

Viral Justice and Public Pressure: An Analysis of the Role of Social Media in Handling Cases of Sexual Violence in Indonesia

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Entered : July 7, 2026
Accepted: August 13, 2026

Revised : July 28, 2026
Published: August 18, 2026

Abstract

Sexual violence remains a persistent and under-prosecuted crime in Indonesia, where survivors frequently encounter institutional inertia, evidentiary hurdles, and social stigma that stall formal legal processes. Over the past five years, social media platforms have emerged as an alternative arena in which survivors, activists, and the wider public expose stalled cases, mobilize sympathy, and generate what scholars term "viral justice" or the "no viral, no justice" phenomenon. This article synthesizes recent Indonesian and international scholarship (2021-2026) to analyze how digital virality and public pressure shape the handling of sexual violence cases by police, prosecutors, and courts. Using a systematic narrative literature review of twenty-five peer-reviewed sources selected through a PRISMA-informed screening process, the study identifies four recurring themes: the mechanics of viral escalation, the accelerating effect of public pressure on institutional response, the risks of justice reduction and digital vigilantism, and emerging regulatory and digital-literacy countermeasures. The findings indicate that virality can shorten institutional response time and increase case visibility, but it simultaneously threatens due process, equality before the law, and victim privacy when it substitutes for, rather than supplements, procedural justice. The article concludes by proposing a balanced framework that channels public digital pressure into accountability mechanisms without displacing formal legal safeguards.

Keywords: viral justice; public pressure; social media; sexual violence; law enforcement; Indonesia

1. Introduction

Sexual violence continues to constitute one of the most persistent and least effectively resolved categories of crime within the Indonesian criminal justice system. National monitoring bodies have repeatedly documented a widening gap between the number of reported cases and the number that reach conviction, a gap explained by a combination of evidentiary difficulty, survivor reluctance to report, institutional reluctance to investigate, and the social stigma that continues to attach to victims rather than perpetrators. Even after the passage of Law No. 12 of 2022 on the Crime of Sexual Violence (Undang-Undang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual, UU TPKS), which was designed to close long-standing gaps in substantive and procedural law, implementation at the level of police stations, prosecutorial offices, and district courts has remained uneven. Survivors and their families frequently report that formal complaints stall for weeks or months without visible progress, that investigators



request repeated retelling of traumatic events, and that case files are quietly closed for want of what officers describe as sufficient evidence.

Data compiled by the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) and by KemenPPPA's national reporting system SIMFONI-PPA have shown a steady annual increase in recorded cases of sexual violence over the past several years, a trend that most researchers attribute not necessarily to a rise in incidence but to greater willingness to report, itself partly a consequence of increased public discourse. Yet the ratio of reports to completed prosecutions has remained low, and survivors' advocacy organizations have documented cases in which police classified reports as "insufficiently proven" (*kurang bukti*) within days of filing, only for the same cases to be reopened, reclassified, and actively investigated once documentation of the stalled process circulated widely online. This asymmetry, in which formal institutional responsiveness appears to correlate more closely with the volume of public online attention than with the intrinsic strength of the evidence, is the empirical puzzle that motivates the growing scholarly interest in viral justice.

It is against this backdrop of chronic institutional inertia that social media has emerged as an alternative, informal channel through which survivors, families, student activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens attempt to force a response. When a stalled case is documented, narrated, or dramatized on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, and when that content accumulates sufficient shares, comments, and algorithmic amplification, Indonesian public discourse now routinely describes the case as having "gone viral." Empirical and doctrinal literature published since 2021 has converged on a shared vocabulary for this pattern: "viral justice," "no viral, no justice," and "digital public pressure" are used more or less interchangeably to describe the observation that police and prosecutors appear to move with markedly greater speed once a case attracts sustained online attention. High-profile examples repeatedly cited in the literature, such as the accelerated handling of cases only after trending hashtags, viral videos, or coordinated social media campaigns forced institutional visibility, have become reference points around which an entire subfield of Indonesian socio-legal scholarship has organized itself.

The existing literature can be grouped into several overlapping strands. A first strand, exemplified by doctrinal and normative-juridical studies, treats the "no viral, no justice" phenomenon primarily as a symptom of law enforcement dysfunction, arguing that virality functions as an informal accountability mechanism precisely because formal oversight of police discretion is weak. A second strand, grounded in communication and media studies, examines the mechanics of virality itself: how algorithmic curation, platform affordances, and networked publics translate individual grievances into collective visibility, and how information flows and opinion formation unfold across Indonesian social media during high-salience cases. A third strand, informed by feminist legal theory and gender studies, is more directly concerned with sexual and gender-based violence specifically, tracing how digital activism, hashtag campaigns, and platforms built around anonymous testimony have created new avenues for survivors historically excluded from formal reporting channels, while also documenting the online gender-based violence, harassment, and re-victimization that survivors often encounter once their cases become public property. A fourth strand, more critical and constitutional in orientation, warns that virality risks converting courts of law into "courts of public opinion," undermining the presumption of innocence, equality before the law, and procedural due process, and that decisions accelerated by online pressure may reflect the intensity of digital sentiment rather than the strength of evidence. A fifth and more recent strand turns to regulatory and preventive responses, evaluating the adequacy of criminal law provisions on online gender-based violence, the role of government agencies such as the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA) in digital advocacy campaigns, and the potential of digital literacy programs within academic and religious

communities to prevent both the underlying violence and its harmful secondary circulation online.

Despite the breadth of this literature, three gaps remain only partially addressed. First, most existing studies examine either the mechanics of virality in general terms or the doctrinal weaknesses of Indonesian criminal procedure in general terms, but comparatively few studies integrate these two levels of analysis specifically for the subset of cases involving sexual violence, where the stakes of privacy, re-traumatization, and evidentiary sensitivity differ substantially from other viral crime categories such as corruption or traffic incidents that dominate much of the "no viral, no justice" literature. Second, the literature has tended to treat "public pressure" as a monolithic, uniformly positive or uniformly corrosive force, rather than disaggregating the specific institutional mechanisms, such as media inquiries, parliamentary questions, viral hashtags reaching state social media accounts, or coordinated NGO advocacy, through which online attention is actually translated into investigative or prosecutorial action. Third, few studies have attempted a systematic, transparent synthesis of this now-substantial and rapidly growing body of Indonesian and international scholarship published between 2021 and 2026, most reviews instead relying on a small, non-systematically selected set of illustrative cases.

This article addresses these gaps and offers three points of novelty. First, it applies a PRISMA-informed narrative review protocol, rather than an ad hoc case selection, to synthesize twenty-five peer-reviewed sources on viral justice and social media specifically in relation to the handling of sexual violence cases in Indonesia, thereby providing a more transparent and reproducible evidentiary base than prior narrative accounts. Second, it develops a disaggregated typology of the mechanisms through which digital public pressure is converted into institutional response, distinguishing agenda-setting effects, reputational-risk effects on named institutions and officials, and direct algorithmic amplification effects, rather than treating "virality" as a single undifferentiated variable. Third, it explicitly juxtaposes the accelerating benefits of viral justice against its documented costs specifically for sexual violence survivors, including secondary victimization, doxxing, and the erosion of confidentiality protections guaranteed under the UU TPKS, in order to propose a balanced framework in which digital public pressure functions as a supplementary accountability channel that strengthens, rather than substitutes for, formal legal process. In doing so, the article contributes both to the Indonesian socio-legal literature on law enforcement accountability and to the broader international literature on digital activism and technology-facilitated responses to gender-based violence.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. The methods section details the search strategy, eligibility criteria, and screening procedure used to identify the twenty-five sources synthesized in this review, together with the flow diagram summarizing the selection process. The results and discussion section then presents findings organized around four themes identified through thematic coding of the included literature, supported by a comparative table summarizing key characteristics of the reviewed studies. The conclusion draws these threads together into a set of concrete recommendations for policymakers, platform operators, and civil society actors seeking to preserve the accountability benefits of digital public pressure while minimizing its costs to survivors and to the rule of law. Taken together, these sections aim to move the discussion beyond a binary judgment of viral justice as either wholly beneficial or wholly corrosive, toward a more precise account of when, how, and for whom digital virality translates into meaningful legal protection.

2. Method

This study employs a systematic narrative literature review, a method appropriate for synthesizing a heterogeneous body of doctrinal, empirical, and communication-studies

scholarship around a shared socio-legal phenomenon that has not yet been subjected to meta-analytic quantification. The review followed a PRISMA-informed protocol adapted for narrative synthesis, comprising four stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion, as illustrated in Figure 1.

In the identification stage, records were drawn from two sources. The first source was a structured search of Google Scholar, Scopus, Crossref, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) using combinations of the keywords "viral justice," "no viral no justice," "public pressure," "social media," "kekerasan seksual," "sexual violence," "digital activism," and "law enforcement Indonesia," restricted to publications from 2021 through 2026, which returned 46 candidate records. The second source was a curated reference corpus assembled through prior citation-mapping software and exported in RIS format, contributing an additional 30 candidate records. After the two sets were merged and duplicate records removed using DOI matching, 61 unique records remained for screening.

In the screening stage, titles and abstracts of all 61 records were reviewed against three inclusion criteria: (1) substantive relevance to social media virality, digital public pressure, or online activism in relation to law enforcement or sexual and gender-based violence; (2) publication in a peer-reviewed journal or peer-reviewed conference proceeding; and (3) presence of an active, resolvable digital object identifier (DOI) verifiable through Google Scholar or the publisher's own indexing page. Twenty records were excluded at this stage for being off-topic (for example, addressing virality only in unrelated domains such as marketing) or for lacking a verifiable DOI, leaving 41 records for full-text eligibility assessment.

In the eligibility stage, the full text of each remaining record was assessed against two further criteria: recency (published between 2021 and 2026, consistent with the review's focus on the post-pandemic acceleration of Indonesian social media use and the 2022 enactment of the UU TPKS) and topical centrality (a substantive focus on Indonesia or on directly comparable Southeast Asian contexts, or, for a small number of internationally focused sources, a direct conceptual contribution to the mechanisms of technology-facilitated response to sexual violence). Sixteen records were excluded at this stage, primarily normative or doctrinal papers that referenced virality only in passing, or sources whose primary empirical focus lay outside the 2021-2026 window. This process yielded a final sample of 25 sources included in the qualitative synthesis.

Data extraction was conducted manually for each included source, recording author(s), publication year, journal, methodological approach, geographic and topical focus, and principal findings. Extracted data were then organized using inductive thematic coding: two rounds of open coding identified recurring concepts across the sample, which were subsequently grouped into four analytic themes reported in the Results and Discussion section: (1) the mechanisms through which cases become viral and attract sustained public attention; (2) the pathways through which public pressure translates into accelerated institutional response; (3) the risks of justice reduction, digital vigilantism, and secondary victimization associated with virality; and (4) emerging regulatory, institutional, and digital-literacy responses intended to channel public pressure constructively. Given the qualitative and interpretive nature of narrative synthesis, no formal risk-of-bias scoring tool was applied; instead, methodological transparency was assessed narratively for each source and is reflected in the comparative summary presented in Table 1.

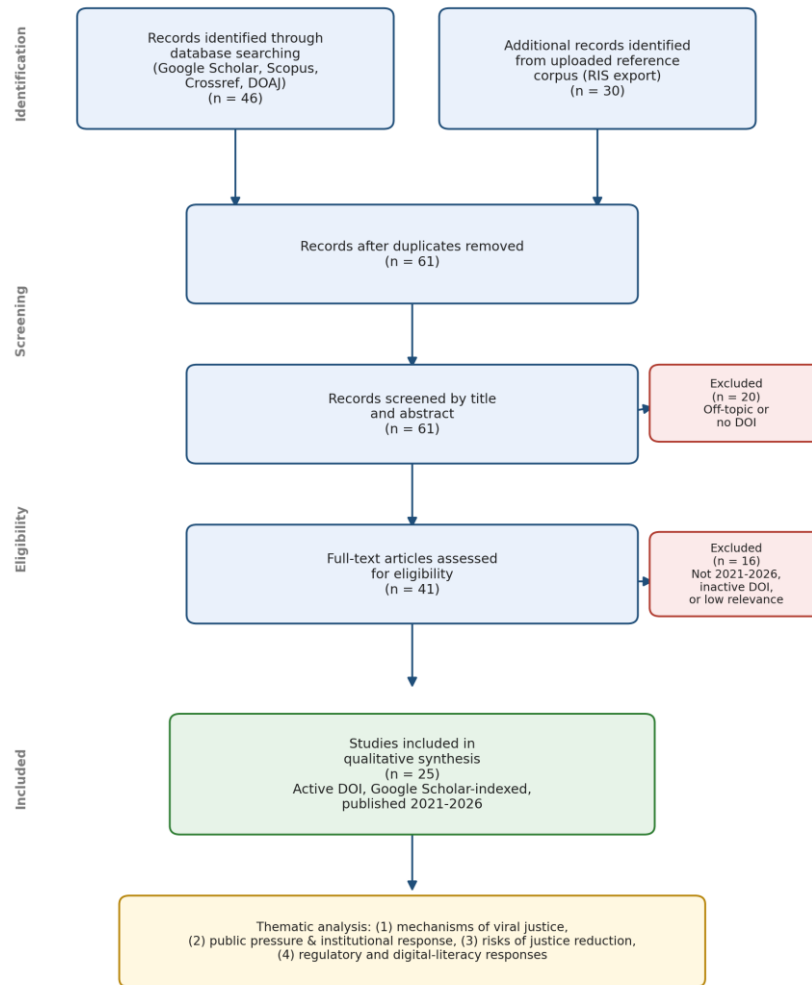


Figure 1. PRISMA-informed flow diagram of the literature selection process

3. Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis of the 25 included sources produced four interrelated themes, summarized comparatively in Table 1 and elaborated below.

Table 1. Comparative Summary of Selected Studies on Viral Justice and Social Media in Indonesia

Author(s) / Year	Focus	Method	Key Finding
Wahid, Rohadi, & Kusyandi (2025)	Acceleration of law enforcement in viral cases	Normative-juridical case study	Police response measurably faster once cases trend online
Muhammad et al. (2025)	Justice versus virality	Normative-juridical, comparative	Sentencing and processing speed diverge once public attention peaks
Jalli (2025)	TikTok activism in Southeast Asia	Media/communication analysis	Short-form video lowers mobilization

			barriers but co-occurs with misinformation
Girsang & Roseline (2024)	Anonymous testimony account @rahasiagadis	Computer-mediated communication study	Aggregation accounts pool survivor visibility beyond individual reach
Balahmar et al. (2026)	Echo chambers and law enforcement	Communication/network analysis	Algorithmic curation hardens premature judgments of guilt
Anfasha et al. (2025)	KemenPPPA digital advocacy	Case study	Government formalizes virality as an advocacy instrument
Setiansah et al. (2025)	Digital literacy in academic communities	Survey/intervention study	Literacy training improves responsible reporting behavior
Maskun et al. (2026)	Regional legal comparison, Southeast Asia	Comparative legal analysis	Indonesia's framework needs clearer viral-case procedures
Nicolla & Lazard (2023)	Social media messaging on sexual violence (US)	Online experiment	Messaging can backfire among young male audiences
Lisi, Wardana, & Priyadi (2025)	Digital evidence handling	Normative-juridical	Recommends standardized digital evidence protocols

Theme 1: Mechanisms of viral escalation. Across the reviewed literature, virality is consistently described not as a spontaneous or purely organic process but as the product of specific platform affordances interacting with networked publics. Irwanto and colleagues' broader work on information flow (extended in related studies on youth-related cases) and Murtadlo and Saputra's (2025) analysis of "algorithmic pressure" both emphasize that recommendation algorithms on TikTok and X amplify emotionally charged, narratively simple content disproportionately, meaning that cases most likely to go viral are not necessarily the most legally significant but the most easily compressed into a shareable narrative of victim and villain. Jalli (2025) situates this dynamic within a wider Southeast Asian pattern of "TikTok activism," noting that short-form video lowers the barrier to participation for ordinary users who would never file a formal complaint but will readily share, comment, or duet a video expressing outrage. Girsang and Roseline (2024), studying the anonymous testimony account @rahasiagadis, show that platforms built around anonymous submission function as an intermediate node: they aggregate individually low-visibility complaints into a single account with a large following, effectively pooling social capital that no single survivor could generate alone. Nudiati et al. (2023), through content analysis of sexual violence news on Twitter (X), similarly find that framing choices by both survivors and journalists, particularly the inclusion of graphic detail or direct quotation, strongly predict the volume of engagement a case receives, independent of its legal complexity.

Theme 2: Public pressure and the acceleration of institutional response. A second cluster of studies documents empirically observable acceleration effects once a case achieves virality. Wahid, Rohadi, and Kusyandi (2025) and Yasir, Muhlis, and Karimuddin (2024) both describe

case studies in which police reopened, reclassified, or expedited investigations within days of a case trending, compared to weeks or months of prior inaction, framing this acceleration through the Islamic legal concept of *maslahah mursalah*, or unconsidered public interest, as a legitimate if informal corrective to institutional lethargy. Anfasha, Rembulan, Syadena, and Hosnah (2025) trace a more institutionalized pathway, showing how KemenPPPA's own digital advocacy campaigns deliberately amplify survivor stories to generate the same pressure dynamic from within government itself, effectively formalizing virality as a policy instrument rather than treating it purely as an external shock. Syarofi (2025) frames this pattern as the emergence of a parallel "social media court" that runs alongside, and sometimes ahead of, the formal judicial process, while Muhammad, Sitompul, Zafarovich, and Embong (2025) document specific high-profile Indonesian cases in which sentencing outcomes and case processing speed diverged from prior baseline patterns once public attention peaked, arguing that virality has begun to function as a *de facto*, if constitutionally unrecognized, variable in criminal justice policy.

Theme 3: Risks of justice reduction, digital vigilantism, and secondary victimization. A substantial share of the reviewed literature, mostly doctrinal and constitutional in orientation, cautions that the same mechanisms that accelerate justice can distort it. Muhammad et al. (2025) coin the phrase "justice versus virality" to describe cases in which the intensity of online sentiment appears to influence sentencing severity independent of proportionality principles. Fatakh (2025) and Aliano (2025) both draw on political and philosophical theory, the latter explicitly invoking Hannah Arendt's account of spectacle politics, to argue that when institutional legitimacy comes to depend on maintaining public approval expressed through virality, law enforcement risks prioritizing visible responsiveness over substantively correct outcomes, a dynamic with troubling implications for due process and the presumption of innocence. Balahmar, Abadi, Wardani, Zahro, and Alfianti (2026) extend this critique through the lens of echo chambers, showing that algorithmic curation tends to expose users primarily to opinion-confirming content, which can harden premature judgments about guilt before formal proceedings conclude and can pressure law enforcement toward outcomes popular within a specific online cluster rather than outcomes that are broadly just. For sexual violence cases specifically, these risks compound with documented harms to survivors themselves. Filia and Setiyono (2024), Ratnasari, Sumartias, and Romli (2021), and Reumi, Medan, Pelupessy, and Usman (2025) all document instances of online gender-based violence, including doxxing, victim-blaming, and non-consensual re-circulation of case details, occurring in the aftermath of a case going viral, effectively imposing a secondary harm on the very survivors that virality was meant to help. Internationally, Nicolla and Lazard (2023) provide experimental evidence from the United States that social media messaging about sexual violence can backfire among young male audiences, generating defensive or dismissive reactions rather than the intended empathy, a caution against assuming that virality reliably produces prosocial outcomes even where it succeeds in generating attention. Sheikh and Rogers (2023), in a scoping review spanning multiple low- and middle-income countries, similarly find that technology-facilitated abuse frequently accompanies, rather than merely follows, technology-facilitated advocacy, suggesting the relationship between digital tools and survivor welfare is structurally ambivalent rather than uniformly positive.

Theme 4: Regulatory and digital-literacy responses. The final theme concerns emerging efforts to channel the accountability benefits of digital public pressure while containing its costs. Hukumu, Syahrir, and Lukum (2025) and Iqbal and Cyprien (2021) both assess the adequacy of Indonesian criminal law provisions addressing online gender-based violence, concluding that despite incremental strengthening through the UU TPKS and the amended Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE), enforcement against secondary online harms directed at survivors remains inconsistent. Maskun and colleagues (2026), adopting a

comparative Southeast Asian lens, argue that Indonesia's legal protection framework for digital sexual violence, while more developed than several regional peers, would benefit from clearer procedural guidelines specifically addressing how law enforcement should treat viral cases without compromising confidentiality guarantees. Lisi, Wardana, and Pribadi (2025) reach a complementary conclusion, recommending standardized protocols for digital evidence handling in gender-based violence cases regardless of whether a case has attracted public attention. On the preventive side, Setiansah, Nuryanti, Santoso, and Wuryaningsih (2025) and Zarkasi, Karolina, and Rizqullah (2023) both examine digital literacy interventions within Indonesian academic communities, finding that structured media literacy training measurably improves students' and staff members' ability to recognize, report, and respond appropriately to sexual violence without relying on public shaming or unverified viral disclosure as a first resort. Mulyono (2023) frames this preventive orientation within the broader concept of digital citizenship, arguing that strengthening civic digital literacy is a necessary complement to, not a substitute for, formal legal reform, since informed citizens are better positioned to exert pressure responsibly, verify claims before amplification, and support survivors without exposing them to further harm.

Taken together, these four themes suggest that viral justice functions less as a single mechanism than as a bundle of distinct effects operating simultaneously: an agenda-setting effect that increases the salience of stalled cases; a reputational-risk effect that motivates named institutions and officials to respond visibly; and an evidentiary-amplification effect through which digitally circulated documentation occasionally supplies investigators with leads unavailable through formal channels. Each of these effects carries a corresponding risk, respectively: disproportionate attention to easily narrated rather than legally significant cases; outcomes shaped by reputational management rather than legal merit; and the circulation of unverified or sensitive material that compounds survivor harm. The literature converges on the conclusion that the net effect of virality on sexual violence case handling in Indonesia is neither uniformly beneficial nor uniformly harmful, but is instead contingent on the presence of institutional safeguards, specifically confidentiality enforcement, digital evidence protocols, and digital literacy, that determine whether public pressure supplements or substitutes for procedural justice.

This disaggregated reading has practical implications that extend beyond the academic debate over whether virality is normatively good or bad. For law enforcement institutions, it suggests that responsiveness to viral cases should be formalized rather than left to ad hoc reputational management: a standing protocol that treats a verified surge in public attention as a trigger for supervisory review, rather than as a signal to bypass ordinary evidentiary standards, would allow institutions to capture the agenda-setting benefit of virality while resisting the pressure to prioritize visible speed over substantively sound outcomes. Several of the reviewed sources, notably Muhammad et al. (2025) and Balahmar et al. (2026), implicitly support such a protocol by showing that the harm from virality arises less from public attention itself than from the absence of any institutional buffer between that attention and final decision-making. For platform companies and civil society intermediaries such as the account studied by Girsang and Roseline (2024), the findings imply a responsibility to build verification and harm-reduction steps into the aggregation process itself, for example by withholding identifying details until a survivor has given informed consent to public disclosure, a practice already partially reflected in the confidentiality provisions of the UU TPKS but not yet consistently operationalized at the platform level.

The comparative evidence from Nicolla and Lazard (2023) and Sheikh and Rogers (2023) further cautions against assuming that Indonesian findings are entirely *sui generis*. The tendency of viral disclosure to generate both accountability pressure and secondary harm appears to recur across very different legal and cultural contexts, suggesting that the

phenomenon reflects structural features of networked digital publics more broadly rather than features unique to Indonesian legal culture. At the same time, the specifically Indonesian contributions reviewed here, particularly those grounded in Islamic legal reasoning such as the *masalah mursalah* framing offered by Yasir, Muhlis, and Karimuddin (2024), demonstrate that local jurisprudential traditions can provide an indigenous normative vocabulary for evaluating when informal public pressure serves the public interest and when it does not, offering a resource for policy design that need not be imported wholesale from Western digital-rights frameworks.

Finally, the pattern of findings across the 25 sources indicates that the maturity of the surrounding scholarly conversation has itself shifted over the review period. Sources published closer to 2021 tend to treat social media primarily as a tool of activism and awareness-raising, in line with Ratnasari, Sumartias, and Romli's (2021) early framing of digital activism, whereas sources published from 2025 onward increasingly treat virality as an established, semi-institutionalized feature of Indonesian legal process requiring formal regulatory attention, as seen in the comparative regional framework proposed by Maskun and colleagues (2026) and the standardized digital-evidence protocols proposed by Lisi, Wardana, and Pribadi (2025). This temporal shift itself constitutes evidence that the "no viral, no justice" phenomenon has moved from an informally observed anomaly to a recognized structural feature of Indonesian law enforcement that now demands the kind of systematic regulatory and institutional response outlined in Theme 4 above.

4. Conclusion

This review has synthesized 25 peer-reviewed sources published between 2021 and 2026 to examine how social media virality and digital public pressure shape the handling of sexual violence cases within the Indonesian criminal justice system. The evidence indicates that virality operates through at least three distinguishable mechanisms, agenda-setting, reputational risk, and evidentiary amplification, each capable of accelerating institutional response to cases that might otherwise stall indefinitely. At the same time, the same mechanisms generate real and well-documented costs, including distorted proportionality in case outcomes, erosion of due process norms, and secondary victimization of survivors through doxxing, non-consensual disclosure, and online harassment. The central conclusion of this review is therefore not that viral justice should be celebrated or condemned wholesale, but that its value depends entirely on whether formal institutions build deliberate safeguards, confidentiality enforcement consistent with the UU TPKS, standardized digital evidence protocols, and supervisory review triggered by public attention, around the informal pressure that virality generates. Where such safeguards exist, digital public pressure can function as a genuine supplement to formal accountability; where they are absent, it risks becoming a substitute for, rather than a support to, procedural justice. Future research would benefit from longitudinal and quantitative designs capable of measuring case-processing time before and after viral escalation, as well as survivor-centered qualitative research examining how survivors themselves weigh the accountability benefits of virality against its personal costs, a perspective that remains comparatively underrepresented in the literature synthesized here.

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