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Twitter Users' Perception of Sexual Crime Towards South Korea Deepfake Crisis: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Amidst South Korea's striking gender divide, South Korean men have utilised deepfake technology to secretly generate unconsented pornographic content of women around them. These pornographic contents were distributed to others via Telegram chatrooms, which were later discovered and labeled as the infamous South Korea Deepfake Crisis. Due to the emergence of deepfake technology, sexual crimes have been digitalised into image-based sexual abuse. To explore and understand the perceptions of Twitter users in the context of South Korea's deepfake crisis, this study aims to identify any social support through interaction on Twitter by examining the applicability of Social Cognitive Theory. To achieve the research objective, content analysis was employed to collect data on Twitter, and purposive sampling was utilised to select comments about the South Korean Deepfake Crisis. After collecting 743 comments, thematic analysis was employed to identify 3 major themes: (1) Strength in unity, (2) Expression of gratitude, and (3) Shared anger over unreliable authority. This study revealed that many users expressed perceptions through acts of informational support, emotional support, and instrumental support alongside gratitude for these actions and displayed anger towards lenient punishment against perpetrators. Furthermore, this study suggests the applicability of Social Cognitive Theory in perception formation. This study also provides insights for South Korean authorities on users' perceptions, while prompting legislatures and policymakers to act and curb deepfake sexual crimes.

Keywords: *South Korea deepfake crisis, sexual crime, social support, deepfake, perception.*

INTRODUCTION

Background of Research

As an Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool with the ability to generate any content, Deepfakes are used to manipulate images and recordings. With its online accessibility, deepfake technology is utilised across various applications, ranging from harmless satire to malicious exploitation. This is illustrated by a case where Deepfakes have been used by many South Korean (SK) men to facilitate a new form of image-based sexual abuse (IBSA). Consequently, many women in South Korea, (henceforth referred to as SK) have found that their own faces were being used in artificially generated non-consensual pornography, which was later distributed to others via Telegram chatrooms. This issue soon turned into a crisis when the reported cases soared from 156 in 2021, to 297 as of July 2024, with school and university students being perpetrators' prime targets (Barr, 2024). Realising that the SK authorities would not take appropriate action without outside interference, SK women turned to "X", also known as Twitter, to inform the foreign public and law enforcers of this crisis. Concurrently, the rapid

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advancement of digital technology has enhanced the capacity of law enforcement agencies to maintain continuous surveillance and operational presence throughout criminal activities, including those occurring within virtual environments (Ghazi et al., 2024).

Twitter, a microblogging platform often used for sharing opinions and information, is known for its controversial discussions due to the nature of its platform. However, such an opinionated platform is also ideal for social activism. The Statista (2024) indicates that there are around 206 million monetizable daily active Twitter users from all over the world, with 10.45 million SK users and 106.23 million American users. This allowed Twitter to become a tool for social activists and victims to disclose issues that may have negative consequences if done so non-anonymously, or in their physical environment. Furthermore, Twitter is an internationalised platform with a generally younger audience who are more likely to be Democrats, leaning towards liberalism (Wojcik & Hughes, 2019). For a crisis that has underlying concerns of gender and its equality, a liberalists' view is more likely to support women and gender equality, rather than a conservative's (Sevincer et al., 2023).

Statement of Research Problem & Theoretical Framework

Sexual crimes have been, and still are, a prevalent issue that concurrently occurs within the realm of misogyny. At present, however, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding perceptions of deepfake sexual crime compared to other forms of sexual crimes (Bogren, Hussein & Lonn, 2023). To fill this research gap, the study aims to identify both existing and emerging perceptions predominantly derived from users' comments by implementing Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). To deepen the understanding of perceptions of deepfake sexual crimes, the researcher aims to identify any social support through interactions on Twitter.

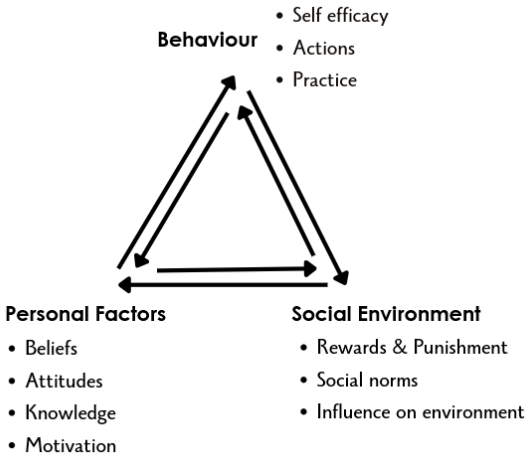


Figure 1: Diagram of Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory is implemented as a theoretical framework to guide this study. SCT, a theory best articulated by Albert Bandura, posits that people learn human behaviour from their social environment and through direct personal experience by observational learning, where individuals acquire information that is not directly taught, but observed (Bandura, 2001). He explained that with all three dynamics reciprocally interacting with one another, human behaviour is a product of interaction between personal factors and environmental influences, leading to behavioural patterns. This mutual interdependence is sometimes also known as "reciprocal determinism". These internal factors include self-

efficacy, motivation, beliefs and many more, while external influences include rewards, punishments, etc. (Foxall, 2023; Liu, 2025; Mujahidah & Yusdiana, 2023).

This study highlighted the effects of exposure to deepfake sexual crime content on users' perceptions in terms of social support. The SK Deepfake Crisis as a case study intertwines misogyny and cybercrime as a gender-targeted crime. Moreover, this study expanded the applicability of SCT in the context of perception expression through social support while calling attention to the current lack of rigid enforcement on nonconsensual deepfake pornography.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Deepfakes as Image-Based Sexual Abuse

Deepfakes are synthetic videos made using AI, starting in 2017 when a Reddit (a social media platform) moderator created a subreddit called "deepfakes" to post pornographic videos with face-swapping technology (Payne, 2024). Its synthetic media including audio, images and videos are all artificially generated by AI which can lead to several ethical issues and mislead audiences since Deepfakes are fake imagery. As a relatively new technology, Deepfake remains a growing area of research to be studied and scrutinised, especially its potential consequences of easy access from the public.

The advancement of AI technology has made deepfakes incredibly hyper-realistic and hard to identify as artificial content. Inherently, deepfakes are not abusive, but in malicious hands, deepfakes can be easily used to mislead and misinform to great degrees, especially to those unsuspecting and vulnerable. According to a behavioural experiment conducted by Kobis et al. (2021), there was only an average of 57.6% accuracy for differentiating deepfakes and authentic videos even though many of the participants were confident in their detection abilities. When put in the context of using deepfake for pornography, asides from ethical issues itself of using a real person in deepfakes, people's unreliable ability to tell from real and fake videos might implicate victims of sexual deepfake content. Especially when people tend to take videos at face value unless they find clear-cut evidence of the video being artificially generated or fake, this could further cement a person's perception of the victim used in the deepfake (Farid, 2019). Implications such as audiences believing that the person in the video had truly done such a thing could alter people's perception of the victim negatively.

Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) is a form of sexual crime whereby it is the non-consensual creation of sexual images that are distributed, and the victim can be threatened by the perpetrator (Powell et al., 2019). Powell et al. (2019) stated that IBSA, also sometimes referred to as "revenge pornography", is a rapidly developing cybercrime issue that targets both men and women at similar rates. They said that IBSA can occur in 5 different contexts; relationship retribution against a current or former intimate partner, sextortion where the perpetrator threatens to create or distribute intimate pictures of the victim, voyeurism for the perpetrator's own sexual gratification or social status building, sexploitation with the goal of monetary benefits, and sexual assault, where perpetrators record videos or take pictures of victims being sexually assaulted/raped and then distribute the content online. By treating women's faces and bodies as digital resources to be used by AI only reinforces the idea that women exist as sexual objects, whether it is for sick gratification or other inexcusable reasons (Nagel, 2020).

That is to say, creating and/or distributing deepfakes which portrays a person sexually without their consent is considered as an IBSA, therefore a sexual crime facilitated by easy access of modern-day technology. While not all deepfakes are used for sexual content creation, Nagel (2020) cites a study that found that 96% of deepfake images and videos are non-consensual porn of mainly female celebrities. Because of the anonymity the internet and social media provide, it is fairly easy for users to engage in IBSA by posting intimate pictures of people, whether using deepfakes or real images and videos, within a culture where women are objectified sexually (Nagel, 2020).

According to Equality Now (2023), there were no specific international laws that protect people from becoming victims of sexual deepfake content, though many organisations have been attempting to curb technology-facilitated gender-based violence. However, some countries have begun addressing the immoral usage of deepfake, most notably, SK.

Social Support and Motivation on Interaction

Generally, social support is defined as an exchange of resources intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient (Jackman et al., 2022). Twitter, although it was not originally designed for community development, has been innovatively utilized in a manner that supports communities and its members (Ezeilo et al., 2023; De Mello, Cheung & Inzlicht, 2024). Twitter users with a larger social network and use more positive language (less swearing) in particular, receive more social support such as emotional support, companionship, esteem support, and informational support (Mejova & Lu, 2022). By providing users with social support, such actions will foster positive norms within social groups and educate others about the importance of providing support to others, thus encouraging reciprocal support that enhances self-efficacy for both parties (Sidor & Dubin, 2025).

Oh and Syn (2015) explained that individuals are motivated to share information and social support by intrinsic (internal desires) and extrinsic (external rewards) motivations, either by internal rewards for self-ego or incentives given by the external community. Such incentives include deriving enjoyment from doing certain acts even without tangible compensation, self-efficacy of feeling productive or competent about distributing information to others, sharing a community interest with personal feelings involved, and even empathy to provide social or emotional support to another due to having similar information concerns (Oh & Syn, 2015). In the context of Twitter, these intrinsic and extrinsic motivations could be applied digitally, where users express their support to others via text, imagery, or emojis in comments.

Within a community that encourages positive social support, behavioural influence or imitation is bound to occur. A study by Chen and Xu (2021) found that social support and empathy is "contagious", whereby users who received social support in their post are more likely to post again and provide social support for others later on. They stated that empathy is proven to exist in text-based form, similarly to how empathy works in face-to-face communication. Such empathy stemming from social support can also improve intergroup relations, meaning the relations between individuals of different societies or social groups (Stephan & Finlay, 1999). In the context of this study, the different groups are Korean Twitter users and users from other countries who are united together to express their support regarding the SK Deepfake case.

The researcher has found few to no studies that view social support from SCT perspective. There is a lack of research on how providing social support may churn from a whirlpool of empathy and positive encouragement from various social groups who band together to support victims or a cause. Instead, most existing studies focused on the positive effects of receiving social support rather than how the act of providing social support is learnt.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed a qualitative method to explore perceptions of sexual crimes on Twitter with SK Deepfake Crisis as a case study to focus on. While employing purposeful sampling, this study conducted conventional content analysis to understand Twitter users' perception of sexual crime in the context of the case study. This would allow the researcher to quantify keywords or phrases with the aim to describe a phenomenon by allowing themes to flow from the data, rather than relying on preconceived themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). These keywords and themes, which are identified during and before the data analysis, will be used to explain the holistic phenomena that occurs within this study's context.

Twitter data has been leveraged by governmental institutions, companies, and other researchers to investigate sentiments and human behaviour on a macroscopic scale or within sub-populations (Brantner & Pfeffer, 2018). This study, therefore, explores the perceptions of deepfake sexual crimes by adopting SK Deepfake Crisis as a case study through analysing Twitter comments. The timeframe of the collected data on Twitter ranged from August 15, 2024 to November 15, 2024. This is because the SK Deepfake Crisis gained exponential attention from internet users and media outlets around August 27. As a result, posts about the case gained more engagement around this time period, allowing more data to be collected.

The sample size of around 700 comments involves Twitter users who engage with the case study as its target population and is guided by data saturation as recommended by Rahimi and Khatooni (2024). The sampling process is selecting sampled posts based on criteria, then filtering out irrelevant comments from sampled posts. The sample criterion is shown below:

1. Post and comments must have texts
2. Post and comments must be related to the SK Deepfake Crisis
3. Post and comments must be posted by real humans and not bots
4. Comments must be taken from posts selected

Once comments were selected, non-English comments were translated via Google Translate, Microsoft Excel's translation function, and DeepL to ensure better translation accuracy. The comments were then reviewed and analysed for its perceptions towards the case or people involved.

Inductive thematic analysis evolved by Clarke and Braun (2013) was then employed to work up from the data where themes are generated without guidelines. The researcher will first familiarise themselves with the data by reading through collected comments and conceptualize common perceptions of deepfake sexual crimes. Using early impressions from the familiarising step, the researcher will code and generate keywords that represent certain perceptions. The researcher will then search for the themes and manually review these themes. Then, the reviewed themes will be interpreted and labelled.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The utilised data were collected from users of varying cultural backgrounds and linguistic differences who display their opinions of SK Deepfake crisis and sexual crimes on Twitter. A total of 743 comments were selected, meeting the data saturation point featuring 3 major themes.

Table 1: Identified social support through interactions on Twitter

Theme	Subtheme
Strength in Unity	1. Provide Information Support
	2. Provide Emotional Support
	3. Provide Instrumental Support
Expression of Gratitude	N/A
Shared Anger over Unreliable Authority	1. Injustice Against Women Perpetuated by Patriarchal Authorities
	2. Demand of Harsher Penalties for Perpetrators

Theme 1: Strength in Unity

a. Provide Informational Support

By providing three forms of social support for victims or SK women, users suggested an overall negative perception of the sexual crimes being committed against victims. The first social support expressed was informational support, where users had provided advice, guidance, or facts on how to avoid deepfake victimisation and informed international organisations of the crisis. Some users such as thedeltakpopper and stuffypenggu, said that men were mass reporting posts that talk about SK Deepfake crisis. Additionally, other users would provide additional information to the original post through commenting to add more context for better understanding, or by providing translations of leaked conversations in the Telegram chatrooms:

> Women with male siblings, be careful (I don't know if being careful will help...) They commit sexual crimes while you're asleep after giving you sleeping pills. When you shower, always close the door. There are a lot of guys who take videos through the crack in the door and send them... (Rekha_jaatni)

> An English translation of what Korean men said: "Honestly, whether the people on the victim list are normal or not, as long as they don't stand out to us(for the crime), it doesn't matter." "Women are always complaining, asking for human rights and to be treated with dignity. (KoreanmenNow)

Many users had also commented to spread awareness by getting international media organisations' attention, which also fall under informational support. Users do so by using "@" to mention the media organisation so that the organisation will be notified of the comment and original posts. Users have mentioned international media organisations such as @BBC, @SkyNews, @AlJazeerah, @CNN and @ChannelNewsAsia. For example:

> Hello @BBCNews, please investigate and report on what's happening in Korea currently, a second "nth room" was found, you can find information about it on twitter and a tiny bit of information by a few Korean media under the search "능욕방" on naver [A social media platform] !!!!! (jim1nspinky)

> @AJENews @BBCWorld @rnz_news @radionz @1NewsNZ @BBCNews @BBCNews @BBCNewsAsia @BBCNewsAus Please investigate and report on Korea's Deepfake crisis. A second "nth room" has been found. You can find a lot of information about it on twitter, as above, but only a bit of coverage (wolfstarblade)

b. Provide Emotional Support

Users had used words like "fighting!" to encourage SK women to stay strong as a form of encouragement, and "girls help girls" to express social inclusion by implicating that other female users would always support fellow women.

> …It's enraging and painful to see what is in Korea right now. It doesn't mean much but I send you all my love and support from south America (vro_ha)

> Women of the world need to stand up, to support Korean women! That's serious! (4M75dCjF7e93642)

> …The international spotlight is really the only reason there are some actions on this crisis. Please support these women. Their posts are being banned and hidden. Please continue to pressure if you can. (ask_aubry)

c. Provide Instrumental Support

Twitter users had predominantly expressed instrumental support through the usage of hashtags. Many users commented on the same hashtags such as #Expose_the_Deepfake_Perpetrators and #Protect_WomenAndGirls. A user, vaelza3, said that they have been attempting to make these tags trending to support SK women by spreading awareness of the issue to bring perpetrators to justice. Some comments also include call to action while making use of tags. Other users instead expressed their desire to boycott SK itself:

> ok but aside from rt [retweeting] and spreading the words how can we help? should we start boycotting k products? if the economy is at an all time low will the government listen and act asap? (jin0432yoon)

> 200k korean men are part of these chatrooms! we want them exposed and held accountable for their actions! this is deranged behaviour! #Protect_WomenAndGirls#South_Korea_expel_criminals#Expose_the_Deepfake_Perpetrators#Digital_Sex_Crimes_In_Schools (graciousjin)

> We need to pay attention and speak out against this kind of society. The Hallyu (Korean Wave) culture was born in such an environment, and international fans are consuming it. It's time to question Korean society and start boycotting it… (sikpangslice)

Theme 2: Expression of Gratitude

In response to the social support many users on Twitter demonstrated, other users who are assumed to be SK women or victims, expressed gratitude for "standing with SK women". The phrase "thank you" was used most often, where users displayed appreciation for spreading awareness and providing informational, emotional and instrumental support. For example:

> Thank you for standing in solidarity with Korean women. (Jnkluvrrr)

> Thank you for mentioning it! South Korea's justice system punishes sex crimes very lightly and does not punish minors at all. This immature system has ultimately created this problem. More attention needs to be paid to punishing the perpetrators. (Lailliiia)

> Thank you Irfan [username of original poster] for spreading this issue. Frightening 😱 (n_z_a_r_d)

Theme 3: Shared Anger over Unreliable Authority

a. Injustice Against Women Perpetuated by Patriarchal Authorities

Many users expressed anger when commenting that SK men felt they were allowed to commit sexual crimes against women due to SK's existing patriarchal systems downplaying the severity of IBSA. They said that the misogyny perpetuated by a patriarchal system has led many SK men to believe they have power over women. Users implemented exclamation marks, typed in all capital letters, and used profanities to manifest anger.

> Hate crimes against women and girls have risen exponentially with the rise of fascism and religiosity. This is not coincidence. As men feel like women are gaining power, they act out against them in brutal and sexually denigrating ways. Disgusting! (edposttalk)

> This is disgusting, Korean women need to get out of that country. The laws against SA crimes are useless, and feminists are treated horribly even by the government. How rotten can the male population in South Korea be for people to wake up and do something about this?? (angmar613)

> Either this patriarchy of yours or your stinking head structure gets in your * [insulting the SK government]. God bless women (sloppycrone)

b. Demand of Harsher Penalty for Perpetrators

Aside from demanding the perpetrators to be exposed and held accountable, many users had demanded harsher punishments, including the death penalty. Users like rickys_rose_ and hyyyyhyyy said that the SK government was too lenient on their perpetrators, or that some perpetrators were not punished at all, which could

encourage more criminal behaviour. They also said the flawed judicial system of SK does not punish minors, which is frustrating when many of the perpetrators are minors. More examples include:

> It's a pattern that is always repeated in our society [SK]. Crimes are because of the victims. Perpetrators are given lenient understanding and punishment is too small. (Duckwhan)

> Sad to see women suffer while politicians men do nothing. If they won't act, maybe putting their faces in the same deplorable situations would force them to criminalize these acts within a week or less. (liyin245749)

> The craziest part is, S. Korea never does anything nor gives Justice to woman. Their judicial system sucks.. I mean look at seungri [a popular SK singer convicted of sexual bribery etc] and so many more… (sam1343400)

Theme 1: Strength in Unity

a. Provide Informational Support

By providing three forms of social support for victims or SK women, users suggested an overall negative perception of the sexual crimes being committed against victims. The first social support expressed by users is informational support. Users had provided additional information to the original post for other users' understanding, such as how deepfake crimes are committed and what can be done to avoid victimisation. When a user had provided an explanation on how to avoid deepfake victimisation, worry was also expressed within the same comment, suggesting that worry may have motivated the user to provide informational support at some degree. This interpretation aligns with Hamzah et al. (2025) and Khan et al. (2023) who explained that individuals are motivated to share information by intrinsic or extrinsic motivations, either by internal rewards for self-ego or incentives given by the external community. These incentives include self-efficacy of feeling productive or competent about distributing information to others, due to having similar information concerns (Hamzah et al., 2025). These findings validate SCT's principle of how environmental rewards and punishments influence user's behaviour to provide informational support, which is further intensified by personal factors such as feelings of empathy or the personal obligation to share information.

Another expression of informational support involves users directly employing the "@" symbol to notify and inform international news organisations of the SK Deepfake Crisis. While this method can also be considered as instrumental support, some users had included additional information and prompted action in the same comment that mentions international organisations. Though the researcher has found no past research about users actively using social media to obtain media's attention, there were existing research that found that journalists began to rely on social media platforms to gather information and report news (Baftiu & Dodds, 2023). These findings also correlate with prior research, which emphasised on Twitter's importance of how a larger number of followers influences how much views the post receives (Xue et al., 2025). Users in this research can be assumed to have acknowledged that if international media organisations post about SK Deepfake Crisis, the case will be expected to receive more attention.

b. Provide Emotional Support

Users had used words like "fighting!" and "girls help girls" to express social inclusion by implicating that other users would always support fellow women, acting as an extension of emotional support. This display of compassion and empathy towards SK women and victims align with past studies, which reveal that positive sentiment in conversations about sexual violence reflects users' wishes of hope and support for victims (Jatiningsih & Siahaan, 2024).

These results can also be understood through the lens of SCT. In this study's context, the environment is a Twitter sub-community created by users' similar interests and sentiments towards the SK Deepfake Crisis. Within a community where many expressed positive social support, repeated exposure or receiving expressions of emotional support can influence users to behave similarly, thus generating a circle of positivity within the community when many users do the same. This is validated by Chen and Xu (2021), who found that social support and empathy is "contagious", whereby users who received social support themselves are likely to provide social support for others later on. However, it is not necessary that users in this study who expressed emotional support received social support themselves before commenting. Instead, modelling of similar behaviour or personal empathy might have been the motivating factor that pushed users to express emotional support.

c. Provide Instrumental Support

Twitter users had predominantly expressed instrumental support through the usage of hashtags. The content that comes with the hashtags promoting advocacy and action by using words like "expose" and "protect" as participating in an online social movement regarding the SK Deepfake Crisis. This substantiates past studies by Estrella-Ramón et al. (2026) and Wang and Zhou (2021) who found that the collective usage of hashtags can impact activism and social movements on Twitter as much as how collective action would impact activism and social movements in the material world.

Many users commented on the same hashtags such as #Expose_the_Deepfake_Perpetrators and #Protect_WomenAndGirls. Users suggested collectively posting these hashtags, which demonstrates their stance on supporting SK women and victims through tangible activism, specifically by amplifying the movement's visibility on Twitter. This finding is consistent with past research that found that the usage of hashtags is significant in raising awareness of social events and eliciting engagement by classifying information and improving searchability (Choo et al., 2022; Ta'amneh & Ghazo, 2021).

The same hashtags were repeatedly used to suggest a collective solidarity with SK women and victims. While no users explicitly stated why they adopted the usage of hashtags to express instrumental support, the widespread and consistent use of the same hashtags suggests a normative online behaviour, while possibly improving the perceived efficacy of users' actions. By incorporating SCT, utilisation of hashtags to advocate is by observing the successful impact hashtags had on other social movements like MeToo. When users learnt to use hashtags for advocacy, it is a means of taking action that can impact the "environment" by making the hashtags trending. This interpretation supports a past study focusing on Instagram, another social media platform, where users used hashtags as a form of "etiquette", implicating that behaviour of users is shaped by what is observed (Erz et al., 2018).

Furthermore, some users had mentioned boycotting SK and its products to force the SK government to take action against perpetrators of the SK Deepfake Crisis. This finding substantiates Makarem and Jae (2016), who found that human rights issues constitute the leading cause of boycotts on Twitter, and that consumer boycott behaviour is more commonly motivated by instrumental motives. In this context, human rights issues would refer to perpetrators committing sexual crimes against victims, which is considered a human right violation, and the instrumental motives are the desire for the SK government to take appropriate action regarding the SK Deepfake Crisis.

Theme 2: Expression of Gratitude

In response to the social support many users on Twitter demonstrated, other users who are assumed to be SK women or victims, expressed gratitude by using words like "thank you". This finding validates past studies which highlighted Twitter as a platform for expressing gratitude towards individuals who offered social support (Esener et al., 2023; Hitl et al., 2025). Through SCT's perspective, gratitude may be viewed as a reward user gain for performing acts of social support, while simultaneously increasing users' sense of self-efficacy and self-worthiness by being recognised for their contributions. This interpretation is consistent with earlier studies that found that receiving gratitude can improve self-efficacy and psychological well-being (Buenconsejo et al., 2024; Cousin et al., 2020; Sidor & Dubin, 2025). An improvement on self-efficacy can also lead to increased persistence and effort, resulting in repeating the same or similar behaviour, that is, providing social support.

Furthermore, SCT's observational learning posits that by observing interactions between Twitter users expressing gratitude, the observing user would adopt similar behaviours, and their contributions would add to existing expressed gratitude on the platform. This interpretation supports Sciara et al. (2021)'s study, whose findings suggest that observing the exchange of grateful posts and comments enhances participants' in-person expression of gratitude, even if it is not accurate to their actual feelings.

Theme 3: Shared Anger over Unreliable Authority

a. Injustice Against Women Perpetuated by Patriarchal Authorities

Many users implemented exclamation marks, commented in all capital letters, and used profanities to manifest anger when commenting about SK's patriarchally influenced justice system that facilitated the abuse of women. A user suggested that fascism and religiosity play a role in reinforcing patriarchal attitudes. These findings align with (Kim, 2024), who stated that patriarchal values continue to shape a social rife with gender conflicts and misogyny, impeding the advancement of social justice. Another user commented that laws against sexual assault crimes in SK were useless, validating Park (2025)'s finding on how the SK judicial system often questions victims' credibility, turning rape trials into false accusation trials, further exacerbating structural imbalance.

Some of these users who spoke about SK's unreliable authority mentioned they were SK or living in SK. Their comments expressed negative sentiments, specifically anger, contradicting past studies that asserted that being raised in an environment promoting patriarchy will make an individual more accepting of it or internalise sexist attitudes (Rached et al., 2021). This result also challenges SCT's perspective on how ideology and behaviour is learnt from the environment.

However, the nuances of what constitutes the environmental influences users are exposed to must be understood. While Twitter is not the most dominant social media platform in SK, WorldPopulationReview estimates 11.3 million users from SK in 2024, and 80% of SK between ages 25 and 35 stated they used Twitter (Statista, 2025). Users who consume Twitter content often are exposed to culturally different attitudes that do not support patriarchy, especially since many Twitter users lean towards liberalism, which supports women and gender equality (Wojcik & Hughes, 2019; Sevincer et al., 2023). That is to say, SK users' perceptions of patriarchy may have been altered through exposure to other ideologies seen on Twitter or any social media platform, a separate environment from a physical community. The interplay between two distinct environments with opposing ideologies and SK users' personal factors yields a unique outcome that is shaped by the ideology the user chooses to align with.

b. Demand of Harsher Penalty for Perpetrators

Users expressed anger and frustration at the injustice of victims and SK women face while demanding harsher penalties for perpetrators and laws to curb IBSA. This finding validates Jatiningsih and Siahaan (2024) who found similar results of users demanding harsher punishments for other sexual crime cases, and Shi (2022) who found that negative emotions are more likely to favour excessive punishments. Many said the SK government was too lenient with punishments, specifically with minors, who equated to the majority of the prosecuted perpetrators. This aligns with an article stating that offenders younger than 14 are sent to youth detention centres and not subjected to criminal law, while legal minors 14 and up are punished by criminal law but with different standards to adults (Yoon, 2022).

Based on SCT, users exposed to communities with strong social norms against sexual crimes may have less tolerance towards sexual crimes and its perpetrators, as opposed to communities which objectify women and tolerate sexual crimes. These attitudes and beliefs, are further cemented when users can observe others' negative attitudes towards sexual crimes, whether on Twitter or in their own physical society. This supports a study by Santoniccolo et al. (2023) who found that societies that objectify women were more likely to minimise the seriousness of sexual crimes, while societies that promote gender equality showed less tolerance for sexual crimes.

Theoretical, Methodological and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study integrates SCT as a framework to guide interpretations of data while validating and expanding its applicability in terms of social support. This study goes in depth on how the three aspects of SCT: environmental, observational learning, and personal beliefs, apply in the context of Twitter users and their perceptions of the SK Deepfake Crisis. Additionally, this study contributes to the body of research on of digitalised non-violent sexual crimes by utilising the SK Deepfake Crisis, a case study rarely found in existing literature as of the time the researcher conducted this study. This study also contributes to the limited pool of present studies that analyses perceptions through individuals' expression of social support.

As the research had found majority of past literature on similar topics to use quantitative methods such as surveys, this study contributes to existing knowledge on perceptions of sexual crime by employing content analysis for its data collection and thematic analysis for its data analysis. This study also analyses users' perceptions of sexual crime using Twitter's comment section, offering a fresh perspective from multilingual and multicultural interactions unaffected by researcher intervention. Compared to other methodologies like

questionnaires or structured interviews, data from comments reflects a more natural or "real" expressions of perceptions.

This study helps understand how social media platforms, particularly Twitter, can be used to provide and receive social support regardless of geographical boundaries. This can inform or guide non-governmental organisations (NGOs), activists and campaigners that Twitter can act as an effective platform for campaigns and social movements.

For bodies of authority, results from this study indicate that many users perceived SK authority's actions against perpetrators as highly insufficient. This study offers practical insights to SK court authorities on how the public views the punishment of perpetrators, and appropriately adjust the severity of sentencing for future cases. The overall negative sentiment towards SK authorities from an internationalised platform informs sociologists that inadequate punishment can lead to the public criticism and boycott threats of an entire nation. Legislatures across the globe are also prompted to draft laws that criminalise and prevent the creation and distribution of unconsented sexual deepfake content. Lastly, this study highlighted deepfake sexual crimes as perceived to be facilitated by misogynistic and patriarchal attitudes. This underscores the need to encourage a shift in cultural narratives where these perspectives are still prevalent.

Limitations

Although past study by Egele et al. (2025) found that SCT is valid in explaining physical activity behaviour, is does not include online behaviour. This calls into question the validity of the theory in this study's context, especially when SCT is considerably general, lacking precision, and can be excessively flexible.

Due to the nature of content analysis, most of the comments collected in this study are in the form of short responses, limiting detailed explanations, which López-Mas et al. (2022) said could also lead to misinterpretation or oversimplification. As a result, the data restricts this study from diving deeply into how deepfake sexual crimes in particular differentiate from users' perceptions of other forms of sexual crime. Utilising content analysis would also fail to reflect perceptions of users who communicate less frequently on Twitter, possibly creating a biased sample of users who are more verbally active. Aside from that, the scope of study is limited to Twitter users and does not account for the perceptions of other social media users.

Moreover, some comments collected were in a language the researcher is not fluent in, although different translation websites were used to ensure accuracy. Even so, translated content might still be unable to replicate the original messages and their sentiment, especially when dealing with nuanced language or cultural context (Almarzoqi & Alsuhaibani, 2025). Lastly, this study's interpretations are subjected to personal bias, as there was no intercoder to conduct the analysis alongside the researcher, failing to establish intercoder reliability and code consistency.

CONCLUSION

This study explored Twitter users' perceptions of deepfake sexual crimes by identifying three types of social support under the context of the South Korea (SK) Deepfake Crisis. Using Social Cognitive Theory to guide this study, results indicate that users chose to demonstrate support towards victims or SK women by providing informational support, emotional support, and instrumental support. Other users instead expressed anger towards SK government's leniency in terms of punishments towards perpetrators. In response to perceived social support, some users conveyed gratitude. Additionally, this study seeks to alert policymakers, sociologists, and the broader academic community of the perceived severity and impacts of deepfake sexual crimes. It highlights deepfake sexual crimes as an emerging form of image-based sexual abuse perpetuated by misogynistic cultural norms, while expanding the applicability of Social Cognitive Theory in the manifestation of social support behaviour.

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