

# Crimentertainment: the logic behind entertainmentization of crime

Trash streaming, entertainmentization of crime, *algorithmic* environment, social media architecture, crime culture

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**How to cite:** Cyrek, Barbara & Maciej Śledź. 2025. "Crimentertainment: the logic behind entertainmentization of crime". *WiderScreen* 28 (1–2). <https://widerscreen.fi/numerot/1-2-2025-widerscreen-28-numerot/crimentertainment-the-logic-behind-entertainmentization-of-crime/>

*This article aims to characterize the phenomenon of crimentertainment: committing crime for audience entertainment on social media, which is gaining popularity in modern media ecosystems. Crimentertainment is defined within the theoretical concept of crime culture. To explain the studied issue, the article draws from the theoretical background of psychology. Two psychological effects are provided for explanation: the forbidden fruit effect (something attracts only because it is forbidden) and the online disinhibition effect (the feeling of anonymity and the "virtuality of actions" on the Internet promotes disinhibition). Besides psychological causes, the article refers to concepts developed in media studies: the democratization of social media (less top-down control attracts audiences) and the attention economy (algorithms do not distinguish whether someone is watching content to praise or condemn it).*

*The analysis also includes two case studies of Polish streamers, whose controversial broadcasts illustrate how crimentertainment works in practice.*

*The article discusses the consequences of crimentertainment, both those already known from history (e.g., killing on the screen in exchange for donations) and those possible in the long-term perspective, including social desensitization and decline in the importance of authorities. Possible ways to counteract the phenomenon are also discussed, with emphasis on media literacy and education.*

## Introduction

*The content of entertainment is limitless.*

~ Stephen Bates & Anthony J. Ferri

“Entertainment should work for health of mind and body, not against it. This is, of course, obvious, but is often forgotten,” stated C. H. Denyer (1914, 135) at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, over a hundred years later, this claim still raises questions about the reciprocal relationship between society and entertainment – particularly how societal values shape entertainment content, and how, in turn, entertainment influences social norms and behaviors (Sayre & King 2010), often in a global dimension.

Although Knapp (2013) argues that mass entertainment did not emerge with the advent of mass media, researchers (e.g. Carpentier 2011; Livingstone 2003) agree that modern media ecosystems enable the engagement of recipients, who are no longer merely audiences (readers, viewers, listeners) but users, able to intervene in the media landscape itself. Therefore, users may appear to have some control over the media content, especially in social media environments. However, this apparent bottom-up participation is often embedded within the structures of digital capitalism, where user engagement simultaneously feeds algorithmic systems and generates profit for platforms. As such, the shaping of media may align more with platform logic than with user intention – even when it comes to controversial or eccentric forms of entertainment. The less top-down control over the content, the more eccentric tastes can be satisfied, including those who find entertainment in witnessing illegal activities.

Following the approach that entertainment could be anything that an individual finds entertaining (McKee et al. 2014; Zillmann & Vorderer 2000) and synthesizing the research to date, this article introduces the term “crimentertainment” to describe the phenomenon of committing crime to entertain the audience. The article provides a comprehensive description of the entertainmentization of crime commitment, with its causes and possible consequences.

To guide this analysis, the article addresses the following research questions:

1. How can crimentertainment be defined and distinguished from related phenomena such as trash streaming?
2. What factors facilitate the phenomenon of crimentertainment on social media?
3. What are the possible consequences of crimentertainment, and how can the phenomenon be countered?

To illustrate and contextualize these questions, the article also examines two case studies of Polish streamers who committed crimes during their streams. These cases serve as concrete examples of how crimentertainment manifests in practice.

## **Literature review**

Research to date has focused on crime and entertainment particularly in the context of true crime content. True crime is defined as “a subset of crime-focused media that turns real cases into entertainment for the public’s consumption” (Slakoff et al. 2024, 303). [\[1\]](#) True crime fans form active communities across different media platforms, and the entertainment drawn from the descriptions of real crimes manifests not only through developing theories and possible solutions to cases, but also by dark tourism and dark fandom [\[2\]](#) (Steenberg & McFadden 2024). The audience of true crime podcasts is predominantly female and entertainment is a prominent motivation for them to consume texts of this genre (Boling & Hull 2018). It was indicated by Soto-Sanfiel & Montoya-Bermúdez (2023) that consumption of true crime content for entertainment is related to low-murder-rate cultural context of the media user, whereas audience from high-murder-rate culture consume true crime for learning and obtaining survival skills. Study by O’Mahony (2022) reveals that true crime podcasts, documentary series and social media content reinforce class-based stereotypes relating to victims and – due to their entertaining character – focus on the mythical elements of the calarke-wase. It was observed by Larke-Walsh (2022) that

within the true crime documentaries a new trend emerged: injustice narratives, focused on accused or convicted perpetrators of crime, which reinforces true crime as entertainment. The subgenre of true crime podcasts was proven to influence listeners' engagement with content (Graham & Stevenson 2022). It was also discussed whether true crime may promote critical debate about justice or does it only serve market targets (Larke-Walsh 2022; Menis 2022; Stoneman & Packer 2021).

Apart from true-crime, different crime-related genres have been described in the literature, such as murder mystery game reality show (Zhi et al. 2023), killer games (Anderson 2019), crime drama (e.g. Schubert 2018; Turnbull 2014) or justice show (Soulliere 2003). Literature also focuses on fictional violence, e.g. movies (Kim & Anderson 2024) or video games (Ivory & Ivory 2015) and board games (Anderson 2019). The research on fictional violence discusses how victims and perpetrators are presented, and what are the motivations behind consumption of such entertainment. Additionally, it was found that overall social media consumption is significantly related to the fear of crime (Intravia et al. 2017). These results are essential in the context of this article, because there are specific groups of audiences that seek live coverage of crimes on social media.

The conducted literature review suggests that the relationship between crime and entertainment is mostly researched in terms of true crime. There is a noticeable scarcity of publications addressing the act of committing crime for the audience's entertainment, indicating a significant gap in the existing research. Existing studies on performance crimes, such as *Formulating Performance Crimes* (Hall & Day 2024) or *Performance Crime and Justice* (Surette 2015), focus mainly on legal implications, media visibility, and offenders' motivations (e.g., fame-seeking, copycat behavior). However, they do not explore how crime is intentionally constructed and consumed as audience entertainment. This article aims to fill this gap, by introducing crimentertainment into the academic discussion.

## **Defining crimentertainment**

According to Bates & Ferri (2010, 15), "entertainment, defined in largely objective terms, entails communication via external stimuli, which reaches a generally passive audience and gives some portion of that audience pleasure". Crimentertainment can be defined using elements of the

definition of entertainment provided by Bates & Ferri: objectivity, communication, external stimulus, pleasure and (passive) audience.

Although entertainment can be perceived subjectively, crimentertainment exhibits a set of objective features characteristic of crime-based content. Crimentertainment refers to the phenomenon of committing crimes for audiences' entertainment that the perpetrator profits from. It does not refer to the phenomenon of cherishing witnessed crime due to audiences' sense of social justice being served by the perpetrator. It is about the entertainment of witnessing, whether affirmative or opposing.

Crimentertainment involves communication with audiences, who are entertained by the perpetrator. Perpetrators do not necessarily entertain themselves while committing crimes – they entertain audiences, who either gain pleasure by witnessing crime or by providing a moral judgment. The moral judgment of entertainment is a factor in the enjoyment of crime drama (Raney 2002). In terms of crime coverage posted online by perpetrators, moral judgment may be observed in the phenomenon of “negative audience” – those who engage with online content in order to criticize it (Jas 2020). Therefore, although undertaken to make a moral judgment, such actions boost the algorithmic visibility of the given content.

Bates & Ferri (2010) suggest that entertainment is the experience of spectatorship rather than participation. However, on social media, spectatorship is deeply rooted in market logic. One can not watch without boosting the algorithm. Each additional action, such as a comment (even a negative one) or a virtual reaction, increases the popularity of the given content or its creator. In the case of livestreaming, the audience is often active and encourages streamers to fulfill their demands. Perpetrators may earn money from the audience both directly (e.g. thanks to donations or paid subscriptions) and indirectly (due to the popularity of published content). Although social media platforms forbid publishing content with illegal activities, perpetrators often manage to avoid bans. Moreover, crimentertaining content often gets remixed and appears on other creators' channels (e.g. sigusiek 2023), becoming “the culture about crime” described further in the article.

## **Crimentertainment and trash streaming**

In 2018, a Polish streamer Rafonix livestreamed how he beat up an internet user who criticized him online (Obszarny 2019) and another streamer, Gural, encouraged children to undress in front of online cameras during the stream (rik 2018; Ośrodek Monitorowania Zachowań Rasistowskich i

Ksenofobicznych 2018). In 2020, during a live stream, a Russian YouTuber Stanislav Reshetnyak caused the death of his 28-year-old pregnant girlfriend. The entire incident, including the paramedics arriving at the scene, was livestreamed (Asarch 2021). In 2023 Polish influencer Szymool streamed the act of stealing priest's stole from the church in Toruń (Błaszkiwicz 2023). The list of similar examples could go on and on. What they have in common is that they create a phenomenon known as trash streaming. This phenomenon was comprehensively defined by Cyrek & Popiołek (2022, 451–452) as

*a form of live video streaming consisting in broadcasting trash-content, i.e. behavior that is hateful, inciting aggression (including self-aggression), violent (in the sense of violence against animals and people), and vulgar, socially unacceptable in the culture of the broadcaster, called here a trash streamer. The content is often broadcast under the influence of alcohol or intoxicants, whereas the streamed activities are located on the edge of the law or outside the law. From the technical side, the broadcasts are not specially prepared, so they give the impression of authenticity. Trash streaming is sustained by audience donations, which may include text messages. The content of these messages may regulate the behavior of trash streamers. As a phenomenon popularizing abuse and habituating violence, trash streaming has an anti-social character.*

Trash streaming fits perfectly into the trend of committing crime for entertainment that the perpetrator profits from – the phenomenon of crimentertainment. It is a dominant, though not the only, crimentertainining online genre. However, trash streaming does not exhaust the issue of crimentertainment, either in form or in content. With the evolution of social media, stories and reels documenting crime may also serve as entertaining material. Moreover, trash streaming refers to anti-social behavior, such as alcohol abuse, which is not an illegal behavior *per se*. Therefore, although trash streaming and crimentertainment overlap to a large extent, they are not identical.

## **What facilitates crimentertainment?**

### **Social media architecture**

As noted by Siedlanowski (2018) the tradition of watching the suffering of others is almost as old as human history. This long-standing interest in the pain of others can be interpreted through the

lens of a psychological mechanism that links spectatorship, affect[3], and pleasure. Building on Zillmann and Vorderer's thesis that entertainment often relies on emotional stimulation – including emotions that may be perceived as morally ambivalent – one may assume that even discomfort or fear can be experienced by individuals as pleasurable.

While the emergence and spread of social media did not cause the phenomenon of being entertained by witnessing antisocial behavior (Cyrek & Popiołek 2022), it would be a significant oversight to ignore the role of the mediatized social environment in the development of this phenomenon.

Due to their democratic character, social media allows any logged-in user to become a creator. Users have, to some extent, the power of agenda-setting, which means that they can present and discuss certain issues frequently and, as a consequence, make them be perceived as important to others (Coleman et al. 2008). This bottom-up control over the agenda is a postulate, as the real power is held by algorithms and those who own them (Kreft 2019). However, social media does allow for less strict content control, and less top-down control attracts audiences. Algorithmic supervision is far from perfect (e.g. Pitsilis et al. 2018; Simon et al. 2022). Crime coverage – whether livestreamed or remixed by other users – may not be blocked and can remain available even years after the crime was committed, as discussed earlier in this article. In academic literature, there is growing evidence that platforms deliberately tolerate—and in some cases even promote—content considered offensive (Gillespie 2018). Such material is often framed by platforms as the result of spontaneous user creativity—for example, uncontrolled live broadcasts—thereby allowing platform operators to shift responsibility for “clickable content” onto users, while continuing to profit from the viewership of controversial material (Caplan & Gillespie 2020). The freedom is attractive, but it can also arouse the desire to push boundaries and to test platform awareness.

The current unlimited access to entertaining content online makes the entertainment market more competitive. Because of social media, every user may enter this market as an entertainer. Thus, there is pressure to push the boundaries and provide a unique experience to the audience. For example Facebook, Weibo and TikTok are dealing with the trend of livestreaming suicide (Kaushik et al. 2023). The question behind the phenomenon of crimentertainment is whether social media pushes creators towards more extreme content or whether people who would commit crimes

anyway simply gain an audience for their actions, which then encourages them to commit more crimes to entertain the audience.

The concept of the attention economy also gives a possible explanation for the rising popularity of crimentertainment. The web expands the amount of information accessible to an individual, but it does not enhance their ability to process or absorb that information (Halavais 2009). Attention is a limited resource, associated with high opportunity cost: “the cost of a site visit is the opportunity cost of that attention which could be allocated elsewhere” (Boik et al 2016, 8). Attention economy fits the McQuail’s (2005) publicity model, which treats gaining attention as communication success. On social media attention is calculated through views, comments, shares and virtual reactions. According to the attention economy, money flows to attention (Goldhaber 1997), and thus, crimentertainers earn money from the attention they gain. Therefore, even the phenomenon of negative audience contributes to perpetrators’ popularity. Moreover, even researchers watching this type of content for scientific purposes contribute to the expanding of such content on social media. The architecture of social media is designed in such a way that withholding spectatorship seems to be the only effective way to counteract committing crimes for audience entertainment. However, as discussed below, restrictive rules may lead to an opposite effect.

## Psychological effects

There is no doubt that in-depth research of crimentertainment within the field of psychology could bring interesting and valuable results. As for the true crime, it is established that “people are drawn to these sensational stories by curiosity about the motivations of the criminals, concerns about justice and the legal system and the thrill of solving a real-life whodunnit” (Jared 2024). The phenomenon of crimentertainment could be explained drawing from the theoretical background of the forbidden fruit effect. This effect basically means that as something becomes prohibited, it becomes more desirable (Varava & Quick 2015). For example, warning labels may increase the desire to expose oneself to restricted media content (Bushman & Cantor 2003; Bijvank et al. 2009). As noted by Bushman & Stack (1996, 225):

*it seems that people are more attracted to media presentations when they are told that the presentations are prohibited for certain audiences, especially if they are a member of the audience to whom the restriction applies.*



The greater the importance of a freedom to an individual, the stronger their reactance when that freedom is threatened or taken away (Bushman & Stack 1996). Crime itself is a prohibited action and such content does not comply with social media platform rules. Therefore, it may be perceived as more attractive, accessible only on social media (in contrast to radio, press or TV with their top-down control) and consequently as a manifestation of freedom. As a result, audiences may be more willing to financially support crimentertainers, which may be recognized as support for freedom. The forbidden fruit effect may also influence how parents and researchers' recommendations not to watch are received.

Another interesting psychological effect that may facilitate crimentertainment is the online disinhibition effect: people may exhibit behavior online that seems much more uninhibited compared to their typical offline conduct (Suler 2005). Moreover, online disinhibition makes Internet users less concerned with the consequences of their actions (Wright et al. 2019). As noted by Suler (2005, 184):

*people may be rude, critical, angry, hateful, and threatening, or they visit places of perversion, crime, and violence – territory they would never explore in the “real” world. We may call this “toxic disinhibition.”*

Mediated communication may affect the audience, which would not choose to witness crimes offline – yet, spectating from the safe space and through the screen could push users towards more extreme content. In their methodological elaboration of trash streaming, Cyrek & Popiołek (2022) ask if the online disinhibition effect applies to remote participation in the livestreamed anti-social activities. This question applies to both perpetrators and their audiences, who often push streamers towards more extreme behavior, as it was in case of Stanislav Reshetnyak: he locked his girlfriend on a balcony during winter, which caused her hypothermia. The action was done upon a request written in an online donation (Stewart 2020). Trash streaming allows the audience to be active participants of the entertainment, however it is up to the streamers if they choose to follow the audience's demands.

## Research Methodology

To deepen the analysis presented in this article, we conducted a case study of selected internet creators. Both of these two selected cases are directly connected to the phenomenon of crimentertainment.

To analyze the material, we applied audiovisual content analysis (Neuendorf 2017), supplemented by elements of discourse analysis (Gee 2014) and netnography (Kozinets 2015). In addition to examining the content itself and the context in which it is embedded, we also incorporated user reactions—specifically those of viewers engaging with the content published by the featured creators.

The primary data sources were YouTube and archived recordings from Twitch.tv—platforms on which the analyzed creators shared their content. YouTube additionally provided access to the comments section, enabling us to conduct a netnographic analysis of audience interaction and reception. Another important data source consisted of news and media outlets, which we used to validate factual claims—an essential step given the nature of the content, which required verification through multiple independent sources.

In selecting the cases for analysis, we established four core criteria that each recording had to meet:

- Publicly available recordings (archival or remixed) – The primary condition was that the content had to be publicly accessible, either as original recordings, reuploads, or reaction/remix videos shared by other users.
- Elements of criminal behavior (unlawful acts) – Each case included actions that could be interpreted as violations of the law (i.e., criminal offenses) or behaviors that crossed social norms and occupied an ethical and legal gray area.
- Profit (economic, symbolic, or viral) for the creator – In all cases, the creators gained clear benefits from their actions, including audience reach, public recognition, financial gain, or a form of cult status within specific viewer communities.
- Audience reactions indicating entertainment value – A key criterion was how the content was received by viewers—through comments expressing amusement or engagement, financial support (e.g., donations), and co-creation of content such as memes, remixes, or reaction videos.

We selected two cases for analysis: Rafonix and Pajalock—both internet creators whose content exemplifies the key features of crimentertainment. In both instances, public recordings (archival or

remixed) were available, and their behavior included unlawful acts or borderline conduct, such as physical violence (Rafonix) or symbolic violence and public humiliation (Pajalock).

Another important element was how audiences engaged with the content—viewers actively participated in live broadcasts, responded with humorous or enthusiastic comments, created memes, and sent donations. Both of the analyzed creators also achieved measurable gains—whether through increased popularity, viral reach, symbolic recognition, or direct financial profit. These cases serve as representative examples of a social mechanism in which violence and controversy are not condemned but transformed into spectacle and entertainment, co-created by the audience.

## **Analysis of Selected Cases**

In the Polish online environment, the creators analyzed below are often referred to as “pathostreamers” – a term describing streamers whose main content revolves around controversial and transgressive materials. In the case of Rafonix, who initially gained recognition by publishing gameplay videos – mainly from the game Tibia – even his early content was marked by confrontational elements: he would insult other players or hunt them down, not to advance in the game, but for the sake of spectacle and viewer entertainment.

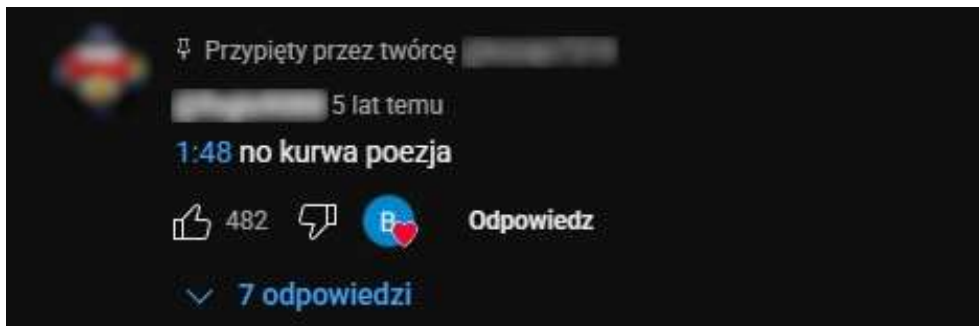
### **Rafonix – Physical Violence as a Live Show**

Rafonix, a streamer known for controversial content, in 2017 broadcast a live stream during which he searched for what he described as a “hater from Wykop” (a Polish online forum) to “deliver justice” for offensive comments that the user had posted under his videos. The entire event resembled a vigilante action streamed to a wide audience. The stream was accompanied by the creator’s running commentary, during which he used explicit language to describe what he intended to do to his hater. When the confrontation finally occurred—unexpected by the other party—Rafonix hit the man and began verbally abusing him.

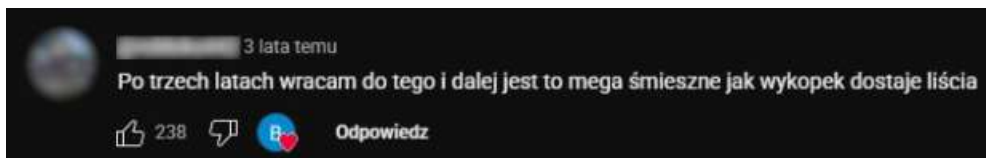
The stream met the key criteria of crimentertainment: the violence was real, it was broadcast in real time, and the audience not only watched passively but actively supported the creator. YouTube reacted with a delay—the video was taken down only after a few days, and the channel continued to operate for a considerable time without major consequences.

As for profit, the stream significantly boosted Rafonix's viewer count, especially thanks to the reuploaded versions of the video. Looking at his other similar actions, it becomes evident that his popularity heavily depends on publishing similarly controversial content across various channels. Each such incident resulted in a spike in views and increased reach.

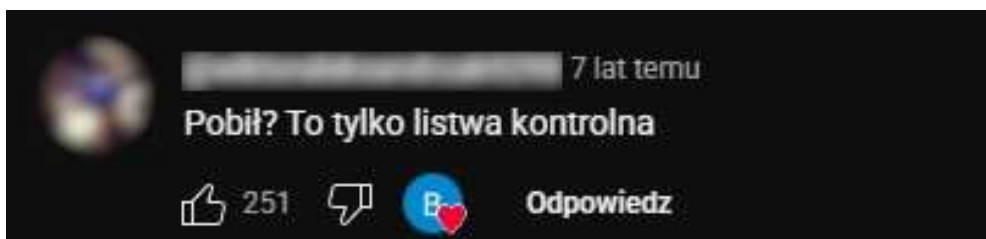
Analyzing viewer reactions, we can see they fully reflect the assumptions behind crimentertainment. All the comments presented below endorse the streamer's actions. Notably, many of them received numerous "likes," while few—if any—expressed disapproval or concern about deriving enjoyment from such violent content.



*Image 1. Comment from Rafonix's video reupload on YouTube (Bartosz 2.6.2018). Authors' own translation of the original text in Polish: 1:48 – fucking poetry.*



*Image 2. Comment from Rafonix's video reupload on YouTube (Bartosz 2.6.2018). Authors' own translation of the original text in Polish: Three years later and I still come back to this – it's still hilarious how that Wykop guy gets slapped.*



*Image 3. Comment from Rafonix's video reupload on YouTube (Bartosz 2.6.2018). Authors' own translation of the original text in Polish: Beaten? That was just a calibration slap.*

These comments not only glorify the streamer's behavior but also show a desire among viewers to revisit such content, in some cases even normalizing it. For example, one user stated that what the streamer did "wasn't assault, just a regular punch."

### **Pajalock – Obscenity, Symbolic Violence, and Testing Boundaries**

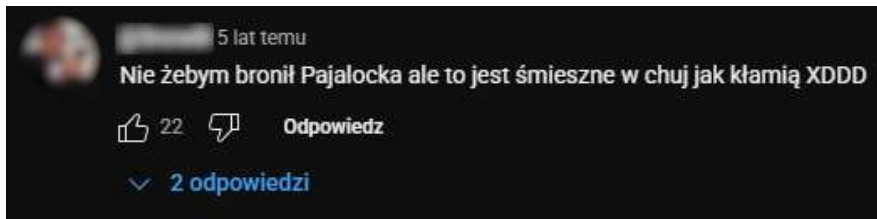
In the case of the creator known by the nickname Pajalock, we encounter a different communication strategy. Unlike Rafonix, whose content involved physical aggression, Pajalock's streams were more about testing the limits—both social and moral. One could argue that the streamer was experimenting to see how far he could go without facing any form of punishment or meaningful consequences.

Most of Pajalock's broadcasts included elements such as vulgar language, humiliation of invited guests (including minors), obscene gestures, and simulated acts of verbal and symbolic violence. Many of these behaviors took the form of public shaming and clearly violated platform community standards.

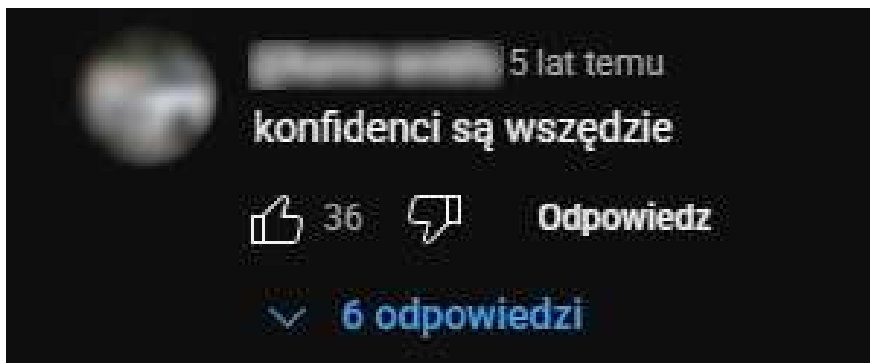
Pajalock's streams were explicitly embedded in the logic of crimentertainment. Although they didn't feature physical violence, they were highly aggressive, spectacular, and transgressive in nature. The audience not only tolerated but actively rewarded the streamer's controversial behavior—through donations, enthusiastic comments (e.g., "come back, angel," "he's playing under a ban"), as well as by creating and sharing memes and remixes.

By producing this type of content, the streamer achieved high viewership, especially peaking during the most controversial moments. Another significant factor boosting his reach was the response from other streamers, whose engagement further amplified Pajalock's visibility and popularity.

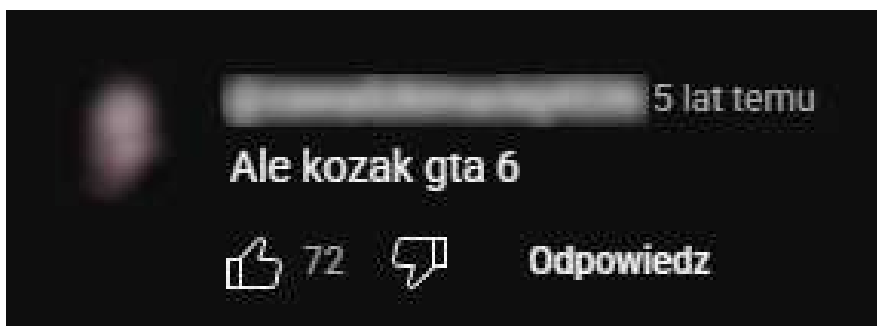
One of the most controversial videos featured a live stream in which the streamer nearly hit pedestrians on a crosswalk with his car. The stream caused a stir and clips from it were broadcast on Polish news channels. Unfortunately, we did not have access to the original footage, as the creator was banned following this legal violation and all his content was deleted. As a result, our analysis focused on viewer comments under reuploads of news reports covering the event. This also sheds an interesting light on the crimentertainment phenomenon described in this article.



*Image 4. Comment from Polsat News video reupload on YouTube (Wertpos 16.7.2019). Authors' own translation of the original text in Polish: Not that I'm defending Pajalock, but it's fucking hilarious when they lie XDDD.*



*Image 5. Comment from Polsat News video reupload on YouTube (Wertpos 16.7.2019). Authors' own translation of the original text in Polish: Snitches are everywhere.*



*Image 6. Comment from Polsat News video reupload on YouTube (Wertpos. 16.7.2019). Authors' own translation of the original text in Polish: What a badass GTA 6.*

We observed that, much like in Rafonix's case, viewers appeared to take pleasure in watching content that openly violated the law. Some even defended the streamer, comparing the incident humorously to the video game series Grand Theft Auto, in which players commonly engage in law-breaking behaviors.

## Possible consequences and solutions

The already known consequences of crimentertainment are dreadful: trash streamers, pushed by audience persuasion, have committed domestic violence and street assaults, abused alcohol and drugs, engaged in theft and even committed murder (Cyrek & Popiołek 2022). Crimentertainment poses a danger to the social media landscape not only due to its nature, but also because of long-term consequences it may bring. The accessibility of such content, often with no age restrictions, raises concerns about how it influences audiences, especially young viewers. The sense of freedom mixed with a sense of breaking the rules make this type of content desirable. In the long run, the popularization of this trend may contribute to an increase in crime (perpetrated for the sake of providing entertainment). In addition, criminals have the opportunity to become social media stars and earn money from their online activities. Because social media celebrities and live streamers are also influencers (Abidin 2018; Woodcock & Johnson 2021), the worst case scenario is that criminals may become opinion leaders, leading to a crimentertainment-driven authority crisis.

Content showing crime committed by perpetrators may circulate on social media even years after it was initially published, even if it violates platforms' policy. A possible reason could be that audiences do not report such content or that algorithmic supervision is insufficient or overloaded. In the long run, the growing popularity of crimentertainment on social media may train algorithms to tolerate such content. Unless media law is strictly enforced, platforms may be reluctant to block such content if it gains popularity and increases user activity, which translates into platforms' income.

As noted by Bates & Ferri (2010, 11) "the content of entertainment is limitless." One may be entertained by spectating everything, including crime. The question that arises during the spread of live crime coverage on social media is whether audiences realize what they are witnessing. Not only may the consequences described above be unclear to those who consume such content, but even the nature of the content consumed. The trust in media is decreasing worldwide (Shirikov 2021). The dissemination of deepfake technology makes audiences more skeptical about videos they watch: people may dismiss genuine footage as fake (Westerlund 2019). This may lead to a situation where the audience engages with the crimentertaining content, presuming it's a directed set-up or a deepfake.

There is no doubt that crimentertainment is a phenomenon that requires intervention. However, possible short-term solutions are not without flaws. Prohibition may cause the forbidden fruit effect and therefore make this type of content even more desirable. Strict censorship on social media platforms will certainly spark debates over freedom of speech, especially if algorithms make mistakes and block harmless content. As the social media architecture supports any type of popular content, cancelling seems to be an answer for the attention economy. Simple as it is, lack of audience will kill the procedure. However, this postulate seems naive, because there will always be people enjoying such content. Leaving them without supervision may lead to even more antisocial consequences. The presence of a negative audience may contribute to content being reported for removal or moderation, but the conflict here is tragic: engaging with the crimentertaining content, even for researching or reporting it, is boosting the viewers count and therefore increases the popularity of this content.

A better, long-term solution is education in media, law and ethics. Making current and future users aware of the importance and consequences of their online actions – even something as simple as a like or share – has the potential to increase users' responsibility for the content they publish and consume. To make this efficient, some requirements must be met.

1. Social sciences need to be up-to-date with the latest threats in the media. Researchers need to delve into and analyze niche phenomena that occur locally, before they become common practice. Therefore, editorial offices of scientific journals should be open to such topics, not just to what is currently a trend in social sciences. No research will bring any social benefit if it is not published.
2. Curricula must keep up with the latest knowledge. The media landscape is changing much faster than educational programs in schools and universities. Policymakers need to fast-track media education curricula or give teachers some flexibility in doing so.
3. The authority of teachers must be unwavering. If influencers are an authority for young people, they will convince youth of their arguments (what is profitable and image-beneficial for them). Therefore, the educational and cultural policy of the state should take care of building the authority of teachers, and teachers themselves should try to support their image as an authority, for example by not emphasizing their ignorance of social media.



## Conclusion

This article examined the phenomenon of crimentertainment—committing crimes for the entertainment of an audience. While it overlaps with practices such as trash streaming, crimentertainment is defined by its focus on unlawful acts rather than merely antisocial behavior. It is facilitated by social media architecture and economy, while psychological mechanisms such as forbidden fruit effect and online disinhibition increase its appeal.

The case studies of Rafonix and Pajalock demonstrate how the phenomenon works in practice. Rafonix used physical violence as spectacle and Pajalock used symbolic aggression. In both cases, unlawful acts became entertainment and profit as audiences engaged through donations, memes, and supportive comments. These examples show that crimentertainment can take many forms, as long as breaking rules draws attention.

The possible consequences of crimentertainment include turning criminals into social media influencers, fostering social desensitization and training algorithms into ignoring such content. Short-term solutions are not without flaws, but in long-term perspective media education offers great potential to counter the phenomenon.

Future studies could focus on motivations of crimentertainment audiences. Also, in case of livestreamed crime, it would be valuable to determine whether the audience is generally passive or actively participating. If the active participation is more common, then livestreamed crimentertainment redefines crime culture, which has generally involved a more passive audience. This issue, however, requires further investigation.

## References

All links verified 10.9.2025.

### Research material

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## Notes

[1] Examples of true crime content are numerous, but for the purpose of illustration, we can point to several sources from different areas of popular media. These include the documentary series *Making a Murderer*, available on Netflix; the classic true crime literary work *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote (1966); as well as more innovative formats that have gained significant followings, such as true crime podcasts like *Serial* (2014) and *Piąte: nie zabijaj* ("Fifth: Thou Shalt Not Kill") hosted by Polish podcaster Justyna Mazur.

[2] Dark tourism refers to the phenomenon of visiting places associated with tragedy, disasters, or murder (See: Stone 2006). The term dark fandom overlaps with dark tourism in certain ways, as it refers to communities fascinated by dark and controversial topics. This may include an interest in serial killers, antiheroes, or various other cultural taboos.

[3] In this specific context, affect is defined as a primary, often unconscious response of the individual. This definition follows from Siedlanowski's notion that the tradition of deriving pleasure from observing the suffering of others is a primordial phenomenon – almost as old as human history itself.

