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The Influence of Social Media on Public Perception of Crime and Law Enforcement

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Abstract

This research examines the influence of social media on public perception of crime and law enforcement in the urban communities of Jakarta and South Tangerang. The aim is to analyse how social media shapes the narrative of crime, trust in law enforcement, and public views on legal policies. The method used is qualitative phenomenology with data collection techniques including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and digital document analysis. Data were analysed using the Miles and Huberman model. The research findings indicate that social media plays a significant role in shaping biassed perceptions, creating "collective anxiety," and triggering public pressure on law enforcement agencies based on the logic of virality. In conclusion, social media has transformed into a powerful space for information circulation as well as a tool for social control, making it necessary to optimise its use in legal communication strategies to enhance transparency and public participation.

Keywords: *Social Media, Public Perception, Crime, Law Enforcement, Phenomenology*

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of everyday life. Digital platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok enable users to share information, interact, and connect with others worldwide. In this context, social media not only serves as a means of communication but also as a source of information that influences public perception and opinion. With the ability to disseminate information quickly and widely, social media can shape narratives and collective perceptions on various issues, including crime and law enforcement. Digital platforms influence public opinion and shape collective

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perceptions of various criminogenic issues and legal responses to them. Social media is not just a reflection of social reality but also plays a crucial role in shaping narratives and public perceptions of crime and law enforcement.

In today's digital age, social media has become the primary channel for the flow of information, influencing public perception of social issues, particularly those related to crime and law enforcement. (Ahmad Ismail, 2024) The ease of access and speed of information dissemination on social media often leads to distorted realities regarding crime, causing public concern that is not always aligned with objective data. (Szczepan, 2021) Various news reports about crime cases through social media tend to highlight sensational and extreme events, which ultimately reinforces the public's perception that the crime rate is higher than reality based on official statistics. (Singh, A., & Pandey, 2024) This pattern is clearly observable in urban centres like Jakarta and South Tangerang, where people are increasingly relying on social media as their primary source of crime information. (Asri, 2023).

According to data from statista.com, it's estimated that by early 2025, the number of global social media users will reach over 5 billion people, and in Indonesia alone, there are more than 212 million active social media users as of early 2024 (We Are Social & Kepios, 2024). This number shows that almost all internet users in Indonesia actively use social media as their primary source of information. (Sabrina Yuniar, 2025).

Meanwhile, a literature review shows that the relationship between social media consumption and the formation of public perception of crime is very complex. Agenda-setting theory and cultivation theory, for example, emphasise the role of media in determining which issues are considered important by the public and in shaping long-term social representations of crime. (KPU Pressbooks. (n.d.) However, both theories have limitations in explaining how social media algorithms and viral phenomena contribute to reinforcing perceptual biases, and how the amplification of voices from certain groups can instantly shape majority opinion. (Oliveira, 2023) Therefore, recent literature concludes that further study is needed on the new dynamics of social media in the realm of public perception of crime. (Smith, 2022).

The widespread use of social media has had a significant impact on how society views and understands social reality, including the formation of public perception. Intensive social media consumption can shape opinions and collective perceptions on various issues, including crime and law enforcement. Information disseminated through digital platforms can influence how society thinks and feels about specific issues, shaping dominant narratives within the community. Therefore, it is essential to understand how social media consumption affects the formation of public perception and how we can use social media wisely to form more balanced and accurate perceptions. By doing so, we can increase awareness of the impact of social media on public perception formation and take steps to utilize it positively.

Social media has become a significant factor in shaping public perception of crime and law enforcement. With the ability to disseminate information quickly and widely, digital platforms can influence public opinion and shape collective perceptions of various criminogenic issues and legal responses to them. Social media is not just a reflection of social reality, but also plays a crucial role in shaping narratives and public perceptions of crime and law enforcement.

Based on these dynamics, the purpose of this study is to deeply analyse the influence of social media on the formation of public perception of crime and law enforcement. (Johnson, 2021) The study specifically aims to: (1) Identify patterns of how social media constructs narratives and perceives crime rates; (2) Analyse the impact of social media on public trust in law enforcement institutions; and (3) Assess how the flow of information circulating through social media can influence public views on law enforcement policies.

Based on the empirical background and objectives outlined, this research is important to conduct in order to bridge the knowledge gap regarding how the social media landscape as a virtual public space is increasingly influencing public perceptions, attitudes, and levels of trust towards law enforcement institutions. (Lee, M., & Ellis, 2022) The main argument underlying this research is that previous review approaches are still dominated by literature and theories that are not fully adapted to the new reality of shifting digital information consumption. (Oliveira, 2023) Thus, this research is expected to

contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of public policy and communication strategies for law enforcement institutions in facing the challenges of the digital information era. (Chen, 2023)

The development of effective public policies and communication strategies in the era of information digitalization requires a deep understanding of social media dynamics and their impact on public perception. Theoretical and practical contributions can be made through research that identifies how social media shapes public perceptions of crime and law enforcement. This enables law enforcement institutions to develop appropriate communication strategies to address the challenges of the digital era, such as the spread of inaccurate information and hoaxes, and build public trust through transparent and effective communication. Additionally, evidence-based public policy development can increase public awareness and participation in maintaining security and order, and promote fair and transparent law enforcement. Thus, theoretical and practical contributions can enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement institutions in facing the challenges of the information digitalization era.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and the Construction of Crime Reality

Social media has become a primary factor in shaping public perceptions of crime and law enforcement. This digital platform allows information about crime to spread rapidly and widely, shaping public opinion and collective perceptions of various criminogenic issues. However, the spread of inaccurate information and hoaxes can also occur, influencing how society views and understands the reality of crime. Therefore, it is essential to understand how social media shapes the construction of crime reality and how law enforcement institutions can use social media effectively to build public trust and promote fair and transparent law enforcement. By doing so, we can increase awareness of the impact of social media on the construction of crime reality and take steps to utilize it positively in maintaining public security and order. Social media can be an

effective tool in shaping public perception and promoting public awareness of crime and law enforcement issues if used wisely and responsibly.

Social media is conceptually defined as a digital platform that facilitates the creation, sharing, and exchange of information between users without spatial and temporal limitations. (Voorveld, 2019) Its main characteristics are speed and massive reach, making it a powerful tool in shaping public opinion. In the context of crime, social media not only reports events but actively frames reality. (Brennan Centre for Justice, 2021) Gerbner's Cultivation Theory explains that repeated exposure to sensational criminal content in the media can foster a perception of the world as more dangerous than it actually is ("mean world syndrome"). (KPU Pressbooks. n.d.) Meanwhile, Agenda-Setting Theory asserts that the media has the ability to determine which issues are considered important by the public.

The digital age has revolutionized how we communicate, interact, and share information, profoundly impacting our social, political, and cultural landscapes. Social media platforms, born out of rapid technological advancements, have become essential to modern life, reshaping our relationships, opinions, and understanding of the world around us (van Dijck & Poell, 2023).

The media has the ability to determine which issues are considered important by the public through a process known as "agenda setting". By selecting and highlighting certain issues, the media can influence public perception of what is important and what is not. This can have a significant impact on the formation of public opinion and public policy. The media can shape narratives and influence how society views certain issues, thus playing a crucial role in determining which issues become public priorities. Therefore, it is essential to understand how the media shapes the public agenda and how we can use the media effectively to promote issues that are important to society. By doing so, we can increase awareness of the media's role in shaping public opinion and promoting relevant issues to society. Responsible media can play a vital role in increasing public awareness and promoting healthy discussions about important issues.

Public Perception and Trust in Legal Institutions

Public perception and trust in legal institutions are crucial aspects of maintaining societal stability and security. When the public has high trust in legal institutions, they are more likely to comply with the law and cooperate with law enforcement to maintain order and security. However, negative public perception of legal institutions can lead to distrust and skepticism, which can impact law compliance and social stability. Therefore, it is essential for legal institutions to understand how public perception is formed and how to build trust through transparent, accountable, and responsive communication. By doing so, legal institutions can increase public trust and play a more effective role in maintaining societal security and order. Public perception and trust in legal institutions can also be influenced by factors such as transparency, accountability, and responsiveness of legal institutions in handling legal cases.

Public perception is a cognitive and affective construction of society towards an issue, formed through the interpretation of information. (Suprapto, R., & Syamsuddin, 2021) In a legal context, this perception reflects the extent to which society assesses the effectiveness and legitimacy of law enforcement agencies. Social media, with its algorithmic nature and tendency to form "echo chambers," can accelerate this polarisation of beliefs. (Stanford HAI, 2023) Viral negative narratives can quickly erode public trust, while successful law enforcement efforts that receive positive attention can increase it.

This perception is not only influenced by objective facts, but also by personal experiences, values, and social norms that exist in society. Therefore, public perception can vary between one community group and another, depending on the social and cultural context they possess. A deep understanding of public perception is crucial in developing effective communication strategies and building good relationships between institutions and the public. By understanding how public perception is formed and the factors that influence it, we can develop more targeted strategies to promote important issues and build public trust.

Law Enforcement in the Digital Age

Law enforcement is a structured process to ensure the functioning of legal norms, which now must adapt to the digital landscape. (Asshiddiqie, 2012) Social media has become a double-edged sword: on one hand, it serves as a tool for social control and transparency, while on the other hand, it is a source of misinformation and public pressure that can disrupt legal processes. (Judicial Commission of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023) Law enforcement institutions are required not only to be procedurally responsive but also to be capable of communicating and managing perceptions in the digital space. (UK Government, 2021)

Law enforcement institutions currently face significant challenges in the rapidly evolving digital era. Amidst the rapid and widespread flow of information on social media and other digital platforms, law enforcement institutions are required not only to be procedurally responsive but also capable of communicating and managing perceptions in the digital space. They must be able to convey accurate and transparent information to the public and respond to questions and concerns quickly and precisely. Additionally, law enforcement institutions need to understand how to manage public perception on social media, where information can be easily misinterpreted or politicized. By doing so, they can build public trust, increase transparency, and better address security challenges. Therefore, the ability to communicate and manage perceptions in the digital space is crucial for enhancing the positive image of law enforcement institutions and building public trust. In the long term, this will help law enforcement institutions to be more effective in carrying out their duties and improving public security and order.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore the meaning and experiences of research subjects related to exposure to crime information on social media. (Delve Tool, 2023) The research locations are Jakarta and South Tangerang, with 25 participants selected through purposive sampling. The participant criteria are citizens aged 18-45 who are active social media users (at least 3 hours/day)

and reside in both regions. Participants came from diverse backgrounds, including students, professionals, homemakers, and activists.

Data collection was conducted through: (1) Semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore participants' experiences, feelings, and perceptions; (2) Online observation of participants' activities on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp groups to observe direct interactions with crime content; and (3) Analysis of digital documents such as relevant screenshots, uploads, and discussion threads. The collected data was analysed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes: Data Reduction: Selecting, simplifying, and grouping data based on themes. Data Presentation: Presenting data in matrix and narrative form to facilitate drawing conclusions. Drawing Conclusions and Verification: Extracting meaning from the data and verifying findings through triangulation of data sources and member checks.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data analysis, the research findings are summarised in the following table to answer the research objectives:

Table 1. Distribution of Public Perception of Crime Rates

Perception Category	Number of Participants	Percentage	Contradiction with Statistical Data
Very High	15	60%	BPS: 15% decrease (2021-2024)
Increasing	8	32%	BPS: Stable in Q1 2024
Stable	2	8%	According to official data
Total	**25**	**100%**	

Table 2. Patterns of Crime Information Consumption on Social Media

Content Type	Frequency/Day	Percentage	Accuracy Rate
Violence Video	3-5 times	45%	28% verified
Criminal News	2-4 times	35%	42% have a source
Broadcast Message	1-3 times	20%	15% accurate
Average	**3-4 times/day**	**100%**	**28% verified**

Table 3. The Influence of Virality on Perceptions of Law Enforcement

Viralality Level	Police Response	Percentage of Participants	Trust Impact
High (>1000 engagement)	< 24 jam	68%	+42% (positif)
Medium (100-1000 engagement)	2-7 hari	25%	+15% (netral)
Low (<100 engagement)	> 7 hari	7%	-67% (negatif)

Table 4. Analysis of Crime Content Quality on Social Media

Quality Aspect	Number of Content	Percentage	Description
Valid Source	97	28%	Verified data

Quality Aspect	Number of Content	Percentage	Description
Exaggeration	156	45%	Exaggerated title/narrative
Without Context	249	72%	Incomplete information
Sensational Content	187	54%	Focus on violence

Distortion of Criminal Reality

The data in Table 1 show that 92% of participants (23 out of 25 people) believe that the crime rate in their neighbourhood is "very high" or "increasing." This belief contradicts data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) which shows a 15% decrease in crime rates in the DKI Jakarta and South Tangerang areas over the past three years.

Based on Table 2, participants reported receiving an average of 3-4 pieces of crime-related information through social media daily, with 45% of this content being violent or robbery-related video content. Only 28% of that content has been verified for accuracy.

The Phenomenon of Justice by Virality

Table 3 reveals that 17 participants (68%) believe legal cases are only taken seriously if they gain viral attention on social media. Observational data shows that cases that go viral on the Twitter platform with over 1,000 retweets are 3 times more likely to receive a quick response from the police compared to cases without social media exposure.

Information Quality and Its Impact

Based on Table 4, an analysis of 347 digital content pieces found that: 72% of crime information circulating on social media is not accompanied by complete context. 45% of the content contains elements of exaggeration in the title or narrative. Only 28% include valid data sources. 54% of the content is sensational with a focus on violent elements.

Impact on Institutional Trust

Data from Table 3 shows significant variation in trust levels in law enforcement institutions based on social media exposure. Participants exposed to positive content about police performance experienced a 42% increase in trust, while those exposed to negative content saw a decrease in trust of up to 67%.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm and deepen the Cultivation and Agenda-Setting theories in the context of modern social media. (KPU Pressbooks. (n.d.) Intensive exposure to algorithmic and viral crime information on digital platforms not only instills fear but also creates a tangible "collective anxiety" among urban populations. What distinguishes this from previous studies is the speed and scale of this effect; perceptions can change drastically in just a few hours, driven by the logic of virality that characterises social media. (Singh, A., & Pandey, 2024)

Findings regarding "Conditional Trust" and the *"No Viral, No Justice"* phenomenon reveal a paradigm shift in the relationship between society and law enforcement. Trust is no longer automatically granted based on institutional authority, but must be "proven" through visible and responsive performance in the digital space. (UK Government, 2021) This aligns with the findings of Garth & Yusuf (2024) regarding the declining credibility of mainstream news sources, leading people to turn to alternative narratives that are actually more susceptible to bias. (Garth, T., & Yusuf, 2024)

The practical implications of this research confirm that law enforcement agencies must adopt proactive and transparent communication strategies. Building a counter-narrative

on social media, responding to complaints quickly, and providing regular updates are no longer just supplementary, but a necessity to maintain legitimacy. (Judicial Commission of the Republic of Indonesia. (2023) On the other hand, the low level of digital and legal literacy in society, as evidenced by the ease with which distorted information is accepted, is a root problem that needs to be addressed through systematic public education.

5. CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the speed and power of social media in transforming public perception of crime and law enforcement, even capable of overcoming the influence of official factual data. Virality and real-time information flows have fuelled collective anxiety dynamics and fluctuations in public trust at levels not previously predicted by conventional media theory. Theoretically, this study enriches understanding by demonstrating how algorithmic logic and social media virality modify classical communication theories. Practically, the results of this study offer a roadmap for law enforcement institutions to optimise digital channels as spaces for dialogue, transparency, and trust-building, while also emphasising the urgency of digital-legal literacy programs for the community.

The limitation of the study lies in the limited scope of participants, which is restricted to two major cities. Future research is highly recommended to expand the geographical and socio-economic scope, as well as to explore the role of influencers and digital opinion leaders in framing crime issues, in order to formulate more inclusive and effective legal communication policies in the digital age.

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