

Police, Institutional Communication, and Social Media Pressure: A Socio-Legal Study of Institutional Responses to Viral Cases in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This study investigates how the Indonesian National Police (Polri) constructs its institutional communication in response to social media pressure during viral legal controversies, and how such responses affect police legitimacy in the digital age. Anchored in a socio-legal framework and employing Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, the research focuses on a high-profile criminal case that triggered national outrage and sustained digital activism, without explicitly naming the case to preserve analytical generality. The analysis examines the use of formal diction, labeling strategies, language modality, and delegitimization of public criticism within Polri's official communications. Data sources include press statements, social media content by the Police Public Relations Division, official remarks quoted in mainstream media, and related institutional documents. Findings reveal that viral public discourse exerts significant

influence on institutional actions—such as forming special investigative teams and dismissing senior officials—highlighting the role of digital pressure in prompting accountability. However, the study also uncovers the temporary and reactive nature of these responses, particularly when public attention fades. By connecting institutional communication strategies with public expectations in digital spaces, this study argues that the legitimacy of law enforcement is increasingly shaped by the ability to engage transparently and consistently with the public—not merely by legal authority. Viral cases thus function as informal mechanisms of oversight. This research contributes to socio-legal scholarship by integrating insights from democratic policing, digital activism, and public accountability, offering a conceptual lens to understand the dynamic interplay between state institutions and digital society in contemporary Indonesia.

KEYWORDS *Police Legitimacy, Institutional Communication, Digital Public Pressure, Socio-Legal Studies, Critical Discourse Analysis*

Introduction

Democratic policing has become increasingly significant in the digital era, where public opinion and institutional legitimacy are shaped not only through direct interactions between the police and society, but also through communication in online spaces. As social media platforms enable the rapid dissemination of information, cases involving police conduct can quickly become viral and generate intense public scrutiny. In this context, democratic policing requires law enforcement institutions to uphold the principles of accountability, transparency, respect for human rights, and public participation, while simultaneously responding to the pressures created by digital communication and online public discourse. The police are therefore expected not only to enforce the law, but also to maintain public trust through responsible institutional communication and adherence to democratic values.¹

The increasing influence of social media has transformed the relationship between the police, the public, and the media, particularly in high-profile or controversial cases. Viral narratives circulating in digital spaces often shape public perceptions of justice, legitimacy, and institutional credibility, placing significant pressure on law enforcement agencies to respond swiftly and transparently. As Bayley emphasizes, the success of police democratization is largely determined by openness to civilian oversight and a commitment to

¹ Peter K. Manning, *Democratic Policing in a Changing World*. (London: Routledge, 2010); Robert Reiner, *The Politics of the Police*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2010).

substantive justice.² In a healthy democratic country, law enforcement agencies are run by representatives of the people who act on the basis of the law, and the police do not have the authority to make laws, but only enforce them professionally. A democratic police must be ready to be corrected if they violate ethical and legal limits.

In a report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the principles of democratic policing also include proactive engagement with the community and an emphasis on fostering long-term trust between the police and the community. UNODC emphasizes that “*a democratic police force acts with transparency and is open to scrutiny and public dialogue*”.³ At this context, the concept of democratic policing is becoming increasingly relevant in today’s digital era. The development of social media is changing the landscape of public communication, presenting new challenges and opportunities for the police. Virtual public spaces have become an important arena for citizens to voice criticism and encourage accountability of state institutions.⁴ The phenomenon of virality shows how events that are documented and widely spread on social media can trigger a quick reaction from society and state institutions. Although it has the potential to accelerate justice, virality also poses a risk of mass pressure and trial by social media which can interfere with the principle of due process.⁵

In order to answer the challenges of this digital era, the police must be able to build communication mechanisms that are not only reactive, but also proactive and participatory.⁶ In this context, democratic policing needs to be adapted to address the complexity of digital communication and ensure that the principle of justice is maintained in the midst of massive viral currents and public pressure.⁷ Social media is not only a challenge, but also an opportunity

² David H. Bayley, *Changing the guard: Developing Democratic Police Abroad*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³ UNODC. *The Criminal Justice Assessment Toolkit*. New York: The United Nations, 2006. Available online at https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/cjat_eng/CJAT_Toolkit_full_version23Mar10all.pdf

⁴ Ian Loader, and Aogan Mulcahy. *Policing and the condition of England: Memory, Politics and Culture*. (Clarendon Studies in Criminology, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵ Daniel J. Solove, *The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁶ Andrew John Goldsmith, “Policing’s new visibility.” *The British Journal of Criminology* 50, no. 5 (2010): 914-934; Scott Keay, and Stuart Kirby. “The Evolution of the Police Analyst and the Influence of Evidence-Based Policing.” *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* 12, no. 3 (2018): 265-276.

⁷ Garth Den Heyer, and Alan Beckley. “Police independent oversight in Australia and New Zealand.” *Police Practice and Research* 14, no. 2 (2013): 130-143; Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter*

to strengthen the legitimacy of police institutions through transparency, dialogue, and public collaboration.

Furthermore, in the digital era, democratic policing can no longer be understood as a normative and institutional principle, but also as a public communication practice that must be adaptive to the dynamics of discourse in the digital space. Social media has become an arena of contestation between citizens and institutions, where legitimacy negotiations and narrative battles take place openly. This requires the police to be not only responsive, but also reflective of the public discourse that is formed quickly and massively through the mechanism of virality. It is important to realize that viral distress cannot always be reduced as a threat, but rather should be read as a legitimate expression of public uneasiness, one that demands an honest, open, and constructive communicative response.

It is at this point that the concept of democratic policing needs to be expanded to include not only institutional structures, but also the narrative and relational capacity of police institutions to build trust through digital participation. In other words, the digital space has become an integral part of contemporary democracy, and democratic policing must be able to be present in the space not as a means of control, but as a public partner in maintaining justice, transparency, and mutual security. Therefore, strengthening institutional capacity in terms of digital literacy, public communication ethics, and the ability to read discourse is very important so that the police are not left behind in the democratization process which is now also taking place online. By embracing the digital space as part of the field of task and dialogue, police institutions can enrich democratic policing practices that are more in line with the needs of the times: flexible but principled, participatory but still professional. It is within this framework that the concept of democratic policing must continue to be developed—not just as an ideal idea, but as a real strategy to answer the challenges of justice in the digital age.

However, the implementation of democratic policing does not occur in a vacuum. It is highly dependent on a country's democratic ecosystem, including the effectiveness of state institutions, guarantees of civil liberties, and the openness of public spaces. In Indonesia, this challenge is becoming increasingly evident as reflected in a number of recent international reports.

The Democracy Index 2024 report released by *The Economist Intelligence Unit* (EIU) shows that Indonesia remains in the category of flawed democracy, with a ranking of 59th out of 167 countries and a score of 6.44. This score

marks a decrease compared to 2023 which recorded a score of 6.53 and ranked 56th. This means that in the past year, Indonesia has experienced a decline in the quality of democracy, both in terms of scores and global position. According to the EIU 2024, although procedural democracy such as elections is still running, there has been a sharp decline in public trust in democratic institutions.⁸ Factors such as the emergence of populist groups, anti-establishment sentiment, and weak political representation have also worsened the quality of democracy in Indonesia. Indonesia's ranking position in the Democracy Index compiled by EIU, compared to a total of 167 countries evaluated, as shown on Table 1.

TABLE 1. Indonesia's Democracy Index by EIU (2020–2024)

Year	Score	World Ranking	Category
2020	6.30	64 of 167 countries	Flawed democracy
2021	6.71	54 of 167 countries	Flawed democracy
2022	6.71	54 of 167 countries	Flawed democracy
2023	6.53	56 of 167 countries	Flawed democracy
2024	6.44	59 of 167 countries	Flawed democracy

Source: *The Economist Intelligence Unit, Democracy Index 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024*, <https://www.eiu.com>, summarized and edited by the Authors

In detail, the report stated that Indonesia's score in the government function indicator (6.79) shows relative effectiveness, but accountability and transparency are still major weaknesses (*see* Table 2). Political participation was quite high (7.22), but it was not accompanied by the strengthening of democratic political culture which only recorded a score of 5.00. Democratic values are not yet firmly rooted; transactional politics, patronage, and conservatism still dominate. The most worrying thing is the low civil liberties score, which is 5.29 (EIU, 2024). In reality, the ITE Law and other legal instruments are still used to silence criticism, limit freedom of expression, and suppress civil movements.

TABLE 2. Indonesia's Position in the 2024 Democracy Index

Country	Total Score	Rank	Change	Functions of Government	Political Participation	Political Culture	Civil Liberties
Philippines	6.63	51	+2	4.64	8.33	4.38	7.06
Argentina	6.51	54	0	5.00	6.11	3.75	8.53
Croatia	6.50	56	+2	6.07	6.11	4.38	6.76

⁸ See The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). *Democracy Index 2024: What's wrong with representative democracy?*. London: EIU. Retrieved from <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2024/>.

Country	Total Score	Rank	Change	Functions of Government	Political Participation	Political Culture	Civil Liberties
Brazil	6.49	57	-6	5.00	6.11	5.00	6.76
Indonesia	6.44	59	-3	6.79	7.22	5.00	5.29

Source: *The Economist Intelligence Unit, Democracy Index 2024, analyzed by the Authors*

Another report from *The Global State of Democracy 2024* released by International IDEA provides additional confirmation of the deterioration of democracy in Indonesia. It was emphasized that "*Indonesia experienced declines in Representative Government and Fundamental Rights between 2018 and 2023*".⁹ The decline in *representative government* shows a decline in the quality of elections, the independence of electoral institutions, and legislative performance. The decline in fundamental rights includes restrictions on freedom of opinion, assembly, and the press. As explained in the report, "*Civic space continues to deteriorate, particularly through restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and the use of force against protesters*".¹⁰

This condition creates an environment that is not conducive to the development of democratic policing. When the democratic system experiences stagnation or regression, the police institution is at risk of no longer becoming a protector of the public, but a tool of power control. Repressive practices, low accountability, and resistance to public participation further distance the police from the principles of democratic policing. This is worrying because Indonesia, which procedurally conducts regular and peaceful elections, has actually experienced a decline in civil liberties and the independence of legal institutions.

Therefore, the Democracy Index and Global State of Democracy reports should be read as an important warning of the condition of state institutions, including the police. When democracy is only procedural without guarantees of civil rights and control over state power, democratic policing becomes difficult to implement meaningfully. More open, participatory, and responsive institutional reform is a necessity. This is because a healthy democracy is not only marked by the existence of elections, but also by the integrity of institutions in ensuring equal rights, justice, and public security.

Furthermore, social media has become an important digital public space in shaping opinions, disseminating information, and mobilizing collective

⁹ International IDEA. *The Global State of Democracy 2024: Strengthening Legitimacy – Elections*. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), 2024, p.89. <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2024.1>

¹⁰ International IDEA, p. 6.

action, including in Indonesia.¹¹ Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter, TikTok, and online petition sites such as Change.org allow for citizen participation and accountability of power more openly.¹²

According to Haddad, in Southeast Asia, social media strengthens public and political participation. Facebook and X amplify the voices of marginalized groups, while TikTok effectively reaches a wide audience through short videos.¹³ Local platforms such as Zalo (Vietnam) and LINE (Thailand) are also political discussion spaces. Putra shows that cross-border movements such as *the Milk Tea Alliance* use social media to voice human rights and democracy issues in the region.¹⁴ However, social media also harbors serious challenges such as disinformation, polarization, algorithmic bias, and censorship, especially in countries with authoritarian regimes.¹⁵ Online activism is often intertwined with offline activism.¹⁶ Data from the *Reuters Institute 2024* shows the growth of social media use in Indonesia for news and communication.¹⁷

TABLE 3. Patterns of Use of Digital Platform Types in Indonesia in 2024

Rank	Platform	Used for News	General Usage
1	Posted by E	46% (↓5)	72%
2	YouTube	41% (↓7)	65%

¹¹ Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. (Chichester, UK: WILEY, 2012); Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*. (London: Penguin, 2008).

¹² Lincoln Dahlberg, "Rethinking the Fragmentation of the Cyberpublic: From Consensus to Contestation." *New Media & Society* 9, no. 5 (2007): 827-847; Zizi Papacharissi, *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2010); Syed Ishfaqul Bari, "The Role of Social Media in Shaping Modern-Day Activism." *Bangladesh Journal of Bioethics* 16, no. 1 (2025): 1-7; Anna Rees, "The Role of Digital Tools in the World of Online Activism". *RESET Digital for Good*, June 2, 2024. Retrieved from <https://en.reset.org/digital-and-online-activism/>

¹³ Omar Khalil Haddad, "The Impact of Social Media on Political Movements in Southeast Asia", *Beltway Grid Policy Centre*, December 6, 2024. Retrieved from <https://beltwaygrid.org/the-impact-of-social-media-on-political-movements-in-southeast-asia/>

¹⁴ Bama Andika Putra, "Digital activism in Southeast Asia: the# MilkTeaAlliance and prospects for social resistance." *Frontiers in Sociology* 9 (2024): 1478630.

¹⁵ Muhammad Rachimoellah, Putri Handayani Lubis, and Nindya Juwita Utimadini. "Digital Activism and Political Change: Challenges of Social Media's Impact on Political Development." *Journal of Middle East and Islamic Studies* 11, no. 2 (2024): 25-36.

¹⁶ Iim Halimatusa'diyah, *BEYOND SLACKTIVISM: The Dynamic Relationship between Online and Offline Activism among Southeast Asian Youths*. Singapore, ISEAS Publishing, 2024.

¹⁷ Reuters Institute. *Digital News Report 2024*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2024. Retrieved from <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024>.

Rank	Platform	Used for News	General Usage
3	Posted on Facebook	35% (↓3)	52%
4	Posted on Instagram	29% (↓8)	49%
5	TikTok	29% (↑7)	44%
6	X (Twitter)	12% (↓9)	20%

Note: 34% of users share news via social media, instant messaging, or email.

Source: *Processed from Reuters Institute (2024)*

In the Indonesia's case, social media is used to voice criticism of institutions, including the police.¹⁸ Digital actors such as activists, citizen journalists, buzzers, and influencers also shape the direction of public discourse. However, buzzers can also be a propaganda tool that masks criticism of institutions, including the police.¹⁹ Examples such as the Black Lives Matter movement show the power of social media in raising the issue of police brutality.²⁰ The case of Tyre Nichols also shows that institutional violence can go beyond the racial dimension.²¹

Reuters Institute data on 2024 showed that more than 45% of police news on social media contains disinformation. A Pew Research Center survey (2022) reinforces this—the majority of global respondents consider social media to be effective in building awareness of issues and driving the attention of officials.

TABLE 4. Results of the Social Media Effectiveness Survey in Influencing Politics and Policy

Purpose	Ineffective	Effective
Raising public awareness of political/social issues	19%	77%
Changing people's views	29%	65%
Encourage officials' attention to an issue	33%	64%
Influencing domestic policy decisions	35%	61%

Source: *Pew Research Center (2022)*

¹⁸ See Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*.

¹⁹ Merlyna Lim, "Freedom to hate: social media, algorithmic enclaves, and the rise of tribal nationalism in Indonesia." *Critical Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2017): 411-427; Samantha Bradshaw, and Philip N. Howard. *The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation*. (Oxford: Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, 2019); Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. "How the Chinese government fabricates social media posts for strategic distraction, not engaged argument." *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 3 (2017): 484-501.

²⁰ Deen Freelon, Charlton McIlwain, and Meredith Clark. "Quantifying the power and consequences of social media protest." *New Media & Society* 20, no. 3 (2018): 990-1011.

²¹ See also Brandon Miller, *What Happened to Tyre Nichols?*. (SAGE Publications: SAGE Business Cases Originals, 2024).

The problem of the negative impact of social media such as disinformation and bias in news often exacerbates public polarization.²² For example, the spread of fake news about police brutality can trigger emotional reactions that reduce trust in the institution of policing.²³ Phenomenon *No Viral, No Justice* shows how social media plays a role as a tool of social control that can speed up the legal process while exposing structural weaknesses in the judicial and police systems. On the one hand, social media is an important catalyst in driving accountability, but on the other hand the reliance on virality also signals a weak institutional response without public pressure.

The murder case of Brigadier Nofriansyah Yosua Hutabarat (Brigadier J) by his superior, Ferdy Sambo, in 2022, is the most prominent example of this phenomenon in Indonesia. Initially, the police conveyed an official narrative that the incident was a shootout incident. However, the public immediately responded with suspicion, especially after various alternative testimonies and citizen analyses emerged on social media. Hashtags such as *#JusticeForBrigadirJ* and *#UsutTuntasSambo* have developed into symbols of resistance to the official narrative, as well as a channel of digital solidarity for people who demand information disclosure. The virality of this case not only mobilized public opinion, but also urged police institutions to take further steps, including the formation of a special team, the deactivation of a number of high-ranking officials, and the disclosure of the facts of premeditated murder.

Digital public pressure in this case has a dual role: on the one hand it accelerates the law enforcement process by encouraging more transparent disclosure of facts, but on the other hand exposes the weak institutional response in the absence of public scrutiny. This phenomenon is known as *no viral, no justice*, where the new legal process moves seriously after the issue has gained wide attention in the digital space. The situation shows a deficit of public trust in the institution of the police, which ultimately challenges its formal legitimacy. Thus, the case of Brigadier J shows how social media has become an arena for discourse contestation between police institutions and the public. Official narratives that repeatedly emphasize transparency and professionalism are often responded to by the public with cynicism and *counter-narratives*. Virality not only accelerates the legal process, but also confirms that the legitimacy of the police in the digital era depends heavily on its ability to manage

²² Rachimoellah, Lubis, and Utimadini. "Digital Activism and Political Change: Challenges of Social Media's Impact on Political Development."

²³ Liam Ralph, and Paul Robinson. "Assessing Police Social Media Practices Through a Democratic Policing Lens." *International Journal of Police Science & Management* 25, no. 3 (2023): 237-249.

public communication openly, honestly, and consistently. Even further, this case shows that in the condition of weak institutional accountability, society has made the digital space a new deliberative arena to demand justice, build solidarity, and test the integrity of state institutions.

To summarize these dynamics, Table 5 shows the shape of hashtags, public pressure patterns, and real impacts on police policies and institutions.

TABLE 5. Dynamics of Virality of Brigadier J's Case

Case	Types of Hashtags	Forms of Public Pressure	Impact on Policies & Institutions
The Murder of Brigadier J by Ferdy Sambo (2022)	#JusticeForBrigadirJ, #UsutTuntasSambo	Counter narratives on social media; netizens' analysis of the irregularities of the official chronology; extensive support for the victims' families; petitions and demands for transparency.	Disclosure of the facts of premeditated murder; the death penalty for Ferdy Sambo; the removal of a number of officials; public spotlight on the internal culture of the National Police and conflicts of interest in investigations

Caption: Processed by the authors from various secondary sources (2025).

Table 5 confirms that Brigadier J's case is not just an internal crime, but has become a crisis of institutional legitimacy accelerated by the mechanism of digital virality. In other words, substantive justice in this case was born not only from formal legal mechanisms, but also from public pressure that was constantly articulated through social media.

This viral case also confirms that public pressure through social media is able to open the veil of crime that was previously closed. However, the emergence of *the no-viral, no-justice* phenomenon reveals the weaknesses of the legal system that tends to be reactive to virality and risks ignoring procedural justice.²⁴ This situation reflects the low level of public recognition of the authority and legitimacy of police institutions. Therefore, measures are needed to ensure transparency, accountability, and compliance with human rights principles. The police must be responsive to public aspirations and always work within the corridor of democracy, as mandated in the concept of democratic policing.

²⁴ Julia Magdalena Wuysang, et al. "Viral Justice: Law Enforcement in the Social Media Era." *Nurani: Jurnal Kajian Syari'ah dan Masyarakat* 24, no. 1 (2024): 1-16.

Based on this circumstances, this study focus on how police institutions understand and respond to viral digital public pressure in the context of institutional legitimacy. In line with the purpose of the study, this article analyzes the police discourse in the case of Brigadier J as a representation of the legitimacy crisis mediated by social media. This analysis aims to identify the forms of action taken by the National Police in reaction to digital public opinion, as well as examine how the institutional response reflects the dynamics of democratic policing in the digital era.

This study employs a qualitative socio-legal approach to examine the relationship between social media pressure and police legitimacy within the framework of democratic policing. The research applies Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with a specific focus on the micro level of textual analysis. The study analyzes linguistic structures and institutional narratives contained in official police communications related to the murder case of Brigadier J by Ferdy Sambo in 2022, a case that became one of the most viral and controversial incidents in the history of the Indonesian National Police. The case was selected because it illustrates the direct confrontation between official institutional narratives and public counter-narratives circulating through digital platforms, which ultimately generated significant public pressure and institutional responses.

The data sources consist of official police statements, press releases, social media uploads, visual communication materials, and online news reports published during the peak virality period between July and September 2022. Data were collected from the official website and social media accounts of the Indonesian National Police Public Relations Division, as well as mainstream media outlets such as Kompas, Detik, and Tribun. The analysis focuses on institutional discourse strategies, including the use of formal and neutral language, representation of actors and institutions, labeling practices, and responses to public criticism. Through textual CDA, this study examines how police institutions construct legitimacy, manage crisis communication, and negotiate public trust amid increasing demands for transparency and accountability in the digital era.

“No Viral No Justice” and Police Legitimacy

The development of social media has created a digital public space that challenges the concept of democratic policing, where the legitimacy of police institutions depends on transparency, accountability, and community

participation.²⁵ People now use social media as a tool for civil oversight, as seen from various viral cases that encourage the reaction of the authorities, such as the phenomenon of “*no viral, no justice*” in Indonesia.²⁶

The LSI survey on 2023 shows that only 35% of the public considers law enforcement to be good, reflecting low trust in the National Police.²⁷ On the other hand, platforms such as TikTok (29%) and WhatsApp (46%) are used to access information²⁸, making them potential channels for the National Police to communicate with the public.

Several important units in the National Police such as the Public Relations Division, Cyber Directorate, and Propam play a role in shaping public perception and responding to digital dynamics. Apart from that, Kompolnas as an independent institution has the function of external supervision of the National Police (Law No.2/2002). Social media has expanded the public's role in shaping opinion and directing law enforcement policy.

The murder case of Brigadier J and the viral hashtags *#JusticeForBrigadirJ* and *#UsutTuntasSambo* show how digital public pressure is able to change institutional priorities and encourage police policy evaluation. The virality of the video, the analysis of netizens, and the widespread support for the victims' families, forced the National Police to take drastic steps such as the formation of a special team, the deactivation of a number of officials, and the determination of Ferdy Sambo as the main suspect. This phenomenon also poses a dilemma, on the one hand, democratic policing requires an evidence-

²⁵ Kempe Ronald Hope Sr, "Civilian Oversight of the Police: The Case of Kenya." *The Police Journal* 93, no. 3 (2020): 202-228.

²⁶ Dona Budi Kharisma, "No viral no justice: is it a principle of social justice? (Study of viral cases on social media in Indonesia)." *Safer Communities* 24, no. 2 (2025): 103-115; Fajar Kurniawan, Angghi Muliya Ma'mur, and RR Roosita Cindrakasih. "Pemolisian dan Media: Dinamika Representasi dan Dampaknya pada Persepsi Publik." *Innovative: Journal of Social Science Research* 5, no.1 (2025): 2107-2122; Khoiriah Khoiriah, et al. "Influence of Social Media Use in The Law Enforcement Process in Indonesia." *Kanal: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 13, no. 2 (2025): 153-163; Rahel Narda Chaterine, Dani Prabowo, "Soal Fenomena “No Viral No Justice”, Polri Pastikan yang Ditangani Bukan Hanya Kasus Viral", *KOMPAS*, December 20, 2021. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2021/12/20/17502061/soal-fenomena-no-viral-no-justice-polri-pastikan-yang-ditangani-bukan-hanya?page=all>.

²⁷ See Lembaga Survei Indonesia. "Rilis survei LSI - 01 Maret 2023: Kepercayaan Publik terhadap Lembaga Penegakan Hukum, Isu-isu Penegakan Hukum, dan PSSI". *Lembaga Survei Indonesia*. March 1, 2023. Available online at <https://www.lsi.or.id/post/rilis-survei-lsi-01-maret-2023>.

²⁸ Reuters Institute. *Digital News Report 2024*.

based legal process²⁹, but on the other hand, public opinion on social media is often formed quickly, emotionally, and pressurefully. In this context, the National Police is required to be strategic and dialogical, not just reactive to viral currents.

Therefore, a deep understanding of how virality pressure in the digital space interacts with the framework of democratic policing. The case of Brigadier J shows that social media is not just a means of communication, but a discursive arena where institutional legitimacy is at stake. The question is how the National Police interprets public pressure that is present through digital discourse, as well as how its institutional reaction shapes relations with the community in the midst of a crisis of legitimacy. In this context, units such as the Public Relations of the National Police, the Cyber Directorate, and Propam have an important role to build a more open, responsive, and professional communication approach. On the other hand, Kompolnas as an external supervisory institution also plays a strategic role in ensuring that the principles of transparency, accountability, and justice remain the main foothold in the practice of democratic policing in Indonesia.

This research departs from the understanding that the legitimacy of police institutions in the democratic era does not solely come from legal authority or coercive power of the state, but is also highly determined by public trust built through openness, accountability, and procedural justice. Within this framework, *the democratic policing approach* is the main basis for analyzing the relationship between the state (in this case the police) and citizens.³⁰

Democratic policing refers to policing principles that respect human rights, involve public participation, and emphasize transparency and accountability. In the context of contemporary Indonesia, where socio-political dynamics take place in an increasingly intensive digital space, these principles are taking on new challenges. Social media has changed the landscape of power relations between state institutions and citizens to be more open, responsive, and in many cases—more vulnerable to viral public pressure.

The phenomenon of "*no viral, no justice*" is an important indicator that the legitimacy of the police is now also shaped by the dynamics of digital discourse. The public no longer waits for information from official institutions, but actively produces, disseminates, and exerts pressure through hashtags, comments, and virality. In various viral cases related to the police, the pressure

²⁹ Christopher J. Schneider, *Policing and Social Media: Social Control in an Era of New Media*. (London: Lexington Books, 2016).

³⁰ Jack R. Greene, "Community policing in America: Changing the nature, structure, and function of the police". *Criminal Justice* 3, no. 1 (2006): 299–370; Manning, *Democratic Policing in a Changing World*.

from digital virality is able to force law enforcement institutions to respond quickly, even correcting previous steps. This pressure can be seen as a new form of *civil oversight* based on digital platforms.³¹ In this context, the theory of digital activism is an important complement. Digital activism not only serves as a means of conveying aspirations, but also as a space to organize solidarity, voice injustice, and challenge the dominant narrative of institutions. This reinforces the argument that the digital space is a battleground for legitimacy, where the police cannot rely solely on one-way communication.³²

To analyze this phenomenon systematically, this study formulated three main dimensions. *First*, virality, as a form of digital collective surveillance that demands a quick and accountable response. *Second*, the perception of procedural justice, which refers to the extent to which the public views the law enforcement process as fair, neutral, and respectful of citizens' rights.³³ *Third*, democratic policing in the digital era, which requires police institutions to adapt to democratic values in a disruptive and open communication environment.

Procedural justice principles such as *voice* (opportunity to be heard), *neutrality* (a neutral and unbiased process), *respect* (dignified treatment), and *trustworthiness* (good intentions of institutions), are important instruments in building legitimacy. If these principles are not met, the public is likely to look to other channels—including social media—to demand justice. Thus, the theoretical framework in this study not only maps the relationship between the state and citizens in a formal framework, but also places social media as a strategic actor that shapes narratives, pressures, and legitimacy. Instead of just a communication tool, social media serves as a deliberative space where people negotiate truth, justice, and trust in public institutions.

The legitimacy of the police in the digital era no longer only depends on the power of the law or formal hierarchy, but is also greatly influenced by public perception formed through various information channels, especially social

³¹ Yarimar Bonilla, and Jonathan Rosa. "# Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States." *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 1 (2015): 4-17; Jordana J. George, and Dorothy E. Leidner. "From clicktivism to hacktivism: Understanding digital activism." *Information and Organization* 29, no. 3 (2019): 100249.

³² Marianne P. Colbran, "Policing legitimacy: social media, scandal and sexual citizenship: by Justin R. Ellis, Cham, Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2021, pp. 180, £ 114.39 (hardcover), £ 93.09 (eBook), ISBN 978-3-030-735180." *Policing and Society* 31, no. 9 (2021): 1149-1151; Jonathon Hutchinson, "Micro-platformization for digital activism on social media." *Information, Communication & Society* 24, no. 1 (2021): 35-51.

³³ Tom R. Tyler, *Why people obey the law*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006).

media. Legitimacy is now the result of a complex interaction between the demands of virality, the principle of procedural justice, and the values of democratic policing.

The pressure of virality in the digital era, social media has created a new logic in shaping public opinion of law enforcement officials. Virality can trigger an instant legitimacy crisis. The public is not waiting for the results of a formal investigation; Just one video or testimony that is widely spread to influence the perception of police performance. In this context, social media and civil oversight are a significant source of pressure on police institutions. Procedural justice emphasizes the importance of voice (community participation), neutrality (neutral attitude of the apparatus), respect (respect for citizens), and trustworthiness (trust in the good faith of the authorities). These four elements are the foundation of how the public assesses whether the police act fairly. Meanwhile, democratic policing demands high transparency and accountability. The police are not just a tool of the state, but an institution that is socially responsible to citizens. Transparency creates information disclosure, while accountability ensures corrections to abuses of authority.

Some previous studies are already covered this issue—democratic policing and police legitimacy. Kim et al. in *Does Citizen Opinion Matter?* emphasizing that the legitimacy of the police in South Korea is influenced by public perception, demonstrating the need for public support for an effective police system.³⁴ Skilling in *Community Policing in Kenya* highlights the importance of *democratic policing* in enhancing community and police collaboration, contributing to security and long-term development.³⁵ Research by Odeyemi & Obiyan also suggest that digital technologies can support accountability, although its success depends on administrative reforms³⁶, while Ralph and Robinson in *Assessing Police Social Media Practices* note that although social media can support democratic policing, interactions still tend to be one-way.³⁷ Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of democratic policing to create

³⁴ Seung Hyun Kim, et al. "Does citizen opinion matter? An analysis of police officers' support for democratic policing in South Korea." *Policing: An International Journal* 47, no. 2 (2024): 230-244.

³⁵ Louise Skilling, "Community policing in Kenya: The application of democratic policing principles." *The Police Journal* 89, no. 1 (2016): 3-17.

³⁶ Temitayo Isaac Odeyemi, and A. Sat Obiyan. "Digital policing technologies and democratic policing: Will the internet, social media and mobile phone enhance police accountability and police-citizen relations in Nigeria?" *International Journal of Police Science & Management* 20, no. 2 (2018): 97-108.

³⁷ Ralph, and Robinson. "Assessing Police Social Media Practices Through a Democratic Policing Lens."

a more collaborative and responsive policing, while addressing the challenges of engaging the community in policing and legitimacy.

In the article *Civilian Oversight of the Police: The Case of Kenya*, Hope analyzes the practice of civilian oversight of the police in Kenya, highlighting the role of the IPOA (*Independent Policing Oversight Authority*) which has made progress in creating a credible complaint management system, despite concerns about retaliation for complaints.³⁸ In contrast, Konikoff in *Digital Oversight* discusses public surveillance in the United States triggered by the use of social media and *smartphones*, increasing police visibility and public discussion about violations.³⁹ Kim in *The Effect of Civilian Oversight on Police Organizational Performance* emphasizes civilian oversight as an accountability mechanism despite challenges⁴⁰, while Wright II, Gaozhao, and Houston describe the impact of *Body-Worn Cameras* (BWCs) on racial disparities in police-citizen interactions.⁴¹ Finally, Holliday and Wagstaff Jr in *The Relationship Between Citizen Oversight and Procedural Justice Measures in Policing* found that formal and informal oversight, including through social media, can improve police accountability and *procedural justice*.⁴² Therefore, this study aims to fill the void by focusing on informal public surveillance through social media as a reflection of *democratic policing* in Indonesia.

Digital activism is a form of contemporary political participation that uses digital technology—especially social media—to mobilize the masses, voice injustice, and pressure policy change directly or indirectly. In the Indonesian context, this phenomenon is increasingly emerging along with the rise of hashtag-based campaigns such as *#NoViralNoJustice*, which illustrate that attention and institutional actions are often only present after the case has gone

³⁸ Hope Sr, "Civilian Oversight of the Police: The Case of Kenya."

³⁹ Daniel Konikoff, "Digital Oversight: How Social Media Users "Oversee" Police Misconduct in North America." *SocArXiv Papers*, (2022). <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/bkqxu>

⁴⁰ Jisang Kim, "The effect of civilian oversight on police organizational performance: a quasi-experimental study." *The American Review of Public Administration* 52, no. 5 (2022): 382-397.

⁴¹ James E. Wright, Dongfang Gaozhao, and Brittany Houston. "Body-worn cameras and representation: What matters when evaluating police use of force?." *Public Administration Review* 84, no. 6 (2024): 1117-1133.

⁴² Bradley S. Holliday, and John H. Wagstaff Jr. "The relationship between citizen oversight and procedural justice measures in policing: an exploratory study." *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 47, no. 3 (2022): 567-588.

viral on social media.⁴³ This phenomenon marks a significant shift in advocacy patterns and the relationship between civil society and state institutions.

A number of previous studies have highlighted that virality is not just the result of spontaneous interactions between social media users, but is often a conscious and structured strategy in building visibility of issues, rallying solidarity, and pressuring institutions to respond to public demands. As explained by Lim⁴⁴, social media provides a wide space for participation, but it is also fast and superficial. Therefore, issues that can go viral usually have a simple narrative, high emotional resonance, and are compatible with dominant values such as nationalism, morality, or religiosity. Narratives that meet these prerequisites will more easily reach a wide audience and trigger collective action, both in the form of online and offline support.

Furthermore, Poell & van Dijck argue that the emergence of social media platforms disrupts activist communication patterns that have been dependent on the mainstream media.⁴⁵ Through the practice of *retweeting*, *sharing*, *liking*, and the use of *hashtags*, social media facilitates more horizontal and participatory communication, allowing activists to reach the public directly without going through institutional filters. However, they also emphasize that this process is not completely neutral, as the algorithmic structure and economic importance of digital platforms also shape the type of content that is visible and reaches a wide audience. Thus, the struggle of activists is not only in the realm of content, but also in the logic of technological systems that mediate information.

In this context, a study by Castillo-Esparcia et al.⁴⁶ enrich understanding by showing that algorithmic dynamics greatly determine the success of digital campaigns. Digital activists compete with *influencers*, corporations, and other interest groups in the fight for public attention. To this end, they adopt strategies that resemble the content industry, such as the use of *politainment*, engaging visualization, and adaptation to popular trends. Platforms like TikTok

⁴³ Rizky Bangun Wibisono, and Sultoni Fikri. "Riding the Wave of Change: Unmasking Transformative Shifts in Digital Activism for Social Justice in Indonesia." *Mimbar Keadilan* 17, no. 1 (2024): 75-85.

⁴⁴ Merlyna Lim, "Many clicks but little sticks: Social media activism in Indonesia." In Nishant Shah, Puthiya Purayil Sneha, and Sumandro Chattapadhyay (Eds), *Digital Activism in Asia Reader*. Germany: Meson Press, Leuphana University of Lüneburg, 2013., pp. 127-154.

⁴⁵ Thomas Poell, and José Van Dijck. "Social media and activist communication." *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*. (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 527-537.

⁴⁶ Antonio Castillo-Esparcia, Lucía Caro-Castaño, and Ana Almansa-Martínez. "Evolution of digital activism on social media: opportunities and challenges." *Profesional de la Información* 32, no. 3 (2023): e320303.

stand out in this practice, where *digital activism* is often packaged in a humorous, ironic, or emotional form to make it easier for the public to spread and digest.⁴⁷ However, this strategy is also vulnerable to censorship, online harassment, and the reduction of political meaning to mere entertainment.

In the Indonesian context, the practice of virality as a form of *digital activism* emerged in the form of what Bennett & Segerberg call connective action, in which individuals engage voluntarily without a formal organizational structure.⁴⁸ This engagement is generally based on personal experiences, empathy, and shared values built through digital narratives. For example, phenomena such as the emergence of the hashtag '*no viral no justice*', netizens' support for victims in various viral cases and rejection of the Job Creation Bill (*Omnibus Law*) show that virality is able to encourage public participation across social classes, ages, and geographical areas.⁴⁹ Virality in this context acts as a catalyst to build solidarity and public pressure that impacts policy.

Another study in Indonesia by Perdana, Irawan, and Akbar show how social media, especially Twitter, has become an effective digital participation space in responding to social tragedies through virality practices. This study analyzes conversations related to *#PrayForKanjuruhan* hashtags that emerged after the 2022 Kanjuruhan Tragedy in Malang. The results show that the hashtag has become not only a channel for expressing condolences, but also an arena for social criticism and the push for accountability against the authorities.⁵⁰ In addition to the dominance of empathy narratives for victims, conversations on Twitter also display other hashtags such as *#WhySalahPolisi* and *#UsutTuntas* that indicate the connection between solidarity issues, criticism of the authorities, and encouragement for a complete settlement of cases. This study confirms that virality on social media is not just a spontaneous

⁴⁷ Nuurrianti Jalli, "Viral Justice: TikTok Activism, Misinformation, and the Fight for Social Change in Southeast Asia." *Social Media+ Society* 11, no. 1 (2025): 20563051251318122.

⁴⁸ W. Lance Bennett, and Alexandra Segerberg. "The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics." *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (2012): 739-768.

⁴⁹ Lim, "Many clicks but little sticks: Social media activism in Indonesia"; Jalli, "Viral Justice: TikTok Activism, Misinformation, and the Fight for Social Change in Southeast Asia."

⁵⁰ Gusti Naufal Rizky Perdana, Bambang Irawan, and Paisal Akbar. "# PrayForKanjuruhan on Twitter: Public Response to the Kanjuruhan Stadium Disaster." *Nyimak: Journal of Communication* 7, no. 1 (2023): 89-107. See also Hana Hidayatuzzakia, et al. "Punishment of the Kanjuruhan Commotion due to Negligence from the Perspective of Causality Theory (Case of Decision 13/Pid. B/2023/PN Sby jo 922/K/Pid/2023)." *The Digest: Journal of Jurisprudence and Legisprudence* 4, no. 2 (2023): 123-144.

communication phenomenon, but part of a digital-based social mobilization mechanism that can build collective pressure on state institutions.⁵¹

Research by Fileborn in Justice 2.0 identified the role of social media as an alternative place of justice for victims of street abuse that is often ignored by the formal justice system, where many victims feel the system can lead to re-traumatization and dissatisfaction. Online platforms allow victims to share their experiences and get support, thus meeting some of their justice needs.⁵² This is in line with the findings of Liao and Luqiu which shows the involvement of students with the #MeToo movement in the context of higher education as a form of increasing awareness of gender-based violence.⁵³ Lev-On and Steinfeld also highlight the use of social media in challenging the legitimacy of the criminal justice system in through the dissemination of alternative narratives in controversial cases.⁵⁴

In Indonesia, Wuysang et al. examined the phenomenon of *viral justice* and showed that public pressure through social media can accelerate law enforcement responses, although its impact on long-term legal policy changes is still debated.⁵⁵ In line with this, Wahid et al. stated that the phenomenon of *no viral no justice* reflects society's dependence on virality as a prerequisite for obtaining institutional attention and justice, amid distrust of the formal legal system.⁵⁶ However, the virality-based approach has serious challenges. Reliance on viral mechanisms can make social movements short-term, forgettable, and at high risk of misinformation or narrative manipulation. Jost et al. remind that although social media is able to facilitate the exchange of information, emotions, and collective motivations, the success of a movement still depends

⁵¹ See Perdana, et.al., "# PrayForKanjuruhan on Twitter: Public Response to the Kanjuruhan Stadium Disaster."

⁵² Bianca Fileborn, "Justice 2.0: Street harassment victims' use of social media and online activism as sites of informal justice." *British Journal of Criminology* 57, no. 6 (2017): 1482-1501.

⁵³ Sara Liao, and Luwei Rose Luqiu. "# MeToo in China: The dynamic of digital activism against sexual assault and harassment in higher education." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 47, no. 3 (2022): 741-764.

⁵⁴ Azi Lev-On, and Nili Steinfeld. "'Objection, your honor': Use of social media by civilians to challenge the criminal justice system." *Social Science Computer Review* 38, no. 3 (2020): 315-333.

⁵⁵ Wuysang, et al. "Viral Justice: Law Enforcement in the Social Media Era."

⁵⁶ Abdul Wahid, Rohadi Rohadi, and Andi Kusyandi. "'No Viral No Justice' Phenomenon in Indonesian Law Enforcement: Acceleration or Threat to Justice?." *Reformasi Hukum* 29, no. 1 (2025): 36-51.

on the robustness of social networks, the credibility of information, and the sustainability of narratives in the face of political and algorithmic challenges.⁵⁷

Thus, the practice of virality as a form of digital activism reflects a paradox. On the one hand, it opens up new space for wider public participation and urges accountability to institutions. But on the other hand, it forms an advocacy pattern that relies heavily on technological mechanisms that do not always favor social justice. In this context, virality is not just a technical phenomenon or a product of popular culture, but a political strategy that is closely related to power relations, the construction of collective identity, and the dynamics of institutional legitimacy in the digital age.

The gap between this study compared to previous research is that previous research tends to separate three major themes. *First*, the democratic policing is discussed from the institutional aspects and formal community engagement.⁵⁸ *Second*, public oversight is often studied through formal mechanisms such as civil oversight agencies⁵⁹ or the use of technology such as body-worn cameras.⁶⁰ *Third*, digital activism focuses more on social media as an arena for protest mobilization or solidarity.⁶¹ This study combines all three: how social media, as a space for digital activism, becomes an informal public surveillance tool that pressures the police to act democratically and accountably. This answers the gap that there have been not many studies that explain the direct connection between digital virality and the legitimacy of state security institutions. This research fills a gap at the empirical level, namely the context of Indonesia as a procedural and conceptual democracy by integrating three major domains (democratic policing, digital activism, and public oversight). Meanwhile, methodologically, this study examines virality not only as a cultural expression, but also as a mechanism of pressure on the institution of power.

⁵⁷ John T. Jost, et al. "How social media facilitates political protest: Information, motivation, and social networks." *Political Psychology* 39, no. 1 (2018): 85-118.

⁵⁸ See Kim, et al. "Does citizen opinion matter? An analysis of police officers' support for democratic policing in South Korea"; Skilling, "Community policing in Kenya: The application of democratic policing principles."

⁵⁹ See Hope Sr, "Civilian Oversight of the Police: The Case of Kenya."

⁶⁰ See Wright, et.al., "Body-worn cameras and representation: What matters when evaluating police use of force?."

⁶¹ See Lim, "Many clicks but little sticks: Social media activism in Indonesia"; Poell, and Van Dijck, "Social media and activist communication."

Legal Legitimacy and Police Communication in Digital Public Space: A Brigadier J case

The National Police's response to the murder of Brigadier J by Ferdy Sambo which captured the public's attention was evident through its various official communication channels. This attention also presents strong public pressure, where police institutions seek to manage legitimacy through official statements, social media posts, and interactions with the mainstream media. Discourse analysis was carried out using the framework of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), especially at the micro level. Four main aspects are the focus of attention, namely the use of neutral diction and official language, labeling practices and delegitimization strategies against criticism, language modalities that affirm positions of power, and the implications of this discourse on the legitimacy of the police in the midst of the dynamics of digital public space

The dynamics of the discourse between the National Police and the public are clearly seen in the responses that appear on social media. Every official upload of the National Police related to the case of Brigadier J, for example, not only serves as an institutional communication channel, but also becomes an arena for legitimacy contestation in the digital space. The repeated claims of transparency, objectivity, and professionalism by the police have triggered a cynical response from the public, who consider these steps to be mere formalities or branding strategies. To show the pattern of interaction, the following table is presented that maps the content of the National Police's posts, the dominant response of the public, and the categories of discourse conflicts that emerge. This presentation helps to underscore how the distance between institutional claims and public perception continues to create tensions, particularly in terms of legitimacy, credibility, and representation of authority.

a) Facebook (July 11–13, 2022)

The following table shows a summary of the interactions between the official Police account on Facebook and the public related to the case of Brigadier J. Each post is analyzed to identify the focus of the Police's message, the public's dominant response, and the category and level of conflict tension that arises. This presentation provides an overview of how the official narrative of the National Police is received, interpreted, or opposed by the digital public, thus reflecting the dynamics of institutional legitimacy in the social media era. The table also emphasizes a consistent pattern of tension between police transparency claims and public skepticism, which is an indicator of the weak communication strategy of institutions in responding to public pressure.

TABLE 6. Police Text Coding – Public

Date	Contents of Police Posts	Dominant Public Response	Categories & Conflict Tensions	Data Source
August 9, 2022	The National Police affirmed its commitment to transparency and revealed the suspect FS.	The public responded with cynicism, saying that the National Police only moved after it went viral.	Conflict of perception & legitimacy tension – the public does not trust transparency.	X/Twitter @DivHumas_Polri
August 11, 2022	Statement of the National Police Chief: professional and transparent investigation.	The public calls it pseudo-transparency.	Credibility conflict – the claim of the National Police was rejected by the public.	X/Twitter @DivHumas_Polri
August 23, 2022	The reconstruction of the case of Brigadier J was attended by Komnas HAM & LPSK.	The public is skeptical, calling it "engineering".	Conflict of representation – the public judges the procedure to be just a formality.	X/Twitter @DivHumas_Polri
August 30, 2022	The National Police appreciates Komnas HAM for calling it transparent.	The public responded negatively, accusing Komnas HAM of not being independent.	Conflicts of authority – external legitimacy are seen as not credible.	X/Twitter @DivHumas_Polri
August 31, 2022	The National Police claims reconstruction is followed by all parties objectively.	The public judged it to be just a "show for the camera".	Conflict of perception & trust – the public rejects claims of objectivity.	X/Twitter @DivHumas_Polri
September 5, 2022	The National Police said the case was attended by an external supervisor.	The public is skeptical, calling the supervisor just a formality.	Supervisory credibility conflict – distrust of external institutions.	X/Twitter @DivHumas_Polri

Date	Contents of Police Posts	Dominant Public Response	Categories & Conflict Tensions	Data Source
September 13, 2022	The National Police claims to continue to be transparent in the legal process.	The public is cynical: "words of commitment continue".	Modal language conflicts – the public rejects repeated claims.	X/Twitter @DivHumas_Polri
19 September 2022	The National Police released the results of the LSI survey that the public trusts the National Police.	The public blames the survey of orders.	Legitimacy conflict – claims of public trust are strongly rejected.	X/Twitter @DivHumas_Polri

From Table 6, it can be seen that the National Police consistently uses neutral diction patterns and official language to affirm its institutional position. Expressions such as "*scientific crime investigation*" and "*objective-accountable*" are used to build an authoritative impression while avoiding the impression of subjectivity. However, this choice of technical language does not necessarily reinforce legitimacy, as the public reinterprets it in a cynical tone, as if the claimed transparency is just a mere formality.

The labeling strategy is also clear. The National Police attached a positive label to him through claims of professionalism, transparency, and openness. However, the public response is in the form of *counter-labeling* that alleges engineering, partisanship, and internal bias. In this context, the symbolic legitimacy built through official language was soon countered by the practice of public delegitimization that took place massively on social media. In addition, the language modality used by the National Police shows a position of power. The use of high-modality words such as "*will*", "*guarantee*", or "*continue to commit*" is intended to reinforce institutional authority. However, this strategy has a countereffect: the public responds with skepticism because it assesses repeated claims without convincing concrete evidence.

The implication is that the National Police's efforts to maintain legitimacy by presenting a joint team, external supervision, or referring to survey results, do not necessarily restore public trust. Instead, the public sees these measures as formalities that reinforce the allegation of un independence. Thus, the discourse pattern that emerges in digital interaction between the National Police and the public is not just information communication, but an arena of legitimacy battle that sharpens the distance between institutional claims and social acceptance.

b) Instagram (@divisihumaspolri, July–August 2022)

Before entering into an in-depth discourse analysis, it is important to first map the dynamics of interaction between the National Police and the public through its official social media, especially in the case of the murder of Brigadier J by Ferdy Sambo which became one of the major turning points in the relationship between the National Police and the public. The following table summarizes ten official uploads of the Public Relations Division of the National Police on Instagram accounts directly related to the issue, along with public responses and categories of conflicts that have arisen.

This mapping shows how the National Police consistently builds claims of legitimacy through a narrative of objectivity, transparency, and the use of technical language such as "*scientific investigation*" or "*digital forensics*". However, the public did not remain silent: in the comment column, there were skeptical responses, accusations of manipulation, and labeling that the National Police's measures were just a strategy to reduce the crisis. The higher the tension of the case, the more you can see the escalation of the discourse conflict between the official claims of the institution and the voices of public criticism.

Thus, this table is not just a list of social media uploads, but a representation of the legitimacy battle between the National Police who seek to maintain an institutional image and the public who test the consistency of these claims through criticism, satire, and *counter-narrative*. This is where the CDA's analysis finds a foothold to read more about how the language, diction, and discourse strategy of the National Police operate in a very open digital space.

TABLE 7. Public Response to Police Instagram Posts

Data Source	Key Issues	Police Claim / Official Narrative	Public Voice	Public Interaction	Conflict Category (Score)
Instagram @divisihumaspolri (13/7/2022)	The National Police Chief forms a special team	The National Police guarantees objective and transparent handling (led by the Deputy Chief of Police)	The public suspects that the special team is just an "internal fortress"	730 👍 , 23 💬	Transparency vs distrust (1)
Instagram @divisihumaspolri (14/7/2022)	Kompolnas Support	Kompolnas appreciates the National Police Chief; objective-transparent claims	Public value support = "pseudo-legitimacy"	575 👍 , 73 💬	External authorizations vs independence criticisms (1)
Instagram @divisihumaspolri (18/7/2022)	IMM Support	IMM appreciates the special team; Hope of independence	Public skeptical, IMM considered "co-opted"	649 👍 , 40 💬	Civil society support vs public distrust (1)

Data Source	Key Issues	Police Claim / Official Narrative	Public Voice	Public Interaction	Conflict Category (Score)
Instagram @divisihumaspolri (19/7/2022)	Deactivation of Ferdy Sambo (Propam)	The National Police Chief appoints the Deputy Chief of Police to take over Propam; Maintain Objectivity	The public is divided: appreciation but suspicious	2088 👍 , 135 🗨	Internal reform vs public skepticism (1)
Instagram @divisihumaspolri (21/7/2022)	Deactivation of other officials	The National Police Chief deactivated Karo Paminal & the South Jakarta Police Chief	The public increasingly demands total transparency	4842 👍 , 474 🗨	Escalation of public pressure (2)
Instagram @divisihumaspolri (24/7/2022)	Forensic CCTV & HP Brigadier J	Labfor conducts scientific investigation	The public waits for results, suspects manipulation	2953 👍 , 325 🗨	Scientific claims vs accusations of manipulation (2)
Instagram @divisihumaspolri (25/7/2022)	Exhumation of Brigadier J	The National Police announces exhumation; Professional Claims	The public is relieved but thinks it's too late	1006 👍 , 91 🗨	Police response vs public pressure (2)
Instagram @divisihumaspolri (27/7/2022)	Re-autopsy	Collaborate with external experts; Commitment to transparency	The public appreciates it, but keep an eye out	1830 👍 , 209 🗨	Objective vs distrust memory (1)
Instagram @divisihumaspolri (10/8/2022)	FS suspect	Mahfud MD appreciated; Assertive Law Enforcement Claims	The public is relieved & begins to believe	3795 👍 , 317 🗨	Public morale victory (0–1)
Instagram @divisihumaspolri (30/8/2022)	LSI Survey	89.4% of the public values the National Police Chief firmly; Claims of Survey Legitimacy	The public is divided: trust vs cynical order survey	Id. at 2358 🗨 👍 .	Claims of legitimacy vs public resistance (1)

Note: Opposition score = 0 (none), 1 (tension), 2 (strong opposition).

The Table 7 shows a pattern of repeated interactions: any official claims of the National Police about objectivity, professionalism, and transparency are immediately met with a skeptical public response. Even when progressive measures such as the formation of special teams, the decommissioning of high-ranking officials, and re-autopsies are carried out, the public continues to test the validity of the narrative through critical commentary, cynicism, and *counter-labeling*. This phenomenon confirms that social media is no longer just a one-way information channel, but rather a discursive arena where institutional legitimacy is openly tested. In other words, the official claims of the National

Police cannot stand alone, but are always negotiated with public voices that appear spontaneously, massively, and virally.

It is from this point that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) finds its relevance. Every choice of diction, labeling strategy, and the use of language modalities by the National Police must be read not only as an official communication practice, but also as an effort to maintain legitimacy in a pressure-laden digital landscape. Furthermore, the discussion was directed at four main aspects of the CDA: neutral diction patterns and official language, labeling and delegitimization strategies for criticism, language modalities and positions of power, and overall implications for police legitimacy.

c) Twitter/X (@DivHumas_Polri, August–September 2022)

The dynamics of the National Police's communication on social media can be seen through various uploads that try to build an image of transparency, moral commitment, and external legitimacy. The National Police has repeatedly emphasized the seriousness of handling the case of Brigadier J by displaying the support of other institutions, promises of disclosure of the case in a transparent manner, as well as technical steps such as re-autopsy and reconstruction. However, in the digital space, the official message is not received passively. The public responded with a variety of tones—ranging from cautious appreciation, skepticism, to sharp sarcasm—that showed the distance between the official narrative and public perception. The following table shows the pattern of interaction, both in the form of engagement, public responses, and representative quotes from netizens.

TABLE 8. Public Response to Police Posts on X/Twitter

Contents of the Post	Engagement (Like/ Comment/ Retweet)	Focus of the Police Message	Public Response Patterns	Tone	Public Representative Quotes
Komnas HAM appreciates the National Police for being transparent	70 / 86 / 21	Legitimize yourself through external support	The public doubts transparency claims	Negative	"Where is transparency from? At the beginning of the case, there were a lot of cover-ups."
The National Police is committed to revealing the case in the light	618 / 625 / 129	Moral promise and commitment	Public skeptical, slow grades	Negative	"The words of commitment continue, but the fact is that it drags on?"
Re-autopsy of Brigadier J's body (video)	76 / 17 / 10	Forensic transparency	Some appreciation, some doubt	Mixture	"It's good to have a re-autopsy, but the results should not be regulated."

Contents of the Post	Engagement (Like/ Comment/ Retweet)	Focus of the Police Message	Public Response Patterns	Tone	Public Representative Quotes
Re-autopsy – proof of the commitment of the National Police	278 / 107 / 46	Affirmation of integrity	Netizens are late	Negative	"Why is it only now a re-autopsy? From the beginning, it should be."
PC (FS's wife) named suspect	457 / 88 / 81	Strict legal action	The public appreciates it, but the sarcasm is slow	Mixture	"Finally! But why is it only now? It's been clear from the past."
Reconstruction of Brigadier J's case (5 min video)	90 / 22 / 8	Procedural transparency	The public considers it a formality	Negative	"The reconstruction is only for the camera, the fact remains dark."
Reconstruction (9 min video continuation)	108 / 48 / 22	Procedural transparency	Netizens satirize imagery	Negative	"A lot of shows, a few facts. The public needs truth, not videos."
LSI survey: public believes the National Police will investigate thoroughly	632 / 1000 / 198	Claims of survey legitimacy	The public is cynical, the survey score is not credible	Negative	"Order survey? In fact, the people don't trust the National Police anymore."

The Table 8 reveals the discursive dynamics that stand out in the communication of the National Police. Textually, the National Police repeatedly uses diction that emphasizes *commitment*, *transparency*, and *procedurality*. Phrases such as "commitment to reveal the case in the light of day" or "re-autopsy as evidence of commitment" display a rhetorical pattern based on moral promise and formal legitimacy. However, the public responded by dismantling the loopholes behind the narrative, for example by calling the promise "protracted" or assessing the Police's move "only after it was too late."

From the perspective of *labeling*, it can be seen that the National Police is trying to frame itself as a professional and open institution by collaborating with external parties such as Komnas HAM or publishing surveys. However, the public response reversed that label through *counter-labeling*, for example by calling the survey a "order" or insinuating the reconstruction as "just for the camera."

In the modality aspect, the National Police uses a lot of normative and confident statements ("*commitment*", "*transparency*", "*thorough investigation*"), which indicates the position of institutional power. However, in the digital public space, this modality is undermined by doubt, sarcasm and cynical tone, which indicates a redistribution of authority: official claims are no longer singular, but must compete with alternative narratives from society. Therefore,

critical discourse analysis shows that the legitimacy of policing is not only built through formal and procedural claims, but is also at stake in the fluid discursive arena on social media. Each official upload becomes an arena for negotiation of meaning between institutions and the public, where trust cannot be forced, but is negotiated through language, response time, and consistency of action.

d) Mainstream media: Kompas, Detik, Tribunnews July - October 2022)

The following table presents a series of news reports from three mainstream media—Detik.com, Kompas.com, and Tribunnews.com—related to the case of Brigadier J. This analysis focuses on how the media reported on the series of events, the National Police's response, and public reaction, while highlighting the framing patterns that emerged from each article. The selection of the 12 items was based on the principle of chronological representation of the case: each key moment in the case, from the initial disclosure to the court verdict, was drawn from each medium to show the dynamics of the interaction between the institutional narrative and public perception. With this number of items, the analysis can cover critical phases in the development of cases, while providing a more comprehensive picture of the legitimacy of police institutions amid public pressure and the virality of information.

TABLE 9. Framing Media (Detik, Kompas, Tribunnews)

Media & Dates	News Headlines	Media Message Focus	Framing Pattern	Public Tone (commentary)	Public Representative Quotes
Seconds (09/07/22) Link	Events for 3 Days Before Brigadier J's Case Was Revealed	The initial official version of the National Police	Procedural legitimacy	Negative	"The classic reason, obviously something is covered up."
Compass (11/07/22) Link	Brigadier J's Family Doubts Police Chronology	Raise family doubts	Public counter-narrative	Negative	"If the family is in doubt, let alone the public."
Tribunnews (13/07/22) Link	National Police Chief: Brigadier J's Case Must Be Disclosed Transparently	The moral commitment of the National Police	Promise & legitimacy	Negative	"Commitment continues, when will the results be?"
Compass (18/07/22) Link	National Police Chief Removes Head of Propam Division Ferdy Sambo	Decisive action by the National Police	Damage limitation	Mixture	"It's nice to be removed, but why is it now?"

Media & Dates	News Headlines	Media Message Focus	Framing Pattern	Public Tone (commentary)	Public Representative Quotes
Seconds (20/07/22) Link	Kombes Leonardo: I Was the One Who Delivered Brigadier J's Body, Not Karo Paminal	Internal clarification of the National Police	Self-defense	Negative	"Who said? I was the one who delivered the body."
Tribunnews (21/07/22) Link	Komnas HAM Investigates Brigadier J Case	External support	Strengthen credibility	Negative	"Komnas HAM can also be regulated."
Compass (02/08/22) Link	National Police Chief Announces Ferdy Sambo as Suspect	A major turning point	Institutional accountability	Positive–Mixed	"Finally! But not only Sambo, others as well."
Seconds (10/08/22) Link	Family Rejects Brigadier Joshua's Autopsy Results	Family rejection	Criticism of independence	Negative	"The results are unbelievable."
Tribunnews (30/08/22) Link	7-hour reconstruction, 51 scenes performed	Procedural transparency	Formalistic	Negative	"A lot of shows, a little bit of facts."
Kompas (19/09/22) Link	National Police Chief Promises Legal Process Without Intervention	Affirm independence	Institutional promise	Negative	"The public doesn't believe it."
Seconds (13/10/22) Link	Brigadier J Doesn't Know the Reason Why Ma'ruf Is Angry with Him	Disclosure of motives	Clarification of the suspect	Negative	"The scapegoat, the main actor is safe."
Compass (13/02/23) Link	Ferdy Sambo Sentenced to Death by the Jakarta District Court	The victory of justice	Peak of accountability	Positive–Mixed	"The punishment is appropriate, but we will see later on appeal."

From the table above, it can be seen that although the National Police is trying to build legitimacy through procedural measures and external support,

the public often responds with skepticism or considers the existence of mere formalities. The National Police use formal and technical diction to affirm accountability, while the public *counter-labels* and emphasizes potential institutional bias. High modalities in official statements such as "guarantee" or "will" affirm the authoritative position of the National Police, but the public response is consistently skeptical of legitimacy tensions. The selection of these 12 media items allows for a more detailed observation of language patterns, framing, and public interaction, so that *the Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) analysis can highlight how institutional texts and media reporting shape the perception of the legitimacy of the National Police in the digital public space.

Based on the analysis of official social media posts by the Indonesian National Police and mainstream media coverage related to the Brigadier J case, this study identifies a consistent pattern of interaction between institutional narratives and public responses. The findings demonstrate a recurring tension between the National Police's claims of transparency and professionalism and the skepticism, criticism, and distrust expressed by the public in digital spaces. The data further indicate that several key moments, particularly the exhumation process and forensic investigations, generated the strongest public reactions and intensified contestation over institutional legitimacy.

To understand this pattern more deeply, it is necessary to conduct a synthesis that summarizes the main trends, the focus of the Police's message, and the public response. This synthesis not only highlights how effectively official narratives build legitimacy, but also identifies areas where public delegitimization appears consistently. Thus, this synthesis is an important introduction before a more detailed linguistic analysis using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, which will examine diction, modalities, and framing strategies as institutional tools in shaping public perception in the digital space.

Data collected from the National Police's official social media and mainstream media coverage show the dynamics of institutional responses and diverse public reactions. Initially, the National Police confirmed the formation of a special team on July 13, 2022 through Instagram @divisihumaspolri, with a focus on enforcing legal procedures and transparency. Although this upload received an engagement of 730 likes and 23 comments, the public responded suspiciously, judging the special team as only an "internal fortress", so it was recorded as a light conflict with a score of 1.

On July 14, 2022, the National Police published Kompolnas' support for the legitimacy of its move, where the official narrative emphasizes objectivity and transparency. The public, however, judged such support as "*pseudo-legitimacy*", reflecting similar tensions (score 1). The support from the IMM on

July 18, 2022 underscored hopes for the independence of the special team, but the public response was skeptical and accused the IMM of being "co-opted", remaining in the category of mild tension.

The deactivation of Ferdy Sambo at Propam on July 19, 2022 and the deactivation of other officials on July 21, 2022 marked an escalation phase. Although the National Police emphasized objectivity through the appointment of the Deputy Chief of Police and administrative actions, the public was torn between appreciation and suspicion, while the pressure for transparency increased significantly, recorded with a tension score of 2 on the act of deactivating other officials.

Analysis of forensic technical measures also shows high tensions. The announcement related to the scientific investigation on July 24, 2022 and the exhumation of Brigadier J on July 25, 2022 received a public response that mixed appreciation and suspicion, highlighting the tension between the institution's scientific claims and allegations of manipulation of results. The re-autopsy announced on July 27, 2022 confirmed the involvement of external experts, but the public remained vigilant in the process, so the conflict was recorded as minor (score 1). The peak of procedural legitimacy came when FS was named as a suspect on August 10, 2022, with the public beginning to believe in the legal actions of the National Police, marking a public moral victory with a score between 0–1. The LSI survey on August 30, 2022 confirmed claims of institutional legitimacy, but the public response remained divided, with some believing and some skeptical of the credibility of the survey, indicating moderate tensions (score 1).

Data from the mainstream media also reinforce the pattern of public response and perception. Kompas.com on August 13, 2022 highlighted the professionalism of the National Police in handling cases, but the public remained skeptical of the objectivity of the procedure, while Tribunnews.com on August 14, 2022 emphasized the exhumation of the body with the involvement of forensic experts, but the public considered the process to be late and formal, indicating higher tension (score 2).

Overall, a synthesis of data from social media and online media shows that while the National Police is trying to build legitimacy through procedural narratives, external support, and expert engagement, the public response remains critical. The tension between institutional claims and public perception marks the democratic dynamics of policing in the digital space, where institutional legitimacy is heavily influenced by narrative virality and perceptions of procedural fairness.

Critical Discourse Analysis of the Brigadier J Case and Police Legitimacy

The murder case of Brigadier J involving former police official Ferdy Sambo became one of the most significant institutional crises faced by the Indonesian National Police in the digital era. The case attracted massive public attention and generated intense scrutiny across social media platforms, mainstream media, and civil society organizations. In responding to the crisis, the Indonesian National Police relied heavily on institutional communication through official channels such as Instagram, Twitter/X, Facebook, press conferences, and statements disseminated through mainstream media outlets including Kompas, Detik, and Tribunnews. These communication practices were intended to maintain institutional legitimacy and demonstrate procedural accountability amid escalating public distrust.

This study employs Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, particularly at the micro-textual level, to examine how institutional language, narrative framing, and communication strategies were constructed by the police during the Brigadier J case. Fairclough argues that discourse is not merely a linguistic practice but also a form of social practice closely connected to relations of power, ideology, and legitimacy.⁶² Through this perspective, police communication can be understood as a strategic effort to shape public perception and preserve institutional authority during a legitimacy crisis.

The findings indicate that the National Police consistently adopted formal, technical, and bureaucratic diction in its official communication. Expressions such as "special investigation team," "scientific investigation," "objective and accountable process," and "professional law enforcement" appeared repeatedly across institutional statements and social media posts. The use of this technical language reflects an institutional attempt to project neutrality, professionalism, and procedural legitimacy. According to van Dijk⁶³, institutional discourse often utilizes formalized language structures to reinforce authority and maintain social control. In the Brigadier J case, such language functioned as a mechanism to affirm that the police remained committed to legal procedures despite mounting public criticism.

However, public responses on social media demonstrated that these institutional narratives were frequently interpreted with skepticism. Rather than strengthening legitimacy, the repetitive use of procedural language generated

⁶² Norman Fairclough. *Media Discourse*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1995).

⁶³ Teun A van Dijk. *Discourse and Power*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

perceptions that the police were attempting to avoid substantive moral responsibility. Netizens often viewed terms such as “transparent investigation” or “objective process” as rhetorical devices intended to protect institutional image rather than reveal the truth. This reaction illustrates the growing gap between institutional communication and public expectations in the digital era.

The analysis also reveals the presence of labeling and delegitimization strategies within police discourse. Official statements frequently characterized criticism circulating on social media as “speculative narratives,” “misleading information,” or “wild public opinions.” Such labels functioned discursively to position the police as rational and authoritative actors while portraying critical public voices as irrational or uninformed. From the perspective of CDA, labeling practices constitute an important mechanism of symbolic power because they shape how social actors and competing narratives are perceived within public discourse.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, these delegitimization strategies proved counterproductive within the context of democratic policing. Instead of restoring public trust, attempts to dismiss criticism intensified perceptions that the police institution was defensive and resistant to accountability. In digital public spaces, social media users actively challenged institutional narratives by producing counter-discourses, satire, memes, and critical commentary. This phenomenon reflects what Castells⁶⁵ describes as the transformation of communication power in the network society, where institutional authority can no longer monopolize public narratives.

Another important finding concerns the use of language modality to reinforce institutional power. The National Police repeatedly employed high-modality expressions such as “will definitely be investigated,” “will be processed according to the law,” and “the institution remains committed to transparency.” Linguistically, these statements convey certainty, authority, and institutional control. Fairclough⁶⁶ notes that modality in discourse reflects the speaker’s degree of authority and ideological positioning. In this case, the police used strong modalities to demonstrate legal certainty and maintain confidence in institutional procedures.

However, public responses indicate that legalistic certainty alone was insufficient to satisfy societal demands. While the police emphasized procedural

⁶⁴ Norman Fairclough. *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁶⁵ See Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*.

⁶⁶ See Norman Fairclough. *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. (London: Routledge, 2003).

correctness, the public demanded empathy, moral accountability, and recognition of institutional wrongdoing. This mismatch highlights a broader tension between formal legality and substantive legitimacy. Democratic policing requires not only procedural compliance but also communicative responsiveness and sensitivity to public concerns.⁶⁷

The dynamics of digital communication further intensified this legitimacy crisis. Social media transformed institutional communication from a one-way transmission of information into an open arena of discursive contestation. Every official upload by the National Police immediately generated public reactions, reinterpretations, and criticisms. Consequently, institutional narratives could no longer function as singular authoritative truths. Instead, legitimacy became continuously negotiated through interaction between institutional actors and digital publics.

One of the most important discursive developments in the Brigadier J case was the emergence of the phrase “no viral, no justice.” This phrase became widely circulated on social media and symbolized public distrust toward formal law enforcement mechanisms. The slogan reflected a growing perception that justice would only be pursued seriously when cases gained massive public attention and digital virality. In socio-legal terms, this phenomenon demonstrates how public legitimacy increasingly depends upon visibility, media pressure, and digital participation rather than solely on institutional legal procedures.

The initial police narrative concerning a “shootout” scenario also contributed significantly to the erosion of public trust. As inconsistencies emerged and alternative evidence circulated online, public skepticism intensified. The contradiction between official narratives and emerging facts created what Habermas⁶⁸ refers to as a legitimacy crisis, in which public confidence in institutional authority deteriorates due to perceived inconsistencies between institutional claims and social reality.

Mainstream media coverage further amplified this discursive contestation. News outlets such as Kompas, Detik, and Tribunnews frequently juxtaposed official police statements with critical responses from victims’ families, civil society organizations, and online communities. This media framing contributed to the construction of competing narratives regarding transparency,

⁶⁷ Ian Loader, and Aogán Mulcahy. *Policing and the Condition of England: Memory, Politics and Culture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶⁸ Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

accountability, and institutional credibility. As McNair⁶⁹ argues, media institutions play a central role in shaping public understanding of political and legal legitimacy in democratic societies.

The findings of this study also reveal that institutional legitimacy in the digital era is highly dependent upon communication strategies capable of fostering public engagement and trust. The police relied heavily on procedural discourse and formalistic communication, yet these strategies failed to address emotional and moral dimensions of public concern. Public criticism was driven not only by doubts regarding procedural fairness but also by perceptions of institutional arrogance, lack of empathy, and delayed accountability.

From a democratic policing perspective, the Brigadier J case demonstrates the limitations of defensive and legalistic institutional communication. Democratic policing requires transparency, accountability, public participation, and responsiveness to societal criticism.⁷⁰ In the context of digital communication, legitimacy cannot be maintained solely through institutional claims of professionalism or legality. Instead, legitimacy must be continuously constructed through meaningful engagement with public concerns and transparent communication practices.

Furthermore, this case illustrates how social media has transformed power relations between state institutions and citizens. Digital platforms provide opportunities for citizens to monitor, criticize, and challenge institutional authority in real time. As a result, police legitimacy is increasingly shaped not only by institutional performance but also by public discourse circulating in digital spaces. This transformation requires law enforcement institutions to reconsider conventional communication strategies that prioritize image management over substantive accountability.

In conclusion, the Brigadier J case reveals that institutional legitimacy in the digital era is fundamentally discursive and relational. The Indonesian National Police attempted to preserve legitimacy through procedural narratives, technical language, and claims of transparency; however, these efforts were consistently challenged by skeptical public responses and counter-discourses on social media. The case demonstrates that democratic policing in contemporary society requires more than legal compliance and formal communication. It demands openness, empathy, participatory engagement, and the willingness to respond substantively to public criticism. Ultimately, legitimacy in the digital age cannot be imposed through institutional authority alone, but must be

⁶⁹ Brian McNair. *An Introduction to Political Communication*. 6th ed. (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁷⁰ See Manning. *Democratic Policing in a Changing World*.

continuously negotiated within the dynamic and contested arena of digital public discourse.

Conclusion

Finally, this study concluded that police legitimacy in the digital era is increasingly shaped by the interaction between institutional communication and public discourse on social media. In the Brigadier J case, the Indonesian National Police's emphasis on procedural transparency proved insufficient to restore public trust, as such claims were widely interpreted as formal rhetoric that reinforced perceptions of distance between the institution and society. The emergence of the "no viral, no justice" phenomenon further illustrates how digital virality and public pressure significantly influence law enforcement responsiveness and shape perceptions of justice in contemporary Indonesia.

The findings suggest that police legitimacy can no longer be understood solely as a product of legal or procedural performance, but must be viewed as a continuously negotiated discursive process between institutions and the digital public. This study therefore highlights the need for democratic policing to recognize social media as a critical arena of accountability and public oversight. Practically, it calls for a shift from one-way, formalistic communication toward more dialogical, transparent, and empathetic engagement, supported by credible independent actors. Ultimately, sustaining institutional legitimacy in the digital age requires genuine public engagement and responsiveness to socially amplified demands for justice.

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