

BUILDING ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AT THE UNIVERSITAS SUMATERA UTARA

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ABSTRACT

The University of North Sumatra developed an entrepreneurship university in response to the challenge of preparing skilled graduates. Integrating entrepreneurship into the academic process requires a communication strategy to build a common perception of how to achieve goals. This study aims to identify the communication processes that influence the awareness and participation of university stakeholders in entrepreneurship. We used a descriptive qualitative research method that included data collection techniques, observation, interviews, and document studies. We conducted interviews with parties directly involved in the development of the entrepreneurship university. The results showed that an effective communication strategy is essential to developing entrepreneurial universities through an integrative approach that combines learning, research, and innovation. We use both top-down and bottom-up communication strategies to enhance students' entrepreneurial knowledge and motivation. However, we need to improve the optimisation of communication through various media platforms to enhance the program's effectiveness and foster a more persuasive and collaborative approach.

Keyword: Building, Communication, Entrepreneurship, Higher Education, Strategy, University.

INTRODUCTION

Efforts to build an entrepreneurial ecosystem by expanding cooperation networks and improving the quality of partnerships, both with the government and the industrial world, have encouraged the transformation of North Sumatra universities into entrepreneurial universities. Higher education has a strategic role in preparing competent and competitive human resources (Christoper et al., 2024). Universities are required to foster innovative and creative entrepreneurs as well as learning and research. To build an entrepreneurial campus model, universities must innovate, create many business incubators, and place human resources as an important asset in improving campus quality (Aimah, 2024). For universities to survive and thrive in the face of new academic changes and challenges, which provide skills and generate ideas and innovations, an entrepreneurial approach is required. This requires a change in mindset and a change in the principles of management and governance principles (Baporikar, 2020). The concept of an entrepreneurial university aims to foster the transfer of academic knowledge to enterprises and promote socio-economic development

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(Dalmarco et al., 2018). Entrepreneur University plays an important role as both a knowledge producer and a knowledge dissemination institution (Guerrero & Urbano, 2012). Recognizing the importance of transformation at Entrepreneur University, Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU) has implemented various strategies to foster an entrepreneurial culture among students and academic staff, as well as create an ecosystem that supports the development of new science- and technology-based businesses. Lack of awareness and effective communication skills in entrepreneurship pose a challenge to producing graduates with entrepreneurial skills. Scimago Institutions Rankings 2024 rank this university as the 4th best campus in Indonesia for research, encouraging efforts to build awareness that integrates research results into entrepreneurial products. To bridge the gap between academic research and entrepreneurship, the university must prioritize governance by optimizing its research function to focus on value creation, innovation, and technical creation. This approach ensures that entrepreneurial research and commercialization are the direct outcomes of research (Naderibeni et al., 2020). Developing academic entrepreneurship using a systems approach can provide protection and commercialization of university intellectual property (Borhani et al., 2020).

The University of North Sumatra strives to enhance students' entrepreneurship skills through diverse programs and activities. However, there are obstacles to developing entrepreneurial skills. One of these difficulties is the lack of an effective communication strategy for developing entrepreneurship skills. The existence of a cooperative relationship between the university and industry has a significant impact on the knowledge gained about the industry's needs. Frequently, higher education programs focus too much on theory without providing enough practical entrepreneurship training. Moreover, although interest in entrepreneurship is high, encouraging more initiative and innovation requires strengthening the internal entrepreneurial culture among students, lecturers, and teaching staff. Entrepreneurship in higher education is considered important as a key driver of innovation, but there is confusion about its conceptualization, meaning, and value (Hannon, 2013). Therefore, the University of North Sumatra requires a comprehensive effort to address various issues and create a conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem. Many studies focus on the potential and benefits of Entrepreneur University. The practical challenges in the communication process, as well as their applicable solutions, continue to receive little attention. Universitas Sumatera Utara will use this research to enhance its communication strategy, which aims to increase stakeholder awareness and participation. An effective communication strategy is crucial for the development of entrepreneurship skills, as it encourages individuals to recognise and appreciate the significance of entrepreneurship.

METHOD

The research methodology used was descriptive-qualitative (Creswell & Poth, 2016). We selected this method to understand the implementation of the entrepreneurship university program because it provides an in-depth description of the phenomenon. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews with stakeholders at the University of North Sumatra, and studying documents related to the transformation to an entrepreneurship university (Rijali, 2019). The research steps include: first, tracing document sources to see program development; then, making observations. Second, conducting interviews with

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stakeholders involved in the development of the entrepreneurship university. Third, analyze the findings by linking them to available literature sources (Snyder, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Entrepreneurial University Communication Strategy Planning

We use effective communication planning to improve entrepreneurial science by combining learning, research, and innovation programs (Juliano, 2023). The process involves both top-down and bottom-up communication. Stakeholders employ various methods of top-down communication to impart entrepreneurship knowledge, while bottom-up communication facilitates the implementation of the current entrepreneurship program through discussion and program assistance (Ridho et al., 2023). The strategy is an approach to building students' awareness and motivation for entrepreneurship and providing opportunities to develop the skills and expertise needed in entrepreneurship, including developing entrepreneurial university programs. Communication skills in entrepreneurship on campus are crucial in determining the target audience for communication purposes (Valencia-Arias et al., 2021). The University of North Sumatra's efforts to transform into an entrepreneurial university underscores the importance of knowledge in fostering innovation, as it plays a crucial role in fostering collective awareness and influencing attitudes. The Entrepreneurial University's implementation limitations prompt efforts to foster collaboration, thereby reducing uncertainty and bias in its application. Stakeholders have partnered with universities to implement and integrate the entrepreneurial curriculum. The collaboration determined the stance on various implementations, including establishing student communities, teaching, and business innovation. Entrepreneurial development emphasizes this particular aspect. This entails not only establishing student businesses but also fostering an entrepreneurial culture that seamlessly integrates into both internal and external campus environments (Rahmawati et al., 2023). Supporting the entrepreneurial programme entails disseminating messages that align with the target audience through effective channels, which include not only opinion leaders and lecturers but also mass media. The limited intensity of news about Entrepreneurial University at the University of North Sumatra is one of the obstacles to limited information among students and the public. It affects the effectiveness of the relationships formed between initiators, developers, implementers, and supervisors. This barrier determines the involvement of various internal and external parties. To enhance students' academic abilities and professionalism, we must improve the development of cooperation networks between universities, industry, civil society, and the environment. A strategic communication policy is necessary to establish clear communication objectives. With the Entrepreneurial University integrates learning, research, and innovation programmes to enhance entrepreneurial knowledge, this stage of development necessitates collaboration from multiple stakeholders.

Persuasive Communication Strategies to Build University Entrepreneurial Character

The challenge of implementing persuasive communication in the context of Entrepreneur University (EU) is inseparable from the gap in the application and internalization of the theme thoroughly and consistently. The Head of Public Relations stated that the success of communicating a message or theme hinges not only on the announcement

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or dissemination of information but also on the comprehension, belief, and implementation of the message by all members of the organization. "Bringing it up about the theme signifies its integration, not just as a topic of discussion within a single unit, but also as communication from the university to the wider community." Even though the EU theme may only provide a glimpse, it often remains unbelievably and improperly applied, rendering it ineffective. It's possible that only a small number of individuals truly comprehend and implement this branding or slogan". Entrepreneur University's acceptance and application demonstrate that persuasive communication efforts may not be strong or effective enough to change the beliefs and behaviors of all community members. This means that the process requires a strategy that goes beyond information dissemination. Lack of confidence in understanding and implementing Entrepreneur University's branding or slogan causes significant changes throughout the organization.

According to the Head of the Innovation Research Development Agency (BPRI), building the Entrepreneurship University ecosystem continues to promote entrepreneurship and nurture the mindset through the synergy of experiential entrepreneurship education, industry partnerships, and entrepreneurship support. This makes it BPRI's role to build the character and culture of entrepreneurial universities by fostering effective communication between stakeholders, including students, lecturers, and the wider community. This strategy helps to create a culture of innovation, collaboration, and mutual respect, which are essential for entrepreneurial success. In addition, industry cooperation is considered crucial to building the ecosystem. It encourages various business development measures. External involvement in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship through support and knowledge necessitates a persuasive approach, beginning with internal motivation. The presence of external parties, such as the government and industry, enables universities to inspire students and lecturers to collaborate towards common goals. One of the efforts is to synchronise the entrepreneurship program with the curriculum so that the development products have an impact on society. Second, it is impossible to separate the program's goals, efforts to commercialize products, and efforts to foster an entrepreneurial spirit from the university's efforts to establish a strong entrepreneurial identity. The University of North Sumatra effectively integrates entrepreneurial values and activities with promotional activities. For the University of North Sumatra, efforts to attract students, investors, and partners who share the same vision and goals require a comprehensive communication process to build strengths and uniqueness to provide an advantage in entrepreneurship, especially for industry. Third, persuasive communication strategies enable universities to engage effectively. Creating a sustainable entrepreneurial culture in universities, especially by communicating the importance of entrepreneurship and innovation, requires integration in various aspects, not only in building human resources but also in building regulations and policies. According to the head of the Business Development Agency (BPU), the concept of an entrepreneurial university is more mature and has a more structured ecosystem. The Head of the Business Development Agency (BPU) endeavors to enlighten and persuade diverse internal stakeholders about the advantages and achievements of this approach, aiming to entice their participation. Typically, discussions revolve around generating revenue for the campus, but the concept of an entrepreneurial university remains relatively unknown. Therefore, there is a need to carry out campaigns through various media platforms that promote

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entrepreneurship in the academic environment. We changed our perspective by using evidence-based messaging and compelling narratives to foster trust and support among internal stakeholders, such as students, lecturers, and staff. "It is more established now. This implies that an ecosystem has emerged. To be honest, in my explanation, I have personally participated in discussions about revenue activity. While we called it an entrepreneurial university, it's still about campus income." In persuasive communication, highlighting the long-term benefits of the entrepreneurial ecosystem is one important strategy to increase interest. BPRI not only creates entrepreneurship but also provides career assistance for students. Building the character and culture of an entrepreneurial university requires encouraging students and lecturers to adopt a pattern of being open to new ideas and continuously adapting to changing circumstances. BPRI's role as a business incubator provides an opportunity to respond to entrepreneurial challenges and opportunities.

Communication Strategy Based on Private Entrepreneurship

The model of developing an entrepreneurial university by building students with entrepreneurial experience has also led to a shift in focus within the university environment towards an entrepreneurial university. The Head of the Business Development Agency stated that new options, more direct in the business world, began to replace the emphasis on academic outputs like scientific publications and intellectual property rights (IPR). The paradigm shift from academic output-based assessment to real impact-based assessment and commercialization encourages incubators such as BPRI to play a critical role. "It should be. The mandatory output should no longer include Scopus and IPR. However, if he possesses an NIB (business identification number) or a brand, it indicates that he has successfully entered the market. Alternatively, they could work together to determine which type of local government to use. something like that, right? The emphasis lies on impact and commercialization. This impact is not necessarily permanent; in certain entrepreneurial university literacy programs, the impact of problem-solving is not always permanent, and this can lead to profit. Not necessarily. Universities must be able to create products or services that benefit people”.

The communication strategy based on private entrepreneurship, which focuses on universities, can produce products or services that have a significant impact and solve real problems. This means that in an entrepreneurial university, the product does not directly generate financial benefits, but its value has a significant impact. We carry out implementation not only through research and publications, but also by developing practical solutions for product production. The activities of the program include not only the execution of the policy plan, but also the mentoring of students through the communication process, which serves as a catalyst for business innovation. Supporting entrepreneurship and encouraging commercialization necessitates business processes that facilitate the development of products or services from idea to market, as well as cooperation with various parties to ensure the implementation and sustainability of these innovations. Lembaga BPRI and the PR Division create a cooperative communication network to socialize product commercialization. Institution BPRI and the PR Division strive to dispel negative perceptions about the emergence of the discourse on university commercialization by crafting a message narrative about products and services that not only aim to generate profits

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but also offer solutions to community problems. PR builds university branding that can maintain a reputation as an institution committed to improving the quality of life in the community while still encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship. This condition is considered a success when student and lecturer interest in business incubators continues to increase. In addition to providing business communication assistance, the BPRI incubator also provides funding assistance that can improve the resulting business process. This implies that universities act as catalysts for change, prioritizing not only profits but also practical solutions to social and economic issues.

Optimising Communication and Promotion Strategies in Building Entrepreneurial University Ecosystems

Raising awareness about business potential by building an entrepreneurial university ecosystem requires consistency in communicating the goals and transformation that the university wants to achieve. According to the head of public relations at the University of North Sumatra, in shaping perceptions and gaining support from various stakeholders, the public relations division builds positive sustainability communications that help increase understanding and support from leaders, lecturers, staff, and students. To develop an Entrepreneur University model using a learning integration approach, it is necessary to bridge the understanding gap by delivering clear and structured information, thereby increasing support from leaders and other stakeholders. One of the measures taken is the development of entrepreneurial media in the internal environment. The diversity of communication and promotion strategies within the framework of private entrepreneurship, as applied within the Entrepreneur University (EU) environment, requires media to spread the message widely. The Entrepreneur University campaign utilises various platforms for publication and promotion, including an internal magazine (Mata USU Magazine) and the official website, demonstrating a holistic approach to information dissemination and branding. The importance of separating the task of media promotion from that of public relations (PR) confirms that the media is not the only promotional tool. This means that an effective communication strategy should not rely on just one channel. The clear division of tasks between the media and PR divisions in managing the media shows a well-planned organisational structure, where each part has a specific focus and responsibility. This reflects the principles of private entrepreneurship, which emphasise efficiency and specialisation in business operations. This means that the PR division can focus more on broader communication strategies and public interaction. "In the EU, we regularly publish content in the Mata USU Magazine and on our website. If we were still collaborating with social media yesterday, we would shift our focus to social media. However, it's important to distinguish between promotion and social media." While social media plays a role in promotion, it's important to note that promotion doesn't solely occur on social media. Therefore, we've separated social media into a dedicated job desk within the media division, which is no longer associated with public relations".

The head of the Innovation Research and Development Agency (BPRI) asserts that the Public Relations division is not solely responsible for the use of promotional media. His party also conducts promotions as a means of streamlining the ongoing communication process. This strategy enables the entrepreneurial university to optimise all available

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communication channels, reach a wider audience, and ensure the consistency of the messages conveyed. BPRI's move can enhance a solid image and reputation, with each platform having a clear role in supporting the institution's goals and vision. The response to the digital era of multiplatform activities is essential to ensuring success in achieving targets and building strong relationships with various stakeholders. Dynamic environments can impede innovation-oriented Entrepreneur University activities, necessitating the implementation of public relations activities aimed at building cooperation, perceptions, and behavior. The Head of the Business Development Agency (BPU) asserts that maximizing the role of public relations at the university level, as demonstrated by USU TV and special promotion teams, necessitates professional management of the delivered content and news to achieve maximum impact. One strategy is to separate the PR team from the promotion office. PR has the role of identifying and managing issues. While the promotion team supports the communication strategy by creating relevant and engaging content, the process carries the risk of not effectively communicating important issues, potentially leading to misunderstandings. The PR division's involvement in every strategic discussion characterizes an integrated communication and promotion strategy, enabling the delivery of important messages attractively and persuasively. This means that the optimization of communication strategies in the Entrepreneur University program requires cooperation, increased competence of human resources, and appreciation to increase communication effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

Effective communication strategy planning is essential to developing an entrepreneurial university at the University of North Sumatra. The University of North Sumatra employs an integrative approach that blends learning, research, and innovation programs to augment entrepreneurial knowledge. We use top-down and bottom-up communication, which has proven to build student awareness and motivation for entrepreneurship. However, communication barriers such as limited coverage in the mass media affect the effectiveness of this program, so a more persuasive and collaborative communication strategy is needed, including utilizing social media and cooperation with industry. Optimizing the communication strategy also involves using various media platforms for promotion and information dissemination, as well as a clear division of tasks between the media and PR divisions to ensure consistent and efficient messaging. A private entrepreneurship-based communication strategy that focuses on tangible impact and product commercialization was implemented to increase the relevance and success of the entrepreneurship program. Optimizing integrated promotion is crucial to building a sustainable entrepreneurial university ecosystem.

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