronize timelines
Public Relations	Confusion over posting schedule and design flow	Created shared calendar and Canva template repository

Tabel 4. Strategic communication approach, Source: UMB Talks 2024

This table supports the idea that communication in student-led projects is both **situational** and **strategic**, requiring real-time negotiation and transparent tracking systems. Based on timeline, communication flow and volume shifted according to event phases, with peak intensity observed during the **event execution phase** and visual asset rollout.

Event Phase	Week	Dominant Platform	Communication Intensity
Coordination Kickoff	Week 1–2	WhatsApp, Google Meet	Moderate
Speaker Confirmation	Week 2–3	WhatsApp, Email	High
Visual Asset Production	Week 3–4	Canva, WhatsApp	High
Execution Phase	Week 5	WhatsApp, GMeet	Very High
Post-Event Evaluation	Week 6	Google Docs, Google Form	Moderate

Tabel 5. The **Event Execution Phase**, **Source: UMB Talks 2024**

This structured timeline is useful for identifying communication bottlenecks and points of stakeholder convergence. Document provides a portfolio of Instagram content organized around four key stages: **Speaker Announcement Posters**, **Countdown Carousel Series**, **Interactive IG Stories** (polls, Q&A), **Event Recap Posts** These social media practices align with the principles of **strategic communication planning**, where audience targeting, content design, and timing synchronization play essential roles. The post-event feedback collected via Google Forms, with **key indicators on clarity, coordination, and presentation quality**.

Conclusions

This study contributes a novel conceptual model of collaborative digital communication within student-led event contexts, specifically analyzing the case of UMB Talks 2024. By integrating Habermas's theory of communicative action, Hallahan's strategic communication framework, and Norman's affordance theory, the research highlights how students adapt digital platforms—WhatsApp, Google Docs, Instagram, Google Meet—not only for operational coordination, but also for participatory learning, deliberation, and stakeholder engagement. The layered, adaptive, and platform-integrated communication patterns discovered in this study provide fresh insights into the intersection of communication theory and digital media practices in higher education.

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