

Public Engagement with the Criminal Justice System in the Age of Social Media

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Abstract

Exemplified by the landmark trial of O.J. Simpson, news media coverage of criminal cases in the United States is now regularly dominated by tabloid style coverage, complete with fixation on the victims and accused in criminal cases. Investigators have shown that such coverage of criminal proceedings is linked to decreasing levels of public trust and confidence in the criminal justice system. What is not yet understood is how rapid changes to the media universe in terms of online news sources and social networking are impacting coverage of criminal proceedings and public understanding of the criminal justice system. By surveying the American public on their news consumption habits, participation in social networking, knowledge and opinions of highly publicized criminal cases, and perceptions of the legitimacy of the justice system, we offer one of the first analyses of social media's impact on public interaction with the criminal justice system. Ultimately we find little evidence that social media is enhancing citizen knowledge about or confidence in the criminal justice system, but we do uncover strong evidence that social media engagement with criminal trials leads to a greater desire for vengeance and encouragement of vigilante attitudes and behavior.

Key words

News participator; crime; tabloidization; social media; cyber vigilantism

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Resumen

Como demostró el emblemático juicio a O.J. Simpson, la cobertura mediática de los casos penales en los Estados Unidos está dominada de forma regular por una cobertura de estilo sensacionalista, centrando su atención en las víctimas y acusados de los casos criminales. Investigaciones han demostrado que esta cobertura de los procesos criminales está relacionada con un menor nivel de confianza del público en el sistema de justicia criminal. Todavía no se conoce con qué rapidez están impactando los cambios en el universo de los medios de comunicación que han llegado de la mano de las fuentes de información en línea y las redes sociales, en la cobertura de los procesos criminales y la comprensión del público del sistema de justicia criminal. A través de entrevistas al público estadounidense sobre sus hábitos de consumo de noticias, participación en redes sociales, conocimiento y opiniones de casos criminales muy difundidos, y las percepciones de la legitimidad del sistema de justicia, ofrecemos uno de los primeros análisis sobre el impacto de las redes sociales en la interacción con el sistema de justicia criminal. Básicamente, se ha encontrado poca evidencia de que las redes sociales estén fortaleciendo el conocimiento o confianza de los ciudadanos en el sistema de justicia criminal. Sin embargo, sí se ha puesto en relieve una fuerte evidencia de que la relación entre redes sociales y juicios criminales lleva a un mayor deseo de venganza y fomenta actitudes y comportamientos para que se tome la justicia por su propia mano.

Palabras clave

Participantes de las noticias; sensacionalismo; medios de comunicación social; redes sociales; justicia por propia mano cibernética

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1. Introduction

In the United States, the news media's shift to tabloid-style coverage of high-profile criminal cases over the past few decades has been linked to decreasing levels of public trust and confidence in the criminal justice system (Fox *et al.* 2007). Very little exploration has been done recently to see if this trend has continued in light of the rapid rise of social media as a news source. In the Pew Research Center's annual report, "The State of the News Media 2013," data indicated that 39 percent of survey respondents got news "yesterday" from the Internet or a mobile device. The audience for digital news media increased 7.2 percent from 2011 to 2012, by far the largest of any of the news sources. The increase in digital news audience is exceptional when compared to the declining audience for traditional news sources such as newspapers, radio, network and local television, and magazines (Pew Research Center 2013b).

Additionally, while almost three-quarters of the Pew respondents typically hear about news first by word of mouth from friends and family, 15 percent say they hear from friends and family through social networking sites. The growing membership of social networking sites continues to allow individuals to connect to others around the nation and the globe almost instantly, and allows news messages to be relayed in real-time, disseminated widely, and discussed in new digital forums. Recent estimates suggest that there are as many as 141,800,000 Twitter users (Bennett 2013) and 159,309,200 Facebook users (Socialbakers 2013) in the United States alone. Major news media outlets now utilize Twitter feeds and Facebook posts to report the latest headlines and provide links to more in-depth news stories on their websites (Standley 2013). Although a variety of research has recently been conducted on patterns in the public's news consumption habits, little research examines the growing role of social media in relation to news coverage of criminal trials and investigations.

Widespread use of social networking sites by major news corporations and members of the American public has changed the way individuals engage with news, political institutions and society. For instance, many members of the public are no longer simply news *consumers* but they have evolved into news *participants*. A *news participant* is someone that posts or re-posts headlines and links to news stories, posts their personal opinion or position relating to a social or political issue, and discusses social or political issues through online chat, postings and blogs (Purcell *et al.* 2010, Surette 2011, Pew Research Center 2013b). Another participatory role that has emerged is the *citizen journalist*. One of the most recent sensational examples of citizen journalism concerns Sohaib Athar who was roused from sleep by the noise of helicopters and began tweeting from Abbottabad Pakistan the series of events he later discovered was the United States Navy SEAL mission that led to the death of Osama bin Laden (Busch 2012, Allan 2013, Lee 2013). Suddenly, anyone can become a journalist through the power of social media and the Internet.

A few other recent high-profile criminal cases demonstrate the new power that social media has bestowed upon citizens to become detectives and whistle-blowers for alleged crimes that may have otherwise gone uninvestigated. For example in April 2012, neighborhood-watch volunteer George Zimmerman was arrested for the shooting death of an unarmed black teenager, Trayvon Martin, and charged with second-degree murder. Yet the arrest and charges came more than six weeks following the incident, and only after a significant amount of social media surrounding the case (Chappell 2012, Pew Research Center's Journalism Project Staff 2012, CNN staff 2013). Public interest in the case and outrage expressed via social networking, in combination with traditional news media attention, led to the case becoming the first story of 2012 to surpass news of the Presidential Election in mainstream media (Pew Research Center's Journalism Project Staff 2012). Between March 26 and March 30 of 2012, the Trayvon Martin shooting was the number one

story on Twitter, the number three topic on blogs, and number one most viewed subject on YouTube (Hitlin and Tan 2012). If it were not for the power of social media and the public whistle-blowers calling into question the decision of the police department not to arrest Zimmerman, the case may not have garnered enough interest to warrant further investigation. In addition, the social media attention led to a nation-wide discussion of the justice of Florida's "Stand Your Ground" law and other similar laws.

Another recent example demonstrates how social media has enabled individuals to engage with the criminal justice system as citizen detectives. In August, 2012 two high-school football players from the town of Steubenville, Ohio were arrested and charged with the kidnap and rape of a fifteen year-old girl. The two teens were convicted in early 2013, mostly on the basis of evidence from social media and digital devices. Many of the incriminating posts from social networking sites had been saved and chronicled on the webpage of Crime Blogger Alexandria Goddard. Also, the hacker activist group known as Anonymous was able to break into the social media profiles of persons of interest in the case and recover incriminating video that had been removed from the web (Pearson 2013, Petrecca 2013). Publishing and re-posting the social media evidence online led to widespread public outcry and attracted national news media attention on the case. While Goddard played the role of the citizen detective or journalist, the members of Anonymous acted in a way that is now beginning to be characterized as cyber vigilantism (Juliano 2012). The group used illegal methods of obtaining information in order to bring facts to light and to deliver what they believed to be justice for the victim.

As these examples indicate, the public understanding and relation to crime, and especially high-profile criminal cases, raises many questions in the era of social media. In this article we present the results of a national survey to examine the degree to which citizens are using social media to follow high-profile criminal trials and the degree to which this interaction may be impacting citizen attitudes and behaviors. Before turning to the results of the survey, we briefly review three areas of literature to help frame our analysis: research related to public perceptions of crime and confidence in the criminal justice system; the research highlighting the role of the news in educating citizens about the criminal justice system; and recent research on the changes in citizen engagement since the introduction of social media. Relying on survey data collected through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk feature, we conclude that substantial numbers of citizens are using social media to follow and engage with high-profile criminal trials. We find little evidence that social media is enhancing citizen knowledge about or confidence in the criminal justice system, but we do uncover strong evidence that social media engagement with criminal trials leads to a greater desire for vengeance and encouragement of vigilante attitudes and behavior.

2. Public perceptions and confidence in the criminal justice system

Amongst scholars focusing on the United States, there is a longstanding tradition of investigating the relationship between the public's news habits and perceptions of crime. As early as the 1950s, a positive relationship was found between consumption of news and public fear of crime (Davis 1952). Survey research conducted in the 1980s revealed that individuals that pay greater attention to crime news, or are exposed to crime news in higher frequencies, are more likely to fear falling victim to a crime (Einsiedel *et al.* 1984, Okeefe and Reidnash 1987). Furthermore, a longitudinal analysis of network TV crime reporting from 1978 through 1998 concluded that the rise in the public perception of crime as the most important problem facing the country from 5 percent in March of 1992 to 52 percent in August of 1994 had mostly to do with news coverage of crime and very little to do with actual reported crime statistics (Lowry *et al.* 2003). Public perception of crime is important because reactions to these perceptions can impact policy, societal norms, and even individual behavior.

In 1972, Sociologist Stanley Cohen wrote a seminal work in which he gave a name to these observable patterns of public perceptions and reactionary behaviors related to media coverage —“moral panic.” “Moral panic” is widespread public reaction to sensationalized stories circulated by the mass media (Cohen 1972). Additional empirical studies have given support to Cohen’s ideas. One study examined press coverage of capital punishment and public opinion of the death penalty from the 1970s to the early 1990s and found that a drop in public support for the death penalty corresponded to increased news coverage of errors in the judicial process that could lead to the execution of innocent people (Fan *et al.* 2002). The rise in sensationalism in mainstream coverage of crime stories and the frequency of news coverage of high-profile criminal cases in the late 1990s and early 2000s prompted Richard Fox, Robert Van Sickle and Thomas Steiger (2007) to declare that the United States had entered into an era of “tabloid justice.” More importantly, the study found strong evidence that the media’s coverage of the judicial system had eroded the general public’s trust and confidence in the system. Institutional confidence and trust is seen as vital to maintaining a culture of law and order in a democratic society (Tyler 2006).

Periods of moral panic in the United States’ history are due to the social construction of crime and the justice system through the agenda-setting and framing practices of the news media. Under social constructionist theory, agenda-setting refers to the prioritization of certain news stories as determined by major news outlets in order to signal to the public which issues are most important. Renowned criminologist and media scholar Ray Surette (2011) explains that frames are pre-constructed, socially-familiar categories that the media and individuals use to explain and deal with crime in society. It is easier for individuals to process and deal with such heinous crimes when they are able to assign it to a category that is more easily accepted or understood. The concepts of agenda-setting and framing are the bedrock of media effects literature. But in the era of social media with news participators and citizen journalists, these concepts lose some of the clarity they once posed. In a world where social media is gaining ground as a source of news, the question of who is doing the agenda-setting and framing becomes much murkier.

Through understanding the role that agenda-setting and framing plays in news media production and consumption, one can see new urgency in the questions regarding a social media news platform that allows for selective consumption and unregulated publishing of opinions and information. Moreover, in the absence of information about the impact of social media on public knowledge of crime and the justice system, questions remain about the possibility for moral panic to be generated through social networking and the impact it could have on public confidence in or attitudes towards judicial institutions in the United States.

2. News media and citizen knowledge about the criminal justice system

For decades, scholars have agreed that news media plays a major role in informing the public about the criminal justice system and in shaping public attitudes towards crime (Garofalo 1981, Roberts and Doob 1990, Fox *et al.* 2007, Surette 2011). Prior research has found a decline in knowledge about current affairs and the criminal justice system in the United States by examining the relationship between knowledge and individuals’ news habits. For example, Oxley found that levels of political knowledge have fallen in recent decades amongst the American public despite new media innovations and the influx of information on the Internet (Oxley 2012). Another study discovered that despite the increase in public exposure to the justice system through extensive coverage of high-profile criminal trials since the early 1990s, “citizens have actually become less informed about the system (Fox *et al.* 2007, p. 146).” From survey data collected in 2000 and 2005, researchers concluded that the public’s “wildly incorrect responses” to questions about the basic functioning of the legal system were at least in part due to the news media’s

highlighting of cases that were “so unusual, so unrepresentative of the normal everyday functioning of the law” (Fox *et al.* 2007, p. 146). Central to the issue of public knowledge are concerns related to the type of information available on social media (i.e. education versus infotainment), the possible effects of such content, and the dangers of misinformation and public misperception.

The lack of regulation of online news, coupled with the continuing trend in tabloidization of news coverage, has created worries over the possible effects of social media on public discourse and democracy. Scholars generally agree that the influx of infotainment and the tabloidization of news coverage have negative effects. Several studies have linked this type of coverage to decreased public trust in political institutions and leaders (Robinson 1976, Norris 2000), as well as increased cynicism and apathy amongst citizens (Cappella and Jamieson 1997, Elenbaas and de Vreese 2008, Jebriil *et al.* 2013). Decreasing public trust in the credibility of news media has also been linked to the growing infotainment trend (McCombs *et al.* 2011). The unregulated content of social media news coverage, the impact of public postings on social networking sites, and the ability to customize or selectively consume news through social media have generated concerns that the effects of infotainment may be exacerbated in a social media environment.

Furthermore, although the Internet is often praised as an invention capable of providing information at your fingertips, misinformation can be found in abundance online. In a study of public misperceptions about the Iraq War, researchers found that unlike consumers of print media, NPR, or PBS, a majority of people using electronic news sources from the Fox, CBS, ABC, CNN, and NBC networks held key misperceptions about U.S. involvement in Iraq such as that “clear evidence that Saddam Hussein was working closely with al Qaeda has been *found*,” “weapons of mass destruction have been *found* in Iraq,” and “world public opinion *favored* the United States going to war with Iraq” (Kull *et al.* 2003). If the prevalence of audience misperception from electronic media is alarming, even more concerning is the possibility of misperception on open, unregulated social media.

Social media has already proven to be dangerous in terms of the rapid spread of damaging misinformation. For example, in the lead-up to the George Zimmerman arrest, movie producer Spike Lee tweeted what he thought was the home address of George Zimmerman. Unfortunately, Lee had the wrong address, and the wrong family received threatening messages and was harassed to the point that the family had to move into a hotel for a period of time (Ngak 2012, Lee 2013). This type of mistake is all too common on social networking sites (Wright 2012, Lee 2013). Craig Silverman highlights what he calls “The Law of Incorrect Tweets,” which dictates that misinformation is tweeted many more times and at a faster pace than the correct information, meaning that the correct information will most likely never reach as many people as the misinformation on Twitter (2012). As news continues to become more interactive, many fear that authoritative perspectives will no longer be distinguishable from public commentary, misinformation will be difficult to separate from information, and the public will not be educated or informed in ways that have been considered vital for democracy to thrive in the United States.

In summary, public knowledge of politics and the judicial system has fallen in recent decades despite the influx of information available in the new media environment. At the same time, the continued rise of infotainment programming and tabloidization of news coverage has shown to be damaging to public discourse and democracy. These trends have inspired new questions about the education the public is receiving through social media. In particular, we want to know whether citizen engagement with crime news on social media results in greater or less knowledge of the judicial system than those who do not engage with the interactive news platforms. Furthermore, our study goes beyond existing work and seeks to discover more about the participatory aspects of social media and the ways in

which citizens are engaging with news and the criminal justice system through social media.

3. Citizen engagement in an era of social media

Recently, there has been a surge of research devoted to discovering the impact of social media on civic engagement. Although most research remains focused on political participation or measures of civic engagement, several studies have shown that social media participation is positively associated with higher levels of participation and engagement both online and offline (Shah *et al.* 2005, Ellison *et al.* 2007, Zhang *et al.* 2010, Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez 2011, de Zuniga 2012, Kim *et al.* 2013). Most of these studies have focused on the role that social networks play in building trust and support amongst virtual communities leading to greater opportunities for civic participation. Few studies have examined the difference between offline and online engagement, or the unique features of social media participation. Perhaps this is because the forms of political and civic participation generally studied – public discussion, organization, voicing of opinions, signaling an intention to vote in an election – do not differ greatly in a social media context and an offline context. But when considering citizen engagement with crime news and the criminal justice system, avenues for participation are greatly increased and vary significantly in substance in a social media environment. For example, technological advancements have aided an individual's ability to play a lead role in surveillance or detection of crime online, which was unheard of only a short time ago. Yet little research has been done in regards to citizen engagement with the criminal justice system through social media. Most evidence of citizen engagement currently available is anecdotal.

The recent introduction of social networking to the news media environment has opened up possibilities for members of society to interact with news, politics, crime, and other important social issues in meaningful ways. We are in the dawn of the era of social media, which has already shown massive change in terms of the creation of new models for civic engagement as news participators, citizen journalists, citizen detectives, and even cyber vigilantes. These developments have inspired a closer look into the media habits and public attitudes towards crime and justice in the age of social media. We want to know whether significant numbers of the public are actually engaging with news and the criminal justice process in these participatory ways, or if there is only a small contingent of people interested in such engagement. Who are the people that are engaging through social media and how do they differ from other news consumers? We are interested to find out what impact, if any, the social media environment has on public education about the criminal justice system. Our study also examines whether social media has changed people's attitudes towards the legal system. Importantly, we make a first attempt to discover what some of the consequences may be of a social media news environment and an interactive platform for justice in the United States.

4. Studying social media, high-profile trials and the criminal justice system

To address our central questions focusing on how the emergence of social media influences public engagement with high profile criminal proceedings and the criminal justice system, we administered a national survey. Utilizing the Mechanical Turk program associated with Amazon.com, we surveyed 1,074 individuals between May 5-12, 2013. Respondents were asked over 200 questions pertaining to the criminal justice system, news gathering habits, and engagement with social media. Prior to administering the survey we identified the four criminal cases that received the most attention in the news media in 2012 and the first four months of 2013. Modeling our approach after previous work (Fox and Van Sickle 2001, Fox *et al.* 2007), we utilize high profile legal and criminal proceedings to see how citizens are exposed to the legal system. Based on analysis of mentions in major newspapers and cable news prime time transcripts, we identified the Casey Anthony trial, the

Jerry Sandusky investigation and trial, the James Holmes case, and the George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin case (on-going at the time the survey was administered) as the most covered criminal justice stories. The survey included numerous questions pertaining directly to how closely respondents had been following these cases and how they were influenced by these cases (Appendix 1 provides a shortened version of the survey instrument, for a complete copy of the survey instrument please contact the authors).

In terms of the quality of the sample, Mechanical Turk has been identified as a high-quality inexpensive source for social science data (Schaffner 2011, Berinsky *et al.* 2012, Holden *et al.* 2013, Shapiro *et al.* 2013). The samples are superior to samples of college students but do not quite mirror representative national samples. Mechanical Turk samples tend to be younger, less racially diverse, and more politically liberal than a national sample (Berinsky *et al.* 2012). Also, respondents are more likely to have higher levels of education and digital literacy than the general population. Ultimately, because we are particularly interested in social media and how future generations will be utilizing social media in terms of information gathering and political activism, we believe this is a very good sample for addressing the questions presented in this manuscript. For a breakdown of the sample demographics see Appendix 2.

5. Social media, news habits, and high-profile legal cases

Little is known about the extent to which individuals actually engage with high-profile legal cases and the criminal justice system through social media. The first set of questions we asked respondents focused on media habits and familiarity with some of the most recent high-profile legal cases. The news gathering habits of this sample reflect trends that have been documented for years (Pew Research Center 2012). Table 1 shows the primary news sources for members of the sample.

Table 1 – News Habits of Survey Participants

Regularly get news from the following sources:	%
Web browsers (e.g. Yahoo, AOL)	62.9
Websites of News Organizations	59.7
National TV News Broadcasts	45.8
Social Networking Sites	45.2
Radio	34.6
Newspapers	27.6
Tablet or Smartphone Applications	21.6
Sample Size	1074

Note: "Regularly" combines those who said they use the source everyday or at least a few times a week.

The results in Table 1 reflect the increasingly digital nature of citizens' news habits. Over 60 percent of respondents regularly utilize web browsers for news, while just over 40 percent use social networking sites as regular source of news. Of particular interest here are social networking sites that were not even part of the information universe less than ten years ago. Roughly 90 percent of sample respondents had a social networking account. Facebook is the most popular with over 83 percent of respondents having a profile, followed by Twitter at 47 percent. More than fifty percent of respondents had more than one social networking account.

Before examining the relationship between social networking and engagement with high-profile legal cases, it is important to understand how familiar citizens are with some of the more recent cases that have been central in news outlets in the United States. Table 2 reveals that roughly 70 percent or more of the survey respondents are familiar with the four most prominent criminal cases that have been covered in U.S. media in the past eighteen months. These levels of familiarity are not as high

as those recorded for the O.J. Simpson case in the mid-1990s, but are comparable to many other high-profile cases such as the trials of Michael Jackson and Scott Peterson, or the investigation into the death of JonBennet Ramsey or disappearance of Natalee Holloway (Fox *et al.* 2007). The results presented in Tables 1 and 2 show that large portions of contemporary citizens are aware of high-profile trials and cases and are gathering news from digital sources that are relatively new to the information environment.

Table 2 – Public Familiarity with Recent High Profile Criminal Investigations and Trials

Criminal Case and/or Trial	Familiar with Case %
Jerry Sandusky	76.4
Casey Anthony	74.9
James Holmes	71.3
George Zimmerman (Trayvon Martin Case)	69.7
Sample Size	1071

Note: Answers combine those who said they were very familiar and somewhat familiar.

In Tables 3 and 4 we turn to the question of the degree to which social media users are using their respective platforms to engage with the high-profile trials. Table 3 reports whether citizens are reading about the four cases or any other cases on social media. Between a quarter and 40 percent of the sample respondents have read about a high-profile criminal case on social media. Almost 50 percent of respondents have read something on social media about at least one of the cases. The bottom half of Table 3 displays whether they have taken the more affirmative step of actually reposting or posting news about the cases themselves – what Pew identified as a “news participator.” Here the numbers are smaller, with roughly 10 to 15 percent of respondents saying they had used social media to spread information about these cases. Regardless, though, this represents a significant percentage of the population that is using social media to engage with leading criminal cases and trials.

Table 3 – Social Media Habits of Citizens Regarding High-Profile Criminal Investigations and Trials

Read updates and posts on Facebook or Twitter about the following cases	Have engaged in the activity %
Jerry Sandusky	30.8
Casey Anthony	38.5
James Holmes	30.2
George Zimmerman (Trayvon Martin Case)	27.6
Other criminal case	24.9
Posted or re-posted news relating to a case/trial on Facebook or Twitter	
Jerry Sandusky	9.6
Casey Anthony	14.0
James Holmes	9.3
George Zimmerman (Trayvon Martin Case)	9.9
Other criminal case	12.3
Sample Size	1074

Table 4 reports on the various modes of engagement that are afforded by the social media platform. For instance, roughly ten percent of survey respondents had actually attempted to contact, through social media, participants in high-profile criminal trials. This is a type of engagement that was not conceivable only a few years ago. Lesser, but still significant numbers of respondents reported being invited to join social networking groups related to high-profile criminal cases. For instance, a Facebook page called "Casey Anthony Updates," has over 277,000 "likes." A Facebook page simply called "Trayvon Martin" has almost 150,000 "likes." A search of Facebook pages using the names of perpetrators and alleged perpetrators reveals dozens of different types of groups – some providing updates on the case, others devoted to conspiracy theories, and others tracking the whereabouts of criminal trial participants. Ultimately, just under five percent of the sample said that they were part of a social networking group devoted to a criminal case.

Table 4 – Social Media Engagement with Criminal Trials

	%
Have you ever used social media to communicate your thoughts or feelings directly to the suspected perpetrator of a crime?	12.1
Have you ever used social media to communicate your thoughts or feelings directly to the suspected victim of a crime?	9.6
Have you ever used social media to encourage other people to take action that directly targets the suspected perpetrator of a crime?	8.1
On social media, have you have been invited to join a group related to a criminal case?	7.7
Have you ever been part of a social media group related to a criminal case?	4.8
Have you ever created a social media group of your own related to a criminal case?	1.2
Samples size	1063

In sum, this group of Tables provides some of the first detailed evidence about how the public is using social media to engage with high-profile criminal trials. The results, though preliminary in nature, reveal that a substantial number of citizens are utilizing social media to learn about high-profile criminal cases. Further, social media has allowed many citizens to follow directly and try to communicate with people involved in the cases we asked about. At the very least our results suggest that social media is encouraging or permitting some people to engage more deeply with the criminal justice system.

6. Social media and knowledge and attitudes toward the criminal justice system

The second central question of this research focuses on how the emergence of social media has impacted public attitudes and behaviors toward the criminal justice system. As the literature review above indicates, there are a number of ways that the news media can affect the public. In *Tabloid Justice*, Fox, Van Sickle and Steiger examine whether media coverage of high-profile and tabloid criminal cases are significantly impacting public knowledge about the criminal justice system and in anyway altering confidence in the justice system. Here we examine knowledge and confidence, and a third possible aspect of influence—urging people to take action and directly engaging with the justice system. We will begin by

assessing whether reliance on social media as a key news gathering tool significantly influences knowledge about the legal system.

To measure knowledge we asked respondents seven questions about the U.S. legal system. The questions asked respondents to identify what percentage of criminal cases go to trial, what percentage of criminal defendants are able to hire a private criminal defense attorney, whether the rate of incarceration is higher, lower, or about the same as other advanced democracies, and so forth. These were close-ended questions where respondents only needed to know a rough estimate for many of the answers. We then broke respondents into three categories: low knowledge (0-2 correct), moderate knowledge (3-4 correct), and high knowledge (5-7 correct). Next, we developed two measures of social media usage. The first measure asked people whether they regularly used platforms such as Twitter and Facebook as a source for news. Here we combined all people who said they regularly use social media to learn the news of the day – this was a little over 45 percent of the population. The second measure we utilized was more specific and asked respondents if they regularly used these social media sources to follow high-profile criminal trials and cases. If they reported utilizing social media to regularly follow at least one of the trials we asked about, they fell into this category. Roughly 30 percent of the sample fell into the second category.

Table 5 – Citizen Knowledge about the Criminal Justice System by Primary News Sources

Knowledge questions	Use social media as a primary source of news		Follow high profile criminal cases using social media	
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Low Knowledge (0-2 correct)	53.7	50.3	54.8	50.5
Moderate Knowledge (3-4 correct)	38.8	41.1	40.0	40.4
High Knowledge (5-7 correct)	7.8	8.7	6.2	9.1
Sample	477	577	323	731

Note: Respondents were asked seven multiple choice questions about the legal system in the United States and received a score of 0-7 based on how many were correct. See Appendix 1 for a list of questions.

Table 5 compares knowledge about the legal system among both measures of social media usage. Two findings emerge from Table 5. First, confirming early studies, public knowledge of the criminal justice system is dismal. More than 50 percent of respondents rated as having low knowledge and less than 9 percent could be considered high knowledge. For instance, fewer than 20 percent of respondents had any idea about the frequency with which criminal cases go to trial, or how often a jury acquits a defendant. As earlier work has found, all of the attention placed on high-profile legal proceedings does not appear to educate the public about the legal system and may actually have the effect of misinforming some people about the legal system (Surette 2011).

The second finding, more pertinent to this investigation, is that social media usage does not influence levels of knowledge about the legal system. Regardless of how we measure social media usage, those who regularly use social media for news are not significantly more or less knowledgeable about the legal system. The broad hope that digital media and direct engagement with the legal and political system would lead to a more informed citizenry does not appear to have transpired, but neither are those reliant on social media any less knowledgeable.

Next, we turn to the issue of citizen confidence in the legal system. The belief that the legal system is fair and just is a central component of state legitimacy (Tyler

and Huo 2002, Tyler 2006), thus it is critical to determine whether social media engagement with the criminal justice system via high-profile legal proceedings in anyway affects confidence in the legal system. Again we rely on our two measures of social media news gathering habits. As Table 6 illustrates, there are almost no differences between social media news users and those who do not use social media. For all categories of media usage, confidence in the legal system generally, and in the various components of the criminal justice system, is roughly the same.

Table 6 – Confidence in the Legal System Based on Use of Social Media as a News Source

Has confidence in . . .	Use social media as a primary source of news		Follow high profile criminal cases using social media	
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
The criminal justice system				
Police	36.6	36.9	35.7	37.2
Jury System	35.6	33.7	39.1*	32.7
Judges	44.3	39.6	41.9	41.2
Defense Attorneys	22.8	20.4	21.9	21.3
Prosecuting Attorneys	27.5	22.7	24.8	25.1
Sample	479	585	326	738

Note: Percentages represent the ratio of respondents who identified that they had complete or a great deal of confidence in the various aspects of the legal system.

* significance test, $p < .05$.

Where social media does not appear to be having an influence on knowledge and confidence in the legal system, we uncovered major differences in our third area - encouraging political activism and direct engagement. Table 7 has seven measures that ask respondents what they have done in response to high-profile legal proceedings. Most of them ask if respondents have taken action that is directly related to one of the criminal cases that we reference in this study. On all of the measures and for both of the ways that we test use of social media for news gathering, there is a statistically significant difference. On all of the measures, individuals that use social media for news, or more specifically to follow criminal trials, are two and three times more likely to have done any of the political activism and engagement items that we asked about. It is important to remember that this is not simply a function of having a social media account, the vast majority of people in the sample are social media users. What we find here is a relationship between utilizing social media for news purposes and the ability and willingness to take some sort of action.

Perhaps most striking is the finding that nearly 20 percent of those using social media as a source of news have tried to communicate directly with the perpetrator of a crime. Moreover, roughly 35 percent and 29 percent, depending on how we measure social media use, have urged other people to take action on social or political issues based on a criminal trial. In this regard, social media, as has been shown in electoral politics in the United States, has become a tool that both provides news and information, but then offers an outlet for social action. The quality of the social and political engagement is beyond the scope of this paper, but social media does give the opportunity for individuals to try to influence others via posting of comments, reposting of news stories, forming groups to work on particular issues, and so forth.

A final aspect of the influence that social media might be having on the public that we consider is the fostering of vigilante attitudes and behaviors. Or what might more appropriately be called cyber vigilantism. Social media allows for a means of engaging a news story in ways that did not previously exist. If for instance, a citizen was upset about something that they witnessed in the O.J. Simpson murder

trial in the mid-1990s, what options did they have for social action? One could write a letter or perhaps an email (though email was not widespread at that time) to the trial participants. One could try to verbally persuade anyone who would listen about the issues at hand in the trial. One could go to the extraordinary step of trying to found an interest group to address issues emerging from the trial. Now contrast these actions with today's possibilities. Today an individual can go online, look up information about any of the trial or case participants, and make postings on a social network site that potentially reaches thousands of people. An agitated trial observer can make a video of themselves commenting on a case or trial and post it on YouTube, and then put a link to the video on their Facebook page. One can start an online group that is devoted to monitoring the actions of participants in a particular case or trial. For instance, there is at least one social networking site devoted to tracking the actions and whereabouts of Casey Anthony.

Table 7 – Citizen Activism & Criminal Justice Based on Use of Social Media as a News Source

	Use social media as a primary source of news		Follow high profile criminal cases using social media	
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Do you ever use social networking sites to encourage other people to take action on a political or social issue arising from a criminal case that is important to you?	28.7 *	12.5	34.6 *	13.3
Have you ever used social media to communicate your thoughts or feelings directly to the suspected perpetrator of a crime?	18.3 *	7.0	22.0 *	7.7
Have you ever used social media to communicate your thoughts or feelings directly to the suspected victim of a crime?	14.2 *	5.8	18.0 *	5.9
Have you ever used social media to encourage other people to take action that directly targets the suspected perpetrator of a crime?	11.9 *	5.0	13.5 *	5.7 *
On social media, have you have been invited to join a group related to a criminal case?	11.9 *	4.3	14.9 *	4.5
Have you ever been part of a social media group related to a criminal case?	6.9 *	3.1	7.9*	3.4
Have you ever created a social media group of your own related to a criminal case?	1.9	.7	2.7 *	.5
Sample size	583	481	328	738

Note: * chi-square significance test, $p < .05$.

One possible outcome of this new environment is that it can lead to more actions that are akin to vigilantism. In Table 8 we asked specifically respondents if they ever wanted to seek revenge against some criminal trial participants, if they would seek it online, and if they would like to see the defendant hurt or miserable. The

results reveal that those who use social networking sites to follow high-profile criminal trials are much more likely to wish they could seek revenge. On two of the three measures this was not the case among those who simply use social media to follow the news. This suggests that social media use has allowed a particular group of people who closely follow these cases to have stronger feelings of vengeance and even perhaps provided a means of carrying out some of their vengeful desires.

Table 8 – Vigilante Attitudes Based on Social Media News Habits

If there was a criminal defendant such as Casey Anthony or James Holmes that you believed to be guilty, and that allegedly committed a horrible crime. ...	Use social media as a primary source of news		Follow high profile criminal cases using social media	
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Would you wish that you could seek revenge?	19.2	15.8	24.2 *	14.3
Would you seek revenge through the internet?	11.5*	7.1	15.1 *	6.4
Would you wish to see that criminal defendant hurt or miserable?	36.0	35.1	42.8 *	32.2
Sample	477	577	323	731

Note: * chi-square significance test, $p < .05$.

To further examine our finding regarding vigilante attitudes, we developed three binary logistic models. Each model had as the dependent variable one of our measures asking respondents about the desire for revenge. Our primary variable of interest is whether respondents use social media to follow high profile criminal cases. We also included two additional types of variables in the models. First, we have included a set of variables measuring citizens knowledge of the legal system (coded 0 to 7 for the number of questions answered correctly), confidence in the legal system (coded from 1 to 5, from complete confidence in the criminal justice system to no confidence at all), and whether or not they follow high-profile cases online (coded 1 if they were familiar with at least three of our four high-profile cases and 0 if they were not). Second are a set of demographic controls including age and education which are numeric variables coded from low to high and dichotomous variables for race (White is 1, other races are 0), sex (male is 1, female is 0), and party identification (Democrat is 1 and Republican and Independents are 0).

The results presented in Table 9 reveal that even when we control for knowledge, confidence, and demographic factors, following criminal cases on social media is a significant predictor of vigilante attitudes in all three models. In fact, it was the only measure that was statistically significant in each of the models. Most importantly, social media usage is significant even if we control for whether or not the respondent is a follower of high profile criminal cases. Even though following trials did lead respondents to be more likely to have vigilante attitudes in two of the three models, social media use remained significant. This suggests that social media is not simply just a new means of following criminal cases, but goes further by encouraging certain types of attitudes and behaviors.

Table 9 – Impact of Social Media Use on Vigilante Attitudes: Multivariate Analysis (Logistic Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors)

	Would like to seek revenge against guilty perpetrators of crimes in high-profile cases?	Would you seek revenge against the perpetrators of crimes through the internet if you could?	Would you wish to see the criminal defendant in high profile criminal trial hurt or miserable?
Follow Crime Cases on Social Media	.51 (.24) **	.87 (.23) **	.46 (.16) **
Knowledge and Attitudes Toward the Criminal Justice System			
Knowledge about the legal system	-.15 (.09)	-.18 (.09) **	-.13 (.06) **
Confidence in the legal system	.56 (.28) **	.24 (.26)	.51 (.16) **
Follower of High-Profile Cases			
Demographic Controls			
Age	-.09 (.09)	-.17 (.09) *	.03 (.05)
Education	.10 (.08)	.02 (.08)	.03 (.05)
Race (White)	-.35 (.27)	-.39 (.26)	-.17 (.18)
Sex (Male)	-.50 (.24) **	-.01 (.23)	-.07 (.14)
Party Identification (Democrat)	-.26 (.24)	.11 (.23)	-.04 (.15)
Constant	-1.93 (.73) **	-1.91 (.74) **	-.18 (.47)
Percent Correctly Predicted	90.2	89.92	59.4
Pseudo R-Squared	.06	.072	.04
N	1074	1074	1074

Note: Significance levels: ** p < .05; * p < .10.

A few other findings did emerge. Individuals with lower levels of knowledge about the legal system were more likely to have vengeful attitudes. Also, women were less likely to want to seek revenge against the perpetrator of a crime, and younger respondents more likely to want to seek revenge through the internet. While our data is limited in its ability to predict likelihood of vigilante action, or the form the action would take, we believe that the presence of strong vigilante attitudes in users of social media news or social media followers of crime is a significant finding.

7. Conclusion and discussion

This paper provides an initial assessment of how the rise of social media has influenced public attitudes and behaviors in regards to high-profile legal proceedings and the criminal justice system. Ultimately, we have three primary findings. First, citizens are indeed utilizing social media as a means of gathering and sharing information about high-profile criminal cases. Social media is serving as a news gathering tool for many citizens, especially those under 40 years of age. Second, social media habits in regards to high-profile cases have had little impact on citizen knowledge about the criminal justice system and citizen confidence in the legal system. Both knowledge and confidence are relatively low for all citizens, but social media use does not appear to have much of an impact in these areas. Third,

social media does appear to encourage or allow for citizens to have many more outlets for political and social activism. Citizens are able to form networks, communicate to fellow citizens around the country, and even directly communicate with trial participants. One aspect of this greater participation that we uncovered was a heightened tendency to feel more vengeful and even want to take matters into their own hands against perpetrators of crimes. In 2001, while tracing the growing trend in sensationalism of crime reporting from World War II to the twenty-first century, Criminologist Robert Reiner boldly concluded, "Crime news stories increasingly orchestrate a kind of virtual vigilantism, in which a proxy audience is constructed to celebrate vengeance against the perpetrators of unmitigated evil." In an era of social media, we see that very celebration of vengeance taking on many forms, including the direct participation of the audience or the public in attempting to enact some type of retributive justice. Whether social media use encourages a sort of cyber vigilantism is certainly a topic that requires further investigation.

Cyber vigilantism is a concept that has surfaced in public debate in recent years as cyber-attacks and cyber terrorism have also risen to the forefront of discussions about national security. The term is used in various ways, but cyber vigilantes have been distinguished from other actors that participate in cyber-attacks and cyber terrorism by their motive of delivering justice (Juliano 2012). However, a noble motive does not exempt the actions from causing harm or detriment to society. In examining the development of the cyber vigilante, Juliano summarizes the issues we see with the shift toward social media: "As the world embraces the accessibility of the Internet, we create a 'virtual space' where the law becomes muddled by issues of jurisdiction, accountability, and responsibility" (2012). This virtual space, absent of clear legal rules and responsibilities, is what lends itself to the rise in cyber vigilantism. Social media has gone beyond other online forums by providing opportunities for citizens to engage with criminal justice, and to feel ever empowered by their ability to influence others or enact justice as they see fit. Describing the public fervor surrounding the search for suspects in the recent Boston bombings, Andrew Leonard talks about how this trend of cyber detectives and cyber vigilantes "makes everyone a sleuth, and a suspect." Leonard quotes Alexis Madrigal, senior editor of the *Atlantic*, and writes, "This is vigilantism, and it's only the illusion that what we do online is not as significant as what we do offline that allows this to go on...This is not how civil society works...Due process is important" (2013).

Complicating the matter is the growing number of instances involving official agents of the justice system requesting help and information from the public (seen most recently in the Boston bombing case), and instances involving citizen detectives and cyber vigilantes helping to solve cases (seen in the Steubenville, Ohio rape case), that encourages public engagement with the justice system to continue in this manner. The major problem is that the gray areas in the law that have yet to deal with many of the muddled issues of the Internet likewise fail to adequately address the damaging consequences of mistakes made by cyber vigilantes and citizen detectives. The controversy surrounding cyber vigilantism is prominent in public discussion (Oremus 2012, Wright 2012, Leonard 2013, Pew Research Center 2013a), and it is a topic that deserves further attention in future studies about the new media environment and citizen engagement with the justice system and other political institutions.

Ultimately, our work begins to fill a void in the literature. For years, scholars have been chronicling the tabloidization of the main stream media and the news media's recurring fixation with a series of high-profile criminal cases and trials. But the media landscape is shifting so rapidly that scholars are having a difficult time keeping up with the changes and trying to measure the impact of the new information delivery systems. Here we try to determine if social media is changing how citizens come to learn about the legal system. The leading social media sites,

Facebook (launched in 2004) and Twitter (launched in 2006), are still new and evolving platforms. In terms of providing guidance to future researchers, our findings would seem to suggest that the one area where more work needs to be done is in the encouragement of activism through social media.

Mass communications literature on the "third-person effect" is one avenue that holds potential for future research on this topic. Research involving the "third-person effect," or the disproportionate estimation of media influence on the self (first-person) and others (third-person) (Davison 1983), has begun to assess the behavioral response of individuals to this perceived unequal media influence by measuring online "corrective actions" that are similar to the online participatory actions analyzed in our study (Rojas 2010, Houston *et al.* 2011). Studying public opinion or perceptions of the impact of media effects related to crime and the justice system may add to our understandings of the online behaviors of social network news consumers and cyber vigilantes.

More broadly, future questions may revolve around the nature of social media engagement. Determining whether or not social networking is actually used as an interactive forum for debate and discussion, or rather if social networking is more of a two-way platform to gather and disseminate information and opinions. Determining the nature of social network engagement may be important to understanding why the use of the Internet and social media is not contributing to a more informed citizenry.

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Appendix 1 - Abbreviated Survey Instrument

How much confidence do you have in the following aspects of the criminal justice systems in the United States?

	Level of Confidence				
	Complete	A Great Deal	Some	Little	No
The police	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The jury system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Judges	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Defense attorneys	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prosecuting attorneys	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The criminal justice system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media coverage of the legal system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How familiar are you with the facts surrounding the following criminal cases?

	Very Familiar	Somewhat Familiar	Somewhat Unfamiliar	Very Unfamiliar
	Trial of Jerry Sandusky (child sex abuse scandal involving Former Penn State football coach)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trial of Casey Anthony (mother of deceased child, Caylee)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Case of George Zimmerman (Trayvon Martin shooting)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Case of James Holmes (Aurora, CO movie theater massacre)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

When you first learn about criminal cases, where do you typically get your initial information from?

- On television
- On the radio
- In a newspaper
- From an online news website
- From an official news media page on a social networking site
- From a friend's post, comment, tweet, etc. on a social networking site
- By word of mouth from a friend, colleague, family member, neighbor, etc.

Thinking about high-profile criminal cases and investigations such as those of Jerry Sandusky, Casey Anthony, George Zimmerman, James Holmes, or others in your area, which of the following activities have you EVER participated in? (Select all that apply)

	Jerry Sandusky Trial	Casey Anthony Trial	George Zimmerman Case	James Holmes Case	Other cases in the news nationally or in your area
Contributed to an online discussion or message board about a case/trial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sent or received email regarding comments or discussion about a case/trial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visited a website, other than a news source, having to do with a case/trial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Read online news story from official news website relating to a case/trial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Read a story in a newspaper about a case/trial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Read a story in a magazine about a case/trial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listened to radio news report about a case/trial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listened to part of a court proceeding on the radio	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Watched live video of a trial or court proceeding on the TV	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Watched live video feed of a trial or court proceeding on the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Read updates and posts on a social networking site like Facebook or Twitter relating to a case/trial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Posted or re-posted news relating to a case/trial on a social networking site like Facebook or Twitter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Posted or re-posted comments relating to a case/trial on a social networking site like Facebook or Twitter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None of the above.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How often do you get news from the following sources:

	Every Day	Several Times a Week	Several Times a Month	Rarely	Never
Newspaper	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Yahoo, Google, AOL, or other Internet servers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Official website of a major news source	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Official Twitter feed of a major news source	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
World/national news TV programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social networking sites, generally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter, generally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
MSNBC on TV	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fox News on TV	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CNN on TV	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Court TV	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other television programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tablet or Smartphone applications that "personalize" or "customize" your news feed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have you, personally, ever:

	Yes	No	Don't know
been invited online or through email to join a group related to a criminal case?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
created an online group of your own related to a criminal case?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
been part of a group related to a criminal case that was created online?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Give me your best guess, what percentage of defendants have their case decided by a jury trial?

- 0-20
- 21-40
- 41-60
- 61-80
- 81-100

Give me your best guess, what percentage of defendants are able to hire their own lawyers?

- 0-20
- 21-40
- 41-60
- 61-80
- 81-100

Give me your best guess, what percentage of defendants are found not guilty in jury trials?

- 0-20
- 21-40
- 41-60
- 61-80
- 81-100

Give me your best guess, what percentage of defendants plead guilty?

- 0-20
- 21-40
- 41-60
- 61-80
- 81-100

Give me your best guess, about many cases does the Supreme Court decide in a year?

- 50
- 100
- 200
- 350
- 500

Give me your best guess, who decided what charges will be brought against a criminal defendant?

- Judge
- Prosecutor
- Police

Compared to other democratic countries, do you believe that the U.S. has a greater, lesser, or about the same percentage of its citizens in jail or prison?

- Greater
- Lesser
- About the same

On which of the following social networking sites do you currently have a profile?

- MySpace
- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Other (please specify): _____
- None, I don't use social networking

Do you ever use social networking sites to:

	Yes	No	Don't know
Encourage other people to take action on a political or social issue arising from a criminal case that is important to you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Encourage other people to take action, through the Internet or otherwise, that directly targets the suspected perpetrator of a crime?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicate your thoughts or feelings directly to the suspected perpetrator of the crime?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicate your thoughts or feelings directly to a victim of a crime?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If there was a criminal defendant such as Casey Anthony or James Holmes that you believed to be guilty, and that allegedly committed a horrible crime that really upset you,

Would you wish that you take revenge?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Would you seek revenge if you could?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Would you seek revenge through the Internet if you could?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Would you wish to see that criminal defendant hurt or miserable?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Appendix 2 – Sample Demographics

	Respondents (%)
Race	
White	81
Black	6
Asian	6
Latino / Hispanic	4
Other	3
Sex	
Men	53
Women	47
Age	
18-24	25
25-29	24
30-39	26
40-49	12
50-59	10
Over 60	4
Education Level	
Some high school	1
High school degree	10
Some college	31
Four year college graduate	58
Party Affiliation	
Democrat	42
Republican	18
Independent	35
Other	6
Household Income	
Less than \$15,000	11
\$15,000 - \$29,999	20
\$30,000 - \$49,999	24
\$50,000 - \$74,999	25
More than \$75,000	20
Sample Size	1,074