

Social Media and Contemporary Policing in Indonesia: Public Communication, Crisis Response, and Institutional Reputation

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Abstract

Social media has transformed communication between police institutions and the public by enabling rapid dissemination of information, direct interaction, and real-time responses to emerging incidents. At the same time, social media exposes police institutions to reputational risks, misinformation, public criticism, and communication crises. This study examines the role of social media in contemporary policing in Indonesia, focusing on public communication, crisis response, and institutional reputation. The research adopts a qualitative approach to analyse police communication practices, digital engagement, and the broader institutional implications of social media use. The study argues that social media should not be viewed solely as a public-relations instrument but as an important component of contemporary police–community relations. Effective digital communication requires transparency, responsiveness, accuracy, consistency, and awareness of public expectations. The analysis also highlights the importance of institutional capacity to respond to misinformation and rapidly developing public controversies without undermining public trust. The study contributes to policing and communication scholarship by examining how digital platforms reshape police legitimacy and institutional communication in Indonesia. It recommends the development of integrated digital communication strategies supported by professional training, clear communication protocols, and mechanisms for public engagement.

[Media sosial telah mengubah komunikasi antara institusi kepolisian dan masyarakat dengan memungkinkan penyebaran informasi yang cepat, interaksi langsung, dan respons seketika terhadap insiden yang sedang terjadi. Di saat yang sama, media sosial juga menghadapkan institusi kepolisian pada risiko reputasi, misinformasi, kritik publik, dan krisis komunikasi. Studi ini mengkaji peran media sosial dalam praktik kepolisian kontemporer di Indonesia, dengan fokus pada komunikasi publik, respons terhadap krisis, dan reputasi institusi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif untuk

menganalisis praktik komunikasi kepolisian, keterlibatan digital, serta implikasi institusional yang lebih luas dari penggunaan media sosial. Studi ini berargumen bahwa media sosial tidak boleh dipandang semata-mata sebagai sarana hubungan masyarakat, melainkan sebagai komponen penting dalam hubungan antara polisi dan masyarakat di era modern. Komunikasi digital yang efektif menuntut adanya transparansi, daya tanggap, akurasi, konsistensi, dan pemahaman terhadap harapan publik. Analisis ini juga menyoroti pentingnya kapasitas institusi dalam merespons misinformasi dan kontroversi publik yang berkembang cepat tanpa mengikis kepercayaan masyarakat. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi bagi kajian kepolisian dan komunikasi dengan menelaah bagaimana platform digital membentuk ulang legitimasi kepolisian serta komunikasi institusional di Indonesia. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan pengembangan strategi komunikasi digital terpadu yang didukung oleh pelatihan profesional, protokol komunikasi yang jelas, dan mekanisme pelibatan publik.]

Keywords: social media policing, police communication, digital engagement, institutional reputation, Indonesia

Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media has fundamentally altered the communication environment surrounding contemporary policing. Police institutions previously depended heavily upon press conferences, conventional news media, public announcements, and face-to-face community engagement to communicate institutional information. Digital platforms have disrupted this relatively linear communication structure by allowing police organisations to communicate directly with citizens while simultaneously enabling citizens to produce, circulate, contest, and reinterpret information about police activity. Consequently, police organisations now operate in an environment characterised by continuous visibility and accelerated feedback. Social media enables institutions to disseminate information rapidly, but it also reduces their capacity to control how information is interpreted after publication. Research on policing and social media has consequently identified both opportunities for engagement and constraints arising from organisational culture, institutional hierarchy, and public scrutiny (Walsh and O'Connor 2019).

The transformation is particularly significant for policing because police institutions possess coercive authority and are consequently subject to intense public expectations concerning transparency, fairness, responsiveness, and accountability. Unlike many public organisations, police institutions routinely become the focus of public controversy when decisions concerning arrests, investigations, use of force, public demonstrations, traffic enforcement, or criminal cases are recorded and circulated online. Social media can therefore transform an isolated encounter into a national controversy within a very short period. Studies of

police legitimacy have demonstrated that social media provides a new environment in which citizens evaluate police conduct and where institutional legitimacy can become an ongoing dialogue between police organisations and their audiences (Ralph 2022). The communicative implications are substantial because the credibility of official information can become intertwined with citizens' prior experiences and expectations concerning police behaviour.

Indonesia provides an important context for examining this transformation. The Indonesian National Police has progressively expanded its digital communication infrastructure through the central Public Relations Division and the social-media presence of regional police units. The official Humas Polri platform currently integrates public-information services, media updates, digital applications, complaints, surveys, and social-media channels including Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. This institutional architecture demonstrates that digital communication has become integrated into the police organisation rather than being treated simply as an informal activity of individual officers. At the same time, the expansion of official digital communication creates organisational expectations concerning speed, accuracy, accessibility, and responsiveness. Once an institution establishes multiple digital channels, silence or delayed communication during a controversial event can itself become interpreted as an institutional response.

The Indonesian police have also formally recognised the changing communication environment. In 2023, the National Police issued Regulation No. 6 of 2023 concerning public relations and the Humas Presisi portal, followed by the development of standard operating procedures for police public-relations units. In 2024, the Head of the Police Public Relations Division emphasised that the development of the internet and social media required police public-relations functions to move beyond conventional communication methods and develop contemporary forms of public communication. This institutional development is analytically important because it demonstrates that social media is increasingly regarded as part of organisational communication infrastructure. The challenge is consequently no longer whether police should use social media, but how digital communication can be integrated into professional policing without reducing public engagement to promotional communication.

The academic literature reveals an important gap in this regard. International studies have examined police social-media strategies, community engagement, crisis communication, legitimacy, public perceptions, and institutional image. However, these strands are often studied separately. Research on social media strategies examines organisational communication, while research on crisis communication focuses on responses to controversial events, and legitimacy research considers citizens' perceptions of police authority. The Indonesian literature has similarly developed case studies concerning Instagram, Twitter, digital public relations, misinformation, and particular police controversies. Yet a more integrated framework is needed to explain how social media simultaneously

functions as a communication channel, a crisis environment, and a site of institutional reputation formation.

This article addresses that gap by conceptualising social media in Indonesian policing as a multidimensional institutional environment. The article asks how social media reshapes police public communication, how digital platforms affect institutional responses during crises, and how communication practices influence the conditions under which institutional reputation and legitimacy are constructed. The central argument is that social media should not be understood merely as a technological instrument for distributing police information. It constitutes a communicative arena in which police organisations make claims about their competence and accountability, citizens evaluate those claims, alternative narratives emerge, and institutional reputation is continuously negotiated. This conceptualisation connects policing scholarship with public communication and crisis-communication literature.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Social media differs fundamentally from traditional mass communication because it combines broadcasting, interaction, user-generated content, networked distribution, and rapid feedback within the same communication environment. Kavanaugh et al. (2012) demonstrate that social media can provide governments with opportunities to identify issues in real time and respond to emerging situations, while simultaneously producing substantial information overload and misinformation that require institutional filtering. For police organisations, this combination creates a dual condition. Digital platforms increase institutional visibility and the capacity to communicate directly with citizens, but they also expose institutions to a continuous stream of public reactions that cannot be completely controlled. The communicative value of social media consequently depends not only on the ability to publish content but also on the ability to interpret, respond to, and learn from digital interactions.

Police social-media strategies are not uniform because organisational structures, professional cultures, institutional objectives, and perceptions of the public influence how platforms are used. Meijer and Thaens (2013), comparing police departments in Boston, Washington, and Toronto, identified different strategic orientations ranging from predominantly one-way communication to interactive and network-oriented approaches. Crump (2011) similarly found that police use of Twitter was constrained by organisational culture and tended to reinforce existing communication structures rather than automatically producing transformative police–public engagement. These findings are important for Indonesia because technological adoption does not automatically create organisational transformation. Digital platforms can reproduce conventional institutional communication patterns if police organisations continue to conceptualise citizens primarily as audiences rather than participants.

The concept of legitimacy provides an important theoretical foundation for analysing this relationship. Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) conceptualise legitimacy as dialogic, meaning that institutional legitimacy involves both claims made by authorities and responses from their audiences. This approach is especially applicable to social media because digital platforms intensify the interaction between institutional claims and public responses. Police organisations can publish statements asserting professionalism, transparency, effectiveness, or accountability, but citizens can immediately challenge those claims through comments, reposts, videos, independent investigations, and alternative narratives. Legitimacy therefore becomes dynamic rather than being a fixed institutional attribute. Social media does not create legitimacy by itself; rather, it changes the communicative conditions under which legitimacy is claimed and evaluated.

Procedural justice further strengthens this theoretical perspective. Tyler's work on legitimacy emphasises the importance of fair treatment, neutrality, voice, and trustworthy motives in shaping citizens' perceptions of legal authorities. Although social media interactions differ from face-to-face encounters, recent research suggests that procedural-justice principles remain relevant online. Zaidi and O'Connor (2024) found that police personnel managing social-media accounts often attempted to address negativity and conflict through principles resembling procedural justice, including respectful interaction and responsiveness. The implication for Indonesia is that online communication should not be assessed solely by the amount of information released. The quality of interaction also matters. A technically accurate response can still undermine legitimacy if citizens perceive the institution as dismissive, defensive, selective, or unwilling to acknowledge legitimate concerns.

The literature on police image work introduces another dimension. O'Connor and Zaidi (2021) found that police services use social media partly to communicate an image of policing that emphasises effectiveness and openness to public engagement. Wood (2020) similarly demonstrates how police organisations can adopt platform-specific engagement strategies, including humorous or informal content, to increase interaction and visibility. Such practices demonstrate the increasing professionalisation of police digital communication. Yet they also raise an important normative question: whether social media is being used to communicate institutional reality or primarily to construct a favourable institutional image. For democratic policing, communication becomes problematic when reputation management becomes detached from substantive accountability.

Transparency provides a further theoretical connection. Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2013) demonstrate that transparency does not automatically produce greater trust and that its effects can vary according to institutional and cultural contexts. This finding is important because police communication frequently assumes that publishing more information will necessarily increase public confidence. In reality, information can produce trust only when audiences perceive it as credible, relevant, complete, and consistent with observable institutional behaviour.

Excessive promotional content may therefore coexist with low trust if citizens perceive a discrepancy between institutional narratives and their experiences.

The crisis-communication literature further demonstrates that social media changes the temporal structure of institutional response. Jungblut, Kämpel, and Steer (2024) show that social media has become essential to police crisis communication because crises generate rapidly evolving information environments in which police organisations must simultaneously inform the public, manage uncertainty, and respond to public reactions. Steele and Blau (2023), examining police crisis communication after use-of-force incidents, similarly demonstrate the importance of social-media communication following highly controversial police events. Crisis communication is therefore not simply an extension of ordinary public relations. It involves decisions concerning timing, accountability, evidence, uncertainty, empathy, and institutional responsibility.

This article brings these theoretical strands together through a framework connecting three dimensions of digital policing. The first is public communication, referring to the police capacity to disseminate accurate information, provide public education, interact with citizens, and create opportunities for digital engagement. The second is crisis response, referring to the institutional capacity to monitor emerging controversies, verify information, communicate uncertainty, correct misinformation, and respond credibly during rapidly developing events. The third is institutional reputation and legitimacy, referring to the longer-term consequences of digital communication for how citizens evaluate police competence, integrity, fairness, and authority. The central proposition is that these dimensions are interdependent: ordinary communication shapes expectations before a crisis, crisis communication affects reputation during moments of heightened scrutiny, and accumulated reputational experiences shape how future police messages are interpreted.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative documentary research design. The approach is appropriate because the objective is to analyse institutional communication practices, conceptual developments, and documented patterns in police social-media use rather than estimate causal relationships through statistical modelling. The research draws upon peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, Indonesian National Police regulations and institutional publications, and empirical studies concerning police communication, digital engagement, crisis communication, legitimacy, and public trust. The source-selection process prioritises materials published no later than 2025 and excludes sources whose publication date falls after the temporal boundary established for this study.

The documentary analysis focuses specifically on the intersection between policing and social media. Sources were examined for recurring themes concerning the purposes of police social-media use, communication strategies, public interaction, misinformation, crisis response, transparency, institutional image,

legitimacy, and trust. Indonesian studies were used to establish the national context, while international studies were used to develop analytical concepts and comparative interpretation. This combination is important because Indonesian police communication operates within a distinctive institutional and social environment, but the underlying challenges of digital policing are also part of broader transformations occurring across democratic and public-sector organisations.

The study does not claim that findings from international police organisations can be directly generalised to Indonesia. Rather, international literature provides theoretical concepts and comparative evidence through which Indonesian practices can be interpreted. Similarly, individual Indonesian case studies are not treated as representative of all police units. Their value lies in identifying recurring institutional patterns and demonstrating how particular communication practices operate within specific contexts. constraints that can make immediate disclosure difficult. The tension between speed and accuracy is therefore central to digital police communication. An institution that communicates too slowly may allow speculation to dominate the information environment, while an institution that communicates before verifying relevant facts risks producing inaccurate statements that later damage credibility. Effective communication consequently requires the ability to distinguish information. The analysis consequently emphasises convergence across sources rather than relying upon a single case as evidence of an organisation-wide condition.

Analaysis and Discussion

A. Public Communication and Digital Engagement

Social media has transformed police communication from a predominantly one-directional process into a potentially interactive relationship. Traditional police communication often assumed that the institution produced authoritative information while journalists and citizens consumed it. Social media disrupts this structure by allowing audiences to comment, question, challenge, remix, and redistribute institutional messages. Williams et al. (2018) demonstrate that police social-media activity can support community-policing objectives when communication becomes interactive rather than remaining purely informational. Their analysis of police departments and their online audiences found evidence that social media could facilitate engagement between institutional agendas and community concerns. The implication is that the effectiveness of digital police communication should not be measured solely through reach or follower numbers. It should also be evaluated through the quality of interaction generated by institutional communication.

The Indonesian National Police has increasingly developed institutional structures capable of supporting such communication. The official Humas Polri platform provides access to public information, digital services, media updates, complaint mechanisms, and multiple social-media channels. This infrastructure

indicates that digital communication has become embedded within the organisation's public-relations architecture. The significance of this development lies not simply in the number of available platforms but in the institutional expectation that police information should be accessible through channels used by citizens in their everyday communication. A police institution that remains dependent upon conventional media intermediaries may experience a communication gap with citizens who increasingly obtain information directly through social platforms.

The expansion of digital channels also creates an expectation of immediacy. Social-media users generally expect institutions to respond quickly when information is developing rapidly. Police organisations, however, operate under evidentiary, legal, and procedural constraints that can make immediate disclosure difficult. The tension between speed and accuracy is therefore central to digital police communication. An institution that communicates too slowly may allow speculation to dominate the information environment, while an institution that communicates before verifying relevant facts risks producing inaccurate statements that later damage credibility. Effective communication consequently requires the ability to distinguish information that can be released immediately from information that requires verification or legal restriction.

This problem has been recognised within Polri's own communication reforms. In 2024, the Public Relations Division introduced standard operating procedures for public-relations functions and emphasised that social-media developments required police communication to become more contemporary, effective, efficient, and transparent. The development of formal communication protocols is important because social-media communication cannot depend entirely on the improvisation of individual administrators. Police messages represent institutional authority, meaning that inaccurate or inconsistent statements from one unit can affect perceptions of the organisation more broadly. Institutional coherence is therefore essential in a decentralised police organisation with national, provincial, and local communication units.

The challenge is that consistency does not necessarily mean uniformity. Meijer and Thaens (2013) demonstrate that police organisations develop different social-media strategies citizens are treated merely as recipients of police information, social media becomes a technologically advanced broadcasting system. If citizens are treated as participants in public communication, the platform can contribute to depending on their institutional environments and communication objectives. Indonesian police units likewise operate in communities with different languages, social characteristics, security concerns, and media environments. A national communication framework therefore needs to establish principles of accuracy, accountability, privacy, and professionalism while allowing local police units sufficient flexibility to communicate in ways appropriate to their communities. Standardisation should regulate institutional integrity rather than force every unit to produce identical content.

Digital engagement also requires a shift in the conception of the citizen. If citizens are treated merely as recipients of police information, social media becomes a technologically advanced broadcasting system. If citizens are treated as participants in public communication, the platform can contribute to community policing. Williams et al. (2018) identify this interactive potential through their analysis of police-community communication on social media. The distinction is especially relevant in Indonesia because police-community relations are shaped by diverse local contexts. Social media can provide information about community concerns that may not become visible through conventional administrative reporting. Comments, questions, complaints, and recurring discussions can therefore constitute a form of informal public intelligence.

However, digital participation should not be romanticised. Online interaction can include harassment, trolling, misinformation, coordinated attacks, and emotionally charged responses. Zaidi and O'Connor (2024) show that police personnel managing social-media accounts must frequently navigate negativity and conflict. The challenge is distinguishing illegitimate abuse from legitimate criticism. If police administrators classify all criticism as hostility, they may unintentionally suppress meaningful public feedback. Conversely, unlimited engagement without moderation can make institutional accounts vulnerable to harassment and misinformation. Professional digital communication therefore requires clear moderation principles that distinguish disagreement from social media to communicate images of effectiveness and openness. There is nothing inherently problematic about communicating successful police work, because citizens require information about institutional performance. However, communication becomes less credible when positive content systematically excludes information about mistakes, complaints, or institutional limitations. The goal should therefore not be to produce a permanently positive digital abuse and criticism from unlawful content.

The distinction between public engagement and reputation management is also important. O'Connor and Zaidi (2021) found that police organisations use social media to communicate images of effectiveness and openness. There is nothing inherently problematic about communicating successful police work, because citizens require information about institutional performance. However, communication becomes less credible when positive content systematically excludes information about mistakes, complaints, or institutional limitations. The goal should therefore not be to produce a permanently positive digital image but to establish a credible institutional identity in which positive achievements and difficult information can coexist. Credibility is strengthened when audiences perceive that the institution does not communicate only when the information is favourable.

Indonesian research on the Instagram account of the Polri Public Relations Division supports the importance of content characteristics in public trust. Yudananto and Damastuti (2023) analysed @divisihumaspolri using indicators

associated with empathy, transparency, expertise, and commitment. Their findings demonstrate that police social-media communication contains elements designed to construct public trust through institutional messaging. This evidence supports the broader argument that police communication has moved beyond simple information dissemination toward strategic relationship management. Nevertheless, the relationship between communication and trust should not be interpreted mechanically. Content expressing commitment may contribute to a favourable perception, but trust ultimately depends upon whether institutional behaviour remains consistent with communicated values.

The experience of Polres Badung offers another illustration of the increasing professionalisation of police digital communication. A 2025 study of its Instagram-based cyber-public-relations strategy identified systematic practices involving content sharing, optimisation, management, and engagement, including responsive interaction and collaboration with the public. The case demonstrates that local police units are experimenting with forms of communication that are more interactive than conventional press relations. It also suggests that the organisational capacity to manage social media increasingly depends on specialised personnel who understand both policing and digital communication. This creates a new professional requirement within police organisations: officers responsible for digital communication need communication competence in addition to conventional policing knowledge.

Research on the Madiun Precinct Police similarly demonstrates the institutionalisation of digital public relations. Tanjung and Asmai (2024) identify transparency, content richness, reach, and internet-based communication as important dimensions of digital public relations within the police. Their study also highlights the challenge of responding to misinformation and the need for personnel capable of producing creative and appropriate digital content. The broader implication is that digital communication capacity should be treated as part of contemporary police professionalism. Communication is no longer an auxiliary activity conducted after policing has occurred; it increasingly forms part of how police institutions interact with communities before, during, and after police interventions.

The importance of this transformation becomes clearer when considering public expectations. Citizens increasingly encounter police institutions not only through physical interactions but through videos, photographs, comments, livestreams, and official posts. Consequently, police legitimacy can be shaped by digital encounters that occur without direct physical contact. Ralph (2022) demonstrates that legitimacy on social media is dynamic and connected to how police personnel and citizens interpret one another's communication. The digital environment therefore extends the arena of police–citizen interaction. A citizen who has never personally encountered a particular officer may nonetheless develop an opinion about the police based upon institutional communication online.

The first implication for Indonesian policing is that social-media communication should be integrated into community-policing strategy rather than isolated within public-relations departments. Digital channels can provide information about local security conditions, public concerns, traffic disruptions, emergency situations, and community initiatives. More importantly, they can create feedback loops between police organisations and communities. The challenge is to ensure that information received through these channels is not merely collected but incorporated into institutional decision-making where appropriate. Digital engagement becomes meaningful when citizens can see that their participation has consequences beyond generating comments or engagement metrics.

The second implication concerns professional training. Police personnel managing digital platforms require knowledge of communication ethics, information verification, privacy, crisis communication, platform-specific practices, and public interaction. The National Police's 2024 efforts to strengthen public-relations SOPs and digital communication training demonstrate movement in this direction. Yet training should extend beyond the central Public Relations Division. Because individual police officers can become sources of viral content through their personal accounts, the organisation's digital communication environment also depends upon broader internal awareness. Digital professionalism should therefore become part of police organisational culture.

B. Social Media as a Crisis-Response Environment

The crisis dimension represents one of the most significant transformations introduced by social media. Police controversies can develop rapidly because users can distribute images, videos, allegations, and commentary before official institutions have completed internal verification. This produces a fundamental temporal asymmetry: citizens may possess publicly circulating information before police organisations are prepared to provide an institutional explanation. The resulting information gap can be filled by speculation, misinformation, or competing narratives. Kavanaugh et al. (2012) identify this characteristic as one of the central challenges of social media for public institutions because digital environments contain both valuable real-time information and substantial volumes of noise and misinformation. For police organisations, crisis communication must therefore combine speed with evidentiary discipline.

Crisis communication should be distinguished from ordinary communication because the stakes are higher and institutional uncertainty is more visible. During routine operations, police organisations can plan content, select appropriate images, verify statistics, and coordinate messages. During crises, these processes may occur under intense time pressure while multiple organisational units are simultaneously involved. Jungblut, Kämpel, and Steer (2024) show that police social-media use during crises involves communication practices at both community and organisational levels, demonstrating that digital platforms become central to crisis management rather than merely supplementary channels. The

Indonesian police therefore require crisis communication systems capable of operating across headquarters, regional police, local units, investigators, and public-relations personnel.

The Kanjuruhan tragedy illustrates the reputational consequences of crisis communication in Indonesia. Research by Putri et al. (2024) examining the Twitter account of the Polri Public Relations Division found that institutional communication following the tragedy involved image-restoration strategies, including efforts to attribute responsibility to other parties. The case is analytically important because it demonstrates that crisis communication does not merely communicate facts. It also constructs responsibility. When an institution faces a crisis, audiences interpret not only what happened but also whether the institution acknowledges responsibility, expresses empathy, explains its actions, and demonstrates commitment to correction.

This issue is consistent with broader crisis-communication research. A 2023 experimental study examining police crisis communication in China found that transparency strategies could affect public anger and trust and that the relationship between communication and trust was mediated by emotional responses. Although the institutional and political context differs from Indonesia, the study demonstrates a broader principle: crisis communication is not simply a technical process of information provision. How an institution frames accountability, provides information, and allows public VINA Cirebon case found weaknesses in crisis preparedness, including limited early detection, delayed or inconsistent official communication, coordination problems between police levels, and insufficient use of social media to address speculation. The study's significance lies in identifying crisis preparedness as an institutional capacity rather than an participation can influence how citizens emotionally and normatively interpret the crisis.

The Indonesian experience also demonstrates the danger of communication delay. Chandra's (2025) study of the VINA Cirebon case found weaknesses in crisis preparedness, including limited early detection, delayed or inconsistent official communication, coordination problems between police levels, and insufficient use of social media to address speculation. The study's significance lies in identifying crisis preparedness as an institutional capacity rather than an improvised response. If police organisations begin developing communication strategies only after an issue becomes viral, the information environment may already be dominated by alternative narratives. Crisis communication should therefore begin before crises occur through monitoring systems, predefined responsibilities, verification procedures, and communication protocols.

The concept of social-media monitoring is particularly important in this context. Sidabutar, Nita, and Gani (2024) examined the use of Intelligence Socio Analytic by the Public Relations Division during the 2024 *Ketupat Operation* to monitor social-media sentiment and understand public communication dynamics. Such analytical capabilities can help institutions identify emerging concerns before they become full-scale crises. However, monitoring should not be understood

simply as surveillance of citizens. Its democratic value depends on whether information collected from digital environments is used to improve public communication, identify legitimate concerns, correct inaccurate information, and support responsive policing. Monitoring that exists solely to suppress criticism would risk undermining the trust it is intended to protect.

Misinformation presents a related challenge. Social media allows false information to spread rapidly, but police organisations must avoid treating every disagreement or unverified claim as deliberate disinformation. A legitimate citizen complaint may initially appear as an allegation requiring verification, while a genuinely false claim may circulate widely without obvious evidence of malicious intent. Communication systems therefore require differentiated responses. Polda Jawa Barat's 2024 communication strategy for addressing Instagram hoaxes involved planning, implementation, evaluation, cyber monitoring, creative communication, and interdepartmental coordination. This model demonstrates that countering misinformation is not simply a matter of issuing denials; it requires institutional capacity to identify claims, verify facts, communicate evidence, and explain corrections.

The credibility of corrections is particularly important because repeated institutional denial can itself become ineffective if audiences perceive the police as automatically rejecting criticism. The objective of crisis communication should therefore be epistemic credibility rather than narrative domination. Police organisations should communicate what is known, what is not yet known, what is being investigated, and what actions are being taken. This approach recognises uncertainty without surrendering institutional authority. It also reduces the risk that an early inaccurate statement will later be contradicted by evidence. In this respect, transparency of consistency is equally important. A national police organisation can face reputational damage when different units provide contradictory accounts of the same event. Social media makes inconsistencies particularly visible affected communities. Yet crises involving death, injury, alleged misconduct, or institutional failure are not merely information problems. They are also social and moral events. A technically correct statement can appear inadequate if it fails to acknowledge harm or public concern.

Crisis communication should therefore combine factual accuracy with appropriate recognition of victims and affected communities. Such communication does not require an institution to accept every public allegation as true. It requires recognition that people can experience legitimate harm and uncertainty even communication strategy tends to prioritise institutional protection, denial, or attribution of responsibility elsewhere. An accountable strategy focuses on evidence, explanation, acknowledgement of legitimate concerns, and corrective action where necessary. These approaches can overlap, but they produce different institutional signals. The former communicates that reputation is the immediate objective, whereas the latter communicates that institutional credibility depends upon the organisation's willingness to explain and correct its conduct. The

Indonesian literature on Kanjuruhan and Vina Cirebon demonstrates why this distinction deserves greater empirical attention in future research. also reveals the limitations of the traditional distinction between communication and policing. When a case becomes viral when the underlying investigation is proceeding lawfully.

Conversely, effective communication cannot compensate indefinitely for poor substantive performance. The relationship is therefore reciprocal: policing affects communication credibility, while communication affects how policing is understood. A police organisation cannot sustainably communicate its way out of the policy implication is the development of an integrated digital crisis-management architecture. Such an architecture should connect social-media monitoring, information verification, public-relations coordination, investigative leadership, legal review, and executive decision-making. The objective should not be to control public narratives but to ensure that citizens receive timely, accurate, and institutionally accountable information. Digital crisis communication should also include post-crisis evaluation because the effects of a crisis can persist after media attention declines. Evaluating which information circulated, which institutional messages were trusted surrounding them.

Police organisations historically exercised considerable control over official descriptions of police activity because journalists depended on institutional sources for information. Social media weakens this asymmetry by allowing citizens, witnesses, journalists, activists, and other institutions legitimacy by creating alternative narratives that challenge official police accounts. This transformation is especially relevant to Indonesia because controversial for a particular operational failure while retaining broader legitimacy because citizens continue to regard its authority as appropriate. Social media can affect both dimensions simultaneously, but emphasises the relationship between institutional claims and public responses. Social media intensifies this dialogue by making public responses reduce delays in correcting inaccurate information. The risk is that institutional communication can become defensive such as empathy, transparency, expertise, and commitment in police Instagram content. These elements suggest that police is an important methodological distinction.

Content analysis measures institutional communication, whereas legitimacy and trust require examination of audience perceptions. Future Indonesian research should therefore combine analysis of police posts with audience surveys, interviews, comment analysis of digital legitimacy. An institution that receives criticism should not automatically interpret criticism as reputational damage. In democratic policing, criticism can function as an accountability mechanism by drawing attention to potential failures or concerns that institutional processes have not adequately addressed. Social media can therefore operate as an informal oversight environment. The challenge is determining which criticisms require institutional investigation and which are context. For policing, the implication is that information disclosure must be accompanied by explanation and institutional

consistency. Releasing large quantities of technical information without electronic word-of-mouth, and public trust in the context of social-media discussions.

Although the findings are context-specific and should not be generalised to all Indonesian citizens, they demonstrate that public trust is shaped within an information environment where citizens encounter both institutional communication and peer-generated evaluations. This reinforces the argument that police organisations cannot in which cases receiving substantial online attention appear to receive faster institutional responses than cases that remain outside public visibility. Such a pattern creates a normative challenge because justice should not depend upon whether a case becomes popular online. Social media can strengthen accountability when it exposes genuine failures, but it can also produce unequal visibility between cases. Police institutions should therefore avoid allowing online popularity to institutional meaning of ordinary complaint mechanisms may weaken. The perception that justice requires social-media pressure can undermine confidence in formal institutional procedures.

For this reason, digital communication should complement, rather than replace, formal accountability mechanisms. Social media can provide visibility and public information, but complaints, investigations, disciplinary procedures, and judicial processes must continue to operate through legally established institutional channels. Citizens may encounter highly professional and responsive police communication online but experience bureaucratic delay or disrespect in physical police stations. Such inconsistency can produce a credibility gap. The reverse is also possible: strong face-to-face relationships can be undermined by insensitive digital communication. Social-media reputation should therefore be considered an extension of institutional performance rather than a separate communication product police leaders increasingly become visible through social media, while individual statements can quickly become institutionalised as representations of the organisation. This creates a need for communication competence among senior officers.

Leadership communication must balance authority with accessibility and decisiveness with openness to legitimate criticism. The objective should not be to make police leaders resemble social-media influencers. Rather, it should be to enable institutional leaders to communicate complex policing responsibilities in ways that are understandable to citizens without sacrificing legal or also communicate findings from institutional reforms. Crisis communication should acknowledge uncertainty and responsibility where appropriate. Ordinary communication should provide meaningful public information rather than exclusively promotional content. Finally, reputation should be evaluated through broader indicators than engagement metrics. Public trust, perceptions of procedural fairness, satisfaction with police services, responsiveness to complaints, and confidence in institutional accountability provide a more substantive basis communication product. Social media can amplify positive police performance, but it can also amplify institutional failures. Attempts to control digital narratives

without addressing substantive organisational problems are unlikely to produce sustainable legitimacy.

Conversely, transparent and responsive communication can help citizens understand complex police work, provided that communication remains consistent with actual institutional behaviour. Digital communication is therefore most effective when it operates as a digital public sphere in which information can be disseminated rapidly, citizens can respond immediately, alternative narratives can develop independently of institutional communication, and controversial incidents can acquire national visibility within a short period. The Indonesian National Police has responded through the development of digital communication infrastructure, public-relations regulations, standard operating procedures, social-media training, monitoring systems, and increasingly media performs three interconnected functions in contemporary Indonesian policing.

First, it constitutes a public communication environment through which police institutions provide information, educate citizens, interact with communities, and receive public feedback. Second, it constitutes a crisis-response environment in which police organisations must manage uncertainty, misinformation, rapidly developing narratives, and heightened public expectations. Third, it constitutes a reputational and legitimacy environment in which police authority is continuously communicated, evaluated, contested, and reconstructed. These functions cannot be separated because ordinary communication influences expectations before crises, crisis public relations. A public-relations perspective focuses primarily on communication effectiveness and institutional image, whereas a policing perspective must also address legitimacy, accountability, procedural justice, and the exercise of public authority. The dialogic conception of legitimacy is particularly useful because it recognises that legitimacy involves an ongoing relationship between institutional claims and audience responses.

Social media intensifies this digital communication capacity should be understood as part of police professionalism. The ability to manage social media requires more than technical familiarity with digital platforms. Police communication personnel must understand evidence verification, crisis communication, privacy, public accountability, procedural justice, platform dynamics, and the distinction between legitimate criticism and misinformation. The development of formal Humas Polri procedures and digital communication communication requires particular institutional attention. The experiences associated with major Indonesian police controversies demonstrate that delayed, inconsistent, defensive, or insufficiently coordinated communication can create an information vacuum that becomes filled by alternative narratives. Effective crisis communication therefore requires preparation before crises occur. Police organisations need monitoring systems, verification procedures, clearly defined communication responsibilities, inter-unit coordination, and mechanisms for be created sustainably through positive content alone. Reputation is influenced by the relationship between what police organisations communicate and what citizens

experience. Promotional communication may increase visibility, but credibility depends upon consistency between institutional narratives and institutional conduct.

Public trust therefore cannot be assumed from social-media engagement metrics. Followers, likes, views, and shares indicate communication reach but do not necessarily demonstrate an integrated digital communication strategy in which public communication, crisis response, and institutional accountability are connected. Social-media channels should provide accurate and accessible information under ordinary conditions while also serving as credible communication infrastructure during emergencies. Digital monitoring should identify emerging concerns without becoming a mechanism for suppressing legitimate criticism. Crisis communication should prioritise explanation and accountability over narrative control, as an institutional environment rather than a communication tool. Digital platforms change the conditions under which policing becomes visible, interpreted, contested, and legitimised. For Indonesian policing, the strategic challenge is therefore not simply to become more active on social media but to become more institutionally responsive within the digital public sphere.

Sustainable digital legitimacy will depend on whether communication reflects substantive policing values: accuracy, fairness, transparency, responsiveness, accountability, and respect for citizens. Social media can strengthen contemporary policing when these principles guide institutional communication; it can undermine Pengaruh Intensitas Konsumsi Pemberitaan Polisi Brutal dan Intensitas Konsumsi E-WOM dalam Aksi Peringatan Darurat di Media Sosial X is not equivalent to disclosing every piece of information immediately. It means communicating honestly about the boundaries of available information and updating the public when those boundaries change.

The principle of consistency is equally important. A national police organisation can face reputational damage when different units provide contradictory accounts of the same event. Social media makes inconsistencies particularly visible because different statements can be archived, compared, and redistributed. The development of standard operating procedures for Humas Polri in 2024 therefore has significance beyond administrative efficiency. Communication protocols can establish responsibility for verification, coordination, approval, and correction. However, central coordination should not become a justification for excessive bureaucratic delay. Crisis communication requires a balance between institutional coherence and operational speed.

Empathy represents another important component of crisis communication. Police organisations sometimes emphasise factual correction while giving insufficient attention to the emotions experienced by affected communities. Yet crises involving death, injury, alleged misconduct, or institutional failure are not merely information problems. They are also social and moral events. A technically correct statement can appear inadequate if it fails to acknowledge harm or public

concern. Crisis communication should therefore combine factual accuracy with appropriate recognition of victims and affected communities. Such communication does not require an institution to accept every public allegation as true. It requires recognition that people can experience legitimate harm and uncertainty even while factual investigations remain incomplete.

The distinction between accountability and defensiveness is therefore central. A defensive communication strategy tends to prioritise institutional protection, denial, or attribution of responsibility elsewhere. An accountable strategy focuses on evidence, explanation, acknowledgement of legitimate concerns, and corrective action where necessary. These approaches can overlap, but they produce different institutional signals. The former communicates that reputation is the immediate objective, whereas the latter communicates that institutional credibility depends upon the organisation's willingness to explain and correct its conduct. The Indonesian literature on Kanjuruhan and Vina Cirebon demonstrates why this distinction deserves greater empirical attention in future research.

Crisis communication also reveals the limitations of the traditional distinction between communication and policing. When a case becomes viral, communication becomes part of the institutional response itself. Citizens may interpret silence as indifference, delay as concealment, or contradiction as incompetence, even when the underlying investigation is proceeding lawfully. Conversely, effective communication cannot compensate indefinitely for poor substantive performance. The relationship is therefore reciprocal: policing affects communication credibility, while communication affects how policing is understood. A police organisation cannot sustainably communicate its way out of a crisis if institutional conduct continues to contradict its public narrative.

For Indonesian policing, the policy implication is the development of an integrated digital crisis-management architecture. Such an architecture should connect social-media monitoring, information verification, public-relations coordination, investigative leadership, legal review, and executive decision-making. The objective should not be to control public narratives but to ensure that citizens receive timely, accurate, and institutionally accountable information. Digital crisis communication should also include post-crisis evaluation because the effects of a crisis can persist after media attention declines. Evaluating which information circulated, which institutional messages were trusted, and where communication failed can contribute to organisational learning.

C. Institutional Reputation, Legitimacy, and Public Trust

Institutional reputation is increasingly constructed in environments where organisations cannot fully control the narratives surrounding them. Police organisations historically exercised considerable control over official descriptions of police activity because journalists depended on institutional sources for information. Social media weakens this asymmetry by allowing citizens, witnesses, journalists, activists, and other institutions to produce competing accounts. Ellis

(2021) demonstrates how social-media-generated police scandals can affect institutional legitimacy by creating alternative narratives that challenge official police accounts. This transformation is especially relevant to Indonesia because controversial police cases can rapidly become national issues through social-media circulation. Reputation is consequently no longer produced primarily through official communication; it emerges through interaction between institutional messages and distributed public narratives.

The concept of reputation should also be distinguished from legitimacy. Reputation generally concerns how an organisation is perceived in terms of qualities such as competence, effectiveness, reliability, or image. Legitimacy concerns whether an institution is regarded as having rightful authority. The two concepts overlap but are not identical. A police organisation may have a strong reputation for operational capability while facing concerns about procedural fairness. Conversely, an institution may be criticised for a particular operational failure while retaining broader legitimacy because citizens continue to regard its authority as appropriate. Social media can affect both dimensions simultaneously, but they should not be analytically collapsed into a single concept.

Bottoms and Tankebe's dialogic conception of legitimacy is especially useful here because it emphasises the relationship between institutional claims and public responses. Social media intensifies this dialogue by making public responses visible and persistent. Citizens can immediately challenge police statements, while police organisations can respond to criticism and explain institutional decisions. Ralph's (2022) research demonstrates that police legitimacy on social media is dynamic and that officers themselves respond to citizen challenges by reconstructing or reasserting institutional legitimacy. The digital environment therefore does not simply transmit legitimacy; it becomes part of the process through which legitimacy is continuously negotiated.

This dynamic creates both opportunities and risks. The opportunity is that police organisations can explain decisions directly to citizens without relying exclusively on traditional media intermediaries. Direct communication can increase accessibility and reduce delays in correcting inaccurate information. The risk is that institutional communication can become defensive, promotional, or excessively controlled. O'Connor and Zaidi (2021) demonstrate that police social-media communication is partly oriented toward image construction. This is understandable from an organisational perspective because institutions seek to communicate their achievements and demonstrate competence. However, legitimacy requires more than positive image construction. It depends on whether citizens believe that police authority is exercised fairly and responsibly.

The distinction becomes particularly important when social-media content is evaluated through engagement metrics. Followers, views, likes, comments, and shares can demonstrate reach, but they do not necessarily demonstrate trust or legitimacy. A controversial police post may receive thousands of comments because users disagree with it. A humorous post may receive high engagement

without contributing significantly to institutional credibility. Wood's (2020) analysis of police meme strategies demonstrates how police organisations can deliberately use platform logics to increase engagement. Engagement is therefore a useful communication metric but an inadequate institutional outcome measure. Police organisations should distinguish between visibility, interaction, satisfaction, trust, legitimacy, and behavioural cooperation.

The Indonesian study of @divisihumaspolri provides an illustration of this distinction. Yudananto and Damastuti (2023) identify trust-related communication elements such as empathy, transparency, expertise, and commitment in police Instagram content. These elements suggest that police communication increasingly seeks to cultivate relational dimensions of institutional reputation. Yet the presence of such elements in content does not establish that citizens actually perceive the institution as trustworthy. This is an important methodological distinction. Content analysis measures institutional communication, whereas legitimacy and trust require examination of audience perceptions. Future Indonesian research should therefore combine analysis of police posts with audience surveys, interviews, comment analysis, and longitudinal measurements of trust.

Public criticism is another essential part of digital legitimacy. An institution that receives criticism should not automatically interpret criticism as reputational damage. In democratic policing, criticism can function as an accountability mechanism by drawing attention to potential failures or concerns that institutional processes have not adequately addressed. Social media can therefore operate as an informal oversight environment. The challenge is determining which criticisms require institutional investigation and which are based on misinformation or misunderstanding. This requires institutional mechanisms capable of distinguishing legitimate criticism from false claims without delegitimising criticism simply because it is inconvenient.

The relationship between digital communication and public trust is therefore conditional rather than automatic. Transparency can contribute to credibility when information is accurate, meaningful, and consistent with institutional behaviour. Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2013), however, caution that transparency does not invariably increase trust and may sometimes produce unintended effects depending upon context. For policing, the implication is that information disclosure must be accompanied by explanation and institutional consistency. Releasing large quantities of technical information without explaining its relevance may overwhelm audiences, while highly selective disclosure may appear manipulative. Effective police communication should therefore prioritise informational relevance and intelligibility.

Indonesian research concerning the relationship between police-related information and public trust further illustrates the significance of digital narratives. Anova and Nugroho (2024) examined the relationship between exposure to reports concerning police brutality, electronic word-of-mouth, and public trust in the context of social-media discussions. Although the findings are context-specific and

should not be generalised to all Indonesian citizens, they demonstrate that public trust is shaped within an information environment where citizens encounter both institutional communication and peer-generated evaluations. This reinforces the argument that police organisations cannot understand reputation solely through the performance of their own communication accounts. They must also understand the broader information ecosystem within which citizens interpret police activity.

The digital environment also changes the meaning of institutional accountability. When a case becomes viral, citizens may expect rapid institutional action because visibility itself creates pressure. This can produce what may be described as a “virality effect,” in which cases receiving substantial online attention appear to receive faster institutional responses than cases that remain outside public visibility. Such a pattern creates a normative challenge because justice should not depend upon whether a case becomes popular online. Social media can strengthen accountability when it exposes genuine failures, but it can also produce unequal visibility between cases. Police institutions should therefore avoid allowing online popularity to become an informal substitute for lawful prioritisation and professional investigation.

The reputation implications are significant. If citizens begin to believe that “viral” exposure is necessary to obtain police attention, the institutional meaning of ordinary complaint mechanisms may weaken. The perception that justice requires social-media pressure can undermine confidence in formal institutional procedures. For this reason, digital communication should complement, rather than replace, formal accountability mechanisms. Social media can provide visibility and public information, but complaints, investigations, disciplinary procedures, and judicial processes must continue to operate through legally established institutional channels. The role of social media should be to increase transparency around those processes rather than become an alternative justice system.

Institutional reputation also depends upon the alignment between online and offline behaviour. Citizens may encounter highly professional and responsive police communication online but experience bureaucratic delay or disrespect in physical police stations. Such inconsistency can produce a credibility gap. The reverse is also possible: strong face-to-face relationships can be undermined by insensitive digital communication. Social-media reputation should therefore be considered an extension of institutional performance rather than a separate communication product. The most sustainable digital reputation is likely to emerge when communication accurately reflects organisational practices.

This observation returns the analysis to procedural justice. Zaidi and O'Connor (2024) argue that principles such as respect, voice, neutrality, and trustworthy motives can inform police interaction online. Applying these principles in Indonesia would mean that police social-media administrators should not merely answer questions but demonstrate respect toward citizens, explain decisions when appropriate, avoid selective engagement based on popularity, and provide channels through which concerns can be escalated. Digital communication should

therefore be understood as a form of institutional interaction governed by professional standards.

The implications extend to police leadership. Senior police leaders increasingly become visible through social media, while individual statements can quickly become institutionalised as representations of the organisation. This creates a need for communication competence among senior officers. Leadership communication must balance authority with accessibility and decisiveness with openness to legitimate criticism. The objective should not be to make police leaders resemble social-media influencers. Rather, it should be to enable institutional leaders to communicate complex policing responsibilities in ways that are understandable to citizens without sacrificing legal or professional accuracy.

For Indonesia, an integrated approach to institutional reputation would therefore connect communication, performance, and accountability. Public-relations units should monitor digital narratives, but they should also communicate findings from institutional reforms. Crisis communication should acknowledge uncertainty and responsibility where appropriate. Ordinary communication should provide meaningful public information rather than exclusively promotional content. Finally, reputation should be evaluated through broader indicators than engagement metrics. Public trust, perceptions of procedural fairness, satisfaction with police services, responsiveness to complaints, and confidence in institutional accountability provide a more substantive basis for assessing whether digital communication is contributing to legitimate policing.

The central argument is consequently that institutional reputation should be treated as an outcome of institutional conduct and communication rather than as an independent communication product. Social media can amplify positive police performance, but it can also amplify institutional failures. Attempts to control digital narratives without addressing substantive organisational problems are unlikely to produce sustainable legitimacy. Conversely, transparent and responsive communication can help citizens understand complex police work, provided that communication remains consistent with actual institutional behaviour. Digital communication is therefore most effective when it operates as an extension of accountable policing rather than as a substitute for it.

Conclusion

Social media has fundamentally changed the environment in which Indonesian policing communicates with society. Police organisations now operate in a digital public sphere in which information can be disseminated rapidly, citizens can respond immediately, alternative narratives can develop independently of institutional communication, and controversial incidents can acquire national visibility within a short period. The Indonesian National Police has responded through the development of digital communication infrastructure, public-relations regulations, standard operating procedures, social-media training, monitoring

systems, and increasingly sophisticated public-engagement practices. These developments demonstrate that digital communication has become an institutional component of contemporary policing rather than a supplementary public-relations activity.

The analysis demonstrates that social media performs three interconnected functions in contemporary Indonesian policing. First, it constitutes a public communication environment through which police institutions provide information, educate citizens, interact with communities, and receive public feedback. Second, it constitutes a crisis-response environment in which police organisations must manage uncertainty, misinformation, rapidly developing narratives, and heightened public expectations. Third, it constitutes a reputational and legitimacy environment in which police authority is continuously communicated, evaluated, contested, and reconstructed. These functions cannot be separated because ordinary communication influences expectations before crises, crisis communication influences reputation during controversial events, and accumulated reputational experiences shape how future institutional messages are interpreted.

The principal theoretical implication is that social-media policing should not be reduced to digital public relations. A public-relations perspective focuses primarily on communication effectiveness and institutional image, whereas a policing perspective must also address legitimacy, accountability, procedural justice, and the exercise of public authority. The dialogic conception of legitimacy is particularly useful because it recognises that legitimacy involves an ongoing relationship between institutional claims and audience responses. Social media intensifies this relationship by making public responses immediate, visible, and persistent. Police organisations consequently face a communication environment in which authority cannot be sustained solely through institutional assertions.

The Indonesian evidence also demonstrates that digital communication capacity should be understood as part of police professionalism. The ability to manage social media requires more than technical familiarity with digital platforms. Police communication personnel must understand evidence verification, crisis communication, privacy, public accountability, procedural justice, platform dynamics, and the distinction between legitimate criticism and misinformation. The development of formal Humas Polri procedures and digital communication training represents progress toward this professionalisation. Yet institutional capacity must extend beyond specialist public-relations units because individual police behaviour can also become digitally visible and affect institutional reputation.

Crisis communication requires particular institutional attention. The experiences associated with major Indonesian police controversies demonstrate that delayed, inconsistent, defensive, or insufficiently coordinated communication can create an information vacuum that becomes filled by alternative narratives. Effective crisis communication therefore requires preparation before crises occur. Police organisations need monitoring systems, verification procedures, clearly

defined communication responsibilities, inter-unit coordination, and mechanisms for updating information as investigations develop. Communication should emphasise accuracy, transparency, empathy, and accountability rather than attempting merely to control public narratives.

The study also concludes that institutional reputation cannot be created sustainably through positive content alone. Reputation is influenced by the relationship between what police organisations communicate and what citizens experience. Promotional communication may increase visibility, but credibility depends upon consistency between institutional narratives and institutional conduct. Public trust therefore cannot be assumed from social-media engagement metrics. Followers, likes, views, and shares indicate communication reach but do not necessarily demonstrate legitimacy. Police organisations should instead evaluate digital communication through broader indicators involving responsiveness, public understanding, perceived fairness, satisfaction, institutional accountability, and trust.

The Indonesian police should consequently develop an integrated digital communication strategy in which public communication, crisis response, and institutional accountability are connected. Social-media channels should provide accurate and accessible information under ordinary conditions while also serving as credible communication infrastructure during emergencies. Digital monitoring should identify emerging concerns without becoming a mechanism for suppressing legitimate criticism. Crisis communication should prioritise explanation and accountability over narrative control. Public-relations performance should be evaluated not simply by engagement but by its contribution to constructive police–community relationships.

The broader contribution of this study lies in conceptualising social media as an institutional environment rather than a communication tool. Digital platforms change the conditions under which policing becomes visible, interpreted, contested, and legitimised. For Indonesian policing, the strategic challenge is therefore not simply to become more active on social media but to become more institutionally responsive within the digital public sphere. Sustainable digital legitimacy will depend on whether communication reflects substantive policing values: accuracy, fairness, transparency, responsiveness, accountability, and respect for citizens. Social media can strengthen contemporary policing when these principles guide institutional communication; it can undermine institutional credibility when digital image management becomes detached from substantive organisational performance.

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