

# Guilty in the Spotlight



The ‘exclusive’ trials of celebrities - Are they a true representation of the law? (Investigating generational shifts (Generation X and Y) in attitudes towards the media and public crime)

# Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Log	5
Chapter 1- Are Celebrities above the law? - Generational Attitudes toward Celebrity Criminals	7
Chapter 2- How does parasocial connection with celebrities influence public opinion in criminal cases?	12
Chapter 3- How does social media fill the gap in discourse to amplify generational attitudes toward celebrity trials?	16
Conclusion	21
Primary Sources	23
Secondary Sources	25

# Introduction

The trial spectacle of celebrity trials is now a routine part of modern media, in which the celebrity defendant is put on trial in full public view. Are these 'exclusive' trials a reflection of justice, or are they controlled by the same media that cover them? As generational transformation has permanently changed our understanding of the relationship with the media, it has become essential to question whether public trials today are objective or simply a presentation of society by the standards of the younger generation. Celebrity trials, especially as they relate to Generations X and Z, are increasingly blurring the lines between justice and media spectacle, as values of society towards privacy, justice, and public crime are redirected. My Personal Interest Project (PIP) analysis examines the coverage of celebrity trials in the media, evaluating whether these trials accurately reflect the law or have become a source of entertainment on a broader level.

In the generational comparison between Generation X and Z, the research aims to understand the shifting cultural attitudes towards crime, justice, and media. With younger generations growing up in a digital age where public and private lives become increasingly intertwined, this topic aims to shed light on how celebrity culture influences society's understanding of justice. I have selected this topic to examine the cross over of the media, law, and social change. The depiction of celebrity trials also does important work in engaging questions about the role of the media in shaping popular perceptions of justice and crime. Because younger individuals are most likely to encounter trial material through social media and digital platforms, looking at this transformation reveals how we comprehend and engage with both legal institutions and public persons.

This investigation contributes to current investigations into how cultural attitudes towards crime, justice, and privacy are evolving in response to shifting media environments. It places particular emphasis on the impact of media exposure on notions of fairness and the law, identifying a potential gap between the legal process and the public's understanding of it. By focusing on Generations X and Z, my PIP gives insight into how media consumption contributes to shifting cultural attitudes and social values. This examination will be directly

steeped in core Society and Culture Concepts, including Continuity and Change, Power and Authority and Identity, especially in the context of differing Generational Perspectives and Institutional trust. The PIP will employ a combination of qualitative methods, including questionnaires to examine the attitudes of Generation X and Z towards the topic, and interviews with both Generation X and Z participants that offer rich detail on individuals' personal beliefs, opinions, and world views.

In addition, content analysis will be employed to examine the reporting of celebrity trials by the media, with attention paid to how they are framed and how they influence public attitudes towards justice and crime. Further to this, the conduction of an expert interview provides invaluable insight into the connection and emotional biases shaping public response to celebrity trials today.

# Log

I selected my Personal Interest Project based on a long-term interest in psychology, law and criminology, which I wish to pursue as a future career. Growing up with a family member as a psychologist, I was frequently surrounded by mature discussions surrounding human behaviour, emotion and identity from a young age, which influenced my beliefs and understanding of human decision making. I wanted to investigate how those psychological elements intertwine with the legal system, particularly when influenced by external factors such as status and media influence. Initially, my focus for Chapter 2 was on social media, but I soon realised that social media was too vast a subject and ethically complex to cover in one chapter. I redirected the focus to a more psychologically driven and better-aligned topic, including my passions, and ensuring a more accurate and focused investigation of the overall question, incorporating media influence and public opinion.

This topic is personally significant to me as it combines two areas I'm passionate about: psychology and the justice system. It speaks to the power of public perceptions in shaping the truth. Growing up in a digital age, I've firsthand seen how celebrities are portrayed and interacted with online, through memes, fan edits, and overemotive public reactions. These experiences helped me to formulate my hypothesis: Are the exclusive trials of celebrities a true representation of the law? This consequently led me to investigate how the generational shifts in attitudes, emotional investment and overwhelming media influence all contribute to shaping public perceptions of justice.

I encountered several issues throughout my research process, particularly in narrowing down the scope of my chapters. I chose to scaffold my chapters to reflect a researched progression with Chapter 1 focusing on how different generations perceive justice in celebrity-driven trials, Chapter 2 exploring the emotional and psychological driving forces in fueling these perceptions, and Chapter 3 expanding these ideas by further examining the media's role in amplifying the generational disparities in opinion and reshaping legal discourse.

My chosen research methodologies were selected to target specific components required for successful research and synthesis in my PIP, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative

results. The use of a questionnaire enabled me to gather valuable insights into generational disparities, providing clear insight into changing attitudes towards celebrity criminals, which varied between Generation Z and X. The interviews, one with a psychologist and two with individuals of different generations, provided a real-life context and depth for my research, particularly for exploring parasocial connections. The content analysis investigating high-profile crime series provided me with insight into how narrative framing and platform design can alter public perceptions of crime and justice. These primary methodologies were all reinforced with secondary research, which reinforced my work with scholarly theories and opinions.

A challenge I had to overcome was guaranteeing objectivity when analysing highly emotional cases. However, my biggest setback was time; I would have wanted to include more expert interviews or a broader sample size in my questionnaire data to ensure greater reliability of results. Despite this, these challenges forced me to focus on quality over quantity and refine my hypothesis and question accordingly.

Overall, the PIP process has significantly deepened my social and cultural literacy, particularly deepening my understanding of how media and identity amplify engagement with law and justice, challenging me to critically evaluate, ask deeper questions and reflect on how we choose to navigate truth in a world of emotional influence and digital noise.

# Chapter 1

## Are Celebrities above the law? - Generational Attitudes toward Celebrity Criminals

In an era where celebrity culture is so inextricably tied up with the law, fears about justice, responsibility, and fairness have assumed a much more public profile. High-profile trials are often a cover for mere scandal mongering; they discover disparities in generational perceptions of justice, as well as societal angst regarding inequality and unethical media control. No matter if the accused is a public figure, performer, musician or social media star, these cases are unravelling controversy surrounding whether money and status unjustly excuse stars from legal repercussions in the real world. These controversies reflect deep underlying tensions in society's concerns, including loss of trust in the justice system and large differences in values and beliefs across generations. This chapter responds to these complexities through a consideration of how different generations define celebrity criminal trials, whether celebrities receive special legal treatment because they have high status and wealth, and how media representation influences public perception and confidence in the judicial system.

Generational differences in the perception of legal trial outcomes often reflect deeper social divisions in values, media consumption, and institutional trust, differences that significantly influence societal cohesion and shape broader public confidence in the justice system. The generational disparities (X and Y) in the perception of the outcome of legal cases play an intricate role in growing distrust throughout macro-level society. It can be seen that Generation X's primary influence, for forming opinions was traditional media in their formative years<sup>1</sup>, leading to the conclusion that Generation X have developed their

---

<sup>1</sup> R. Kania, 'Media's Influence on the Perception of Criminal Justice', *Crimes and Justice Research Alliance* (2018), <https://crimeandjusticeresearchalliance.org/rsrch/medias-influence-on-the-perception-of-criminal-justice/>, accessed 28 December 2025

perceptions, including legal, based on structured news reports, leading to a more deeply structured and institutionalised blind belief in the justice system compared to their younger counterpart generation Z. The research found that contrasting generation X, generation Z, having grown up with digital/social media as a primary source of information, including the ‘exposure to rapid, often unverified information’<sup>2</sup>, can lead to scepticism toward traditional legal institutions and a belief in systemic biases, especially in high-profile celebrity cases. This notion is further reinforced in a content analysis discussing the ‘Depp v Heard’ case premiered on Netflix it was found that Generation Z was subject to more ‘fake news’ media platforms viewed the case through a pop culture lens<sup>3</sup> rather than for its true legal intent, viewing the case as more entertainment than a true legal case. While Generation X contradicts this view, the series is viewed through a more critical lens, less subject to media interference, highlighting them to be more media literate and cautious in their beliefs<sup>4</sup>, illuminating the stark disparities between the generations' perceptions on these highly engaged legal cases. These disparities in perceptions towards legal cases as a result of factors such as media, both social and traditional, and differing levels of media literacy have contributed to the increasingly negative attitude towards the judicial system. This adverse notion is highlighted in a scholarly article stating that "the perception of leniency or expedited processes can erode public trust in the justice system and raise questions about the application of the law being impartial and consistent."<sup>5</sup>, implying that the differing perceptions of the outcome of the legal cases between Generation Z and Generation X have raised questions in macro society towards legal decisions, therefore weakening overall trust in the judicial system, which can consequently lead to reduced public compliance with laws and increased social unrest, leading to poor social cohesion and challenges in maintaining the law.

---

<sup>2</sup> R. Kania, ‘Media’s Influence on the Perception of Criminal Justice’, *Crimes and Justice Research Alliance* (2018), <https://crimeandjusticeresearchalliance.org/rsrch/medias-influence-on-the-perception-of-criminal-justice/>, accessed 28 December 2025

<sup>3</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

<sup>4</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

<sup>5</sup> A. Swaiss, ‘From Sensationalism to Reform: A Critical Analysis of Celebrity Cases and Their Influence on the Legal System’, *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2024), [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4761286](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4761286), accessed 6 November 2024



The question of whether celebrities receive preferential treatment within the justice system due to their status, wealth and affluence presents ongoing questions about equal justice under law, institutional bias, and perception of integrity of justice. With society observing celebrity trials splattered on media news and popular sentiment moulded by internet media, the justice system finds itself under greater examination. This research establishes whether celebrities are treated differently due to their status and wealth, and what the legal ramifications of this are for public trust in the legal system. Research indicated that celebrities do receive preferential treatment as a result of many different aspects, such as ‘They can afford high-end attorneys who can get their clients out of nearly any charge. They may also be able to call in a favour or use connections to get them out of such crimes. Celebrities have also been observed to receive lenient sentences, rehab, community service, and anger management courses in cases where regular people would likely face lost licenses, huge fines, and jail time’<sup>6</sup>, seen in high profile cases such as the OJ Simpson trial, noted in the OJ: Made in America series a narrator stated - ‘He had the money to hire the best lawyers in America, the Dream Team.’ - Narration in Episode 4’<sup>7</sup>Directly addresses how O.J.'s wealth allowed him to out-resource the prosecution and build a team that turned the trial into a performance. As a result of this, with these unjust advantages being brought into light on a macro level, it was discovered that ‘72% of Americans believe celebrities receive special treatment in the justice system’<sup>8</sup>, reflecting the widespread knowledge and belief in this unjust notion. Furthermore, this is reinforced in research, stating that ‘celebrity criminals can present their case to the media, which more often than not strengthens their case’<sup>9</sup>, directly reinforcing the conviction that celebrities do receive preferential treatment, as a result of status and wealth. Furthermore in Interviews conducted with two interviewees, when asked ‘do you believe celebrities receive more lenient treatment in the legal system?’<sup>10</sup>, they believed that there is ‘lenient treatment

---

<sup>6</sup> G. Howe, ‘Celebrities and Their Legal Privileges: Fair or Foul?’, *Law Shun* (12 January 2025), [https://lawshun.com/article/do-celebrities-get-off-easier-when-they-break-the-law?utm\\_source=sout.com](https://lawshun.com/article/do-celebrities-get-off-easier-when-they-break-the-law?utm_source=sout.com), accessed 30 December 2025

<sup>7</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

<sup>8</sup> G. Howe, ‘Celebrities and Their Legal Privileges: Fair or Foul?’, *Law Shun* (12 January 2025), [https://lawshun.com/article/do-celebrities-get-off-easier-when-they-break-the-law?utm\\_source=sout.com](https://lawshun.com/article/do-celebrities-get-off-easier-when-they-break-the-law?utm_source=sout.com), accessed 30 December 2025

<sup>9</sup> J. Chamberlain & M.K. Miller & A. Jehle, ‘Celebrities in the Courtroom: Legal Responses Psychological Theory and Empirical Research’, *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Law*, (2020), <https://scholarship.law.vanderbilt.edu/jetlaw/vol8/iss3/2/>, accessed 2 January 2025

<sup>10</sup> Primary Research, Interview

from and for celebrities based on who is ‘hot’ versus who is ‘not’<sup>11</sup>, highlighting that celebrities receive lenient treatment due to their high profile status. Similarly stated by an interviewee, they believed ‘it often seems like they do because they have very expensive lawyers, and if in a jury trial though, could be susceptible to bias’<sup>12</sup>, showcasing the agreement between the generational attitudes towards the idea of celebrity preferential treatment, hence reinforcing the message that celebrities unequivocally do receive more lenient and preferential treatment as a result of their status and wealth.

The mass media play a significant role in shaping public opinion regarding celebrity criminal cases through agenda-setting and framing. By making tactful choices on what facts to highlight, which pictures to share, and which tone to use, the media influences public perceptions of guilt, innocence, and personality, emphasising their overwhelming power over society. Sensationalised headlines, selective coverage, and emotive tone typically introduce bias, which commonly leads to strong public opinion and views before reaching an actual determination of legal outcomes. Research discovered that media impacts public opinions as it allows for ‘Rapid information spread: News travels quickly, with constant updates that may prioritise sensationalism over nuance.’<sup>13</sup>, emphasising how media, both traditional and social, are a platform by which news, not always truthful, can spread rapidly, swaying public opinion before the real legal truth is even unveiled. Media's catastrophic nature in swaying public opinion on high-profile cases is further seen in interview responses, when asked, *‘In your opinion, does media coverage of celebrity trials prioritise factual reporting, or does it contribute to a more entertainment-driven narrative? How might this affect public confidence in the justice system?’*<sup>14</sup>, both participants stated that they strongly believe that media has a significant impact on public opinion of these high profile cases, while turning them into a more entertainment driven narrative, giving media and its coverage to entirely sway macro level societies personal opinion on high profile cases, with a participant stating ‘It contributes to a more entertainment driven narrative and often twists the facts slightly to make them less

---

<sup>11</sup> Primary Research, Interview

<sup>12</sup> Primary Research, Interview

<sup>13</sup> McCready Law Group, ‘The Impact of Public Opinion on Criminal Trials’, *Zachary McCready Law* (2024), <https://zacharymccreadylaw.com/blog/the-impact-of-public-opinion-on-criminal-trials/>, accessed 28 July 2025

<sup>14</sup> Primary Research, Interview

facts, but more speculation or vice versa'<sup>15</sup>. Media's momentous influence over public opinion is illuminated in the real life case of Depp v Heard, the content analysis on the Netflix series demonstrated that medias influence on public opinion on the case in the statement Heard's attorney, reflecting on the decision to allow cameras in the courtroom and its effect on public perception: "I regret allowing cameras in the courtroom. It turned the trial into a zoo."<sup>16</sup>, emphasising the media's influential and possibly detrimental effect on public opinion of high-profile cases, highlighting the media's catastrophic and huge potential for swaying public opinion, especially in the instance of celebrity criminals.

The belief that celebrities are 'above the law' comes not from legal doctrine, but from overwhelming unequal access to resources, deep media influence and different generational views. This research discovered that generational attitudes towards celebrity criminals differ because of the unequal levels of trust in the media and justice system. Generation X tended to perceive legal outcomes as fair, while Generation Z engaged with a more sceptical viewpoint, viewing trials as biased and performative. However, across both generational cohorts, there is a shared belief that celebrities do typically receive preferential treatment due to status and wealth, with media playing a key role in forming these views, often turning trials into entertainment. Overall, the combination of fame, media and justice deteriorates confidence in the fairness of the legal system, especially in younger generations.

---

<sup>15</sup> Primary Research, Interview

<sup>16</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

# Chapter 2

## How does parasocial connection with celebrities influence public opinion in criminal cases?

In today's complex and deeply connected mediascape, high-profile criminal cases are increasingly not unfolding solely in the courtroom; instead, they're widely broadcast, dissected ruthlessly online and debated in the increasingly prevalent and powerful court of public opinion. Pivotal in charging this shift are parasocial relationships, the one-sided emotional bonds individuals form with high-profile public figures, typically through online interactions. These unhealthy attachments have the potential to significantly mould the way in which individuals interpret guilt, innocence and the reliability of high-profile legal case outcomes. This chapter examines the way in which parasocial relationships influence public responses to high-profile celebrity crime cases, specifically through emotional ties and a false sense of loyalty, the amplification effect of social media, and the differing generational variation in responses.

Paraosical relationships create a deep felt sense of intimacy, connection and loyalty with celebrities, consequently leading individuals to perceive these figures as trustworthy, even in the face of criminal allegations or evidence. A psychologist noted that these unhealthy emotional bonds can trigger psychological responses comparable to the sensation of grief. 'People with these deep, one-sided connections to celebrities may respond to negative accusations as though they were a close friend. It's almost impossible to divorce the actual person from the character or online persona they have grown to love.' <sup>17</sup> This deep emotional investment towards high-profile figures can result in an unintentional biased perspective in legal cases, where individuals may overlook the facts of the case to protect their deep emotional investment. Results from a questionnaire indicate that 58% of Generation Z participants admitted they have 'changed their opinion about a legal case based on social

---

<sup>17</sup> Primary Research, Interview

media presentation'<sup>18</sup>. The respondent's views reflect a clear social construct in the way media and celebrity attachment are deeply influencing not only opinion but the personal identities of individuals. Psychologically, this idea is aligned with the cognitive dissonance theory, in which individuals experience deep discomfort when confronted with beliefs that conflict with their own<sup>19</sup>, conflating with the increasingly prevalent scenario of individuals blindly ignoring facts of criminal behaviour in celebrities they have acquired an emotional attachment to, which can warp public perception of justice, allowing status to overshadow accountability. This unhealthy dynamic was seen in the Netflix Docuserie 'Depp v Heard', as found in a content analysis, the series consistently presented overly emotionally driven scenes and extreme fan reactions.<sup>20</sup> The series, using selective scenes, portrayed Depp in a more sympathetic light, while often mocking Heard, intentionally creating an underlying trope of 'Good vs Bad'<sup>21</sup>, which the audience internalised. Generation Z, more frequently present in online media spaces, were seen participating in viral trends that glorified Depp while vilifying Heard, subject to online spaces with 'headcannons' and personal opinions on the case<sup>22</sup>. This digital mobilisation reflects how unhealthy emotional ties and loyalty, deepened by false parasocial closeness, can result in audiences defending high-profile individuals based on emotional connection rather than for their true legal body.<sup>23</sup>

Social media drastically heightens parasocial relationships and connection by providing a constant personalised engagement stream, as well as specially curated online personas. Celebrities' online presence, such as livestreams and 'behind-the-scenes action' posts, provides individuals with the illusion of intimacy and connection. Responses derived from an Interview with a psychologist reinforced this, stating that 'online platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat create a constant stream of exposure and wrongly perceived

---

<sup>18</sup> Primary Research, Questionnaire

<sup>19</sup> M. Moraes et al., 'Celebrity Influences on Consumer Decision Making: New Insights and Research Directions', *Journal of Marketing Management*, 35/1159 (2019), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334247343\\_Celebrity\\_influences\\_on\\_consumer\\_decision\\_making\\_new\\_insights\\_and\\_research\\_directions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334247343_Celebrity_influences_on_consumer_decision_making_new_insights_and_research_directions), accessed 4 January 2025

<sup>20</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

<sup>21</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

<sup>22</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

<sup>23</sup> M. Fullen, 'The Ethics of Parasocial Relationships in the Digital Age', *Platform Magazine* (9 April 2024), <https://platformmagazine.org/2024/04/09/the-ethics-of-parasocial-relationships-in-the-digital-age/>, accessed 12 January 2025

intimacy, reinforcing biased narratives and deepening emotional investment’<sup>24</sup>. When criminal allegations arise, due to these individuals with emotional ties often feel unsure of themselves, their views and are emotionally implicated, believing they are obligated to support the celebrity. A content analysis conducted on Netflix’s ‘Monsters: Jeffrey Dahmer Story’ illuminates how younger individuals, Generation Z, engaged with the show as entertainment rather than for its true criminal account and legal body.<sup>25</sup> This included the creation and participation of the online phenomenon ‘headcannons’, which romanticised, narrativised, and even involved ‘fan edits’ of Dahmer<sup>26</sup>, despite the severity of his crimes. The show’s sensationalised undertone led to the consequential blurring of fact and fiction, as reflected in the statement from a reporter, “They’re turning this into entertainment.”<sup>27</sup> which critiques how media commodifies trauma<sup>28</sup>. These online trends embody how media as an agent of socialisation has the power to influence how individuals perceive issues such as morality, justice and authority, posing a serious threat in the future for accountability and the law.

The amplification of social media was also evidenced by the questionnaire, where 39.5% of people indicated that media coverage/ celebrity activism had greatly influenced their opinion on legal cases<sup>29</sup>. This reflects a form of collective consciousness, in which mass emotional attachment and responses on social media form a ‘collective echo chamber’<sup>30</sup>, in which beliefs and values can be reinforced, further weakening trust in legal outcomes.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Primary Research, Interview

<sup>25</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

<sup>26</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

<sup>27</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

<sup>28</sup> B. Livings et al. ‘Crime and Justice Seventh Edition’, *Thomson Reuters Australia* (2025) <https://store.thomsonreuters.com.au/crime-and-justice-seventh-edition/productdetail/131992>, accessed 3 January 2025

<sup>29</sup> Primary Research, Questionnaire

<sup>30</sup> Primary Research, Interview

<sup>31</sup> A. Marwick and B. Danah, ‘To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter’, *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 17/139 (2011), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228576317\\_To\\_See\\_and\\_Be\\_Seen\\_Celebrity\\_Practice\\_on\\_Twitter](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228576317_To_See_and_Be_Seen_Celebrity_Practice_on_Twitter) accessed 12 January 2025

While Generation Z, a younger audience, exhibit intense emotional investment with celebrity cases, Generation X showcase a more mature, distanced and disengaged viewpoint, typically tending to more skeptically analyse facts.

As, ‘Generation Z often view justice through a more emotionally driven lens, Generation X however may take a more precautionary or traditional viewpoint’<sup>32</sup> This idea was made evident in the differing generational responses found in this content analysis, where Generation Z expressed more empathy and deep levels of interest in both the Dahmer and Depp v Heard case<sup>33</sup>, while Generation X approached the cases with a more critical viewpoint focused and concerned more on the ethics of media production and the trauma imposed on victims families<sup>34</sup>.

Parasocial relationships, especially in the case of younger generations such as Generation Z, not only distort justice and legal outcome perceptions in individuals but also prioritise the emotional investment individuals feel towards high-profile people rather than cases based on their true legal merits. While older generations such as Generation x, critique these cases more closely and harshly, proving to be more detached from the phenomenon, Generation Zs unhealthy attachment and investment reflects the cultural and technological shifts occurring in modern society, where individuals must critically examine how fame and the media can intertwine to distort fact, to understand whose truth is prioritised.

---

<sup>32</sup> Primary Research, Interview

<sup>33</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

<sup>34</sup> A. Freiberg, ‘Bridging Gaps, Not Leaping Chasms: Trust, Confidence and Sentencing Councils’, *Intentional Journal for Court Administration*, 12 (2021), <https://iacajournal.org/articles/10.36745/ijca.421>, accessed 20 January 2025

# Chapter 3

## How does social media fill the gap in discourse to amplify generational attitudes toward celebrity trials?

Social media has transformed how society engages, interacts and interprets worldwide issues, including the increasingly prevalent issue of the spectacle of celebrity trials, morphing the once private legal matter into a global spectacle shaped by public opinion. As online platforms such as TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter, and Instagram have become hubs for public discourse, they have filled in the gaps left behind by traditional media, presenting individuals, particularly younger generations such as Generation Z, a space to discuss, react and even reshape narratives presented within high spectacle crime cases. This chapter explores this idea, investigating how these online platforms not only facilitate modern-day public forums, providing a space within which individuals can voice unfiltered and anonymous beliefs, but also reflect the stark disparities in generational beliefs, attitudes and forms of consumption towards these high-profile trials. The boundless rise in online activism and uncensored opinionated speech has challenged the legal system's authority and positional power over macro society, consequently shifting the perceived legal outcome of high-profile cases. This chapter investigates to what extent social media amplifies generational attitudes towards celebrity justice, investigating whether these attitudes align with the law itself or distort it, directly addressing the broader question: *Are the 'exclusive' trials of celebrities a true representation of the law?*

Social Media platforms, including TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter, have transformed into modern-day public forums, filling in the gaps left by traditional media, allowing everyday users, especially Generation Z, to actively engage and shape the discourse surrounding celebrity trials. The increase in social media presence and interactions with celebrities has consequently led to the increasingly present discussion around celebrity trials, while this can be a positive ramification, allowing people to express and discuss topics of



interest, it has been found that ‘Generation Z prefers receiving news through their favorite influencers and the comment sections, valuing the opinions and cultural reactions of others over their own research.’<sup>35</sup>, illustrating the potential bias and misinformation consistently being spread by younger generations, therefore presenting a more biased image of the justice system. Contrasting this it was found that Generation X were Primarily influenced by traditional media during formative years, meaning they may have developed perceptions based on structured news reporting, leading to a more institutional trust in the justice system<sup>36</sup>, revealing that the ‘rise in digital spectatorship’ is an issue impacting primarily younger individuals (generation Z), as a result of generation Zs tendency to participate in online spaces including live tweets, commenting on high profile pages, and online forums discussing high profile celebrity cases, filling the gap in traditional medias discourse and importance, allowing macro level society participation in high profile areas. This democratisation of discourse of traditional media is evident in the high profile ‘Depp v Heard’ case, a content analysis conducted revealed that Gen Z was ‘heavily influenced by social media and online trends, as they are typically online and subject to this more than older generations, consequently they saw the case through more of a Popular Culture lens rather than for its real facts’.<sup>37</sup> The deep and overwhelmingly popular nature of this case online, particularly for Generation Z, not only weakened trust in the justice system, with public opinions and ‘factual statements’ being thrown around with no real understanding, but also emphasised the ability of social media to illegitimate legal narratives, simply by allowing individuals to take part in media discussion.

The increasing prevalence of social media in modern society has had a striking impact on the public interest in celebrity trials, reflecting harsh generational disparities in opinions regarding these high-profile cases and how they are perceived. Generation Z and Generation X react dramatically differently to celebrity crime, with Generation Z reflecting unwarranted

---

<sup>35</sup> A. Kalogeropoulos, ‘How Younger Generations Consume News Differently’, *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (24 May 2019) <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/how-younger-generations-consume-news-differently/>, accessed 28 July 2025

<sup>36</sup> R. Kania, ‘Media’s Influence on the Perception of Criminal Justice’, *Crimes and Justice Research Alliance* (2018), <https://crimeandjusticeresearchalliance.org/rsrch/medias-influence-on-the-perception-of-criminal-justice/>, accessed 28 December 2025

<sup>37</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

emotional investment through stan culture, fan edits and parasocial connections<sup>38</sup>, whereas Generation X reacted in a more conservative and fact-focused way<sup>39</sup>. From questionnaire and interview data, this in-depth analysis puts into focus how celebrity privilege attitudes and doubt of legal results vary across generations, ultimately determining that perceptions of justice across generations are increasingly fueled by narrative in the media rather than legal fact. The presence of social media in modern-day life has proven both a tool and a weapon. With more and more individuals being exposed to social media from a young age, the susceptibility and increase in unhealthy emotional investment in well-known figures have been staggering. The disparities within generational perspectives towards cases, as a result of susceptibility to different media narratives, were highlighted from interview question results, when asked, *‘Do you believe celebrities receive more lenient treatment in the legal system? Does this perception differ across generations?’* Generation Z responded *‘I think that younger generations are probably more susceptible to accepting what the media says as informative, not opinionated, as there is a greater level of trust and influence from it. Older generations may be more sceptical of the information shared, seeing it as a way to overtly share opinions/ protest/ manipulate by only showing one side of the story, promoting the celebrity as either guilty/ bad OR not guilty/good, without any opportunity for other arguments.’*<sup>40</sup> reiterating the disparities in perceptions between the generations towards high profile cases, acknowledging gen zs increased vulnerability to biased/ untrue narratives surrounding crime trials as a result of their *‘preference to receiving news through their favorite influencers and the comment sections, valuing the opinions and cultural reactions of others over their research’*<sup>41</sup>, emphasizing the differences in perception as a result of increased social media presence, and participation in trends such as ‘headcannons’. Reinforcing this notion of differing perspectives due to social media engagement, an interview response from a Gen X participant, when prompted with the same question, responded - *‘I believe that my views are what they are due to my age and the trials and tribulations that I have observed and seen play out in the media’*<sup>42</sup>. Further reiterating the notion that with different age brackets,

---

<sup>38</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

<sup>39</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

<sup>40</sup> Primary Research, Interview

<sup>41</sup> A. Diaz, ‘Gen Z Turning to TikTok as Primary Source of News and Opinion, Study Shows’ *New York Post*, (2 July 2024), <https://nypost.com/2024/07/02/lifestyle/gen-z-turning-to-social-media-as-primary-source-of-news-study/>, accessed 28 May 2025

<sup>42</sup> Primary Research, Interview

there are differing levels of social media, therefore contrasting perceptions towards high-profile cases.

Social media has worked in recent years to increasingly blur the lines between journalism and opinion, especially in the case of high-profile trials. Social media, online activism and commentary have proven to have the ability to reinforce or contradict legal decisions made surrounding these trials, as well as deeply influence susceptible viewers' opinions, consequently discrediting the legal system.

Social media has enabled online activism and commentary on many different aspects of macro level society, including those of high profile celebrity cases, while social media and online commentary has 'given silenced voices a platform, allowing them to be heard globally and making diverse demographics more accessible in various ways'<sup>43</sup>, according to a secondary article, it also has the potential to cause harm to society as, 'In theory, online activism could hinder offline protests'<sup>44</sup>, highlighting its overwhelming power over society and 'many individuals feel pressured to post about topics they may not fully understand'<sup>45</sup>, often out of fear of social backlash potentially leading to the discreditation of legal outcomes, as individuals with minimal understanding on high issue subjects are projecting untrue opinions onto to macro level society, warping the line between facts and wrong, consequently challenging legal decisions made on high profile celebrity cases as individuals are continuously mislead. Furthermore the online discussion surrounding cases such as Depp v Heard has emphasised the public pushback towards the justice system as a result of these online spaces perceiving the outcome to be unjust, as seen in a content analysis conducted on the Depp v Heard case, where Gen Z 'Was heavily influenced by social media and online trends'<sup>46</sup>, and as a result of these online discussion spaces, it 'Weakened trust in the justice system, highlighting how social media and public opinion can have an overwhelming amount

---

<sup>43</sup> N. Reiley, 'Social Media Activism: A Force for Change or Mere Performance', *University Times*, (2025), <https://universitytimes.ie/2025/03/social-media-activism-a-force-for-change-or-mere-performance/>, accessed 28 April 2025

<sup>44</sup> H. Greijdanusand et. al, 'The Psychology of Online Activism and Social Movements: Relations between Online and Offline Collective Action', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 35/49, (2020), <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32330859/>, accessed 28 July 2025

<sup>45</sup> N. Reiley, 'Social Media Activism: A Force for Change or Mere Performance', *University Times*, (2025), <https://universitytimes.ie/2025/03/social-media-activism-a-force-for-change-or-mere-performance/>, accessed 28 April 2025

<sup>46</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

of influence in shaping the outcome of these highly publicised cases, forcing people to question whether the law can remain separate and unphased from social media influence'<sup>47</sup>, emphasising the increasingly blurred lines between true justice and online activism, reinforcing social medias ability to contradict macro level decisions as a result of public pushback.

Social media's dynamic nature has transformed the public sphere, particularly celebrity high-profile trials, through levels of interaction never before seen, most notably the Generation Z crowd, whose online immersion has redefined notions of justice and responsibility for them. This is an echo of broader inter-generational socialisation and differential access, where emotional possession and peer-discourse replace objective legality. With online discussions contributing more and more to common thought, the distinction between well-informed opinion and disinformation is destroyed, reshaping social trust in institutional authority. The spreading of such attitudes online not only destroys the legitimacy of legal outcomes but also sustains a broader cultural shift in justice consumption and interpretation. Lastly, social media's capability to reframe stories in the moment underscores the deepening struggle between entrenched systems of power and the fluid, collaborative nature of contemporary culture.

---

<sup>47</sup> Primary Research, Content Analysis

# Conclusion

In modern-day media-crazed society, celebrity trials are becoming less courtroom dramas and more public spectacles, where justice appears as a performance tailored simply for clicks, likes, and viral outrage. This dramatic crossover of fame, law and generational disparities is exposing the deep fragility of legal authority as well as the cultural forces that are reforming what we perceive justice should look like every day.

The phenomenon of celebrity trials highlights the underlying tensions between true law and spectacle, which become evident when viewed through the lens of two differing generations. From the start, this PIP aimed to examine whether these ‘exclusive trials’ were a true reflection of the legal system's integrity, or simply reflected the generational biases and media distortion prevalent in today's age. In doing so, I discovered not only generational division but also an alarming shift in how justice is carried out, consumed and understood.

Each of the chapters successfully investigated my hypothesis that modern-day celebrity trials are ruled not by impartial procedure, but by media dynamics, parasocial investment and differing generational perspectives. Chapter 1 examined whether celebrities are truly ‘above the law’, combining peer-reviewed scholarship, content analysis, questionnaire data and interviews. Both Generation X and Generation Z recognised preferential treatment; however, Generation Z's exhaustive digital exposure led to scepticism, whereas Generation X's judgments reflected their continued trust in traditional media and news outlets. Chapter 2 interrogated parasocial attachment, highlighting that unhealthy bonds, particularly among Generation Z, can skew judgements of responsibility. Questionnaire responses and expert interviews emphasised social media's role in the collapse of boundaries between fact and fiction, elevating emotional allegiance over evidence. Chapter 3 analysed how social media functions as a type of ‘digital courtroom’, shaping public verdict. Generation X typically engaged cautiously in social media spaces, while Generation Z actively reframed narratives, forging a conception of justice that is increasingly emotive, reactive, and fragmented.

Through the process of my PIP, I've learned that the portrayal of celebrities in the courtroom is not simply a legal dilemma; it is a cultural mirror that is exposing how media ecosystems, emotional investment, and generational worldviews are combining to change perceptions of fairness. The answer to the question, 'Are celebrity trials a true representation of the law?' is complex, while legally they follow the correct procedure, socially they are completely distorted and influenced by money, media framing and collective emotional investment. These high-profile trials are no longer just legal events; they are entertainment shaped by people watching from their screens.

My choices of research methodologies were highly useful for this PIP. A questionnaire enabled generational comparison, highlighting disparities in opinion, while interviews added more psychological depth and context needed to investigate the topic. Furthermore, a content analysis provided valuable insights into how media influenced individuals' perceptions, and secondary research grounded all my findings, reinforcing them with scholarly information. Together, these research methods, both primary and secondary, offered a multifaceted view of the topic.

Ultimately, this PIP has revealed that the justice system is increasingly on trial itself, not just in the courtroom but in culture. The law, which was once viewed as a final authority, is now just one voice among the many noisy, emotional and generational courts of public opinion. If justice is to retain its meaning in today's age of social media overexposure and parasocial attachment, society must reckon with whose truth we value more: the one proven in court, or the one performed on screen.

# Annotated Bibliography

## Primary Sources

### **Questionnaire-**

The use of an anonymous questionnaire was a highly useful tool in the writing and research of my PIP, collecting data from a large sample size (119 responses), as well as from a wide range of age groups was essential in deepening the reliability and validity of my writing. The carefully chosen, unbiased questions including both qualitative, quantitative, open and closed questions were highly useful throughout all of my Chapters as they identified key differences in the generational attitudes towards the justice system and celebrity criminals, while also ensuring validity by allowing respondents to express personal beliefs and comparative data, further providing my research with real-life examples of engagement with online discourse, participation in celebrity-led activism movements and identifying trends with consumption habits in each respective generation. Overall, the use of a questionnaire was essential for identifying generational disparities in attitudes and consumption of celebrity trials, as well as illustrating how parasocial connection and media framing can influence views on equality and fairness in the justice system.

### **Content Analysis-**

The use of the primary research method of a Content Analysis, focused on comparing the media's portrayal and influence over 3 major celebrity cases, was highly useful for the writing of my PIP. Utilising platforms such as Netflix and Disney, the content analysis successfully highlighted the use of language, tone, framing, emotional appeal and music as a method to emotionalise and sensationalise high-profile cases, leading to the skewed perceptions seen in society today, consequently causing the increase in distrust in the Justice System seen today. This research method was highly valid as it directly aligned with the overarching question of my PIP, while deepening my understanding of how the media's representation can distort or reinforce public perceptions of justice, offering a reliable base point in identifying patterns in generational disparities of opinions.

### **Interview with Generation Z and Generation X Participants-**

The conduction of Interviews with both Generation Z and Generation X successfully explored how generational identity influences interpretation and emotional reactions to high-profile celebrity trials. The use of open-ended and non-biased questions allowed both participants to freely express their beliefs and values in a non-judgmental environment, increasing the overall validity. Despite having a small sample size with 1 participant for each generation, the data were both reliable and valid due to the cross-generational comparison, providing both interviewees with the same questions to identify disparities. This method was highly useful across all of my Chapters, providing invaluable insight into the generational shift in perceptions of celebrity justice and providing a personal depth to my qualitative data.

### **Interview with an Expert-**

The conduction of an Interview with an expert (Psychologist) in the field of my PIP provided me with critical insights and information into emotional investment, parasocial connections and cognitive dissonance, all of which impact public perceptions of celebrity trials. This primary method is directly aligned with the focus of my Chapter 2 in the PIP. The method was highly valid, focusing on emotional loyalty and psychological processes that shape support for individuals even in spite of criminal allegations. The presentation of psychological theories and reliable information from the interview not only boosted the reliability of my research but ensured all my writing was grounded in academic findings. This method was highly useful for my PIP, providing a professional viewpoint to reinforce both my primary and secondary findings, further strengthening the critical evaluation of emotive narratives and prioritising connection over truth in my Chapter 2.



# Secondary Sources

## **Source 1 - From Sensationalism to Reform: A Critical Analysis of Celebrity Cases and their Influence on the Legal System**

Swaiss A, 'From Sensationalism to Reform: A Critical Analysis of Celebrity Cases and Their Influence on the Legal System' [2024] SSRN Electronic Journal <[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4761286](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4761286)> accessed 6 November 2024

This source addresses the concept of celebrities and their potential influence on the legal system, delving into the multifaceted impact of such cases and the drawbacks of this potential, emphasising the necessity of upholding a fair legal system. These concepts directly relate to my chosen PIP topic and provide both a negative and positive perspective on the topic, making it an extremely useful source as it includes no bias from the author. The source is recently published (2024), ensuring that the data and information I have gathered from it are up-to-date and relevant. It draws from a diverse range of Academic Sources, legal case studies and scholarly articles, providing accurate and reliable information. It includes many different aspects of primary research into celebrity cases, with accurate and well-informed research from a range of sources, further proving the validity of the source. This article has been a useful tool in the secondary research into my PIP project as it has presented reliable evidence/ information with no author bias, drawing from a range of reliable academic resources to assist in the development of my PIP.

### **Source 2- 3 Ways The Media Has Influenced Trial Outcomes**

Mehran Ebadolahi, '3 Ways the Media Has Influenced Trial Outcomes' (*11 Study Resources for First Year Law School* 2018) <<https://testmaxprep.com/blog/11/media-influences-trial-outcomes>> accessed 6 November 2024

This source provides an insight into the ways the media has influenced legal trial outcomes, providing examples of the different ways in which the media has affected trials, as well as providing statistics about media use and consumption, helping to highlight the susceptibility of individuals to their influence. This article provided useful examples of trials that can be discussed in my PIP, as well as reliable statistics that can be used for my quantitative section of research. The source has a slightly biased tone, as the author continually implies that the media has a significant impact on the outcome of legal cases, providing no alternative perspectives and only examples that support this idea. This approach could potentially influence the information and statistics presented in the source. Despite this, the source has provided reliable information and has proved useful for me in my research process for my PIP, as it has given me many primary examples of cases, with accurate statistics and direct quotes to be used in my PIP.

### **Source 3 - Media Coverage and Public Opinion of the O.J Simpson Trial: Implications for the Criminal Justice System**

Brown WJ, Duane JJ and Fraser BP, 'Media Coverage and Public Opinion of the O. J. Simpson Trial: Implications for the Criminal Justice System' (1997) 2 *Communication Law and Policy* 261 <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232824729\\_Media\\_coverage\\_and\\_public\\_opinion\\_of\\_the\\_O\\_J\\_Simpson\\_trial\\_Implications\\_for\\_the\\_criminal\\_justice\\_system](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232824729_Media_coverage_and_public_opinion_of_the_O_J_Simpson_trial_Implications_for_the_criminal_justice_system)> accessed 6 November 2024

This Source considered and analysed some of the “beneficial and detrimental influences” of media coverage on legal trials, including statistics and data acquired from a survey during the O.J. Simpson trials. This source provides information and statistics that are extremely important and relevant to my PIP as it incorporates primary research findings from a survey

conducted during the trials, while also delving into the question of “does media coverage help or hurt the justice system?”. These concepts discussed throughout the article have been extremely useful in furthering my understanding of the way media works in the context of legal systems, and greatly increased my information/ statistics to be used in the PIP. It is a reliable source and is peer-reviewed from a scholarly source with no author bias.

#### **Source 4- Crime and the Media**

University of Glasgow, ‘Crime and the Media’ (2022)  
<<https://www.sccjr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/17-Crime-and-Media-2022.pdf>>

This Source is a reliable article written by the University of Glasgow School of Education. It provides an in-depth discussion of the relationship between the media and crime, and the role of the media in portraying crime and justice, as well as the direct or indirect effect this can have on criminal cases and proceedings. It is a useful source for my PIP research as it gave me the base information to use to form my critical questions in my PIP, as well as providing an extremely in-depth history of media and its uses in the legal field.

#### **Source 5- Media's Influence on the Perception of Criminal Justice**

‘Media’s Influence on the Perception of Criminal Justice – Crime & Justice Research Alliance’ (Crimeandjusticeresearchalliance.org2018)  
<<https://crimeandjusticeresearchalliance.org/rsrch/medias-influence-on-the-perception-of-criminal-justice/>> accessed 28 July 2025

This source examined how the media's sensationalised news coverage is influencing the public's understanding and trust in the legal system. It investigates both traditional and digital media and how they are overemphasising and emotionally charging celebrity cases, which can consequently lead to warped perceptions of the justice system and high-profile cases. The article incorporates research and commentary from highly credible scholars in the criminal justice field, contributing to its strong reliability and academic validity. The source is both reliable and unbiased as it is published by a research-based organisation that is peer-reviewed and authored by academics and experts in the field. This article was highly useful for the

writing and research of my Chapter 3, which examined social media's role in filling in gaps in legal discourse by amplifying generational attitudes towards celebrity criminals. It effectively reinforced my overarching hypothesis that social media is actively shaping how different generations interact and interpret justice, replacing complex legal proceedings with emotionally driven narratives. This article furthermore provided essential secondary data that aligned with data recorded from my primary research, reinforcing my arguments and validity in this chapter.

#### **Source 6- Celebrities and Their Legal Privileges: Fair or Foul?**

‘Celebrities and Their Legal Privileges: Fair or Foul? | LawShun’ (*Lawshun.com* 12 January 2025)

<[https://lawshun.com/article/do-celebrities-get-off-easier-when-they-break-the-law?utm\\_sour](https://lawshun.com/article/do-celebrities-get-off-easier-when-they-break-the-law?utm_source=)  
.com> accessed 28 July 2025

This article *Celebrities and Their Legal Privileges: Fair or Foul?*, critically explores whether celebrities receive preferential treatment within the legal system due to their high-profile, well-received image and how this can, in turn, influence the outcome of legal cases. It highlights specific scenarios where high-profile figures were granted leniency or favourable media framing, potentially influencing public responses to legal outcomes. This article also discusses the role of wealth, legal teams, and media influence in moulding courtroom dynamics for celebrities. As a contemporary legal commentary from a law-focused publisher, the source is highly reliable. While it lacks peer review, it demonstrates clear legal reasoning and references current cases, which enhances its validity as a secondary source. This article was highly valuable for my Chapter 1, which investigates generational attitudes towards celebrity criminals, providing insight into the structural and societal privileges celebrities often benefit from and aligned with Generation X's perspectives collected in my primary research, which view the justice system as compromised by fame.

### **Source 7- The impact of public opinion on criminal trials**

‘The Impact of Public Opinion on Criminal Trials | McCready Law Group’  
(*Zacharymccreadylaw.com*2024)

<<https://zacharymccreadylaw.com/blog/the-impact-of-public-opinion-on-criminal-trials/>>  
accessed 28 July 2025

This source examined how external influences such as media and public opinion can have a detrimental impact on courtroom proceedings and legal outcomes. It emphasises the risk of the dubbed ‘trial by media’ phenomenon in which public opinion, which is often influenced by social media and sensationalised narratives, has the potential to skew true proceedings of the legal process. The source is moderately reliable, composed by a law firm and reflecting lived experience with the law, giving it professional credibility, as well as reflecting no author bias; it does, however, lack peer review. This source was highly useful for my Chapter 1 as it provided a deeper understanding of how social media is actively influencing and shaping public opinion, while skewing objective legal decision-making. It further supported my primary research findings, highlighting Generation Z's tendency to interpret trials through an emotionally media-filtered lens, while Generation X typically questions the fairness and conduct of the legal process, viewing it through a more critical lens.

### **Source 8- Cognitive Dissonance and the Celebrity effect: How emotional investment influences moral judgement**

Moraes M and others, ‘Celebrity Influences on Consumer Decision Making: New Insights and Research Directions’ (2019) 35 Journal of Marketing Management 1159  
<[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334247343\\_Celebrity\\_influences\\_on\\_consumer\\_decision\\_making\\_new\\_insights\\_and\\_research\\_directions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334247343_Celebrity_influences_on_consumer_decision_making_new_insights_and_research_directions)> accessed 28 July 2025

This source examines how cognitive dissonance can influence an individual's moral reasoning when confronted with the wrongdoings of an idolised public figure. The source highlights how emotionally invested and obsessive ‘fans’ tend to excuse or rationalise any criminal allegations against these idolised figures to protect their own beliefs. This psychological mechanism is essential for understanding and conducting research into how parasocial relationships can skew moral judgment. The source is both peer-reviewed and

established by a psychological theory, with no author bias, proving to be academically reliable. It was highly useful for Chapter 2 of my PIP, investigating parasocial connections with celebrities and this consequential influence on public perceptions of criminal cases, aligning perfectly with my writing. Furthermore, the incorporation of the cognitive dissonance theory steeped my writing in psychological validity, as well as validating my primary research findings of Generation Z participants defending celebrities such as Johnny Depp, in spite of criminal allegations. Overall, this source provided an invaluable theoretical framework to interpret my primary research findings, while increasing the validity of my writing.

### **Source 9- The Ethics of Parasocial Relationships in the Digital Age**

Fullen M, 'The Ethics of Parasocial Relationships in the Digital Age - Platform Magazine' (*Platform Magazine* April 2024)  
<<https://platformmagazine.org/2024/04/09/the-ethics-of-parasocial-relationships-in-the-digital-age/>> accessed 28 July 2025

This source investigated the increasingly prevalent narrative of emotional loyalty towards celebrities, especially in the form of parasocial relationships, and how this false sense of connection can, in turn, lead to the public defence of high-profile figures, despite serious allegations. It examined how digital mobilisation is catalysing online discourse and widespread support, based on false perceived connections with a high-profile figure. This research directly aligns with Chapter 2 of my PIP, investigating how parasocial bonds influence public opinion on high-profile trials. This article is highly useful as it draws attention to the emotional dimensions of public engagement, especially among younger generations, without displaying author bias. Published in 2024, the source offers recent insight into online culture and the role of social media, ensuring all perspectives incorporated are current and relevant to my research. As it incorporates modern psychological theories and media trends, it provides highly reliable information and evidence-based analysis, supported by its consistency with established research into parasocial connection, and its validity is further enhanced by its real-world case examples. Overall, this article has been an essential secondary resource in bettering my understanding of how emotional investment can override objective reasoning in public responses to high-profile crimes.

### **Source 10- Crime and justice: A guide to criminology**

‘Crime and Justice Seventh Edition’ (Thomson Reuters Australia 2025)  
<<https://store.thomsonreuters.com.au/crime-and-justice-seventh-edition/productdetail/131992>  
> accessed 28 July 2025

This source provides a comprehensive overview of criminological theory, justice, and the influence of external social factors on legal proceedings. It includes an analysis of how public opinion, media narratives, and emotional biases can form public responses to crime, which directly supports the aims of Chapter 2 of my PIP. The article examines the audience engagement's role in high-profile cases, making it highly relevant to my investigation into parasocial connections with celebrities influencing public judgment. As an academic book authored by criminology scholars and reputable legal publishers, the source is both highly reliable and valid. It incorporates peer-reviewed research, case studies, and recognised theoretical frameworks, ensuring that the information it presents is evidence-based and well supported. The material is up to date, having been published in 2022, and incorporates references to up-to-date social and legal developments. It contains no author bias and upholds a critical, balanced perspective, which enhances its usefulness in informing my secondary research. This source has been essential in shaping the academic foundation of the PIP and in supporting ideas about emotional and psychological factors that influence public responses to celebrity crime.

### **Source 11- To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter**

Marwick A and boyd danah, ‘To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter’ (2011) 17  
Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies 139  
<[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228576317\\_To\\_See\\_and\\_Be\\_Seen\\_Celebrity\\_Practice\\_on\\_Twitter](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228576317_To_See_and_Be_Seen_Celebrity_Practice_on_Twitter)> accessed 28 July 2025

This source examines how celebrities use online spaces such as Twitter to construct and perform their public identities, allowing them to feel a sense of intimate belonging and connection with them. This aligns closely with Chapter 2 of my PIP, which investigates how parasocial connections are shaping public opinion on criminal cases. The article is highly reliable and valid, published in a peer-reviewed journal and authored by a digital media

scholar. It incorporates valid research, including deep studies and content analysis of social media usage, which contributes to depth and credibility. Despite being published in 2011, the source is still relevant and reliable as it incorporates up-to-date discussions on both the present and possible future of social media and celebrity culture. The article consists of an analytical, non-biased tone and is layered in academic literature. This source has been highly useful in supporting my secondary research by offering a framework for widening my understanding of how emotional investment and falsely perceived intimacy with celebrities in online spaces can, in turn, influence public responses during times of legal controversy and criminal allegations.

#### **Source 12- Bridging Gaps, Not leaping Chasms: Trust, Confidence and Sentencing Councils**

Freiberg A, 'Bridging Gaps, Not Leaping Chasms: Trust, Confidence and Sentencing Councils' (2021) 12 International Journal for Court Administration <<https://iacajournal.org/articles/10.36745/ijca.421>> accessed 28 July 2025

This source explores public confidence in the criminal justice system and focuses deeply on how media narratives, emotion and personal beliefs and values can impact perceptions of fairness and guilt. It highlights how trust, moral judgment and emotional attachments all play a role in influencing public responses to high-profile trials. This was directly relevant and useful for my Chapter 2, which investigated parasocial connections in distorting public opinion on high-profile cases. The article is both reliable and valid, published in a peer-reviewed legal journal, and it incorporates psychological research, media studies and real-life case examples, which further strengthen its validity. The article provided a non biased and ethical analysis, and was extremely useful in providing my PIP with academic theory, especially for Generation Z who struggle to view celebrities objectively.

#### **Source 13- How Younger Generations Consume News Differently**

Kalogeropoulos A, 'How Younger Generations Consume News Differently - Reuters Institute Digital News Report' (*Reuters Institute Digital News Report* 24 May 2019)



<<https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/how-younger-generations-consume-news-differently/>> accessed 28 July 2025

This source investigates how differing generations react and interpret news on social media platforms, emphasising a large divide in how information is trusted and interpreted. It highlighted that younger individuals, such as Generation Z, typically consume and react with news about celebrities and crime in non-traditional manners, especially on social media, which contributes to the more emotionally charged and unfiltered portrayals of celebrities. This directly supports the aim of my Chapter 3, which explores ‘how social media fills the gaps in legal discourse and amplifies generational attitudes towards celebrity criminals’. The research is both reliable and valid, authored by a widely recognised research body. It incorporates data and cross-generational analysis to further deepen its findings. The article contains no bias, presenting its information in a balanced and objective manner. It has been useful for reinforcing my overall argument regarding social media working as an ‘informal courtroom’, especially among younger, more susceptible generations. This source helped ground my understanding of digital discourse as a factor reshaping justice, fairness and credibility, working to reinforce my primary findings on generational divide in high-profile trials, including how their interpreted and discussed.

#### **Source 14- Gen Z Turning to TikTok as Primary Source of News and Opinion, Study Shows**

Diaz A, ‘Gen Z Turning to TikTok as Primary Source of News and Opinion, Study Shows’  
(*New York Post* July 2024)  
<<https://nypost.com/2024/07/02/lifestyle/gen-z-turning-to-social-media-as-primary-source-of-news-study/>> accessed 28 July 2025

This article explores how younger generations, typically Generation Z, are increasingly turning to social media and media commentary for news and legal information, often prioritising emotional reactions over true research or journalism. This directly relates to Chapter 3 of my PIP, investigating how social media fills the gap in legal traditional discourse and amplifies generational attitudes towards celebrities. The source is both valid and relevant for my research into digital consumption habits, and this is a driving force for creating mistrust, proving social media to be not simply a passive news outlet but an active arena for

emotional influence and discourse. While the New York Post can lean towards sensationalised undertones, this article references reliable data from valid digital studies, increasing its reliability for examining changing generational behaviour patterns.

#### **Source 15- Social Media Activism: A Force for Change or Mere Performance**

‘Social Media Activism: A Force for Change or Mere Performance’ (*Universitytimes.ie*2025) <<https://universitytimes.ie/2025/03/social-media-activism-a-force-for-change-or-mere-performance/>> accessed 28 July 2025

This source examines the growth in social media activism, critically examining whether it forms genuine societal change or simply functions as performative expression. It dissects the role of emotionally charged online movements, especially celebrity cases, in blurring the lines between advocacy and entertainment. This aligns directly with Chapter 3 of my PIP, which analyses how social media is working as an online forum in which individuals are influenced to different interpretations and biased opinions on celebrity trials. The source, published in 2025, is both relevant and valid for my research, providing an up-to-date and useful opinion, ensuring that all information and data recorded is valid today. The article upholds a non-biased narrative voice, further boosting its validity. Overall, this source was useful in the research and writing of my Chapter 3, reinforcing that online spaces amplify misinformation and emotionally-led bias rather than providing rational and balanced discussion, especially among younger generations, providing crucial information to support my hypothesis of generational perspectives being shaped through digital interaction.

#### **Source 17- The Psychology of Online Activism and Social Movements: Relations between Online and Offline Collective Action**

Greijdanus H and others, ‘The Psychology of Online Activism and Social Movements: Relations between Online and Offline Collective Action’ (2020) 35 *Current Opinion in Psychology* 49 <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32330859/>> accessed 28 July 2025

This source provided a peer-reviewed, scholarly authored investigation into the processes that are behind online activism, and how this digital mobilisation can be transferred into

real-world action. It was a highly useful source for my Chapter 3 of the PIP as it explored in depth social media's role in amplifying attitudes towards high-profile scenarios, directly aligning with the focus of my chapter. The source is highly reliable and valid as it was published in a respected academic journal with credible sources, presenting its findings in a neutral and scholarly tone, avoiding any bias. The article was critical for my writing as well as strengthening my secondary research, providing an academic viewpoint through which to understand how digital platforms influence and intensify public discourse surrounding crime and justice.