

Representation of the Police Image on Social Media X in Online Gambling Cases: A Netnographic Study of the Official Account of the Metro Police Department

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of the Indonesian National Police, particularly the Metro Jaya Regional Police, in handling online gambling cases through social media X (formerly Twitter) during the period from September to November 2024. The use of social media by state institutions has become a significant communication strategy in building public image in the digital age. Through a qualitative approach and netnographic methods, this study aims to uncover how the construction of police image is shaped through digital narratives, visual symbols, and interactions between the institution and netizens. Stuart Hall's Representation Theory is used to examine how the meaning of the police image is produced and negotiated; Symbolic Convergence Theory to trace the formation of collective meaning; and Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) Theory to understand patterns of online social interaction. The results show that the Jakarta Metropolitan Police actively builds a positive image through informative posts, visualizations of firm actions, and heroic narratives that portray the institution as a protector of the community. However, on the other hand, netizens' perceptions are not always aligned. Public comments and discussions often reflect suspicion, cynicism, and distrust, particularly regarding issues of police internal integrity. These findings indicate a representational tension between institutional communication strategies and public responses in the digital space. This research contributes to the development of literature on public institutional communication on social media and provides practical recommendations for police institutions in managing their image and digital interactions in a more strategic and participatory manner.

Keywords: Representation, Police Image, Social Media X, Online Gambling, Netnography, Digital Communication

DOI: 10.7176/NMMC/109-02

Publication date: October 31st 2025

Introduction

Advances in digital technology have driven significant changes in public communication patterns. Social media has now become one of the main tools for shaping public opinion and institutional image. Not only is it used by the business sector, but government institutions are also actively building their image through digital platforms. The Indonesian National Police, as a law enforcement agency, also utilizes social media to build public trust and represent its role in the digital public sphere (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

According to data from We Are Social (2024), social media platform X—formerly known as Twitter—ranks sixth in popularity among social media platforms in Indonesia. However, the Jakarta Metropolitan Police actively uses this platform to inform the public about legal actions, including in the handling of an online gambling case in 2024. This case has attracted attention because it involves a wide network and has implicated several public officials, including those from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Detik.com, 1 November 2024).

The results of a survey conducted by Litbang Kompas in June 2024 showed that the positive image of the Indonesian National Police had increased to 73.1%, but then declined again to 65.7% in January 2025, mainly due to controversial cases involving individuals within the police force (Rahayu, 2024; Suwanti, 2025). This reflects that despite efforts to build image through social media, public perception remains volatile and is greatly influenced by narratives circulating online.

According to Hall (1997), representation is not merely a reflection of reality, but a process of meaning production involving language, symbols, and cultural context. In the digital context, the representation of the police's image on social media is not only shaped by the institution itself but also by public responses and interpretations recorded through comments, reposts, and online discussions. Netizens, as active actors in the virtual space, play a significant role in shaping the collective narrative about the police (Wicaksono et al., 2019).

In handling online gambling cases, the official @PoldaMetroJaya account on social media X displays a heroic narrative, visualization of firm action, and moral rhetoric. However, public interactions show a variety of responses—from support to cynicism and harsh criticism of the integrity of the apparatus. The tension between institutional narratives and public perceptions shows the importance of studying how the image of the police is

constructed and negotiated digitally (Wijaya, Anggraini, & Prabowo, 2024). Starting from this background, this study focuses on how the representation of the police image is constructed on social media X through uploads and interactions on the official Polda Metro Jaya account in the context of the 2024 online gambling case. This study uses a qualitative approach with a netnography method, and refers to the theory of Representation (Hall, 1997), Symbolic Convergence (Bormann, 1985), and Computer-Mediated Communication (Walther, 1992) to understand the process of meaning production, the formation of collective narratives, and the dynamics of digital social interaction.

Literature Review

This study uses three main theories to frame the analysis of police image representation in digital space, namely Stuart Hall's representation theory, Ernest Bormann's symbolic convergence, and computer-mediated communication (CMC).

1. Stuart Hall Representation Theory

According to Stuart Hall (1997), representation is the process of producing meaning through language, symbols, and cultural systems. Hall views that meaning is not inherently inherent in objects or events, but is constructed through discursive practices governed by power and ideology. In the context of social media, representation can be understood as how institutions such as the police convey certain messages through visual symbols, texts, and narratives that aim to shape public perception. Hall emphasized that media not only conveys reality, but also shapes and reproduces social meaning through the process of encoding (message delivery by institutions) and decoding (meaning by the audience). In this study, the representation process is studied from the content uploaded by the official Polda Metro Jaya account and the reactions shown by netizens on social media X.

2. Symbolic convergence theory

Ernest G. Bormann (1985) through symbolic convergence theory explains how social groups create and share meaning through collective narratives called fantasy themes. These themes unite the group's perceptions, emotions, and values towards an event or institution. When online communities respond to an issue together—whether with support, criticism, or humor—they create symbolic convergence that reflects collective views. In this study, symbolic convergence is used to explore how a shared narrative about the image of the police is formed among netizens who respond to posts about online gambling cases. Netizens' responses in the form of comments, retweets, and memes are expressions of fantasy themes that form a shared reality in digital space.

3. Computer-Mediated Communication Theory (CMC)

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory explains how social interaction takes place through digital media. According to Walther (1992), communication in digital media has characteristics such as asynchronous, anonymous, and can expand the space for public participation. In the context of this research, CMC theory is useful for understanding how institutional accounts (such as Polda Metro Jaya) interact with the public in social media X, and how the dynamics of this communication shape or change public perceptions of the institution. The characteristics of social media X allow for open, real-time, and participatory interactions, which significantly influence the process of forming the institutional image of labor.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with the netnography method, developed by Kozinets (2010) as an adaptation of ethnography to study culture and interaction in online communities. Netnography allows researchers to trace the construction of meaning and narratives formed in digital platforms through participatory and non-participatory observation of internet user activities, in this case netizens and official institutional accounts.

The paradigm used in this study is constructivism, which views that social reality is formed through symbolic interaction and the construction of shared meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This paradigm is in accordance with the objectives of the study which is to explore how the image of the police is constructed through symbolic representation and digital social interaction between the official Polda Metro Jaya account and the public on social media X.

The object of the study focused on the official account @PoldaMetroJaya on platform X (Twitter) during the period from September to November 2024, with the main topic around handling online gambling cases. Primary data was obtained through online observation of institutional upload content and netizen comments, as well as in-depth interviews with account managers, police institutional sources, and legal practitioners. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from media documentation, upload archives, and online news.

The data analysis technique used thematic analysis assisted by NVivo 12 Plus software, which

facilitates the identification of narrative patterns, dominant themes, and visual symbols. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation (between official accounts, public comments, and news media), theory triangulation, and member checking of key informants. In maintaining research ethics, researchers prioritize the principles of informed consent, anonymization of sensitive public comments, and caution regarding open data so as not to have a negative impact on the individuals or institutions involved (Kozinets, 2010).

The Findings

This research found that the representation of the image of the police in handling online gambling cases on the official social media account of X @PoldaMetroJaya is generally framed in the form of a positive image, with a dominant narrative that places the police as a firm law enforcer, a protector of the community, and a hero in eradicating digital crime. However, this representation is not immediately fully accepted by the public; responses from netizens show diverse perception dynamics, ranging from support to sharp criticism..

1. Police Representation as Hero

In the observation period (September–November 2024), the @PoldaMetroJaya account consistently uploaded content that showed the success of the perpetrator's arrest, the destruction of evidence, and official statements from institutional leaders.

Picture 1 Statement of Polda Metro Jaya and the Arrest of Online Gambling



Perpetrators

The picture above shows one of the uploads in the form of documentation of evidence worth Rp76 billion that was confiscated from online gambling perpetrators. This visual narrative is reinforced with symbols such as red and white backgrounds, National Police emblems, and heroic-themed captions such as "Police Present to Protect People from Digital Crime".

2. Netizen Comment and Perceptions

The public response to the upload is diverse.

Picture 2 Public Assessment Graph

Penilaian Publik terhadap Polisi dalam Penanganan Kasus Judi Online (Media Sosial X, Sept–Nov 2024)

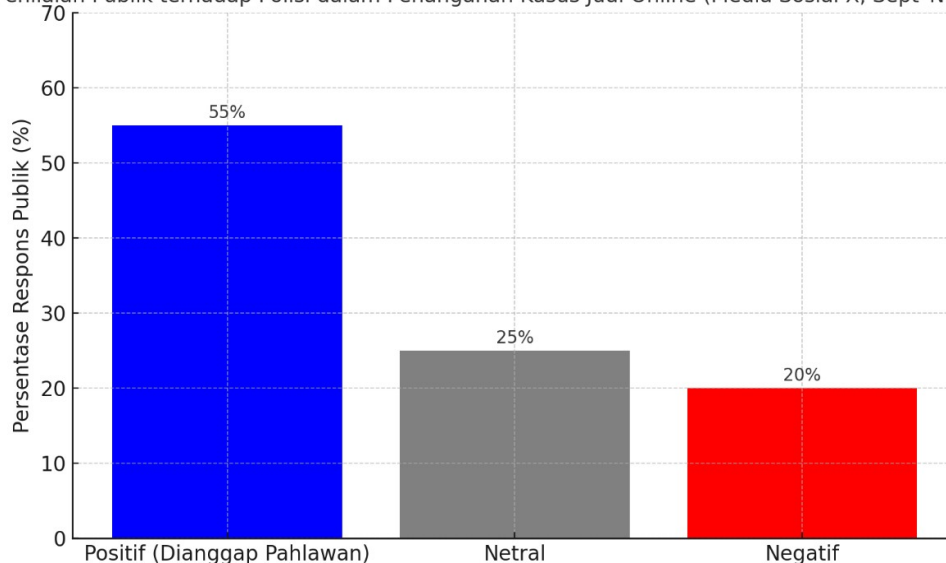


Figure 2 above shows a diagram of netizens' response which is categorized into positive, neutral, and negative comments. Although there were comments expressing appreciation for the police's actions, most netizens questioned the transparency, the courage of the police to investigate big actors, and the issue of election felling.

Picture 3 of Bambang Sador Online Gambling Case



A real example can be seen in the comments on the upload related to the arrest of the creator of the "Sador" content, which is shown in Figure 3, where the public questions why other celebrities are not processed.

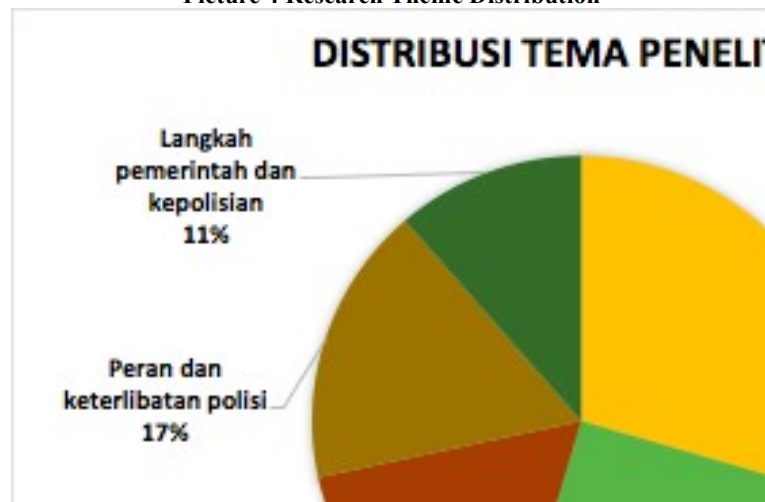
Table 1 Comparison Table of Netizen and Police Perception

Aspect	Netizen Perception	Police Perception
The Purpose of Communication on Social Media	Assess and supervise police actions; skeptical of imaging motives	Delivering information, demonstrating performance, and building public trust
View of Transparency	Appreciate openness, but be suspicious if it is considered incomplete or dishonest	Transparency is part of professionalism and a form of accountability
The Meaning of Visual/Narrative Representation	Tend to be critical; consider heroic visuals as excessive imagery	Visualization is used to strengthen the impression of success and public education
Response to Public Criticism	Actively giving criticism, satire, or meme as an expression of dissatisfaction	Considering criticism as input, but emphasizing that the content is based on legal facts
Use of Symbols/Visual Language	Understand the symbol, but often miss or criticize the symbol	Using certain symbols to strengthen positive identity and courage
Expectations for Police Institutions	Want real change, not just a look on social media	Hoping a positive image can build support and strengthen legitimacy

Table 1 presents a perception comparison between Police (based on in-depth interviews) and netizens (from online observation). The police consider the representation that is built in accordance with the facts in the field and as part of public education. Meanwhile, netizens tend to form perceptions based on viral narratives that circulate, not from institutional statements.

3. Symbolism and Moral Rethoric

Picture 4 Research Theme Distribution



The police also build moral narratives in their content. For example, in Figure 4, the distribution of the upload theme is shown which shows the dominance of messages about "the danger of online gambling", "family protection", and "the safety of the younger generation". This narrative shows the institution's efforts to place itself as a guardian of public morale.

Picture 5 Branch Diagram Results Related to Online Gambling and Police Image



Image Analysis Through NVivoThe use of NVivo 12 Plus software produces visualization in the form of word clouds and branch diagrams (Figure 5) that identify dominant keywords such as "firm", "judol", "commitment", "person", and "cleaning". This result shows how digital narratives form a network of interconnected meanings and strengthen the desired institutional representation, as well as reveal the symbolic resistance of netizens through cynical comments and negative hashtags.

Discussion

The research results show that Polda Metro Jaya actively forms a positive image representation through the social media platform X in handling online gambling cases. Institutional uploads tend to emphasize success, assertiveness, and moral commitment in enforcing the law. This is in line with the concept of representation according to Hall (1997), which states that meaning is not inherent in nature, but is formed through discursive practices such as media narratives and visual symbols.

Polda Metro Jaya uses visualization strategies—for example, displaying large quantities of evidence, press conferences by high officials, to the use of campaign hashtags (#judol, #komdigi)—to create a narrative that institutions are present as protectors of society from digital crime. These symbols function as rhetorical tools to strengthen the institution's position in the realm of public discourse (Hall, 1997; Wicaksono et al., 2024).

However, on the other hand, netizens' comments and reactions show the dynamics of the reception that is not always in line with the official narrative. Some users expressed their support for the performance of the police, but not a few voiced suspicion of the integrity of the officers, even satirizing the existence of "selectful felling" in the legal process. This phenomenon reflects the theory of Symbolic Convergence (Bormann, 1985), where the public creates fantasy themes as a form of collective response to institutional discourse. Cynical hashtags such as #1Hari1Oknum become a symbol of resistance against hegemonic narratives and show that public opinion is dynamic and critical.

The tension between institutional narrative and public perception can also be explained through the Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory. Social media as a digital interaction space allows open, real-time, and anonymous two-way communication (Walther, 1992). In this context, institutions no longer monopolize the production of meaning, but have to deal with "alternative communicators" from netizens who have great amplification power through reposts, comments, and virality.

In addition, the difference in perception between the police and netizens found in this study confirms that social media is not just a one-way publication, but a discourse arena where institutional legitimacy is tested by public opinion. The representation process in the digital space is competitive and takes place continuously.

Thus, it can be concluded that the success of the police institution's communication strategy on social media depends on its ability to build a consistent, transparent, and open narrative to public dialogue. Response to public criticism, explanation of sensitive issues, and consistency of legal action are the keys to the sustainability of a positive image in an increasingly critical digital space

Conclusion

This research shows that social media, especially platform X, becomes an important space in the formation and negotiation of institutional images. In the context of the 2024 online gambling case, Polda Metro Jaya actively utilizes its official account to build a police image representation as a firm, responsive, and responsible institution for digital crime.

Using the netnographic approach, it was found that the representation was formed through systematic visual and verbal narratives—for example the use of evidence photos, excerpts of official statements, to campaign hashtags that reinforce the institution's identity. This finding strengthens Stuart Hall (1997)'s view that representation is a process of meaning production that involves cultural and symbolic practices.

However, the digital space is not a neutral arena. Netizens' responses show that public perception of police image is dynamic, critical, and formed through online social interaction. Symbolic Convergence Theory explains how the public creates counter-narratives as a form of collective expression, while CMC theory helps to understand how the characteristics of digital communication affect the process..

Thus, the success of the institution's image representation is not only determined by the official narrative, but also by the extent to which the institution is able to build a transparent, responsive, and adaptive two-way communication to the dynamics of public opinion in the digital space.

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