

# The Evolution of Legal Communication through History

Geriga Manisuru

Department of Public Administration and Management Kampala International University Uganda  
 Email: Manisuru.geriga@studwc.kiu.ac.ug

## ABSTRACT

Legal communication, the vehicle through which law is understood, applied, and transformed, has undergone significant changes across historical epochs. This paper traces the evolution of legal communication from ancient tribal customs to contemporary digital platforms. It explores how legal norms transitioned from oral practices and ritual sanctions to written codes, rhetorical performances, bureaucratic documentation, and finally, electronic and cross-cultural systems. Drawing on legal theory, communication studies, and historical developments, the paper uncovers the socio-political and technological forces shaping the ways law is conveyed and interpreted. Each era, the Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance, Enlightenment, 19th and 20th centuries, and the digital present, reveals a dynamic interplay between legal institutions and communication mechanisms. Emphasis is placed on the democratization and challenges of modern legal discourse, such as e-filing, cross-cultural vulnerabilities, and communicative inequalities. Ultimately, the study argues for a more inclusive and adaptive framework that accounts for the complexities of contemporary legal interaction and its cognitive, cultural, and technological dimensions.

**Keywords:** Legal communication, History of law, Legal rhetoric, Digital law, Cross-cultural communication, Legal literacy, E-discovery.

## INTRODUCTION

Legal communication comprises any communication acts directed to the civil, criminal or regulatory law, whether public or private. Hence, it encompasses a wide area including every printed, spoken or electronic-type communication, from court judgements to messages included in informatic devices installed in every car to monitor health problems. The research area includes the disciplines of: social-legal studies, which investigate how the law affects its stakeholders; communication studies which seek a better understanding of the communication systems by using systemic theories; and legal studies which account where one legal system ends and the next one starts. Beyond presenting a thorough definition of the research area and showing some preliminary results, the aim of this research is to find one single-paragraph definition of legal communication. The introduction of parsing algorithms to automatically build or augment definition and/or classifications databases. Legal communication is one of the most relevant human activities since Western civilization happens in written law. As law's decisions and valences come almost exclusively from legal communication, law's force and relevance also come from its communication. Contemporary studies and legal systems suggest that legal communication and its understanding deserve more attention. There is still an unexplored dimension of legal knowledge-seeking in all basic and higher education programs, law-related expertise forecasts, and technology marketing. On the investments side, there is also a technical approach of reverse engineering the manual systems and their databases into useful, readable formats to the public: the database structure is of course changed too and grand opportunities open. Inquiry's strategic and social grounds could range from tracking social change to law monitoring or action against damages. As there is no univocal definition of legal communication per se, an incremental operation will be suggested as awareness of its not quite clear bounds will allow for better research on such a relevant area as legal communication [1, 2].

### Ancient Legal Systems

In primitive communities, humans lived in groups governed by basic behavioral rules that dictated acceptable conduct towards each other, kin groups, and nature. Violating these rules significantly affected

the community's survival, prompting sanctions to restore order. Effective sanctions required a large, homogenous community, fostering shared fears and punishments that resonated throughout kinship ties, including severe consequences at a tribal level. Individual punishment emerged for rule violations, bypassing kinship structures. Over time, the death penalty was replaced by expulsion, a form of collective responsibility, and a focus on material redemption through compensation to the injured and the community. As a result, good behavior became tied to financial reparations instead of harsh punishments. This shift led to the emergence of judicial norms, which were distinct from social norms. Judicial norms included sanctions that reinforced social order, while social norms could exist independently of legal structures. Legal norms, conversely, required an existing social framework, suggesting that in the absence of legal order, judicial norms would also be nonexistent [3, 4].

#### **Medieval Legal Communication**

The institutions of medieval cities stem from the existence of a commune, represented by municipal assemblies. They are not merely state institutions empowered by the Prince; rather, municipal magistracies embody a duality, being legitimate representatives of both the commune and the legal order. This legal framework is rooted not only in Roman law and the Christian tradition but also in the development of writs as essential public documents from the twelfth century. These writs detail charges and establish guidelines for legal proceedings that adhere to common rules. By 120, new judicial methods were required. The performance of legal proceedings had to align with accepted standards, and judges emerged as primary actors who read from written records. Although these written accounts clarified legal assumptions, they did not guarantee accuracy outside the courtroom. During this transitional phase, it was possible for conflicting records to exist, leading to varying performances of court actions despite a common language and documented texts. Consequently, the audience had to navigate this complex scenario of competing narratives [5, 6].

#### **Renaissance and the Reformation**

The Renaissance, regarded as the cradle of modernity, marked a creatively rich era whose effects still resonate today. The revival of Greek and Roman texts was crucial in transitioning to this new age. Copyists prepared these writings for both libraries and emerging schools, which needed educational resources as they formed unique cultural identities. Humanists, believing in the power of thought and speech, adapted these texts into Latin and analyzed their political themes for contemporary use. The texts served as syllabi for public speaking courses and provided insights into legal matters. Legal language became more defined, and knowledge about it spread widely. Early treatises on public address focused on structure, length, and language. "Resumo vulgar" outlined the basics of oratory, eloquence theory, and legal speeches. Italian neoclassicists drew from Cicero and Quintilian, emphasizing the orator-prince's character and situational resources for governance. Theoretical models of governance often illustrated static forms and procedural events surrounding speeches, accompanied by rules for civic virtue. Rhetorical handbooks established the groundwork for argument structure and idea organization. The Renaissance examined the essence and societal role of legal rhetoric, encompassing various forms like praise poems and invective letters. Literature was seen as potentially dangerous, while treatises highlighted administrative roles, largely excluding the judiciary, which implied the importance of legislative power. The humanization of rhetoric marked a shift, moving from divine ownership of the spoken word to a broader human engagement with it [7, 8].

#### **The Enlightenment Era**

By the end of the Renaissance, the printing press had unveiled various ideas that significantly shaped European society. The Protestant Reformation further amplified the public's engagement with these ideas, as pamphlets and treatises filled the discourse. Johannes Calvin emerged as a pivotal figure, advocating for individuals' rights to read the Bible independently. In Geneva, he established a public forum where residents could openly discuss theology and societal issues, solidifying the city as a center of Protestant thought. Calvin's influence extended to England and Scotland, where he was recognized more for his advocacy for the oppressed than his writings. Concurrently, shifts in authority and moral obedience evolved, leading to a philosophy that emphasized equality among individuals in intellect and life. Hugo Grotius emerged as a key voice in this intellectual movement, focusing on moral and social dimensions. He highlighted the necessity for governments to adhere to natural law, arguing that this compliance was essential for lasting peace. In this context, individuals were empowered by natural law to defend their lives and possessions, positing that the understanding of such laws could be both innate and rediscovered through reflection [9, 10].

#### **19th Century Legal Communication**

Two great currents in the historical evolution of legal communication converged upon the United States during the nineteenth century: English legal institutions, and the eloquent variant of Anglo-American

legal culture that underlay these institutions. In such a richly evoked new nation, entailing the fertility either for stubborn provincialism or for broader visions and hopes, both these great forces would find their own adaptations, formats, and features that, while rooted in earlier circumstances, would take on colors, textures, and moldings, not found before. Structurally the New World was diverse enough to accommodate them: wilderness and cities, river shores and mountain tops; people wandering and neighbors congenially settled; regions Keltic, Teutonic, and Latin. Diversities of locality were burying down in illiteracies of low culture and populism but were also generating new inventions of illegal modes of communication. This discord locked states and communities in recurrent turmoil of localism, factionalism, and sectionalism, while the slow smoothing and unification was an agenda of a huge nationalistic vision. The American Civil War marked a dramatic turning point in this process. It called upon, and demonstrated, the total resourcefulness of America to wage a nation state war, overcoming innumerable discordance: armies in the field, taking sides of states, locality, sectionalism, and party, where neighbors of small towns would suddenly find themselves as enemies in battle fields, the treaties precluded democracies of "one man, one vote" in affairs of states and conscription of armies. The great Lincoln-Douglas debates centered on rival interpretation of the very foundation and essence of nationhood for the United States. The newness, drama, and high stakes of that unbelievable everyday occurrences imbued elevatingly risks in the surrounding law and orientations in the communication landscape. New settings in towns and networks of regional and national organizations framed new ethics of assurance, and Edison's invention of the type writer radically changed the efficient working modes and formats of documents. Court trials, tantalizingly staged under limbs of 17th century cosmo-theism, and public soap opera spectacles of shop lifting turned sensationalist this written law and paper stories. On the one hand, largeness and richness of the new terrain posed vanishingly huge uncertainties, but, on the other hand, a sizable achievability anchored by increasing urban networks and flocks of lawyers swarming nationwide expanded hopes beyond reaches of public concerns and colors of perversion [11, 12].

#### **20th Century Developments**

After adopting the typewriter and the telephone the profession stood ready for a new challenge that came with the arrival of the 20th century. On the eve of World War I typewriters composed every brief and letter, telegrams announced keyed decisions, and the office building was a creation in steel and concrete. For decades to come many developments were to accompany improvements in efficiency brought about by electric lighting, telegraphy, and the ever-present telephone. In each field economy of time fostered within itself tone; as products of evolution they could not have emerged at an earlier age but must await a more developed communication system to give them full force and range. Meanwhile there remained of that period an element that was all across the board. It was not directly a matter of instruments but nevertheless a logical step when legal thought first came to be in writing and arose to the dominance that it has today. 19th century development was a time renaissance of reality and matter. Name alone stands for a world of immediate existence, a world where space was a divider holding people apart, acting as a barrier to a legal system that is a tower to be left standing, a world where binding acts and words are outside an individual personally intertwined with mutual thoughts and beliefs. During evolution a parallel change takes place in language. Space systems of letters are related to a true sonorous spoken tongue. Toward the end of the 19th century the latter begins to slip away [13, 14].

#### **Contemporary Legal Communication**

Legal communication today is characterized by a global web of electronic resources and tools. Distance communication now occurs electronically, with advanced technologies reshaping telephonic communication and information storage. Law, legal education, and practice have adapted these advancements for delivering and storing information, as well as for new persuasive techniques and communication styles. E-divisions excel in writing e-forms, utilizing e-networks, and accessing e-records, leading to modern electronic communication forms categorized as (1) e-publications, (2) e-files and e-storage, (3) e-challenges and e-hazards, and (4) e-convictions. E-filing evolved quickly, becoming standard in federal courts, revolutionizing document submission into a faster and less costly process. E-research now dominates legal education, but it raises concerns about the complexities of effective electronic communication and the potential for deception. As e-discovery and document review become commonplace, there is a growing emphasis on minimizing the impact of one's own words in litigation and practice. E-communication has unique styles and implications, creating communication that is performative and laden with challenges unseen in prior methods [15, 16].

#### **Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Legal Communication**

The Special Issue delves deeply into cross-cultural perspectives on legal communication, meticulously highlighting the significant differences in how various cultural groups interpret legal language as well as the diverse functions it serves. The collection of papers presented in this issue offers a range of unique

insights drawn from an array of jurisdictions, some of which are well-known to legal scholars, while others remain less explored and understood within the field. One particularly intriguing article discusses the metaphor of the system as communication, effectively illustrating how legal institutions strategically manage communicative resources within both their political and civil communities. It interestingly compares communication to technology, much like essential resources such as time and money, while addressing pertinent policy questions that arise regarding resource allocation aimed at fostering beneficial interactions across different legal contexts. The paper places great emphasis on the reliance that legal systems have on various human ontological resources, simultaneously highlighting the numerous communication challenges that often go unrecognized and are overlooked in the broader discourse on risk management. The concept of 'communicative vulnerabilities' emerges as a critical theme, as these vulnerabilities become reproduced within the legal sphere itself, ultimately creating risks that affect individuals and jeopardize the systemic structure as a whole. By tracing the historical roots of this issue back to 1950s America, the article reveals how this particular framing continues to perpetuate inherent systemic risks within the legal framework and advocates for the adoption of alternative frameworks. These frameworks would seek to harness and celebrate human diversity in order to generate greater value and enhance resilience in legal communication practices. This exploration serves as a vital reminder of the importance of recognizing and understanding the cultural dimensions of legal communication in order to address ongoing challenges and foster a more inclusive legal landscape that benefits all cultural groups involved [17, 18].

### **Challenges in Legal Communication**

Beyond changing communication laws, addressing procedural regulators' views on Americans' communicative abilities can drive systemic improvements. Many barriers faced by attorneys for individuals with communicative challenges in the US legal system stem from a status quo mentality. Many regulators maintain a fundamental communication competency that perceives communication as a transactional property, trivializing anything beyond the basic ability to answer simple questions and disregarding the cognitive resources essential for effective communication. As these resources wane, the legal system's definition of communication diminishes, revealing an underlying tautology. Individuals may experience a legal environment focused on "you did not" or "you cannot," indicative of systemic risks. This framing overlooks how the law itself burdens the cognitive resources that support communication. American law's rules and procedures often deplete essential cognitive resources affecting both sourcing and information exchanges. This limitation hampers the system's ability to seek interventions that might alleviate its burden on communicatively competent persons, creating obstacles for them and their attorneys. Ideally, a courtroom should empower all parties, offering processes that enable effective communication across diverse capacities. However, prevailing attitudes present significant challenges; thus, expanding the definition of communication within legal boundaries and in procedural designs should promote necessary systemic change [19, 20].

### **Future Trends in Legal Communication**

There is uncertainty regarding the future of the lawyer-client relationship and its communication forms. Opportunities exist for flexibility through creative approaches and technology. Innovative legal tasks and effective systems will be key to success. However, ongoing forces threaten to undermine this relationship. Innovation can inspire new communication methods, such as visual legal communication, which might involve visualized evidence or examples of statutes and precedents in practice. Legal communications may shift away from text-focused interactions toward more meaningful human understanding. This raises questions about the best media formats for client communication, whether interactive simulations or engaging videos are preferable. In a more unusual scenario, an entire murder trial could even unfold in a video game format, allowing players to examine evidence and draw their own conclusions about guilt or innocence. To help lawyers explore these ideas, a new class of technology is emerging. While current PIOs and AI-assisted programs show promise, they are still limited by data-sharing rules. As these tools evolve, they may enable more effective legal communication, increase client access to legal knowledge, and reinforce the importance of personal understanding. Unfortunately, the legal profession has compromised much of its integrity and standards in courtrooms, becoming overly focused on aggressive technicalities [21, 22].

### **Case Studies in Legal Communication**

Volume, Variety, Velocity, Variability, and Veracity are the five essential V's of data. Additional V's frequently include Value, Visualization, Validity, Viability, and Volatility. These V's can be arranged according to different dimensions to support unique interpretations; for example, two distinct groupings could be derived based on three social-technical or six technological dimensions. In turn, each of those dimensions is considered individually below. The first five V's represent the traditional, broadest

definitions of big data, using data-centric descriptions as is typical in the discipline of information studies. An examination of their meanings anchors subsequent discussions of challenges in the legal domain. The remaining additional V's support alternative meanings and interpretations that prioritize the unique social context in which data exist and flow. Exploring these additional V's facilitates discussions on how to define and measure big data in legal communication contexts. Legal systems are often founded on the belief that laws, rules, and binding agreements should not rely on the whims of human social systems. One mechanism by which modern legal systems accomplish this is through the creation of hard and soft laws that cannot be altered with the collective will or whims of people in the legal system. In these systems, the law is represented as a text and handed to machines to process; people then must conform to that legal text and its processing. The legal system's current systems and epistemologies reflect this simplistic binary understanding of the computing and social systems interacting with large amounts of data that constitute a "big data" reality in the upper left-hand cell of a classic two-by-two table. The surprising implications of this classic epistemological fallacy for public safety, health, and privacy are just beginning to be understood. Nonlegal interpretation, acceptance, and processing of legal duties, jurisdictions, and exceptions as rules is important to CMLF. Nevertheless, it confronts the limits of existing hard law as an ever-increasing volume and variety, requiring new thinking about categorizing and deciding priorities as an increasingly interdependent network with uncertain velocities and variabilities. Such thinking is crucial to designing future machines or other systems able to process legal duties and the system's new understanding of legal representation, which will enable new efficiencies for decision makers [23, 24].

### **Legal Communication in Different Jurisdictions**

To study the dissemination of judicial decisions and laws, one must first identify their key elements. These preliminary issues, though complex, are essential for presenting new thoughts. The construction of issues, hypotheses, and theses requires a clear development of ideas to enhance understanding for the reader. The traditional goal is to make judicial decisions as predictable as possible, necessitating further research, especially from an epistemological perspective. There is limited knowledge about how journalistic news relates to legal productions, including judgments and laws. Therefore, the focus will be on court decisions, also applicable to laws. While the text forms of legislation differ from decisions, both share a common operational question. Judgments are made by collegiate courts; they begin with the issue at hand, followed by the rapporteur's opinion and voting from chamber members. Each judge, in their role, offers a report of the case and conducts an analysis, resulting in a text that lists the decision question, provides a brief report, and details the behaviors according to the decisions' composition [25, 26].

### **The Role of Ethics in Legal Communication**

This essay reflects on how and why the field of legal ethics took shape, what its modern form consists of, and how it is likely to evolve. Legal ethics is broadly defined as the moral precepts governing lawyers in their capacity as lawyers. As such, it is a subfield of applied professional ethics. Professional ethics is, in turn, part of a broader field of moral philosophy, starting from the Aristotelian inquiry into the virtues and vices of practitioners of particular trades and the moral obligations and permissions associated with the fulfillment of social roles. Some moral obligations and permissions are quite general, applying to anyone in any social role. However, the moral duties and permissions that are best thought of as the obligations and permissions of professional roles are often distinctive to the professions and vary from one profession to another. Among the large number of social roles for which distinctive role morality has been recognized by moral philosophers and legal ethicists, perhaps the most frequently analyzed is that of the attorney. The lawyer's role morality is the oldest question in the philosophical legal ethics literature. Few members of the judiciary or bar, whether on the ivory tower or the working end of the bar's activities, wrote about the professional ethics of lawyers that might be called modern before the late 1970s. After the Clark Commission, however, and in a burst of creativity unseen in any other field of law, there was a sudden outpouring, almost a mania, of articles and books on theoretical legal ethics, giving birth to a modern subject on which there is now a vast literature. During the next twenty years, more than a hundred philosophical articles and book chapters on the subject were published, and as many again looked at concrete issues of professional conduct or codes of conduct through a philosophical lens. Thus, there is something to be said about both the absence as well as, with the professionalism revolution, the sudden presence of philosophical legal ethics [27, 28].

### **CONCLUSION**

The trajectory of legal communication throughout history reflects a profound transformation in how societies express, enforce, and evolve their legal norms. From the oral and symbolic rituals of ancient communities to the codified laws of medieval municipalities, and from the rhetorical humanism of the



Renaissance to the digitalized legal infrastructures of today, communication has remained central to law's operation and legitimacy. Each era introduced new tools and expectations, culminating in a contemporary legal environment characterized by electronic communication, global interconnectivity, and cultural diversity. However, modern advancements also bring new challenges, including communicative inequities, systemic risks, and cognitive overload. As the field continues to evolve, legal communication must expand its definitions and methods to accommodate a broader range of voices, capacities, and technologies. By reimagining legal discourse as inclusive, adaptive, and culturally sensitive, we can enhance not only the accessibility of justice but also the resilience and responsiveness of legal systems in an increasingly complex world.

## REFERENCES

1. Caristi D, Davie WR, Lee LT. Communication law: practical applications in the digital age. Routledge; 2021 Nov 29.
2. Patil J. cyber laws in India: an overview. Issue 1 Indian JL & Legal Rsch.. 2022;4:1.
3. Lee S, Callahan J, Kwak DH. Normative vs. Instrumental model of police legitimacy: examining the mediation effects of fear of sanction. International journal of comparative and applied criminal justice. 2024 Jan 2;48(1):95-112. [\[HTML\]](#)
4. Porcu O, Hermans L, Broersma M. Trust and fear in the newsroom: How emotions drive the exchange of innovative ideas. Journalism studies. 2022 Jul 4;23(9):999-1017.
5. Lafont C, Urbinati N. The Lottocratic Mentality: Defending Democracy against Lottocracy. Oxford University Press; 2024 Nov 14.
6. Bookchin M. From urbanization to cities: The politics of democratic municipalism. AK Press; 2021 Nov 1.
7. Kinkela D. The Ecological Landscapes of Jane Jacobs and Rachel Carson. American Quarterly. 2009;61(4):905-28.
8. Yelle RA. The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society. By Brad S. Gregory. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012. 574 pp. \$39.95 cloth. Church History. 2012 Dec;81(4):918-24.
9. Praetorius AK, Jentsch A, Luoto J, Keller SD, Fauth B. Context in research on teaching quality: Bringing a complex idea into the spotlight. School Effectiveness and School Improvement. 2025 Apr 3;36(2):263-96. [tandfonline.com](#)
10. Kundnani H. Eurowhiteness: culture, empire and race in the European project. Oxford University Press; 2023.
11. Hoy RF, Jeebhay MF, Cavalin C, Chen W, Cohen RA, Fireman E, Go LH, León-Jiménez A, Menéndez-Navarro A, Ribeiro M, Rosental PA. Current global perspectives on silicosis—Convergence of old and newly emergent hazards. Respiriology. 2022 Jun;27(6):387-98. [wiley.com](#)
12. Li M. Adapting legal education for the changing landscape of regional emerging economies: A dynamic framework for law majors. Journal of the Knowledge Economy. 2024 Sep;15(3):10227-56.
13. Deuchar HS. A Case of Multiple Identities: Uncanny Histories of the Arabic Typewriter. International Journal of Middle East Studies. 2023 May;55(2):238-59.
14. Ludwick Jr AL, Ludwick P. A Doctor's War: Letters and Reflections from the Frontlines of World War II. McFarland; 2022 Sep 26.
15. Zaki Z, Tian G, Amini MY. Literature Review on Belt and Road Initiative's Integration for Trade Connectivity of Afghanistan. Open Journal of Business and Management. 2023 Oct 13;11(6):3287-312.
16. Shah A. Path to Justice: Navigating Judicial Reforms and Technological Innovation in India's Legal System. LawFoyer Int'l J. Doctrinal Legal Rsch.. 2024;2:923.
17. Staudt RW. All the wild possibilities: Technology that attacks barriers to access to justice. Loy. LAL Rev.. 2008;42:1117.
18. Yuan X. Vulnerability, moral concepts, and ethics in interpreting. Just. Journal of Language Rights & Minorities, Revista de Drets Lingüístics i Minories. 2024 Apr 16;3(1):25-51. [uv.es](#)
19. Simshaw D. Access to AI justice: Avoiding an inequitable two-tiered system of legal services. Yale JL & Tech.. 2022;24:150.
20. Singley E. A holistic approach to user privacy in academic libraries. The Journal of Academic Librarianship. 2020 May 1;46(3):102151.
21. Yu G, Akhter S, Kumar T, Ortiz GG, Saddhono K. Innovative application of new media in visual communication design and resistance to innovation. Frontiers in Psychology. 2022 Aug 3;13:940899. [frontiersin.org](#)

22. de Souza SP. Communicating the Law: Thinking through Design, Visuals and Presentation of Legal Content. Technology, Innovation and Access to Justice: Dialogues on the Future of Law. 2021:180-91. [oapen.org](http://oapen.org)
23. Leider R. The modern common law of crime. The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology (1973-). 2021. [ssrn.com](http://ssrn.com)
24. Hariati S, Jamin M, Sulistiyono A. The Legal Status of Marriage (Merariq) Implementation Within The Indigenous People of Sasak Lombok. Jurnal IUS Kajian Hukum Dan Keadilan. 2024 Aug 30;12(2):406-22. [jurnalius.ac.id](http://jurnalius.ac.id)
25. Brenner M, Gersen JS, Haley M, Lin M, Merchant A, Millett RJ, Sarkar SK, Wegner D. Constitutional dimensions of predictive algorithms in criminal justice. Harv. CR-CLL Rev.. 2020;55:267.
26. Smith HH. Revisiting the History of the Independent State Legislature Doctrine. . Mary's LJ. 2021;53:445.
27. Zhenzhao N. Introduction to ethical literary criticism. Routledge; 2023 Sep 15.
28. Bietti E. From ethics washing to ethics bashing: a moral philosophy view on tech ethics. Journal of Social Computing. 2021 Sep;2(3):266-83.

**CITE AS: Geriga Manisuru (2025). The Evolution of Legal Communication through History. IDOSR JOURNAL OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES 11(1):56-62.**  
<https://doi.org/10.59298/IDOSRJAH/2025/1115662>