

Developing An Integrated Digital Communication Model For Institutional Image Enhancement In Higher Education

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Abstract

Digital transformation compels higher education institutions to adapt communication strategies to fortify their institutional image, a strategic asset significantly shaped by the quality of digital interactions. This study analyzes the digital communication practices within public services at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Negeri Malang (FIS UM), to formulate an optimization model. Employing a qualitative-descriptive method, data were collected through in-depth interviews with stakeholders, digital observation of official platforms, and document analysis. The findings reveal that current communication is predominantly reactive, fragmented, and strategically misaligned with audience needs. Furthermore, an underdeveloped user interface and experience (UI/UX) on the faculty's digital platforms fail to project a professional image and hinder user engagement. Concluding that a coherent digital communication strategy is absent, this research proposes an Integrated Service Unit (ULT) as its primary contribution. The model's novelty lies in its function as a proactive instrument for

reputation management, transforming disparate interactions into a cohesive strategy for measurably strengthening the institutional image.

Keywords: *Digital Communication; Good University Governance; Higher Education Institution; Institutional Image; Strategic Communication.*

Introduction

The digital transformation of the higher education sector has brought significant changes that impact the way academic institutions operate and compete. With rapid advancements in information technology, universities are no longer assessed solely on academic quality, but also on their ability to manage public perception and build meaningful relationships with stakeholders through diverse communication channels (Wibowo et al., 2022). This indicates that the institutional image, which is the totality of public perceptions of the organization, has turned into a very important strategic asset (Balmer & Podnar, 2021). A positive image, cultivated through effective communication, can influence prospective students' decisions and reinforce engagement with alumni, industry partners, and the wider community (Ahmed et al., 2024; Ghani et al., 2023; Isa et al., 2023). Despite this strategic importance, a persistent gap remains between the goal of projecting a coherent and professional image and the actual implementation of digital communication practices, particularly at the faculty level, where most direct interactions with stakeholders occur. This study seeks to address this problem by developing an integrated digital communication model aimed at enhancing institutional image through strategic public service delivery.

In this digital era, the utilization of social media as a promotional tool has become one of the promising methods to increase visibility and positive perceptions of educational institutions (Juhaidi, 2024; Masele & Rwehikiza, 2024). Through the right marketing strategy, including the effective use of high-quality content on social media, institutions can increase awareness and foster loyalty among the academic community and other stakeholders (M. Susanti, 2023). Therefore, to achieve this goal, it is crucial for universities to analyze and adopt communication and marketing models that are relevant to the latest technological developments (Kambau, 2024).

The theoretical foundation for strengthening institutional image lies in the principles of strategic communication, particularly the concept of two-way symmetrical communication, a core tenet of Grunig's Excellence Theory (Grunig, 2009). This model posits that long-term, trust-based relationships are best built not through one-way dissemination of

information (informational or persuasive models) but through genuine dialogue that seeks mutual understanding and adjustment between an organization and its publics (Men & Stacks, 2014). An institutional image is, therefore, a direct outcome of the quality of these relationships. In other words, institutional image is a multi-faceted construct representing the net perception of an organization held by its publics, which is formed through all encounters, communications, and third-party reports (Sung & Yang, 2008).

A positive image is cultivated when stakeholders perceive the institution as responsive, transparent, and genuinely engaged in dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). In the context of digital media, this translates into using platforms not merely as information outlets, but as interactive spaces that facilitate listening, responding, and co-creating value (Aggerholm & Thomsen, 2020; Yang & Taylor, 2010). Nonetheless, many higher education institutions continue to rely on one-way communication models where digital platforms function passively, limiting their potential as tools for relationship management and image enhancement (Charbonnet, 2012).

As one of the state campuses and with the status of PTN BH (legal state university), the Faculty of Social Sciences or FIS (Fakultas Ilmu Sosial) UM is required to provide the best service, especially in the context of optimizing the use of digital media in public communication and services for the internal communities (Lecturers, Students) and external communities (Business & Industry Partners, the general public) to maintain the institution's reputation as the best state university in Indonesia.

As a public faculty under the governance of a Legal Entity State University (Perguruan Tinggi Negeri Badan Hukum, PTN-BH), FIS UM is mandated to deliver high-quality services. This includes optimizing the use of digital media in public communication for both internal audiences (lecturers, students) and external stakeholders (industry partners, prospective students, general public), in alignment with the university's broader reputation-building goals.

Digital transformation in higher education is not solely about modernization, but also about enhancing academic performance and operational efficiency (Wibowo et al., 2022). The implementation of information systems and the effective use of websites not only facilitate teaching and learning activities but also strengthen interactions with prospective students through a more transparent and accessible admission process (Fadlan et al., 2022). Given this importance, institutions that are able to adapt quickly to digital changes and optimize their resources will have a better competitive advantage (Kambau, 2024). Therefore, a strong

institutional image in this era depends not only on academic quality but also on how effectively the institution maintains stakeholder relationships through innovative and strategic communication practices.

While extensive literature widely acknowledges the importance of digital presence for university-level branding (Carvalho et al., 2021; Rutter et al., 2016) A significant research gap exists concerning its strategic implementation at the faculty level. Faculties serve as the primary service points and interact directly with students and other stakeholders, yet they are often overlooked in strategic communication studies. As a result, faculty-level communication challenges are inadequately addressed in the current body of knowledge (Wattie et al., 2024). Moreover, existing research often identifies problems without providing actionable, integrated models for communication enhancement (T. Susanti et al., 2023).

In addition, many existing studies are descriptive and only identify problems without offering applicable and integrated solution models. This suggests the need for a more strategic and innovative approach to public service communication practice. For example, in the context of digital transformation, effective communication strategies must address the challenges posed by social and technological change (Neill & Bowen, 2021). New models that can integrate stakeholder engagement and utilize digital platforms will go a long way in improving the effectiveness and responsiveness of communications at the faculty level (Ruck & Men, 2021).

This study aims to address that gap by moving beyond the conventional focus on the what (institutional image) and why (competitive advantage) to explore the how (the formulation of a structured digital communication model tailored to the faculty's specific operational context).

The objectives of this research are threefold: (1) to analyze the current practices and shortcomings of digital public service communication at the faculty level, (2) to identify the discrepancies between existing communication efforts and stakeholder expectations through the lens of the two-way symmetrical model, and (3) to propose an integrated digital communication model designed to strategically enhance the faculty's institutional image.

To analyze this issue in a real-world context, this study employs a descriptive qualitative design focused on the Faculty of Social Sciences at Universitas Negeri Malang (FIS UM). As a constituent of a prominent state university in Indonesia with a legal entity status (PTN-BH), FIS UM exemplifies the tension between the strategic mandate to project an image of excellence and the on-the-ground challenges of managing digital

communication effectively. This transition—from general problem identification to a context-specific case—is essential for producing rich, applicable insights. By conducting an in-depth analysis of FIS UM, this research seeks to generate contextually rich insights and develop a transferable model that can guide other faculties in optimizing their digital communication to systematically build and strengthen their institutional image.

Research Method

This research employed a descriptive qualitative research design to gain an in-depth and contextual understanding of digital communication practices in public services at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Negeri Malang (FIS UM). This methodological orientation was selected for its strength in capturing complex meanings, subjective experiences, and nuanced perceptions of service users and administrators, phenomena that are not easily quantifiable (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Rather than testing hypotheses or generating statistical generalizations, this research aimed to describe communication practices as they naturally occur, and to understand the meanings attributed to them by key stakeholders. In this regard, descriptive qualitative design is particularly suitable for examining the dynamics of institutional communication within a specific organizational and sociocultural context.

The research location was focused on the Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Negeri Malang (FIS UM), and involved purposive sampling of 14 informants based on their relevance to the research objectives. The selection criteria required informants to be active users or managers of the faculty's digital services. Informants consisted of 10 undergraduate students who had directly used faculty digital services, two service coordinators responsible for academic and general administration, and two external stakeholders who had engaged with the faculty's digital platforms. The sample was selected to ensure representation from both internal and external users, thereby capturing diverse perspectives on the quality, accessibility, and responsiveness of digital communication channels.

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period from July to August 2024. To capture rich and comprehensive data, this research employed a triangulation of methods (Bryman, 2016). Firstly, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with all informants to explore their perceptions, needs, and evaluations of the provided digital communication channels. These interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online via Google Meet or WhatsApp calls to accommodate informant availability. Each interview lasted between 45 -90 minutes and

was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. All interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity and depth of the data.

Secondly, non-intrusive digital observation was carried out on FIS UM's official platforms (Instagram and WhatsApp) to analyze real-time interaction patterns, content types, and managerial responsiveness. Thirdly, document analysis of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), social media content, and other related official documents was performed to understand the formal framework of the implemented communication strategy. This triangulation allowed for the cross-verification of findings; for instance, informant testimonies from interviews were corroborated with observed digital behaviors and official policy documents, thereby strengthening the study's credibility.



Figure 1. Research Work Flow

In line with qualitative research rigor, this study implemented a triangulation strategy using three data sources: (1) in-depth interviews to elicit stakeholder experiences and perceptions; (2) non-intrusive observations of digital interactions on official FIS UM platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp; and (3) document analysis of service standard operating procedures (SOPs) and archived social media content. These triangulated methods enabled cross-verification of findings and enhanced the validity of interpretations, particularly in uncovering discrepancies between intended communication strategies and actual user experiences (Fusch et al., 2018).

All collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as outlined by. The analysis process included six phases: (1) familiarization with the

data, (2) initial coding, (3) search for relevant themes, (4) review of themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, validation strategies such as peer debriefing and member checking were applied. Selected participants were re-engaged to confirm the accuracy of theme interpretations, while peer discussions among researchers helped refine coding consistency and analytical depth (Nowell et al., 2017). By employing a descriptive qualitative design, this study was able to offer a nuanced and evidence-based understanding of how digital communication practices shape the institutional image of FIS UM.

Results and Discussion

Data analysis conducted through a series of interviews, digital observations, and document studies revealed significant challenges in the practice of public service communication at FIS UM. Collectively, these findings indicate that the optimization of digital communication has not been run strategically, which has direct implications for efforts to strengthen the institutional image. The existing communication patterns show the fragmentation of information and service reactivity, the gap between the content presented and the audience's needs, and the interface design that does not fully represent a professional image. Field data findings and analysis will be presented in three main points, including (1) digital communication practices in public services at FIS UM, (2) gaps in meeting information needs and information seeking behavior among internal public (lecturers and students) and external public, and (3) the relevance between perceptions of the quality of public services through digital media and the image of educational institutions.

The era of digital transformation has encouraged higher education institutions to optimize the use of digital media, especially social media, in their public service systems. In this context, FIS UM, as one of the leading higher education institutions in Indonesia, needs to respond to this dynamic to realize good governance, quality, and integrity. Research conducted by Nursito (2022) shows that 75% of higher education stakeholders expect more responsive and integrated services through digital platforms. A similar research found that effective communication through digital media contributed to increased stakeholder satisfaction in higher education institutions (Carvalho et al., 2021). In the context of higher education institutions in Indonesia, research conducted by Malešević et al. (2021) shows that institutions that adopt digital-based service systems experience significant improvements in aspects of stakeholder satisfaction and communication effectiveness (Malešević et al.,

2021). These findings are in line with the opinion that the quality of digital interactions, including responsiveness and clarity of information, is an important factor in building a positive image of educational institutions (Carvalho et al., 2021). By utilizing social media and other digital platforms, institutions can improve communication with students and stakeholders, which in turn can strengthen their reputation and attractiveness in the eyes of the public (Swan et al., 2019).

One of the challenges faced is how to ensure that every digital interaction creates a satisfying experience for service users by promoting integrity values. In this case, communication management in the digital era is not only about using technology, but also includes developing strategic communication strategies to achieve the goals of educational institutions (Chiang, 2023)). Therefore, it is important for FIS UM as a competitive higher education institution that prioritizes excellent service to develop a comprehensive and integrated approach to digital communication, to ensure that all interactions with stakeholders add value and reflect professionalism (Malešević et al., 2021).

In addition, the existence of an online-based service application owned by the UM Faculty of Social Sciences was initiated in 2023 when the state university, Universitas Negeri Malang, launched the formation of the Integrity Zone (IZ) as part of the realization of Good University Governance. The existence of this Integrity Zone does not only concern the issue of gratuity (corruption) in terms of 'money', but what is more important is how to provide the best service for internal communities (lecturers, students) and external communities (prospective students, parents, DUDI cooperation partners, the general public) both in the academic, student affairs, and general services.

In line with the opinion above, one of the informants admitted that he preferred to 'surf' looking for information about lectures online rather than having to meet service officers face to face. According to him, the existence of the FIS UM helpdesk is quite helpful in getting information when he is a new student who needs a lot of information in both academic and non-academic fields. Geographical factors, the distance between domicile and campus, are the main reason why informants are more likely to fulfill information needs about campus through digital communication channels (Instagram).

"I prefer to browse through FIS's IG, rather than having to come all the way to campus. When I was a freshman, I used to chat (contact) the helpdesk and DM on IG too to ask questions about campus, and the response was fast." (DA, a student)

As one of the service users in the campus environment, students feel helped by the existence of a helpdesk that can be contacted anytime and anywhere. This is in line with the statement conveyed by Rossel et al (2006) who underlined the importance of a mobile-first approach in developing digital service systems in higher education, or in other words, how digital technology focuses attention on user needs, such as ease and speed of access, readability of information, and personalized responses (Rossel et al., 2006). The existence of a help desk encourages the formation of a fast and accountable service culture. However, based on the researchers' investigation, the helpdesk contact information owned by FIS UM has not been socialized to all service users and has not been fully integrated with the types of services needed by users, and moreover, not all of them are mobile-friendly. In fact, research conducted by Sambo (2021) on nearly 1500 respondents from undergraduate students at a Nigerian Specialized University revealed that more than 40% of the students chose to access campus services via their smart devices/ smartphones, and most of them were located off campus (Sambo et al., 2021). This condition does not mean that accessing services via a laptop has no positive implications; it's just that, citing informants' recognition, it takes a little longer and a stable internet connection if you have to open a laptop rather than a cellphone.

"I am actually helped by the existence of SIPEJAR when lecturers cannot attend the class, but oftentimes if you want to access it, you have to open your laptop first, find a plug first, you can't easily access it from your cellphone, it often has bugs (errors)..." (NB, a student)

The same statement was also often conveyed by other informants (students) in interviews related to information integration between units. They admitted that they experienced difficulties in accessing information and faculty services because the information system between units had not been integrated. This condition not only has an impact on stakeholder satisfaction but also significantly affects the overall operational effectiveness of the organization (Krøtel, 2021).

Digital communication practices carried out by service officers at FIS UM also prioritize 'closeness', thus every digital connection has meaning for service users - in this case, students, lecturers, and the general public. As stated by Nguyen et.al (2022) in the results of their research, the Covid-19 pandemic has facilitated social connectedness and emotional closeness with new forms that are not much different from face-to-face communication, such as through video calls, the use of emoticons/stickers, and other forms of interaction (Nguyen et al., 2022). Strengthening the previous opinion, Moral-Torazo et.al (2005) state that interactions in the

digital space allow individuals to freely express ‘emotions’ to encourage the creation of personal connections between the two parties (service officers - service recipients) as seen in the following screenshot of FIS UM’s IG direct message:

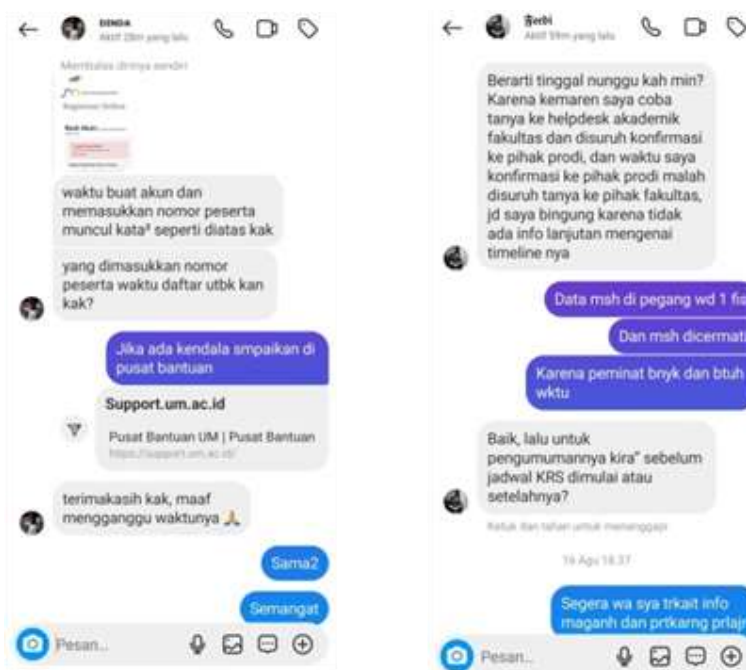


Figure 2. Communication practices of FIS UM’s service officers

Referring to Media Richness Theory, it is explained that social media, which should be a rich medium to facilitate dialogic communication, actually reduces its effectiveness due to a lack of interactivity and consistency. In this research, the official social media account of FIS UM becomes a communication channel between FIS UM and the internal and external communities. However, this utilization is still limited to economic relations of supply and demand, not yet touching the personal aspects that can create closeness between organizations and stakeholders.

The next finding relates to information preferences and information-seeking behavior by the internal and external communities. Based on the researchers’ investigation, university student informants prefer the presentation of information on social media such as Instagram, accompanied by attention-grabbing visual displays. According to them, information that is packaged with aesthetic design, good grammar, and brevity can save them time to understand the meaning of the message,

rather than having to read long texts on the website. The narrative of other informants also reinforces the importance of FIS UM paying attention to the user interface (UI) and user experience (UX) on their official digital media accounts (website and Instagram). According to them, the visual dimension is closely related to the positioning of the organization in building an image.



Figure 3. The Interface before and after the declaration of IZ at FIS UM (left-right)

User Interface (UI) and User Experience (UX) on websites and social media play a crucial role in shaping the image of higher education institutions. Research shows that effective user interaction, supported by user-friendly and intuitive design, can increase student satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, research by Ghani et al. (2023) underlines the importance of a strong social media presence, which not only enhances reputation but also attracts prospective students by showcasing the unique and prestigious aspects of the institution (Ghani et al., 2023). Integrating responsive communication through digital channels helps to strengthen stakeholder engagement, as Weiger et al. (2017) reveal that the proper application of communication strategies can increase perceptions of a brand's value (Weiger et al., 2017). In a broader perspective, Simiyu et al. (2019) found a positive relationship between social media engagement and institutional reputation ratings (Simiyu et al., 2019). This suggests that proper interaction can be a tool to improve an organizational image. Therefore, good UI and UX not only serve to display information, but also serve as an important pillar in building a positive reputation for higher education institutions in this digital era (Amin & Khan, 2021).



Figure 4. UI/UX of UM and FIS UM Instagram Accounts

According to the observational analysis on the interface of the official Instagram account of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Negeri Malang (@fis.um), a strategic effort can be seen through the utilization of visual communication to support institutional branding. This digital artifact not only functions as a medium for conveying information, but also acts as an important element in perception management and image building. Research conducted by Malik and Frimadani (2022) emphasizes that good user interface (UI) design can create a positive user experience (UX), which contributes to the overall brand image (Malik & Frimadani, 2022). Furthermore, Syafei and Hidayatullah's (2023) research showed that implementing effective UI/UX on digital platforms has the potential to increase user satisfaction and, in turn, strengthen positive perceptions of the organization (Syafei & Hidayatullah, 2023). This is in line with the finding showing that good visual communication quality can strengthen user interaction with online content, as described in Pateman and Pramudia's (2024) research. Therefore, the utilization of good visual communication strategies through social media and other digital platforms is essential for the faculty's positive branding in today's digital era.

Functionally, the arrangement of information in the account bio - including Helpdesk contact details, address, and link to the official website - as well as the content organization through highlight features ("INFORMATION," "ACHIEVEMENT," "FIS AGENDA") is an implementation of the principle of user-centered design. By providing clear and intuitive access points, faculty proactively reduce ambiguity and cognitive costs for users, as stated by Al Rahmah et.al (2022) who assert that functional and easily accessible website (and social media) features significantly enhance the image and trust of higher education institutions

(Al Rahmah et al., 2022). This ease of navigation indirectly builds the perception that the institution is organized, efficient, and cares about the needs of its stakeholders.

Meanwhile, the results of previous research show that the use of social media by government agencies is an innovation in maximizing the Internet of Things (IoT) technology. This opinion reinforces the benefits of social media for the government, which are not limited to being a means of communication in times of crisis and disaster, but can also restore public confidence in government policy issues (Sulistiowati & Febriyanta, 2020)

From an aesthetic and identity perspective, the use of a consistent color palette, uniform iconography, and clear typography indicates an effort to build a coherent Corporate Visual Identity (CVI). A strong and consistent CVI across digital platforms is fundamental to enhancing brand recall and projecting an image of professionalism (Kaur & Kaur, 2021; Van den Bosch et al., 2005). The clean and structured layout of the various posts on the @fis.um account supports the organization to communicate non-verbal messages about the seriousness and credibility of the institution.

Overall, the utilization of visual and functional elements on the @fis.um Instagram account can be analyzed as a first step towards more symmetrical communication practices. Despite the one-to-many nature of the platform, the interface design that is responsive to user needs represents a form of passive “listening”. This positive interaction, facilitated by good design, according to Rutter, Roper, & Lettice (2016), has a strong correlation with positive perceptions of the university's brand and can ultimately influence recruitment performance (Rutter et al., 2016). Thus, the visualization of this digital interface serves not only as an information showcase but also as a strategic instrument to build relationships and strengthen the brand equity of FIS UM in a competitive digital landscape.

On the other hand, the researchers found different opinions regarding information seeking preferences among university students. Instead of utilizing digital media (WA or social media), informants stated that they preferred to communicate face-to-face to get information about the campus because of the trust and certainty factor, as expressed by informants AF and FKH (students):

"For me, I never [use the helpdesk], because for me it's better to come directly ... because in my opinion, if I come and am welcomed, there is a person who is immediately willing to serve, so it's fast. If through the helpdesk, WA or IG DM, sometimes it takes a long time to reply".

"Honestly, I rarely use social media, I just followed FIS UM (IG) because my friends recently followed it, since I think I can't get enough information from it, because sometimes they take a long time to give us the information".

The above conditions indicate that the utilization of digital communication channels owned by FIS UM is not optimal. The existence of a helpdesk that can be contacted through the official WhatsApp channel or the official Instagram account @fis.um has not fully met the expectations of the internal and external communities, especially in fulfilling information. In fact, the use of intuitive and responsive digital platforms can increase positive user interactions, thereby strengthening the institution's image as a professional institution (Pandey et al., 2020). Furthermore, strategic communication management, which includes analyzing and improving user experience, is a key pillar in building and maintaining reputation in the digital era (Brockhaus et al., 2023).

Social media, which should function as a potential communication channel to convey information quickly, relevantly, and massively to students, seems to receive less attention from the institution. Poor management of social media accounts can lead to inconsistent or unreliable information, which in turn can reduce internal and external public trust in the educational institution. Research shows that good social media management can increase the popularity and performance of higher education institutions, while poor management can create a negative impression in the eyes of the public (Shah et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the reputation of institutions is greatly influenced by how they interact with students through social media. When the information conveyed is not well managed, students tend to doubt the credibility of the information. This is in line with the finding that social media functions as a new public space where students can share and discuss important issues (Kwestel & Milano, 2020). If a faculty's social media account is inactive or unresponsive, students may seek information from other, unofficial sources, which can worsen their perception of the institution.

Additionally, effective social media management can help build community and better engagement between faculty and students. Research shows that active engagement on social media can strengthen relationships between institutions and students, as well as increase students' sense of belonging (Galioto et al., 2025; Kazmi et al., 2024). Conversely, a lack of management can create distance between faculty and students, which can contribute to a decline in trust and reputation.

As such, it is important for faculty to develop effective and responsive social media management strategies. This will not only increase student trust in the information delivered but will also strengthen the institution's reputation in the eyes of the public. Research shows that institutions that optimally utilize social media can achieve higher levels of engagement and build a positive image among students and the wider community (Bonilla Quijada et al., 2022; Koshkin et al., 2017). As a final part of the research findings and contributions, this research cites the Information Systems Theory that emphasizes the importance of system integration in improving the effectiveness of organizational services. The implementation of the integrated information system is expressed in an information service model based on the Integrated Service Unit or ULT (Unit Layanan Terpadu), which is an easily accessible, transparent, and responsive service information portal. ULT FIS UM is designed to integrate various administrative and information services into one door, thus enabling students, lecturers, and the public to obtain services more efficiently. In the context of higher education, which is increasingly digitized, ULT is also one of the innovations in the field of services that can strengthen institutional integrity, as shown in the chart below:

Operational and Strategic Significance

ULT FIS UM represents more than a technical system; it is a strategic communication infrastructure that aligns with the principles of symmetrical two-way communication. The model enables ongoing dialogic engagement through real-time helpdesk interfaces, structured feedback mechanisms, and adaptive content strategies tailored to user needs. By establishing a centralized intake point (using Google Form) and a standardized, ticket-based workflow, the model replaces inconsistent, ad-hoc responses with a structured and accountable process. This system introduces transparency and predictability into service delivery, elements that are crucial for building stakeholder trust and satisfaction. The implementation of a single-window service model has been shown to significantly improve efficiency and user perception in public sector organizations by reducing complexity and clarifying accountability (E. Crocco et al., 2024). The model's integrated feedback loop includes a satisfaction survey and a formal mechanism for resolving information disputes. This aligns with findings by Ruck and Men (2021), who argue that transparent and interactive internal communication systems are central to institutional legitimacy and reputation management in complex environments (Ruck & Men, 2021).

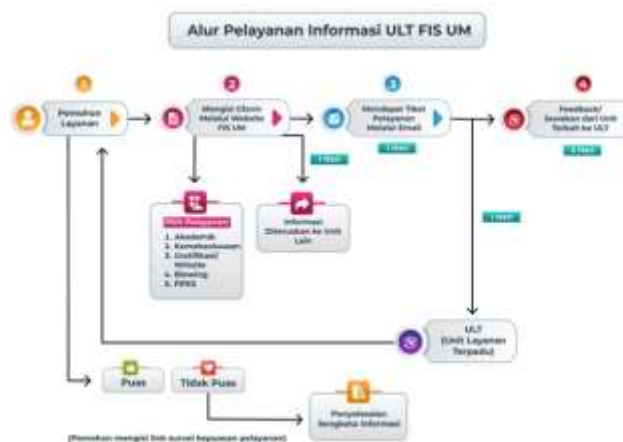


Figure 5. Conceptual Model of Integrated Information Service at FIS UM

Operationalizing Symmetrical Communication

While the existing communication practices were largely asymmetrical and monologic, the ULT framework embeds dialogic principles into its very structure. The subsequent ticketing and response system institutionalizes the concept of feedback, a cornerstone of two-way communication (Johnston, 2014). Most significantly, the inclusion of a satisfaction survey and a dispute resolution process moves the faculty beyond mere responsiveness toward genuine organizational adjustment. It creates a formal channel for the public to voice their evaluations and for the organization to ethically negotiate and resolve issues, demonstrating that stakeholder perspectives are valued and can influence institutional processes. This shift from monologue to dialogue is fundamental for building high-quality, long-term relationships, which are the bedrock of a positive institutional image (Kang & Sung, 2017).

Implications for Institutional Image Enhancement

Finally, by systematically improving service quality and fostering dialogic relationships, the ULT model functions as a powerful instrument for strengthening the institutional image of FIS UM. A university's image is not built on promotional messaging alone but is significantly shaped by the cumulative daily experiences of its stakeholders (Foroudi et al., 2018). A service interaction that is efficient, transparent, and responsive communicates non-verbal messages of professionalism, competence, and institutional care. Each positive service encounter facilitated by the ULT system becomes a micro-level reinforcement of a positive institutional

identity. By creating a reliable and stakeholder-centric service environment, the model helps to cultivate an image of an institution that is not only academically excellent but also administratively superior and genuinely committed to the well-being of its community (Hong, 2019). Thus, the ULT model transcends its administrative function to become a strategic asset in the ongoing process of reputation management in an increasingly competitive higher education landscape.

Finally, the ULT model reflects the broader shift towards digital governance in education, where public service innovation is increasingly evaluated through the lenses of openness, interactivity, and user empowerment. In this respect, the model is not only an internal solution but also a response to external demands for institutional transparency and service excellence, as emphasized in recent digital transformation frameworks in higher education that centralized digital service platforms contribute to increased user satisfaction, operational efficiency, and organizational reputation in higher education institutions (Carvalho et al., 2021; Galioto et al., 2025).

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the critical role of digital communication in enhancing service quality and institutional image within the Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Negeri Malang. The findings underscore three core priorities: (1) the urgency of streamlining information flows, (2) the strategic value of developing an Integrated Service Unit (ULT), and (3) the necessity of optimizing digital platforms—particularly social media—as tools for institutional engagement. These insights collectively inform the formulation of the ULT FIS UM model, a centralized digital communication framework designed to integrate various administrative services, standardize institutional messaging, and enhance responsiveness across stakeholder groups.

The analytical significance of this model lies in its ability to address operational fragmentation by offering a unified, transparent, and accessible information system. It reflects a shift from reactive, siloed communication practices to a proactive, user-centered service culture. If implemented effectively, the ULT model has the potential to improve service efficiency, elevate stakeholder satisfaction, and strengthen the institution's public reputation. However, several limitations temper this potential and require careful consideration.

First, while the model presents a comprehensive conceptual framework, its practical implementation faces notable constraints. These include limited digital infrastructure, inconsistent human resource

readiness, and potential resistance to change—particularly within entrenched bureaucratic cultures. The success of the ULT model is thus contingent upon institutional commitment, sustained leadership support, adequate technical resources, and active management strategies that address cultural and psychological barriers among staff.

Second, the study's scope was limited to internal stakeholders (students, lecturers, and administrative staff). As such, the findings do not fully capture the perceptions of external stakeholders—such as alumni, parents, industry partners, or the general public—whose trust and engagement are equally critical to institutional image-building. Expanding the research to include these groups will enable more holistic validation of service quality and brand positioning.

Third, this research stops at the level of model formulation. Future studies are needed to transition from conceptual modeling to system prototyping and deployment. Employing design-based research or action research methodologies can support the development of a working ULT platform, followed by empirical testing through usability evaluations, UI/UX assessments, and effectiveness benchmarking. Metrics such as digital engagement rates, satisfaction indices, and response time improvements should be used to evaluate its operational impact.

Further research is also recommended in three strategic directions:

1. **Stakeholder-Inclusive Validation:** Adopting a 360-degree evaluation approach that involves alumni, industry partners, and public users to assess the perceived quality, trustworthiness, and reputational value of digital communication systems.
2. **Socio-Cultural Readiness Analysis:** Conducting ethnographic or qualitative organizational research to explore internal readiness, potential resistance, and the cultural adaptation required for successful technology adoption at the faculty level.
3. **Financial Feasibility and ROI:** Developing a financial model that evaluates the cost-benefit ratio of ULT implementation, incorporating both tangible outcomes (e.g., operational efficiency) and intangible returns (e.g., enhanced reputation, stakeholder loyalty, and public trust).

In conclusion, the ULT model offers a promising pathway toward digital transformation in faculty-level public services. Yet, its success depends not only on technical design but also on institutional alignment, resource allocation, and a willingness to embrace change. Future research must bridge the gap between conceptual innovation and applied implementation, ensuring that digital communication strategies in higher

education are both impactful and sustainable in advancing service quality and institutional excellence.

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