

Online Communication Platform Contributions to Internal Communication:

A Lesson from Telkom Digital Service Division

Karina Aliefiani, Mohammad Shihab*

Communication Studies
President University
Bekasi, Indonesia

*shihab@president.ac.id

Abstract—Nowadays, computer-mediated communication (CMC) enables the employees to ease work coordination and communication within an organization. An organization, in which hierarchy exists among its employees, must keep the communication flow in order to maintain activities leading to reach the organizational goals. Telkom Digital Service, as a part of Telekomunikasi Indonesia, Tbk utilizes a CMC tool called Slack.com as an integrated internal communication platform for employees to communicate and coordinate in- and off-working hours. Using qualitative approach, three participants were involved in in-depth interviews to gain their insights and understanding on how the platform contributed to the internal communication within the company. Recently, the researchers found that the CMC platform helped them in attaining direct information, uploading and downloading important documents, and organizing multi-channels for multi-purposes. Moreover, the participants admitted that the platform had allowed them to express emotions without any barrier caused by the hierarchy within the organization.

Keywords—computer-mediated communication; internal communication; organizational communication; slack.com

I. INTRODUCTION

Telkom Digital Service Division is a part of PT Telekomunikasi Indonesia, Tbk, in which its 52,09% of the stock is state-owned enterprise (BUMN) and the rest (47,91%) is owned by public per December 31st, 2016. Telkom must fulfill the service needs that private enterprise cannot comply [1]. Telkom Digital Service Division has been established since October 2015 splits into two different workplaces, which are in Jakarta and Bandung. As a group of people who work together as a part of an organization, Digital Service Division realized that they needed the support system to help the employees not just to communicate, but also to create a good internal coordination. Therefore, to enhance the internal communication, to follow the trends in the digital era, and to support the working performances, Telkom Digital Service Division finally chose 'Slack' application as a new platform to ease the employee communication and coordination. Slack is a web-based application designed for an internal team project. Socializing via computer-mediated methods also could be effective [2].

Along with the existence Telkom Digital Service Division, the employees have been using Slack since 2015 as an integrated internal communication vehicle for the employee to communicate in- and off-working hour. The existence of social media is a form of a revival for the organization are awakening as a value to enhance internal communications [3]. Nowadays, many organizations are utilizing new digital communication channels, such as social media, in their internal communication; however, research indicates that social media (e.g. blogs, communities) are particularly seen as more important for external communications, its main objectives being branding and creating awareness [4]. Communication tactics have influenced by the major technological change which occurs in an organization, especially the repetition of innovative communication technology in organizational communication [5]. According to Welch & Jackson, internal communication is the strategic management of interactions and relationship among participants [6]. Internal communication also provides new social tools to support the interaction by distributing information and depend on the technology-based channel [4]. This could Telkom Digital Service Division applied Slack application as one of the essentials for working needs. Working activities are as follow: 1) Meeting Agenda; 2) Meeting Invitation; 3) Recent Division Update; 4) Informative Information; 5) etc.

As Slack has been introduced, it becomes useful for 323 (data per September 2017) employees of Telkom Digital Service Division with 191 employees in Jakarta and 172 employees in Bandung, which consist of 29 sub-units to communicate, even though they are not in the office and discussing urgent matter things. For example, the certainty of meeting agenda, invitation, until giving recent updates regarding the events in Telkom Digital Service Division. Slack also facilitates some integrations into other application, such as Dropbox, Google Drive, or Survey Monkey. Besides that, Slack also provides the users to upload files from their devices, such as PDF, documents, or media.

But, literature studies show that not all employees read publications, e-mail, or intranet content [3]. In Telkom Digital Service, although the platform of division's communication tool already provided, some people do not use Slack other than

day-to-day business activist. From the situation explained above, it brought up a question addressed by the author on how do Telkom Digital Service Division use *Slack* as an online communication platform to enhance internal communication. In line with the research question, the objective is aimed to find out the thought, advance, or opinion of Telkom Digital Service Division employees about its function.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed qualitative research method with case study approach. To support the research, we collected the primary data through in-depth interviews with four employees of the division, who used the *Slack* application in their working activities.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Slack Media Richness*

TSDSD was established in October 2015 in two different work locations, Jakarta and Bandung. Earlier before the Division decided to use the application, the employees used various messengers such as WhatsApp, BlackBerry Messenger, direct communication, e-mail, and even Facebook to communicate with other employees. However, one of the informants, Cita, found some difficulties in coordinating with other employees through the messengers. When she had to reach her colleague through Whatsapp, she had to save the colleague's number first, and she thought that it was not efficient. Other employees also shared the same experience. Therefore, the employees realized a platform was necessary to facilitate communication and collaboration. The *Slack* application was chosen based on the Division's need to facilitate their works and communications.

There are so many features in *Slack* application. The employees who signed up in *Slack* can be invited to join the correlated-channels based on his or her interests. Doko explained that the *Slack* users were divided into three types: multi-channel guest, single-channel guest, and full-member. Multi-channel guest can only be invited to some channels and single-channel guest can be invited into a single channel. Different to guest mode users, full-member user can join any channel without waiting for any invitation. Full-member user can see the catalog channels available in the Division; channels the user has and has not joined; and the contents of the channels.

All conversations and documents uploaded in the channels are stored in the application storage. The storage capacity is vary depending on the package options. The Division uses Standard Package that can accommodate document storage up to 3 terabytes. The application also allows integration with other applications like Google Documents and Dropbox that can be used as additional storage. Currently, the Division has stored more than 100 million files in *Slack* storage. *Slack* guarantees that the stored documents were kept confidential and many global corporations uses *Slack* as their internal communication tools.

The Division integrates *Slack* with Telkom internal applications, such as SPBD application, leave application, and

official memo. The Division also integrates its own web portal based on WordPress application with *Slack*, so that every new web post will be automatically shared in *Slack*.

Slack provides many features to full-members. *Slack* allows full-member users to customize their own emojis, which they can use the emojis in any interaction within the application. Yusuf gave his opinion the feature. He contended that it could be a form of feedback when they had read the message. The users could count the responses by how many emojis were given to indicate whether the messages were worth to read. He also considered that some users thought that responding to a post by giving emoji was sufficient, without adding more comments.

Slack application possesses many functions more than just to communicate with employees. Cita thought that *Slack* was like a 'Google' for the Division because it made her a lot easier to get information and materials of her works. Not only had that, another employee, Hani, said that *Slack* allowed the employees to share files and information.

"*Slack* is an integrated communication tool. Because we can post anytime and it is stored. Whenever we need the data, we can search it easily. It is different with WhatsApp which you may lose your data. In *Slack*, we can find it with search feature, as long as we remember the keyword," Hani shared.

As an integrated communication tool, *Slack* application provides file-sharing that could be useful for the employees to do their work better. At first, Yusuf thought that *Slack* was similar to other regular chatting applications. But then, he was surprised by the features provided in the application. He said that *Slack* was integrated with other office applications, like Google Calendar, and *Slack* kept its features updated and improved.

In addition to the features, Doko added that *Slack* allowed the employees to create certain channels, a 'cluster room', based on topic or certain units.

"These channels could be set into public or private mode. It is to provide a distinction authority toward the channels. And, it is to keep the conversation confidential," Doko said.

Moreover, the participants agreed that *Slack* assisted their work in the Division. Yusuf admitted that through the use of *Slack*, the employees got equal knowledge because *Slack* could be a tool for knowledge sharing. The employees could make a sharing session with the others within the application.

Slack also can replace face-to-face communication along with the increasing of internet-based technologies. It also contributes to efficiency, establishing good coordination, and creating better decision. Doko shared that the employee in TSDSD Bandung did not need to cost much money for the accommodation to reach the Jakarta Division, and vice versa.

B. *Dependency on Accessing Slack*

Slack becomes the primary internal communication platform in Telkom Digital Service Division. All the employees in the Division access *Slack* every day. Yusuf decided to use *Slack* as the communication tool for internal needs, replacing WhatsApp which he used for his external

communication purpose. But, another user, Hani, shared that she primarily used *Slack* to update the work progress in her unit, but she still used WhatsApp to report progress or make announcements, like meeting schedules and instructions, before they checked it in *Slack*. Additionally, *Slack* becomes the primary internal platform because all employees will coordinate each other based on the information shared in the application. If an employee was out of contact, he/she would always be reminded to check the application regularly.

C. Dynamic of Communication Tactics in Digital Service Division

All the participants agreed that the use of *Slack* minimized gap between managers and staffs. Interestingly, the communication process in *Slack* application between managers and staffs runs very well. Yusuf contended that they could express feelings with no hesitation. All employees in Telkom Digital Service Division joined a channel named 'Curhat Dong'. The channel is established as a channel where every employee can share any concern, including critics and inputs. *Slack* provides anonymous post option, so the employee's identity will remain hidden. This is useful for the employees to express their concerns without a fear of being intimidated by superior employees. Managers can use the channel to generate any input from their staffs.

However, Cita was not sure the managers would accept the critics, inputs, or suggestions. But, she believed that EGM and DEGMs committed to building communication with their staffs to make the employees open in *Slack*. Additionally, Hani added that being anonymous was respectable, since the users could use *Slack* to express their feelings. She hoped that the problems might not spread outside the application, because all the aspirations, critics, or inputs should be gathered in one scope.

All participants found the communication tactics between face-to-face and computer-mediated communication were different. Hani said that by using mediated communication, everything became more structuralized. She thought that *Slack* was a form of written message where the users could think before the users finally posted it. On the other hand, she thought during face-to-face communication people directly shared they wanted to say.

Yusuf experienced the objectivity of the interactions in *Slack* because he and the person related only focused on the messages that wanted to deliver. Otherwise, through face-to-face communication, he only knew how the others responded only by seeing their facial expression. Meanwhile, Cita seemed awkward in a certain condition when she met someone new, but she felt looked like she knew each other well in *Slack*. The new finding came from Cita who felt the differences between communications to each other, either verbal or written. Sometimes, the things could not deliver written (via *Slack*) and it should be delivered directly.

Sometimes, miscommunication occurs in *Slack*. Hani settled that written language was absolutely different to face-

to-face communication. She believed that was the reason why the employees sometimes misinterpreted the messages. Cita failed to understand other employee's personality and felt hard, because she failed to interpret the written messages in *Slack*.

"Everyone has their own perception in reading the writing and some may interpret it differently, such as perceptions of people in reading the exclamation mark at the end of writing. Some may feel it is normal, but we often find it is unethical. At the beginning, I felt hard-feeling, but as time goes by, I tried to understand the personality."

Miscommunication is also experienced by Yusuf. As the Manager of Secretary Division, he takes parts in preceding the management's agenda, event, administrative, secretariat, documentation, and publication. He often finds problems when he has to re-schedule the meeting. The miscommunication usually happens when the employees do not read the latest information in *Slack*, especially when the information is posted in the middle of the night. It causes conflicts on the meeting schedule.

IV. CONCLUSION

Slack was the primary online communication platform to communicate and coordinate among employees in Telkom Digital Service Division. It was beyond a regular chat because it had many features to be used. The communication in the application was so dynamic and miscommunication sometimes occurred during the mediated-communication.

This research suggests the further studies to discover more on the process of communication on the *Slack* application and examine the impact of the application toward the work effectivity in the company.

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