

Social network analysis of murder cases in Indonesian police institutions: Digital public opinion mapping

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Abstract

This study analyzes the communication behavior of social media users X in responding to a shooting case by a high-ranking Indonesian police official. This study was motivated by the high public response to the murder case of Brigadier Nofriansyah Yosua Hutabarat by Inspector General Ferdy Sambo, which triggered a crisis of trust in the National Police. With a qualitative approach and analysis methods of communication networks and content, data was collected from 18,000 tweets, which included original tweets, retweets, mentions, and comments from within and outside the country. The data is then analyzed using NVivo software for coding and classification. The results of the study show that social media X plays a role as a digital public space where netizens express emotions, form opinions, and create social pressure on state institutions. The structure of communication networks reveals the key actors that shape the public narrative. These findings confirm the importance of social media in the study of public communication and the crisis of institutional legitimacy.

Introduction

In recent years, the institution of the Indonesian National Police has been in the spotlight due to various incidents that have injured the institution's image of professionalism and integrity. One of the events that attracted the most public attention was the murder of Brigadier Nofriansyah Yosua Hutabarat (Brigadier NJH), which was allegedly carried out by his superior, Inspector General Ferdy Sambo. This case is not just an individual crime, but reflects a serious rift in the internal supervision system of the National Police and the culture of power that is developing in legal institutions.

Quoted from the results of a survey by the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) conducted in September 2022, public trust in the National Police has decreased sharply from 72.1% to 59.1% after the emergence of the Sambo case (Firmansyah, 2022). This decline did not occur in a vacuum, but was a reflection of the public's accumulated disappointment with many incidents of violence, organized crime, and alleged manipulation of the law by the authorities themselves.

In a democratic society, law enforcement institutions are the main pillars in ensuring social justice and maintaining the stability of the rule of law. When law enforcement becomes

the perpetrator of violence, the public trust that is the foundation of state legitimacy is eroded. The murder of a high-ranking officer by his subordinates marks a deeper crisis: an imbalance in power relations within law enforcement agencies, a weak oversight system, and a lack of transparency in internal legal processes. In this framework, social media is present as an arena for expression, venting, and social control.

Social media X (Twitter) has become the main field for the public to voice criticism, demand justice, and build collective opinion. This phenomenon shows the transformation of social media from just a communication platform to a means of political articulation and digital advocacy. The public is no longer waiting for the mainstream media to convey their aspirations; They shape their discourse, build digital solidarity networks, and mobilize pressure on state institutions.

This communication dynamic reflects the emergence of the so-called “network society” (Castells, 2012), where information power is no longer centralized but distributed in active digital nodes. Through hashtags (#), retweets, and mentions (@), netizens form an alternative communication structure that is horizontal and responsive. In this context, digital space becomes an arena for contesting the meaning of an event, including the murder of Brigadier NJH.

It should be noted that the Sambo case not only reflects the dysfunction of the legal system but also opens up space for reflection on the relationship between society and state institutions. On the one hand, the public has high hopes for fair law enforcement; On the other hand, they realize that the existing system can be used to perpetuate power and protect the elite. This tension manifests itself in the form of digital expressions that are rampant, sharp, and often emotional.

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be analyzed through the lens of *the crisis of legitimacy* (Habermas, 1981), where the state’s failure to meet the demands of justice triggers the emergence of alternative public spaces. In this space, discourse is no longer controlled by the state or elite media, but is formed collectively by digital citizens. This is an important symptom of the development of deliberative democracy in the information age, where netizens become discursive actors in formulating public opinion.

This study is important to be positioned in the context of the public trust deficit that law enforcement agencies are currently facing. Many previous studies revealed that when trust in state institutions declines, people tend to build their own control arena, one of which is through digital media (Papacharissi, 2015; McNair, 2011). Thus, the analysis of netizens’ communication in responding to the Ferdi Sambo case not only records public opinion but also reads the direction of the digital citizenship political movement in Indonesia.

This research is relevant because it combines empirical context (factual cases) and theoretical analysis of the communication behavior of the digital society. In addition, by using a communication network analysis approach and qualitative content analysis, this study was able to describe the netizens’ interaction map and identify key actors in the formation of discourse.

Therefore, this study not only seeks to answer what is communicated by netizens, but also how the communication structure is formed and what its implications are for institutional legitimacy. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how the digital public responds to power inequality and how they use communication technologies to rebuild expectations of justice.

Departing from this background, this study asks two research questions: (1) What is the communication behavior of social media user X in responding to the shooting case by a high-ranking police official against his subordinates? (2) How does the mapping of public

opinion in social media X shape the narrative and pressure on state institutions?

These two questions are the main guidelines in compiling this research design, developing data analysis, and formulating conclusions. This research is expected to make an empirical and conceptual contribution to the study of digital communication, public opinion, and institutional reform in Indonesia.

The first question is focused on the dimension of communication behavior, both textual and social, shown by netizens in responding to cases. This question was answered in a discussion about the intensity of the use of social media as a space for social criticism, the dynamics of public emotions, and the identification of key actors and digital communication patterns. The findings show that social media functions as a medium for criticism and articulation of collective unrest, as well as showing the existence of a complex and horizontally distributed communication structure.

The second question focuses on how public opinion is formed and represented collectively through online communication networks. The discussion outlined how social media helped construct a large narrative about the crisis of public trust, as well as contributing to shaping pressure on state institutions. Our mapping using NVivo software tools and social network analysis has shown that public opinion in X is not only reactive, but also builds a consistent framework of discourse in demanding institutional reform.

Communication Behavior Theory

Communication behavior is a verbal or non-verbal action carried out by individuals or groups in order to convey, receive, and respond to information (Thaib, 2019). In the context of digital communication, netizens' communication behavior reflects how individuals react to social stimuli through online media. Classic communication models such as Lasswell's *"Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect"* are still relevant in understanding interactions on social media, with adjustments to the characteristics of new media that are interactive and participatory (Wenxiu, 2015).

Communication on social media is influenced by social context, psychological motivation, and group dynamics. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2015), social media serves as an extension of self-expression, where users not only consume information but also become content producers. Therefore, the study of digital communication needs to consider the complexity of relationships between users, as well as the cumulative effects of messages that are spread virally.

Social Media and Public Opinion

Social media has become the primary medium in the formation of contemporary public opinion. Research by Mulawarman and Nurfitri (2017) shows that social media, especially X and Facebook, provides a new space for exploration in the social sciences, especially through applied social psychology approaches. Algorithm-based predictive technology allows researchers to examine users' communication personalities and behaviors on a large scale. Meanwhile, Nugraha and Akbar (2019) emphasized that comfort, social encouragement, and personal motivation also affect the tendency of social media users to actively engage in digital discussions.

In the Indonesian context, social media is not only a space for conversation, but also a political arena where symbolic resistance to the official state narrative takes place (Ritonga, 2019). When formal institutions such as the mainstream media are unable or reluctant to voice criticism, social media becomes an alternative channel used by the public to express opinions, build solidarity, and strengthen pressure on state institutions.

Social Network Analysis

Social network analysis (SNA) is a methodological and theoretical approach to mapping the relationships between actors in a social system. SNA focuses on relationship structures, not just individual attributes (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). In social media studies, SNA is used to identify key actors, investigate interaction patterns, and understand how information spreads in a digital community. Several previous studies have shown the effectiveness of SNA in examining the dynamics of public opinion on digital platforms. Salahudin et al. (2020) and Nurmandi et al. (2018) emphasize that the use of software such as NVivo simplifies the process of classification, visualization, and analysis of online conversations. In the context of Ferdy Sambo's case, SNA is a relevant tool to detect key nodes in public conversations, as well as how topics develop and spread in digital social networks.

Institutional Violence and Legitimacy Crisis

Violence by state officials against citizens or fellow officials not only reflects violations of the law, but also a crisis of values and institutional governance. Research by Muradi (2017) and Tolan et al. (2017) shows that institutional violence often occurs in patronistic bureaucratic systems, where personal loyalty is more dominant than professional accountability. In this framework, the deviant behavior of the state apparatus cannot be separated from the power structure that forms it.

The phenomenon of the murder of Brigadier Josua by Inspector General Ferdy Sambo is an important case study that shows the failure of the institution's internal mechanisms in preventing violence. According to Pangathousands (2022), this case shows how the patron-client relationship in the police institution creates a protective network that weakens ethical and legal control. This situation poses a serious dilemma for the public, who end up diverting their expressions of disappointment through social media.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a social media-based communication network analysis design. This approach was chosen to deeply understand the communication behavior of netizens in response to the murder case of Brigadier NJH by high-ranking Indonesian police officials. The qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the meanings contained in digital conversations, as well as interpret how public opinion is formed and conveyed in cyberspace.

The analysis was carried out on conversation data obtained from the social media platform X in the period from July 15, 2022, to July 25, 2022. This range was chosen because it reflects the very high intensity of public discussion regarding the initial development of the case. This research not only aims to describe the data descriptively, but also to interpret the dynamics of communication between users based on the socio-political context behind it. Data was collected through online scraping techniques on public content on platform X. Keyword selection was purposively carried out using terms relevant to the case, such as "Brigadier Josua", "Ferdy Sambo", "Putri Candrawathi", "police shooting", and "Polri".

The data obtained includes original tweets, retweets, mentions, and comments that contain opinions or narratives about the case. The amount of data that was successfully collected reached 18,000 tweets from user X in various regions, both from within the country and abroad. The data is then downloaded in CSV format and imported into NVivo software for further coding, classification, and analysis.

Data analysis was carried out using the Social Network Analysis (SNA) approach and qualitative content analysis. SNA is used to map the structure of social networks, identify

key actors, and analyze the patterns of relationships between users. The qualitative content analysis is used to interpret the meaning of tweets, including sentiments, communication tones, and dominant narratives that develop. NVivo software plays an important role in the process of data processing and visualization. Features such as *text search query*, *word frequency*, and *sociogram* are used to identify frequently occurring words or phrases, as well as to describe interactions between user accounts. The results of this visualization provide an empirical picture of the intensity and direction of communication in public discourse on social media.

Results and discussion

1. Distribution and Intensity of Netizen Communication

Data analysis shows that the topic of Brigadier NJH's death sparked a very wide public conversation on X, with a total of 18,000 tweets in ten days. Of these, 16,767 tweets discussed Richard Eliezer (RE), 699 tweets discussed Brigadier Josua, 382 tweets discussed Putri Candrawathi, and 11 tweets discussed Ferdy Sambo directly. Most of the conversations came from Indonesia, but there was also participation from other countries such as Taiwan, the United States, Canada, South Korea, and Kenya. This is as **Figures 1 and 2** show that the case has received global attention, especially from the Indonesian diaspora and the human rights observer community.

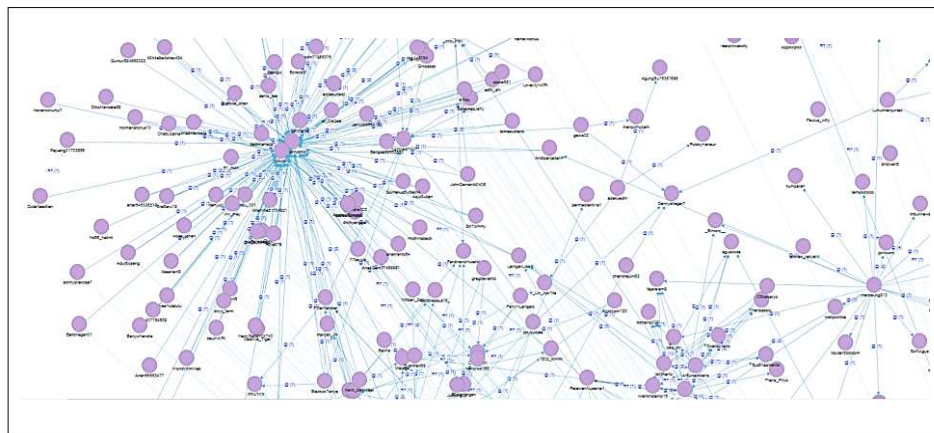


Figure 1: The sociogram shows the attention of netizens from various countries regarding the arrest of the FS police general for shooting dead his men.

Figure 1 above is the result of a visualization of netizens' communication networks on social media X, which was analyzed using the *Social Network Analysis (SNA)* approach. Each purple circle (called a *node*) represents one user account X, while the connecting lines between nodes (called *edges*) indicate a communication relationship either in the form of mention (@), reply, retweet, or other interactions related to the topic of the murder case of Brigadier Nofriansyah Yosua Hutabarat. The different node sizes reflect the level of centrality or influence of those accounts in the communication network.

Larger nodes, such as the one in the center of the image, indicate the accounts that have the highest intensity of interaction and are the center of public attention. These accounts can be individuals with large followings, journalists, activists, or media accounts that have the ability to disseminate information widely. The existence of other scattered nodes shows additional actors who contribute to building discourse, both as disseminators of information, commenters, and supporters of discussions.

From this visualization, it can be seen that netizens' communication is not random or sporadic, but rather forms a systematic and interconnected network structure. This structure shows that public discussion of the case of Inspector General of Police Ferdi Sambo on social media not only reflects individual expression, but is also a collective phenomenon that is organically organized through algorithms and social interactions. Academically, we designed this image to confirm that social media X is a digital public space where social discourse takes place, with a communication configuration that resembles a social system in the real world. This data can be used to identify key actors in public opinion, the direction of narrative spread, and the power of influence in shaping the collective consciousness of society.

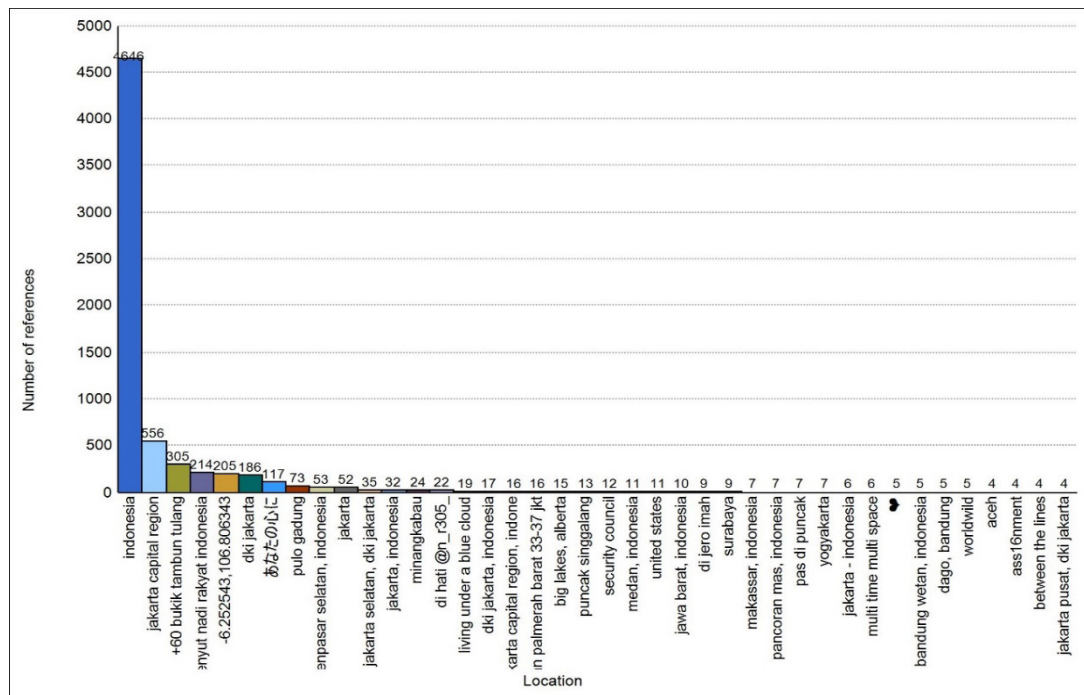


Figure 2: Graph of netizens using X based on location.

Figure 2 above shows the results of the visualization of the location data of social media users X who responded or commented on the murder case of Brigadier Nofriansyah Yosua Hutabarat. This visualization is in the form of a vertical bar chart that displays the number of references based on the user's location, as identified from the account metadata. The horizontal axis (X) indicates the location label, while the vertical axis (Y) indicates the frequency or number of references from each location.

Strikingly, the "Indonesian" location dominates with a total of 4646 referrals, which means that the majority of users who interact are from the domestic region in general. It was followed by "Jakarta Capital Region" with 556 references, showing the high involvement of users from the capital, the center of government, and the heart of national political activity. Other locations such as Bukit Kambu, Ujung Pandang, as well as big cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan, Makassar, Aceh, Yogyakarta, Bandung, and even netizens from the United States, were also detected, although the number was much lower. There are even uncommon locations or in the form of GPS coordinates, indicating the diversity of social media user settings X.

Academically, this visualization indicates that the issue of murder by high-ranking National Police officials has become a national and cross-regional concern. It also shows that social media X has overcome geographical boundaries and enabled public participation in

the digital discourse space. This data strengthens the argument that social media is a new democratic space, where people from various backgrounds participate in shaping opinions, exerting pressure, and reflecting on the crisis of trust in legal institutions through massive and equitable online engagement.

The findings in this study affirm the role of social media as an arena of resistance to the state's official narrative, as well as an uninstitutionalized public advocacy space. Social media X has become a channel where netizens not only express their opinions but also build digital solidarity and create collective pressure. In Sambo's case, netizens acted as a *public watchdog*, observing every development of the case, exposing narrative inconsistencies, and mobilizing support for a transparent legal process. This paradigm is in line with *Habermas'* (1989) thinking about public space as an arena where citizens can discuss rationally and critically about power. However, in the digital context, public space is transformed into a digital public space (Papacharissi, 2015), which is no longer homogeneous and elite but fragmented, dynamic, and affective. Emotions, social affiliations, and moral affinity are important factors in the mobilization of opinions and solidarity in this space.

Network analysis shows that netizens' communication in response to Sambo's case forms a dense and connected structure, with certain actors being the center of attention (*hubs*). This structure shows a pattern of discussion that is not random, but rather directed at key themes such as justice, power, and institutional ethics. Actors such as @mrsrachelin or @oposicerdas accounts play an important role in spreading the narrative and reinforcing the framing of the case.

With the *network society* approach from Castells (2012), we can understand that the power of information in the digital space is not hierarchical, but reticular (networked). Netizens who have high social and digital credibility are able to influence narratives widely without having to come from formal institutions. They become *discursive producers* who form collective opinions based on experience, interpretation, and sensitivity to injustice.

2. Accounts Dominate the Conversation

Several accounts were identified as *influencers* or *key opinion leaders* in this discourse. For example, @mrsrachelin account became the most active account in discussing the case of Brigadier Josua, accounting for 37.7% of the total tweets analyzed. Meanwhile, accounts such as @princecentauri, @suhardi1110, @oposicerdas, and @mediakomando are also quite active and have a wide reach. In the case of tweets against Ferdy Sambo, @amrizaldy511 account accounted for 36.36% of the total tweets, followed by @kayanaduris with 18.18%. The influence of these accounts can be seen from the number of retweets and responses they receive from other netizens, so their role in shaping public opinion is very significant as shown in **figure 3**.

Figure 3 below is a data visualization in the form of a pie chart that illustrates the distribution of contributions of social media user accounts X in discussing the murder case of Brigadier Nofriansyah Josua Hutabarat. Each slice of the circle represents one user account, with the percentage of participation indicated by the area of that slice. The larger the slice, the more dominant the account's contribution to the case-related conversation.

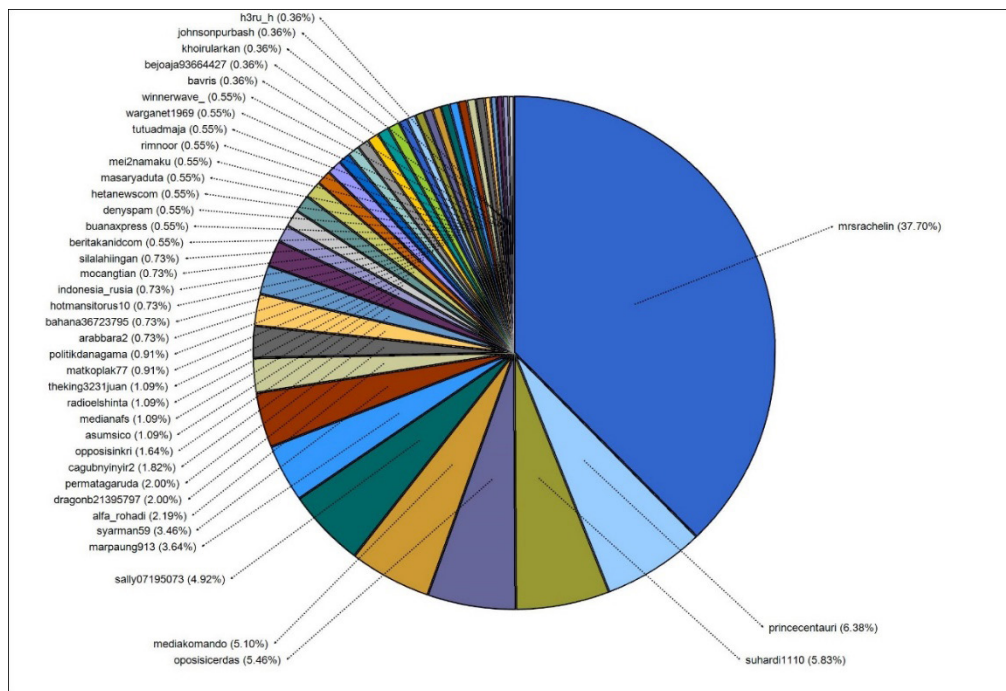


Figure 3: The account that dominates the digital conversation on X about the case of Inspector General of Police Ferdi Sambo, who killed his own men. (Source: processed researcher, 2025)

It appears that @mrsrachelin account is the most dominant actor with a contribution of 37.70%, indicating that this account plays a very active role, both in producing tweets, resharing information, and sparking discussions. Other accounts such as @princecentauri (6.38%), @suhardi1110 (5.83%), @mediakomando (5.10%), and @oposisicerdas (5.46%) also showed high levels of involvement in shaping public opinion. The dominance of these accounts indicates the existence of centers of influence in digital communication networks, which act as *opinion leaders* or the main disseminators of case narratives.

Academically, this visualization reflects a phenomenon called the distribution of discourse power in the digital space. Not all actors have a balanced influence; A small percentage of accounts play a central role in shaping the direction of the public conversation. In the context of digital mass communication, these accounts function like alternative media that supply information, shape the framing of issues, and direct public perception of cases. Thus, this account participation analysis is important to understand how public opinion is formed organically in a networked society, as well as an evaluation of the dynamics of digital democracy that is increasingly decentralized but still raises points of concentration of influence.

The majority of netizens' communication is colored by negative sentiments, especially towards the institution of the National Police. Netizens' responses showed anger, disappointment, and distrust of the law enforcement process. Many tweets stated that the actions of Ferdy Sambo and his group have tarnished the good name of the police, even considered a form of betrayal of the institutional mandate. Some of the netizens' tweet quotes that reflect this sentiment include:

"What kind of act made Brigadier Josua deserve to die? Even if it is wrong, can't it be brought to the realm of law? Why stretch your life in the general's house?" (@mrsrachelin)

"We don't believe anymore... The police shot the police at the police station." (@LeniWidyawati19)

"The determination of Inspector General Ferdy Sambo as a suspect in the murder of Brigadier Josua is just the beginning, a bloody tragedy of the National Police institution." (@catchmeupid)

The tone of communication of netizens at X is not only reactive, but also reflective. Many are demanding institutional reform in the Indonesian Police, and netizens are urging transparency and accountability of the police in the legal process in cases that worsen the image of the police in the eyes of the wider public.

The results of social network mapping using the NVivo tools have shown that communication in this discourse is highly interconnected, with several nodes that are the center of public attention. These nodes consist of netizens' accounts, mass media accounts, and accounts of public figures such as the President of the Republic of Indonesia and the National Police Chief. There were more than 20% of mentions addressed directly to the official account of the National Police Public Relations Division, while 3.33% of mentions were addressed to President Jokowi and National Police Chief General Listyo Sigit. This communication network forms a structure that indicates the existence of collective social pressure on state institutions to act. This pattern is in line with the spiral of silence theory, where dominant public opinion can pressure authorities to respond openly.

One of the important findings of this study is that public opinion formed through social media can function as social capital in the democratization process. Opinions formed through thousands of interactions are not just a reflection of momentary emotions, but an articulation of the social values held by the public: justice, transparency, and accountability.

In the theory of social capital put forward by *Putnam* (1993), trust and social networks are collective assets that drive the effectiveness of civil society. When a country experiences a crisis of legitimacy, public opinion can be a significant source of moral pressure. This can be seen from how public opinion in the Sambo case succeeded in encouraging the acceleration of the investigation process, the formation of a special team of the National Police, and a more open media escort.

However, social capital in the digital space also has a *dark side of social capital*, which is when public opinion is formed through disinformation or unfounded sentiments. Therefore, it is important for netizens to have digital literacy and ethics of public discussion so that this social capital continues to function constructively, not destructively.

The discourse that develops in social media also reveals the informal power structure that is still strong in the National Police, namely the culture of patronage. This culture has become the object of criticism from netizens because it is considered the root of the practice of impunity, legal manipulation, and blind loyalty to superiors. The criticism of Inspector General Sambo is not only directed at his criminal acts, but also at the network of power that protects him.

Within the framework of *the field* and *habitus* theory of Bourdieu (1990), the actions of actors in the field of power (in this case, policing) are shaped by symbolic structures and patron-client relationships. Netizens through social media collectively deconstructed the habitus of power by giving rise to a counter-narrative that law enforcement officials must submit to the rule of law, not to personal power.

Public discourse on social media is not only expressive but also reflective of the social structures that shape it. When society collectively realizes the existence of power inequality, the digital space becomes an important arena for formulating new forms of

social resistance. Netizens are no longer just recipients of information, but are active agents in constructing socio-political reality.

Although social media provides space for the democratization of discourse, it also harbors ambivalence. On the one hand, social media expands citizens' participation in state surveillance; On the other hand, it has the potential to create opinion fragmentation, polarization, and even mob justice that is not based on facts. In this context, the state has an important role not to silence the digital space, but to build a healthy, transparent, and inclusive public communication ecosystem.

The state needs to come up with policies that support digital literacy, protection of freedom of opinion, and a monitoring mechanism for state institutions that are truly responsive to public votes. Otherwise, the digital space will only become an "emotional valve" that relieves pressure, without bringing substantive changes to the unequal socio-political system.

This research contributes to developing an understanding of digital communication in political and legal contexts. By combining a qualitative approach and network analysis, this study proves that public opinion on social media is legitimate social data to be analyzed scientifically. These findings open up new space for communication research that is more contextual and directly connected to actual phenomena.

In addition, this research integrates major theories such as Habermas, Castells, and Bourdieu into a concrete analysis of legal cases, which have often been considered the domain of legal science. In this case, communication science appears as a discipline that is able to bridge the study of media, politics, and digital sociology integrally.

Conclusion

This research reveals that social media X plays a significant role as a discursive space where the public voices opinions, emotions, and demands for transparency and accountability of state institutions, especially in the context of the murder case of Brigadier NJH by Inspector General Ferdy Sambo. Using the communication network analysis approach and qualitative content analysis assisted by NVivo software, this study succeeded in identifying digital communication patterns that reflect two main dimensions: netizens' communication behavior and collective public opinion mapping.

First, the communication behavior of netizens on platform X shows high emotional and intellectual involvement in responding to the case. Expressions of anger, distrust, and calls for police reform appear repeatedly and consistently in thousands of tweets. Digital communication is not only limited to the delivery of information, but has developed into a form of social control over the performance of state institutions. *Second*, the mapping of public opinion shows the formation of the main communication nodes that act as drivers of public narratives. The structure of the communication network that is formed illustrates a pattern of decentralization of influence, where the power of discourse is no longer centralized to state actors or mainstream media, but is spread among social media users who have discursive authority based on digital reputation.

This research also reveals the existence of bureaucratic patronage in police institutions, which is reflected in the involvement of dozens of members of the National Police in the scenario of closing cases. This fact shows that institutional deviations are not only individual, but structural, thus demanding systemic changes in the police body. Social media has transformed into a means of democratizing discourse and people's symbolic

resistance to the dominance of the state's official narrative. In this case, X serves as a digital deliberative forum that brings together opinions, solidarity, and collective pressure from citizens against the government and law enforcement.

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