"No Viral, No Justice": Unveiling the Phenomenon of Digital Vigilantism from a Psychological Perspective

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Abstract. The rapid advancement of the cyber world has spurred new behaviors and a complex transition from real-life to online behaviors. One behavior arising from this development is digital vigilantism. This concept utilizes social media and the internet to punish or publicly shame those perceived as normatively guilty. Using a narrative literature review method, this article aimed to explore digital vigilantism behavior and analyze it through the lens of psychology. The literature review examined seven research articles discussing digital vigilantism published from 2014–2024. Key focuses include the concept of digital vigilantism, analysis based on psychology theories (such as social identity theory and theory of justice), as well as an examination of its strengths and weaknesses. The article provides fresh insights into digital vigilantism and its intersection with psychology.

Keywords: digital vigilantism; justice; online; social identity; psychology

Introduction

According to the "We Are Social" report, 185.3 million people in Indonesia were active internet users as of January 2024. Approximately 139 million people, or 49.9% of Indonesia's total population, are active social media users (We Are Social, 2024). Social media has garnered significant attention from the Indonesian people due to its multifunctional and interactive platform. It is not only used to distribute information but also serves as a portal to establish a virtual network of friends and a medium for data sharing (Hamna, 2017).

The spread of information through social media is very fast and flexible, although it tends to be uncontrolled (Luo et al., 2021; Putra & Setiawan, 2023). This happens because social media offers virtually unlimited access and ease of use. Everyone can access social media with only two requirements: having communication media and an internet connection. The speed of information dissemination on social media is one of the primary reasons people use it (Asfand-E-Yar et al., 2023).

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"We Are Social" noted that people use social media for various reasons, such as to fill leisure time, connect with friends and family, and find out what is currently the topic of conversation in the community (We Are Social, 2024).

Internet users'activities on social media have led to various symptoms that quickly transform into massive digital phenomena worldwide, one of which is digital vigilantism. Trottier (2016) defined digital vigilantism as a digital practice by individuals or groups aimed at unveiling or criticizing legal or moral violations committed by others. Digital vigilantism can be seen as a form of citizen participation in monitoring and enforcing the law outside the existing legal framework.

Vigilantism is not new in Indonesia. Even before the development of digital technology, people already practiced vigilantism. It is described as an action carried out by individuals or civilian groups that are not institutional or based on the instructions of certain authorities. Additionally, vigilantism is described as an action that causes damage and highlights violence (Departemen Kriminologi FISIP Universitas Indonesia, 2022).

Unlike vigilantism in the real world, digital vigilantism can be interpreted from various perspectives. Several meanings have shifted from traditional vigilantism (Reichl, 2019). Vigilantism is no longer seen as solely focusing on violence but can provide a sense of security and support in the digital space. This can be observed in cases and information related to violations that dynamically unfold in cyberspace. The expression "It must go viral first, then be investigated" reflects how laws are often times only enforced after case have received widespread public attention through social media. In the context of digital vigilantism, this indicates that crimes and violations are often ignored until they gain significant public attention, usually from digital platforms (Huang, 2021; Moncada, 2017). In some cases, digital vigilantism is considered a form of self-defense for crime victims who do not receive procedural justice through legal means, allowing them to receive assistance and mass trials (Bateson, 2012).

Digital vigilantism activities offer both advantages and disadvantages. It often involves disclosing personal information about someone accused of committing a violation. However, there is a high risk of misidentification, which can slander and damage the reputation of an innocent person (Douglas, 2016). This mistake can negatively impact the accused's personal and professional life. Additionally, digital vigilantism can potentially violate a person's digital security rights or direct digital attacks on social media accounts or websites belonging to journalists and activists (Galleguillos, 2021). The perpetrators of these activities are difficult to detect because they tend to take advantage of online anonymity.

An individual or group conducting digital vigilantism activities, whether it is positive or negative, is referred to as a vigilante. A vigilante is an individual or group that enforce laws outside of official authority (Trottier, 2016). They operate based on personal or collective initiative to address violations of the law that they believe need immediate attention. The urgency in this practice usually arises because individuals or groups identify themselves as sharing similar social identity with the victims (Walby & Joshua, 2021). This also gives rise to conformity, whereas leading individuals or groups to show their solidarity through support and assistance in digital vigilante activities (Tippett,

2022).

Vigilantes are often motivated by a strong sense of justice or morality (Legocki et al., 2020). They feel that the legal system is ineffective or slow, so they have the urge to intervene and uphold justice (Tippett, 2022). Although vigilantes feel that their actions are justified, they do not have the authority or legal legitimacy to enforce law (Asif & Weenink, 2019). This often places them outside the boundaries of formal law.

Like the double-edged practice of digital vigilantism, vigilantes are also prone to being trapped in the narrative of vigilantism as a safe space and social support. The complexity of digital vigilantism is one of the strong reasons to reexamine and explore this digital activity. Digital vigilantism is like a vigilante circle without a deep search for truth, while on the other hand also forms another circle in mentoring and support.

This study is expected to help readers recognize and understand the concepts and psychological dynamics in the digital vigilantism phenomenon in Indonesia. This can be viewed from the social identity and sense of justice that motivates someone to become a vigilante. This study is also expected to provide an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of vigilantism in cyberspace.

The researcher proposed the following research questions: a) What is the concept of digital vigilantism? b) How are the psychological dynamics of digital vigilantism reviewed from social identity and justice theory? c) What are the advantages and disadvantages of digital vigilantism?

Methods

This study used one of the qualitative methods commonly employed for literature reviews, namely the Narrative Literature Review (NLR) method. This method is the earliest form of literature review developed and used by many researchers, featuring a writing format that is not too rigid (Byrne, 2016). This distinguishes it from the systematic literature review (SLR), which emphasizes systemic aspects. Unlike the SLR, which is compiled for evidence-based interests (Page et al., 2021), the NLR is more concerned with the transfer of knowledge from the author to the reader (Coughlan & Cronin, 2020).

The NLR involves compiling and presenting the results of previous research in the form of a narrative or story (Coughlan & Cronin, 2020). Its purpose is to provide a fundamental and significant picture of the problem discussed in the full manuscript (Baker, 2016). The NLR method also aims to identify and summarize previously published articles, avoid research duplication, and discover unexplored research areas (Ferrari, 2015). This aligns with the objectives of this study, which were to understand the concept of digital vigilantism, its psychological dynamics in the context of social identity and justice theory, and to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of this phenomenon.

The NLR writing process in this study followed Ferrari (2015) guidelines, which emphasize the importance of a rigorous methodological approach similar to the SLR to improve the quality of NLRs, reduce bias, and implement effective literature search strategies. According to Ferrari (2015), the NLR writing process includes several main steps: 1) Literature search, which is conducted with a clear strategy using a combination of relevant keywords and recording the date and number of search

results; and 2) Article selection, which is done by setting clear inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the relevance and availability of all selected studies. Researchers can manually add articles from the bibliography of selected journal articles until they reach the point of "saturation." 3) Synthesis, which involves combining the results, examining their quality, and interpreting them; 4) Comprehensive discussion and conclusion. This approach ensures that the resulting NLR is of high quality and informative.

To conduct the NLR, the inclusion criteria used in the present study were: (1) articles published in the last ten years from 2014 to 2024, (2) discussing the topic of digital vigilantism, (3) research journal articles, (4) written in English or Indonesian, (5) studies employing empirical methods instead of literature reviews, and (6) open access. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria include (1) articles discussing vigilantism in general without focusing on digital vigilantism, (2) publications in the form of books, and (3) articles using the literature review or scoping review method.

In the first stage, a search was conducted on three main databases, namely: Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, and Sage Journal. The keywords used in searching the three databases were "digital vigilantism" OR "online vigilantism" OR "cyber vigilantism" AND "justice" AND "conformity" AND "identity". At this stage, the researcher found a total of 103 articles. Then, the researcher filtered for duplication using Rayyan AI software. The screening results found 10 duplicates, leaving 93 journals. In the second stage, the researcher screened the abstracts to see if they were in accordance with the inclusion and exclusion criteria, also using Rayyan AI software. During the abstract screening stage, 10 articles were included. Furthermore, from these 10 articles, the researcher read the entire research articles. The results found seven appropriate articles, so these articles were further examined to answer the research questions. This selection process is shown in the PRISMA diagram (Figure 1).

Figure 1

PRISMA Diagram of the Article Selection Process
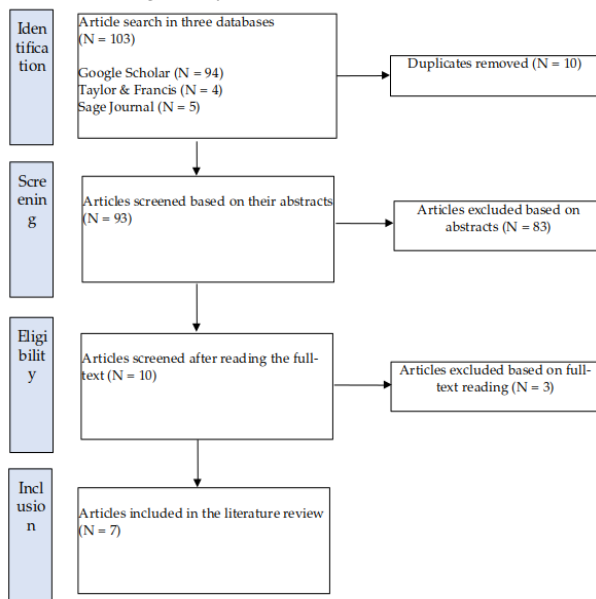
Result

This study involved seven selected articles. Based on the review of all selected articles, the researcher found two main findings: the concept of digital vigilantism and the psychological dynamics involved.

The concept of digital vigilantism includes terms used in the selected articles along with definitions from several different experts. The terms used to describe vigilantism activities in the cyber world is not limited to "digital vigilantism." One article used the term online public shaming (Blitvich, 2022), online shaming (Hou et al., 2017), and cyber vigilantism (Lindsay, 2011). Two articles used the term digilantism (Schwarz & Richey, 2019; Wight & Stanley, 2022). Two other articles used similar terms, namely digital vigilantism (Isnaini et al., 2020; Walby & Joshua, 2021).

The definition of digital vigilantism used by the articles comes from various sources. Lindsay (2011) employed the definition of vigilantism from Dumsday (2009). Hou et al. (2017) used Johnston (1996) definition of vigilantism. Schwarz and Richey (2019) derived definitions of digital vigilantism from Jane (2017) and Trottier (2016). Blitvich (2022) based the research on Trottier (2012) definition of digital vigilantism. Wight and Stanley (2022) used the author's definition, supported by the concepts of Gerbaudo and Treré (2015), Jane (2017), and Trottier (2019). Isnaini et al. (2020) employed Trottier (2016) and Loveluck (2019) definitions. Finally, Walby and Joshua (2021) used (Favarel-Garrigues, 2020) definition.

Psychological dynamics involve aspects of social identity and justice. Six articles discuss social identity in digital vigilantism behavior, such as efforts to fit in with groups (Schwarz & Richey, 2019), defending individuals or groupss perceived rights (Hou et al., 2017; Isnaini et al., 2020), restoring the group's reputation (Lindsay, 2011), and negative labeling of individuals outside groups (Walby & Joshua, 2021; Wight & Stanley, 2022). The identities formed can include gender differences (Wight & Stanley, 2022), certain regional groups (Isnaini et al., 2020), race (Blitvich, 2022), and economic and social status conditions (Hou et al., 2017).

Justice is discussed in several articles in relation to the violation of norms, moral values, and laws (Blitvich, 2022; Schwarz & Richey, 2019; Wight & Stanley, 2022). Violations triggers judgments of injustice that manifest in the form of empathy and emotions (Blitvich, 2022). These judgments lead to behaviors, such as online shaming (Blitvich, 2022; Hou et al., 2017) and demands for punishment (Isnaini et al., 2020).

All of these studies were conducted using empirical research methods, namely qualitative and experimental. Six articles used qualitative methods, with two using netnography (Blitvich, 2022; Wight & Stanley, 2022), and four involving content analysis (Isnaini et al., 2020; Lindsay, 2011; Schwarz & Richey, 2019; Walby & Joshua, 2021). One article used experimental methods (Hou et al., 2017). The synthesis results can be seen in Table 1.

Furthermore, in the discussion section, the researchers delve deeper into the concept of digital vigilantism and its psychological dynamics as well as analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of

digital vigilantism.

Discussion

The Concept of Digital Vigilantism

Based on the selected articles, we found the definition of digital vigilantism from several experts, namely Dumsday (2009), Favarel-Garrigues (2020), Gerbaudo and Treré (2015), Jane (2017), Johnston (1996), Loveluck (2019), and Trottier (2012, 2016, 2019, 2020). The definition of digital vigilantism starts from the understanding of vigilantism in general. Lindsay (2011) research used Dumsday (2009) definition of vigilantism, which is the organized use of violence or threat of violence by individuals or groups acting alone without official authority. The perpetrators of this practice are referred to as vigilantes. The purpose of the action is to control criminal or non-criminal acts that are considered deviant, with the violence or threat specifically directed at the perpetrator or alleged perpetrator. These actions are based on a vigilante value system that they consider minimally defensible, and motivations include what is seen as an attempt to uphold justice or the good of the community.

Hou et al. (2017) used the term "online shaming" to describe digital vigilantism activities. This online shaming behavior reflects vigilantism. According to Johnston (1996), vigilantism is defined as an act of social control carried out by individuals or groups when the existing social order is perceived to be threatened by violations, potential violations, or alleged violations of established norms.

Schwarz and Richey (2019) used the term digilantism, which means digital vigilantism. This study employed Jane (2017) definition of digital vigilantism. Jane (2017) explained that digilantism refers to extrajudicial practices suspected of being politically motivated in the online realm, aiming to punish or hold others accountable in response to the lack or absence of institutional solutions. Additionally, this study used the concept of digital vigilantism by Trottier (2016), who defined it as surveillance carried out independently by social media users to prosecute perpetrators of crimes or unethical actions.

Isnaini et al. (2020) research was based on the concept of digital vigilantism put forward by Loveluck (2019), describing vigilantism as a form of violent expression from collective power to seek or restore order through direct punishment, as opposed to regulations made by official institutions (Loveluck, 2019). The terminology of vigilantism was then absorbed into the online arena to become digital vigilantism, referring to direct online actions in response to violations, crimes, inequality, revenge, or hatred. Furthermore, this study also used Trottier (2016) concept of digital vigilantism, describing it as actions by citizens or groups who offend, insult, and attack the activities of other citizens or groups, followed by retaliatory actions on digital media and social media platforms.

Walby and Joshua (2021) research used the concept of digital vigilantism formulated by Favarel-Garrigues (2020), who defined digital vigilantism as a practice where people on social media collectively identify and respond to a perceived threat, often by shaming the perpetrators. Blitvich (2022) introduced another term for digital vigilantism activities: online public shaming. Subjects or identities that respond to perceived violations and carry out online public shaming are called cyber

vigilantes, digilantes, or smart mobs. Online public shaming behavior is a form of peer surveillance, manifested through user-uploaded photos, videos, and texts on websites, blogs, forums, and portals that display impolite, uncivilized, and illegal behavior in society, with the aim of exposing and shaming such behavior (Skoric et al., 2010).

Wight and Stanley (2022) research used the definition of digital vigilantism, or digilantism, as compiled by the authors based on Gerbaudo and Treré (2015), Jane (2017), and Trottier (2020). The perpetrators of digital vigilantism practices are called digilantes. Wight and Stanley (2022) concluded that digilantism is the online equivalent of vigilantism carried out by digilantes. Overall, digital vigilantism can be understood as a form of collective action carried out by individuals or groups through digital media to uphold social and moral values. This practice can manifest in various forms, both positive, such as assistance and support, and negative, such as humiliating and punishing those perceived to have violated norms or laws.

Typology of Digital Vigilantism

Loveluck (2019) explained four typologies of digital vigilantism: flagging, investigating, hounding, and organised leaking. First, flagging involves identifying and reporting violations of social norms. The usual action is shaming, where individuals publicly reprimand or expose others for their actions to enforce social rules or hold them accountable. Second, investigating involves investigating incidents to find perpetrators, search for missing persons, or gather evidence. The usual action is naming, which involves identifying individuals involved in actions perceived as violating the norms. Third, hounding refers to pursuing the target perpetrator as a form of punishment. The usual actions range from naming and shaming to doxing and even assault (Loveluck, 2019). Doxing involves revealing personal information about others without their consent on the internet (Eckert & Metzger-Riftkin, 2020). Assault is a coordinated effort by a group to target individuals or organizations online, often resulting in mass actions such as flooding social media accounts with negative comments or reviews. Fourth, organised leaking involves the systematic disclosure of information. The usual action is providing incentives for the information provided (Loveluck, 2019).

In addition to Loveluck (2019), Isnaini et al. (2020) described five elements of digital vigilantism found in inter-group conflicts in Indonesia: security, surveillance, punishment, control, and discipline. First, security practices involve preventive measures taken by individuals or groups to protect themselves or their groups from perceived threats. This element includes surveillance and gathering information about other groups through social media. Second, surveillance involves monitoring and observing the behavior of other groups by analyzing content uploaded to social media and interactions between users that can indicate potential violations of laws or norms. Third, punishment manifests in the form of naming and shaming on social media. Fourth, control involves efforts to regulate and control the behavior of other individuals or groups through social pressure in the form of threats or intimidation. Fifth, discipline involves disciplining individuals or groups who violate norms or laws. Examples of discipline practices include deleting content or reporting to the authorities, as noted in Isnaini et al. (2020).

Factors Affecting Digital Vigilantism

Based on the selected articles, several factors were found to influence digital vigilantism, namely socioeconomic status or SES (Hou et al., 2017), gender (Wight & Stanley, 2022), and race (Blitvich, 2022). Hou et al. (2017) found that individuals with higher SES tend to participate in online shaming behavior more than individuals with lower SES. This can occur because individuals with high SES have more access to the internet, supported by higher income, better health conditions, and better education. Additionally, Hou et al. (2017) explained that individuals with high SES also have a sense of social responsibility when injustice occurs, leading them to confront it directly. Meanwhile, individuals with lower SES tend to accept unfair behavior even when they are the ones harmed.

Wight and Stanley (2022) research showed that gender significantly influences digital vigilantism. The study found that digilantes were more critical of women and younger individuals who uploaded photos at Holocaust sites (Nazi's concentration camps for Jews during the World War II, which have been transformed into tourist sites and prohibit self-portraits). Women, especially younger ones, were generally seen posing more prominently than men. In addition to being targets, men and women also differ in responding and behaving as digilantes. Galleguillos (2021) found that women more often investigated and blamed targets lightly, while men more frequently carried out harsh attacks, such as reprimands. Women made more posts that called for God's wrath (such as hoping the perpetrator would go to hell) and made the target feel guilty, while men were more supportive of severe punishments, such as legal sanctions and even the death of the target.

Blitvich (2022) positioned digilantes as a group that defends and acts prosocial towards people of color who are still victims of violations of moral values by white people. In addition to supporting a particular race, digilantes also carry out vigilantism against individuals or groups through a specific culture or language. Wight and Stanley (2022) study found that digilantes humiliate individuals online through critical comments influenced by language differences. Individuals who upload images on social media using languages other than English receive more critical comments because they are perceived as deviating from moral values. The study also found that critical comments were mostly dominated by accounts from the United Kingdom and the United States and directed at other countries that do not use English in their post captions. This can occur because both countries are familiar with digital vigilantism behavior, such as "cancel culture," "wokeness," and other digital vigilantism activities.

Psychological Dynamics of Digital Vigilantism

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), focuses on the process of individuals forming their identities based on membership in certain groups. This theory explains that individual identity is greatly influenced by the groups they join and how they compare themselves to other groups. There are three basic assumptions of this theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). First, individuals strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity. Second, positive social identity is based on mostly favorable comparisons between the in-group and several relevant out-groups. The in-group

must be viewed as positively different from the relevant out-group. Third, when social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will seek to leave the existing group and join a more positively different group and/or make the existing group more positively different (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

Individuals involved in digital vigilantism often form a positive social identity as part of a vigilante group. This social identity influences their actions, motivations, and reasons for participating in seeking justice online (Trottier, 2019). The relationship between digital vigilantism and social identity theory also lies in the formation of a collective identity based on shared beliefs, values, and norms among group members. This group identity can influence individuals' views on justice, their targets, and their actions in cyberspace (Brown et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2015).

For example, individuals who firmly believe in equality between women and men can take an active part in handling online gender-based violence (OGBV) cases. Based on data from SAFEnet (2021), the number of OGBV complaints in Indonesia reached 600 cases. When they receive these complaints, individuals can become digital vigilantes by revealing the identity of the perpetrators on social media. This action not only affects the individuals involved but also encourages other communities who share the same values to impose social punishment on the perpetrators. Thus, a sense of pride and unity is created in a large group that fights for the same values (Jasko et al., 2019). This helps each member of the group in achieving or maintaining a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

Based on selected articles, researchers found various roles of social identity in digital vigilantism behavior. Social identity is reflected in the practice of digital vigilantism, which is often used to defend individuals or groups considered to have moral legitimacy (Hou et al., 2017; Isnaini et al., 2020). Additionally, digital vigilantism often plays a role in efforts to restore the reputation of groups involved in conflicts or riots (Lindsay, 2014). This process is often accompanied by negative labeling of external individuals or groups, indicating a preference for the in-group and antipathy towards the out-group (Walby & Joshua, 2021; Wight & Stanley, 2022). The similarity of identity characteristics and interests within the group makes individuals strive to join and remain in the group (Dion, 2000). Individuals will make an attempt to fit in or conform with the group to be accepted (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Insko, 1984). Conformity is a type of social influence that directs individuals to change their attitudes and behaviors to comply with existing social norms (Branscombe & Baron, 2022). Although certain values held by the group may not be true in reality, conformity explains why individuals follow these norms.

In the context of mass media, self-reflection and individualistic thinking are reduced (Weissman, 2021). Individuals are pressured by collective opinion on social media because it is a large community that continuously subjects them to the judgment of many (Branscombe & Baron, 2022). This causes individuals to lose their unique identity, merging with the mass that cannot be distinguished and imitated. Individuals adjust their attitudes and behaviors on social media according to what most others do, as it is considered normative (Neubaum et al., 2018; Schwarz & Richey, 2019).

In essence, social identity theory explains that a person's self-esteem and sense of belonging to a particular group can drive them to engage in digital vigilantism. This is because they want to

uphold the norms and values of the group in cyberspace (Trottier, 2019). It is important to remember that group formation does not have to be a formal process. As shown by Tajfel (1970) research, under minimal conditions, group views regarding in-groups and out-groups can already be formed. This happens even when individuals have never met their group.

Justice Theory

Justice is a very sensitive issue when associated with social and community situations. The assessment of justice drives certain reactions in individuals, such as attitudes, emotions, and behavior (Lange et al., 2012). According to the theory of justice, there are two types of assessments of justice in general: distributive justice and procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Each type of justice has a different approach to determining fairness, which in turn influences reactions to injustice.

First, distributive justice assesses justice based on equity. This means something is described as just or fair if it results in the right, appropriate, and equitable outcomes according to what is done and comparable to what others get (Cohen, 1987; Faturochman, 1999; Tyler & Huo, 2002). This perspective explains that society understands what they are entitled to receive and evaluates the results obtained (Lange et al., 2012).Second, procedural justice states that something can be considered fair if it has gone through a proper and appropriate procedure or judicial process. This approach relates to law enforcement using fair and honorable procedures in exercising authority.

The two types of justice assessment are based on two models of psychological drives in assessing justice: the resource model and the relational model (Tyler, 1994). Individuals who prioritize resources assess fairness based on the results obtained, hoping for personal benefits and satisfaction. Personal interests are the basis for individuals to negotiate injustice and control decisions (Lind & Tyler, 1988). This model closely relates to the assessment of distributive justice, focusing on the results obtained from others or third parties (Tyler, 1994). However, distributive justice is also based on the relational model.

The second model is the relational model. Individuals or groups define justice based on an assessment of certain criteria in the law enforcement process, such as trustworthiness, position, and neutrality. Society accepts justice if the enforcer of justice shows respect and recognizes the rights and position of the community (Tyler, 1994). The relational model emphasizes group values. Suppose one member of the group is treated dishonorably in a legal procedure. In that case, it will trigger a reaction in other group members, often in the form of defending the group member (Lind & Tyler, 1988). The relational model dominates the assessment of procedural justice. Law enforcers in this type of procedural justice elevate the dignity of the community, making the community feel valued. This strategy is more likely to be accepted by the community and push them to comply with legal decisions (Tyler & Huo, 2002).

Justice is one of the reasons individuals or groups engage in digital vigilantism. Based on personal interests, individuals who feel they have not been treated well by certain services will seek retribution on social media (Grégoire et al., 2018). Vigilantes usually aim for revenge and to protect others from suffering the same losses. Forms of personal interests were described by Schwarz

and Richey (2019), who examined vigilantism against volunteers carrying out humanitarian actions. Volunteers avoid using posts that invite stereotypes or harm certain moral values to avoid vigilantism. This aligns with the assessment of justice based on the resource model (Tyler, 1994). Volunteers' belief in behaving fairly to receive fair treatment is personally beneficial.

In addition to personal interests, more studies have observed justice-seeking behavior in a group context through social media (Huang, 2021). Vigilantes seek common interests out of moral concern, empathy, and altruism toward victims of violations (Blitvich, 2022; Hou et al., 2017; Neubaum et al., 2018). This aligns with the research of Faturochman and Ancok (2001), which showed that a sense of empathy for a particular group proves the presence of upheld moral values, thus de-emphasizing personal interests. Vigilantes who feel moral injury from the treatment of certain parties towards victims will criticize, defend against, and make efforts to humiliate the perpetrators online (Blitvich, 2022). Digital vigilantism is carried out as an act of solidarity with victims (Neubaum et al., 2018).

Regarding legal procedures, we found that there are two forms of community response associated with vigilantism on social media. First, people who are dissatisfied with the procedures and results of law enforcement decisions may create petitions and actively search for perpetrators on social media (Ireland, 2022). The petition allows individuals to find communities with the same goals on social media. Many individuals collectively voicing certain issues can attract the attention of law enforcement to resolve the case promptly (Huang, 2021).

Second, people who are satisfied with law enforcement are more compliant with legal procedures (Tyler & Huo, 2002). People are said to be satisfied with law enforcement when they trust the judicial and police systems (Ireland, 2023). Law enforcement is considered to have listened to and respected the community. This makes people more compliant with legal policies so that they are not motivated to judge criminals illegally on social media.

Identity-Justice Integration in Digital Vigilantism

Based on the explanation in the previous sub-discussion, digital vigilantism can be understood from the perspective of psychological theory, namely social identity and justice theory. The integration of each perspective can be seen in Figure 2. This approach helps explain the psychological dynamics that influence the behavior and motivation of individuals or groups in digital vigilantism. Figure 2 shows that individuals assess problems, such as crime, and solutions, based on their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with justice. When individuals feel satisfied with the solution to a problem, they will trust law enforcement and accept the legitimacy of the law. Conversely, when individuals feel dissatisfied with the solution, it fuels a sense of injustice. Sense of injustice arises from an individual's self-identification with the social identity of a group considered to be the victim. Additionally, the large number of groups voicing justice as a form of dissatisfaction makes individuals feel that these actions are justified. This situation gives rise to conformity, leading several individuals to take similar actions. Coupled with internal considerations, such as empathy and altruism to help victims, the opportunity for individuals to engage in digital vigilantism increases.

Figure 2

The Dynamics of Digital Vigilantism from a Psychological Perspective (Social Identity and Justice)
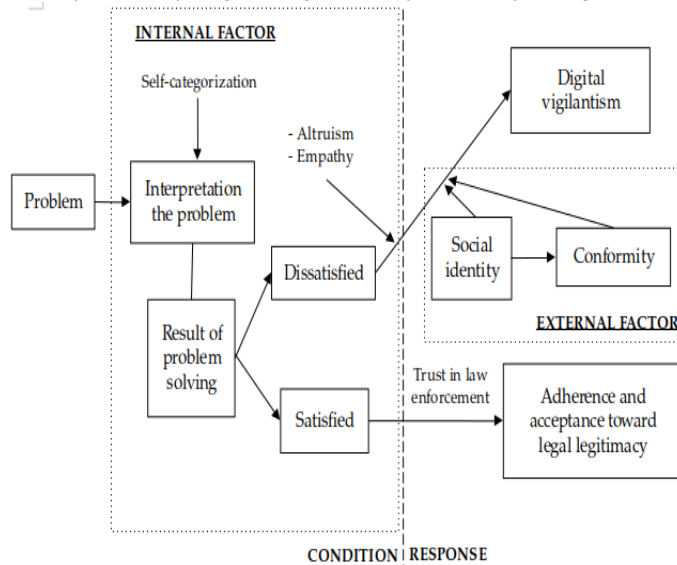
Analysis of the Advantages and Disadvantages of Digital Vigilantism

Digital vigilantism has become a controversial topic in public discussions due to its broad and complex impacts (Cook et al., 2021; Siahaan & Susanto, 2023; Stratton et al., 2017). This phenomenon is like a double-edged sword, meaning that while digital vigilantism has advantages, it also poses disadvantages that can endanger the individuals involved. By exploring both sides of digital vigilantism, we can gain a better understanding of its role in modern society.

Based on the selected articles, participation in digital vigilantism is considered an effective way to prevent crime (Blitvich, 2022; Hou et al., 2017; Schwarz & Richey, 2019). Public security actors believe that community involvement in digital vigilantism can increase awareness of legal compliance and strengthen social norms (Blitvich, 2022; Dekker & Meijer, 2020). Online shaming behavior, such as that carried out by vigilantes against criminals, can create a safer and more welcoming environment for marginalized and collectively organized groups (Dekker & Meijer, 2020; Hou et al., 2017; Skoric et al., 2010; Thomason, 2021; Walby & Joshua, 2021).

Digital vigilantism activities allow individuals to voice complaints and seek justice in the digital world (Trottier, 2016). Digital platforms enable people to come together and respond to injustices they experience (Lindsay, 2011; Trottier, 2016; Wight & Stanley, 2022). Social media and mobile devices provide opportunities for people to voice their problems and demand accountability from crime perpetrators (Trottier, 2019). This is particularly meaningful for individuals who do not have direct access to traditional justice systems (Trottier, 2019).

For example, digital vigilantism in Indonesia supported the victim of the abuse of David Ozora by Mario Dandy (Putsanra, 2023). Out of jealousy, Mario beat David into a coma. The video recording of the violent act circulated on social media, leading to widespread public outrage. Many spoke out

and monitored the case. The identity of Mario, his girlfriend, and his family were disseminated on social media by the public. This shows significant public support and attention towards the case and a desire to uphold justice (Douglas, 2020; Legocki et al., 2020). Finally, Mario was arrested, and his father was dismissed from his position for corruption. In this case, digital vigilantism not only succeeded in getting justice for David but also in uncovering a corruption case.

The case of the abuse of David Ozora by Mario Dandy can be linked to the typology of digital vigilantism by Loveluck (2019) in a series of processes. In the first stage, flagging, the video of the abuse circulating on social media triggers a public reaction that identifies and reports violations of social norms, in accordance with the concept of open shaming. In the second stage, investigating, the public begins to investigate Mario, his girlfriend, and his family, which is a form of naming, where individuals involved in the violation are identified and exposed. The third stage is a hounding, where the public engages in not only naming and shaming but also doxing, revealing personal information, and attacking Mario and his family by flooding social media with demands for justice. These demands are manifested in the Instagram hashtag #KawalDavid. Finally, at the stage of organised leaking, this digital vigilantism action succeeded in dragging Mario into the legal system, even exposing a corruption case involving his father, which resulted in his dismissal. This process shows that digital vigilantism in this case succeeded in achieving social justice through a series of systematic stages.

Digital vigilantism also has weaknesses. It can be detrimental when accusations are made without sufficient evidence, leading to wild speculation and misidentifying innocent people as suspects (Dekker & Meijer, 2020). Gabdulhakov (2018) noted that digital vigilantism often applies the principle of presumption of guilt, assuming that the provided information is true and the accused is definitely guilty.

An error in determining the suspect occurred recently in Indonesia, involving Nasarius, a security guard at a mall in Jakarta (Henry, 2024). Nasarius was fired for kicking a guard dog after a mall visitor recorded the action and made the video viral. Social sanctions in the form of insults and sharp criticism were directed at Nasarius. However, upon investigation, it was revealed that Nasarius was trying to save a kitten that the guard dog wanted to eat. The viral video misrepresented the incident's original intention. The initial intention of the vigilante, as an animal lover, was to voice injustice. However, due to a lack of sufficient evidence, it resulted in wrongful accusations against an innocent person (Dekker & Meijer, 2020).

Another weakness of digital vigilantism is that individuals focus more on the results than the process of handling the problem (Dekker & Meijer, 2020). This focus encourages each case to be resolved quickly without considering legality. In psychology, the information processing used is heuristic, which involves making complex decisions or drawing conclusions quickly without requiring great effort (Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2012). For example, not ensuring data protection and privacy, non-discrimination, and accountability for a person's actions. Often, decisions about who should be punished and how to punish them are not transparent, accountable, or democratic (Dekker & Meijer, 2020). Although vigilantes seek and uphold justice, these activities need to be regulated to avoid endangering the social environment (Chia, 2019).

Table 1

Literature Review Summary

No	Author	Research Objectives	Country	Research Sample	Research Methods	Concept Digital Vigilantism	Research Results	Focus on Psychological Dynamics
1	Lindsay (2011)	Exploring the behavior of individuals posting on the Vancouver 2011 Stanley Cup riot Facebook page during the six months following the event	Canada	The research sample was three Facebook pages. These pages were chosen because they each reached more than 2,000 comments, had "likes" or support from between 15,000 and 90,000 users, had been recognized by various online news media and helped the police.	Qualitative - Content analysis	Dumsday (2009)	The researcher used social identity theory as the basis for analysis. The results showed that online discussions about the riots focused on restoring the community's reputation by affirming the community's identity as "law-abiding" and peaceful, and discrediting riot participants as "others" who deserved to be punished.	Social Identity and Justice

Table 1 (Continued)

Literature Review Summary

No	Author	Research Objectives	Country	Research Sample	Research Methods	Concept Digital Vigilantism	Research Results	Focus on Psychological Dynamics
				245 employees (111 male; mean age = 29.52 years; $SD = 8.35$) from Nanjing City, Jiangsu Province, China. About half of the			1. Individuals with SES are more likely to participate in online shaming compared to low SES individuals.	
2	Hou et al. (2017)	Investigating just-world beliefs mediating the influence of socioeconomic status (SES) in predicting online shaming	China	participants had a monthly income below the average income in Nanjing (RMB 3,457 or US$485) and half had an income above the average.	Experiment	Johnston (1996)	2. Belief in a just world positively mediates the relationship between SES and online shaming.	Social Identity and Justice

Table 1 (Continued)

Literature Review Summary

No	Author	Research Objectives	Country	Research Sample	Research Methods	Concept Digital Vigilantism	Research Results	Focus on Psychological Dynamics
				Three humanitarian-themed campaigns: Radi-Aid on YouTube, Humanitarians of Tinder on Tumblr, and Barbie Savior on Instagram.	Analysis of public information related to three humanitarian-themed campaigns.	Jane (2017) and Trottier (2016).	1. Humanitarian-themed humor campaigns successfully critique and present alternatives to stereotypical representations. 2. International volunteers show awareness of the critique of voluntourism and avoid posting images that could be perceived as stereotypical.	
3	(Schwarz & Richey, 2019)	Understanding how voluntary tourism practices are exposed and monitored online	United Kingdom, Norway	12 students from the UK who participated in a 10-week volunteer program in Kenya in the summer of 2014. A retrospective sample of 15 people who had participated in similar programs between 2004 and 2013.	Repeated semi-structured interviews and analysis of visual content on Facebook posted by volunteers.			Social Identity and Justice

Table 1 (Continued)

Literature Review Summary

No	Author	Research Objectives	Country	Research Sample	Research Methods	Concept Digital Vigilantism	Research Results	Focus on Psychological Dynamics
4	(Isnaini et al., 2020)	Analyzing the practice of digital vigilantism on social media in intergroup conflicts	Indonesia	Facebook content from 4 accounts of groups that often brawl along with four informants who are admins of these accounts.	Qualitative-Content Analysis	Loveluck (2019) and Trottier (2016).	The practice of digital vigilantism on social media plays a significant role in fueling intergroup conflict. Some of the key findings discuss the practice of digital vigilantism in relation to collective identity and the presence of social media as an arena where intergroup conflict is expressed and amplified.	Social Identity

Table 1 (Continued)

Literature Review Summary

No	Author	Research Objectives	Country	Research Sample	Research Methods	Concept Digital Vigilantism	Research Results	Focus on Psychological Dynamics
5	Walby and Joshua (2021)	Analyzing and understanding the dynamics of crime prevention and community watch groups that operate online, and the impact of their communications on community safety.	Canada	The research sample in this journal article consisted of 35 crime prevention and community watchdog groups identified through online searches and snowball sampling methods. The study included groups operating in 12 Canadian cities.	Qualitative-Content Analysis	Favarel-Garrigues (2020)	Some key findings relate to crime prevention groups and community watchdogs in the context of online communication (in-group and out-group dynamics, modes of communication and symbolism used, and types of crime discussed) and the impact of their interactions.	Social Identity

Table 1 (Continued)
Literature Review Summary

No	Author	Research Objectives	Country	Research Sample	Research Methods	Concept Digital Vigilantism	Research Results	Focus on Psychological Dynamics
		Providing a better understanding of online public shaming (OPS)		6 out of 25 OPS cases in the US during 2018 were discussed	Qualitative: Netnography, thematic analysis of		Motivation for digilante to do OPS: a. Moral outrage and moral empathy b. Good moral panic (concern for moral deviance)	
6	Blitvich (2022)	in terms of the motivations and goals that digilante seek in conducting OPS.	United States	in more depth, 1800 comments on the cases were analyzed thematically.	cases and comments on various social media platforms	Trottier (2012)	The purpose of conducting OPS was to jointly condemn and expose the perpetrators of deviant moral values.	Justice
7	Wight and Stanley (2022)	Examining and understanding the digilante treatment as a public reaction to the behavior of taking and uploading photos against the background of an unauthorized place, namely the Holocaust memorial.	Scotland	4,000 Instagram selfies, with the hashtags #auschwitz and #holocaust, on the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe geotag in Germany and Poland.	Qualitative: Netnography through Instagram, critical discourse analysis.	Gerbaudo and Treré (2015) and Jane (2017), and Trottier (2020)	1. Digilante presents one's own identity as morally superior to the subject of the photo. 2. Digilante reacts more against posts that do not have a clear narrative, non-English posts.	Social Identity and Justice

Conclusion

Digital vigilantism has recently become popular, offering a major contribution to various aspects of human life via social media. This study explored the concept of digital vigilantism, psychological dynamics reviewed from the perspective of social identity and justice theory, as well as its advantages and disadvantages. The concept of digital vigilantism comes from various sources, but the majority of current sources refer to Trottier as the main reference. From the perspective of psychological dynamics, vigilante activities carried out collectively are interesting to explore in the context of psychology. Individuals involved in digital vigilantism are usually driven by social identity within a particular group, thus creating normative social influences that encourage conformity, as well as perceptions of injustice by law enforcement. Regarding advantages and disadvantages, digital vigilantism is useful for upholding justice. However, it can also have a negative impact if the target of the vigilante is ultimately not the actual perpetrator. Vigilante activities that focus on results and tend to ignore the judicial process often allow vigilante groups to prosecute certain targets in discreditable manners. In the end, these activities are still carried out without clear accountability.

Recommendation

The current digital vigilantism phenomenon requires society and the government to consider both its positive and negative impacts. Studying the psychological dynamics and impacts of digital vigilantism can guide individuals and groups to be smarter and more assertive in using social media, especially regarding social and community aspects. Digital vigilantism activities should be based on in-depth information searches before individuals draw conclusions and make justifications. It should be remembered that individuals or groups must be careful not to engage in digital "vigilante" behavior without strong evidence.

Furthermore, studies on digital vigilantism in the Indonesian context are still relatively limited, especially from a psychological perspective. Our findings show that previous studies generally examine digital vigilantism within the context of communication science and sociology, while in-depth studies from a psychological perspective are still minimal. Additionally, there has been no empirical research linking the distinctive identities of Indonesian society, such as religion or ethnicity, with the phenomenon of digital vigilantism. In fact, social identity theory has the potential to explain this phenomenon. Thus, future research can further examine digital vigilantism within various psychological contexts, particularly at the collective or group level, involving the distinctive characteristics of Indonesian society, such as ethnicity or religion.

Declaration

Authors' Contributions

The following are the authors' contributions to this research: LA designed the concept of the script, conducted literature review, analysis, wrote the script, and edited the script. WA conducted literature review, analysis, wrote the script, and edited the script. BGSJR conducted the literature review, analysis, and wrote the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest in this paper.

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