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Digital Activism and Legitimacy of Law Enforcement (Case Study of "No Viral, No Justice" in the National Data Center Corruption Case)

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Abstract

The “No Viral No Justice” phenomenon reflects a crisis of legal legitimacy in Indonesia, where law enforcement often only takes action after a case goes viral on social media. This study aims to analyze how the crisis of legal legitimacy, digital public pressure, uncoventional political participation, regulatory gaps, and media narratives shape the dynamics of law enforcement. The research method used was Netnography, collecting data from social media (Twitter/X, TikTok) and online news portals. Analysis was conducted though thematic coding of public posts , media acoounts, and public comments highlighting issues releted to the National Data Center. Reseacrh findings indicate that digital pressure from netizens acts as a primary catalyst, compelling legal institutions to respond swiftly to safeguard their public image. However, this pattern of virality driven law enforcement fosters selective case handling and widens the justice gap for those lacking digital acces. The study’s implications underscore the need for structural reform in law enforcement responsiveness to ensure it does not rely on online publik pressure. Advances in information technology have transformed the landscape of the relationship between the state and its critizens in Indonesia, the :No Viral No Justice” phenomenon has emerged as both a form of protest and an expression of public non-confidence in the performance of law enforcement agencies. When formal channels are perceived as slow and bureaucratic, social media transforms into a public courtroom a venue for enforcing justice that compels authorities to act more swiftly.
Keywords: “No Viral No Justice”, legal legitimacy, digital political participation, netnography, National Data Center.

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) recorded that the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 221,563,479 in 2024, representing approximately 79.5% of the total national population. This data indicates that the majority of citizens are now connected within a digital space that enables the rapid dissemination of information and criticism, as well as the mobilization of public opinion. Digital activism manifests not only through social campaigns but also through the monitoring of law enforcement particularly when the public perceives that legal institutions are failing to act swiftly and consistently. According to a 2025 survey by Indikator Politik Indonesia, public trust in law enforcement institutions fluctuates and remains at a moderate level. This phenomenon is reflected in the rising popularity of the phrase "No Viral, No Justice" within Indonesian public discourse; the term encapsulates the perception that legal cases often only receive serious attention from law enforcement authorities after going viral on social media.

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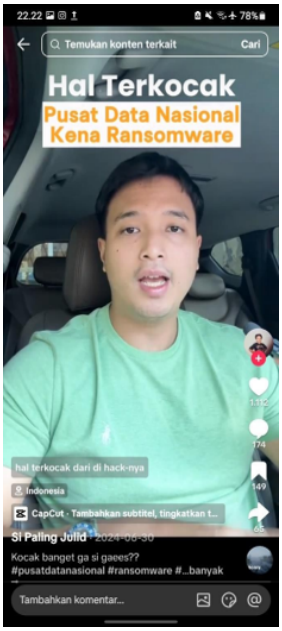
Figure Illustration of the National Data Center case



Source: Kominfo.lhokseumawekota.go.id+1

The National Data Center project, initiated in 2019, aimed to establish national data infrastructure with a budget exceeding IDR 959 billion. However, the Central Jakarta District Attorney's Office uncovered evidence of tender rigging by officials from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo). The "No Viral, No Justice" phenomenon illustrates that law enforcement authorities often take action only after a case goes viral on social media. This has sparked a crisis of legal legitimacy, as the legal process operates based on public pressure rather than the principles of justice.

Figure National Data Center Case Content



Source : Drgmunarsetiyoadi

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The TikTok content in question exemplifies how the digital space has become a primary arena for shaping public opinion. This phenomenon demonstrates that the perceived legitimacy of how the government and law enforcement handle cases is now heavily influenced by the virality of digital content. It reflects the "No Viral, No Justice" phenomenon where issues only gain widespread attention after going viral on social media. While such content facilitates the rapid dissemination of information to the public, this style of humor can also trivialize serious issues regarding state data security issues that actually concern the integrity of the national digital system.

The "No Viral, No Justice" phenomenon observed in the National Data Center corruption case reveals how the legitimacy of law enforcement often hinges on public pressure exerted through digital activism, raising fundamental questions. The National Data Center corruption case exposes weaknesses in the government's digital governance, where a strategic project became a breeding ground for corruption (Aprilla et al., 2024). In recent years, the Indonesian public has witnessed a pattern where law enforcement action often only commences after a case goes viral on social media; a clear example is the strategic project with a budget of nearly IDR 1 trillion, which was compromised by tender rigging, yet only received serious attention following a ransomware attack.

Figure National Data Center Case



Source: Citizenjournalist.id

The involvement of a former Director General at the Ministry of Communication and Informatics with private sector entities underscores how national strategic projects can become

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breeding grounds for corruption through the rigging of tenders. This case serves as a prime example of the pivotal role digital activism and public scrutiny play in driving law enforcement action. "The Government of the Republic of Indonesia issued Presidential Regulation Number 95 of 2018 concerning the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE), which mandates the establishment of a National Data Center to serve as an independent, integrated data management hub and the infrastructure for the national SPBE," stated Safrianto in remarks cited by Detik on Thursday (May 22). The repercussions of this case are far-reaching: significant financial loss to the state as substantial funds allocated for digital infrastructure development were not utilized as intended, thereby stalling a national strategic program and a crisis of public trust, with the public losing faith in the government and law enforcement agencies because action was taken only after the issue went viral on social media. This reliance on virality driven by the "No Viral, No Justice" phenomenon reveals that law enforcement does not operate automatically based on the principles of the rule of law but instead hinges on digital public pressure; it exposes a weakness in the rule of law, where law enforcement agencies appear to function not as guardians of justice, but merely as entities that react to public opinion.

Figure The National Data Center Case



Source: *Kumparan*

The content of the Kumparan post presents a digital news report linking two major issues: the cyberattack on the National Data Center and corrupt practices within the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo). This post illustrates how digital media serves as a primary channel for the public to stay informed about and evaluate government performance. The National Data Center case

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has become a symbol of a digital governance crisis, wherein corruption not only causes financial loss to the state but also threatens the security of public data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Legitimacy

David Beetham (1991; contemporary relevance highlighted by research from Gussela [2025] and Sinaga & Hulwanullah [2025]): Legal legitimacy depends not only on formal procedures but also on public acceptance.

Deliberative Democracy and Political Participation

Deliberative democracy emphasizes the importance of the public sphere as an arena for rational discussion. Social media has now become a new space for deliberation, where public opinion is formed and exerts pressure on the state.

Rule of Law & State Capture

Dicey (Rule of Law) posits that the law must be enforced based on principles of justice rather than public pressure. Hellman et al. (State Capture) highlight how private interests can dominate public policy. Thahar & Maharani (2026) note that while government digitalization should enhance transparency, the National Data Center case has instead become a breeding ground for corruption.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing netnography and content analysis to examine the "No Viral No Justice" phenomenon within the context of the National Data Center corruption case. Data were collected through non-participatory observation of posts, comments, memes, and videos on social media platforms specifically X (Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok as well as through online news reports and relevant legal documents. The research instruments consisted of digital content observation sheets and documentation sheets, with data categorized into five groups: viral content, law enforcement responses, public criticism, legal documents, and media narratives. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The validity of the findings was reinforced through the triangulation of data, methods, and theories, drawing upon perspectives of political legitimacy, the rule of law, deliberative democracy, and political participation to understand the interplay between digital activism, public pressure, and the legitimacy of law enforcement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analyzed accounts were grouped into several categories. First, national mass media accounts such as Kompas.com, detikcom, and Metro TV disseminated information regarding the PDN

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incident's progression and official responses. Second, community information accounts, including those discussing how the KIP Kuliah service disruption affected students. Third, cybersecurity expert or community accounts notably Teguh Aprianto (@secgron) which offered technical critiques regarding security management and data backups. Fourth, meme or satire accounts like @AnakKolong, which employed humor as a form of political criticism. Fifth, TikTok accounts such as MetroNewZ, which helped spread the issue to users of short-video platforms. These categories demonstrate that digital activism does not emerge from a single type of account alone. Journalistic outlets provided context for the events, technical experts offered explanations and evaluations, while satirical accounts transformed dissatisfaction into easily shareable expressions. This diversity in formats and audiences allowed the "No Viral No Justice" narrative to spread across different user groups.

Documentation image uploaded by media related to the PDN case



Source: Research document.

Documentation image of the analyzed account or post



Source: Research documents.

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Documentation of digital conversations regarding the PDN case.



Source: Research documents.

Documentation of public response on social media



Source: Research documentation.

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Figure Additional visual documentation of the research data



Source: Research documentation

Results

An analysis of the comments reveals several key patterns. First, there is public resistance toward officials perceived as incompetent in handling security and data recovery. Second, comments contain technical criticisms regarding weak digital governance, the need for data backups, and human resource readiness. Third, memes and satire are employed to convey criticism in a concise and highly shareable manner. Fourth, some comments view political and legal institutions as insufficiently proactive, reinforcing the notion that viral pressure is necessary to drive accountability.

These patterns demonstrate that digital comments do more than just express emotion; they also articulate claims regarding institutional competence, responsibility, and legitimacy. Criticisms employing harsh language or humor must be understood within the context of digital political communication: while the form may be satirical, the core message often centers on demands for transparency, professionalism, and accountability.

Netnography Coding Table

Digital data source	Key issue/narrative	Socio-political significance	Theoretical connections in the source text
Kompas.com, June 27, 2024	Impact of the PDN ransomware attack	Perceptions of state protection and legal	Political legitimacy

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	and potential civil lawsuits	legitimacy	
Metro TV, June 28, 2024	BSSN unable to identify the hackers	Perception of the state's unpreparedness to face digital threats	Rule of law
SNBP and SNBT Info, June 28, 2024	Access disruptions to the KIP-K program and student concerns	Direct impact on public services and demands for accountability	Deliberative democracy
@AnakKolong, June 24, 2024	Satire regarding the PDN security breach	Humor as an expression of resistance and social control	Political participation
Teguh Aprianto, June 28, 2024	Criticism of PDN management and the lack of data backups	Demands for professionalism and governance evaluation	State capture/governance
Teguh Aprianto, July 9, 2024	Public discourse and criticism directed at the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kemkominfo)	Alternative media amplifying criticism and public pressure	Public sphere
MetroNewZ TikTok, June 25, 2024	Reports on the ransomware ransom and the government's response	Cybersecurity crisis and the spread of public opinion	Legal legitimacy and cybersecurity

The coding table summarizes the relationships among digital sources, emerging narratives, socio-political meanings, and the theories applied within the source documents. This categorization reveals that public criticism is not uniform: some critiques focus on service impact, others on technical competence, and still others on the accountability of officials and institutions.

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Narrative Pattern "No Viral No Justice"

The "No Viral No Justice" narrative emerged when users linked the slow or inadequate institutional response to the level of social media attention. In the PDN case, viral comments and posts acted as a form of reputational pressure, as state agencies and officials faced direct public scrutiny. However, virality cannot be viewed as a substitute for legal processes. While public attention can drive transparency and follow-up actions, the determination of culpability must still occur through legitimate legal mechanisms. This pattern reveals the ambivalence of digital activism. On one hand, social media creates a relatively accessible space for participation, enabling the public to demand explanations. On the other hand, viral conversations risk oversimplifying technical and legal issues, amplifying unverified information, or making popularity the primary benchmark for institutional responses. Consequently, digital literacy and the transparency of official information remain crucial.

Discussion

The findings indicate that social media serves as a public sphere where the public interprets the PDN incident, evaluates government performance, and demands accountability. Comments across mass media, cybersecurity expert, community, and satire accounts demonstrate that opinion formation occurs through diverse sources and communication styles. The combination of information, technical criticism, and humor broadens the issue's reach while generating social pressure on the institutions involved.

From the perspectives of political legitimacy and the rule of law as noted in the source documents public criticism reflects an expectation that state authority be exercised competently, transparently, and accountably. Disruptions to public services intensified these demands because the impact was felt directly by citizens, including those requiring educational services. Viewed through the lens of the public sphere and deliberative democracy, digital conversations allow citizens' experiences to enter public discourse, although the quality of deliberation remains influenced by information accuracy, communication ethics, and institutional responses.

Meanwhile, political satire can be understood as a form of non-conventional participation. Humor makes criticism more memorable and shareable, yet it can also oversimplify issues or unfairly target individuals. Therefore, netnographic analysis must distinguish emotional expressions from the substance of the demands, while also situating comments within the context of the events and their sources.

Implications for Law Enforcement Accountability

The “No Viral No Justice” phenomenon signals a gap between public expectations and confidence in institutional responses. While going viral can drive public attention and discourse,

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credible law enforcement must be grounded in evidence, proper procedures, and adequate transparency. Relevant institutions need to clearly communicate case progress, explain the responsibilities of each party, and demonstrate accountable follow-up actions.

Implications for Digital Activism

Digital activism expands opportunities for the public to voice criticism without relying on formal organizations. However, constructive participation requires verifying information, distinguishing between fact and opinion, and considering the impact of disseminating personal data or unproven allegations. Thus, social media can serve as an effective tool for public oversight, provided that viral pressure is accompanied by fact-based demands and does not supplant legal processes.

CONCLUSION

Analysis indicates that digital activism via social media plays a significant role in driving law enforcement. The public utilizes Twitter, TikTok, and other platforms to voice grievances, disseminate criticism, and create political satire. The viral nature of issues generates public pressure that compels law enforcement agencies and the government to respond immediately. The "No Viral, No Justice" phenomenon has emerged due to the limited capacity of legal institutions and digital governance; law enforcement agencies tend to react to viral issues rather than acting based on formal legal procedures. This fosters a public perception that legal institutions lack independence and instead rely on digital opinion. "No Viral, No Justice" directly impacts the state's legal and political legitimacy; when the state fails to protect public data and acts only after an issue goes viral, legal legitimacy collapses. This also has implications for political legitimacy, as the public views the government as incapable of fulfilling its fundamental role of protecting the public interest. "No Viral, No Justice" is not merely about the virality of issues but reflects structural problems within law enforcement and digital governance in Indonesia. A crisis of legal legitimacy, a compromised rule of law, non-conventional political participation, regulatory gaps, media narratives, and a digital security crisis are interconnected factors that reinforce this phenomenon.

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