



The Dual Impact of Institutional Logic and Emotional Attachment on the Legitimacy of Digital Emotion Monitoring

Xialian Liu; Rong Zheng*; Yimeng Lai; Guoqiang Tang

Chengdu University of Information Technology, Sichuan Province, Chengdu, China

*3497210061@qq.com

Abstract. The widespread application of digital sentiment monitoring in organizational governance is facing a profound legitimacy crisis. Employees may either comply passively under systemic pressure or accept temporarily out of emotional appeal, neither of which can sustainably support technological advancement. Existing domestic and international research remains confined within the dualistic opposition between technical rationality and power critique, failing to reveal the deeper causes of this predicament. This study finds that legitimacy is not a singular static concept, but rather the result of a dynamic synergy between institutional and emotional attachments within an organization and the internal identification they inspire. The framework further constructs legitimacy configurations and reveals the co-evolutionary mechanisms between institutions and emotions. This study not only provides an integrative theoretical lens to transcend the singular perspective of legitimacy research but also charts critical practical pathways for organizations to balance technological efficiency with humanistic care in digital governance, thereby building sustainable surveillance systems.

Keywords: First Institutional Logic; Emotional Attachment; Digital Emotion Monitoring; Organizational Support

1 Introduction

The iterative advancement of digital technology has propelled organizational governance into an era where emotions can be quantified. Digital emotion monitoring systems, powered by AI algorithms and physiological sensing technology, capture employees' multidimensional physiological data to enable real-time analysis of emotional states. These systems are now widely deployed in scenarios such as risk early warning and team management ^[1]. However, a stark tension exists between the widespread adoption of technology and the lack of legitimacy recognition. Some surveillance systems that comply with regulations such as the Personal Information Protection Law still face covert resistance from employees, with frequent instances of governance failure like data falsification and behavioral evasion. Meanwhile, surveillance models built on emotional appeals from managers quickly lose their legitimacy foundation

after organizational changes due to the absence of institutional support. This dilemma has become a critical bottleneck constraining organizational digital transformation, making it imperative to clarify the underlying logic governing the legitimacy of digital sentiment monitoring.

Exploring the legitimacy-generating mechanisms of digital emotion surveillance holds significant theoretical and practical value. Theoretically, existing research has long been trapped in the binary opposition between technological rationality and power critique^[2]. From a technocratic perspective, surveillance is viewed as a neutral tool of efficiency, emphasizing its quantitative advantages while suspending consideration of power dynamics and institutional contexts. The critique of power, centered on Foucault's panopticons, focuses on its disciplinary essence yet fails to account for employees' voluntary identification. Both approaches sever the interplay between institutional constraints and emotional identification. This study constructs an integrated framework that transforms legitimacy-building from a static attribute into a dynamic process. This approach effectively addresses the one-dimensional limitations of existing theories and enriches the application dimensions of organizational legitimacy theory within the field of digital governance. At the practical level, clarifying the core mechanisms and risk boundaries of legitimacy generation, and proposing remedial strategies for typical issues such as fragile legitimization and the pitfalls of rule by man, can provide direct operational guidance for organizations to balance technological efficiency with humanistic care and build sustainable monitoring systems.

2 Theoretical Review and Integrative Framework Development

2.1 Research Methodology and Theoretical Construct Operationalization

This study employs a systematic literature review methodology, searching authoritative databases such as CNKI, Web of Science, and Scopus (2000-2025). Using keyword combinations including "digital emotion monitoring," "institutional logics," and "affective attachment," 86 core publications were identified and screened. Building on this foundation, core constructs are systematically operationalized: institutional logics are measured through coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism mechanisms, encompassing dimensions such as regulatory compliance, industry imitation, and ethical norms; affective attachment is deconstructed across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, including indicators such as perception of support intent, quality of emotional response, and usage proactivity. Complete measurement is achieved through policy text analysis, institutional auditing, and multi-source data collection.

2.2 Dual-Pathway Model: Institutional Logics and Affective Attachment

Based on the rigorously operationalized constructs, we develop an integrated dual-pathway analytical framework that elucidates the complex interplay between institutional logics and affective attachment in shaping organizational legitimacy. The institutional logics pathway establishes essential external compliance foundations through the triple isomorphism mechanisms, creating the necessary structural conditions for legitimacy formation. Simultaneously, the affective attachment pathway operates through psychological mechanisms to cultivate genuine internal identification and voluntary acceptance among stakeholders.^[3] These two pathways engage in dynamic, dialectically unified interactions that collectively determine the sustainability of legitimacy.

Our framework further articulates this complexity through a two-dimensional matrix that identifies four distinct legitimacy configurations, as illustrated in Fig.1. The optimal state of deep legitimacy emerges when both institutional compliance and affective attachment are strong, creating a self-reinforcing virtuous cycle that sustains organizational legitimacy. In contrast, brittle legitimation describes the precarious situation where strong institutional frameworks coexist with weak affective bonds, creating systems vulnerable to legitimacy crises despite apparent compliance. The affectively dominant configuration occurs when strong emotional connections lack adequate institutional support, potentially leading to personalized relationships that undermine systematic legitimacy. The most problematic doubly deficient state describes complete absence of both institutional and affective foundations, representing fundamental legitimacy failure. Critically, our model incorporates a dynamic perspective that traces potential evolutionary pathways between these states and identifies specific transition conditions that facilitate or inhibit movement toward sustainable legitimacy.

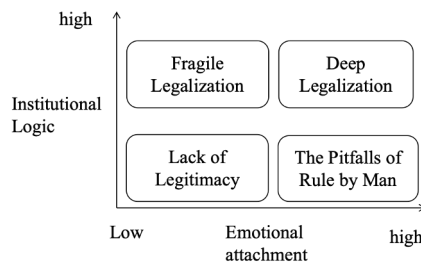


Fig. 1. A figure caption is the dynamic interactive model of digital monitoring legitimacy construction.

2.3 Co-evolution Mechanisms and Managerial Intervention

The longitudinal interaction between institutions and affect manifests as a three-stage co-evolutionary process with distinct characteristics at each phase. The initial institutional structuring stage is predominantly characterized by external compliance imperatives, where formal rules and procedures establish the basic legitimacy framework. As the system matures, it transitions into the interactive adaptation stage, marked by

recursive feedback loops between institutional optimization and affective responses—each shaping and reshaping the other in continuous adjustment^[4]. The most advanced deep interstructuring stage represents a qualitative transformation from mere regulatory compliance to genuine normative consensus, where institutional arrangements and affective commitments become mutually constitutive and reinforcing.

This evolutionary trajectory contains critical junctures that determine systemic outcomes. When institutional frameworks demonstrate sufficient flexibility and inclusiveness to effectively incorporate and respond to affective feedback, the system possesses the capacity to evolve toward robust deep legitimacy. Conversely, when institutions remain rigid and unresponsive, the system risks regressing toward brittle legitimation or falling into personalized rule-by-man traps where legitimacy depends excessively on individual relationships rather than systematic arrangements. Strategic managerial intervention proves particularly crucial at these evolutionary inflection points. Specific intervention mechanisms include implementing structured affective feedback loops that systematically channel stakeholder emotions into institutional refinement processes, and conducting regular institutional-affective coupling audits that assess alignment between formal structures and psychological commitments. These targeted interventions can significantly improve the system's evolutionary trajectory, providing both theoretical insights and practical implementation pathways for constructing sustainable digital monitoring regimes that balance regulatory requirements with genuine social acceptance.

3 Practical Applications and Strategies

3.1 A Synergistic Governance of Institutions and Emotions

The legitimacy of digital emotion monitoring hinges on the organic synergy between institutional frameworks and emotional considerations. Successful governance practices should integrate rigorous institutional design with thoughtful emotional care, establishing a governance framework that combines firmness with compassion. The four quadrants of this collaborative governance logic are visualized in Fig.2, which displays differentiated governance outcomes corresponding to varying levels of institutional sophistication and emotional identification. At the institutional level, organizations must establish a legally compliant monitoring framework that clearly defines the boundaries of data usage. Establish an ethics oversight committee comprising management, employee representatives, and external experts, and implement a regular review mechanism to continuously monitor the application of emotional data. Institutional design should prioritize procedural fairness,^[5] enhancing the system's enforceability through clear data usage protocols and accountability mechanisms. Emotional governance requires cultivating employees' intrinsic acceptance of monitoring through affective mechanisms. Effective strategies include integrating emotional data feedback with employee career development support, embedding interactive fairness elements into system design, and granting employees appropriate rights to interpret data and raise objections.

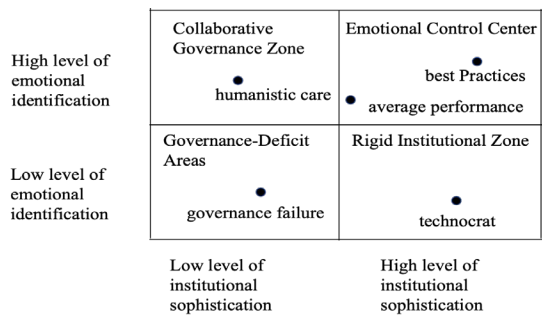


Fig. 2. A figure caption is the visualization of Technology-Emotion collaborative governance outcomes.

The synergistic governance of systems and emotions should achieve deep integration, The specific governance outcomes are shown in the figure below. Organizations can establish institutionalized emotional management mechanisms to ensure rational expression of emotions through systems, while infusing systems with human warmth through emotions.

3.2 Institutional Pathways to Avoid the Pitfalls of Arbitrary Rule

The pitfalls of human-centric governance in digital sentiment monitoring primarily manifest as systems becoming overly reliant on individual managers' discretion, lacking institutionalized constraints. Emotional management is the foundation for avoiding the pitfalls of rule by man. Organizations must establish clear emotional management protocols to standardize the collection, analysis, and application of emotional data. Institutional design should emphasize the appropriate decentralization of power to prevent any single individual from exercising absolute control over emotional data. Therefore, a multidimensional system of checks and balances must be established to prevent excessive concentration of power. Additionally, systematic legitimacy audits should be implemented to maintain the stability of the monitoring system. Organizations need to establish a regular two-way evaluation mechanism to monitor the operational status of the system from two dimensions: compliance with regulations and employee acceptance. By designing a scientifically sound evaluation indicator system, it is possible to promptly identify cracks in legitimacy and implement targeted measures.

3.3 Diagnosis and Remediation Strategies for Institutional Alienation

When systems designed to regulate emotional management gradually deviate from their original purpose of serving human and organizational development, we witness what we call “institutional alienation.” The visualization of systems and emotions is shown in the figure 3. To achieve accurate diagnosis, several key indicators must be considered: the purpose of emotional data collection, employee emotional experience data, emotional KPI phenomena, and reliance on quantitative metrics.

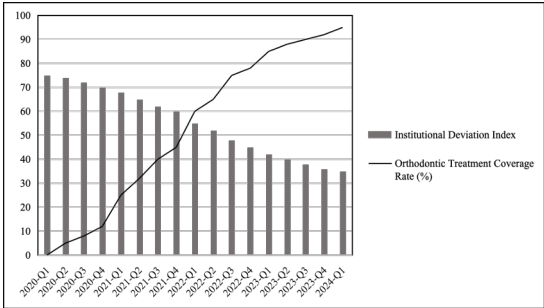


Fig. 3. A figure caption is the coverage rate of collaborative governance.

The human-centered approach to institutional reconstruction is the primary task in addressing alienation. Organizations should embed mechanisms for emotional reflection in institutional design, conduct regular assessments of institutional humanization, and design flexible adjustment mechanisms for institutional frameworks. Cultivating critical data literacy is the fundamental approach to preventing institutional alienation. Organizations should train all employees to recognize the limitations of sentiment data while fostering a healthy culture of data skepticism. Establishing a flexible institutional adaptation mechanism is crucial.^[6] Organizations must develop early warning systems to detect institutional deviation and continuously monitor the effectiveness of institutional operations through diverse methods. Upon identifying signs of deviation, they should immediately initiate multi-stakeholder revision procedures.

4 Conclusions

This study examines the legitimacy dilemma in organizational digital transformation processes, compellingly demonstrating that the emergence of legitimacy for digital surveillance is a process jointly driven by external institutional constraints and internal psychological identification. The specific theoretical contribution lies in how institutional logic establishes the compliance foundation for surveillance systems through coercion, imitation, and norms; while emotional attachment cultivates an internal disposition toward acceptance by influencing employees' behavioral intentions. Based on this framework, we have identified four typical configurations: deep legalization, fragile legalization, lack of legitimacy, and pitfalls of rule by man, providing a basis for diagnosing the realities of organizational contexts. This study reveals the evolutionary trajectory of legitimacy construction from a dynamic perspective: transitioning from "institutional construction" characterized by external imposition, to the interaction between institutions and emotions, and ultimately advancing toward their profound mutual construction. This study bridges the gap between macro-level analysis and micro-level psychology in legitimacy research, guiding organizations to avoid falling into either institutional determinism or emotional determinism, and instead pursue a collaborative governance wisdom. However, this study has limitations, and its cross-cultural applicability remains to be explored. Future research could build upon

this foundation to conduct empirical tests and delve deeper into the characteristics of this collaborative model across different cultural contexts and organizational types.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have helped me during the creation of this paper. Firstly, I would like to extend my sincerest and heartiest thanks and respect to my supervisors. Their suggestions and encouragement have given me many profound insights into these translation studies. It is a great privilege and joy to study under their guidance and supervision. I am also extremely grateful to all my friends and classmates who have kindly offered me assistance and companionship during the preparation of this paper. In addition, I sincerely thank my family for their unwavering love and steadfast support. Finally, I sincerely appreciate all those who have devoted much time to reading this paper and provided me with numerous suggestions, which will be of great benefit to my future studies.

Project Number:202510621013.

References

1. Zhong Yanfei. The Interactive Effects of Electronic Performance Monitoring and Monitoring Purpose Rationality on Employee Proactive Behavior: The Mediating Role of Organizational Trust [D]. Jinan University, 2023.
2. Wei Huafei, Wang Zhang. The Influence of Transformational Leadership on Employee Knowledge Sharing Behavior: The Role of Organizational Identification and Affective Commitment [J]. Journal of Shandong University of Science and Technology (Social Sciences Edition), 2020, 22(01): 102-110.
3. Liu Chaoyang. Ethical Risks of Electronic Performance Monitoring and Countermeasures in the Context of Enterprise Digital Transformation [J]. China Enterprise Management Knowledge Repository, 2025, 23(01): 109-113.
4. Zhang Jianyu, Lin Xiangyu, Yang Xu. The Influence of Cognitive Flexibility and Perceived Organizational Support on Employees' Commitment to Digital Transformation [J]. Business Economics and Management, 2025, (08): 26-38.
5. Chen Chuchu, Wang Yao. Generative Artificial Intelligence Technology and Corporate Human Resource Management [J]. Modern Enterprise, 2025, (11): 166-168.
6. Luo Jie, Yu Kuantong. Human Resource Management Challenges and Solutions for "Specialized, Refined, Unique, and Innovative" SMEs [J]. Value Engineering, 2025, 44(34): 42-45.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

