ISSN: XXXX-XXXX
KOMVISTA: Journal of Communication, Media, Society and Public Discourse
Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026 e-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

Integrating Linear, Interactional, Transactional, and Lasswell Communication Models in the Digital Era

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received:
13 March 2026
Accepted:
29 April 2026
Publication:
30 April 2026

Keywords

Communication Models
Linear
Interactional
Transactional
Lasswell
Digital communication
Interactivity

Kata Kunci

Model Komunikasi
Linier
Interaksional
Transaksional
Lasswell
Komunikasi Digital
Interaktivitas

ABSTRACT

Digital communication does not eliminate the relevance of classical communication models; it changes how they should be used to examine message transmission, interaction, meaning-making, and effects. This article integrates the linear, interactional, transactional, and Lasswell models discussed in Learning Activity 9 of Pengantar Ilmu Komunikasi and assesses their relevance to digital communication. The study uses an integrative literature review, with Learning Activity 9 as the primary conceptual source and journal articles as supporting evidence. The review shows that the linear model is useful for transmission, channels, and noise; the interactional model for feedback and role exchange; the transactional model for simultaneous and contextual meaning-making; and Lasswell for strategic auditing of communicator, message, channel, audience, and effects. The article proposes an integrated framework that treats platforms, algorithms, and intermediary actors as a contextual layer. Digital 2026 reports 230 million internet users and 180 million social-media user identities in Indonesia at the end of 2025. The contribution is an operational basis for selecting communication models according to research questions and digital contexts.

ABSTRAK

Komunikasi digital tidak menghilangkan relevansi model-model komunikasi klasik; sebaliknya, komunikasi digital mengubah cara model-model tersebut digunakan untuk mengkaji proses penyampaian pesan, interaksi, pembentukan makna, dan dampak komunikasi. Artikel ini mengintegrasikan model komunikasi linear, interaksional, transaksional, dan model Lasswell yang dibahas dalam Kegiatan Belajar 9 Pengantar Ilmu Komunikasi, serta menilai relevansinya dalam konteks komunikasi digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan tinjauan literatur integratif, dengan Kegiatan Belajar 9 sebagai sumber konseptual utama dan artikel-artikel jurnal sebagai bukti pendukung. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa model linear berguna untuk memahami proses transmisi pesan, saluran komunikasi, dan gangguan (noise); model interaksional untuk memahami umpan balik dan pertukaran peran antara komunikator dan komunikan; model transaksional untuk memahami proses pembentukan makna yang berlangsung secara simultan dan dipengaruhi konteks; sedangkan model Lasswell berguna untuk menganalisis secara strategis komunikator, pesan, saluran, khalayak, dan efek komunikasi. Artikel ini mengusulkan kerangka integratif yang menempatkan platform digital, algoritma, dan aktor perantara sebagai lapisan kontekstual dalam proses komunikasi. Berdasarkan laporan Digital 2026, terdapat sekitar 230 juta pengguna internet dan 180 juta identitas pengguna media sosial di Indonesia pada akhir 2025. Kontribusi artikel ini adalah menyediakan dasar operasional untuk menentukan model komunikasi yang sesuai berdasarkan pertanyaan penelitian dan konteks komunikasi digital.

INTRODUCTION

Communication models function as conceptual representations that help researchers explain how messages are formed, transmitted, received, interpreted, exchanged, and transformed into effects. Learning Activity 9 in Pengantar Ilmu Komunikasi places four models—linear, interactional, transactional, and Lasswell—as foundations for understanding communication processes. The source defines communication as the exchange or delivery of information, ideas, emotions, or messages involving sender, message, channel, receiver, feedback, and context. Communication purposes include information delivery, relationship building, attitude or behavior change, problem solving, and the creation of shared understanding (Ratnawita et al., 2024, pp. 110–111).

Conceptually, the four models represent an evolution in how communication is understood. The linear model emphasizes one-way message flow; the interactional model introduces feedback and role exchange; the transactional model treats communicators as simultaneously creating and interpreting messages; while the Lasswell model offers five analytical questions—who, says what, in which channel, to whom, and with what effect. Learning Activity 9 explicitly differentiates these emphases and shows that each model serves a distinct analytical function (Ratnawita et al., 2024, pp. 113–120).

The digital communication environment makes the boundaries among sender, receiver, channel, and audience increasingly fluid. Users can produce messages, receive messages, provide feedback, modify messages, and redistribute them. Message flows may also involve influencers, journalists, bots, recommendation systems, and platforms as intermediary actors. Ohme et al. (2026) show that communication on digital platforms needs to be understood through structures that may shift from dyadic to triadic relations when intermediaries enter content flows. The theoretical issue, therefore, is no longer whether classical models are right or wrong, but which model best addresses a particular communication question.

This issue is especially relevant in Indonesia. DataReportal's Digital 2026 reports 230 million internet users and 180 million social-media user identities in Indonesia in October 2025, equivalent to 80.5% internet penetration and 62.9% of the population for social-media identities. These figures do not mean that every identity represents a unique individual and the categories should not be added together; nevertheless, they demonstrate the scale of the digital communication ecosystem that communication theory must explain (DataReportal, 2026).

Against this background, the article asks three questions: (1) what are the strengths and limitations of each communication model; (2) how does journal evidence demonstrate the relevance of these models to digital communication; and (3) how can the four models be integrated into an analytical framework better suited to Indonesia's digital communication environment? The article's novelty lies in a functional integration of the four models rather than a merely definitional comparison, while positioning digital platforms and intermediary actors as a contextual layer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Linear Communication Model: Strengths in Transmission and Noise

In Learning Activity 9, the linear model is presented as a transmission or Shannon–Weaver model that depicts communication as a one-way process from sender to receiver. Its main elements are sender, message, channel, receiver, feedback, and noise. Although feedback may occur after message reception, the model's defining characteristic remains the movement of a

message from one point to another without substantial reciprocal interaction (Ratnawita et al., 2024, pp. 113–114).

The strength of this model lies in its simplicity. It is useful when research asks whether a message reaches its intended destination, which channel is used, what forms of disturbance occur, and how transmission quality affects reception. Getchell et al. (2023) caution that transmission models are highly dominant in communication education, but excessive reliance on them may limit understanding of dynamic organizational communication. In digital settings, this critique does not mean that the linear model should be abandoned. It remains useful for examining the initial stage of communication: content production, encoding, media selection, technical or semantic noise, and reception.

Sianipar et al. (2024) demonstrate the usefulness of the Shannon–Weaver model for analyzing digital political communication. In their case concerning the use of a sensitive term in the Jakarta regional election, noise involved not only technical disturbance but also semantic noise and sociocultural context. This finding suggests that the linear model can be extended from technical transmission problems toward the diagnosis of meaning-related disturbances.

2. Interactional Communication Model: Feedback, Role Exchange, and Context

The interactional model, associated with Schramm in Learning Activity 9, expands communication from transmission into an exchange involving response and feedback. Sender and receiver are no longer treated as completely fixed positions. Context—including culture, physical environment, interpersonal relationships, and time—is also incorporated as a factor shaping communication (Ratnawita et al., 2024, pp. 114–116).

Empirical evidence demonstrates the importance of interactivity. Zhang and Lin (2015) show that social media gives users greater control over communication because users can initiate messages, decide whether to share information, and determine when to comment. Namkoong et al. (2017), through an experiment involving an anti-smoking social media campaign, found that interactive communication encouraged information seeking across channels and contributed to changes in attitudes and behavioral intentions. These findings reinforce the idea that feedback is not merely an addition after reception but an important part of communicative influence.

In digital public services, Nabila et al. (2025) demonstrate that WhatsApp can function as a two-way communication medium for handling customer complaints. The process is theoretically better captured by the interactional model than by the linear model because service quality depends not only on an institution's initial message but also on customer responses and institutional follow-up. The interactional model is therefore relevant to service communication, customer engagement, education, and digital campaigns.

3. Transactional Communication Model: Simultaneity and Shared Meaning-Making

The transactional model goes further by viewing communication as a simultaneous and dynamic process. Learning Activity 9 explains that both parties can function as sender and receiver at the same time; symbols, interpersonal relationships, communication patterns, and context jointly shape meaning. The model emphasizes that communication is continuous and that participants influence one another (Ratnawita et al., 2024, pp. 116–118).

Baskin and Bruno (1977) show that the transactional model can connect encoding and decoding processes with individuals' psychological systems. Tang and Bradshaw (2020) demonstrate that communication media differ in their capacity to convey verbal and nonverbal cues: face-to-face communication provides multiple channels simultaneously, whereas instant

messaging tends to lose some nonverbal cues. The implication is that medium choice affects how participants construct presence and interpret messages.

In digital communication, the transactional principle becomes particularly important because meaning can emerge through sequences of responses, comments, emojis, reposts, visuals, and community contexts. Lew and Stohl (2023) found that interactivity—for example, replies and explicit references to previous messages—increases perceived contingency and users' willingness to comment. Responses perceived as genuinely addressing previous messages can therefore alter the quality of the communicative transaction.

4. Lasswell Model: A Diagnostic Framework for Strategic Communication

The Lasswell model formulates five questions: Who, Says What, In Which Channel, To Whom, and With What Effect. In Learning Activity 9, these elements are used to identify the communicator, message, audience, channel, and effects. The source also acknowledges the model's limitations: it is simple and does not adequately capture context, interaction, or relational dynamics (Ratnawita et al., 2024, pp. 118–120).

These limitations can become a strength when Lasswell is used as an audit framework. In political communication, Taqi et al. (2025) show that the five Lasswell elements can map communicator credibility, message construction, channel choice, audience segmentation, and communication effects in the 2024 East Java gubernatorial election. Lasswell can therefore function as a strategic checklist that is complemented by interactional and transactional models.

Recent developments encourage a reinterpretation of Lasswell. Dewi et al. (2026) position algorithms as an important component in transforming Lasswell's model in the social-media era. This aligns with Ohme et al. (2026), who propose the Dynamic Intermediary Model to explain how intermediaries such as journalists, influencers, artificial agents, or platform actors alter source–receiver relationships. The channel element in Lasswell should therefore be read more broadly as a mediation ecosystem rather than merely a medium that carries messages.

RESEARCH METHODS

This article uses an integrative literature review. The approach was selected because the study does not seek to estimate relationships among variables through a survey; instead, it integrates conceptual knowledge about four communication models and assesses their relevance in digital environments. The primary conceptual source is Learning Activity 9 in the 2024 edition of Pengantar Ilmu Komunikasi, particularly its sections on the definition of communication, barriers, linear, interactional, transactional, and Lasswell models, summary, and exercises.

Supporting literature was selected from journal articles addressing at least one of five themes: (1) transmission/linear communication models; (2) interaction and interactivity; (3) transactional communication; (4) digital/social-media communication; and (5) Lasswell or model-based communication analysis. The literature includes classical and contemporary publications through 2026. Synthesis was conducted in three stages: extraction of core concepts, mapping of each model's function to communication problems, and integration of the findings into an analytical framework.

To enrich the empirical context, secondary data from DataReportal/Kepios's Digital 2026: Indonesia were used. These data serve only as indicators of the scale of the digital ecosystem and not as a research sample. Because the source distinguishes mobile connections, internet users, and social-media user identities, the figures are not added together and are not treated as counts of unique individuals. This approach avoids empirical claims unsupported by the research design.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Functional Comparison of the Four Models

Table 1 indicates that the four models should not be treated as mutually exclusive alternatives. The linear model asks whether a message can be transmitted; the interactional model asks how the receiver responds; the transactional model asks how meaning is jointly constructed; and Lasswell asks who communicates, what is communicated, through which channel, to whom, and with what effects. These questions represent different analytical layers.

Table 1

Functional Comparison of the Four Communication Models

Model	Main logic	Key elements	Best suited for	Limitation	Digital context
Linear	One-way transmission	Sender–message–channel–receiver; noise	Transmission accuracy, channels, disturbance	Limited treatment of feedback and meaning negotiation	Broadcasts, announcements, information distribution
Interactional	Two-way exchange	Sender/receiver, feedback, context	Response, feedback, role exchange	Does not fully capture simultaneity and complex networks	Customer service, chat, interactive campaigns
Transactional	Simultaneous meaning-making	Simultaneity, symbols, relationships, context	Shared meaning and mutual influence	More difficult to operationalize in large networks	Discussion, collaboration, digital communities
Lasswell	Strategic audit of elements and effects	Who–What–Channel–Whom–Effect	Communicator, message, channel, audience, effects	Simple and less circular	Campaigns, politics, public relations, policy communication

2. Scale of Indonesia's Digital Communication Ecosystem

The scale of digital communication in Indonesia illustrates why a model focused only on sender and receiver can become insufficient when used alone. Digital 2026 reports 331 million mobile connections, 230 million internet users, and 180 million social-media user identities at the end of 2025. Kepios's analysis indicates that social-media user identities increased by 37 million, or 26.0%, compared with the end of 2024. These data depict a highly connected ecosystem with substantial interaction potential, although the figures come from different measurement categories.

Table 2

Digital Indicators for Indonesia

Indicator	Value	Proportion	Interpretive note
Mobile connections	331 million	116% of population	Mobile connections; not equivalent to number of individuals
Internet users	230 million	80.5% of population	Internet users in October 2025
Social-media user identities	180 million	62.9% of population	User identities; not necessarily unique individuals
Social-media use among internet users	78.2%	—	Share of internet users using at least one social platform

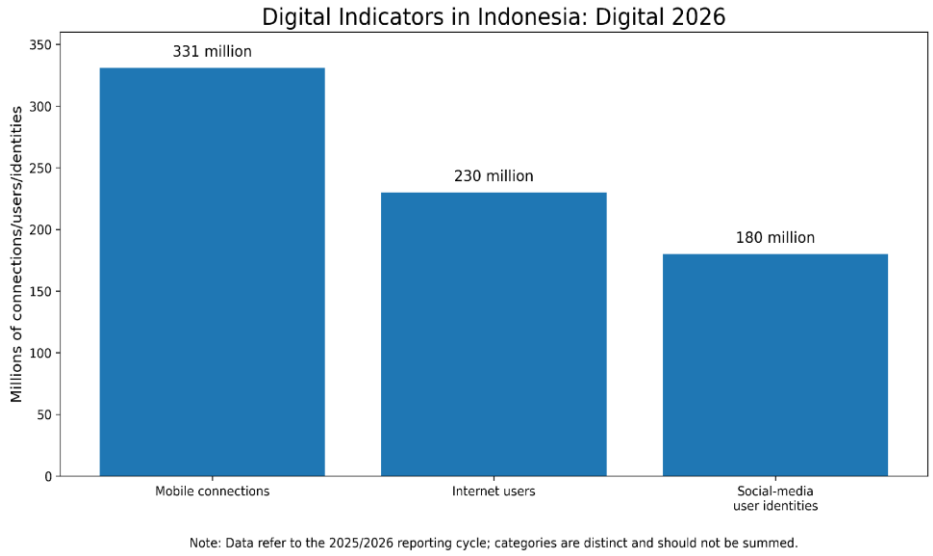


Figure 1. Digital indicators in Indonesia, Digital 2026. Source: DataReportal/Kepios (2026).

The theoretical implication is that digital communication should be understood as a layered process. Messages still have sources and channels, but channels now possess affordances, platform rules, recommendation systems, and distribution mechanisms that can influence who sees a message and how it circulates. The linear model therefore remains useful at the transmission level but is insufficient to explain the entire journey of a message.

3. Synthesis of Journal Evidence: From Interaction to the Platform Ecosystem

The synthesis reveals a consistent developmental pattern. First, the linear model remains relevant when the unit of analysis is the message and channel. Second, when users can respond, the interactional model becomes more appropriate. Third, when messages and responses occur simultaneously and meaning is constructed through relationships and context, the transactional model becomes more adequate. Fourth, when researchers need to audit communication strategy systematically, Lasswell provides a practical categorization structure. Fifth, on digital platforms, the four models need to be situated within an ecosystem involving intermediary actors and platform mechanisms.

Synthesis of Journal Evidence

Table 3 summarizes selected studies and shows how evidence from different contexts supports a complementary use of the four models.

Table 3

Synthesis of Selected Journal Evidence

Study	Model focus	Context / method	Main implication
Getchell, Dubinsky, & Lentz (2023)	Transmission/linear	Critique of transmission-model dominance in management education	Linear models are useful but can limit understanding of dynamic communication
Tang & Bradshaw (2020)	Linear–interactional–transactional	Comparison of instant messaging and face-to-face communication	Medium affects cues, copresence, satisfaction, and effectiveness
Zhang & Lin (2015)	Interactional	Social-media interactivity and business–user communication	Users gain greater control over initiating and responding to messages
Namkoong et al. (2017)	Interactional	Experiment in an anti-	Interactive communication

Study	Model focus	Context / method	Main implication
		smoking campaign	supports information seeking and attitude/intent change
Lew & Stohl (2023)	Interactional	Interactivity experiment in online CSR communication	Replies and contingency increase willingness to comment
Bozkurt (2021)	Interactional	Perceived social-media interactivity and customer engagement	Interactivity relates to feedback, referral, and engagement
Baskin & Bruno (1977)	Transactional	Transactional model and psychological systems	Encoding/decoding are shaped by individual psychological systems
Hinck & Carr (2021)	Transactional/digital	Interpersonal versus intergroup communication on social media	Digital communication can operate along an interpersonal–intergroup spectrum
Capriotti et al. (2024)	Interactional/digital	90,241 posts from 70 universities	Interactivity strategies are important in institutional communication
Ohme et al. (2026)	Transactional/networked	Dynamic Intermediary Model	Intermediaries can shift dyadic relations toward triadic content flows
Taqi et al. (2025)	Lasswell	2024 East Java gubernatorial election	Who–What–Channel–Whom–Effect supports strategic political communication analysis
Dewi, Marbun, & Mujahid (2026)	Lasswell/digital	Reinterpretation of Lasswell for social media	Algorithms need to be considered in digital communication analysis

4. Integrated Four-Model Framework

Figure 2 proposes an analytical sequence rather than a rigid temporal sequence. The first stage uses the linear model to audit transmission: who sends the message, what the message is, which channel is used, and what disturbances occur. The second stage uses the interactional model to identify responses, feedback, and role exchange. The third stage uses the transactional model to assess how participants simultaneously negotiate meaning through symbols, relationships, and context. The fourth stage uses Lasswell as a strategic audit to assess consistency among communicator, message, channel, audience, and effects.

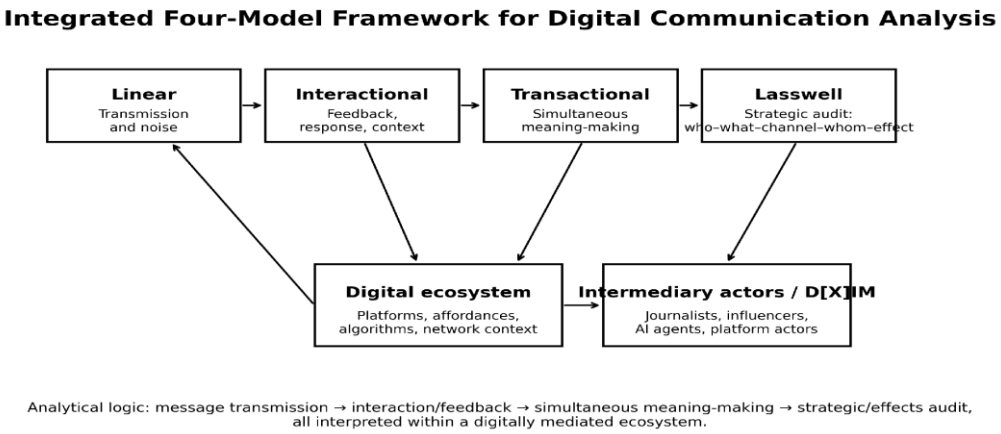


Figure 2. Integrated four-model framework for digital communication analysis. Source: author's synthesis based on Ratnawita et al. (2024) and supporting literature.

A digital-ecosystem layer is added because platform communication does not occur only between two humans. Platforms can determine message visibility through recommendations; influencers or journalists can act as intermediaries; and artificial agents can assist in generating or distributing content. Ohme et al. (2026) show that intermediary actors can shift communication

from dyadic toward triadic relations. Accordingly, the channel element in Lasswell should be expanded into a mediation ecosystem, while the transactional model should account for changes in relationships produced by platform mediation.

5. Selecting a Model According to the Research Question

The guide indicates that model selection should be based on the unit of analysis and research question rather than preference for a particular model. Communication researchers can use one model as the primary lens and another as a complementary lens. Such a strategy reduces the risk of theoretical reductionism.

Table 4

Model Selection Guide by Research Question

Research question	Primary model	Analytical dimensions	Suitable methods
Does the message reach the audience and what are the main disturbances?	Linear	Channel, noise, encoding/decoding	Content analysis, channel audit, readability testing
How does the receiver respond to the message?	Interactional	Feedback, response, context	Conversation analysis, comment analysis, interviews
How is meaning jointly constructed and negotiated?	Transactional	Simultaneity, symbols, relationships, context	Digital ethnography, interaction observation, conversation analysis
Who communicates, what is said, through which channel, to whom, and with what effects?	Lasswell	Who–What–Channel–Whom–Effect	Strategy, campaign, policy, and public-relations analysis
How does content move through platforms and intermediary actors?	Integrated + D[X]IM	Source–intermediary–recipient–content flow	Network analysis, digital trace analysis, computational methods

6. Theoretical Implications

First, the article argues that the development of communication models is cumulative. A newer model does not automatically make an older model irrelevant. Linearity still appears at particular stages of digital communication, for example when an organization publishes an announcement. Once audiences comment, reshare, or produce counter-messages, however, the process moves toward interaction. When responses occur simultaneously and meaning is shaped through relationships, transactional characteristics become dominant.

Second, interactivity is not equivalent to the existence of a comment function. Lew and Stohl (2023) highlight the importance of perceived contingency—whether a response genuinely refers to and addresses a previous message. A digital communication channel may therefore have a comment button without producing substantive communication. Organizations need responses that are relevant and contextual.

Third, context and medium should be treated as part of communication theory rather than as variables placed outside the model. Tang and Bradshaw (2020) demonstrate that differences in communicative cues between face-to-face communication and instant messaging affect the quality of communication experiences. On digital platforms, technological affordances, algorithms, and network architecture also shape interaction possibilities.

Fourth, Lasswell remains strong as a strategic analytical model because its five questions are easy to operationalize. However, “with what effect” should not be interpreted only as a static endpoint. In digital ecosystems, an effect can trigger a new response and become a message for

another actor. Lasswell is therefore best positioned as an audit device within a more circular model.

Fifth, model integration has methodological consequences. Digital communication research should not measure only message volume or engagement. Researchers should distinguish exposure, response, interaction quality, meaning negotiation, network diffusion, and outcomes. The integrated four-model framework provides a logic for connecting these indicators.

7. Practical Implications for Communicators

For public and government communication, use linear logic to ensure that core messages are clear and free from noise, then use interactional logic to build feedback mechanisms. For campaigns and political communication, use Lasswell to map communicators, messages, channels, audience segments, and effects, then use the transactional model to examine public response and meaning negotiation. For digital education, use interactional and transactional models so that learning moves beyond content distribution toward dialogue and shared knowledge creation. For customer service, measure not only response speed but also whether responses are relevant to complaints and whether the communicative transaction produces problem resolution. For social-media communication, treat platforms and intermediary actors as part of the communication ecosystem rather than merely neutral channels.

8. Limitations and Research Agenda

This article is an integrative review rather than field research. The proposed framework therefore requires empirical testing. Future studies can develop instruments to measure transmission quality, feedback quality, shared meaning-making, and communication effects simultaneously. PLS-SEM may be used to test relationships among constructs in digital service contexts; social network analysis may examine changes in actor structures; and computational content analysis may analyze millions of comments or posts.

Another agenda is to test the framework across different Indonesian contexts—government communication, health communication, education, political communication, public services, and organizational communication. Cross-platform research is also important because interaction characteristics on TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and text-based platforms are not identical. Ohme et al. (2026) emphasize that network structures and actor functions may differ by platform, so an integrated model must remain sensitive to platform characteristics.

CONCLUSION

Linear, interactional, transactional, and Lasswell communication models remain relevant in the digital communication ecosystem, but their relevance differs according to the analytical question. The linear model is strongest for transmission, channels, and noise; the interactional model for feedback and response; the transactional model for simultaneity, relationships, context, and meaning-making; and Lasswell for strategic audits of communicator, message, channel, audience, and effects.

The central finding is that these models should be understood integratively. Digital communication is not merely faster transmission; it is increasingly interactive, transactional, networked, and platform-mediated. Digital 2026 data—230 million internet users and 180 million social-media user identities in Indonesia at the end of 2025—indicate the scale of the environment that calls for more comprehensive analytical tools.

The article proposes an Integrated Four-Model Framework as its conceptual contribution. The framework uses the linear model to audit transmission, the interactional model to read feedback, the transactional model to analyze meaning-making, and Lasswell to audit strategy and effects. Platforms and intermediary actors form the mediating context. This approach does not treat classical models as obsolete, but as complementary components for understanding digital communication more fully.

Ethics And Transparency Statement

This article is an integrative literature review and does not involve collection of personal data or direct interaction with human participants. The Indonesian digital data used are public secondary data and their measurement limitations are explicitly acknowledged. The manuscript does not claim new survey or experimental findings

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