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IMPLEMENTATION OF A BUDDHIST RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION MODEL BASED ON DHAMMA ETHICS

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the implementation of a Buddhist religious leadership communication model based on Dhamma ethics in Central Java Province, Indonesia. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed to explore communication practices, ethical principles, and leadership interactions within Buddhist communities. Data were collected from January to July 2026 through semi-structured interviews and direct observations involving Buddhist leaders, government officials, and managers of monasteries and Buddhist temples (*vihara*) across several regencies and cities in Central Java. Relevant organizational records and activity reports were also used as documentary sources. Data were analyzed through data familiarization, coding, categorization, theme development, interpretation, and conclusion drawing/verification, while triangulation was conducted across interview, observational, and documentary evidence. The results identified six recurring forms of Dhamma-based leadership communication: participatory communication in Dhamma activities, two-way communication, respect for community opinions and input, ethical communication and rejection of misinformation, mutual respect, and attentive listening. These practices reflect Dhamma values such as *sammā vācā*, *mettā*, *karuṇā*, and *paññā* and position religious leaders as facilitators of dialogue, ethical role models, and attentive listeners rather than solely as transmitters of religious teachings. The study concludes that Dhamma ethics provides a practical foundation for participatory, dialogical, and ethically responsible leadership communication that supports mutual respect, trust, and internal harmony within Buddhist communities in Central Java.

Keywords Buddhist Leadership, Dhamma Ethics, Internal Harmony, Leadership Communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious leadership communication plays an important role in shaping trust, participation, ethical interaction, and harmonious relationships within religious communities. In Buddhist contexts, communication is not merely a mechanism for transmitting religious teachings or organizational instructions but may also function as a practical expression of Dhamma ethics. Principles such as *sammā vācā* (Right Speech), *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *paññā* (wisdom) provide an ethical orientation toward truthful, non-harmful, respectful, and compassionate interaction. Contemporary scholarship on Buddhist ethics emphasizes that moral conduct is embedded in a broader path of ethical and psychological cultivation rather than being separated from everyday practice (Gold, 2023; Hidalgo, 2022). Right Speech, in particular, requires attention to the moral consequences of verbal interaction and provides an important ethical basis for communication (Abdul Rahman et al., 2022). Recent communication scholarship has also demonstrated the relevance of Buddhist philosophical perspectives for reconsidering positive, relational, and ethically responsible organizational communication (Leach & Wong, 2024). These perspectives raise an important empirical question concerning how Buddhist ethical principles are actually enacted through leadership communication in contemporary religious communities.

Recent studies indicate that Buddhist and ethically oriented leadership can generate relational and organizational outcomes through compassion, mindfulness, trust, ethical communication, and attention to followers. Buddhist-enacted leaders have been shown to draw on Buddhist ethics when interpreting their responsibilities toward others and meaningful organizational relationships (Vu & Gill, 2023). Buddhist compassionate leadership is associated with trust in leaders and positive psychological outcomes (Leesmidt & Jarunratanakul, 2022) while mindful leadership in Buddhist educational settings emphasizes deep listening, compassion, and non-judgmental attention (Burmansah et al., 2020). Beyond explicitly Buddhist contexts, ethical leadership has been linked to workplace spirituality and positive relational outcomes (Aftab et al., 2023), whereas servant leadership research emphasizes moral orientation and attention to followers' needs (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). Compassionate leadership likewise involves attending, understanding, empathizing, and helping (Sansó et al., 2022). Within Indonesia, Buddhist leadership research has identified ethics, compassion, and wisdom as important leadership foundations (Astuti & Kabri, 2024), while studies of Buddhist organizations have demonstrated the relevance of Buddhist leadership values to institutional management (Selwen, 2021).

A second body of scholarship highlights participation, dialogue, voice, and listening as important mechanisms through which relational leadership becomes visible in practice. Ethical leader-member communication can strengthen positive organizational behavior beyond the effects of ethical leadership alone (Abu Bakar & Connaughton, 2022). Inclusive leadership has been associated with greater willingness to speak up through psychological safety and empowerment (Lee & Dahinten, 2021; Younas et al., 2023) while leader humility can facilitate employee voice and a climate of civility (Achmadi et al., 2022; Zou & Chen, 2022). These findings are relevant to religious leadership because opportunities to express concerns, suggestions, and experiences can indicate whether leadership interaction is genuinely participatory. At the communication level, dialogic scholarship distinguishes meaningful dialogue from simple one-way information transmission and emphasizes reciprocity, engagement, and responsiveness (Chen et al., 2020; Kent & Lane, 2021; Liu et al., 2020). Listening is also increasingly understood as a multidimensional organizational process with important relational consequences (Yip & Fisher, 2022). Mindfulness scholarship further connects attentive presence with communication and prosocial behavior (Hafenbrack et al., 2020) (Heisterkamp, 2022).

The ethical dimension of communication has become particularly significant in digital environments. Contemporary misinformation research demonstrates that inaccurate information may be shared because attention is diverted from accuracy or because repeated sharing becomes habitual (Ceylan et al., 2023; Pennycook et al., 2021). Interventions that redirect attention toward accuracy can reduce willingness to disseminate misinformation (Pennycook & Rand, 2022). These findings are relevant to *sammā vācā* because truthful and non-harmful speech is not limited to face-to-face interaction but also concerns responsible information sharing. Recent research among Buddhist students in Indonesia has shown that understanding Right Speech is significantly associated with communication ethics on social media (Paramita et al., 2025), demonstrating the continuing relevance of Dhamma ethics to contemporary digital communication.

The Indonesian Buddhist context provides further evidence that leadership, communication, mindfulness, and harmony are interconnected but have generally been examined separately. Spiritual leaders have been shown to contribute to socio-cultural communication networks in Buddhayana communities (Rapiadi et al., 2023), while Buddhist religious counselors adapt religious communication knowledge to the changing needs of communities (Gautama et al., 2024). Buddha's interpersonal communication has also been discussed as a model of compassionate service to

Buddhist communities (Suryani et al., 2024). Quantitative evidence indicates that mindfulness in communication is positively associated with tolerance and harmony within Buddhist community life (Pramita et al., 2024). More broadly, communication among religious stakeholders and local community leadership can contribute to religious harmony in Indonesia (Agung et al., 2024; Ridho et al., 2023), while Buddhist ethical scholarship emphasizes harmonious social relations and ethical responsibility (Shofwan, 2021; Yati & Suherman, 2024). Participatory communication has likewise been identified as an important dimension of socially engaged Buddhist communities (Rodloytuk, 2021).

Despite these developments, several gaps remain. First, research on Buddhist leadership has predominantly examined leadership characteristics, organizational management, mindfulness, spirituality, or meaningful work, while communication itself has received less attention as the mechanism through which Dhamma ethics becomes observable in leadership practice. Second, dialogic communication, active listening, participation, ethical information sharing, conflict management, and respect for differing opinions have rarely been examined together within one empirical framework of Buddhist religious leadership. Third, evidence remains limited concerning how these dimensions are enacted within Buddhist communities in Central Java. The novelty of the present study therefore lies in its contextual and integrative examination of how Dhamma ethics is expressed through actual leadership communication practices. Specifically, it examines communication involving participation, reciprocal dialogue, respect for community input, ethical speech, mutual respect, and attentive listening. Accordingly, this study aims to describe the implementation of a Buddhist religious leadership communication model based on Dhamma ethics in Central Java Province.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to examine Buddhist religious leadership communication based on Dhamma ethics within its social and organizational context. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' accounts, perceptions, observed interactions, and the meanings attached to leadership communication practices rather than to test predetermined causal relationships (Moleong, 2017).

The research was conducted in Central Java Province, Indonesia, from January to July 2026. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and direct observations involving Buddhist

religious leaders, government religious officials, religious counselors, and managers of monasteries and Buddhist temples (*vihara*). Participants were drawn from several regencies and cities, including Temanggung, Kebumen, Purworejo, Semarang, Boyolali, Sragen, Karanganyar, Grobogan, and the city of Semarang. Interviews and observations focused on leadership communication practices, participation in religious and organizational activities, decision-making processes, responses to disagreements, and the application of Dhamma ethical principles in community interactions. Relevant organizational records and activity reports were used as documentary sources to complement the primary data.

Data analysis was conducted iteratively. Interview material and observational records were first familiarized and organized, followed by coding, data reduction, categorization, comparison across sources, theme development, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. These procedures were informed by thematic analysis principles that emphasize systematic engagement with patterns of meaning in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing/verification were also conducted interactively throughout the analytical process, consistent with the qualitative data analysis framework of (Miles et al., 2014). Triangulation was performed by comparing interview accounts, direct observational evidence, and relevant documentary sources to strengthen the credibility and consistency of the interpretations. The research process can be illustrated in the following research flow:

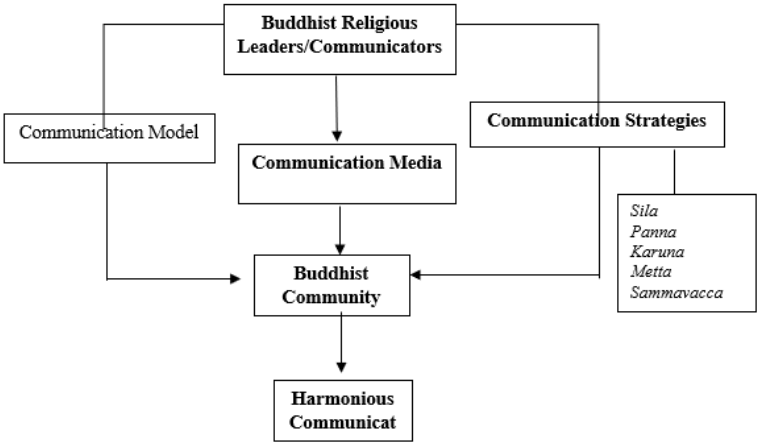


Figure 1. The Research Process

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The leadership communication model in Buddhism has characteristics that differ from an authoritarian leadership model. Leadership based on Buddhist teachings places greater emphasis on the ethical values of the Dhamma, deliberation, respect for others, and communication that promotes harmony. The interview and observation data identified six recurring forms of Dhamma-based leadership communication in Central Java: participatory communication in Dhamma activities, two-way communication, respect for community input, ethical communication, mutual respect, and attentive listening. These practices were observed across religious guidance, Dhamma teaching, community service, and organizational activities.

Buddhist religious leaders emphasized that communication in Buddhism is not merely a means of conveying messages but also serves as a means of character formation, fostering harmony, and developing wisdom among members of the Buddhist community. Effective communication should be grounded in the values of loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), honesty, patience, and respect for others. Table 1 summarizes the principal forms of implementation and the empirical evidence supporting each theme.

Table 1. Implementation of the Buddhist Religious Leadership Communication Model Based on Dhamma Ethics in Central Java Province

No	Theme	Empirical Evidence from the Findings
1	Participatory communication in Dhamma activities	Community members are given opportunities to speak, ask questions, share spiritual experiences, and suggest discussion topics
2	Two-way communication	Dialogue, discussion, and consultation enable reciprocal communication between leaders and community members
3	Respect for opinions and input	Community members can provide criticism, suggestions, and ideas regardless of age, educational background, or organizational position
4	Ethical communication and rejection of misinformation	Leaders emphasize sammā vācā, honesty, verification of information, and avoidance of hoaxes, hate speech, and harmful communication
5	Mutual respect	Leaders encourage appreciation of differences and respectful interaction within and beyond Buddhist communities
6	Attentive listening	Leaders listen to community members' personal, family, economic, educational, and social concerns and provide Dhamma-based guidance

Providing Opportunities for All Members of the Buddhist Community to Participate in Communicating Buddhist Teachings

The interview findings indicate that Buddhist religious leaders do not monopolize communication in the delivery of Dhamma teachings or in determining topics for religious discussion. Bhikkhus, Panditas, leaders of Buddhist religious organizations, and Vihara administrators provide opportunities for members of the Buddhist community to participate in religious communication activities. In practice, members are given space to express their views, share their spiritual experiences, and ask questions concerning Buddhist teachings. These practices indicate that participation is treated as an integral element of leadership communication rather than as a supplementary activity.

One of the informants, Pandita SAW, explained that communication in Buddhism should be participatory. According to him, the delivery of Dhamma teachings becomes more meaningful when members of the community are involved in discussions and in sharing their experiences in everyday life. "*Dalam pembabaran Dhamma, kami tidak ingin umat hanya duduk mendengarkan. Umat juga harus diberi kesempatan untuk berbicara, bertanya, bahkan memberikan tema yang ingin dibahas supaya komunikasi berjalan lebih hidup*" *(Interview with Pandita SAW, April 22, 2026)*

A similar view was expressed by the Chairperson of Central Java Center 1, who emphasized that Buddhist leadership should not be dominant. Religious leaders should be able to function as facilitators of communication for all members of the Buddhist community. This indicates that religious leaders are positioned as facilitators of dialogue rather than as the sole source of communicative authority. "*Kadang kita sebenarnya ingin membalas perkataan orang, tetapi kalau langsung dibalas, biasanya masalahnya semakin panjang. Jadi saya mencoba menenangkan diri dulu sebelum menjawab." (Interview with Pandita Y, Chairperson of Central Java Center 1, May 14, 2026).* These practices position community members as active participants in religious communication and organizational life

Emphasizing Two-Way Communication

The interview findings also indicate that Buddhist religious leaders in Central Java consistently emphasize the importance of two-way communication. Communication does not take place solely in one direction, from leaders to members of the Buddhist community, but occurs reciprocally through dialogue, discussion, and consultation. Such interaction allows leaders to understand community members' needs, experiences, and daily challenges more directly.

The Buddhist Religious Affairs Coordinator (Pembimas Buddha) explained that two-way communication is part of the practice of Dhamma ethics because Buddhist teachings emphasize the importance of listening to and understanding others. "*Komunikasi dalam agama Buddha tidak hanya ceramah satu arah. Tokoh agama harus membuka ruang dialog sehingga umat merasa diperhatikan dan dihargai*" (Interview with the Buddhist Religious Affairs Coordinator, KRB, March 6, 2026).

Pandita JS, who also serves as a State Civil Apparatus (ASN) Buddhist religious counselor in Wonogiri Regency, similarly stated that two-way communication can strengthen the relationship between religious leaders and members of the Buddhist community. **"***Kalau komunikasi hanya satu arah, umat akan merasa jauh. Tetapi kalau ada dialog, umat menjadi lebih terbuka dan merasa dekat dengan tokoh agamanya"(Interview with Pandita JS, April 22, 2026).*

Through two-way communication, members can directly communicate their problems, needs, and expectations to religious leaders. This finding is also supported by the researcher's observations during a general meeting at Cetya Jendi, where community members were given opportunities to share experiences, comment on issues, and express their opinions. The observation confirms that two-way communication functions as a practical mechanism for aligning religious guidance with community needs.

Respecting the Opinions and Input of All Members of the Buddhist Community

Based on the interview findings, Buddhist religious leaders consistently respect the opinions, voices, and input of community members regardless of their social background, age, educational level, or organizational status. In religious and organizational forums, this respect is operationalized by providing space for criticism, suggestions, and new ideas from community members.

Pandita PRM, who also serves as the Head of the Wonogiri District, stated that religious leaders should demonstrate humility and should not consider themselves to be the sole holders of truth. "*Kami selalu menerima masukan dari umat. Kadang justru umat memiliki pengalaman dan pandangan yang sangat baik untuk perkembangan vihara maupun pembinaan Dhamma."* (Interview with Pandita PRM, April 22, 2026). The statement is supported by the researcher's observation during the SPD (Sebulan Penghayatan Dharma) activity at Cetya Jatisrono, where community suggestions concerning the Vesak celebration were collected and subsequently brought to the Working Team meeting.

The Chairperson of Central Java Center 1 also emphasized that respecting the opinions of community members is part of the practice of wisdom in Buddhism: **"***Dalam organisasi Buddhis, semua*

suara harus dihargai. Jangan melihat siapa yang berbicara, tetapi lihat nilai dan manfaat dari masukan tersebut." (Interview with Pandita Y, Chairperson of Central Java Center 1, March 6, 2026). Taken together, the interview and observational evidence indicate that openness to community input reduces reliance on hierarchical authority and strengthens participatory involvement.

Emphasizing Communication Ethics and Rejecting the Dissemination of Hoaxes

The interview findings indicate that Buddhist religious leaders strongly emphasize the importance of ethical communication, particularly in the current era of social media and digital technological development. Religious leaders consistently remind members of the Buddhist community not to disseminate hoaxes, hate speech, or unverified information. These practices reflect the application of Right Speech (sammā vācā) through honesty, verification of information, respectful expression, and avoidance of harmful communication.

Pandita WGM, a Buddhist religious leader from Purworejo, explained that communication ethics constitute a significant challenge in the digital era because many members of the community receive and circulate information without first verifying its accuracy. "*Kami selalu mengingatkan umat agar berhati-hati menggunakan media sosial. Jangan mudah menyebarkan berita yang belum tentu benar karena hal itu dapat menimbulkan konflik dan karma buruk*." *(Interview with Pandita WGM, May 14, 2026).*

Pandita KRS, who also serves as a Buddhist religious counselor, similarly stated that Buddhist communication should promote peace rather than generate conflict. *"Ajaran Buddha mengajarkan ucapan benar. Jadi komunikasi harus dilakukan dengan sopan, jujur, tidak memfitnah, dan tidak menyebarkan kebencian"* (Interview with Pandita KRS, April 22, 2026).

The implementation of Dhamma-based communication ethics is therefore highly relevant to maintaining religious harmony and strengthening social cohesion within a pluralistic society. The findings indicate that ethical communication functions both as a religious practice and as a mechanism for preventing misinformation and reducing interpersonal and social tension.

Cultivating Mutual Respect and Appreciation for the Opinions of Others

In the religious life of the Buddhist community in Central Java, Buddhist religious leaders consistently cultivate attitudes of mutual respect and appreciation for the opinions of others. These values are practiced both within the Vihara environment and in social interactions with members of other religious communities. The interview evidence indicates that respectful communication is understood as a means of accommodating differences and reducing interpersonal conflict.

Pandita TM from Boyolali explained that Buddhists are taught not to impose their will or opinions on others. *"Kami selalu mengajarkan umat untuk menghargai perbedaan. Dalam komunikasi, tidak perlu merasa paling benar karena setiap orang memiliki sudut pandang masing-masing" (Interview with Pandita TM, May 1, 2026).* Pandita HRS similarly emphasized that respect for others constitutes a practical expression of universal loving-kindness in Buddhism. *"Saling menghormati adalah bagian dari praktik metta dan karuna. Kalau komunikasi dilakukan dengan hormat, maka hubungan antarumat maupun antaragama akan harmonis" (Interview with Pandita HRS, April 22, 2026).*

The value of mutual respect therefore constitutes an important foundation for establishing peaceful religious life in Central Java Province. Within the observed leadership communication practices, respect for different perspectives functions as an expression of Dhamma ethics and supports more inclusive interpersonal and interreligious relationships.

Religious Leaders as Attentive Listeners to the Buddhist Community

The interview findings indicate that Buddhist religious leaders strive to become attentive listeners when members of the Buddhist community face various challenges in their lives. Religious leaders do not function solely as providers of religious sermons but also serve as spiritual guides and sources of consultation. Community members seek guidance concerning family, economic, educational, and social problems, and leaders respond through attentive listening and Dhamma-based guidance.

Pandita WD from the Sragen District explained that the ability to listen constitutes an important aspect of Buddhist leadership. **"***Pemimpin agama harus mau mendengarkan umat. Kadang umat hanya membutuhkan tempat untuk bercerita dan didengarkan dengan baik"* (Interview with Pandita WD, April 12, 2026). MST, Chairperson of Central Java Center 4 and a Buddhist religious leader in Purwodadi, Central Java, further emphasized that attentive listening can strengthen the emotional relationship between religious leaders and members of the community. *"Kalau tokoh agama mau mendengar, umat akan merasa diperhatikan dan dihargai. Dari situ muncul kepercayaan dan kedekatan" (Interview with Pandita MST, March 13, 2026).*

The practice of being an attentive listener reflects the values of compassion (karuṇā) and social concern within Buddhist leadership. The evidence suggests that listening functions not only as a communication technique but also as an ethical practice through which leaders demonstrate empathy, care, and responsiveness to community members' needs.

Discussion

The findings show that Buddhist religious leadership communication in Central Java is enacted through six interconnected practices: participatory communication, two-way dialogue, respect for community opinions and input, ethical communication, mutual respect, and attentive listening. Taken together, these practices demonstrate that Dhamma ethics does not operate solely as a normative religious doctrine but can become visible through concrete communicative behavior. This interpretation is consistent with contemporary Buddhist ethical scholarship, which emphasizes the relationship between ethical cultivation and lived practice (Gold, 2023; Hidalgo, 2022). It also corresponds with research showing that Buddhist philosophies can provide a distinctive ethical and relational perspective on organizational communication (Leach & Wong, 2024) and that Buddhist-enacted leaders interpret leadership responsibility through interdependence and ethical concern for others (Vu & Gill, 2023). In the Indonesian context, the findings reinforce arguments that Buddhist leadership is closely associated with ethics, compassion, and wisdom (Astuti & Kabri, 2024).

The participatory and dialogical practices identified in the study suggest that leadership authority is not exercised exclusively through one-way instruction. Community members are given opportunities to ask questions, communicate experiences, offer criticism, and contribute suggestions. Such practices can be interpreted through recent evidence showing that ethical leader-member communication provides relational value beyond ethical leadership as an abstract orientation (Abu Bakar & Connaughton, 2022). Research on inclusive leadership similarly demonstrates that leaders who create psychologically safe and empowering environments increase opportunities for member voice (Lee & Dahinten, 2021; Younas et al., 2023). Humility is also relevant because leaders who acknowledge others' contributions and remain receptive to input can encourage voice and civility (Achmadi et al., 2022; Zou & Chen, 2022). In this respect, the present findings suggest that respect for community input represents a communicative manifestation of humility and participation rather than merely an interpersonal courtesy.

The findings also clarify the role of dialogue in Buddhist religious leadership. Reciprocal discussion and consultation allow community members to communicate needs and concerns while enabling leaders to adjust guidance to the situations faced by the community. This interpretation is consistent with contemporary dialogic communication scholarship, which conceptualizes dialogue as more than the exchange of messages and emphasizes reciprocity, responsiveness, engagement, and relational orientation (Chen et al., 2020; Kent & Lane, 2021). Evidence from digitally mediated

communication further demonstrates that dialogic characteristics can influence public engagement (Liu et al., 2020). The present study extends these insights into a religious-community setting by showing that reciprocal dialogue can operate simultaneously as an organizational communication mechanism and an expression of Dhamma-oriented respect.

Attentive listening represents another important link between communication practice and Buddhist ethics. Leaders in the study listened to community members' family, economic, educational, spiritual, and social concerns, indicating that leadership communication extends beyond sermon delivery. Contemporary organizational scholarship treats listening as a consequential relational process rather than a passive communication skill (Yip & Fisher, 2022). The Buddhist context adds an explicitly compassionate dimension to this process. Buddhist compassionate leadership has been associated with trust in leaders (Leesmidt & Jarunratanakul, 2022) while mindful Buddhist leadership emphasizes compassion, deep listening, and attention without judgment (Burmansah et al., 2020). Research on compassionate leadership similarly identifies attending, understanding, empathizing, and helping as central dimensions (Sansó et al., 2022). Moreover, mindfulness has been associated with prosocial behavior and empathic responsiveness (Hafenbrack et al., 2020) and communication scholarship recognizes mindfulness as relevant to how individuals attend and respond to others (Heisterkamp, 2022). These studies help explain why attentive listening in the present research is better interpreted as an ethical-relational practice than merely as a communication technique. The Indonesian evidence that mindfulness-based communication contributes to tolerance and harmony further supports this interpretation (Pramita et al., 2024).

The findings also connect Dhamma-based leadership communication with broader research on moral, compassionate, and service-oriented leadership. Ethical leadership has been associated with workplace spirituality and positive relational outcomes (Aftab et al., 2023), while systematic scholarship on servant leadership emphasizes the moral prioritization of followers and stakeholders (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). The present findings share this orientation because Buddhist religious leaders are described not only as transmitters of teachings but also as facilitators, listeners, and role models. At the same time, the findings should not be treated as evidence that Buddhist religious leadership is identical to existing secular leadership theories. Transformational leadership, for example, has long emphasized individualized consideration and leader influence (Bass, 1985), but the present study indicates that Buddhist leadership communication is additionally grounded in

specific ethical concepts such as *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *paññā*, and *sammā vācā*. Its distinctive feature therefore lies in the ethical-spiritual basis through which participatory and relational leadership practices are interpreted.

Communication ethics in the digital era constitutes another significant finding. Religious leaders' emphasis on verification, avoidance of hoaxes, responsible speech, and non-harm directly reflects *sammā vācā*. Buddhist scholarship on Right Speech identifies truthful and ethically responsible utterance as an integral element of the Noble Eightfold Path (Abdul Rahman et al., 2022). This principle has contemporary relevance because misinformation research demonstrates that people may share inaccurate information without sufficient attention to truth, and habitual patterns of social-media sharing can further intensify this problem (Ceylan et al., 2023; Pennycook et al., 2021). Experimental evidence also shows that prompting users to consider accuracy can improve the quality of information they are willing to share (Pennycook & Rand, 2022). In a directly relevant Indonesian Buddhist context, (Paramita et al., 2025) found that Right Speech significantly influenced Buddhist students' communication ethics on social media. The present study therefore suggests that *sammā vācā* can be understood not simply as an ancient normative teaching but as an applicable ethical framework for contemporary digital communication.

The emphasis on mutual respect and harmony must also be understood within the Indonesian religious and cultural context. Studies of Buddhayana communities show that spiritual leaders play an important role in building socio-cultural communication networks and community solidarity (Rapiadi et al., 2023), while Buddhist religious counselors adapt communication practices to changing social and spiritual needs (Gautama et al., 2024). Research on the Buddha's interpersonal communication similarly emphasizes gentle, compassionate, and peace-oriented service (Suryani et al., 2024). The present results are also compatible with broader Indonesian evidence showing that stakeholder communication and local wisdom can contribute to interreligious harmony (Agung et al., 2024; Ridho et al., 2023). Buddhist scholarship in Indonesia has further emphasized the relationship between ethical conduct and harmonious collective life (Shofwan, 2021; Yati & Suherman, 2024), while participatory communication has been identified as an important feature of socially engaged Buddhist communities beyond Indonesia (Rodloytuk, 2021). These comparisons situate the Central Java findings within a wider pattern while preserving their context-specific character.

Overall, the study contributes to the literature by integrating dimensions that have often been examined separately. Previous studies have addressed Buddhist organizational leadership (Selwen, 2021), compassionate leadership, mindfulness, ethical communication, dialogue, active listening, and religious harmony, but the present findings bring these dimensions together in an empirical account of Dhamma-based religious leadership communication. The resulting framework is best understood as context-sensitive rather than universally generalizable. Its contribution lies in demonstrating how Buddhist ethical concepts become observable through leadership communication practices involving participation, reciprocal dialogue, respectful engagement, responsible information sharing, mutual respect, and attentive listening. This integration provides a clearer empirical explanation of how Dhamma ethics can inform leadership communication and contribute to trust and internal harmony within Buddhist communities.

Therefore, the findings of this study extend existing discussions of participatory leadership, dialogical communication, active listening, servant leadership, and ethical communication by showing how these principles are enacted within a Dhamma-based religious context. The distinctive contribution of the study lies in demonstrating the empirical interrelationship between Buddhist ethical principles and everyday leadership communication practices in Central Java. Rather than proposing a universally applicable model, the findings provide a context-sensitive framework for understanding how Dhamma ethics informs participatory, dialogical, and ethically responsible religious leadership communication.

CONCLUSION

The Buddhist religious leadership communication model based on Dhamma ethics is implemented through participatory, dialogical, ethical, and relational communication practices. The implementation of this communication model takes place through various religious activities, including puja bakti, Dhamma guidance and development activities, organizational deliberations, management meetings, social activities, and interpersonal communication between religious leaders and members of the Buddhist community. Buddhist religious leaders do not merely function as transmitters of religious teachings but also serve as facilitators of dialogue, attentive listeners, and ethical role models who apply Dhamma values in their interactions with community members. The communication model emphasizes two-way communication, openness, respect for differences, and deliberation together with respect for community input and responsible communication based on

sammā vācā. These findings demonstrate that Dhamma ethics provides a practical foundation for leadership communication that promotes participation, mutual respect, trust, and internal harmony within Buddhist communities in Central Java.

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