

## **Popularity Trap: Communication Ethic of Indonesia Public Figures on Instagram**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Popularity is a double-edged sword for public figures, especially in today's era of social media. Through social media platforms like Instagram, a public figure can easily increase their popularity through the content or posts they share. This study focuses on the case of an Indonesian public figure who was accused of defaming a police officer on social media. The incident caused a setback in their life. A public figure usually has a large number of followers on their social media, so any message they share will always attract attention and greatly affect many people. Therefore, when communicating in the virtual world, public figures must pay attention to digital communication ethics. This research uses a qualitative case study approach by collecting data through interviews and digital observation. This research is significant because it reveals how digital popularity can become a trap that leads to the downfall of public figures in the era of viral culture. Theoretically, this study enriches the development of communication ethics theory and digital reputation. Practically, the findings are useful for increasing public awareness to be more responsible in the digital space. These findings provide input, especially for social media content creators, to be more careful and wise in delivering their information to the general public, because every action and word in the digital space has consequences or effect.

**Keywords:** Popularity; Communication Ethics; Public Figure; Instagram

### **INTRODUCTION**

Cases of defamation, especially on social media, have increased significantly over the past five years, including those involving Indonesian public figures. According to data from the Indonesian National Police's Criminal Investigation Unit, there were 162 cases of defamation in 2022, an increase from 118 cases in the previous year. There has been an increase in defamation cases of approximately 37 percent from the previous year. Public figures usually have a large number of followers on social media, so they are often endorsed by various companies or brands to promote to their followers. Many public figures use social media as a medium to increase their popularity and also as a place to make money. However, on the other hand, social media has many negative impacts, such as being used to spread hate speech, provoke, slander, and vent all kinds of feelings that can lead to defamation of someone.

The popularity of public figures on social media can bring many benefits or, conversely, cause problems for themselves or the wider public. With the help of endorsements from public

figures to the wider audience, the delivery of positive information can be faster, more effective, and more efficient, thus bringing about benefits. However, on the contrary, when there is negative information, posts, or content presented on social media accounts, it will spread very quickly and the impact can be felt immediately, influencing public perception or opinion on a particular issue.

When public figures are in conflict or have problems in the real world and these are brought into the virtual world, they can easily go viral. Many public figures have seen their careers ruined and fallen because of problems brought into the digital space. Popularity can be destroyed in an instant, and it is not uncommon for some public figures to end up behind bars due to their lack of wisdom in communicating in the digital space. Similarly, a post, statement, or action by a public figure posted on social media, if not balanced with wisdom and ethics as a guide, can destroy their digital reputation. In this study, the researcher took the case of a presenter and actor with the initials AF who uploaded a 15-second video to his personal Instagram account. The video highlighted a police officer who was in the Gelora Bung Karno area, Central Jakarta, and accused him of being a ticket scalper for the 2018 Asian Games wheelchair basketball competition. The video quickly went viral on social media, but after an investigation by the police, the allegations were proven false. The accused police officer felt that his reputation had been tarnished and reported AF for alleged defamation through electronic media.

Previous studies have stated that defamation cases usually arise because the plaintiff feels that their reputation has been attacked in a certain way (David Pritchard, 2022). David's research found that the way people describe the damage to their reputation and who they are (their background and social status) influences whether defamation cases are filed and their outcomes. This shows how important communication and personal narratives are in shaping the legal and social reputation of a person. This research gap shows that although the study highlights how the plaintiff and their social background influence the filing and outcome of defamation cases, it does not emphasize the dynamics of reputation in the digital realm, especially for public figures.

According to another study by Carlson & Terry, there are significant differences in how each country interprets and applies defamation laws. Carlson & Terry conducted a comparative analysis of defamation laws in Brazil, Germany, and the United States. They highlight that although defamation laws can be used to combat hate speech, their application is often hampered by abuse by political actors and a lack of participation from social media platforms in responding to content that is harmful to certain groups. (Carlson and Terry, 2024) Although Carlson and Terry's research highlights how defamation laws work in various countries and the obstacles to their implementation, another study

by Derigen Silver suggests that public figures with limited objectives and public figures who are unintentional may be involved in defamation cases due to viral content on social media. Silver & Eumsey assess whether these individuals meet the criteria as public figures and how this can influence defamation. The study emphasizes the importance of understanding the context and impact of viral content in determining whether the statement can significantly damage an individual's reputation. The study also suggests that the court should focus on whether the person actually influenced public opinion or not. (Derigen Silver & Rumsey, 2023)

This research gap indicates that although both highlight public figures—whether with limited roles or unintentionally—they can become entangled in defamation issues due to viral content, the study pays less attention to the context of digital popularity and digital communication ethics. This research is important for understanding how digital popularity can become a trap for public figures amid viral culture. Until now, studies on digital reputation and communication ethics tend to be separate, even though both are interconnected. Theoretically,

this research contributes to the development of ethical theory and digital reputation theory; this approach also broadens the understanding of how virality theory and social media operate in the context of the downfall of public figures. Practically, the results of this study are useful for public figures, digital communication practitioners, and policymakers to navigate ethical and integrity-based communication in the digital space. In addition, this research also raises public awareness about responsibility in the digital space. This study aims to analyze the relationship between popularity and digital communication ethics, identify factors that influence digital reputation and the downfall process of public figures, and explore viral culture and the formation of public opinion.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Robert Post, reputation is not a single concept but consists of three different concepts. First, reputation as property means that a good name is considered a personal asset, like wealth that can be damaged or stolen. In law, when someone slanders another person, it is considered to be damaging the victim's social property (i.e., their image in the eyes of others). This causes individual harm. Second, reputation as honor, meaning that a good name is a person's social status and dignity within their community. Defamation is considered a violation of social norms of honor, attacking the dignity recognized by a particular social group. Third, reputation is part of a person's identity that is formed through social communication. In law and communication ethics, defamation not only damages what people think about us but also disrupts how we understand ourselves in the public sphere. When someone is defamed virally, their image in the virtual world becomes inconsistent with their true identity, damaging their digital reputation (Yaara Arabel, 2024).

Digital reputation is a central concept in the era of platform-based communication. Unlike conventional reputation, which is formed through face-to-face interactions and traditional media, digital reputation is born from the accumulation of self-representation on social media, digital footprints, and public interactions that are recorded and accessible to a wide audience. It is dynamic, easily changeable, and vulnerable to manipulation because its mechanisms are influenced by algorithms, the speed of information distribution, and user participation. In the context of public figures, digital reputation not only reflects one's image in the eyes of the public, but also becomes a symbolic asset that determines social legitimacy, popularity, and economic opportunities. The posts, comments, and online conversations of public figures have the potential to strengthen or destroy their reputation. Therefore, digital reputation can be understood as social capital and symbolic capital that is at stake in every interaction in the digital space. Thus, social media can be said to have the power to change a person's reputation, including that of a public figure.

According to the Digital Reputation Theory by Mazzoleni, public figures must adapt to the logic of the media, so that their digital reputation becomes a product of the interaction between media narratives, digital trace algorithms, and legitimacy. (Mazzoleni, 2017). High popularity does indeed make public figures more vulnerable to defamation, while also requiring them to act ethically in conveying messages, responding to or giving criticism, and managing their interactions on social media. In other words, maintaining digital reputation cannot be separated from upholding the principles of ethical communication. The main principle of communication ethics is to act based on principles that can be used as universal laws: Before acting, we must consider whether our actions can be used as universal laws that apply to everyone, and respect humans as a goal, not as a means. We must treat humans as goals that have dignity and intrinsic value, not as a means to achieve other goals (Allison, 2024).

Communication ethics relates to both verbal and written communication. It encompasses the study of moral principles and their application in communication practices, ensuring that communication is conducted in a respectful, honest, and responsible manner (Sarah Hollingsworth, 2025). In the context of the reputation of public figures, this principle is crucial because the way public figures interact on social media, whether responding to criticism or conveying information, can directly influence public perception of their reputation. Thus, maintaining a digital reputation is not only a matter of popularity but also of managing communication ethically in the virtual world.

Ethics on social media are often overlooked because of the freedom that social media facilitates as a space for interaction and communication. Through social media, users can easily search for or add friends, share information, express feelings or ideas, convey feelings or emotions in words, images, or photos, and even share news. This freedom to share often leads to offensive remarks, indirect hurtful comments, and bullying, both to the person being spoken to and to parties outside the conversation. This is what is referred to today as an ethical crisis (Astajaya, 2020). The flow of communication on social media, as in real life, does not escape the importance of upholding ethical communication. Freedom on social media is not unlimited freedom. On the contrary, it is necessary to pay attention to human values, norms, and rules, just as when interacting in the real world.

Instagram is a visual-based social media platform that allows users to share moments through photos and videos. Instagram has revolutionized the way humans build digital identities and seek social validation through likes, comments, and the number of followers. Instagram also has great potential as a medium for marketing and self-image, especially for public figures. However, the public nature of content on Instagram makes it prone to conflict, blasphemy, and even defamation, because what is posted can spread quickly without full control from the account owner (Prajari, 2019).

Instagram is a powerful communication tool for sharing photos, videos, messages, and information. Instagram allows users to engage in interactive conversations and provides opportunities to enhance creativity. (Farah, et al, 2024)

The discussion of digital reputation and Instagram shows that social media can be a powerful tool for building image, but it also carries the risk of defamation. Defamation through social media is an act committed by a person or individual who, without authorization, spreads slander or words, whether in the form of videos, that can attack the honor and reputation of a person, who usually feels ashamed as a result. Defamation is a complaint offense where a person can be said to have had their reputation tarnished if there is a party who feels that their dignity and honor have been attacked. (Gonggom, 2020). Defamation on social media is a criminal offense under Indonesian criminal law, specifically in Article 27 paragraph 3 of the ITE Law and Articles 310 and 311 of the Criminal Code. In cases of defamation on social media, the evidence must show that there are elements of insult or slander spread through digital platforms and accessible to the public. (Sugiharto, 2025).

Digital ethics has opened up new avenues for defamation, and malicious actors are taking advantage of this with increasingly sophisticated tools (Kumar, 2024). Insulting and defamatory comments on social media raise concerns in modern society. This phenomenon can have a negative impact on individuals, including the target, damaging their reputation and self-esteem and causing stress, anxiety, and depression (Isnawan, 2025). Based on various studies, it appears that social media is not only a space for expression, but also an arena for reputation battles and potential violations of communication ethics. The phenomenon of defamation that arises in the digital space reveals the complexity of the relationship between law, ethics, and popularity. Based on this, the objectives of this study include analyzing how popularity can become a trap for the downfall of the digital reputation of public figures due to defamation

cases, identifying forms of communication ethics violations on social media, and explaining how viral culture on social media can shape public opinion.

Viral Psychology explains that certain types of information, especially those that trigger strong emotional reactions such as shock or anger, are more likely to spread widely on digital platforms. According to Rathje and Van Bavel, there are several psychological factors that influence the viral spread of content on social media, including emotional arousal, meaning that content containing negative information or triggering strong emotions such as anger is more likely to be shared. This is due to human cognitive bias, which pays more attention to threats or negative information as a survival mechanism. The next factor is Moral Emotion and Social Identity. Content that expresses moral outrage or criticism of outsiders can strengthen an individual's social identity. The third factor is the Virality Paradox, meaning that the spread of content does not always reflect individual preferences but is more influenced by social and psychological dynamics. The fourth factor is the role of social structure and technology; the spread of information is also influenced by social structure and algorithms. (Rathje, 2025).

## **METHOD**

In this study, the author uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. The data collection methods used in this study are interviews and digital observation of several posts by public figures that caused them to be embroiled in defamation cases. The author chose case studies because they wanted to analyze in depth how the popularity and reputation of public figures can be destroyed and ruined due to a social media post that does not respect the values of ethical communication. A single case study is a qualitative research strategy that emphasizes an in-depth study of a specific case that is clearly limited by time, place, or event. A single case study is a research design that places one main unit of analysis (individual, organization, group, event, or phenomenon) as the focus of the study, with the aim of comprehensively understanding the dynamics of the case (Yin, 2018, p. 96). This study uses purposive sampling technique, which is the deliberate selection of subjects based on certain considerations relevant to the research. The main subject chosen is a public figure with the initials AF and the account @axxxfxxxxxxx. He is an actor and presenter who has been involved in a defamation case through the social media platform Instagram. This case was chosen because it represents the phenomenon of the decline of a public figure's digital reputation in the digital space. This study highlights the challenges of communication ethics that arise on social media and their relationship to the reputation of public figures. This study also highlights how the digital popularity of public figures can influence the risk of defamation. The source in this study is a figure from the world of acting and presenting with the initials AF, who was once involved in a defamation case on social media, and whose case has been resolved.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section, the researcher will present the results of research focusing on the dynamics of communication ethics in social media or digital space and the fall of public figures' reputations amid the culture of social media virality. The findings of this study indicate that digital popularity can function as both a strength and a trap. Based on a case study of an Indonesian public figure with the initials AF, who experienced defamation on social media due to a post on Instagram, the results of this study are described in several themes, including: First, Popularity and Digital Communication Ethics; Second, Digital Reputation and the Fall of Public Figures; and Third, Viral Culture and the Formation of Public Opinion.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher outlines the relationship between Popularity and Digital Communication Ethics through the table below :

Tabel 1  
 Between Popularity and Digital Communication Ethics

<b>Aspec of Communication</b>	<b>Action Of Public Figures on Social media</b>	<b>Impact on Popularity</b>	<b>Ethical Implications</b>
Honesty and informations verivications	Spreading accusatory videos without prior confirmation	Credibility decreases, reputation crisis arises	Ethics of truth and responsibility Responsibility
Admitting mistakes	Acknowledging Mistakes	Reputation slowly recovers	Ethics of acknowledgment and moral justice
Empathy and Emotional Influence	Posting in spontaneous anger without careful thought	Public opinion is divided (pros and cons)	Ethics of self-control in the digital space

### **POPULARITY AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION ETHICS**

The results of this study show that popularity on social media has two sides. The popularity of public figures can bring benefits and be a source of social legitimacy, but on the other hand, popularity can also be an ethical trap in digital communication. For public figures, popularity is an important thing to strive for and becomes a symbolic image of a public figure, which is the capital that allows public figures to continue to exist. Popularity is an asset that public figures already possess. In the digital era, popularity is no longer just recognition, but also a form of social pressure. Public figures feel they must be present and responsive to anything related to their surroundings that is considered important by the public, even when it could lead to misunderstandings, hate speech, and online conflicts. In this context, digital communication ethics become fragile because the motivation for popularity often overrides ethical or professional considerations.

A research finding explains that the culture of digital popularity creates a new form of attention economy, where moral values are often compromised in order to maintain social relevance (Marwick & Boyd, 2021). In addition, this phenomenon reinforces the view that digital reputation has now become a form of social currency that influences how a person negotiates their identity in the online public sphere. (Post, 2020). In the context of defamation, popularity plays a dual role. On the one hand, popularity amplifies the impact of conflict because every post has high viral potential. On the other hand, popularity is also used as a means of self-defense, where public figures utilize the support of their followers to shape opinion and reframe narratives that are detrimental to them. This kind of practice raises ethical dilemmas. The purpose of ethics is to provide guidance on how humans should act, not to describe human behavior in real life. It is a set of rules that should be followed by human behavior. (Tolulope, et.al, 2024)

When linked to the case of public figure AF, the most appropriate reason is that his popularity has a tremendous impact on his posts, with enough followers that his posts quickly

go viral and cause turmoil in the community, because his posts drag in an individual from the Indonesian police institution.

However, due to a previous defamation case against him, AF is aware and has learned from experience that social media must be used wisely, thinking before posting and considering the pros and cons. He shared this in an interview: *"Think before you post. So, before we post, we think first—is it good or not? Is it true or not? So, for me, it's about learning to be wiser and more cautious."* (AF, 2025)

Thus, digital popularity cannot be separated from ethical communication responsibilities. The need to maintain public attention must be balanced with moral awareness of the social impact of every communication action or act. In an increasingly competitive digital ecosystem, ethics becomes a symbolic boundary that determines whether popularity functions as a tool for empowerment or as a source of social vulnerability. With this experience, AF encourages people to be wiser and more careful when posting.

*"My experience with social media is that I've had problems. Social media is where we become people, especially for friends. Anyone who has a lot of followers can be called a celebrity, artist, or public figure. It would be good for us to use social media wisely. This is also a message for myself, especially since I have experienced it. So, let's continue to use social media with proper ethics. We know we must be polite and how we can provide good value to many people because we will be followed. The good will be followed. The bad will also be followed. It would be unfortunate if we set a bad example. So, let's learn together to use social media correctly so that we can deliver good messages to everyone, as much as possible."* (AF, 2025).

From AF's experience, we must use social media wisely and not ignore ethical communication values such as:

1. Honesty and truthfulness of information

Honesty must be upheld by every individual in society, especially public figures. Information conveyed to the public should not contain misleading news or information, and should not attempt to spread hoaxes because this can shape public opinion.

2. Maintaining privacy

In the digital space, we must respect our own privacy and that of others by not disclosing personal data, photos, or conversations without permission.

3. Respect for others

Respecting the dignity of others is essential in the digital space because considering others' feelings before sharing, commenting, or posting will help avoid digital conflicts.

4. Responsibility for content

Every individual and public figure must be responsible for their posts on social media, whether in the form of speech, writing, or actions. In addition, they must also be aware of the social, legal, and reputational consequences of every piece of content they share.

5. Ethical Awareness in Virality

In the digital space or social media, there are often individuals or public figures who exploit conflicts or tragedies to increase their engagement or popularity. This must be avoided because it affects the mental health of the wider community, as they are exposed to content that is uneducational and useless, benefiting only one party.

According to AF, public figures inevitably have many followers, and the good will be emulated, while the bad will also be emulated. He never tires of reminding people about social media ethics. "In my case, I am also emotional, giving my opinion first, but I didn't check who that person was, whether they were selling tickets or refunding tickets at the time. Therefore, it would be better if we always understand the situation before criticizing or doing anything else."

## **DIGITAL REPUTATION AND THE DOWNFALL OF PUBLIC FIGURES**

This study explains that digital reputation for public figures is a symbolic asset that is highly vulnerable to the dynamics of public opinion. In the era of social media, reputation is no longer formed linearly through professional achievements and credibility, but rather through interaction, personal branding, perception, and algorithms or visibility. Digital reputation can rise dramatically through positive viral momentum, but it can be destroyed instantly in a matter of hours or even minutes due to a single communication error that is considered unethical by the public.

Public figures involved in defamation cases acknowledge that the fall of reputation is often not caused by the substance of the conflict, but by the moral perceptions of the audience. In this context, digital communication ethics becomes the main determinant in the public assessment process. The digital community assesses not only what is associated, but also how, when, and to whom the message is conveyed. This shows that digital reputation is built through ethical performance, not only through actions, but also through the moral image displayed in the online public sphere. This finding is consistent with Robert Post's view that reputation in the digital age is a form of moral communication that is constantly negotiated between individuals and online communities. Meanwhile, Papacharissi (2015) highlights that reputation decline is often a consequence of public emotionality shaped by platform algorithms, where emotional reactions (likes, comments, and shares) become the mechanism for determining the social value of a figure.

In this case, the downfall of public figures on social media is not just a personal phenomenon but a representation of the transformation of values in digital culture. Popularity built without a foundation of ethical communication becomes fragile because it depends on fluctuating public sentiment. Conversely, figures who integrate ethical values, transparency, and empathy in digital communication tend to have a reputation that is more resistant to crisis. Thus, digital reputation functions as a moral mirror that shows the reciprocal relationship between individuals, technology, and society. The downfall of public figures is not solely the result of communication failures or mistakes, but a reflection of the failure to maintain ethical integrity amid algorithmic pressures and ever-changing public expectations.

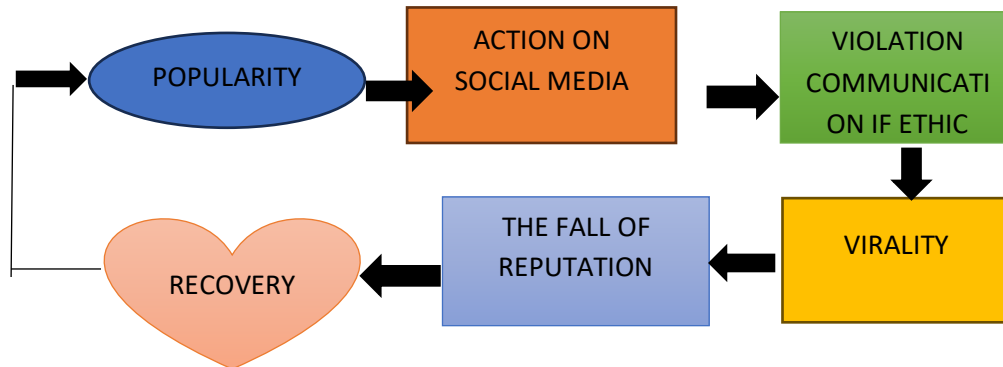
In relation to the case of AF's defamation, the reputation he had built over many years as a presenter and actor instantly collapsed due to one post that was deemed unethical. Even his last Instagram post before he was named a suspect drew a flood of criticism from netizens. Many criticized AF's post. Netizens argued that AF should have considered the impact of uploading the video. Some also regretted AF's actions because they caused him to have to deal with the police. This happened even though AF was about to release his latest film. (Ninda Iswara, 2018).

During his five-month prison sentence for defamation, AF found it difficult to endure being away from his family, especially his young child. However, AF tried to serve his sentence with an open heart and cooperated with the legal process. After his release, AF tried to be more prudent in using social media. However, according to AF, he views his case as a valuable lesson and never felt ashamed because his name was clean and he had never been involved in any legal cases before, nor had he committed any serious offenses or crimes.

AF feels that his popularity or reputation did not increase or decrease after the defamation case that ensnared him. "I think it's the same, but I would say that maybe there was a moment when, because I had just been released from prison, everyone wanted to invite me to events, but other than that, it's still the same. I'm still invited to shoot series or films, there are still some, even though they're not as wow and crowded. Personally, regarding my case, I feel the same. Whether it's bad or not, whether it changes immediately or not. So, I'm still

grateful that I can still work in the entertainment industry, still be able to entertain, so I'm grateful.

Based on the researcher's observations and analysis, typically a public figure with high popularity, after experiencing virality and a fall in reputation, will go through a point of reflection or self-reputation recovery, which may lead them to become someone who changes for the better and regains popularity. The following is the cycle of a public figure's reputational fall in the digital and viral culture era:



### **VIRAL CULTURE AND THE FORMATION OF PUBLIC OPINION**

The phenomenon of viral culture on social media plays an important role in shaping public opinion about a person or institution. Based on digital observations, content such as that posted by Public Figure AF is a type of video that will elicit diverse reactions from the public, especially emotional responses and anger, because the video posted depicts the behavior of a police officer who is suspected of being a ticket scalper at the ASEAN GAMES. As a result, the video posted by AF went viral and caused an uproar in the virtual world. On Instagram, reaction videos have become a significant form of creative expression (Khusnul Fitri dkk, 2025)

This is in line with the psychological theory of virality proposed by Rathje and Van Bavel, which states that content that evokes emotional arousal and moral resonance is more likely to be shared by individuals as an expression of social identity and group loyalty. In addition, the phenomenon of viral paradox explains that viral content is not always accurate or of high quality, but is influenced by social interactions and digital platform algorithms, so that public opinion can be formed emotionally with this perspective that viral culture is not just the dissemination of information but also a social process that shapes the norms, perceptions, and collective attitudes of the audience towards certain issues. Therefore, the theory of virality is an effective analytical tool for understanding the dynamics of public opinion formation in the digital age, where content virality and social psychology interact in shaping public perception. The following is a screenshot of a video post on the Instagram social media account of public figure AF.



source: Viva News & Insight, 2018

*“Shameful!!! This is my first day at GBK to support the INDONESIAN Wheelchair Basketball Team @xxxxx at @xxxxx...I am proud, happy, and moved by the enthusiasm of the FULL HOUSE audience at the Senayan basketball court,”*

*“I even bought tickets with coach @xxxx and waited in a long line to enter the court. But I am disappointed and upset by this incident! The police, who are supposed to protect and serve the public, are instead acting as ticket scalpers. This is unacceptable! Let the public judge. I'm doing this because I love Indonesia,”*

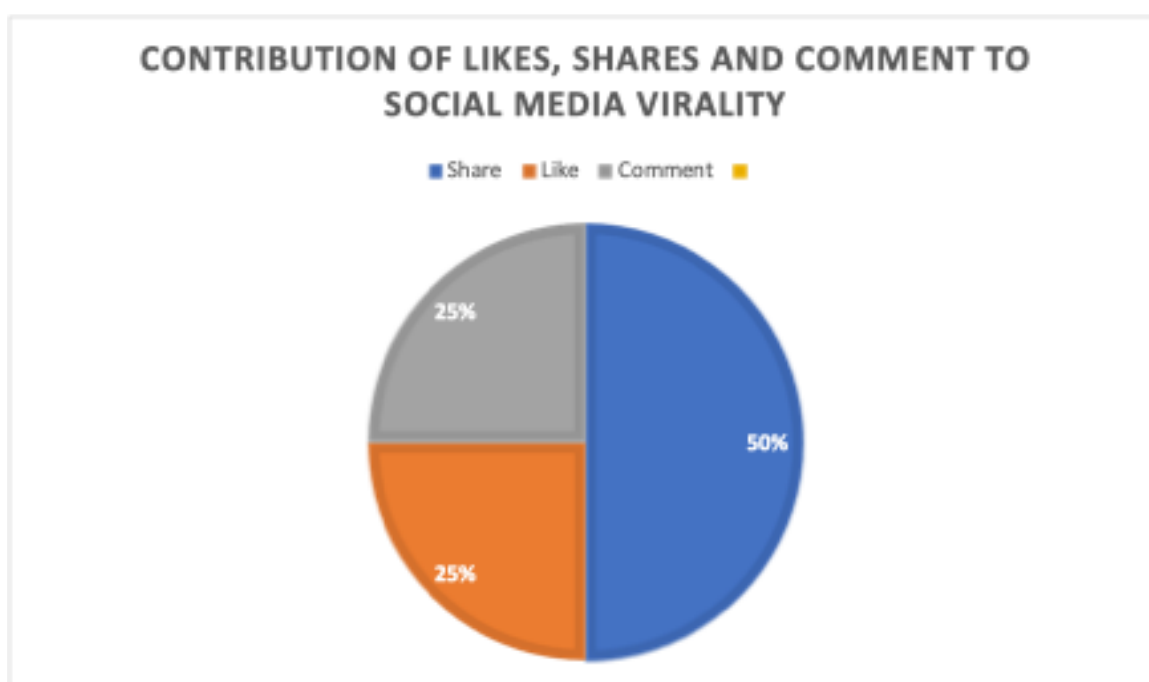
According to the statement from the Jakarta Central Police Chief, the police officers in the video only wanted to process ticket refunds. Since the post contained anger and negative emotions, the content spread rapidly online. The police officers in the video felt their reputation was tarnished and reported public figure AF for defamation under Article 27(3) of the Information and Electronic Transactions Law. As a result of the post, public figure AF had to face legal consequences and served five months in prison.

Researchers conducted a direct interview with AF. During the conversation, AF admitted to being shocked and not expecting it. *“Shocked... yes... because I didn't expect it... because at that time, I only thought about wanting to spread something good and wanted to inform the public about something that was not true. We told the public that it was not true, but it turned out to be the opposite; it became a big deal and caused a commotion. After entering the legal system, it turned out that I did not have strong witnesses or evidence. I didn't think about going viral; I just wanted to give constructive criticism. Why did I end up in jail...? I saw something that was wrong, in my opinion. I posted the video with the hope that I was actually quite careful at that time with the wording, with the captions, by using the term “individual” but not intending to mention a specific institution or agency, but it turned out that I didn't have any evidence or witnesses to support me, so I was considered to be spreading false news...”*

Based on the interview results, the researcher analyzed that posts by public figures with a large number of followers can easily go viral, especially if the posts have negative tendencies and emotions. When posts on Instagram easily appear on everyone's accounts, they can easily influence psychological or emotional aspects. When the post is reposted, commented on, and given likes/loves, it can indirectly shape public opinion. If a video is shared on social media accounts and then reposted, it will go viral very quickly, and public reaction cannot be

controlled because diverse perceptions and comments will form. The public opinion formed from these posts includes the negative image of the police force, and the police officer in question feels that his good name has been tarnished because his face is clearly visible. Public opinion can also be formed because netizens/the public read the comments on the shared post. The words written by netizens in the comments section certainly affect the perceptions of each individual/member of the public who sees the post.

Based on the researcher's observations, several cases of defamation on the social media platform Instagram went viral due to various interactions such as likes, shares, and comments. According to the researcher's findings, the act of followers or netizens sharing posts causes the posts to quickly go viral. Similarly, activities such as likes and comments also contribute to the formation of public opinion because individuals can influence each other just by reading comments and seeing the number of people who like a post on social media. A person's perception, who initially knows nothing, can be affected by reading comments, whether positive or negative, which at the very least will influence public opinion.



## CONCLUSION

This study shows that in the era of social media, reputation and digital communication ethics are interrelated and difficult to separate. Popularity in the digital space provides an opportunity for someone to become widely known, but at the same time makes them easy to spot, judge, and even bring down. It is in this situation that individuals, especially public figures, are always in the public eye. Social media has now become a space driven by emotions, sympathy, anger, or the desire to defend or bring someone down, which spreads quickly and shapes public opinion. As a result, the fall of a public figure's reputation is often not due to one major mistake but rather a wave of emotions that is continuously amplified by algorithms and viral culture. Finally, this study confirms that the digital world will become a healthier space when popularity is exercised with responsibility, reputation is built with integrity, and every interaction or post

is fortified with empathy and mutual respect. Ethics are not merely a moral requirement but a compass to prevent humans from getting lost in the digital flow.

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