



Trial by Social Media and the Transformation of Legal Culture in Indonesian Criminal Justice

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed public participation in Indonesia's criminal justice system. Digital platforms no longer function solely as channels for communication but have also become spaces where public opinion is formed and judgments regarding criminal cases are expressed before judicial proceedings are concluded. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as *trial by social media*, raises significant concerns regarding the presumption of innocence, due process of law, and judicial independence. This study examines how *trial by social media* has transformed legal culture within the Indonesian criminal justice system. Employing normative legal research, this article adopts statutory, conceptual, and case approaches by analysing relevant legislation, legal principles, selected criminal cases, and contemporary legal scholarship. The study argues that social media has altered legal culture by shifting public trust from formal judicial institutions toward digital public opinion, thereby increasing pressure on law enforcement authorities and influencing perceptions of justice. The findings demonstrate that the transformation of legal culture requires a balanced legal response that preserves public participation while safeguarding fundamental principles of criminal justice. Strengthening digital legal awareness and reinforcing due process are essential to maintaining the legitimacy and integrity of Indonesia's criminal justice system.



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INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has transformed the way society accesses, interprets, and responds to legal information. The rapid expansion of social media has created a digital public sphere where criminal cases are no longer discussed exclusively through formal legal institutions or conventional media but are continuously debated by the public through online platforms. Information concerning investigations, arrests, and court proceedings can now be disseminated within minutes, enabling public participation in legal discourse on an unprecedented scale. While this development strengthens public access to legal information and institutional accountability, it also creates new challenges for the administration of criminal justice (Castells, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

One of the most significant consequences of this transformation is the emergence of trial by social media. Public opinion is increasingly formed before judicial institutions complete the adjudication process, allowing individuals involved in criminal proceedings to be judged through viral narratives, online discussions, and mass dissemination of digital content. Unlike criminal proceedings, which are governed by evidentiary rules and procedural safeguards, judgments formed through social media are frequently influenced by emotional reactions, incomplete information, and algorithm-driven visibility. Trottier (2017) describes this phenomenon as a form of digital vigilantism, in which citizens utilise digital platforms to create a parallel mechanism of social justice that may operate independently of formal law enforcement.

Indonesia has experienced similar developments in several high-profile criminal cases that attracted extensive public attention. Public discussions surrounding the cases involving Ferdy Sambo, Mario Dandy Satriyo, and the renewed scrutiny of the Vina Cirebon case illustrate how digital platforms may shape public perceptions of guilt and innocence while criminal proceedings remain ongoing. In many instances, social sanctions emerge long before legal sanctions are imposed, creating substantial public pressure on investigators, prosecutors, and judges. Although public participation may encourage transparency and accountability, excessive digital intervention also raises concerns regarding the protection of the presumption of innocence, due process of law, and judicial independence, which constitute fundamental principles of criminal justice recognised under international human rights law.

From a socio-legal perspective, this phenomenon reflects more than a technological shift; it demonstrates a transformation in legal culture. Friedman (1975) defines legal culture as the values, attitudes, and expectations that society holds toward law and legal institutions, influencing how law operates in practice. Building upon Friedman's framework, recent scholarship has introduced the concept of Digital Legal Culture, arguing that social media has fundamentally altered how legal knowledge is disseminated, interpreted, and legitimised in contemporary society. Rather than relying solely on courts and legal professionals, legal meanings are increasingly negotiated through digital interactions involving online communities, influencers, journalists, and ordinary citizens.

Existing scholarship has examined the relationship between digital technology and law from various perspectives, including cyber law, digital vigilantism, freedom of expression, and digital legal culture. Trottier (2017) explains how digital platforms facilitate citizen-led forms of social control that may function as parallel mechanisms of justice, while Sholehudin (2025) conceptualises the emergence of Digital Legal Culture as an expansion of Friedman's theory in response to the digitalisation of legal awareness and behaviour. Nevertheless, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to analysing trial by social media specifically within the context of Indonesia's criminal justice system. Existing studies primarily focus on the transformation of legal culture in general or on digital participation without examining how public judgment formed through social media affects the implementation of fundamental criminal procedure principles, particularly the presumption of innocence, due process of law, and judicial independence.

Against this background, this article examines trial by social media through the perspective of Friedman's legal culture theory to explain how digital public participation reshapes legal culture within Indonesia's criminal justice system. Unlike previous studies that conceptualise digital legal culture at a general level, this study focuses on the interaction between online public judgment and formal criminal justice institutions. By integrating legal theory, statutory analysis, and selected criminal cases in Indonesia, this article seeks to explain how trial by social media influences legal legitimacy, public trust, and the implementation of criminal justice in the digital era.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed normative legal research to examine trial by social media and its implications for legal culture within Indonesia's criminal justice system. The research adopted a statute approach, conceptual approach, and case approach. The statute approach was used to analyse relevant legislation governing criminal justice, while the conceptual approach examined Lawrence M. Friedman's theory of legal culture. The case approach analysed selected criminal cases in Indonesia that attracted extensive public attention through social media.

Primary legal materials consisted of legislation and international legal instruments, while secondary legal materials included scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, court decisions, and official reports. The collected legal materials were analysed qualitatively using descriptive and analytical methods to evaluate the influence of trial by social media on legal culture and its implications for Indonesia's criminal justice system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Media and the Transformation of Indonesia's Digital Public Sphere

The rapid development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the relationship between society and the criminal justice system in Indonesia. Criminal cases are no longer communicated exclusively through judicial proceedings and conventional news media but are simultaneously discussed, interpreted, and evaluated across various digital platforms. The emergence

of social media has altered the production and dissemination of legal information by enabling individuals to participate directly in public discussions concerning investigations, prosecutions, and judicial decisions. Consequently, legal discourse is no longer monopolised by state institutions and professional journalists but is increasingly shaped through continuous interactions among internet users. Castells (2010) argues that the network society has reconfigured the production and circulation of information through digital communication, while Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explain that social media transforms users from passive recipients of information into active participants in content creation and dissemination.

Indonesia provides an important context for examining this transformation because of its extensive digital connectivity and high level of social media adoption. The latest reports published by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) and DataReportal demonstrate the widespread use of internet services and social media across the country, indicating that digital platforms have become an integral component of everyday communication and public discourse.

Table 1 Internet and Social Media Use in Indonesia

Indicator	Data	Source
Internet users	221.56 million	APJII (2024)
Internet penetration	79.5%	APJII (2024)
Internet users (January 2025)	212 million	DataReportal (2025)
Social media user identities	143 million	DataReportal (2025)

Source: APJII (2024); DataReportal (2025)

The indicators presented in Table 1 signify more than the expansion of internet access. They reflect the emergence of a digital public sphere in which legal information is continuously produced, redistributed, and interpreted by millions of users. Unlike conventional media, where information generally passes through editorial processes before publication, social media enables individuals to comment on, reinterpret, and disseminate information instantly through reposts, short-form videos, live streaming, and algorithm-driven recommendations. Consequently, public discussions surrounding criminal cases increasingly evolve alongside formal legal proceedings rather than after judicial decisions have been delivered. Such conditions create an environment in which legal narratives are collectively constructed through digital interaction instead of being shaped exclusively by formal legal institutions. This characteristic corresponds with Trottier's (2017) concept of digital vigilantism, which explains how digital platforms facilitate citizen participation in monitoring, evaluating, and sanctioning perceived wrongdoing beyond formal legal mechanisms.

From the perspective of Lawrence M. Friedman's theory, these developments primarily affect the cultural dimension of the legal system rather than its substantive or structural dimensions. Friedman (1975) defines legal culture as the values, attitudes, and expectations that shape the way society understands and responds to law. While Indonesia's criminal legislation and procedural framework remain governed by statutory law, public engagement with the criminal justice process has changed considerably. Citizens no longer function merely as observers of criminal proceedings; they increasingly interpret evidence, assess investigative performance, question prosecutorial decisions, and express expectations regarding criminal punishment through digital platforms. As a result, public perceptions of justice are formed not only through judicial reasoning but also through continuous interaction within online communities.

Recent socio-legal scholarship characterises this phenomenon as the emergence of digital legal culture, namely the transformation of legal awareness, legal behaviour, and public perceptions of justice through digital communication. Rather than replacing formal legal institutions, digital platforms have created an additional arena in which legal legitimacy is continuously negotiated by the public. Public acceptance of judicial outcomes is therefore influenced not only by the legal reasoning articulated in court decisions but also by the narratives that emerge and evolve throughout digital communication. This development demonstrates that legal culture in contemporary Indonesia is increasingly shaped by the interaction between formal criminal justice institutions and digitally mediated public participation.

The transformation of legal culture described above provides the socio-legal foundation for understanding the emergence of trial by social media in Indonesia. As criminal proceedings increasingly

unfold simultaneously within courtrooms and digital public spaces, public judgments regarding criminal responsibility frequently develop before judicial institutions reach legally binding conclusions. Consequently, the administration of criminal justice now operates within two interconnected arenas: formal adjudication governed by legal procedures and informal digital evaluation driven by public participation. The following section examines three prominent Indonesian criminal cases to illustrate how this transformation of legal culture manifests in practice and how trial by social media has reshaped public perceptions of justice within Indonesia's criminal justice system.

Trial by Social Media in Selected Indonesian Criminal Cases

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed the way criminal cases are understood, discussed, and evaluated in Indonesia. Rather than remaining confined to formal judicial proceedings, high-profile criminal cases increasingly unfold simultaneously within digital spaces where public opinion develops alongside the legal process. As information circulates rapidly across social media platforms, public perceptions of criminal responsibility, institutional credibility, and judicial legitimacy are often formed before courts reach their final decisions. Consequently, criminal disputes are no longer adjudicated exclusively within courtrooms but are also contested in digital spaces where legal narratives are continuously constructed, disseminated, and challenged by the public (Trottier, 2017; Castells, 2015).

Unlike conventional media, which disseminates information through editorial verification and professional gatekeeping, social media enables the rapid circulation of videos, photographs, personal opinions, and legal commentary without comparable institutional control. This participatory environment allows citizens to examine evidence, question official statements, reconstruct criminal events, and publicly evaluate the conduct of law enforcement agencies. As a result, digital platforms increasingly function as an informal arena of legal deliberation, where members of the public participate directly in shaping narratives surrounding criminal responsibility and institutional accountability. While such participation may strengthen transparency, it may also challenge fundamental principles of criminal justice, including the presumption of innocence, due process of law, and judicial independence (Trottier, 2017; Wahyudi et al., 2022).

Indonesia provides a particularly relevant context for examining trial by social media due to its extensive use of digital platforms and the growing influence of online public opinion on law enforcement. High-profile criminal cases are frequently accompanied by extensive online discussions that shape public expectations regarding police investigations and judicial proceedings. This development is reflected in the popular expression "No Viral, No Justice," which captures a growing public perception that legal institutions respond more effectively after cases receive widespread attention on social media. An opinion published by The Jakarta Post argued that increasing reliance on social media virality risks producing "selective justice," whereby cases attracting widespread public attention receive greater institutional priority than equally deserving cases that remain outside the digital spotlight. Using the renewed investigation of the Vina Cirebon case as an example, the article highlighted how online mobilisation may influence institutional responses to criminal cases (The Jakarta Post, 2024). These observations are consistent with recent socio-legal studies suggesting that social media has become an increasingly influential factor shaping public trust in law enforcement and perceptions of procedural justice (Runturambi et al., 2024; Wahid et al., 2025).

Despite the growing literature on digital vigilantism, media influence, and the No Viral, No Justice phenomenon, relatively few studies have analysed how trial by social media transforms Indonesia's legal culture through concrete criminal cases. Existing scholarship has primarily focused on media effects, criminal policy, or institutional responsiveness, while paying comparatively limited attention to the interaction between digital public participation and the cultural dimension of the legal system as conceptualised by Friedman (1975). Accordingly, this study employs Friedman's theory of legal culture to analyse how social media reshapes public attitudes towards criminal responsibility, institutional legitimacy, and the administration of justice across different stages of criminal proceedings.

To achieve this objective, this study examines three prominent Indonesian criminal cases: the Ferdy Sambo case, the Mario Dandy Satriyo case, and the Vina Cirebon case. These cases were selected purposively because each represents a distinct manifestation of trial by social media within Indonesia's criminal justice process. The Ferdy Sambo case demonstrates how sustained digital scrutiny strengthened public oversight throughout the investigation and trial of a senior police official. The

Mario Dandy Satriyo case illustrates how viral audiovisual evidence rapidly shaped public perceptions of criminal responsibility immediately after the offence occurred. Meanwhile, the Vina Cirebon case demonstrates that digital public participation may continue to influence perceptions of justice even after criminal judgments have become legally final by generating renewed demands for legal review. Collectively, these cases provide a comparative basis for examining how social media has transformed legal culture before, during, and after formal criminal adjudication in Indonesia.

Table 2 Characteristics of Trial by Social Media in Selected Indonesian Criminal Cases

Case	Criminal Offence	Stage of Criminal Justice	Digital Trigger	Characteristics of Trial by Social Media	Implications for Legal Culture
Ferdy Sambo (2022)	Premeditated murder and obstruction of justice	Investigation and trial	Public dissemination of inconsistencies in the official police narrative through social media and mainstream news coverage (The Jakarta Post, 2022a).	Continuous public scrutiny, collective examination of evidence, digital monitoring of investigative developments, and demands for institutional transparency.	Strengthened public oversight while increasing external pressure on law enforcement agencies and the judiciary.
Mario Dandy Satriyo (2023)	Aggravated assault	Investigation and prosecution	Viral circulation of assault videos across multiple social media platforms, generating immediate nationwide public attention.	Rapid public judgment regarding criminal responsibility, widespread condemnation, and demands for severe punishment.	Intensified tensions between digital accountability and the presumption of innocence.
Vina Cirebon (2016; renewed in 2024)	Murder	Post-conviction	Resurgence of public attention following the release of <i>Vina: Sebelum 7 Hari</i> and extensive social media campaigns calling for case review (The Jakarta Post, 2024).	Re-examination of previous investigations and judicial decisions through digital mobilisation and public advocacy.	Demonstrated that legal legitimacy remains subject to continuous public evaluation even after judicial decisions become final.

Rather than representing isolated incidents, these three cases illustrate different pathways through which social media reshapes public engagement with criminal justice from demanding institutional accountability during investigations, to accelerating public judgments regarding criminal responsibility, to challenging the legitimacy of judicial outcomes after convictions have become final. Examining these cases comparatively provides a more comprehensive understanding of how trial by social media contributes to the transformation of Indonesia's legal culture. The following sections analyse each case individually.

The Ferdy Sambo Case

The Ferdy Sambo case represents one of the most prominent examples of trial by social media in Indonesia, illustrating how digital public participation can influence public perceptions of criminal justice throughout the investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of a high-profile criminal case. Unlike ordinary criminal proceedings, the case unfolded simultaneously within two interconnected arenas: the formal criminal justice system and the digital public sphere. While investigators, prosecutors, and judges exercised their respective legal functions, the public continuously evaluated official statements, scrutinised emerging evidence, and questioned the credibility of law enforcement institutions through various social media platforms. Consequently, public opinion evolved alongside the formal legal process, making the case a significant illustration of how digital communication has become an influential component of Indonesia's contemporary legal culture.

The case began on 8 July 2022, when Brigadier Nofriansyah Yosua Hutabarat (Brigadier J), an aide to Inspector General Ferdy Sambo, was found dead at Sambo's official residence in Jakarta. The Indonesian National Police initially announced that Brigadier J had died during a shootout with another police officer following an alleged incident involving Sambo's wife. However, inconsistencies between the official chronology, forensic findings, and information presented by the victim's family quickly generated public scepticism. National media subsequently reported allegations of evidence

manipulation, inconsistencies regarding CCTV footage, and contradictory statements from police officials, leading to widespread calls for an independent and transparent investigation (The Jakarta Post, 2022).

As public confidence in the official explanation declined, discussions surrounding the case rapidly expanded across digital platforms, particularly X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Rather than functioning merely as channels for information dissemination, these platforms evolved into spaces where citizens collectively examined official statements, discussed forensic evidence, and evaluated the performance of law enforcement agencies. Empirical evidence supports this phenomenon. Santoso (2025), analysing approximately 18,000 social media posts concerning the Ferdy Sambo case using social network analysis, found that X functioned as a digital public sphere where users expressed collective emotions, formed public opinion, and generated social pressure on state institutions. The study further demonstrates that online communication surrounding the case was organised through interconnected network structures rather than isolated individual expressions, indicating that social media had become an important mechanism through which institutional legitimacy was publicly negotiated.

The growing digital scrutiny coincided with significant developments in the criminal investigation. The National Police subsequently established a Special Investigation Team, which concluded that the initial account of a shootout had been fabricated. Investigators determined that Ferdy Sambo had orchestrated the premeditated murder of Brigadier J and instructed several police officers to manipulate the crime scene, destroy CCTV recordings, and provide false statements in an effort to obstruct the investigation, as reflected in the Public Prosecutor's Indictment. Reporting on the commencement of the trial, Reuters observed that the case had become a national symbol of alleged police impunity and institutional accountability, attracting unprecedented public attention throughout Indonesia.

Judicial proceedings before the South Jakarta District Court were conducted under intense public observation. Ferdy Sambo was charged with premeditated murder under Article 340 of the Indonesian Criminal Code in conjunction with Article 55 paragraph (1) of the Criminal Code, together with related offences arising from his role in the crime. On 13 February 2023, the South Jakarta District Court convicted Ferdy Sambo and sentenced him to death. The conviction was subsequently upheld on appeal and later affirmed by the Supreme Court through Decision No. 813 K/Pid/2023, confirming his criminal responsibility for the premeditated murder of Brigadier J.

Beyond the judicial outcome, the Ferdy Sambo case demonstrates how trial by social media reshaped the relationship between society and the criminal justice system. Prastiti et al. (2024), using Social Network Analysis of discussions on X, found that the case significantly influenced public perceptions of police integrity and institutional credibility. Their findings indicate that social media discussions extended beyond information sharing and became a mechanism through which citizens articulated expectations regarding transparency, accountability, and public relations within law enforcement institutions.

Viewed through Friedman's (1975) concept of legal culture, the Ferdy Sambo case illustrates a transformation in public engagement with criminal justice. Traditionally, legal institutions exercised primary authority in constructing legal narratives and determining criminal responsibility. In contrast, the widespread use of social media enabled citizens to become active participants in scrutinising investigative processes, evaluating institutional conduct, and influencing broader public discourse concerning justice. Consistent with Trottier's (2017) concept of digital vigilantism, digital participation functioned not only as a mechanism of public oversight but also as a source of external pressure on criminal justice institutions. The case therefore demonstrates that, in Indonesia's contemporary legal culture, the legitimacy of criminal justice institutions is increasingly shaped not only by judicial reasoning and procedural fairness but also by their ability to maintain public trust within an environment characterised by continuous digital scrutiny.

The Mario Dandy Case

Mario Dandy Satriyo's assault on Cristalino David Ozora became one of Indonesia's most widely discussed criminal cases and provides a clear example of trial by social media. Public attention emerged almost immediately after a video of the assault circulated online, allowing millions of users to witness the incident before investigators had completed their work. Unlike the Ferdy Sambo case, where

public suspicion developed because of conflicting official statements, the Mario Dandy case was driven by visual evidence that spread rapidly across digital platforms. As a result, public discussion expanded beyond the assault itself and evolved into debates about privilege, equal treatment before the law, and accountability within public institutions.

On 20 February 2023, Mario Dandy assaulted David Ozora in Pesanggrahan, South Jakarta. Shane Lukas, who accompanied Mario during the incident, recorded the assault, and the footage quickly spread through X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and other social media platforms. ANTARA (2023) reported that Mario Dandy and Shane Lukas were arrested shortly afterwards and were formally named suspects as investigators developed the case. Media attention intensified after it was revealed that Mario Dandy was the son of Rafael Alun Trisambodo, a senior official at the Directorate General of Taxes. According to Kompas (2023), this revelation shifted public discussion from the assault itself to broader concerns regarding the lifestyle of public officials, abuse of privilege, and whether social status could influence the criminal justice process.

The availability of video evidence significantly changed the way the public engaged with the case. Instead of relying solely on media reports, social media users were able to observe the incident directly, comment on the evidence, and openly express their views regarding criminal responsibility and appropriate punishment. Digital platforms therefore became more than channels for sharing information. They evolved into spaces where legal events were interpreted collectively and where competing narratives regarding justice developed alongside the formal investigation.

Empirical research supports this pattern. Using Social Network Analysis, Irwanto et al. (2025) analysed 264,155 interactions generated by 83,097 X accounts discussing the Mario Dandy case. Their findings indicate that public communication developed through highly connected digital networks that rapidly amplified information and encouraged collective opinion formation. The study also found that discussions gradually shifted from emotional reactions to broader criticism of institutional integrity, privilege, and equality before the law. These findings suggest that social media users did not merely react to the assault but actively evaluated the legitimacy of the criminal justice process.

Public scrutiny continued throughout the investigation and trial. Mainstream media regularly reported developments such as the reconstruction of the crime scene, witness examinations, the reading of the indictment, and court hearings. Those reports were quickly redistributed through social media, allowing public discussion to develop in parallel with the judicial process. By the time the court reached its decision, public opinion regarding Mario Dandy's criminal responsibility and the severity of the appropriate punishment had already become firmly established.

The South Jakarta District Court ultimately convicted Mario Dandy of aggravated assault causing serious injury and sentenced him to 12 years' imprisonment. The court also ordered him to pay restitution to the victim, and the conviction was subsequently upheld on appeal. Although the proceedings followed the procedural requirements of Indonesian criminal law, the case illustrates how extensive digital exposure can shape public perceptions of guilt and punishment before judicial decisions become final.

Friedman's (1975) theory of legal culture provides a useful framework for understanding this development. The case shows that public participation in criminal justice no longer ends with observing judicial outcomes. Digital platforms enable citizens to monitor investigations, assess institutional performance, and influence broader public discussions concerning justice. Habermas (1989) similarly explains that public opinion is formed through open communication within the public sphere. In the digital era, that sphere increasingly operates through social media rather than conventional public forums. Trottier's (2017) concept of digital vigilantism further explains why online communities actively scrutinise both alleged offenders and state institutions. Viewed together, these perspectives indicate that social media has become an important element of Indonesia's contemporary legal culture. It strengthens public oversight of criminal justice institutions while simultaneously creating tension with due process, judicial impartiality, and the presumption of innocence.

The Vina Cirebon Case

The Vina Cirebon case presents a distinct form of trial by social media in Indonesia. Unlike the Ferdy Sambo and Mario Dandy cases, where public attention developed while criminal proceedings were still ongoing, widespread public scrutiny in this case emerged several years after the original convictions had become final. Public discussion intensified following the release of the film Vina:

Sebelum 7 Hari in May 2024, which renewed interest in the case and encouraged extensive debate across social media. As competing narratives circulated online, questions regarding the original investigation, the reliability of evidence, and the fairness of the judicial process became the focus of national attention.

The case originated in August 2016 when Vina Dewi Arsita and Muhammad Rizky, commonly known as Eky, were found dead in Cirebon, West Java. Police subsequently prosecuted several individuals for murder, while three suspects remained on the wanted list for several years. Although the criminal proceedings had long been concluded, the widespread circulation of information through X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and other digital platforms transformed the case into one of Indonesia's most debated legal issues. According to ANTARA (2024), the growing public attention prompted the National Police and the West Java Regional Police to provide repeated public explanations regarding the progress of the investigation and the status of the remaining suspects. Kompas (2024) also reported that law enforcement agencies continued responding to questions raised by the public as discussions surrounding the case expanded across digital platforms.

Unlike the previous cases examined in this study, public debate was driven less by newly discovered evidence than by renewed public examination of information that had existed for years. Social media users revisited witness statements, compared media reports, discussed court documents, and shared different interpretations of the investigation. These discussions were further amplified by content creators, online news outlets, and public figures, allowing alternative interpretations of the case to spread rapidly across multiple digital platforms. As a result, the legitimacy of the original investigation and judicial process became subjects of continuous public evaluation.

The influence of social media extended beyond shaping public opinion. Intense public attention was followed by renewed investigative activities, including efforts to locate the remaining wanted suspects and official responses to allegations circulating online. The arrest of Pegi Setiawan in May 2024 generated another wave of public discussion, particularly after legal proceedings challenged the basis of his designation as a suspect. Subsequent developments, including the decision granting his pretrial application, further intensified public scrutiny of investigative procedures and reinforced broader debates concerning due process, evidentiary standards, and police accountability (Kompas, 2024; ANTARA, 2024).

This sequence of events illustrates that trial by social media may influence criminal justice even after judicial decisions have acquired legal finality. Rather than focusing solely on the criminal liability of individual suspects, public discussion increasingly centred on whether investigative institutions had acted professionally and whether the criminal justice system had reached a reliable outcome. Digital platforms therefore became spaces where confidence in legal institutions was continuously negotiated through public participation.

Friedman's (1975) concept of legal culture provides an appropriate framework for understanding this development. The Vina Cirebon case demonstrates that citizens increasingly participate in evaluating the performance of criminal justice institutions, even after formal judicial proceedings have ended. Habermas (1989) similarly argues that public opinion develops through open communication within the public sphere. In today's digital environment, social media has become one of the primary arenas where that communication takes place. Trottier's (2017) theory of digital vigilantism further explains why online communities actively scrutinise not only alleged offenders but also investigators, prosecutors, and other legal institutions. Collectively, these perspectives suggest that trial by social media in Indonesia has evolved beyond influencing ongoing investigations or criminal trials. It now extends to reassessing concluded criminal cases and shaping public expectations regarding institutional accountability and the legitimacy of the justice system.

Comparative Analysis of the Three Cases

Although the three cases arose from different factual circumstances, each demonstrates how social media has become an influential component of Indonesia's contemporary legal culture. Public participation no longer occurs only through conventional media or formal legal mechanisms. Instead, digital platforms enable citizens to observe criminal proceedings in real time, exchange information, evaluate institutional performance, and influence public discourse throughout the justice process. The comparison also indicates that the impact of trial by social media varies according to the stage of the criminal process and the nature of the information circulating online.

The Ferdy Sambo case illustrates how social media challenged official narratives during the early stages of a criminal investigation. Public scepticism emerged after inconsistencies appeared in the initial explanations provided by law enforcement authorities. As journalists, legal experts, and ordinary citizens compared official statements with newly available information, pressure mounted for a transparent investigation. In this context, digital platforms functioned primarily as mechanisms of public oversight, encouraging greater institutional accountability and limiting opportunities for information control.

A different pattern appeared in the Mario Dandy case. Public attention was driven not by conflicting institutional narratives but by the rapid circulation of visual evidence showing the assault. Because millions of users could directly observe the incident, public discussion focused on criminal responsibility, the proportionality of punishment, and concerns that the offender's family background might influence the legal process. Rather than questioning whether the crime had occurred, online discussions centred on whether justice would ultimately be administered fairly. Social media therefore shaped public expectations regarding both the conduct of legal institutions and the outcome of the trial.

The Vina Cirebon case demonstrates a further evolution of this phenomenon. Instead of accompanying an ongoing investigation or trial, public attention re-emerged several years after the criminal proceedings had largely concluded. Digital platforms enabled users to revisit witness statements, media reports, and publicly available information while questioning the reliability of earlier investigative and judicial processes. The renewed public scrutiny generated sustained institutional responses and transformed a concluded criminal case into an active subject of national debate. This development indicates that trial by social media may continue to influence public confidence in criminal justice even after judicial decisions have become legally final.

Taken together, the three cases demonstrate that trial by social media operates through different mechanisms depending on the procedural stage of criminal justice. In the Ferdy Sambo case, digital communication primarily promoted transparency by challenging inconsistent official narratives during the investigation. In the Mario Dandy case, widespread circulation of visual evidence accelerated public judgments regarding criminal responsibility and shaped expectations about punishment. Meanwhile, the Vina Cirebon case illustrates that social media may continue to influence institutional legitimacy even after criminal proceedings have concluded by encouraging renewed public scrutiny of earlier judicial outcomes. These different patterns indicate that social media has become an influential arena where public participation extends across investigations, trials, and post-adjudication processes, reshaping legal culture within Indonesia's criminal justice system.

These comparative findings reinforce Friedman's (1975) proposition that legal culture is reflected in society's attitudes, expectations, and patterns of participation in the legal system. Rather than acting solely as observers, citizens increasingly evaluate institutional performance and engage in legal discourse through digital platforms. Consequently, legal legitimacy is influenced not only by formal judicial decisions but also by public perceptions that develop within the digital public sphere.

The comparative analysis also demonstrates that trial by social media produces both beneficial and problematic consequences. Greater public scrutiny may strengthen institutional transparency, encourage accountability, and reduce opportunities for abuses of authority. At the same time, extensive online discussion may create public pressure that affects perceptions of guilt before judicial proceedings are completed, exposes legal actors to extraordinary public scrutiny, and challenges the principle that criminal liability should be determined exclusively through lawful judicial procedures. The Indonesian experience therefore illustrates the need to balance democratic public participation in the digital sphere with the fundamental guarantees of due process and the presumption of innocence.

Implications for Indonesian Criminal Justice

The findings of this study demonstrate that trial by social media has become an integral feature of Indonesia's contemporary criminal justice system. Criminal proceedings are no longer evaluated exclusively within formal legal institutions. Instead, social media has created an additional arena in which investigations, prosecutions, and judicial decisions are continuously observed and debated by the public. This development reflects a broader transformation in Indonesia's legal culture, where digital participation increasingly influences public perceptions of justice and institutional legitimacy.

One significant implication concerns the growing demand for transparency and accountability within criminal justice institutions. The three case studies indicate that extensive public attention

encouraged investigators and other law enforcement agencies to provide more timely explanations regarding investigative developments and procedural decisions. In the Ferdy Sambo case, sustained public scrutiny contributed to greater transparency after inconsistencies appeared in the initial official narrative. The Mario Dandy case demonstrated that continuous media attention encouraged close public monitoring of every stage of the criminal proceedings. Meanwhile, renewed public discussion surrounding the Vina Cirebon case prompted institutional responses to questions concerning earlier investigative processes. Collectively, these cases suggest that social media has strengthened public oversight and reduced the ability of public institutions to control information during high-profile criminal proceedings.

Nevertheless, increased transparency does not eliminate the obligation to uphold fundamental principles of criminal procedure. Indonesian criminal justice is founded upon the rule of law, which requires criminal responsibility to be determined through lawful judicial proceedings rather than public opinion. The presumption of innocence remains a fundamental guarantee within the criminal process, ensuring that every individual is treated as innocent until proven guilty by a final judicial decision. Similarly, judicial independence requires judges to decide cases solely on the basis of legally admissible evidence and applicable law, free from external influence, including pressure generated through mass media or social media. These principles are reflected in Article 24 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and further reinforced by Law Number 48 of 2009 on Judicial Power, which requires courts to administer justice independently and impartially.

The findings indicate that trial by social media creates a continuing tension between democratic participation and procedural fairness. Digital platforms allow citizens to monitor criminal proceedings more actively than ever before, thereby strengthening public participation in legal affairs. At the same time, online discussions often develop before all relevant evidence has been presented in court. Information may circulate without adequate verification, legal issues may be simplified into competing narratives, and public expectations regarding guilt or punishment may emerge before judicial examination has been completed. Although public participation is essential in a democratic society, criminal liability cannot be determined through digital opinion or online popularity. The legitimacy of criminal justice ultimately depends upon compliance with legal procedures, evidentiary standards, and judicial reasoning rather than the volume of public support expressed on social media.

These findings also demonstrate that criminal justice institutions require more effective strategies for communicating with the public in the digital era. Delayed, inconsistent, or incomplete official information creates opportunities for speculation and misinformation to spread rapidly across digital platforms. Conversely, accurate and timely public communication may strengthen institutional credibility while reducing uncertainty surrounding ongoing investigations. Greater transparency, however, should not be interpreted as unlimited disclosure. Law enforcement agencies remain responsible for protecting confidential evidence, witnesses, victims, and the integrity of criminal investigations. Effective public communication must therefore balance society's legitimate right to information with the procedural safeguards necessary to ensure a fair trial.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the existing literature on trial by social media by demonstrating that its influence varies according to the procedural stage of criminal justice. The comparative analysis identifies three distinct patterns. First, social media may challenge official narratives during criminal investigations, as reflected in the Ferdy Sambo case. Second, digital communication may shape public expectations regarding criminal responsibility and punishment during trial, as demonstrated by the Mario Dandy case. Third, social media may continue to influence institutional legitimacy even after judicial proceedings have concluded, as illustrated by the Vina Cirebon case. Rather than functioning as a single phenomenon, trial by social media operates through different mechanisms that influence investigations, trials, and post-adjudication public discourse in different ways. This typology represents the principal contribution of the present study to the growing scholarship on digital communication and criminal justice.

Accordingly, Indonesia's criminal justice system should not regard trial by social media solely as either a threat or a mechanism of public control. Digital participation has become an inevitable characteristic of contemporary legal culture and offers important opportunities to strengthen institutional accountability. At the same time, preserving the integrity of criminal proceedings requires consistent protection of due process, judicial independence, and the presumption of innocence.

Achieving an appropriate balance between these competing interests will be essential for maintaining both public confidence and the rule of law in Indonesia's evolving digital society.

CONCLUSION

The growing influence of social media has fundamentally transformed the relationship between society and Indonesia's criminal justice system. Analysis of the Ferdy Sambo, Mario Dandy, and Vina Cirebon cases demonstrates that criminal proceedings are no longer assessed exclusively within formal legal institutions. Public discussion now develops simultaneously with investigations, trials, and even concluded cases, making digital platforms an influential arena where transparency, accountability, and institutional legitimacy are continuously negotiated.

Comparison of the three cases reveals that trial by social media does not operate through a single pattern. Public scrutiny challenged official narratives during the investigation of the Ferdy Sambo case, shaped public expectations regarding criminal responsibility and punishment throughout the Mario Dandy trial, and prompted renewed scrutiny of institutional legitimacy in the Vina Cirebon case years after the original proceedings had concluded. These different patterns indicate that the influence of social media varies according to the procedural stage of criminal justice and the nature of the information circulating within the digital public sphere.

A key contribution of this study lies in the development of a procedural typology of trial by social media in Indonesia. Rather than treating the phenomenon as a uniform form of online public opinion, the findings demonstrate that digital participation may influence criminal justice through three distinct mechanisms: challenging official narratives during investigations, shaping public expectations throughout judicial proceedings, and reassessing institutional legitimacy after criminal cases have been resolved. This typology offers a broader analytical framework for understanding the interaction between digital communication and criminal justice in Indonesia while extending existing discussions on legal culture, the public sphere, and digital vigilantism.

Growing public participation in criminal justice should therefore be recognised as an inevitable characteristic of Indonesia's digital society rather than merely as a challenge to legal institutions. Strengthening transparency and public accountability remains essential, but these objectives must be pursued alongside consistent protection of due process, judicial independence, and the presumption of innocence. Future research may build upon this framework by examining additional categories of criminal cases, comparing developments across jurisdictions, or employing empirical methods to further explore how digital public participation influences criminal justice decision-making.

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