

## Viral Justice: Law Enforcement in the Social Media Era

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**Abstract:** *The phenomenon of viral justice has significantly transformed the law enforcement process in the era of social media and warrants thorough explanation and evaluation. However, previous research has failed to provide a comprehensive discussion of this phenomenon. This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to elucidate and analyze how the characteristics, factors, and implications of viral justice affect the law enforcement process in the social media era, while also addressing the deficiencies in prior studies. The findings of this study unveil three significant conditions for the viral justice phenomenon that have emerged and evolved during the social media era. Firstly, the features of legal violation cases that go viral on social media are complex, encompassing a wide spectrum from minor to major infractions. Secondly, the spread of law enforcement cases on social media is influenced by contextual factors, such as ineffective law enforcement, unaddressed reports, and a perceived lack of transparency in law enforcement. Thirdly, the viral justice phenomenon has significantly impacted the image of law enforcement in the social media era, leading to increasingly complex and contextual perceptions. This is evident in the growing public distrust, delegitimization, and negative associations with the concept of justice. This study also underscores the necessity of investigating the public's motivations for sharing their interactions with law enforcement on social media.*

## Introduction

In this study, the viral justice is defined as a catalyst in the informal justice-seeking process that disseminates thoughts or experiences about legal events via social media. Hughes (2004) believes that viral justice results from media convergence, which has caused preferences in the law enforcement process to become more sophisticated and contextualized. In Indonesia, incidents of law violations have gone viral on social media over the last five years, including five cases of sexual harassment, six cases of murder, and seven cases of viral crimes in Solo City (Kompas, 2020; Sentralberita, 2021; Jatengid, 2021). According to Wood et al. (2019), this phenomenon occurs due to the implications of a disproportionate law enforcement procedure, whereby people seek to spread their ideas or criminal experiences to elicit compassion, action, or fair treatment. Therefore, the examination of the viral phenomenon of justice is critical as it has altered public views and meanings of law enforcement choices in the social media era (Subarkah et al., 2023; Sudar et al., 2024).

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The term "viral" has become one of the most frequently used phrases in the age of social media (Agustina, 2020). Viral is an informational communication activity that emerged and evolved within the social media era (Han et al., 2020). It refers to the rapid transmission of information that seeks to influence people's perspectives on social, legal, political, and economic matters. Social media platforms provide individuals with the means to express and analyze the social realities within their communities, including their adherence to principles, norms, and punishments (Bernatta & Kartika, 2020; Jahn & Schwartz, 2024). This is evident in the dissemination of legal issues via the Internet, which has become a popular avenue for seeking legal justice in the social media era. Sjoraida et al. (2021) also noted that the spread of legal cases on social media has evolved from being simply an informative communication practice to becoming a potential and rational model, increasingly favored by the public, making it critical to analyze legal studies and media culture.

So far, studies on the spread of legal cases in social media have exclusively focused on the official use of social media platforms to advocate for principles of justice (Blevins et al., 2019; Larasati & Fernando, 2023; Strand, 2022). Strand (2022) argues that spreading law violations through social media is a form of public protest against the disproportionate formal law enforcement system. Furthermore, research on the dissemination of legal issues on social media has centered on normative concepts of legal justice (Rae, 2020; Moernaut et al., 2018; Sawaoka & Monin, 2018). Moernaut et al., (2018) asserts that social media has become a platform for articulating the concept of judicial justice in both value and practice. However, existing research on the spread of legal cases on social media does not adequately address the constant and proportional influence of media consumption on the law enforcement process (Dolliver et al., 2018; Boateng & Kaiser, 2019; Lev-On & Steinfeld, 2020).

The emergence of law enforcement in the social media era has led to a trend in seeking justice through the dissemination of information and experiences related to legal violations (Nur Muhammad et al., 2022). Consequently, it is imperative to delve into the phenomenon of viral justice, exploring and analyzing it comprehensively. This study aims to address three pivotal questions central to the discussion of this phenomenon. First, what are the defining characteristics of law violation cases that become viral on social media? Second, what factors influence the proliferation of viral justice phenomena on social media? Third, how does the viral nature of justice impact the law enforcement process in the social media era? In light of these inquiries, this study posits that the viral justice phenomenon not only represents a form of evaluative expression disseminated through social media but also presents a viable and rational alternative for navigating the contentious landscape of law enforcement. In essence, the viral justice phenomenon transcends mere digital communication and interaction, serving as a means to evaluate and potentially transform the law enforcement process in the era of social media.

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The era of social media has brought about substantial changes in the values and decision-making processes of law enforcement in cases of law violations. According to Wood et al. (2019), the viral phenomena of justice that have emerged and evolved in the social media era have significantly influenced the dynamic nature of the law enforcement process, thus making it imperative to explain and evaluate these changes. However, previous research on the dissemination of cases of law violations on social media has been limited to three contexts: social media as a platform for fighting for justice, the concept of normative legal justice, and media consumption of the law enforcement process. In other words, studies on this topic have not been extensive. Given the complex impact of the viral justice phenomenon on the law enforcement process in the social media era, this study not only aims to address the shortcomings of previous research but also focuses on explaining the characteristics, factors, and implications of the viral of justice phenomenon on the law enforcement process in the social media era.

### **Method**

This study was conducted at a time when Indonesians preferred to share their knowledge and experiences regarding cases of law violations on social media rather than reporting or bringing them to formal normative law. This study employs three considerations to explain the characteristics, factors, and implications of the viral justice phenomenon in social media. Firstly, spreading justice via the Internet is a critical subject that has received little attention in legal and media studies. Secondly, due to the highly contextualized forms and elements of the viral justice phenomena, the motivations behind the phenomenon must be explained and evaluated. Thirdly, the phenomenon of viral justice, which began and developed throughout the era of social media, has had a significant impact on the law enforcement process, rendering it more dynamic, effective, and efficient. These three factors serve as the foundation for this study, which aims to explain and examine the viral justice phenomenon that has formed and developed during the social media era.

This is a descriptive qualitative study that employs a normative legal case method. The primary data for this study consisted of excerpts from descriptions of internet news texts related to incidents of law violations. The data were gathered by thoroughly examining 1,300 internet news pieces using the Google search term "viral law violation news in Indonesia". The process of searching for and reading internet news texts began on January 20, 2024, and continued until February 19. The internet news was selected and read immediately, with a focus on the headlines. The reading process yielded 619 online news articles about the characteristics of law violation cases that have gone viral on social media, 360 online news articles about the factors influencing the emergence of the viral justice phenomenon in the social media era, and 321 online news articles about the implications of viral justice on the law enforcement process. Secondary data for this study was collected by reading books, websites, and journals pertinent to the research topic.

The data analysis was based on the process proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994), which focuses on three processes. First, data reduction is a procedure that organizes data into a more systematic form based on classification according to the forms, factors, and implications that the data indicates. Second, data verification is the process of conceptually summarizing a reduced dataset. Third, data description exhibits data that has been thematically defined and then displayed as a table, including verified quotes from online news texts relevant to the debate. After completing these three steps, the next step was conducting inductive data analysis as a foundation for interpreting the acquired data. Data interpretation involves reflecting and restating the data to correspond with the obtained data's forms, aspects, and implications. The technique and analysis phases allowed the researchers to conclude by explaining the studied phenomenon (Galuh Larasati et al., 2023).

## **Results and Discussion**

The viral justice phenomenon is an important movement to understand to examine its characteristics, factors, and implications for the process and manifestation of fair law enforcement in the social media era. The findings of this study not only explain the form of viral legal cases in Indonesia but also examine the factors and implications of the viral justice phenomenon on the process and law enforcement in Indonesia during the social media era. The context can be observed through the three major conclusions below.

### **Characteristics of Viral Law Violation Cases**

The characteristics of law violation instances that have gone viral on social media are complex. Ariyani et al. (2023) claim that instances of legal violations that have gone viral on social media demonstrate the complexities of minor, moderate, and severe violations of the law. Table 1 provides a more detailed explanation of the characteristics of incidents of legal violations that have gone viral on social media.

**Table 1.** The Characteristics of Viral Law Violation Cases

<b>Form</b>	<b>Narration</b>
Sexual abuse	Because she did not know where to report, MS ultimately put down the case of bullying and sexual harassment she faced in a letter that later went viral on Twitter and social media in early September 2021. After it became viral, only then did KPI and other parties seek to follow up on this case (Chaterine & Prabowo, 2021).
Rape	In early October 2021, the case of three children being raped by their biological father dominated headlines. This instance was revealed immediately by the

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	mother of three children in a media report. When the case became viral, the East Luwu Police in South Sulawesi opened a new investigation into the alleged rape of the three girls (Chaterine & Prabowo, 2021).
Persecution	A group of young males were detained when their crime spread on social media. Of the three culprits, one is still 17 years old or younger. Klojen Police Chief, Police Commissioner Domingos Ximenes, revealed that the matter was made public following a viral post regarding the actions of a group of juveniles who accused other teenagers of persecuting their younger brothers (Midaada, 2022).
Stabbing	The police have finally apprehended the suspects in the stabbing and persecution of a man with the initials EYW (26) on Jalan Bunga Lili RT 10 RW 06, Bintaro, Pesanggrahan, South Jakarta. CCTV cameras positioned across the area documented the victim's persecution. The video footage became popular on social media after the Instagram account @junet. Jakarta released it on Tuesday, September 20, 2022 (Bustomi & Arbi, 2022).
Theft	Tambora Police successfully apprehended three culprits involved in the theft and violence against two expedition workers on Jalan Pintu Kecil II, Roa Malaka, Tambora, West Jakarta. The incident on Sunday, May 22, 2022, went viral on multiple social media platforms, including Tiktok (Pristiwa News, 2022).

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Source: Online news via Google.

Table 1 depicts the features of cases of law violations that have gone viral on social media and influenced the criminal justice process. The table also presents three crucial circumstances for the features of law violations that have gone viral on social media. First, instances of sexual harassment are legal offenses that often go viral on social media, as described by Chaterine & Prabowo (2021). Second, incidents of persecution are legal violations that have gone viral on social media, according to Midaada (2022). Third, theft cases are legal violations that have often gone viral on social media, as reported by Pristiwa News (2022). The three characteristics of these cases show that viral cases of legal violations on social media take on a complicated form, ranging from light, moderate, and severe violations of the law. The spread of law

violations via the internet has also significantly impacted the law enforcement process.

The viral justice phenomenon that emerges and grows on social media is a form of activism that has the potential to expedite the law enforcement process in a favorable way. This context arises because the dissemination of cases of legal violations on social media, in addition to providing information (Fernando et al., 2023), serves as a catalytic expression, offering victims an alternative means to seek justice in a law enforcement process that is frequently slow and contentious. According to Wood et al., (2019), the dissemination of cases of legal violations on social media has become an alternative method used by victims of criminal acts to seek and garner sympathy from the public for the law enforcement process they are undergoing. Therefore, the dissemination of cases of legal violations on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook is an alternative method used by individuals and victims to gain access to and encourage the law enforcement process in a more proportional manner.

In the era of social media, access to and law enforcement processes have become more diverse in applying proportional justice principles. According to Bernatta and Kartika (2020), the dissemination of instances of law violations through the Internet has created alternative preferences for audiences in the pursuit of justice in the social media era, serving as a catalytic expression. This assertion is further supported by Madrid et al., (2020), who contend that the proliferation of cases of legal infractions represents a form of active audience engagement in response to a sluggish or contentious law enforcement system. For instance, journalists at Spanish universities have employed the viral concept to combat significant gender violence on social media platforms (Madrid et al., 2020). Therefore, the phenomenon of viral justice, which has become widespread in the social media age, is influenced by law enforcement procedures that are often slow and contentious. Consequently, audiences and victims prefer to share their experiences regarding violations of the law via social media.

### **Factors Influencing the Rise and Spread of Law Violation Cases**

The spread of legal violations on social media is driven by contextual variables rather than simply appearing and developing. According to Firdaus et al. (2018), disseminating examples of law violations on social media is impacted in no small part by problematic law enforcement elements. This context is also apparent in Table 2, which illustrates the factors influencing the spread of law violation cases on social media.

**Table 2.** Factors Influencing the Rise and Spread of Law Violation Cases

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Narration</b>
Ineffective Laws	So, if it does not go viral, the law is ineffective. Cases that go viral tend to be resolved quickly. This

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	is undoubtedly a problem that we (the police) must investigate to see why it occurs," Listyo stated at the coordination conference for the analysis and evaluation of the General Supervisory Inspectorate (Itwasum) of the Police in Yogyakarta on Friday. (17/12). (CNN Indonesia, 2021).
Reports that are not responded to	Then, one netizen responded to the @DivHumas_Polri account's tweet. One of them is @v_yudhistira. He believed that the police ignored his family members' reports when they were victims of criminal offenses. According to his story, his grandmother experienced a criminal act (Hidayat & Simbolon, 2020).
Public disappointment toward law enforcement	Issues on social media have a significant impact, especially if they are related to community problems. And #PercumaLaporPolisi is an honest statement of the public's dissatisfaction with the numerous unprofessional police officers, particularly those processing public complaints. Therefore, it has gotten a lot of support (Sukowati, 2022).
Slow response from law enforcement	He stated that the issue of people spreading crimes on social media was caused by a variety of factors, including police personnel's perceived slowness and lack of responsiveness. In this environment, the police should not be seen as less predictive and responsive (Lubabah, 2021).
Law enforcement is not transparent.	The police's enforcement of the law is less transparent, nonetheless discriminatory and indiscriminate. As a result, there is a risk that the police would question their professionalism and responsibility, prompting people to seek social media support first to ensure that their legal efforts are addressed by the police (Rezkisari, 2021).

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Source: Online news via Google.

Table 2 presents the factors that influence the spread of legal violation cases on social media, along with three critical contexts for the primary factors influencing the spread of law violation instances on social media. According to CNN Indonesia (2021), inadequate law enforcement contributes to the spread of law violation cases on social media. Additionally, Hidayat & Simbolon (2020) suggest that unaddressed reports by law enforcement also play a role in the dissemination of law violation incidents on social media. Furthermore, Rezkisari (2021) reports that the lack of transparency in law enforcement contributes to the spread of law violation cases on social media. These findings indicate that contextual factors, such as ineffective law enforcement, unaddressed reports, and lack of transparency in law enforcement, significantly influence the spread of law violation incidents on social media.

The proliferation of the viral justice phenomenon on social media can largely be attributed to law enforcement's failure to ensure fair legal procedures and judgments. Gould (2022) further asserts that legal dysfunction has sparked numerous societal debates and given rise to an alternative approach to seeking justice that deviates from the norm. The increasing instances of law enforcement mismanagement and limited access (Musawwamah, 2020; Suka & Gunarto, 2018) have contributed to the surge in legal infractions being publicized on social media, reflecting a widespread consensus on the imperfections of legal processes and flawed decisions (Abdillah et al., 2023; Mulkan, 2021; Shortland & Shortland, 2020). In other words, the rise of the viral justice phenomenon on social media is affected by legal dysfunction in the implementation process, which is regarded as delayed, less responsive, and significantly less transparent in revealing situations of legal violation. In addition to hurting public trust, this legal dysfunction is a major element in the rise of the viral of justice phenomenon on social media.

The lack of dedication by law enforcement in implementing fair law enforcement has played a significant role in the rise of the viral justice phenomenon in the social media era. Viral justice serves as an expressive catalyst and an evaluation of the process, highlighting law enforcement's failure to achieve legal proportionality. According to Lim (2018), the dissemination of public information and experiences concerning the viral law enforcement process on social media is influenced by the public's low level of trust in law enforcement's ability to address the legal challenges they encounter. In essence, the emergence of the viral justice phenomenon on social media not only depicts the process of disproportionate law enforcement but also evaluates law enforcement's lack of commitment to fulfilling legal duties. This backdrop is exemplified by the viral hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi, which signifies public dissatisfaction with unprofessional police personnel.

### **The Implications of the Viral of Justice in the Law Enforcement Process**

The phenomenon of viral justice has not only created an alternative path but also complex and contextual consequences in the law enforcement process in the social media era. Grecya dan Yahya (2022) also stated that the broadcasting of content on social media has the potential to construct a social



vision and deconstruct the process and application of contentious values and norms. This framework may also be seen in Table 3, which depicts the implications of viral justice in enforcing law violations in the era of social media.

**Table 3.** The Implications of the Viral of Justice in Law Enforcement

<b>Implications</b>	<b>Narration</b>
Public distrust	So, there's no need to wait for it to go viral in the media before taking action. The people may not fully trust the police because they believe police officers' integrity in law enforcement is less independent, less transparent, selective, and indiscriminate (Sukowati, 2022).
Delegitimization of law enforcement	At the end of 2021, a new phenomenon in the digital space emerged that is highly intriguing: the digital space has become a law enforcement tool. This concept occurs in reaction to the phrase "no viral, no justice," which is displayed to the National Police as criticism or input (Habsy, 2022).
Crisis of trust in law enforcement	The treatment of the rape case of three children by their biological father in East Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi, became the pinnacle of public dissatisfaction with the Indonesian National Police (Polri) organization. The case stalled in 2019 and came to the public after going viral on social media in early October 2021. The campaign with the hashtag "it's useless to report the police" quickly became a hot topic on Twitter, demonstrating the public's lack of trust in National law enforcement (Putra, 2021).
The death of public hope	The hashtag phenomenon #PercumaLaporPolisi and #SatuHariSatuOknum have also recently been trending on social media. The former Banten Police Chief then asked his workers to embrace all feedback and evaluate themselves using these hashtags. This is the moment for us to improve, clean up, and perform better to satisfy the community's expectations (Putra, 2021).
Negative perceptions of justice	Police officers must take all public reports seriously. This is extremely important because of the public's perceptions of the police. Furthermore, follow the

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hashtag	#PercumaLaporPolisi,
#SatuHariSatuOknum,	and #NoViralNoJustice
(Ekspres, 2021).	

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Source: Online news via Google.

Table 3 illustrates the increasingly complex and contextual consequences of viral justice in the law enforcement process in the social media era. The table outlines three significant implications. Firstly, according to Sukowati (2022), the viral spread of justice has normalized popular cynicism towards law enforcement's commitment to upholding the concept of legal justice. Secondly, Habsy (2022) reports that the viral spread of justice has delegitimized law enforcement in handling cases of law violations. Thirdly, as noted by Ekspres (2021), the viral spread of justice has led to a negative public perception of the concept of justice in the law enforcement process. These implications suggest that the spread of justice has significantly influenced the public image of law enforcement in the social media era, directing it towards a more complex and contextual trajectory, starting with the the formation of public distrust, delegitimization, and negative perceptions of the concept of justice.

The emergence and evolution of Internet-based activism for justice in the social media era have significant implications for preferences in the legal process and just legal decisions. According to Alamsyah dan Putra (2023), people's decision to share their knowledge and experiences regarding social and legal events is believed to expedite the process and law enforcement by emphasizing the dissemination of content on social media. In addition to significantly impacting the law enforcement process, social media can also influence public perception and law enforcement responses to cases of law infractions. Gugule & Mesra (2022) note that in the era of social media, the law enforcement procedure has undergone a significant transformation, especially when dealing with viral cases of law violations. The implication is that individuals have a greater opportunity to report and resolve legal issues by publishing cases online rather than reporting and going through traditional legal processes.

Based on the viral justice phenomenon in the social media era, the law enforcement procedure may lead to negative public perceptions of the concept of normative legal justice in the future. According to Amin et al. (2024), this situation results from a decrease in public trust in the law enforcement process, which is increasingly controversial and excessive, leading to the delegitimization of the normative process. Thus, choosing to highlight cases of law violations based on their virality is a potential and sensible strategy to seek justice in the era of social media (Airlangga PH et al., 2024; Akbar, 2011; Barkah, 2017). The viral justice phenomenon that has emerged on social media has given the community a new approach to addressing instances of legal violations encountered in the social media era. Building viral opinions on social

media can affect perceptions and generate immense moral support from the community as a new method or concept in advocating for a more effective and efficient law enforcement process.

## Conclusion

The study presents three key findings about the growth of the viral justice phenomenon in the social media era. Firstly, the features of viral legal violation cases on social media are complex, ranging from minor to major violations. Secondly, the spread of law enforcement cases on social media is influenced by contextual factors, such as dysfunctional law enforcement, unresponsive reports, and perceived lack of transparency in law enforcement. Thirdly, the viral justice phenomenon has influenced the image of law enforcement in the social media era in an increasingly complex and contextual manner, leading to the formation of public distrust, delegitimization, and negative perceptions of the concept of justice. Based on these three findings, it is evident that the viral phenomenon of justice is not only a subjective evaluative expression, but also a potential and rational choice for addressing the shortcomings of the contentious legal system.

The conclusions of this study differ from those of previous studies. Thus far, studies on the relationship between law enforcement and social media have focused solely on the context of communication and engagement in the law enforcement process. However, the outcomes of this study suggest that the distribution of law violation cases on social media is an important and prospective path for attaining justice. The results of this study are expected to provide an alternative advocacy model in legal studies. This study also has limitations in explaining viral law violation cases in the media space via online media coverage. Therefore, it has not examined the motivations of people who choose to share their experiences in law violation situations. However, the study's limitations are likely to contribute to future research, particularly to those that seek to investigate the motivations of the public in choosing to spread their experiences of legal violations on social media.

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