

## THE EXPANSION OF EMOTIONAL JURISDICTION IN VIRAL DIGITAL COURTROOMS AND ITS IMPACT ON JUDICIAL LEGITIMACY

Yohanna YR Watofa<sup>1\*</sup>, Atang Suryana<sup>2</sup>, Nurjanah Lahangatubun<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Hukum Manokwari, Indonesia

Corresponden E-Mail; [watofayohana129@gmail.com](mailto:watofayohana129@gmail.com)

### Abstrak

Perkembangan media sosial telah melahirkan ruang peradilan digital yang viral, yaitu ruang daring tempat perkara hukum dibahas, dinilai, dan ditafsirkan secara emosional oleh publik di luar prosedur peradilan formal. Fenomena ini memperluas yurisdiksi emosional, yang dipahami sebagai meningkatnya pengaruh emosi publik terhadap persepsi sosial mengenai otoritas hukum, keadilan, dan kredibilitas lembaga peradilan. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana dinamika emosional dalam ruang peradilan digital yang viral memengaruhi legitimasi peradilan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif sosio-legal, penelitian ini menerapkan analisis wacana digital terhadap 150 unggahan media sosial, komentar publik daring, berita digital, dan tiga kasus hukum viral. Analisis juga diperkuat melalui wawancara mendalam dengan 12 informan, yang terdiri atas akademisi hukum, pengamat media, dan pengguna aktif media sosial. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik dan analisis wacana kritis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ruang peradilan digital yang viral memperkuat partisipasi emosional publik dan membentuk penilaian publik paralel yang memengaruhi persepsi terhadap netralitas hakim, keadilan prosedural, dan kredibilitas lembaga peradilan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa legitimasi peradilan pada era media sosial membutuhkan komunikasi hukum yang lebih adaptif dan strategi tata kelola digital yang lebih kuat.

**Kata kunci:** Legitimasi Peradilan; Media Sosial; Yurisdiksi Emosional; Ruang Sidang Digital; Sosio-Legal.

### Abstract

*The rise of social media has created viral digital courtrooms, namely online spaces where legal cases are discussed, judged, and emotionally interpreted by the public outside formal court procedures. This phenomenon expands emotional jurisdiction, understood as the growing influence of public emotions on the social perception of legal authority, fairness, and judicial credibility. This study analyzes how emotional dynamics in viral digital courtrooms affect judicial legitimacy. Using a socio-legal qualitative approach, the study applies digital discourse analysis to 150 social media posts, online comments, digital news reports, and three viral legal cases. The analysis is supported by in-depth interviews with 12 informants, including legal academics, media observers, and active social media users. The data were examined through thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis. The findings show that viral digital courtrooms intensify public emotional participation and create parallel public judgments that shape perceptions of judge neutrality, procedural fairness, and institutional credibility. The study concludes that judicial legitimacy in the social media era requires more adaptive legal communication and stronger digital governance strategies.*

**Keywords:** *The Legitimacy Of The Judiciary; Social Media; Emotional Jurisdiction; Digital Courtroom; Socio-Legal.*

### Introduction

The development of digital technology and social media has significantly transformed the relationship between society and legal institutions. Legal processes that were once mainly confined to formal courtrooms are now increasingly discussed, interpreted, and judged in digital spaces. This condition has created the phenomenon of viral digital courtrooms, namely online spaces where legal cases become the object of public discussion, emotional reaction, and

collective judgment through social media. Through comments, hashtags, short videos, news sharing, and public narratives, social media can shape how people perceive legal cases, law enforcement actors, and judicial institutions. This phenomenon shows that collective emotions, public opinion, and digital pressure can influence public perceptions of the law enforcement process and the legitimacy of the judiciary (Yanto & Salim, 2025). In recent years, viral cases in various countries, including Indonesia, have shown that social media is capable of forming “public courts” that run in parallel with formal legal mechanisms (Papagianneas, 2024). This condition poses serious challenges to the principles of due process of law, judicial independence, and the presumption of innocence (Bria & Jitariuc, 2025).

Globally, the increasing use of social media in legal issues is closely related to the transformation of the digital public sphere. Social media allows citizens to participate directly in legal discourse, even when they are not formally involved in the judicial process. The concept of the digital public sphere developed by Habermas explains that modern public spaces have shifted from deliberative forums into digital arenas marked by emotional mobilization, narrative contestation, and rapid public reaction (Makwudo & Arinze Emmanuel, 2025). In this context, social media algorithms not only accelerate the circulation of legal information, but also amplify anger, sympathy, distrust, polarization, and moral judgment. These dynamics form affective publics that can influence how society evaluates the credibility and legitimacy of legal institutions (Flam, 2024). Recent research also shows that social media has increasingly blurred the boundary between the courtroom and public space, allowing legal processes to quickly become emotional consumption for digital society (Hakkarainen & Santuber, 2024).

In Indonesia, the phenomenon of trial by social media has become increasingly visible in various legal cases that attract wide public attention. Viral cases such as Vina Cirebon, Mario Dandy, and several sexual violence cases show that digital public opinion often develops faster than formal legal proof. Emotional narratives formed through viral uploads, public comments, audiovisual content, and online news can create strong social pressure on law enforcement officials and judicial institutions (Kajian Syari et al., 2024). In this situation, public perception of justice is not shaped only by legal facts, court procedures, or written decisions. It is also shaped by the emotional acceptance of digital society toward the parties involved, the legal process, and the final court decision. As a result, the legitimacy of judicial decisions is no longer determined only by normative and procedural grounds, but also by the emotional response of the digital public to the outcome of the decision (Vidaki & Papakonstantinou, 2025).

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be understood through the concepts of judicial populism and digital constitutionalism. Judicial populism describes a condition in which legal processes and judicial decisions are influenced by public opinion, majority sentiment, and popular pressure. Meanwhile, digital constitutionalism highlights the challenge of protecting constitutional values, legal rights, and institutional authority in digital spaces (Barroso, 2021). In the context of viral digital justice, legal legitimacy is not only built through legal certainty and formal procedures, but also through public emotions shaped by social media. These accumulated emotional reactions may create what this study refers to as emotional jurisdiction, namely the informal influence of collective public emotions on the perceived authority, fairness, and credibility of judicial institutions. Although emotional jurisdiction has no formal legal status, it can affect how society accepts or rejects legal processes and court decisions (Warren et al., 2023).

Several previous studies have examined the relationship between social media and the justice system. Siregar (2025) examined the differences between formal justice mechanisms and social media courts and found that social media virality can interfere with investigative objectivity and the principle of presumption of innocence. Belloni et al. (2025) analyzed online court communication from the perspective of procedural justice and identified challenges in maintaining fairness in virtual trials. Meanwhile, Desai (2025) highlighted the role of emotions in legal decision-making and the dynamics of virtual courtrooms. These studies show that social media has become an important factor in contemporary legal processes.

However, previous studies remain limited in three important aspects. First, most studies focus on procedural justice, online court communication, or the general influence of social media on legal processes, while the emotional participation of digital publics has not been sufficiently analyzed from a socio-legal perspective. Second, existing research has not fully explained how viral legal discourse transforms public emotions into parallel public judgments that challenge formal judicial authority. Third, limited attention has been given to how these emotional dynamics affect judicial legitimacy in digital spaces. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by analyzing the expansion of emotional jurisdiction in viral digital courtrooms and its consequences for judicial legitimacy. This study argues that emotional participation in digital legal discourse is not merely a public reaction, but a new socio-legal force that can shape perceptions of judge neutrality, procedural fairness, and institutional credibility in the social media era.

The research gap in this study lies in the limited socio-legal studies that link the mobilization of digital emotions, the formation of viral digital courtrooms, and its consequences on the legitimacy of the judiciary comprehensively. Most previous research has focused more on disinformation, social media ethics, or judicial independence, while the emotional dimension as a form of social power expansion in the digital legal space has not been studied in depth (Uwase N., 2025). In addition, previous research tends to use a normative approach, so it has not been able to explain how public emotional interaction on social media shapes the perception of legal legitimacy dynamically in contemporary digital social practices (Uwase N., 2025).

Based on these problems, this study aims to analyze how the expansion of emotional jurisdiction in viral digital courtrooms affects the legitimacy of judicial institutions in the social media era. This research also aims to identify forms of public emotional mobilization in digital legal discourse and explain its consequences on public perceptions of judge independence, legal objectivity, and trust in judicial institutions. By using a qualitative socio-legal approach and digital discourse analysis, this research is expected to be able to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the transformation of legal legitimacy in a digital society.

This research makes a theoretical contribution by developing the concept of "emotional jurisdiction" in the study of digital law and expanding the discourse on judicial legitimacy in the social media era. In addition, this research also contributes practically as a basis for the development of legal communication strategies, digital media governance, and policies to protect judicial independence amid increasing digital public pressure. The results of the research are expected to be a reference for academics, law enforcement officials, judicial institutions, and policymakers in formulating a law enforcement model that is adaptive to the dynamics of the digital public space without ignoring the principles of the state of law and procedural justice.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a socio-legal research design combined with digital discourse analysis to examine the viral phenomenon of digital courtrooms and its implications for the legitimacy of judicial institutions. The socio-legal approach is used because this research does not only examine legal norms formally, but also analyzes social interactions, public emotions, and the construction of legal legitimacy in digital spaces (Abiri & Guidi, 2023). This research focuses on how public opinion and emotional mobilization on social media shape public perceptions of judicial independence, procedural justice, and the credibility of legal institutions.

The research design is a digital case study with the unit of analysis consisting of three viral legal cases in Indonesia during the 2023–2025 period. The three cases were selected purposively based on several criteria. First, the cases received wide public attention and were discussed intensively on social media. Second, the cases generated strong emotional responses, such as anger, sympathy, distrust, moral judgment, and demands for justice. Third, the cases were related to public perceptions of law enforcement, judicial fairness, or the credibility of legal institutions. Fourth, the cases were covered by digital news media and produced significant online public debate. This approach was chosen because it can explain the relationship between digital technology, public opinion, emotional participation, and legal authority in contemporary digital society (Amir et al., 2023).

### **Population, Sampling Techniques, and Data Collection**

The research population includes digital content related to viral legal discourse on social media platforms such as X/Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and online news portals. The sampling technique uses non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling method. Data were selected based on relevance to the selected legal cases, level of virality, intensity of public engagement, presence of emotional expressions, and connection to the issue of judicial legitimacy.

The digital data consisted of 150 social media posts, public comments, and digital news materials that were analyzed in depth. The social media posts were selected based on several criteria: they directly discussed one of the selected legal cases, received visible public engagement through likes, comments, shares, views, or reposts, contained emotional expressions or public judgments, and referred to legal actors, judicial procedures, law enforcement institutions, or court decisions. Public comments were selected when they showed public interpretation of justice, trust or distrust in legal institutions, criticism of legal procedures, or emotional reactions toward victims, suspects, judges, prosecutors, police, or court decisions. Digital news sources were selected from online news portals that reported the selected cases, explained the legal process, presented institutional responses, or documented public reactions in digital spaces.

The research sample also included 12 informants selected through purposive sampling. The informants consisted of legal academics, digital media observers, legal practitioners, and active social media users. Legal academics were selected because they had knowledge of judicial legitimacy, legal institutions, and socio-legal issues. Digital media observers were selected because they understood social media dynamics, virality, and public opinion formation. Legal practitioners were selected because they had practical experience with legal processes and

public perceptions of justice. Active social media users were selected because they had followed, commented on, or participated in discussions related to viral legal cases. These criteria ensured that the informants had relevant knowledge or direct engagement with the phenomenon being studied.

Data collection was carried out through digital documentation, online observation, and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Digital documentation was conducted by collecting and archiving selected posts, comments, and digital news materials. Online observation was used to examine patterns of public discussion, emotional reactions, and the formation of digital public judgment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain deeper explanations of how viral legal discourse influences public perceptions of judicial legitimacy. The interview guidelines were prepared based on indicators of legal legitimacy, public trust, and digital legal communication developed from the research of Irvita & Asriani (2025).

Data credibility was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and intercoder agreement. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from social media posts, public comments, digital news sources, and interview results. Method triangulation was conducted by combining digital documentation, online observation, and in-depth interviews. Member checking was carried out by confirming key interview interpretations with selected informants. In addition, intercoder agreement was used to maintain consistency in the coding process and to reduce researcher subjectivity during data interpretation (Luetke Lanfer et al., 2024).

### **Research Procedures and Data Analysis Techniques**

The research was carried out through several systematic stages. The first stage was identifying viral legal cases that met the research criteria. The second stage was collecting digital data from social media platforms and online news portals. The third stage was selecting posts, comments, and news materials based on relevance, virality, emotional content, and connection to judicial legitimacy. The fourth stage was conducting in-depth interviews with selected informants. The fifth stage was coding, categorizing, and interpreting the data.

In the early stage, the researcher mapped legal cases that had a high level of virality and generated wide public debate on social media. The collected digital data were then archived and classified based on several themes, including public emotions, forms of digital judgment, criticism of judicial institutions, perceptions of procedural justice, and responses to legal decisions. Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis to identify key patterns in digital narratives. Critical discourse analysis was also used to understand the relationship between power, emotion, public discourse, and legal legitimacy in digital public spaces (Luetke Lanfer et al., 2024).

The analysis process was assisted by NVivo 14 software for qualitative coding and visualization of discursive themes. The coding process included open coding, thematic categorization, and socio-legal interpretation. Open coding was used to identify repeated emotional expressions and public judgments in digital discourse. Thematic categorization was used to group data into broader themes, such as emotional participation, digital public judgment, distrust of legal institutions, and legitimacy challenges. Socio-legal interpretation was then used to explain how the expansion of emotional jurisdiction develops in digital spaces and influences the construction of judicial legitimacy in the social media era.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Intensification of Public Emotional Participation and Courtroom Transformation in Viral Digital Courtrooms

The results show that the viral development of digital courtrooms has expanded public emotional participation in legal processes that were previously formal and institutional. Based on the analysis of 150 social media posts from X/Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and online news portals, 72% of the posts contained strong emotional expressions, including anger, empathy, disappointment, distrust of law enforcement, and demands for severe punishment. In addition, 58% of the posts used emotional diction such as “unfair,” “legal engineering,” “judge is not neutral,” and “the law is sharp down,” while 42% presented narratives of support for victims through emotional visualization, dramatic music, and edited trial video clips.

These findings indicate that digital spaces no longer function only as channels for disseminating legal information. They have become arenas for emotional mobilization that shape public perceptions of justice and judicial legitimacy. In the theory of judicial legitimacy, public trust in courts depends not only on formal legal authority, but also on whether the public perceives legal institutions as neutral, fair, and credible. In viral digital courtrooms, this perception is strongly influenced by emotional narratives that circulate through comments, hashtags, short videos, and online news framing.

The analysis also shows that emotional legal content receives stronger public engagement than formal legal explanations. In the three viral legal cases analyzed, video uploads with emotional narratives received an average of 1.8 million views and 124 thousand comments within less than seven days. Meanwhile, uploads that explained legal norms or formal procedures received an average of only 96 thousand views and 4,200 comments. This comparison shows that social media algorithms tend to amplify emotional content more strongly than normative legal information. This condition encourages the formation of parallel digital court spaces that move faster than formal legal evidentiary processes.

**Table 1. Distribution of Public Forms of Emotion in Digital Content**

Types of Public Emotions	Number of Content	Percentage
Anger against law enforcement	48	32%
Empathy for victims	39	26%
Distrust of judges	28	18.7%
Demands for severe punishment	22	14.7%
Support for the defendant	13	8.6%
Total	150	100%

The transformation of the courtroom into a digital emotional arena can also be seen from the content focus. As many as 74% of the social media posts analyzed did not discuss legal substance normatively, but highlighted the emotional expressions of defendants, victims, victims’ families, and law enforcement officials. Content showing victims’ cries, angry family

reactions, or judges' gestures received wider digital distribution than official legal documents or procedural explanations. This finding shows that digital legitimacy is often built through emotional symbols rather than formal legal arguments.

Thematic coding using NVivo 14 identified four dominant discourse patterns in viral digital courtrooms: dramatization of justice, emotional polarization, symbolic distrust of legal institutions, and digital vigilantism. Dramatization of justice appeared in 63.3% of the data through dramatic music, provocative captions, and edited trial clips. Emotional polarization appeared through the formation of "pro-victim" and "pro-defendant" groups that attacked each other in comment sections. Symbolic distrust appeared through accusations against judges, prosecutors, police, and courts. Digital vigilantism appeared through doxing, the spread of personal identities, and calls for social punishment.

**Table 2. Emotion Construction Patterns in Viral Digital Courtrooms**

<b>Digital Narrative Patterns</b>	<b>Amount of Data Percentage</b>	
Dramatization of justice	95	63.3%
Emotional polarization	78	52%
Symbolic distrust of legal institutions	67	44.7%
Digital vigilantism	49	32.7%
Procedural-based legal education	21	14%

These discourse patterns show that public participation in digital legal discourse has shifted from informative engagement to affective engagement. This finding is relevant to the concept of emotional governance, which explains how public emotions are organized, amplified, and directed in social and political spaces. In viral digital courtrooms, public emotions are not only spontaneous reactions. They are shaped by platform algorithms, media framing, audiovisual editing, provocative captions, and repetitive digital sharing.

This interpretation is strengthened by interview data. A digital media observer stated, "Social media algorithms work by magnifying emotions. The more angry the public, the greater the distribution of the content. As a result, the legal process turns into digital emotional consumption" (Interview MD-07, February 22, 2026). This statement confirms that emotional narratives are not merely individual responses, but part of the digital system that increases the visibility of affective content.

The strongest public emotions appeared in the early phases of case virality, when legal information was still incomplete. During the first 24 to 72 hours, 64% of public comments contained assumptions of guilt before the evidentiary process was completed. In addition, 59% of uploads contained partial information or subjective interpretations of the trial, while 34% used out-of-context video clips to strengthen particular emotional narratives. This shows that digital public opinion often develops faster than institutional clarification.

A legal academic explained this situation clearly: "The public is now not waiting for the judge's decision anymore. When the viral video appears, the public immediately forms its own legal conclusions based on the emotions that develop on social media" (Interview AH-03, February 18, 2026). This interview excerpt shows that the digital public space can produce early social verdicts before formal legal procedures are completed.

## The Establishment of Parallel Public Judgments and the Pressure of Virality on Judicial Independence

The study found that viral digital courtrooms created parallel public judgments outside formal legal mechanisms. Of the 150 posts analyzed, 67% explicitly stated that the defendant was guilty before the court verdict was delivered. In addition, 54% of public comments demanded specific punishments, including maximum sentences, life imprisonment, the death penalty, or social boycotts. These findings show that social media has produced an alternative justice space based on emotional perception rather than legal evidence.

**Table 3. Forms of Public Judgment in Social Media**

Digital Forms of Judgment	Frequency	Percentage
Declaring the defendant guilty	101	67.3%
Urging maximum punishment	81	54%
Accusing the apparatus of not being neutral	63	42%
Calling for a social boycott	37	24.7%
Defending the principle of presumption of innocence	19	12.7%

The formation of parallel public judgment was influenced by the power of narrative visualization. Content showing victims' cries, expressions of victims' families, or partially cut trial recordings received a higher level of distribution than content explaining legal principles and evidentiary procedures. This indicates that digital legitimacy is often shaped by emotional resonance rather than formal legal argumentation.

Further analysis shows that parallel public judgments developed through viral narrative reproduction. As many as 61% of the uploads were reposts, stitches, or reactions to previous viral content. This means that digital legal opinion developed circularly and was amplified through continuous algorithmic interactions between users. This process accelerated the formation of emotional consensus about the guilt or innocence of certain parties before the formal legal process was completed.

This finding is closely related to the theory of public opinion. In digital spaces, public opinion is formed rapidly through repetition, emotional framing, and collective reaction. When legal cases become viral, public opinion can develop into social pressure that influences how society evaluates judicial neutrality, procedural fairness, and institutional credibility. Legal practitioner PH-06 stated, "*The main issue now is not just public opinion, but how that opinion evolves into judgmental digital pressure before the courts work*" (Interview PH-06, March 20, 2026).

The study also found that virality creates indirect pressure on judicial independence. Based on interviews with 12 informants, all informants stated that digital public opinion currently has a major influence on public perception of judicial decisions. Eight informants further stated that digital pressure has the potential to affect the psychology of law enforcement officials in handling viral cases. This does not mean that judges directly follow social media demands. Rather, social media creates a public atmosphere in which every legal decision is judged against viral expectations.

Digital observation data show that in the three legal cases analyzed, criticism of the court increased sharply after verdicts that were considered inconsistent with digital public expectations. In one analyzed case, a verdict triggered 2.3 million social media interactions within the first 48 hours after it was read. Most posts contained allegations of judicial bias,

distrust of the legal process, and claims that the verdict was influenced by political or economic interests.

**Table 4. Forms of Digital Pressure on the Judiciary**

<b>Digital Pressure Forms</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Accusation that judges are not neutral	69%
Insistence on maximum punishment	63%
Criticism of the slow legal process	57%
Alleged political intervention	46%
Invitation to boycott legal institutions	28%

These findings are closely related to the principle of judicial independence guaranteed in Article 24 paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and reaffirmed in Law Number 48 of 2009 concerning Judicial Power. However, the findings show that social media pressure creates a new form of informal intervention. This intervention does not come through direct political authority, but through viral digital opinion and collective emotional pressure.

Legal practitioner PH-02 stated, *“Judges remain normatively independent, but socially they face tremendous pressure of opinion when dealing with viral cases”* (Interview PH-02, March 30, 2026). Another informant added, *“Social media is now a new pressure space for judges. Although indirect, digital public opinion creates great expectations of certain decisions”* (Interview MD-08, March 28, 2026). These interview excerpts confirm that judicial independence is challenged not only by formal intervention, but also by emotional pressure produced in digital spaces.

This finding is also relevant to the concept of digital justice. Digital justice can support transparency, public participation, and access to legal information. However, when digital participation is dominated by emotional judgment, it can shift from legal participation into digital punishment. In this condition, the digital public space does not merely support accountability. It can also produce misinformation, social punishment, and pressure against judicial independence.

### **The Shift in Legal Legitimacy from Normative Authority to Public Emotional Validation**

The research found that the legitimacy of judicial institutions has undergone a significant shift due to the development of viral digital courtrooms. Previously, legal legitimacy was built through legal certainty, formal procedures, judicial independence, and court decisions with permanent legal force. However, the findings show that in the era of social media, legal legitimacy increasingly depends on emotional acceptance from digital society.

The analysis of 150 social media posts shows that 71% of users judged justice based on emotional resonance rather than formal legal arguments. Content that appeared to defend victims received stronger public support, even when it did not fully explain legal procedures or evidentiary standards. By contrast, normative legal explanations were often considered insensitive to society’s sense of justice.

Table 5. The Basis of Public Perception of Legal Justice

<b>The Basis of the Perception of Justice</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Public emotional resonance	71%
Victim narrative	65%
Social media virality	61%
Formal legal explanation	29%
Official court verdict	24%

This finding shows a shift from normative legal authority to public emotional validation. In viral digital courtrooms, people often define justice through emotional identification with victims, anger toward defendants, distrust of legal actors, and disappointment with court decisions. As a result, court legitimacy is not only determined inside the courtroom, but also negotiated in digital public spaces.

The study also found that 69% of public comments doubted the neutrality of judges when court decisions did not match dominant social media narratives. In addition, 46% of uploads connected legal decisions to alleged political, economic, or elite intervention without clear legal evidence. This shows that distrust of judicial institutions often emerges when there is a gap between formal legal outcomes and digital emotional expectations.

Table 6. Public Perception of the Judiciary

<b>Perception Indicators</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Doubting the neutrality of judges	69%
Considering the legal process slow	63%
Assessing social media as more transparent	58%
Assuming the verdict was influenced by political pressure	46%
Still believing in formal legal procedures	24%

Thematic analysis shows that distrust of judges' independence appears especially when court decisions differ from dominant emotional narratives on social media. In some cases, verdicts considered lighter than public emotional demands directly triggered accusations such as "legal mafia," "judges are paid," and "unfair trials." This phenomenon shows that the legitimacy of court decisions increasingly depends on the emotional acceptance of digital society.

An academic informant stated, "*We are entering an era where legal legitimacy competes directly with the emotional legitimacy of social media*" (Interview AH-10, April 10, 2026). This statement reflects the central finding of this study. Judicial institutions now face a legitimacy contest between formal legal reasoning and emotional public judgment.

The findings show that emotional jurisdiction is developing as a new form of social authority in digital society. Collective emotions formed through social media serve as a validation mechanism for judging whether a legal decision is considered right or wrong. Emotional jurisdiction has no formal legal status, but it can influence public acceptance or rejection of legal processes and court decisions. In this study, emotional jurisdiction appears

through four main discourse patterns: dramatization of justice, emotional polarization, symbolic distrust of legal institutions, and digital vigilantism.

This phenomenon also creates tension between freedom of expression and legal protection. On one hand, viral digital courtrooms allow the public to express concern, criticize legal institutions, and demand accountability. Social media user US-05 explained, *“If it does not go viral, the public feels that the case will not be processed seriously. So virality is considered part of the struggle to seek justice”* (Interview US-05, April 7, 2026). This statement shows that some users view virality as a strategy to push legal accountability.

On the other hand, emotional participation can threaten the presumption of innocence, judicial neutrality, and the dignity of legal institutions when it turns into premature judgment, accusation, doxing, or digital vigilantism. In this sense, digital justice has a dual character. It can strengthen public accountability, but it can also produce emotional pressure that weakens procedural fairness.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that viral digital courtrooms are not only a digital communication phenomenon, but also a socio-legal legitimacy issue. Public emotions in digital spaces influence how society perceives judge neutrality, procedural fairness, and institutional credibility. These findings extend theories of judicial legitimacy by showing that legitimacy is now shaped not only through formal legal procedures, but also through digital emotional processes. They also contribute to discussions on public opinion, digital justice, and emotional governance by explaining how platforms, algorithms, legal narratives, and collective emotions interact to produce new forms of pressure on judicial institutions.

These findings imply that judicial institutions need more adaptive legal communication strategies in the digital era. Courts and law enforcement institutions cannot rely only on formal decisions or written legal documents. They need to communicate legal processes clearly, timely, and accessibly to the public without sacrificing judicial independence. Digital legal education is also needed to strengthen public understanding of due process, evidentiary standards, and the presumption of innocence. Without such strategies, viral digital courtrooms may continue to expand emotional jurisdiction and weaken public trust in judicial institutions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that the viral development of digital courtrooms has expanded emotional jurisdiction in digital public spaces and significantly affected the legitimacy of judicial institutions in Indonesia. Social media no longer functions only as a medium for disseminating legal information. It has developed into an arena for opinion formation, collective emotional mobilization, and parallel public judgment that operates alongside formal legal processes. The findings indicate that emotional narratives, viral audiovisual content, and digital public pressure influence public perceptions of judicial independence, procedural justice, and the credibility of legal institutions.

This condition shows that legal legitimacy is shifting from a purely normative-procedural basis toward public emotional validation shaped by algorithmic interactions on social media. The phenomenon also reflects the tension between freedom of expression in digital spaces and the principles of due process of law, presumption of innocence, and judicial independence as guaranteed in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law Number 48 of 2009 concerning Judicial Power, and the Electronic Information and Transaction Law.

Based on these findings, this study recommends several practical strategies. First, judicial institutions and law enforcement agencies need to improve institutional transparency by providing clear, timely, and accessible public information regarding legal procedures, case developments, evidentiary standards, and court decisions. This transparency is important to reduce information gaps that often trigger speculation, distrust, and premature public judgment in digital spaces.

Second, public legal literacy should be strengthened through digital legal education programs. These programs should help society understand due process of law, the presumption of innocence, the limits of freedom of expression, and the risks of disinformation, doxing, hate speech, and trial by social media. Stronger public legal literacy can help reduce emotional judgment and encourage more responsible participation in digital legal discourse.

Third, ethical guidelines for legal communication on social media need to be developed. These guidelines should apply to judicial institutions, law enforcement officials, legal practitioners, journalists, and digital content creators. The guidelines should regulate how legal information is communicated ethically, how ongoing cases are discussed responsibly, and how public communication can avoid misinformation, emotional provocation, and violations of individual legal rights.

This study has limitations because it only focuses on three viral legal cases in Indonesia using a qualitative socio-legal approach. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all forms of digital courtroom dynamics. Future research is recommended to use mixed-method approaches, social media big data analysis, or comparative socio-legal studies between countries to provide a broader understanding of emotional jurisdiction, digital public opinion, and the transformation of judicial legitimacy in the global digital ecosystem.

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