



ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION AUDIT IN A YOUTH COMMUNITY: EVIDENCE FROM DUTA MUDA SUMATERA UTARA

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ABSTRACT

Effective organizational communication is fundamental to the success of youth development programs. This study examines the organizational communication audit within the Duta Muda Sumatera Utara (DMSU) community, a youth ambassador program in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Employing a quantitative survey approach supported by a systematic literature review, this study analyzed communication patterns, models, and effectiveness across four analytical frameworks: structural, functional, perceptual, and cultural models. A total of 28 respondents consisting of 12 committee members and 16 participants were involved in this study. Data were collected through a validated questionnaire using a Likert scale and analyzed using descriptive statistics and percentage analysis. Findings reveal that overall communication effectiveness in the DMSU community reached 74.6%, indicating a moderately high level of effectiveness with identifiable gaps particularly in feedback mechanisms, information clarity, and channel optimization. The structural model revealed formal communication channels are more reliable than informal ones. The functional model indicated coordination functions are well-served but motivational communication requires improvement. The perceptual model identified significant variation in message interpretation across respondents. The cultural model highlighted strong communicative norms of respect but limited participative communication culture. The study concludes that a systematic communication audit significantly contributes to identifying communication strengths and weaknesses, enabling the DMSU community to develop targeted communication improvement strategies for future program cycles.

Keywords: Communication Audit, Organizational Communication, Duta Muda Sumatera Utara, Youth Organization, Communication Effectiveness, Communication Models.

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizational communication is a critical factor in the effectiveness of programs involving multiple stakeholders, particularly youth organizations in which coordination, information clarity, interpersonal interaction, and role distribution directly influence program implementation (Fauzan et al., 2024; Müller et al., 2025). Youth organizations are characterized by dynamic interactions among participants, committees, mentors, and external stakeholders, making effective communication essential for maintaining coordination and achieving organizational objectives. In this context, Duta Muda Sumatera Utara (DMSU) represents a youth ambassador program designed to develop leadership, social engagement, and youth participation in North Sumatra.

DMSU involves a series of interconnected activities, including administrative selection, interviews, orientation, leadership development, community service, educational campaigns, and a grand final. These activities require intensive communication among organizers, participants, mentors, judges, and supporting partners (Kitsios & Kamariotou, 2023; Suhendar & Halimi, 2023). The diversity of actors and program stages can create communication challenges, such as unequal information distribution, ambiguous instructions, ineffective feedback mechanisms, and inconsistencies between formal communication procedures and informal interaction patterns (Dalimunthe et al., 2024; Kholil et al., 2024). Such conditions indicate the importance of systematically assessing communication processes rather than relying solely on informal organizational evaluations.

A communication audit provides a systematic approach for diagnosing communication practices by identifying strengths, weaknesses, barriers, and areas requiring improvement within an organization (Cardile et al., 2023; Humaizi et al., 2024). Communication audits can examine not only the transmission of information but also communication structures, functions, perceptions, and organizational culture (Proell et al., 2022; Sikumbang et al., 2024). Therefore, applying a multidimensional communication audit to youth organizations can provide more comprehensive evidence regarding how communication operates across different organizational levels and program activities.

Previous communication audit research has been predominantly associated with

formal organizational settings, including corporations and public institutions, whereas its application to temporary, participatory, and youth-based organizations remains comparatively limited (Dalimunthe et al., 2025; Kumi et al., 2025). Moreover, studies of communication in youth organizations often emphasize qualitative descriptions of communication patterns and participant experiences, while systematic quantitative diagnostics that allow dimensions of organizational communication to be comparatively assessed remain less frequently applied (Dalimunthe et al., 2024; Jordan et al., 2026). Consequently, the research gap concerns not merely the organizational setting but also the need for a multidimensional and measurable assessment capable of explaining structural arrangements, communication functions, participant perceptions, and communication culture within a single analytical framework.

Responding to this gap, the present study integrates four communication audit perspectives structural, functional, perceptual, and cultural through a quantitative survey to evaluate communication within the DMSU community. The novelty lies in the simultaneous application of these four dimensions to generate an integrated diagnostic profile rather than examining communication only from a single structural or interpersonal perspective. Accordingly, this study does not claim to provide the first communication audit benchmark for youth organizations, but rather offers an empirical benchmark specifically for the DMSU context that can support future evaluation and program improvement.

The study addresses three questions: (1) What is the state of organizational communication within DMSU based on the four communication audit dimensions? (2) What communication strengths and weaknesses are identified through the audit? and (3) What improvements can be recommended for future DMSU program cycles? Theoretically, the study extends multidimensional communication audit applications to youth-based organizational settings. Practically, it provides diagnostic evidence that may assist DMSU organizers in improving information flow, coordination, feedback, and communication effectiveness.

2. RESEARCH METHODE

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design to evaluate organizational communication within the Duta Muda Sumatera Utara (DMSU) community (Creswell,

2021). The study focused on four communication audit dimensions: structural, functional, perceptual, and cultural. Instrument development was supported by a focused review of relevant communication audit literature and established instruments, particularly the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire and the ICA Communication Audit Survey. The review served to identify indicators and questionnaire items and was not conducted as a formal Systematic Literature Review (SLR).

The population consisted of fewer than 50 active DMSU members, including committee members and participants. A total of 28 respondents participated, comprising 12 committee members and 16 participants. Purposive sampling was used because respondents were required to have direct experience with DMSU communication activities, including information exchange, coordination, and program implementation. Considering the relatively small and specific population, 28 respondents provided substantial coverage for descriptive analysis. However, because purposive sampling is non-probabilistic, the findings are intended primarily to describe the DMSU context and should not be generalized to all youth organizations.

Data were collected using a 40-item questionnaire consisting of 10 items for each communication audit dimension. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Content validity was assessed by two communication scholars who evaluated item relevance, clarity, conceptual consistency, and suitability for each dimension. Items considered ambiguous or overlapping were revised before distribution.

Reliability testing produced Cronbach's alpha values of 0.847 for structural, 0.831 for functional, 0.819 for perceptual, 0.862 for cultural, and 0.891 for the overall instrument, indicating good internal consistency. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 through frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Mean scores were converted into percentages using the formula: $\text{mean score} / \text{maximum score} \times 100$, and interpreted using five categories from very low to high.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Overall Communication Effectiveness

The overall communication effectiveness of the DMSU community as measured across the four audit model dimensions reached a mean score of 3.73 out of 5.00, corresponding to a percentage effectiveness score of 74.6%. According to the interpretive scale employed in this study, this score falls within the Moderately High category (61-80%), indicating that communication in the DMSU community is generally functional but contains identifiable areas requiring systematic improvement. Table 3 presents the summary of effectiveness scores by dimension.

Table 1. Communication Effectiveness Scores by Audit Model Dimension

Dimension	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	Effectiveness (%)	Category
Structural Model	3.68	0.61	73.6%	Moderately High
Functional Model	3.71	0.58	74.2%	Moderately High
Perceptual Model	3.62	0.74	72.4%	Moderately High
Cultural Model	3.91	0.53	78.2%	Moderately High
Overall Average	3.73	0.62	74.6%	Moderately High

Source: Primary data, processed by researcher (2026)

The cultural model dimension recorded the highest effectiveness score ($M = 3.91$, 78.2%), reflecting the strong communicative norms of mutual respect, social harmony, and peer solidarity embedded in the DMSU community culture. The perceptual model dimension recorded the lowest score ($M = 3.62$, 72.4%), suggesting that message interpretation and perceptual alignment represent the most significant communication challenge within the community. These findings are consistent with research by Clampitt and Downs (2016), who identify perceptual variation as a persistent source of communication ineffectiveness in organizations with diverse membership.

Structural Model Analysis

Analysis of the structural model dimension revealed that formal communication channels, including official briefing sessions, written announcements, and the primary WhatsApp communication group, are perceived as significantly more reliable and

effective than informal communication channels. Table 4 presents the mean scores for the five highest and lowest rated items within the structural dimension.

Table 2. Structural Model - Key Item Scores

Item	Description	Mean	SD
S1	Information from committee reaches participants on time	3.89	0.58
S2	Official communication channels are clearly defined	3.82	0.64
S3	Briefing sessions provide sufficient information	3.75	0.67
S4	Two-way communication is encouraged in formal settings	3.43	0.79
S5	Informal communication supplements formal channels effectively	3.36	0.83
S6	Feedback from participants reaches committee systematically	3.21	0.91
S7	Information is not lost or distorted during transmission	3.54	0.72
S8	Communication structure is clearly understood by all members	3.61	0.69
S9	Digital communication platforms are used effectively	3.79	0.61
S10	Network of communication covers all stakeholders	3.57	0.74

Source: Primary data, processed by researcher (2026)

The data reveal that information timeliness (S1: $M = 3.89$) and channel definition (S2: $M = 3.82$) are the strongest structural communication features within DMSU. However, feedback mechanisms score notably lower, with item S6 (Feedback from participants reaches committee systematically) recording the lowest structural score ($M = 3.21$). This finding indicates a structural asymmetry in information flow: while downward communication from committee to participants is relatively effective, upward communication channels are less well-developed, creating a communication structure that is predominantly one-directional.

This structural pattern is consistent with findings from Gaikwad & Pandey (2026), who observed that youth organizations frequently exhibit stronger downward communication effectiveness than upward feedback mechanisms, particularly in programs with clear hierarchical differentiation between organizing committees and participants. The practical implication for DMSU is the need to institutionalize structured feedback mechanisms, such as regular feedback sessions, anonymous

suggestion systems, or post-activity evaluations, that create reliable upward communication pathways.

Functional Model Analysis

The functional model analysis examined the degree to which communication in DMSU successfully performs its core organizational functions: informing, coordinating, motivating, and relationship management. The overall functional effectiveness score of 74.2% indicates generally adequate functional communication, with coordination emerging as the strongest functional area and motivation-related communication representing the primary developmental opportunity.

Table 3. Functional Model - Communication Function Scores

Communication Function	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	Effectiveness (%)
Information Delivery	3.76	0.59	75.2%
Coordination Support	3.88	0.54	77.6%
Motivational Communication	3.52	0.81	70.4%
Relationship Management	3.69	0.63	73.8%
Overall Functional Score	3.71	0.64	74.2%

Source: Primary data, processed by researcher (2026)

Coordination communication recorded the highest functional score ($M = 3.88$, 77.6%), indicating that DMSU's communication system is most effective in ensuring that participants and committee members understand their roles, responsibilities, and schedules. This finding reflects the program's structured operational design, which features regular briefing sessions, detailed rundown documents, and designated coordination personnel for each program phase.

Motivational communication recorded the lowest functional score ($M = 3.52$, 70.4%), suggesting that while DMSU communication successfully conveys operational information, it is less effective in communicating inspirational messages, recognizing participant contributions, and sustaining participant motivation throughout the demanding program cycle. Research by Mihus & Nakonechna (2022) emphasizes that motivational communication is a distinct communicative competence that requires deliberate cultivation, involving not just the content of messages but the relational

quality and emotional intelligence of communication actors. DMSU would benefit from communication capacity building focused specifically on motivational and appreciative communication.

Perceptual Model Analysis

The perceptual model dimension recorded the lowest overall effectiveness score ($M = 3.62$, 72.4%) and the highest standard deviation ($SD = 0.74$) among the four model dimensions, indicating the greatest variability in communication perceptions across respondents. This finding is particularly significant as it suggests that the same communication events are being experienced and interpreted quite differently by different DMSU community members.

Table 4. Perceptual Model - Committee vs. Participant Score Comparison

Perceptual Dimension	Committee Mean	Participant Mean	Difference	Gap Significance
Clarity of instructions received	4.08	3.44	0.64	Significant
Understanding of program objectives	4.17	3.69	0.48	Moderate
Perceived fairness of communication	3.75	3.31	0.44	Moderate
Comfort expressing opinions	3.58	3.19	0.39	Moderate
Accuracy of message interpretation	3.83	3.38	0.45	Moderate

Source: Primary data, processed by researcher (2026)

A notable perceptual gap exists between committee members and participants across all measured dimensions. Committee members consistently rate communication clarity, objective understanding, and fairness higher than participants do. The largest gap occurs in the perceived clarity of instructions received (Committee $M = 4.08$ vs. Participant $M = 3.44$, difference = 0.64). This disparity suggests that committee members, who are closer to information sources and involved in communication design, overestimate the clarity of their communications as experienced by participants who are information recipients.

This perceptual asymmetry is a well-documented phenomenon in organizational communication research, often referred to as the communication sender-receiver gap (Tanner & Pfennig, 2026). Message senders typically evaluate the clarity of their communications more positively than recipients, because senders have access to the full context and intent behind messages that recipients may lack. For DMSU, this finding underscores the importance of communication verification mechanisms, such as comprehension checks, Q&A sessions, and structured feedback requests, that help committee members calibrate their communication against participants' actual understanding.

Cultural Model Analysis

The cultural model dimension recorded the highest effectiveness score (M = 3.91, 78.2%) among the four dimensions, reflecting the strong communicative culture of mutual respect, social cohesion, and shared identity within the DMSU community. This finding aligns with Tadesse Bogale & Debela (2024), who identify strong organizational culture as a significant enabler of communication effectiveness, particularly in organizations that emphasize collective identity and shared values.

Table 5. Cultural Model - Key Cultural Communication Indicators

Cultural Indicator	Mean Score	SD	Category
Respectful communication norms	4.21	0.48	High
Sense of community and belonging	4.07	0.52	High
Openness to diverse perspectives	3.79	0.61	Moderately High
Participative communication culture	3.54	0.73	Moderately High
Communication in social activities	4.11	0.49	High
Cultural sensitivity in communication	3.93	0.57	Moderately High

Source: Primary data, processed by researcher (2026)

Respectful communication norms received the highest cultural indicator score (M = 4.21), reflecting DMSU's strong emphasis on interpersonal respect, courtesy, and social harmony. The community's experience in social activities such as orphanage visits and community service appears to reinforce empathetic and considerate communication practices.

However, participative communication culture scored lower ($M = 3.54$), indicating that while DMSU members communicate respectfully, the organizational culture does not yet fully support open participation, constructive dissent, and proactive contribution to organizational decision-making. This finding resonates with observations from Reddy & Devassy (2026) regarding the tendency of hierarchically structured organizations to cultivate surface-level communicative harmony while suppressing critical upward communication. For DMSU, building a more genuinely participative communication culture would require deliberate structural and cultural interventions that go beyond courtesy norms to create genuine spaces for participant voice.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this communication audit reveal a DMSU community that communicates with moderate-to-high effectiveness overall but exhibits distinct patterns of strength and vulnerability across the four audit model dimensions. The cultural model's strength reflects the community's well-developed social cohesion and interpersonal communication norms, which provide a strong relational foundation for organizational communication. The perceptual model's relative weakness, however, indicates that this relational warmth does not automatically translate into mutual understanding, and that systematic gaps in message comprehension between committee members and participants remain a persistent challenge.

The structural analysis highlights an important design asymmetry: the DMSU communication architecture is better optimized for downward information flow than for upward feedback and horizontal peer communication. This structural imbalance is common in programs that are primarily designed around operational efficiency, where the primary communication goal is ensuring that participants receive the information they need to perform program activities correctly (Abanda et al., 2025; Kagai et al., 2024; Saraan et al., 2024). While this approach achieves moderate effectiveness for coordination purposes, it underserves the communication needs of participants who require channels to voice concerns, seek clarification, and contribute to program improvement.

The functional analysis adds a motivational dimension to this picture. The gap between coordination effectiveness (77.6%) and motivational communication effectiveness (70.4%) suggests that DMSU's communication system is more developed as an operational tool than as a vehicle for inspiration, recognition, and sustained engagement. In a program that aims to develop young leaders and agents of change, motivational communication is not peripheral but central to the program's core developmental purpose. Committee members who communicate effectively about schedules and logistics but less effectively about meaning, purpose, and recognition are not fully leveraging the developmental potential of their communication interactions with participants.

Taken together, these findings point toward a set of strategic communication improvement priorities for DMSU. First, feedback infrastructure needs systematic development, with structured mechanisms for participant voice built into each phase of the program cycle. Second, communication verification practices, such as comprehension checks and structured Q&A sessions, need to be normalized as standard components of information delivery. Third, communication capacity development for committee members should specifically address motivational communication, appreciative communication, and participative facilitation skills. Fourth, the cultural communication strengths of the community, particularly its strong respect norms and social solidarity, should be leveraged as foundations for building a more openly participative communication culture.

These findings are broadly consistent with the existing communication audit literature. Proell et al.(2022) found similar patterns in their longitudinal audit study, noting that organizations typically show stronger operational communication effectiveness than motivational and feedback communication effectiveness. Jefferson (2025) similarly observed that the most common communication gap in organizational audits is between downward information delivery and upward feedback reception. The DMSU findings thus reflect patterns that transcend the specific organizational context and point toward general principles of communication improvement that the audit literature has consistently identified.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has applied a four-model organizational communication audit framework to the Duta Muda Sumatera Utara community, generating the first systematic empirical assessment of communication effectiveness within this youth ambassador program. Using a quantitative survey with 28 respondents across committee and participant groups, the study documented an overall communication effectiveness level of 74.6% (Moderately High), with distinct patterns of strength and weakness across structural, functional, perceptual, and cultural dimensions.

The study's primary contributions are threefold. First, it demonstrates the applicability and practical value of organizational communication audit frameworks in youth community contexts, extending the application of these tools beyond their traditional corporate settings (Oladeinde et al., 2023; Purba et al., 2025). Second, it generates specific diagnostic data about DMSU's communication system that can directly inform communication improvement planning for future program cycles. Third, it contributes to the growing literature on organizational communication in Indonesian youth organizations, providing a methodological and empirical foundation for future research in this domain.

The practical recommendations derived from this study cluster around four priorities. Structural improvements should focus on developing robust upward communication channels that create genuine participant voice. Functional improvements should target motivational communication and recognition practices as deliberate components of committee communication competence. Perceptual improvements require systematic comprehension verification and communication clarity protocols. Cultural improvements should build on existing relational strengths to cultivate a genuinely participative communication culture.

Several limitations of this study warrant acknowledgment. The sample size of 28 respondents, while appropriate for descriptive analysis, limits statistical generalizability. The cross-sectional design captures communication perceptions at a single point in time, precluding analysis of communication dynamics over the program cycle. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, larger samples, and mixed-methods approaches that combine survey data with in-depth interviews and observational analysis to generate richer, more comprehensive communication audit

findings. Comparative studies across multiple youth ambassador programs in Indonesia would also contribute significantly to the field.

In conclusion, this study affirms that systematic communication auditing is a valuable investment for youth organizations seeking to enhance program quality and participant development outcomes. Organizations like DMSU that commit to regular, evidence-based communication assessment and improvement are better positioned to fulfill their mission of developing effective communicators, leaders, and agents of change among North Sumatra's youth.

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