



DIGITAL MEDIA AND EMPLOYEE INTEGRITY IN REJECTING GRATIFICATION: A CASE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION AT USU HOSPITAL

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of digital media in organizational communication in strengthening employee integrity, particularly in rejecting gratification practices within healthcare institutions. Using a qualitative case study approach at the University of North Sumatra Hospital, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis involving 15 informants selected purposively. The findings reveal that digital media function not only as communication tools but also as a cultural infrastructure that reinforces integrity values through continuous exposure, transparency, and interactive systems. Digital platforms such as intranet systems, integrity dashboards, and online reporting mechanisms enhance information accessibility and foster employees' confidence in rejecting and reporting gratification. Furthermore, digital communication contributes to ethical behavior formation through cognitive recall, norm internalization, and social learning processes. This study proposes the Digital Integrity Communication Model (DICM) as a theoretical contribution, emphasizing the integration of technology, organizational values, and behavior in shaping organizational image and trust.

Keywords: Digital organizational communication, employee integrity, gratification rejection, healthcare institutions; organizational image.

1. INTRODUCTION

The practice of bribery in the healthcare sector is a crucial issue in public service governance, directly impacting public trust (Radević et al., 2022; Sommersguter-Reichmann & Reichmann, 2024). Various studies indicate that the healthcare sector is highly vulnerable to unethical practices due to the asymmetrical relationship between

medical personnel and patients and the high demand for urgent services. In the Indonesian context, the results of the Integrity Assessment Survey conducted by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) indicate that bribery practices are still found in various public service institutions, including hospitals, posing a serious challenge to achieving clean and accountable governance.

As a healthcare institution and teaching hospital, the University of North Sumatra Hospital (RS USU) holds a strategic position in building an organizational culture based on integrity. This role relates not only to the provision of medical services but also to the formation of professional and ethical values among healthcare workers (Pakkanen et al., 2024; Sakr et al., 2022). Within the framework of good governance, strengthening employee integrity especially in rejecting bribery is a crucial indicator in maintaining the credibility and organizational image of public service institutions (Hartanto et al., 2021; Koeswayo et al., 2024).

With the advancement of information technology, organizational communication has undergone a significant transformation toward a digital-based system. Digital media is no longer simply a means of conveying information, but has evolved into a strategic instrument in shaping organizational values, norms, and behavior (Gershon, 2024; Suhendar et al., 2023). From an organizational communication perspective, the use of digital platforms such as intranets, internal social media, and online reporting systems enables institutions to internalize integrity values more systematically and sustainably. Previous research has shown that effective digital communication can increase organizational transparency, strengthen accountability, and encourage ethical employee behavior (Dalimunthe et al., 2020; Guo, 2022).

However, empirical studies specifically linking the use of digital media in organizational communication to the development of employee integrity, particularly in the context of refusing bribes in the healthcare sector, are still relatively limited. Most previous research has focused on the use of digital media for public services or external communication, while the internal dimensions of the organization especially those related to the development of a culture of integrity have not been explored in depth (Kim & Park, 2025). Furthermore, few studies have examined how digital-based organizational communication can contribute to the formation of organizational image through employee ethical practices.

Based on the research gap, this study aims to analyze the role of digital media in organizational communication in strengthening employee integrity, particularly in the practice of refusing gratification, and its implications for the formation of organizational image. By taking a case study at the University of North Sumatra Hospital, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions in the development of digital organizational communication studies as well as practical contributions for healthcare institutions in designing effective communication strategies to build a culture of integrity.

2. RESEARCH METHODE

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. This approach was chosen because the research aims to deeply understand the dynamics of digital media utilization in organizational communication and its implications for the formation of employee integrity in a complex social context (Creswell, 2021). The case study method allows for a contextual and holistic exploration of phenomena, particularly in answering exploratory research questions such as "how" and "why" digital organizational communication practices contribute to anti-gratification behavior.

The research was conducted at the University of North Sumatra Hospital (RS USU) in Medan, a healthcare institution and teaching hospital that has implemented a digital-based communication system in its operations. The study lasted six months, from January to June 2025, and included data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings.

Research Subjects and Informant Selection Techniques

Research informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, ensuring that the selected subjects possess experience, knowledge, and direct involvement in the phenomenon being studied. The informant criteria were set more specifically to ensure data depth, namely:

- 1) Active employees of USU Hospital with a minimum of two years of service, thus possessing an understanding of the organizational culture.

- 2) Direct involvement or exposure to the organization's digital media (intranet, dashboard, or internal communication media).
- 3) Have interacted with integrity policies or anti-gratification programs.
- 4) Willingness to provide information openly and reflectively.
- 5) Represent a variety of structural and functional positions (medical, non-medical, managerial, and communications personnel).

The 15 informants were selected based on the principle of data saturation, which occurs when the data obtained demonstrates recurring patterns and no significant new information is found.

Data Collection Techniques

In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted semi-structured using interview guidelines developed based on the theoretical framework of organizational communication and integrity. The interviews aimed to explore the experiences, perceptions, and reflections of informants regarding the use of digital media in building an anti-gratification culture. Each interview lasted 60–90 minutes and was recorded with the informant's consent.

Participatory Observation

Participatory observation was conducted to understand organizational communication practices in a real-world context. Researchers observed communication interactions via digital media during organizational activities such as meetings, briefings, and policy socializations to capture actual dynamics that do not always emerge in interviews.

Document Analysis

Document analysis was used to strengthen empirical data through a review of policy documents, the organization's digital media content, and integrity-related

reports. This technique helped identify alignment between formal policies and implemented practices in the field.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Digital Media Utilization Patterns in Organizational Communication

The research results show that USU Hospital has developed a digital communication ecosystem integrated into daily organizational activities. Platforms such as the intranet, integrity dashboard, internal applications, and instant messaging platforms serve as primary channels for disseminating organizational information, including anti-gratuuity policies.

However, from a qualitative perspective, the main finding lies not in the number of users, but rather in the strategic function of digital media as a medium for internalizing organizational values. Informants consistently emphasized that platforms such as the integrity dashboard and intranet are not merely administrative tools, but also symbolic spaces that represent the organization's commitment to transparency.

Theme 1: Internalizing Integrity Values through Digital Media

Research findings identify that digital media plays a crucial role in shaping employee awareness of integrity values. Information delivered regularly through digital platforms creates a process of message reinforcement that strengthens employees' understanding of organizational norms.

One informant stated:

"After the integrity dashboard was introduced, I feel constantly reminded that our actions are systematically monitored."

This finding suggests that digital media functions as a norm internalization mechanism, where organizational values are not only communicated formally but also internalized through repeated exposure in daily communication.

Theme 2: Information Accessibility and Organizational Transparency

Digital media significantly increases the accessibility of information related to anti-gratification policies. Informants emphasized that easy access to policies through intranets and other digital platforms reduces bureaucratic barriers that previously existed with manual systems.

"Now all policies can be accessed directly, there's no need to search for physical documents."

This finding confirms that organizational transparency depends not only on formal regulations, but also on the effectiveness of digital communication systems in disseminating information openly and quickly.

Theme 3: Digital Reporting and the Courage to Refuse Gratuities

One of the most significant findings is that the digital-based reporting system increases employees' courage in refusing and reporting gratuities. The anonymous reporting feature provides a sense of psychological security for employees.

"I feel safer reporting because I can do it anonymously."

In this context, digital media serves not only as a communication tool but also as an organizational protection mechanism for whistleblowers, directly encouraging ethical behavior..

Theme 4: Empirical Experience of Rejecting Gratuities

The informants' empirical experiences indicate that exposure to integrity messages through digital media contributes to ethical decision-making in real-life situations.

"I immediately remembered the group message about gratuities when I was offered an envelope."

This finding demonstrates that digital communication has a cognitive recall effect, where previously received messages serve as a reference in real-life actions.

Theme 5: Impact on Organizational Image

The use of digital media in integrity communication also impacts the formation of organizational image. Informants and documentary data indicate that transparency and a commitment to anti-gratification increase public trust in the institution. Organizational image, in this context, is not built solely through external communication, but through consistency between internal values and organizational practices.

Theme 6: Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The findings show that the success of digital communication implementation is influenced by:

Supporting factors:

- Leadership commitment
- Digital infrastructure
- Clear policies
- Open organizational culture

Inhibiting factors:

- Digital literacy gap
- Resistance to change
- Information overload

These findings emphasize that technology does not exist in isolation, but rather depends on social and organizational factors.

Digital Organizational Communication as a Cultural Infrastructure of Integrity

The findings of this study indicate that digital media do not merely function as communication tools, but rather as a cultural infrastructure that continuously shapes and reproduces organizational values. From the perspective of contemporary organizational communication, digital transformation has shifted communication

from a linear model to a network-based communication system, in which messages are not only transmitted but also reproduced through collective interaction (Deif et al., 2025; Maurer et al., 2023).

This phenomenon aligns with the development of digital communication studies, which emphasize that communication technologies have the capacity to shape organizational norms through repeated, real-time, and cross-hierarchical information dissemination. In this study, platforms such as integrity dashboards and intranet systems function as symbolic reinforcement systems that continuously reproduce integrity values as organizational norms (Oladimeji et al., 2023).

Furthermore, these findings reinforce the concept of organizational technoethics, which highlights that technology is not neutral but actively shapes ethical behavior within organizations through the communication structures it creates. Thus, employee integrity is influenced not only by formal regulations but also by the design of digital communication systems that frame behavior as structured social practices.

Digital Communication and Ethical Behavior Formation: Beyond Technology Acceptance

The results of this study demonstrate that the use of digital media contributes to the formation of ethical behavior through both cognitive and normative mechanisms (Arslan et al., 2026; Li et al., 2024). Within the framework of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), technology adoption is generally explained through perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. However, the findings of this study suggest a significant extension of this model. In the context of public service organizations, technology acceptance is not solely driven by efficiency but also by the ethical values embedded within the system. Recent studies support this view, indicating that digital responsibility and ethical behavior are influenced by leadership and normative values, rather than purely technical factors (Kamal et al., 2025; Verma & Garg, 2024).

Accordingly, this study proposes that in the context of digital organizational communication, TAM should be extended into an Ethical-Technology Acceptance

Framework, where moral dimensions such as integrity, transparency, and accountability serve as critical variables in explaining technology adoption.

Digital Platforms as Social Learning Ecosystems

The findings also reveal that digital media function as social learning ecosystems within organizations. The dissemination of anti-gratification practices and recognition of employees with high integrity creates an observational learning mechanism. This is consistent with Social Learning Theory, which explains that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and social reinforcement (Alkan & Cavusoglu, 2024; Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022). Recent studies have shown that digital media can enhance organizational learning by providing continuous and experience-based interaction spaces. In this context, digital communication not only conveys information but also establishes digital role models that accelerate the diffusion of integrity values. These findings extend previous literature by demonstrating that digital media in public organizations can function as behavioral reinforcement mechanisms, rather than merely as communication tools.

Transparency, Trust, and Organizational Image in the Digital Era

One of the key contributions of this study is demonstrating that internal digital communication has direct implications for organizational image. Transparency established through digital systems simultaneously enhances both internal and external trust. Recent literature emphasizes that in the digital era, organizational trust is not only built through external communication but also through the consistency between internal practices and communicated values (Huda, 2024; Tong & Chan, 2022). This aligns with the concept of communication ethics, which positions communication as the moral compass of an organization in shaping public perception. These findings reinforce the argument that organizational image in the digital era is the result of alignment between internal communication, ethical practices, and public exposure, rather than merely a product of branding strategies.

Digital Communication, Organizational Culture, and Institutional Integrity

This study also demonstrates that the success of digital communication implementation is highly dependent on organizational culture. Strong digital infrastructure alone is insufficient without a supportive organizational culture, committed leadership, and adequate digital literacy (Hasanudin et al., 2025). Recent empirical studies indicate that organizational culture and digital literacy significantly influence employee commitment and work behavior. Additionally, effective organizational communication has been shown to contribute directly to performance and workplace quality. These findings suggest that digital communication should be understood as part of a socio-technical system, where technology and organizational culture interact in shaping ethical behavior.

Theoretical Contribution: Toward a Digital Integrity Communication Model

The primary theoretical contribution of this study lies in the development of the concept that digital organizational communication can function as a structural mechanism in shaping organizational integrity (Fuerst et al., 2023). Unlike previous studies that emphasize communication as a tool for information transmission, this study demonstrates that:

- 1) Digital media act as normative infrastructure within organizations;
- 2) Digital communication shapes ethical behavior through cognitive, social, and symbolic mechanisms;
- 3) Organizational integrity emerges from the interaction between technology, culture, and communication.

Accordingly, this study proposes a new conceptual framework figure 1.

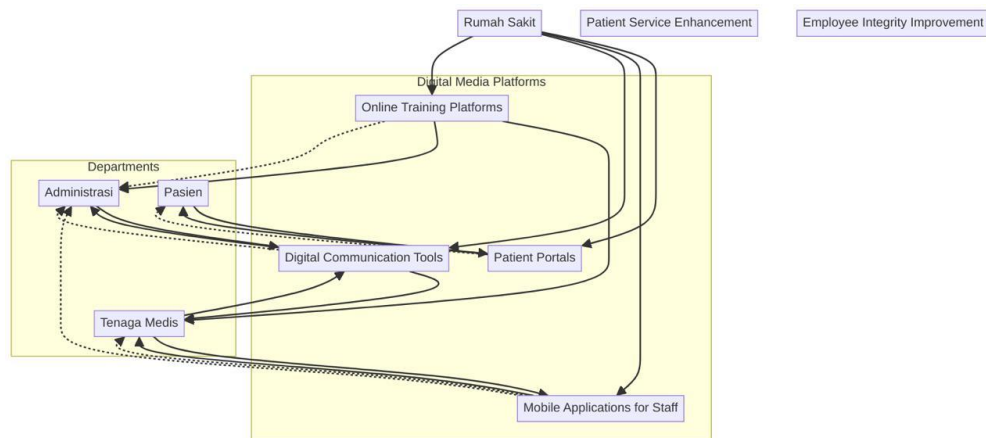


Figure 1. Digital Integrity Communication Model (DICM)

This model positions digital communication as the central integrative mechanism connecting:

- organizational values
- technological systems
- individual behavior
- and organizational image

This contribution extends the literature on digital organizational communication by shifting the focus from communication effectiveness toward the ethical and integrity dimensions as key outcomes of digital communication.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital media play a strategic role in strengthening employee integrity within organizational communication, particularly in the context of rejecting gratification practices in healthcare institutions. The findings reveal that digital organizational communication functions not merely as an information delivery tool, but as a cultural infrastructure that continuously reinforces integrity values through systematic, accessible, and interactive communication processes.

The study further shows that digital platforms contribute to ethical behavior formation through mechanisms of norm internalization, cognitive recall, and social learning. The availability of transparent information and secure digital reporting

systems enhances employees' confidence in rejecting and reporting gratification practices. At the same time, the alignment between internal communication, ethical practices, and organizational values significantly strengthens the institution's organizational image and public trust.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the development of digital organizational communication studies by proposing the Digital Integrity Communication Model (DICM), which positions digital communication as a central mechanism integrating organizational values, technological systems, individual behavior, and organizational image. Practically, the findings suggest that healthcare institutions need to design structured digital communication strategies, supported by leadership commitment, digital literacy, and organizational culture, to effectively build a sustainable integrity system.

However, this study is limited to a single case study and a qualitative approach, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research is recommended to adopt longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to examine causal relationships and explore the role of emerging technologies in shaping ethical communication within organizations.

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