

From Channels to Information Journeys: Reframing Institutional Communication in a Multi-Campus Higher Education Institution in Kenya

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Abstract

Higher education institutions communicate through overlapping formal, digital and interpersonal channels, yet channel evaluations often treat those media as separate alternatives. This article reanalyses aggregate findings from a 2024 communication audit of a geographically distributed Kenyan health-training institution and uses the results to develop a domain-specific Institutional Information Journey. The source study achieved 92 participants: 87 questionnaire respondents and five senior-management key informants. Among questionnaire respondents, awareness was highest for print (64/87, 73.6%) and social media (60/87, 69.0%), while both were reported as most frequently used by 42/87 (48.3%). The largest aggregate difference between awareness and reported frequent use occurred for electronic channels (32.2 percentage points). Social media (58/87, 66.7%) and face-to-face communication (54/87, 62.1%) had the highest perceived contribution to information needs, followed by print (39/87, 44.8%). One internally inconsistent archived channel row was excluded from the derived comparison. These patterns show that awareness, reported use, and perceived contribution produce different channel orderings and should not be treated as interchangeable measures. Positioning the findings against established information-process and information-journey scholarship, the article proposes six functions - discovery, interpretation, confirmation, decision, action and sharing - situated between an information need or trigger and a resolution outcome. The framework is a conceptual extension for institutional communication, not a sequence observed in the source audit, and is expressed through four propositions for prospective testing.

Keywords: institutional communication; communication audit; information behaviour; media repertoires; higher education; information journey; Kenya; student communication

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions depend on communication to coordinate academic life, student services and institutional participation. Examination timetables, fee requirements, registration instructions, placement notices, policies, academic calendars and support information may be distributed through websites, email, student portals, social media, printed notices and face-to-face interactions. Channel availability, however, says little about how stakeholders actually encounter, assess, and use that information.

Student and staff communication now takes place in a multi-source environment. Official messages can circulate alongside class messaging groups, peer conversations, social platforms and institutional webpages. Gilani (2024), drawing on 17 student-communication surveys involving 20,134 respondents in the United Kingdom, found that students expect universities to use a range of channels rather than a single medium. Shawa and Gilani (2025) similarly identify channel development, engagement, strategic frameworks and evaluation as recurring priorities in university communication. Kenyan research also documents social networking sites as part of postgraduate students' scholarly communication practices (Kipruto et al., 2021). These studies support a multi-channel view while leaving a more specific question open: how do different sources function within one information episode?

This article revisits a communication audit conducted at the Kenya Medical Training College (KMTTC) and completed as a Master of Arts thesis at Daystar University in 2024 (Ochiel, 2024). The source study assessed communication structures, channel awareness, reported use, contribution to information needs, information flow and stakeholder feedback. The present study performs a transparent secondary aggregate reanalysis of those

results and uses the resulting patterns, documented communication frictions and established information-behaviour theory to develop a testable institutional-communication framework.

The article makes three contributions. First, it reconstructs verifiable item denominators and reports counts alongside percentages while preserving documented source anomalies. Second, it shows that awareness, reported frequent use, and perceived contribution produce different descriptive channel patterns. Third, it positions a domain-specific Institutional Information Journey against earlier information-process and information-journey models, focusing on how institutional messages move across discovery, interpretation, confirmation, decision, action and sharing before an information task is resolved.

Research questions

- RQ1. What patterns emerge when communication-channel awareness, reported frequent use, and contribution to information needs are compared using the archived item-level denominators?
- RQ2. What communication frictions in the source audit help explain why channel availability alone may not produce effective information flow?
- RQ3. How can the aggregate findings, interpreted against established information-process and information-journey scholarship, inform a testable Institutional Information Journey for higher education communication?

2. Conceptual background

2.1 Communication audits and stakeholder-oriented communication

Communication audits diagnose how information moves through organisations, how channels are experienced and where bottlenecks or mismatches occur (Hargie & Tourish, 2009). The source KMTC study combined this audit logic with Excellence Theory and Stakeholder Theory, emphasising responsiveness, feedback and communication aligned with stakeholder needs (Grunig, 2008; Freeman, 1984; Ochiel, 2024). A stakeholder-oriented audit therefore needs to distinguish channel presence from what audiences can actually do with the information they receive.

That distinction is especially important in higher education. An institution may publish a message successfully while students or staff encounter it late, interpret it differently, seek confirmation elsewhere or fail to complete the intended task. The analytical problem is therefore wider than identifying the most visible or preferred platform.

2.2 From channel preference to media repertoires

Media-repertoire research shifts attention from isolated media to configurations of media used in everyday life. Hasebrink and Popp (2006) argue that patterns of selective use across media are more informative than single-channel exposure, while Hasebrink and Domeyer (2012) emphasise the relationships and meanings that connect media within a repertoire. In a university setting, one channel may be strong for rapid discovery, another for explanation, another for durable record-keeping and another for authoritative confirmation.

This perspective weakens a substitution logic in which the highest-ranked channel is expected to replace the others. It also bridges channel measurement to a process question: how do stakeholders combine sources while resolving a specific institutional information need?

2.3 Information-process models and the information-journey tradition

Information-behaviour research has long treated seeking as a process rather than a single retrieval event. Wilson (1999) situates information seeking, use and transfer within broader information behaviour. Ellis (1989) identifies recurring information-seeking characteristics such as starting, chaining, browsing, differentiating, monitoring and extracting, while Bates's (1989) berrypicking model emphasises evolving searches in which queries and information needs change as new information is encountered. Kuhlthau (1991) adds an explicitly

processual account of initiation, exploration, formulation, collection and presentation, showing that information seeking involves changing thoughts, actions and uncertainty.

Sense-making perspectives connect information to use. Savolainen (2006), reviewing Dervin's sense-making methodology, describes information use through the metaphor of gap-bridging. Information encountering research also shows that useful information can be discovered incidentally and then trigger further exploration, saving, use or sharing (Jiang et al., 2015). These approaches support an information need or trigger as an antecedent without assuming that every journey begins with a consciously articulated need.

The term information journey is already established in prior scholarship. Adams and Blandford (2005) used it to examine changing information requirements across health and academic contexts, identifying initiation, facilitation and interpretation. Blandford and Attfield (2010) later presented the information journey as a holistic account of information interaction, and Pontis et al. (2017) applied the framework to how academic researchers keep up to date, showing that formal and interpersonal sources can play different roles. The present article therefore does not claim originality for the term or the general idea of a journey. Its contribution is a domain-specific extension for institutional communication that makes cross-channel source transitions, authoritative confirmation, action and recursive sharing explicit.

Credibility and peer exchange are central to that extension. Source and contextual cues can shape credibility judgements (Westerman et al., 2014), and source credibility, medium credibility and perceived information quality are interrelated among university students (Hussain et al., 2023). Student-to-student knowledge sharing is also a recognised feature of university life (Gamlath & Wilson, 2022), making redistribution part of the communication environment rather than an activity that begins only after formal institutional communication has ended.

2.4 A domain-specific Institutional Information Journey

An earlier professional interpretation of the KMTC audit proposed a Student Information Journey (Ochiel, 2026). The present article revises that idea in two ways. First, it uses the broader label Institutional Information Journey because the archived questionnaire aggregates 72 student leaders and 15 heads of departments, while senior managers contributed key-informant evidence. Second, it replaces conversation with interpretation so that the model captures both interpersonal discussion and individual sense-making.

The framework places six information functions between an antecedent and an outcome. An information need or trigger may activate the process, although incidental discovery can occur before a need is consciously recognised. Discovery is first exposure to relevant information. Interpretation is the process of making sense of it, alone or with others. Confirmation is the search for sufficient authority or credibility to rely on the information. Decision is selecting a response. Action is the behaviour taken. Sharing redistributes the information and can become another stakeholder's discovery. Resolution or outcome sits outside the six functions and captures whether the underlying information task was completed successfully.

The model is functional and recursive rather than strictly linear. A stakeholder may move directly from an authoritative discovery to action, return from confirmation to interpretation when sources conflict, or share information before acting. The framework therefore specifies observable functions and transitions for future study rather than prescribing a universal sequence.

Function/element	Theoretical grounding	Audit signal	Future observable indicator
Need/trigger	Wilson; Kuhlthau; sense-making	Information needs and audience dependence are explicit in the source audit	Problem, task or event that activates seeking; whether need was recognised before discovery
Discovery	Information encountering; media repertoires; berrypicking	Multiple channels are recognised and used at different levels	First source through which a specific message is encountered

Function/element	Theoretical grounding	Audit signal	Future observable indicator
Interpretation	Sense-making; interpersonal exchange; knowledge sharing	Face-to-face communication remains important, and feedback concerns recur	How meaning is formed; people or sources consulted for clarification
Confirmation	Credibility and source assessment	Controlled electronic channels offer record-keeping advantages but were underused	Source used to verify accuracy, authority or currency
Decision	Information use; gap-bridging	Effectiveness varies by target audience and information need	Choice selected after interpretation or confirmation
Action	Information use and task completion	Communication effectiveness is linked to response and usefulness	Behaviour completed; timing and correctness of response
Sharing	Information transfer; peer knowledge sharing	Social and interpersonal channels facilitate circulation	Forwarding, reposting or interpersonal redistribution
Resolution/outcome	Task completion and information-use outcome	Not directly measured in the source audit	Whether the underlying information need was resolved accurately and in time

Table 1. Theoretical positioning and future operationalisation of the Institutional Information Journey.

Analytical logic of the article

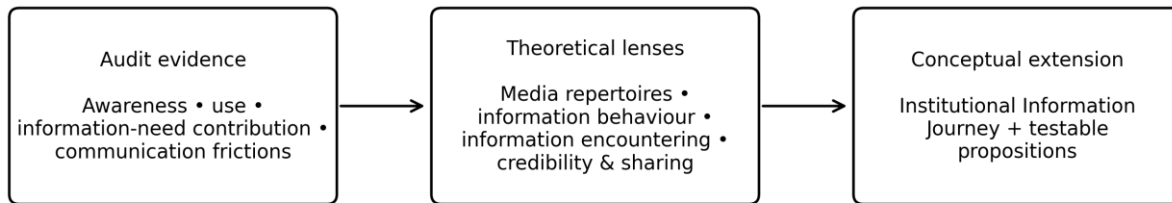


Figure 1. Analytical separation of archived audit evidence, theoretical interpretation and conceptual extension.

3. Methods

3.1 Design and source study

This article is a secondary aggregate analysis and conceptual-development study based on a completed communication audit; no new human-participant data were collected. The source audit was conducted at KMTC, a public multi-campus health-training institution in Kenya, and was completed as a Daystar University master's thesis in 2024 (Ochiel, 2024). The thesis describes a 72-campus institutional setting and selected information-rich respondent roles involved in or exposed to institutional communication processes.

The source study used questionnaires and key-informant interviews. Student leaders and heads of departments contributed questionnaire data, while senior management contributed key-informant interviews. The present analysis uses only values traceable to the archived thesis tables or narrative and does not infer missing respondent-level records.

3.2 Achieved respondent structure and denominator reconciliation

The archived thesis contains inconsistent planning figures. One narrative passage refers to a planned sample of 105, while the population table lists 18 academic heads, 72 student representatives and seven senior managers but prints a total of 98. The response-rate table, however, is internally consistent for achieved participation and is therefore used as the denominator anchor: 72 student leaders and 15 heads of departments completed questionnaires (n=87), and five senior managers completed key-informant interviews, giving an achieved total of N=92 and an overall reported response rate of 93.88%. The unresolved planning discrepancy is retained as an archival limitation rather than corrected by inference.

Instrument/group	Expected in response table	Achieved	Reported response rate
Questionnaire - student leaders	72	72	100.0%
Questionnaire - heads of departments	19	15	78.94%
Questionnaire subtotal	91	87	95.60%
Key-informant interviews - senior management	7	5	71%
Total	98	92	93.88%

Table 2. Achieved respondent structure reproduced from the source study response-rate table.

3.3 Secondary quantitative analysis

Three descriptive operations were applied to the archived aggregate results. First, channel-awareness and reported frequent-use counts were recomputed against the achieved questionnaire denominator (n=87), allowing percentages to be presented consistently to one decimal place alongside n/N. Second, aggregate awareness-reported-use differences were calculated as simple percentage-point differences for each channel. They compare two aggregate items and are not within-person transition measures.

Third, for the source table assessing contribution to stakeholder information needs on a five-point scale, the Great Extent and Very Great Extent categories were collapsed to indicate strong perceived contribution. The print, face-to-face and social-media rows each report a total of 87 and were therefore included. The electronic-channel row reports a total of 90, exceeding the achieved questionnaire sample of 87, and was excluded rather than silently normalised. The source table on overall media effectiveness reports n=87 and was retained as an overall, not channel-specific, measure.

No inferential tests were conducted. The sampling design targeted representative, information-rich roles rather than a probability sample of all students and staff. Respondent-level data were unavailable, and the published aggregate tables do not permit student-leader responses to be separated from department-head responses for the analysed questionnaire items. The analysis is therefore descriptive and theory-building.

3.4 Qualitative contextual evidence

The source thesis narrative and interview summaries were reviewed for communication frictions relevant to cross-channel interpretation. Clearly reported themes - delayed responses, inadequate feedback, underuse of electronic channels, information overload, technical barriers and information dissipation - are used as contextual evidence. The study introduces no new frequency counts or claims of thematic saturation.

3.5 Ethics and research integrity

The source study received approval from the Daystar University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee (approval DU-ISERC-000932) and a National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation

research licence (NACOSTI/P/23/28956). This article uses only the completed study's aggregate findings and public thesis material. Reproduced evidence, derived descriptive metrics and conceptual propositions are kept analytically separate, and documented source anomalies are preserved rather than resolved by assumption.

4. Results

4.1 Awareness and reported frequent use follow different patterns

Among the 87 questionnaire respondents, print had the highest reported awareness at 64/87 (73.6%), followed by social media at 60/87 (69.0%), electronic channels at 45/87 (51.7%) and face-to-face communication at 42/87 (48.3%). The order changed when respondents identified the channels they used most frequently: print and social media were each mentioned by 42/87 (48.3%), face-to-face by 21/87 (24.1%), and electronic channels by 17/87 (19.5%).

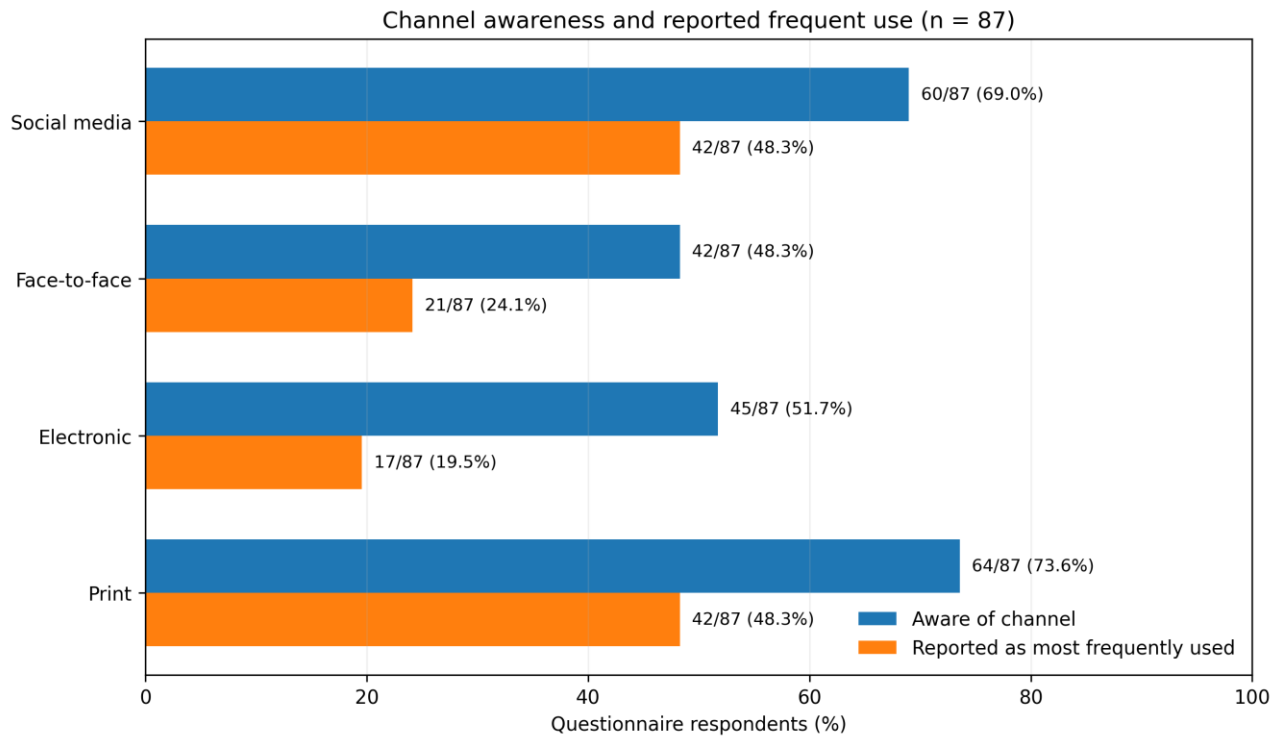


Figure 2. Channel awareness and reported frequent use among questionnaire respondents (n=87). Percentages were recomputed from the archived counts.

4.2 The largest aggregate awareness-reported-use difference concerns electronic channels

Because the awareness and frequent-use items share the same achieved questionnaire denominator, their aggregate percentage-point differences can be compared descriptively. Electronic channels show the largest difference at 32.2 percentage points, followed by print at 25.3, face-to-face communication at 24.1 and social media at 20.7. The comparison indicates that institutional recognition and reported routine application are different properties; it does not track within-person movement between channels.

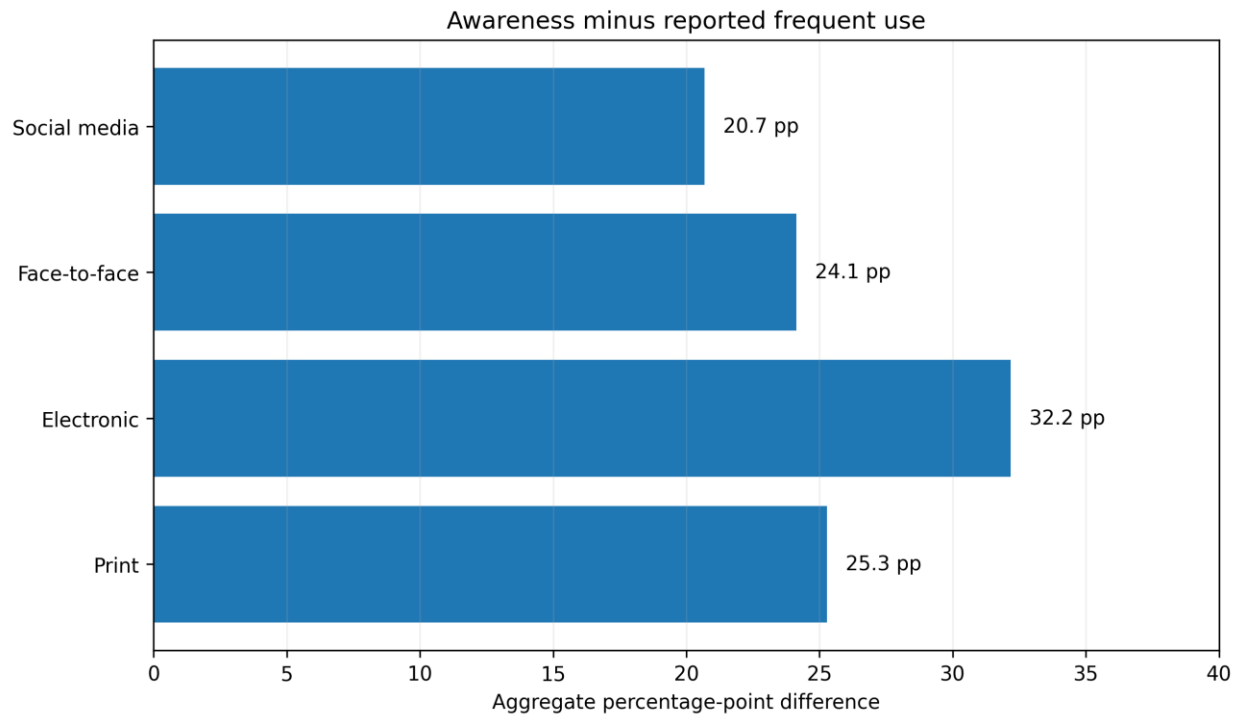


Figure 3. Aggregate difference between channel awareness and reported frequent use. The metric is descriptive and does not represent within-person transition.

4.3 Contribution to stakeholder information needs differs by channel

The source audit asked respondents to rate how much each broad channel category contributed to stakeholder information needs. Combining Great Extent and Very Great Extent for internally consistent rows produced 58/87 (66.7%) for social media, 54/87 (62.1%) for face-to-face communication and 39/87 (44.8%) for print. The electronic-channel row is excluded because its archived total is 90, not 87. In a separate overall item covering the combined communication media, 46/87 respondents (52.9%) rated general effectiveness as great or very great, 30/87 (34.5%) selected moderate extent, and 11/87 (12.6%) selected small or very small extent.

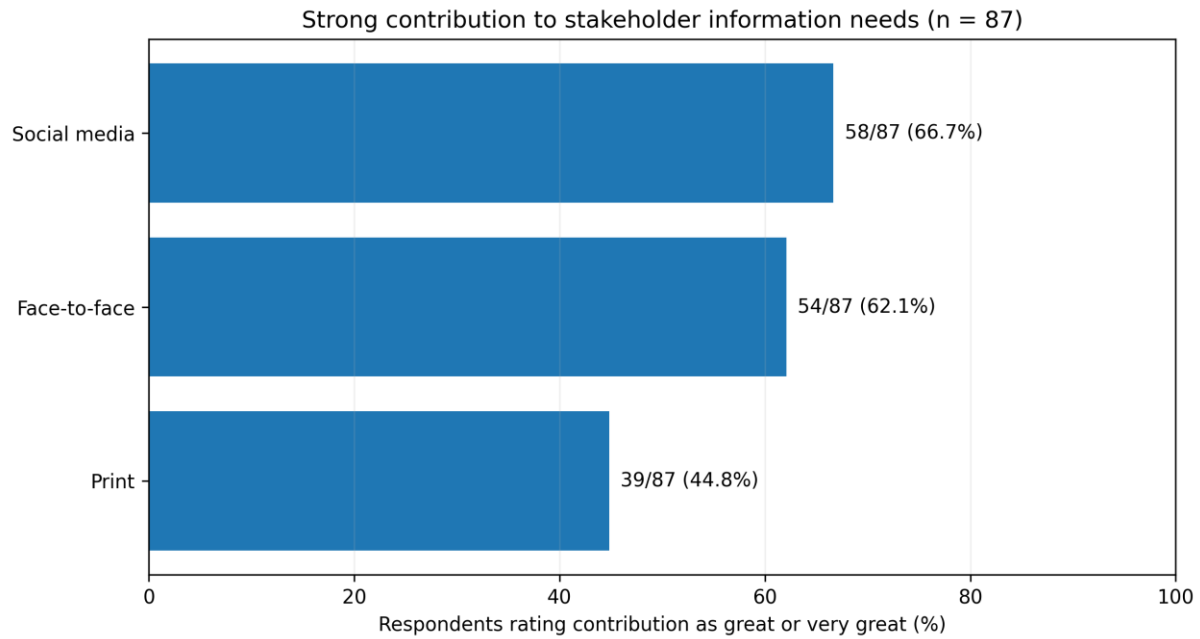


Figure 4. Strong perceived contribution to stakeholder information needs. “Strong” combines Great Extent and Very Great Extent. The electronic-channel row is excluded because the archived source table reports n=90, exceeding the achieved questionnaire sample n=87.

Dimension	Print	Electronic	Face-to-face	Social media
Awareness	64/87 (73.6%)	45/87 (51.7%)	42/87 (48.3%)	60/87 (69.0%)
Reported as most frequently used	42/87 (48.3%)	17/87 (19.5%)	21/87 (24.1%)	42/87 (48.3%)
Awareness minus reported use	25.3 pp	32.2 pp	24.1 pp	20.7 pp
Great + very great contribution	39/87 (44.8%)	Excluded: archived row total n=90	54/87 (62.1%)	58/87 (66.7%)

Table 3. Reconstructed and derived channel metrics used in the secondary analysis.

4.4 Communication frictions extend beyond channel rankings

The source audit identifies frictions that are not visible in the rankings alone. Electronic channels such as phone calls, text messages, the institutional website and the student portal were described as comparatively underused despite their potential for wider reach, control and record-keeping. Respondents also reported delayed email responses and delays through non-digital communication as threats to turnaround time and clear information flow.

Feedback was another recurring concern. Respondents recommended regular feedback mechanisms, timely communication, better targeting and deliberate combination of channels. Respondents also noted information overload, technical barriers, and information dissipation. Together, these findings show that multiple available channels do not automatically create timely, responsive or verifiable communication.

5. Discussion

5.1 Channel performance is multidimensional

Print was the most widely recognised channel, yet social media matched print on reported frequent use and received the strongest internally consistent rating for contribution to information needs. Face-to-face

communication had lower awareness but a comparatively high strong-contribution rating, while electronic channels showed the largest aggregate difference between awareness and reported frequent use. The ordering therefore depends on what is measured.

The implication is methodological as well as practical. Awareness, reported use and perceived contribution should not be collapsed into a single notion of effectiveness. A lower-frequency channel may still provide authority, traceability or explanation that another channel cannot supply.

5.2 Complementarity is more plausible than substitution

The cross-channel pattern is consistent with media-repertoire theory: channels derive part of their value from how they operate alongside other channels (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006; Hasebrink & Dörmeyer, 2012). The KMTC findings provide little support for a winner-takes-all strategy. Social media can offer speed and reach, face-to-face interaction can support interpretation, print can provide formal visibility and persistence, and electronic systems can offer controlled distribution and record-keeping.

This interpretation also fits the source audit's communication frictions. Delayed responses, inadequate feedback and underuse of controlled electronic channels are problems of connection and workflow as much as platform availability. Communication design should therefore consider how a message moves between sources and what function each source is expected to perform.

5.3 Positioning the model against established information-process frameworks

The proposed framework sits within a substantial information-behaviour tradition. Ellis (1989) describes recurring seeking behaviours; Bates (1989) emphasises evolving searches and changing needs; Kuhlthau (1991) models the cognitive, affective and behavioural progression of complex information seeking; and Wilson (1999) situates seeking, use and transfer within broader information behaviour. These models explain important parts of how people seek and make sense of information.

The information-journey tradition is even closer. Adams and Blandford (2005) identified initiation, facilitation and interpretation across health and academic domains, while Blandford and Attfield (2010) developed a broader information-interaction account and Pontis et al. (2017) used the journey framework to study researchers' formal and interpersonal information practices. The Institutional Information Journey proposed here is therefore not a claim to invent the journey concept. Its narrower contribution is to adapt process thinking to organisational messages whose practical value may depend on cross-channel discovery, interpretation, authoritative confirmation, action and redistribution.

That emphasis matters because institutional communication contains an accountability problem that generic search models do not always foreground: stakeholders may discover a message in one place but need a different source before they are willing to act. The distinction between discovery and confirmation is therefore central to the proposed model.

5.4 The Institutional Information Journey

The framework begins with an information need or trigger but allows incidental discovery to occur first. Six functions then describe the information episode: discovery, interpretation, confirmation, decision, action and sharing. Resolution, or outcome, is treated separately so action is not automatically equated with success. A stakeholder can act on incorrect or incomplete information; the outcome measure asks whether the underlying task was resolved accurately and in time.

The model is recursive. Conflicting information may move a stakeholder back from confirmation to interpretation, and sharing can initiate discovery for someone else. These loops align with process scholarship, in which information seeking, use, and sharing interact rather than follow one fixed order.

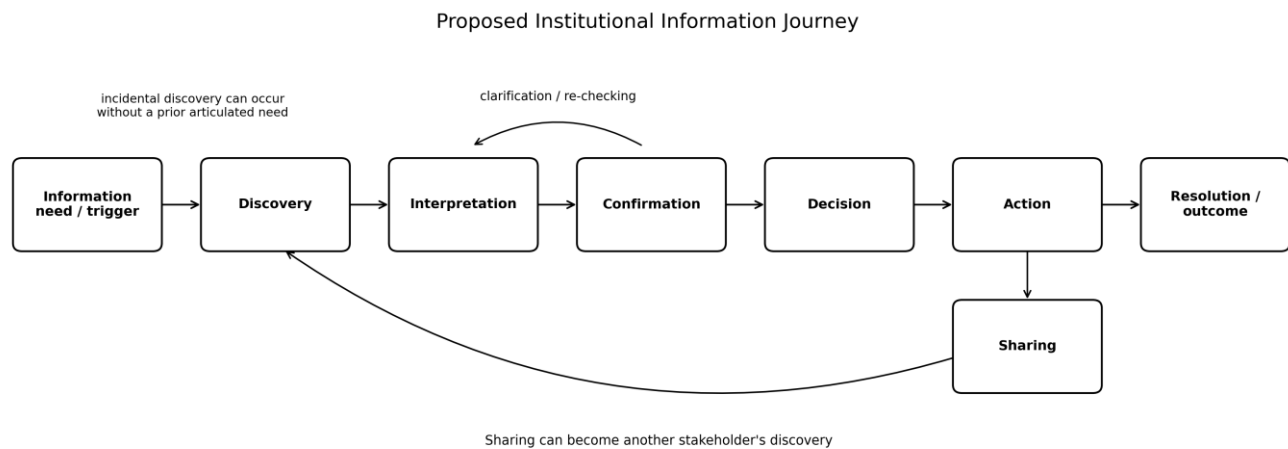


Figure 5. Proposed Institutional Information Journey. *Information need/trigger is an antecedent, resolution/outcome is an outcome, and the six central functions may be shortened, repeated or reordered.*

5.5 Testable propositions

Four propositions translate the framework into questions that can be tested with event-level data:

- P1. Institutional communication performance is multidimensional: awareness, reported use, and perceived contribution need not produce the same channel ordering.
- P2. Different communication channels can perform complementary functions within the same information episode; lower routine use does not necessarily imply lower strategic value.
- P3. The source through which institutional information is first discovered may differ from the source used for authoritative confirmation before action.
- P4. Sharing is recursive: redistribution by one stakeholder can become discovery for another, extending institutional communication beyond the organisation's original delivery channel.

5.6 Practical implications for higher education communication

Communication planning can begin with high-stakes information tasks rather than a list of platforms. For an examination change, fee deadline, clinical-placement instruction or registration requirement, institutions can specify where rapid discovery should occur, which source provides authoritative confirmation and what outcome indicates successful resolution.

Measurement should follow the same logic. Reach and awareness remain useful, but they can be complemented by interpretation, confirmation, response time, task completion and feedback. This approach also separates speed from authority: an informal channel can support discovery, while an authenticated portal or official notice remains the source of record.

6. Limitations

This study concerns one geographically distributed institution and should not be treated as a national estimate of Kenyan higher education. The source respondents were selected because of representative or information-rich roles rather than through a probability sample of all students and staff.

The archived source also contains data-quality constraints. Planned-sample descriptions are inconsistent, although the achieved response table provides a coherent denominator anchor. One electronic-channel contribution row totals 90 despite an achieved questionnaire sample of 87, so it was excluded from the derived comparison. Respondent-level records were unavailable, so student-leader and department-head responses cannot be separated for the analysed aggregate questionnaire items.

The original audit measured broad channel categories and perceptions rather than event-level information journeys. It did not observe whether the same stakeholder moved through discovery, interpretation, confirmation, decision, action and sharing, and it did not directly measure successful resolution. The conceptual model therefore requires prospective validation.

Finally, the author conducted the source audit and later developed the information-journey interpretation. This provides contextual knowledge but introduces a risk of confirmation bias. The article addresses this risk by separating archived findings, derived descriptive metrics, and conceptual propositions, and by retaining source anomalies instead of normalising them.

7. Future research

Prospective validation should use event-level data across several public and private higher education institutions. Participants could reconstruct recent information episodes involving examinations, fees, registration, placement, accommodation or student services and identify the trigger, first source encountered, interpretation activity, source used for confirmation, decision, action, sharing and final resolution.

Task-based observation, diaries or digital traces could provide behavioural evidence of channel transitions. A validation instrument should measure channel-function fit, transition frequency, trust in confirmation sources, response time and outcome completion. Sequence analysis or process-mining methods could then test whether recurring journey types exist and whether particular pathways are associated with faster or more accurate resolution. A student-only sample would also allow direct testing of a Student Information Journey as a nested application of the broader institutional framework.

8. Conclusion

The secondary analysis shows that channel awareness, reported frequent use, and perceived contribution do not produce the same ordering. That finding supports a functional view of institutional communication in which channels can complement one another rather than compete for a single rank.

The Institutional Information Journey develops that argument into a testable framework: information need or trigger -> discovery -> interpretation -> confirmation -> decision -> action -> sharing, with resolution treated as the outcome and recursive movement allowed between functions. The framework is explicitly positioned as a higher education communication extension of established information-process and information-journey scholarship. Its practical value is to shift planning and evaluation from the question 'Which channel works best?' towards a more useful question: 'How does information move across sources until the stakeholder can resolve the task with confidence?'

Declarations

Ethics approval

The source study received Daystar University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee approval (DU-ISERC-000932) and a National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation research licence (NACOSTI/P/23/28956). This secondary article generated no new human-participant data.

Data availability

The article analyses aggregate results reported in the publicly archived master's thesis. Respondent-level data were not used in this secondary analysis. Derived values reported here can be reproduced directly from the archived item counts identified in the Methods and Results sections.

Funding

No external funding is reported for this secondary analysis.

Competing interests and positionality

The author conducted the source communication audit and developed the later information-journey interpretation. This positionality is disclosed because it may shape interpretation. The article distinguishes source findings from secondary calculations and conceptual propositions to improve transparency.

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