

Organizational Communication and University Internationalization: Evidence from a Private University in Bandung

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Abstract

This study examines the role of organizational communication in supporting the internationalization of a private computer university in Bandung, West Java toward achieving World Class University (WCU) recognition. Using Karl Weick's theory of organizing particularly sensemaking and enactment the study reveals how communication enables leaders and stakeholders to interpret global standards, coordinate actions, and adapt to changing expectations. Employing a qualitative case study method, data were collected through interviews with university leaders, program heads, faculty, students, and international partners. The findings indicate that communication at a private computer university in Bandung, West Java functions as a dynamic mechanism of sensemaking that aligns leadership vision, cross-unit collaboration, and stakeholder engagement while navigating challenges of regulation, resources, and cultural adaptation. The process also reflects strategic alignment with QS World University Rankings (QS WUR), Webometrics, UniRank, and Scimago Institutions Rankings (SIR) standards. Effective communication thus becomes central to enacting internationalization and shaping institutional identity.

Keywords: *organizational communication; internationalization; higher education; World Class University; private computer university.*

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Abstrak

Studi ini mengkaji peran komunikasi organisasi dalam mendukung internasionalisasi sebuah universitas komputer swasta di Bandung, Jawa Barat menuju pencapaian pengakuan World Class University (WCU). Dengan menggunakan teori pengorganisasian Karl Weick, khususnya sensemaking dan enactment, studi ini mengungkap bagaimana komunikasi memungkinkan para pemimpin dan pemangku kepentingan untuk menafsirkan standar global, mengkoordinasikan tindakan, dan beradaptasi dengan perubahan ekspektasi. Dengan menggunakan metode studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dengan para pemimpin universitas, kepala program, fakultas, mahasiswa, dan mitra internasional. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi di sebuah universitas komputer swasta di Bandung, Jawa Barat berfungsi sebagai mekanisme dinamis

sensemaking yang menyelaraskan visi kepemimpinan, kolaborasi lintas unit, dan keterlibatan pemangku kepentingan sambil menavigasi tantangan regulasi, sumber daya, dan adaptasi budaya. Proses ini juga mencerminkan keselarasan strategis dengan standar QS World University Rankings (QS WUR), Webometrics, UniRank, dan Scimago Institutions Rankings (SIR). Dengan demikian, komunikasi yang efektif menjadi sentral dalam memberlakukan internasionalisasi dan membentuk identitas institusional.

Kata kunci: komunikasi organisasi; internasionalisasi; pendidikan tinggi; World Class University; universitas komputer swasta.

Introduction

The internationalization of higher education has emerged as a central strategy for universities worldwide in the 21st century. The process involves not only the expansion of academic collaborations and student mobility but also the establishment of a global reputation that is aligned with the idea of a World Class University (WCU) (Alsawaha & Al-Alawi, 2021; de Wit & Altbach, 2020; Zulfa, 2016). The concept of WCU emphasizes research excellence, global visibility, and the ability of higher education institutions (HEIs) to compete in international rankings such as the QS World University Rankings (QS WUR), Times Higher Education (THE), UniRank, or the Scimago Institutions Rankings (SIR) (Capriotti & Zeler, 2023; Hou et al., 2014). Yet, behind these institutional ambitions lies a critical element that is often overlooked: the role of organizational communication. As Karl Weick (1995) highlights in his theory of sensemaking, organizations are not merely structures or hierarchies, but are continuously shaped and reshaped through communication processes. Thus, understanding how communication flows internally among leaders, staff, and students, as well as externally with partners and the public is vital in explaining the dynamics of internationalization (Marginson, 2018; Tran et al., 2023).

In the Indonesian context, the urgency of internationalization is particularly evident. Indonesia, as the fourth most populous country in the world, has long recognized the need for universities to enhance their global competitiveness (British Council, 2015). Government policies such as the Kampus Merdeka initiative and the Ministry of Education's encouragement of international collaboration have pushed universities to adopt strategies that strengthen research, academic mobility, and global partnerships (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi & Kebudayaan, 2021; Ngo & Meek, 2019). However, most private universities (Perguruan Tinggi Swasta, or PTS) face unique challenges in pursuing WCU status (Saragi & Simon, 2023). Unlike state universities, PTS often operate with limited resources, but at the same time must compete in an overcrowded higher education market (Murdowo, 2018). This competitive landscape is particularly intense in West Java, the province with the highest concentration of private universities in Indonesia (Kafrawi et al., 2023; Kemenristekdikti, 2023). Against this background, a computer-based private university in Bandung, West Java, provides a compelling case study of how a PTS navigates internationalization through strategic organizational communication.

The university has explicitly articulated its vision to become a world-class university

by advancing international collaborations, securing international accreditations, and increasing research output visibility. Its organizational culture, summarized by the acronym PIQIE (Professionalism, Integrity, Quality, Information Technology, Excellence), provides an internal normative framework that shapes both academic and administrative practices. This study further examines how communication channels such as roadshows, coordination meetings, and cross-unit digital platforms serve to operationalize these PIQIE values into actionable internationalization strategies, ensuring that they function not merely as symbolic rhetoric but as drivers of policy implementation.

Yet, as several studies suggest, organizational culture alone cannot guarantee successful internationalization; effective communication is needed to translate these values into concrete action (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2015a). At the university, communication flows across multiple levels of hierarchy: the rectorate, directors, faculty deans, program heads, lecturers, and finally students. Moreover, external communication with international partners, accreditation bodies such as FIBAA, and even foreign embassies also plays a significant role in shaping how the institution positions itself globally. In this study, the term World Class University (WCU) is understood not merely as alignment with global ranking organizations such as QS WUR, UniRank, or SIR, but as a distinctive institutional branding constructed through the university's own communicative practices and strategic vision. Rather than pursuing numerical ranking as the ultimate measure,

the university defines its WCU identity through the articulation of its core values, innovation-driven culture, and consistent communication of academic excellence at both national and international levels. This approach positions "World Class University" as a symbolic yet strategic narrative embedded within the university's organizational communication framework, reflecting how the university enacts its internationalization goals in a uniquely contextualized manner.

The significance of organizational communication in this context can be framed through Weick's (1979, 1995) organizational communication and sensemaking theory. According to Weick, organizations exist because of continuous processes of interaction, interpretation, and enactment. Internationalization, with its complexity and uncertainty, requires actors within the organization to constantly make sense of new policies, shifting global standards, and external expectations. At the university, such uncertainties primarily arise from changing government accreditation regulations, evolving international partnership requirements, and initial faculty skepticism toward internationalization initiatives. Communication serves as the mechanism through which these uncertainties are reduced and coordinated action is enabled. In other words, without effective communication, the lofty goal of WCU cannot be operationalized within daily organizational practices. Previous research on higher education internationalization often focuses on policy frameworks, mobility programs, or rankings (de Wit & Altbach, 2020; Marginson, 2018). However,

fewer studies delve into the micro-level communication processes that mediate the implementation of internationalization strategies. This gap becomes even more pronounced in the context of Indonesian PTS, where organizational communication has rarely been examined in relation to internationalization.

In this regard, the case university represents both a challenge and an opportunity. On one hand, the university is relatively young compared to other prestigious Indonesian institutions such as Universitas Indonesia (UI) or Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB), and it does not enjoy the same level of state funding. On the other hand, the university has distinguished itself through its strong emphasis on information technology, entrepreneurial culture, and international accreditation processes, particularly with programs like Communication Science and English Literature that have successfully obtained FIBAA accreditation. These achievements suggest that communication both as a strategic function managed by units like the Directorate of International Programs and Public Relations, and as daily practices among faculty and students has become a critical driver in its internationalization journey.

At the internal level, organizational communication in the university involves processes of disseminating policies, motivating staff, and aligning various units toward a shared vision of WCU. Interviews with leaders and program directors highlight the challenges of ensuring that all staff members, from faculty to administrative staff, understand and internalize the goals of internationalization. Initial reactions

among staff and faculty often included resistance or apathy, as internationalization was perceived as adding more workload without immediate benefits. Coordinating governance and organizational structures to achieve this goal proved to be a gradual process spanning the 2021–2025 strategic period, requiring sustained communication across hierarchical levels. However, through consistent communication such as roadshows, meetings, and the use of digital channels the leadership attempted to cultivate a sense of ownership and collective responsibility. These communication initiatives were explicitly designed to reflect and enact the university's PIQIE values—Professionalism, Integrity, Quality, Information Technology, and Excellence—transforming them from normative principles into operational behaviors within daily academic and administrative routines. The process was facilitated by professional communicators within the Directorate of International Programs and Public Relations, who coordinated messaging consistency, monitored internal feedback loops, and ensured that the institutional vision of becoming a World Class University was communicated effectively across all organizational levels.

This resonates with Weick's notion of enactment, where communication not only transmits information but also creates realities and commitments among organizational members (Weick et al., 2005). At the university, this process was reflected in specific internal communication practices such as weekly coordination meetings between the rectorate and faculty leaders, where progress updates and concerns were openly discussed. Regular

“internationalization briefings” and the use of digital platforms particularly WhatsApp groups and the University Information System Portal allowed rapid dissemination of achievements, schedules, and feedback. These consistent, transparent communication routines gradually shifted faculty attitudes from initial skepticism to active involvement in achieving shared institutional goals.

Externally, the university’s communication strategy is oriented toward building reputation and partnerships. Press releases, collaborations with national and international media, participation in international conferences, and proactive engagement with embassies have been used to project the university’s achievements to the global stage. Public relations plays a central role here, ensuring that the institution milestones such as winning national awards, hosting international conferences, or student achievements are framed as evidence of its growing international stature. These external communication efforts contribute not only to visibility but also to trust-building with international partners. As Knight (2015) notes, internationalization is not only about mobility and rankings but also about creating sustainable relationships across borders. The case university case exemplifies how communication acts as both a symbolic and practical tool in this regard.

Despite these efforts, several challenges persist. One of the main obstacles is the high cost of internationalization, particularly in maintaining overseas partnerships and participating in global academic events. Similar to findings by de Huang et al (2022), financial constraints remain a critical barrier for private

universities in achieving sustainable international engagement. Differences in institutional expectations and geopolitical uncertainties also create communication gaps between the university and its foreign partners. Such barriers often arise from differing administrative norms and cultural communication styles, which, as DeLaquil et al (2021) note, can slow down collaboration and trust-building across institutions.

Internally, coordination between units such as Public Relations, the Directorate of International Programs, and academic faculties still needs improvement. Delays in feedback and fragmented digital communication often hinder effective policy implementation. This reflects what Amaral et al (2016) describe as “internal misalignment,” where complex bureaucratic structures disrupt communication flow. To address these challenges, universities must design communication systems that are both structured and adaptive, allowing for rapid response to dynamic environments. In Weick’s (1995) terms, organizations must continually engage in sensemaking to manage the ambiguity of internationalization processes. This means communication should not only convey information but also create shared understanding and coordinated action.

Theoretically, this study is positioned at the intersection of organizational communication and higher education internationalization. Drawing on Weick’s theory of sensemaking and enactment, it explores how communication enables meaning construction, coordination, and legitimacy within organizational change. As Gede & Huluka (2023) argue,

communication is essential in transforming internationalization policies from formal documents into collective institutional commitments. The study also addresses a research gap limited exploration of communication dynamics in non-elite, resource-constrained institutions, particularly in Southeast Asia. Previous applications of Karl Weick's sensemaking theory in higher education contexts remain limited, as most studies have focused on business organizations or Western public institutions, leaving its reliability in explaining communication processes within universities striving for World Class University (WCU) status underexplored. While global scholarship often focuses on prestigious universities in developed contexts (Marginson, 2018; Salmi, 2011), emerging research calls for more attention to how smaller institutions navigate similar ambitions under financial and structural constraints (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Mok, 2007). Recent literature also reinforces the evolving relevance of Weick's framework. Cristofaro (2022) highlights the co-evolutionary nature of organizational sensemaking, while Malik et al. (2025) demonstrate how digital environments shape strategic agility through communicative interpretation. Weick (2021) further extends the theory by linking sensemaking to accountability and organizational behavior. The computer-based private university in Bandung, West Java, as a private university in Indonesia, offers valuable insights into how communication functions as both a managerial tool and a meaning-making process in the pursuit of global visibility.

Accordingly, this study has two objectives. First, it analyzes how organizational communication within universities facilitates the internationalization process toward achieving World-Class University (WCU) status, emphasizing internal coordination, leadership, and organizational culture. Second, it examines how external communication through public relations, academic collaborations, and international networking contributes to building the university's reputation. Rather than merely applying Weick's framework, this study takes an exploratory orientation that allows communication patterns, institutional norms, and cultural dynamics to emerge inductively from the data. This perspective helps position the research not only as an application of sensemaking theory but also as a contextual contribution that reveals how communication, culture, and strategy intersect in the university's pursuit of WCU identity. These findings highlight both the progress and the ongoing challenges faced by the institution, providing insights relevant for other private universities in Indonesia and the broader Southeast Asian region pursuing internationalization (Candra et al., 2025; Sanders et al., 2020).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section presents the theoretical framework, followed by the methodology describing the case study design and data collection procedures. The subsequent sections outline the findings and discuss their implications for higher education governance and communication. Finally, the paper concludes with reflections on the role of communication in advancing

university internationalization and offers recommendations for strengthening institutional pathways toward WCU recognition. This structure is deliberately designed to move from conceptual grounding to empirical analysis, ensuring a coherent narrative that links Karl Weick's sensemaking theory with the practical realities of communication in a resource-constrained private university context. Through this organization, the study aims to highlight both its theoretical contribution to organizational communication scholarship and its practical relevance for policy and institutional strategy in Indonesian higher education.

Methods

This study adopted a qualitative case study design, guided by Robert K. Yin's (2018) methodological framework. The case study approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth investigation of complex and contemporary organizational phenomena within their real-life context. Internationalization in higher education, particularly in private universities, involves multiple actors, policies, and communication practices that cannot be separated from their institutional environment. By focusing on one university as a bounded case, this research was able to capture the dynamics of organizational communication in supporting the process of internationalization.

The research site was a computer-based private university in West Java, a private university in West Java that has recently intensified its efforts to achieve international recognition after obtaining national "Unggul" accreditation.

The case study was bounded by the university's organizational context and the internationalization strategies pursued between 2021 and 2025. The focus was on how communication practices at different organizational levels contributed to the university's ambition to position itself as a world-class university.

Data collection relied on multiple sources of evidence, in line with Yin's emphasis on triangulation. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source, supplemented by documentary analysis and limited observation. A total of fifteen informants were purposively selected to reflect the organizational hierarchy and stakeholder diversity involved in internationalization. These included senior leaders at the rectorate level, directors responsible for international and communication programs, deans and heads of accredited programs, administrative staff, students, and external partners. By involving actors from different levels, the study was able to capture both top-down directives and bottom-up responses to communication practices. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, which allowed the researcher to ask guiding questions related to the research objectives while giving space for participants to share their own perspectives and experiences in detail. Each session was recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and later subjected to thematic analysis.

Documentary evidence provided additional depth and served as a tool for cross-validation. The documents analyzed included the university's internationalization roadmap, self-evaluation reports for accreditation, policy

guidelines, and communication outputs such as press releases. These materials offered insight into how communication was formally structured and how messages about internationalization were framed for both internal and external audiences. Observations of meetings, workshops, and digital communication platforms such as email and WhatsApp groups added further contextual understanding of how communication unfolded in practice.

The analysis process followed Yin's strategy of relying on theoretical propositions. Karl Weick's sensemaking framework was used as a guiding lens, emphasizing how communication helps organizational members interpret, reduce ambiguity, and create shared meanings in times of uncertainty. Specifically, five recurring themes were identified and coded as indicators of sensemaking in the interview data: (1) interpretation of institutional vision and internationalization goals; (2) adaptation to policy and accreditation changes; (3) negotiation of roles and responsibilities among units; (4) emotional and cultural responses to organizational change; and (5) collective reflection through meetings and digital interactions. Data coding was carried out inductively and deductively: inductively to capture emergent themes from the interview transcripts and documents, and deductively to map these themes against the theoretical framework and research questions. Through this process, patterns were identified regarding the strategic role of communication, its function in preparation and policy implementation, its reception among the academic community, and its extension to external stakeholders.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several measures were taken. Credibility was enhanced through data triangulation across interviews, documents, and observations. Member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of findings with selected participants to confirm their accuracy. Dependability was addressed by maintaining an audit trail of coding decisions and analytic notes, while confirmability was supported through peer debriefing sessions with supervisors and colleagues. Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing data. Informants are referred to by their roles rather than personal names to protect their identities.

In sum, by employing Yin's case study methodology and integrating multiple sources of evidence, this research was able to generate a comprehensive understanding of the role of organizational communication in the internationalization of a private university in Indonesia. The methodological design ensured that the findings were both contextually embedded and theoretically informed, highlighting how communication serves not only as a tool for information exchange but also as a constitutive process that shapes organizational reality. In this study, the analytical process was iterative and data-informed, allowing insights from interviews, documents, and observations to reveal how communication practices supported strategic planning, performance evaluation, and the formulation of employee Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) aligned

with institutional goals beyond the National Higher Education Standards (Standar Nasional Dikti). This integration between empirical findings and Weick's organizing framework provides a comprehensive understanding of how the case university's internationalization strategies evolved through communicative action.

Result & Discussion

Strategic Role of Organizational Communication in Internationalization

Organizational communication plays a pivotal role in the strategic positioning of higher education institutions aiming for internationalization. In the case of a computer-based private university in West Java, Indonesia, communication does not merely serve as a technical channel for information transfer but functions as a symbolic and constitutive act that defines the university's identity and direction. As articulated by a senior leader at the rectorate level, "...reputation is not the ultimate goal. It is a means, an instrument to achieve quality education. What matters most is the quality of our graduates, not just the ranking..." (Interview, Rectorate, 2025). This statement echoes Weick's (1995) concept of sensemaking, where communication provides a shared frame of reference for interpreting internationalization, not as an end in itself but as a pathway toward sustainable academic excellence.

Another rectorate member emphasized that internationalization is indispensable for private universities in West Java, given the intense competition with the highest number of private institutions nationwide. "...to stay competitive, we cannot be static.

We must continuously upgrade quality and aim for global recognition. That is why communication is important, so everyone understands this urgency..." (Interview, Rectorate, 2025). This highlights the way communication frames the narrative of competitiveness, aligning organizational members toward shared goals. In this sense, organizational communication provides not only directives but also motivation, cultivating a sense of institutional pride and urgency.

At the directorate level, the role of communication becomes more operational yet still strategic. One director underscored:

"Peta jalan internasionalisasi itu sudah ada, tapi kalau tidak dikomunikasikan dengan baik ke dosen, staf, dan mahasiswa, maka hanya akan menjadi dokumen saja. Kami terus melakukan sosialisasi kebijakan, mendorong kolaborasi, dan mengingatkan semua pihak tentang visi besar universitas." (Wawancara, Direktorat, 2025).

"The roadmap for internationalization is there, but without proper communication to lecturers, staff, and students, it would remain just a document. We constantly socialize policies, encourage collaboration, and remind stakeholders about the bigger vision." (Interview, Directorate, 2025). This reflects a practical application of Weick's sensemaking theory, in which communication serves as a continuous interpretive process—translating strategic documents into shared understanding and coordinated action among stakeholders.

The operationalization of communication in this context occurs across multiple levels. Vertically, leaders use regular

coordination meetings, weekly leadership briefings, and policy dissemination as top-down mechanisms. Horizontally, faculties and directorates collaborate through working groups and roadshows to embed internationalization into curricula, research practices, and student programs. One program leader explained, "...we had to adjust our courses and accreditation standards to international frameworks, and this required ongoing communication between program heads, faculty, and the directorate. Without that, misunderstandings would delay the process..." (Interview, Program Leader, 2025).

These practices reflect what de Wit et Kafrawi et al (2023) describe as the embedding of internationalization through organizational structures and communication flows. Rather than being a one-off campaign, communication in this university is cyclical and continuous, helping to normalize internationalization as part of institutional culture. Omilion-Hodges & Ptacek (2021) further argue that communication is constitutive of organizations, meaning that the organization does not exist outside of communicative practices. This is evident in how leaders, directors, and faculty consistently framed internationalization not as an external requirement but as part of the university's evolving identity.

Students were also identified as crucial recipients and agents of communication. As one director explained, "...students are always involved. We encourage them to join international classes, internships abroad, and language training. Through communication, we build their confidence to engage globally..." (Interview, Directorate,

2025). This bottom-up involvement ensures that the message of internationalization is not confined to policy but becomes experiential for students, strengthening the institution's reputation in the process.

The findings align with Kapfudzaruwa (2024) assertion that internationalization in higher education is shaped not only by policy frameworks but also by the communicative practices that engage stakeholders in meaning-making. In this case, organizational communication functions as both a strategic compass and a practical tool, linking vision with action. The framing of international reputation as a "means" rather than a "goal" exemplifies the reflexive use of communication to manage expectations and prevent a purely ranking-oriented mindset.

In conclusion, the strategic role of organizational communication in the internationalization of this private university illustrates how communication serves as both an instrument and a process of sensemaking. It enables leaders to align stakeholders across hierarchical levels, embed global standards into academic practices, and sustain competitiveness in a crowded higher education landscape. By positioning communication as central, the university demonstrates Karl Weick's (1995) theoretical proposition that organizations are constituted in and through communication, where meaning-making becomes the foundation of institutional progress.

Communication in Preparation and Policy Implementation

The preparatory stage of internationalization at the university

was characterized by the intensive use of organizational communication to translate abstract visions into concrete operational steps. Informants from the directorate level highlighted that one of the most difficult aspects was not the conceptualization of internationalization itself, but the preparation of policies and technical documents that would support accreditation and partnership processes. As one program director noted:

“The most challenging part is the preparation of policy and documentation. It is heavy work, and if the communication is not clear, then misunderstandings occur across units.” (Interview, Director of International Program, 2025)

This statement underscores that communication was not merely an administrative process but a strategic tool to reduce uncertainty and distribute tasks equitably. Communication channels—ranging from leadership meetings to informal WhatsApp groups—were employed to synchronize information and create alignment among diverse actors. At the heart of this preparation, lecturers were positioned as critical actors. Several directors emphasized that they were expected to publish internationally, build collaborations, and break down disciplinary silos. The demand was communicated through formal meetings and policy documents, but also reinforced in informal exchanges. As one director stressed:

“Lecturers must not be allergic to collaboration. They need to write, publish, and engage with others beyond their field.” (Interview, Director, 2025)

This reflects how communication served not only to inform but also to persuade, functioning as a motivational tool that encouraged faculty to adjust their academic practices to global standards. Such findings resonate with Weick’s (1995) theory of sensemaking, which suggests that communication is the primary means through which organizational members construct shared meanings and respond to ambiguity. In this case, communication transformed internationalization from an abstract goal into tangible expectations for faculty performance.

Middle managers, such as deans and heads of accredited programs, described how top-level policies were reinterpreted within their units. Policy directives from the rectorate were translated into actionable tasks such as preparing self-evaluation reports for accreditation bodies like FIBAA. One head of program explained:

“At the program level, we translate rectorate directives into real action. For instance, preparing accreditation documents means mobilizing all lecturers to contribute data and evidence.” (Interview, Head of Accredited Program, 2025)

This illustrates the recursive nature of communication: top-down messages were recontextualized and operationalized at different levels of the organization, aligning with Weick’s argument that organizational reality is continuously reconstructed through communicative practices.

The literature strongly supports this dynamic. Marinoni et al (2024) argue that successful internationalization hinges on whether organizational communication

is able to transform strategies into collective commitments rather than isolated managerial initiatives. Similarly, Marginson & Sutrisno (2018; 2019) highlights that miscommunication and fragmented understanding often derail internationalization in private universities with limited resources. In contrast, the case here shows deliberate efforts to maintain coherence through consistent communication practices.

Regular leadership meetings were a key element of this coherence. Informants reported that the rector convened weekly meetings with vice-rectors and directors, during which progress was evaluated, challenges were surfaced, and adjustments were made. One senior administrator remarked:

“Evaluation happens weekly in leadership meetings. Everyone reports progress, and if something doesn’t work, it is adjusted immediately.” (Interview, Senior Administrator, 2025)

Such evaluative communication reflects what Eisenberg et al. (2010) (describe as “strategic ambiguity,” where leaders allow room for interpretation in early stages to encourage flexibility, but later clarify through feedback and evaluation forums. This duality-ambiguity followed by clarification was central to the preparatory phase of internationalization.

Another communication strategy was roadshows to faculties, where directors visited units to socialize internationalization policies. These sessions were not only informational but also dialogic, providing opportunities for faculty members to ask questions, voice concerns, and negotiate

expectations. By doing so, communication reinforced commitment and reduced resistance, aligning with Knight’s (2015b) observation that internationalization requires embedding into the culture of the institution, not just remaining as a top-level mandate.

Finally, the use of multiple channels formal meetings, workshops, written guidelines, and instant messaging—illustrates the hybrid communication ecology of the university. This multiplicity ensured that information flowed across hierarchical levels and reached different audiences in accessible forms. It also demonstrates the diagonal communication patterns described by organizational communication theorists (Lewis, 2011; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009), where information does not only move vertically or horizontally but intersects across units to foster integration.

In sum, the preparatory and policy implementation phase of internationalization was fundamentally communicative. Communication was used to assign tasks, persuade stakeholders, reinterpret strategies at different levels, and evaluate progress. Without these processes, internationalization risks becoming fragmented or misunderstood. The findings affirm that communication in this context is not ancillary but constitutive—it builds the very structures through which internationalization is enacted.

Internal Communication with Academic Community

The communication of internationalization programs to the university’s internal community—

lecturers, staff, and students emerged as one of the most complex dimensions of the process. Unlike strategic communication at the rectorate level, which is typically directive and policy-oriented, internal communication operates at the intersection of persuasion, motivation, and negotiation. Informants consistently described how the rollout of internationalization policies elicited diverse reactions, ranging from enthusiasm to resistance.

At the faculty and program level, initial responses to the internationalization agenda were marked by surprise and concern. One academic leader recalled:

"When the initiative was first announced, there was shock... because it meant extra work and added responsibilities for lecturers who already had a heavy teaching load." (Interview, Head of Program, 2025).

This reaction illustrates a common challenge in organizational change, where members perceive new initiatives as burdens rather than opportunities. Weick (1995) argues that sensemaking is often triggered in such moments of uncertainty, as organizational members attempt to interpret and assign meaning to unexpected changes. In this case, communication played a crucial role in reducing equivocality and reframing internationalization not as an additional burden, but as a necessary step toward institutional growth and competitiveness.

Directors in charge of the programs acknowledged that not all members were immediately aligned with the vision. Some displayed apathy, questioning the relevance of internationalization for their

daily academic work. To address this, the leadership organized intensive roadshows across faculties, program-level meetings, and workshops. One director explained:

"Not everyone was on board in the beginning. Some were apathetic. That's why we had to go faculty by faculty, program by program, explaining the goals, the benefits, and why this direction was important." (Interview, Director of Internationalization, 2025)

Such repeated efforts highlight the iterative nature of internal communication, where the same message must be delivered through multiple channels and occasions before it becomes embedded in organizational understanding. This aligns with Keyton's (2011) view that organizational communication is not a one-time event but an ongoing process of sensegiving and sensemaking, where leaders repeatedly frame messages until coherence is achieved.

From the perspective of staff members involved in administrative tasks, communication challenges were more technical but equally significant. Several directors admitted that delayed feedback or unclear instructions sometimes created inefficiencies in preparing accreditation documents or coordinating with international partners. As one administrator noted:

"Sometimes the feedback loop was slow. Documents had to be corrected several times because instructions were not immediately clear. But over time, with more meetings and faster communication through WhatsApp or email, the process became smoother." (Interview, Administrative Staff, 2025)

This highlights the importance of timely and transparent communication flows in supporting complex organizational projects. Inefficiencies at this stage reflect what Eisenberg et al. (2010) describe as the tension between strategic ambiguity and the need for clarity: while some ambiguity can foster flexibility, excessive vagueness can create confusion and delays.

For students, the communication of internationalization was framed quite differently. Rather than obligations, students were presented with internationalization as opportunities for growth and identity-building. Informants described how students were encouraged to participate in international classes, internships abroad, summer courses, and foreign language training. One student participant shared:

“Being part of the international program felt like a privilege. Joining accreditation processes or summer courses gave me a sense of pride that I could represent the university internationally.” (Interview, Student, 2025)

This motivational framing illustrates how communication not only informs but also inspires. Robson et al. (2017) argue that student engagement in internationalization is strongly shaped by how opportunities are communicated and supported. When framed as pathways to personal and professional growth, students are more likely to view internationalization as integral to their identity as global learners.

The adaptive use of communication channels also played a central role. Internal stakeholders described how leadership utilized both formal and informal platforms: official meetings

for major announcements, email for detailed instructions, and WhatsApp groups for real-time coordination. Such hybrid practices demonstrate diagonal communication patterns that cut across hierarchical boundaries, enabling flexibility and speed (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). This adaptability reflects a broader cultural shift toward openness and inclusivity in organizational communication.

In sum, internal communication during the internationalization process revealed both challenges and opportunities. Faculty and staff initially expressed resistance or confusion, while students largely responded with enthusiasm when opportunities were clearly framed. Over time, the institution’s willingness to maintain multiple communication channels, repeat messages through roadshows, and provide motivational framing contributed to greater alignment across the academic community. This dynamic underscores that organizational communication in higher education is not simply about information transfer, but about shaping perceptions, building motivation, and constructing shared meanings.

External Communication and Global Networking

Beyond the internal dynamics of organizational communication, the study revealed that external communication strategies were pivotal for constructing the university’s international reputation. Informants from the public relations and international program offices emphasized that while internal communication was about alignment, external communication was about visibility and legitimacy. In this

sense, communication operated as both a branding mechanism and a gateway for building academic networks across borders.

One senior communication officer explained that their primary role was to disseminate information about the university's international achievements:

"Our job is to publish news about international recognitions, achievements, and collaborations—through press releases, conventional media like newspapers and radio, as well as digital platforms. This helps shift the institution image from being just local to being recognized globally." (Interview, Communication Office, 2025)

Such a strategy demonstrates the deliberate shift from functional publicity to symbolic communication, where the institution frames itself as globally competitive. Instead of relying on explicit promotional advertising, the university strategically utilized editorialized releases to highlight milestones such as international accreditation, awards, and leadership positions in academic associations. As the officer added:

"We no longer focus only on student recruitment ads. Instead, we write releases that talk about achievements—winning awards, joining international associations, and leadership roles. This way, the story tells itself without being too promotional." (Interview, Public Relations Staff, 2025)

This practice aligns with Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka's (2015) argument that in higher education marketing, storytelling and reputational narratives are often more powerful than direct advertisements. By

embedding achievements within stories rather than promotional campaigns, the university sought to build authenticity and credibility in its communication.

External communication also played a significant role in branding through recognition. For instance, participation in national-level competitions such as communication and public relations awards was used strategically as a branding tool. Winning or even reaching the final stages of such competitions became a narrative asset to demonstrate institutional credibility. This resonates with Amzat & Avolio (2023; 2024), who highlighted that recognition in external arenas helps private universities, especially in developing contexts, to build reputational capital beyond mere rankings.

At the same time, external communication extended beyond media publicity into the realm of academic networking. Directors of international programs explained that their strategies included submitting papers to international conferences, attending global education events, and maintaining ongoing digital correspondence with foreign partners. One director reflected on these practices:

"We keep sending papers to conferences, joining events abroad, and following up with partners by email. That's how we keep the network alive. But it's not easy—sometimes the cost is too high, and sometimes geopolitical situations make our plans impossible." (Interview, Director of International Program, 2025)

This testimony highlights both the aspirations and the structural constraints of international networking. Hou et al. (2014) argue that universities in the Global South, particularly private institutions,

often face financial and geopolitical barriers that complicate their engagement in internationalization. In the case studied, limited budgets and unpredictable global contexts (such as conflicts or travel restrictions) disrupted plans, reflecting the precariousness of relying heavily on face-to-face networking abroad.

Nevertheless, the persistence of communication strategies—through both physical presence at conferences and continuous digital correspondence illustrates what Brandenburg and de Wit (2015) call the “dual orientation” of internationalization: balancing branding and academic collaboration. On the one hand, communication efforts promoted the university’s image as a credible global actor; on the other, they opened channels for meaningful partnerships in research, curriculum development, and student mobility.

Another important element was the use of goodwill and relational capital with media and partners. Informants explained that many collaborations and publicity opportunities arose not from formal negotiations but from long-standing personal relationships with journalists and institutional counterparts. As one communication officer shared:

“Sometimes it’s just about goodwill. With the media, a simple WhatsApp message was enough to get coverage. With international partners, sometimes it’s about having met them before at a conference and keeping the conversation alive digitally.” (Interview, Communication Office, 2025)

This echoes Lusher et al (2012) view that informal communication and networks of trust are often as important as formal

agreements in sustaining institutional partnerships. Especially for private universities that lack the extensive resources of public institutions, leveraging relational goodwill becomes a practical strategy for sustaining visibility.

Despite these achievements, communication officers also acknowledged persistent challenges. One difficulty was maintaining consistency in external messaging, particularly given structural overlaps between different directorates—such as the international office, public relations, and digital marketing divisions. Another challenge was the speed of response. As one officer admitted:

“Sometimes the feedback is slow, especially when confirming news for release. If we’re late, the momentum is gone. That’s one of the weaknesses we still face.” (Interview, Communication Office, 2025)

This challenge reflects what Cornelissen (2011) describes as the problem of coordination in multi-layered organizational communication systems. Without well-integrated processes, delays in approval or misalignments in content can undermine the effectiveness of external communication campaigns.

In summary, external communication in the internationalization process was not limited to publicity but extended to strategic branding and global networking. Through news releases, participation in competitions, conference engagements, and digital correspondence, the university managed to position itself as a credible international player despite resource and geopolitical constraints. By combining storytelling, relational goodwill, and persistent outreach, communication efforts reinforced both

reputational and collaborative dimensions of internationalization.

From a theoretical perspective, these four communication dimensions identified in this study the strategic role of organizational communication, communication in preparation and policy implementation, internal communication with the academic community, and external communication and global networking — can be situated within Weick's (1995) framework of sensemaking. Rather than representing the seven properties of sensemaking directly, they capture the occasions and substance of sensemaking within the institution organizational context. The strategic role of communication illustrates identity construction and plausibility, as leaders continuously interpret and project the university's world-class vision. The preparation and policy implementation phase reflects enactment and ongoing processes, where actors transform institutional goals into coordinated practices. Internal communication embodies social activity and retrospection, as dialogue and reflection shape collective understanding, while external communication demonstrates extracted cues through interpreting global partnerships and recognition as affirmations of institutional identity. Collectively, these aspects show how sensemaking operates dynamically in practice, connecting Weick's theoretical propositions with the communicative realities of university internationalization.

Conclusion

This study concludes that organizational communication plays

a decisive and multi-layered role in supporting the internationalization process of a computer-based private university in West Java, Indonesia. At the strategic level, communication provides the framework through which internationalization is defined, not as a superficial goal of ranking but as a pathway toward improving educational quality and competitiveness. Leaders used communication to frame the idea of reputation as a “means” rather than an “end,” allowing members of the organization to see the broader significance of aligning with global standards while still maintaining the institution's cultural identity and values.

During the preparation and policy implementation stages, communication emerged as a mechanism to reduce ambiguity and ensure coherence across units. Directives from the top were consistently translated into operational actions at the faculty and program levels through meetings, guidelines, and continuous dialogue. Although challenges were noted in formulating policies, adjusting to regulatory changes, and mobilizing limited resources, communication created a shared understanding that facilitated adaptation and progress. The presence of evaluative communication, such as leadership meetings and monitoring systems, further allowed the institution to remain flexible yet consistent in pursuing its internationalization goals.

Internal communication revealed both enthusiasm and resistance, reflecting the complexity of change management in higher education. Faculty often expressed concerns about additional workloads, while students responded positively when

opportunities were framed as privileges, such as participation in exchange programs and international classes. Persistent and multi-channel communication helped reduce skepticism, fostered collaboration, and gradually cultivated a culture of global orientation within the academic community.

Externally, communication served to project achievements and build credibility beyond the local context. Through the strategic use of media releases, branding narratives, and participation in international forums, the university managed to create visibility and recognition despite financial and geopolitical constraints. This dual function of communication—as both promotional and relational—strengthened the university’s integration into international academic networks.

In sum, communication within the institution functions as more than just information sharing; it constitutes the very process through which internationalization is imagined, enacted, and sustained. It bridges strategy and practice, aligns internal actors with a common vision, and positions the institution within the global academic community. Without effective organizational communication, the effort toward becoming a world-class university would remain fragmented and lack coherence.

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