

Building Shared Understanding in Public Digital Services: CRM Communication Strategies in the Online PPDB System

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Abstract

Public digital services increasingly rely on complex information systems that require users to interpret procedural rules, policy constraints, and technical instructions within limited time frames. In high-stakes services such as online student admission systems, misunderstandings can quickly escalate into perceptions of unfairness and institutional failure. This study examines how Customer Relationship Management (CRM) communication strategies contribute to building shared understanding in the implementation of the Online PPDB System as a public digital service. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with CRM personnel, non-participant observation of service interactions, and analysis of internal documents and user communication records. The findings show that user difficulties are predominantly communicative rather than technical, stemming from misalignment between institutional logic and user interpretation. CRM communication operates as a sensemaking infrastructure that translates abstract policies into actionable understanding through iterative interaction. The escalation mechanism functions not merely as a technical procedure but as a structured communication process that manages uncertainty, urgency, and accountability. Timely and consistent communication reinforces user trust, while delays or inconsistent explanations undermine perceived legitimacy. The study concludes that CRM communication is an integral component of policy implementation in public digital services. Effective digital governance therefore depends on sustained communicative alignment between institutions and users, positioning CRM as a strategic mechanism for enhancing service effectiveness, trust, and legitimacy.

Keywords: Communication strategy, Customer relationship management, Digital public services, Online PPDB system, Shared understanding

1. Introduction

Public digital services increasingly function as relationship systems rather than mere transactional portals, because citizens interpret every interface prompt, error message, and response delay as a signal of institutional reliability and care [1], [2]. In education governance, online admissions platforms such as PPDB concentrate high-stakes decisions into short time windows, making communication breakdowns immediately consequential for perceived fairness and legitimacy [3], [4]. Digital-first reforms can therefore fail to produce compliance and satisfaction when agencies treat communication as one-way instruction rather than as continuous sensemaking across multiple actors and channels [5], [6]. A central

challenge in online PPDB is that citizens do not encounter “the system” in isolation, but instead navigate fragmented information ecologies that combine official websites, social media posts, peer-to-peer forwarding, and informal troubleshooting groups [7].

In such environments, administrative clarity in regulations is insufficient if users cannot translate procedural language into actionable steps that match their situation, device capability, and literacy level [8], [9]. This gap matters because citizen-centricity depends not only on service availability, but also on shared understanding of what the service is, what it requires, and what outcomes are realistic [10]. Research on omnichannel public services shows that citizens experience friction when channels are poorly integrated, when handoffs between online forms and offline verification are unclear, and when responsibility boundaries between units are invisible to users. For PPDB, this is amplified by peak demand, repeated login attempts, quota competition, and the social pressure of school choice, which can turn small interface ambiguities into collective anxiety and rumor escalation [11].

Service disruptions then become interpreted not simply as technical issues but as distributive injustice, especially when citizens cannot obtain timely explanations that feel personalized and empathic [12], [13]. Within digital government studies, trust consistently mediates the relationship between perceived service quality and continued use, especially when services require users to submit sensitive personal data [14], [15]. Trust also becomes fragile under “privacy fatigue,” where repeated consent prompts and unclear data practices push users to disengage or comply without comprehension, undermining genuine informed participation [16]. In education admissions, where family records, addresses, and child identifiers circulate, legitimacy is closely linked to whether the institution communicates security, accountability, and recourse in language that users can verify [17].

These conditions position CRM-oriented communication as a strategic requirement for public platforms, because CRM emphasizes relationship continuity, responsiveness, and learning from citizen interactions rather than merely completing transactions [18]. Evidence from citizen relationship management systems indicates that structured feedback loops can expand citizen participation, yet political and organizational dynamics can also distort responsiveness if communication becomes symbolic rather than problem-solving [19]. This is relevant to PPDB because admissions controversies often emerge from mismatches between system rules, local implementation discretion, and public expectations shaped by prior years and peer narratives [20]. CRM communication strategies in online PPDB can be operationalized through proactive messaging (before peak periods), real-time clarification (during peak load), and post-incident explanation (after disruptions), each designed to stabilize shared understanding across channels.

Interactive support features ticketing, chat-based guidance, and well-governed chatbots can reduce uncertainty when they prioritize problem resolution and relevance rather than generic scripts [21], [22]. At the same time, AI-enabled public services require institutional reputation and transparent governance to prevent automation from being perceived as avoidance of responsibility [23]. A further barrier is unequal digital literacy, which shapes whether citizens can interpret system categories, upload documents correctly, and troubleshoot failures without falling back on misinformation or brokers. Studies of telecom and e-government adoption also show that perceived effort, facilitating conditions, and channel accessibility significantly condition uptake, implying that communication must be adapted to varied devices, bandwidth, and user competence. In Indonesian public service contexts, CRM practice is further shaped by organizational coordination and the need to align front-stage messages with back-stage capacity, because inconsistent explanations can quickly erode public confidence.

For these reasons, this study frames the Online PPDB system as a public digital service where shared understanding is built through CRM communication strategies that connect rules, interfaces, and support interactions into a coherent relationship experience. Analyzing how communication is designed, delivered, and interpreted across official and informal channels becomes essential to explain why formally correct information may still fail to produce correct user action and perceived fairness. Accordingly, the title “Building Shared Understanding in Public Digital Services: CRM Communication Strategies in the Online PPDB System” positions communication not as auxiliary messaging but as an implementation mechanism that sustains trust, reduces risk perceptions, and strengthens legitimacy in high-stakes public platforms [27].

2. Research Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine how Customer Relationship Management (CRM) communication strategies contribute to building shared understanding in public digital services, specifically within the implementation of the Online PPDB system. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research seeks to understand meanings, interpretations, and interaction processes rather than to measure causal relationships or test hypotheses statistically. Qualitative inquiry enables an in-depth exploration of how communication is produced, interpreted, and negotiated among multiple actors involved in a complex public service environment.

The study employs a case study approach, focusing on the Online PPDB system managed by a public-private service provider as a bounded case. Case study research is particularly suitable for investigating contemporary phenomena embedded in real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident [30]. In the context of public digital services, communication practices cannot be separated from organizational routines, technological infrastructures, and institutional regulations. Therefore, the case study design allows the researcher to capture the dynamic interplay between CRM communication strategies, system implementation, and user interpretation within a natural setting. The research is grounded in a constructivist paradigm, which assumes that social reality is constructed through interaction and shared meaning. From this perspective, “understanding” in digital public services is not treated as an objective outcome of information delivery but as an intersubjective process shaped by communication among service providers, intermediaries, and users. This paradigm aligns with studies in digital government that emphasize sensemaking, interpretation, and meaning alignment as core elements of successful service implementation.

Research Setting and Unit of Analysis

The research setting is the implementation of the Online PPDB system during an active admission cycle, a period characterized by high user traffic, time pressure, and intensive communication exchanges. The unit of analysis is the CRM communication process, encompassing interactions between CRM staff, internal coordinators, technical teams, and service users (such as school operators and parents). Rather than focusing solely on the technical performance of the system, the study concentrates on how communication strategies are enacted, adjusted, and interpreted across different stages of service delivery.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Techniques

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and contextual richness. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including CRM supervisors and frontline CRM personnel. These informants were selected through purposive sampling because of their

direct involvement in designing and implementing communication strategies. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility to probe emerging themes while maintaining consistency across informants. Second, non-participant observation was carried out to document real-time communication practices during service interactions, such as complaint handling, clarification processes, and escalation mechanisms. Observation enables the researcher to capture discrepancies between formal procedures and actual practices, which is critical in studying public digital services where informal communication often complements official channels. Third, document analysis was used to examine internal SOPs, communication guidelines, training materials, and selected records of user interactions (e.g., anonymized chat transcripts or support logs). Document analysis provides insight into the institutional logic underpinning CRM strategies and supports triangulation between reported practices and formal rules. Data analysis followed a thematic analysis procedure. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded iteratively to identify patterns related to communication goals, message framing, role differentiation, escalation processes, and mechanisms for achieving shared understanding. Coding was conducted in multiple cycles, beginning with open coding to capture emergent concepts, followed by axial coding to relate categories and refine themes. This analytical strategy is widely used in qualitative studies of organizational communication and digital governance because it allows theory-informed interpretation while remaining grounded in empirical data.

3. Results and Discussion Data

Results

This section presents and discusses the empirical findings of the study to explain how CRM communication strategies contribute to building shared understanding in public digital services, using the Online PPDB System as a case study. The analysis integrates observed practices, interview data, and document review to demonstrate that communication is not merely supportive but constitutive of service implementation. PPDB System operates through a multi-layered organizational structure designed to manage high interaction volumes and diverse user needs during the admission period. Communication responsibilities are distributed across distinct roles, enabling both responsiveness and procedural control.

Table 1. CRM Communication Roles in the Online PPDB System

Role	Primary Function	Communication Responsibility
CRM Officer	Frontline support	Explaining procedures, receiving and clarifying user complaints
Person in Charge (PIC)	Regional coordination	Interpreting policies and contextualizing implementation
Technical Team	System resolution	Handling bugs, errors, and data synchronization
CRM Supervisor	Oversight and control	Monitoring SOP compliance and escalation decisions

Interview data show that users almost exclusively interact first with CRM officers, making frontline communication a critical determinant of overall user perception. When initial explanations fail to align user understanding with system logic, issues tend to escalate and multiply. Analysis of complaints and inquiries reveals that most user problems are communicative rather than technical. Users frequently

interpreted procedural constraints or policy rules as system failures, indicating a gap between institutional logic and user interpretation.

Table 2. Dominant Categories of User Issues

Issue Category	Description
Procedural misunderstanding	Confusion about registration steps and verification processes
Policy interpretation	Misunderstanding eligibility rules and administrative requirements
Account-related issues	Login, verification status, and data modification limitations
Technical issues	System errors, upload failures, or synchronization delays

These findings suggest that the Online PPDB System functions not only as a technological platform but also as an interpretive space where users construct meaning through communication encounters. Errors in action often stemmed from partial or fragmented understanding rather than from system malfunction. A key empirical finding is that the escalation mechanism functions as a structured communication process rather than merely a technical workflow. Escalation regulates how uncertainty, urgency, and responsibility are communicated internally and externally.

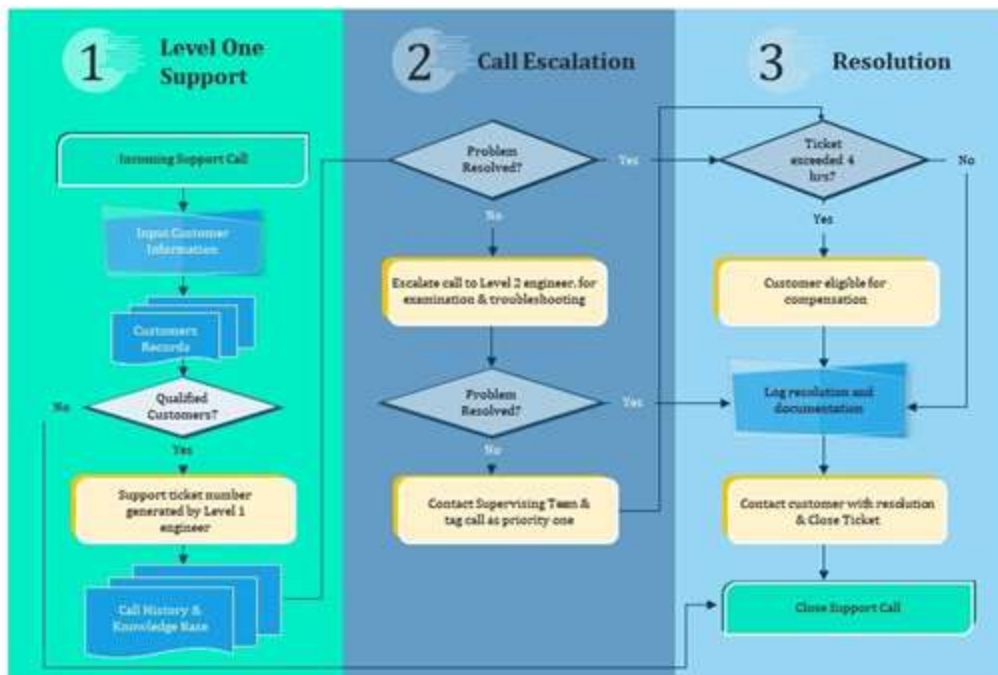


Figure 1. CRM Escalation and Resolution Flow in the Online PPDB System

This figure illustrates the three-stage escalation process observed in the Online PPDB CRM operations: Level One Support, Call Escalation, and Resolution. At the initial stage, CRM officers receive and classify user issues. Unresolved cases are escalated to higher technical or supervisory levels. The process concludes with resolution documentation and follow-up communication to the user. Field observations indicate that:

1. Procedural and informational issues are typically resolved at Level One Support.
2. Technical and policy-related issues require escalation to specialized units.
3. Response time strongly influences user trust and satisfaction.

However, from the user's perspective, escalation delays were often interpreted as institutional uncertainty unless accompanied by clear explanatory communication.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that CRM communication functions as a sensemaking infrastructure that translates abstract system rules into actionable understanding for users. Effective CRM officers did not merely repeat regulations but reframed them using examples, step-by-step explanations, and context-specific narratives. When communication relied heavily on technical or bureaucratic language, misunderstandings persisted and interaction cycles lengthened. Conversely, narrative-based explanations reduced confusion and emotional distress, reinforcing the importance of interpretive communication in public digital services. Trust emerged as a central but fragile outcome of CRM communication practices. Users consistently associated timely responses **and** message consistency with institutional competence and fairness. Three recurring patterns were identified:

1. Prompt clarification strengthened trust, even when outcomes were unfavorable.
2. Inconsistent explanations across channels generated suspicion and rumor circulation.
3. Lack of feedback was interpreted as system failure rather than process delay.

Thus, CRM communication carries symbolic significance by representing the institution's accountability and reliability during high-stakes service encounters. The results indicate that CRM should not be conceptualized as a peripheral support function. Instead, CRM communication constitutes a core mechanism of policy implementation in digital public services. Through continuous interaction, CRM actors actively shape how policies are understood, accepted, and enacted by users. The escalation system reinforces this role by structuring internal accountability. Yet, without adequate communicative explanation to users, escalation risks undermining shared understanding. This finding underscores that effective digital governance depends as much on communication alignment as on technical performance. Overall, the results and discussion demonstrate that:

1. User difficulties in the Online PPDB System are predominantly communicative rather than technical.
2. Escalation mechanisms operate as structured communication processes.
3. Shared understanding is built through iterative interaction, not one-way information delivery.
4. CRM communication functions as an implementation mechanism that sustains trust and legitimacy.

These findings support the central argument of this study that building shared understanding is fundamental to the success of public digital services, positioning CRM communication strategies as a strategic governance practice rather than a secondary operational tool.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that building shared understanding in public digital services is fundamentally a communicative process rather than a purely technical or administrative outcome. Through an in-depth examination of CRM communication strategies in the Online PPDB System, the findings reveal that user difficulties are predominantly rooted in misalignment between institutional logic and user interpretation. Formal system accuracy and regulatory clarity alone are insufficient to ensure effective service use when users encounter fragmented information environments and varying levels of digital literacy. Empirical results show that CRM communication functions as a core implementation mechanism within digital public services. Frontline CRM officers, regional coordinators, technical teams, and supervisors collectively shape how policies are translated into actionable meaning for users. The escalation

mechanism, often understood as a technical workflow, operates in practice as a structured communication process that manages uncertainty, urgency, and accountability. When escalation is accompanied by clear and timely explanation, user trust is reinforced; when communication is delayed or inconsistent, institutional reliability is questioned.

The study also highlights that trust and legitimacy in high-stakes public services such as online student admissions are highly sensitive to communication timing and coherence. Users interpret responsiveness and message consistency as indicators of fairness and institutional competence. In this context, silence or ambiguous feedback carries symbolic weight and can undermine confidence even when technical resolutions are underway. CRM communication therefore plays a dual role: resolving individual problems and representing the institution's commitment to transparency and accountability. Theoretically, these findings support the argument that shared understanding emerges through iterative interaction and sensemaking, aligning with perspectives that view communication as constitutive of organizational processes. Practically, the study suggests that public digital service design should integrate CRM communication strategies from the outset, prioritize narrative and example-based explanations, and treat user interactions as learning resources for continuous service improvement. In conclusion, the success of public digital platforms such as the Online PPDB System depends not only on technological robustness but on the institution's capacity to sustain communicative alignment with users. By positioning CRM communication as a strategic governance practice rather than a peripheral support function, public organizations can enhance service effectiveness, strengthen trust, and ensure more equitable and comprehensible digital service delivery.

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