

The Strategic Role of the Master of Ceremony in Organizing Protocol Events in the Malang City Government

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ABSTRACT

The Master of Ceremony (MC) plays a strategic role in organizing protocol events within the Malang City Government. This study aims to examine the strategic role of the MC in implementing protocol events while identifying supporting and inhibiting factors in carrying out this role. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with seven informants consisting of the Head of the Protocol Section and protocol staff, direct observation, and documentation. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman interactive model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that the MC's strategic role encompasses three main dimensions: as a communicator who bridges officials and invited guests, maintaining order in the ceremony and ensuring compliance with the protocol sequence, and as a representation of the institutional image that reflects the identity of the Malang City Government. Supporting factors include detailed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), competency development programs, and solid coordination among protocol staff. Inhibiting factors include limited human resources, technical constraints during concurrent events, and minimal follow-up training. This study contributes to communication science by highlighting the functional and symbolic dimensions of the MC in the context of government, an area that is still rarely explored in existing studies

INTRODUCTION

Official government events not only demand procedural order, but also consistency in institutional communication, normative compliance, and representation of the institution's image before the public (Novalia, 2025). In the context of image representation and public perception, strategically managed communication can strengthen the legitimacy of institutions (Pertiwi Hele et al., 2018). So in this context, the Master of Ceremony (MC) can no longer be understood solely as a reader of the program schedule, but rather as a strategic communication actor who connects officials, invited guests, technical equipment, and the audience in an orderly and meaningful flow of interaction (Bahardur & Afrinda, 2024). Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 16 of 2024 emphasizes that protocol in regional government includes venue arrangements, ceremonial arrangements, respect arrangements, dress codes, and visiting arrangements, so that the implementation of official events requires both technical and communicative competencies (Tumanggor & Kholil, 2025).

Previous studies have shown that the function of protocol and communication of leaders in local government environments is increasingly understood as a strategic instrument for maintaining coordination, orderly events, and public trust in government institutions (Novalia, 2025). On the other hand, recent organizational communication literature also shows that the effectiveness of institutional communication is determined by the organization's ability to manage message flow, cross-functional coordination, adaptation to changing situations, and alignment between formal messages and institutional appearance (Habibie & Santoso, 2025). Previous research shows that organizational communication strategies play an important role in increasing the effectiveness of public services and institutional coordination (FSM, 2019). Thus, the study of the MC's role in local government protocol events is important because it lies at the intersection of formal regulations, organizational communication practices, and institutional image management.

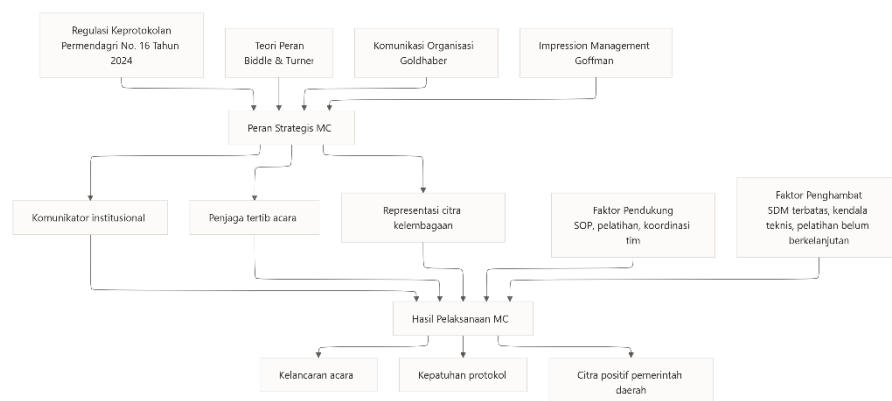
Based on this review, the research gap in this study lies in the limited number of studies that specifically position MC as a strategic actor in institutional communication in organizing official regional government events, especially after the issuance of Home Affairs Ministerial Regulation Number 16 of 2024 as the latest normative reference (Minister of Home Affairs, 2024). In addition, there has not been much research that integrates role theory, organizational communication, and impression management simultaneously to explain how MCs carry out communicative functions, event control functions, and representational functions in the context of government protocol (Sun et al., 2021; Taruchaín-Pozo et al., 2025; Wehner & Thies, 2014). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the strategic role of MC in organizing protocol events in Malang City Government and to identify factors that support and hinder the implementation of this role.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Conceptually, this research rests on three main foundations. First, role theory explains that a person's behavior in an organization is shaped by a set of expectations, norms, responsibilities, and social positions attached to the position held (Aartsen & Hansen, 2019; Wehner & Thies, 2014). In the context of this research, the MC plays a formal role that is determined not only by personal abilities but also by institutional expectations, protocol structures, and the rules of official local government events. Second, organizational communication is used to explain that the success of an official event depends on the smooth flow of information, coordination between organizers, clarity of messages, and the organization's ability to maintain consistency in conveying information to the public (Fitra Mayu & Muttaqin Mustari, 2023). In protocol events, the MC functions as a formal communication node that translates the institutional agenda into speech, instructions, transitions, and symbolic affirmations during the event (Bahardur & Afrinda, 2024).

Third, the concept of impression management explains that individuals and organizations consciously manage their appearance, language, attitudes, and symbols to form a certain impression in the eyes of the audience (Sun et al., 2021; Taruchaín-Pozo et al., 2025). In the context of government protocol, the way the MC speaks, chooses diction, maintains intonation, displays composure, and adapts to the formality of the event is part of the strategy to represent the image of the local government (Ensour & Sarhan, 2024). The integration of these three perspectives shows that the role of the MC in protocol events is not singular, but multidimensional: as an institutional communicator, a guardian of order at the event, and a representation of the institutional image (Novalia, 2025). This framework also shows that the quality of MC role implementation is influenced by supporting factors such as SOPs, training, and team coordination, as well as inhibiting factors such as limited human resources, technical constraints, and weak follow-up on capacity development (Taruchaín-Pozo et al., 2025).



Picture1: Theoretical Framework Diagram

The theoretical framework of the study integrates regulations, three theoretical foundations, contextual factors, and the outputs of the MC role implementation. At the top, Permendagri No. 16 of 2024 is represented as a regulatory framework that provides normative and technical boundaries for protocol practices; this regulation becomes the operational basis for MC

activities. Three conceptual foundations (role theory, organizational communication, and impression management) are positioned as conceptual sources that together form the construct of the “MC Strategic Role”: role theory explains the normative expectations and responsibilities of the position, organizational communication explains the MC's function as a formal channel that maintains the accuracy and continuity of institutional messages, while impression management explains the performative and representational dimensions of MC actions. The MC's strategic role is further manifested in three operational functions: institutional communicator, event order maintainer, and institutional image representation embodied in event practices. The MC's actual performance is influenced by supporting factors (e.g., SOPs, training, team coordination) and inhibiting factors (e.g., limited human resources, technical constraints, unsustainable training). The interaction between the MC's function and these factors determines the outcome of the event, namely, the smooth running of the event, adherence to protocols, and the creation of a positive image of local government. This framework emphasizes that strengthening the MC's role must be viewed as a systemic effort combining regulatory strengthening, organizational capacity, and public presentation strategies, rather than simply enhancing individual skills.

The theoretical framework of this research rests on three conceptual foundations. First, role theory, developed by Biddle (1986) and elaborated by Turner (1990), views roles as a set of norms, expectations, and behaviors attached to a particular position in the social structure. Second, Goldhaber's (1990) concept of organizational communication, which emphasizes the importance of formal communication channels in maintaining the integrity of institutional messages.(Goldhaber, 1990)Third, the concept of impression management from Goffman (1959), which is relevant to explain how MCs manage self-presentation and institutional representation in front of the public.(Richard, 2012).

Based on the background and research gaps, this study formulates two main objectives: (1) to determine the strategic role of MC in organizing protocol events within the Malang City Government; and (2) to identify factors that support and hinder the implementation of the strategic role of MC.(Bimtekpusdiklat, 2024)The novelty of this research lies in the integration of strategic communication perspectives with the latest protocol regulatory framework and the local government context, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of MC's position as an institutional communication actor.

Role Theory

1. Definition of key roles and perspectives

Roles are understood as distinctive patterns of behavior inherent in social positions, where people as members of social positions hold expectations for their own behavior and the behavior of others. Biddle identifies several perspectives: functional, symbolic interactionist, structural, organizational, and cognitive, and relates roles to concepts such as consensus, conformity, role conflict, and role taking. (Biddle, 1986). Turner focuses on role-taking, that is, taking another person's point of view, which may or may not involve adopting that point of view as one's own, and may or may not be reflexive (Turner, 1956).

2. Implications for MC

MCs can be understood as holding a certain social position with a set of normative expectations, while continuing to role-take towards the audience and the institution.

3. Organizational Communication (Goldhaber)

Organizational communication has evolved as a discipline with its own content, methodology, and applications, rooted in social psychology, human relations, and organizational theory. Goldhaber emphasizes the importance of communication audits and empirical findings on how messages flow within North American and European organizations, including through the ICA Communication Audit study (Goldhaber & Barnett, 1988). The Handbook of Organizational Communication expands on this by discussing field boundaries, paradigms, and how new technologies are changing communication in public and private organizations (Goldhaber, 1990).

4. Relevance for MC

From this, it can be concluded that the role of MC is closely related to formal communication channels that maintain the integrity of institutional messages, although the specific details of MC are not explained directly in these texts.

5. Impression Management (Goffman)

Goffman describes face-to-face interaction as an arena in which individuals present themselves, and others try to obtain information about their socio-economic status, self-concept, attitudes, competence, and beliefs (Goffman, 1959). Individuals must act in such a way that they intentionally or unintentionally express themselves, and others will be "impressed" by them based on various behavioral and appearance cues (Goffman, 1959).

6. Relation to institutional representation

This framework supports the idea that MCs not only convey messages, but also manage the presentation of themselves and the image of the institution before the public, through verbal and nonverbal signals.

7. The Relationship of the Three Concepts

Table 1. A brief comparison of three conceptual foundations

Aspect	Role Theory	Organizational Communication	Impression Management
Main focus	Behavior patterns and expectations of social position	Message flow and communication audit in organizations	Self-presentation and impression in face-to-face interactions

8. Protocol Standards and Implications for Local Governments

Table 2. The role of MC and protocol standards in local government

Aspect	Key Findings	Relevance for City Government
Protocol standards	Local governments need to have standard protocol rules to ensure event consistency (Ni & Sarweni, 2014).	Becomes a reference for MC in composing text and plot
Flexibility	Rules should not be rigid, allowing room for adjustment as needed (Ni & Sarweni, 2014)	MC can adapt style without breaking protocol

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, which is considered most appropriate for exploring the depth of meaning, context, and complexity of social phenomena that cannot be reduced to numbers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The choice of this approach is based on the research objective, which is oriented towards a deep understanding of how MC carries out its role in the reality of local government protocol, not simply measuring the frequency or correlation of variables.

The data sources for this research consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from seven informants who were purposively selected based on the criteria of direct involvement in organizing protocol events. The seven informants consisted of two Heads of Protocol Sections of the Malang City Government, namely the Head of Protocol Section from the previous period and the Head of Protocol Section currently serving, as well as protocol staff serving as MCs and supporting teams (5 people). Secondary data included documents on the agenda, protocol SOPs, activity reports, and related regulations, including Permendagri No. 16 of 2024.

Data collection was conducted through three complementary methods. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews using an interview guide developed based on the dimensions of the MC's role and the factors that influence it. Second, non-participant observation of several protocol events within the Malang City Government during the research period to directly observe how MCs carry out their duties. Third, documentation was conducted through a review of official documents, video recordings of events, and relevant protocol archives.

Data analysis using interactive models (Miles & Huberman, 1994) consists of four stages: data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data condensation was carried out by selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data from field notes and interview transcripts. Data presentation was carried out in the form of narrative text and a thematic matrix to facilitate the conclusion. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation, and member checking with key informants to ensure the researcher's interpretations were in line with their experiences.

RESEARCH RESULT

Based on interviews, observations, and documentation, it was found that the role of the MC in organizing protocol events in the Malang City Government is structured into three main themes: institutional communicator, ceremonial order maintainer, and representation of institutional image. These three themes emerged consistently from all informants and were supported by observations at official events that showed that the MC not only read the agenda, but also managed the flow of communication, the rhythm of the event, and the formal impression of the institution.

Table 3. Key Research Findings

Theme findings of	Description of findings	Field evidence
Institutional communicator	The MC bridges officials, invited guests, and the technical team so that information is conveyed clearly and orderly.	The informant emphasized that the MC must understand the context of the event, the positions of the invitees, and the order of respect.
Ceremony order guard	The MC maintains smooth transitions between sections of the event and is able to improvise when sudden changes occur.	Observations show that MCs remain calm when delays or technical problems occur.
Representation of institutional image	MC becomes the symbolic face of local government	Informants stated that the professionalism of the MC influences the image of the

Theme findings of	Description of findings	Field evidence
	through speech, attitude and appearance.	Malang City Government in the eyes of guests.
Supporting factors	Detailed SOPs, training, mentoring, and team coordination strengthen the implementation of the MC role.	All informants mentioned briefings, SOPs, and senior-junior coaching.
Inhibiting factors	Limited human resources, sound system constraints, and unsustainable training hamper MC performance.	Informants mentioned the event was crowded, the venue was problematic, and the knowledge transfer was uneven.

Research Context Profile

The Malang City Government Protocol Section is under the Regional Secretariat and is responsible for organizing all official city government events. In practice, this section handles an average of 150–200 protocol events per year, ranging from official coordination meetings to major events such as Malang City's Anniversary, Independence Day ceremonies, and receptions for other regional leaders. All seven informants involved in this study had at least three years of experience in protocol, with a work period ranging from 3–18 years.

The Strategic Role of MC

The results of the field data analysis show that the strategic role of MC in protocol events in the Malang City Government is mapped into three main interrelated dimensions, namely institutional communicator, ceremonial order maintainer, and institutional image representation.

Institutional Communicator

The first finding indicates that the MC acts as a communicator, bridging the various parties involved in the event, namely government officials, guests of honor, event participants, and the technical team. Informant 1 emphasized that the MC is not merely a host, but rather a bridge between city leaders and the attending public. Each MC's speech represents the institution, not an individual.

Informant 3 added that the MC must know who is present, their titles, and the correct order of respect. Mispronunciation of names or titles at formal events can have serious protocol implications. Thus, the MC's communicative function is not only informative, but also technical and normative.

Keeping Order at the Ceremony

The second dimension emerging from the field findings is the MC's role as a guardian of order and the smooth running of the event. In every protocol event, the MC not only reads the agenda, but also monitors the time, coordinates transitions between sections of the event, and anticipates changes to the established plan. Informant 4 explained that when sudden changes occur, such as an official being late or the order of events needing to be adjusted, the MC must be able to improvise without disrupting the flow of the event. This demonstrates that MCs are required to be professionally prepared and able to control the situation in real time. Observations of three protocol events also confirmed that MCs were able to manage transitions between sections of the event well, even when there was a delay in one of the sessions. On several occasions, MCs successfully filled unplanned pauses with relevant information segments without creating a chaotic impression for the guests.

Representation of Institutional Image

The third dimension, and the most strategic from an organizational communication perspective, is the MC's role as a representative of the Malang City Government's image. At formal events, the MC does not appear as a mere individual, but rather as an institutional persona representing the city government's values, identity, and professional commitment. Informant 2 emphasized that the way the MC speaks, behaves, and dresses reflects how the Malang City Government wants to be perceived by guests and the public. A single MC who appears unprofessional can damage the image of an event that has been carefully prepared. Informant 5 added that before the event begins, he always does vocal exercises and rereads the program schedule to be able to deliver each section with confidence and composure.

Supporting Factors for the Implementation of MC's Strategic Role

The research findings revealed three key supporting factors. First, the existence of detailed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The Malang City Government's protocol SOPs have been developed in detail for various types of events and include the order of events, dress code, MC grammar, handling of unforeseen situations, and coordination mechanisms with other departments. Second, there is a structured competency development program. The Malang City Government regularly sends protocol staff to attend protocol training organized by the Ministry of Home Affairs and related institutions. Furthermore, there is an internal mentoring mechanism between senior and junior staff. Third, the success of MCs is also supported by strong synergy and coordination within the protocol team. Before the event begins, the team always holds a joint briefing so that everyone understands their respective roles. The MC must be aware of what the sound system, guest, and catering teams are doing, as all of these elements are directly related to the smooth running of the event.

Factors Inhibiting the Implementation of the Strategic Role of MC

On the other hand, this study also identified three major inhibiting factors. First, limited qualified human resources. The number of protocol staff is not always commensurate with the number of events, especially during peak periods like April and August. On some days, two or three events can occur simultaneously at different locations, so the quality of the MCs assigned is not always consistent. Second, there are technical constraints, particularly with sound systems and event infrastructure. Some city government venues lack adequate technical capabilities, posing a real obstacle to MCs conveying messages effectively. Third, training programs are not fully sustainable. Although training is available, not all staff can attend, and post-training follow-up is not systematically conducted. This situation indicates a knowledge management issue that needs to be addressed.

DISCUSSION

MC as an Institutional Communicator

The finding that the MC functions as an institutional communicator indicates that the MC's role in protocol events goes beyond the usual host function. The MC serves as a formal communication channel that connects leaders, guests, event participants, and the technical team in a unified communication system. From an organizational communication perspective, this function is crucial because the accuracy, relevance, and timeliness of messages are key elements in maintaining the integrity of institutional messages. In the context of the Malang City Government, the MC must understand not only the agenda but also the job structure, event context, and respectful procedures. This demonstrates that the MC's competence is dual, namely communicative and procedural. Thus, the MC can be understood as a crucial actor in ensuring that institutional communication runs orderly and in accordance with protocol norms.

MC as the Guardian of Order at the Ceremony

The MC's role as a ceremonial orderly demonstrates that formal government events require careful control of rhythm and transitions. The MC not only reads from a script but also professionally manages situational changes. The ability to structure improvisation demonstrates that the MC must master the overall flow of the event, not just their own portion. Theoretically, these findings confirm that the MC's role is adaptive. The MC is required to adhere to the formal structure, but at the same time must be able to respond to changes without disrupting the event's prestige. In this context, the MC's role can be understood as a form of situational management that combines procedural discipline and practical dexterity.

MC and Institutional Image Representation

The representational dimension of institutional image indicates that MCs play a crucial symbolic function in government communication. The way MCs speak, dress, and conduct themselves influences public perception of the institutional quality of local government. In other words, MCs not only convey

messages but also create impressions. The concept of impression management is highly relevant to explain these findings. In formal events, MCs occupy the front room, which serves as an arena for public evaluation. Therefore, controlling intonation, language choice, and physical appearance are part of the institution's representational strategy. These findings reinforce the view that government communication occurs not only at the policy level but also at the performative level through field actors such as MCs.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors as Determinants of Role Quality

Supporting factors such as SOPs, training, mentoring, and team coordination indicate that the quality of the MC's role is largely determined by the support of the organizational system. Detailed SOPs provide clarity of action, training enhances capacity, and team coordination ensures that the MC does not work alone. This confirms that MC success is the result of the interaction between individual capabilities and organizational readiness. Conversely, inhibiting factors such as limited human resources, technical constraints, and discontinuous training indicate that the MC's role cannot function optimally without structural support. Limited personnel can reduce the quality of events, while technical issues can interfere with the effectiveness of message delivery. Irregular training follow-up also indicates that capacity building has not yet become a fully integrated organizational learning system.

Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study expands the use of role theory in the context of government communication by demonstrating that the MC's role encompasses multiple functions, rather than a single role. It also strengthens the relevance of the concept of impression management in protocol practice, particularly when the MC acts as an institutional representative before the public. Practically, the results of this study indicate that protocol SOPs need to be continuously updated to include scenarios for handling unexpected situations. Local governments also need to strengthen training programs and establish knowledge-sharing systems to ensure MC competency is evenly distributed across the team. Furthermore, improving the quality of technical infrastructure and structuring the workload of protocol staff are crucial steps to maintain the consistent quality of official events.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study successfully answered two main objectives. First, this study shows that MCs play a crucial role in organizing protocol events in the Malang City Government. This role is evident in three main functions: as a communicator who helps connect various parties at the event, as a maintainer of order at the event so that it runs according to protocol regulations and Home Affairs Ministerial Regulation Number 16 of 2024, and as a representative of the local government's image, demonstrating the professionalism of the Malang City Government. These three roles are interrelated and are a crucial part of the implementation of official events. Second, this study also identified several factors that influence the implementation of the MC's role. Supporting factors include the existence of clear protocol SOPs, structured training and capacity building programs, and good protocol teamwork. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors include the limited number of protocol personnel with adequate skills, technical obstacles during event implementation, and inadequate training. Based on the results of this study, several suggestions can be made. For the Malang City Government, it is recommended to increase the number of protocol staff with MC certification due to the large number of official activities held. Furthermore, the government needs to develop an internal knowledge-sharing system to ensure training outcomes are understood by the entire protocol team, and to conduct regular inspections of event equipment and infrastructure to minimize technical challenges. Future researchers are advised to examine guest and community perceptions of the quality of protocol events and conduct comparisons with other local governments to broaden and strengthen research findings.

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