

The Use of Facebook by Police:
RCMP Compared to Municipal Departments

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Abstract

This study examined how the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) can effectively use social media when compared to the municipal police departments in the province of British Columbia, Canada. Relevant literature on the police use of social media was reviewed examining the benefits, strategies, and potential risks. Quantitative data was collected from the Facebook pages of 12 RCMP detachments and 11 municipal departments. All posts from the month of January 2018 were analysed and categorized based on what the posts were about. Qualitative data was collected from literature to support conclusions drawn from the quantitative data. How the posts made on the Facebook pages can affect the public's view of the police were discussed. Recommendations on how the RCMP can tailor their current resources into their social media strategy to fit the specific needs of the individual communities they police were made. Recommendations for further studies were also made.

Keywords: police, social media, Facebook, public opinion,

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Background

Social media has become an integral part of our society. People use it to stay in contact with old friends and have social connections outside of work and school. People also use it to engage with celebrities and politicians. With the popularity and use of social media increasing almost exponentially over the past decade, government agencies quickly jumped on board, creating accounts that allowed them to engage with the public and allowing the public to engage back (van de Velde, Meiger, & Homburg, 2015, p. 4). Things that were previously available only through traditional media networks like the news, newspapers, magazines are now available on social media networks like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or Twitter.

It is no longer good enough for government agencies wanting to share information with the public to simply put in it the weekly paper or wait for the evening news. Social media has granted the public immediate access to almost any information by typing a few key words and a couple clicks of the computer mouse. For government agencies to keep up, their use of social media was necessary.

As more and more government agencies made information readily available on social media networks, police agencies had to join as well. Police agencies serve and protect the public, and in a way answer to the public, and have to constantly share information with the public. Schneider (2016a) quotes the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) National Executive Associates (2013) in his book *Policing and Social Media* saying, “the question is no longer whether the police will use SM [social media], it is just how quickly and how well we will do it!” (p. 63).

Many police agencies have started using social media networks as a way of communicating and engaging with the public. In 2011, the Toronto Police Service launched a

new social media strategy that saw not only the force itself have a social media account, but also the force's separate divisions, as well as individual officers. By November of 2011, 177 Toronto Police Service members had corporate accounts which allowed them to engage with the communities they were policing like never before (News Staff, 2011). Their social media strategy has constantly evolved since then, but at its core it maintains the same goal: "Prevent crime, improve relationships with the community, humanize law enforcement by demonstrating a genuine care and concern for public safety, and to provide further information about where direct complaints," (Carter, 2016). As a whole, police agencies are using social media networks to engage with the public more than ever before, and the use of social media will only continue to rise in the future, clear successful social media strategies are important for police agencies to adapt to ensure that their use of social media is having the maximum impact it can have.

Research Question and Rationale

There are currently three levels of policing in Canada: municipal, provincial and federal. Policing is a provincial responsibility. Municipalities of over 5000 people are required to provide their own police force, however, they can contract with the provincial police force to police their municipalities. The provinces are responsible to provide policing to municipalities of under 5000 people but can contract with the federal police force to provide provincial policing. The ability to contract with another police agency to provide the necessary police services has led to the RCMP fulfilling both provincial and municipal policing roles as well as their federal policing roles.

Unlike municipal departments that are responsible for policing one municipality, The RCMP is responsible for policing a wide variety of municipalities all throughout Canada. These can range from large cities with hundreds of thousands of people to small towns with less than

one thousand people. Where municipal departments can focus their social media strategies on the specific needs of the community they police, the RCMP must consider the needs of the wide variety of communities they police. This research project looked at how the RCMP can effectively use social media when compared to municipal departments in the province of British Columbia.

Of the thirteen municipal police departments in British Columbia all but one of them have social media accounts on Facebook. Their use of social media can be considered fairly simple when compared to the police force in Canada. Municipal departments are able to apply a social media policy that directly applies to their community. Because the RCMP polices communities all across their community their social media policy needs to afford individual detachments the ability to engage the specific community they are policing.

This research project looked at how the RCMP can effectively use social media at a community level when compared to municipal police departments. It examined how they are currently using social media, as well as what strategies they could adapt moving into the future. This research project did not critique or discredit any police force based on their social media use. It compared different social media strategies by different police forces around the world by analysing the current literature and addressed potential opportunities for change and development in the social media strategy of the RCMP.

Literature Review

Because social media is a new tool being used by police forces around the world, literature on the subject is recent and applicable to this research project. Literature I reviewed covered the benefits of the police using social media and how it can affect and improve their

relations with the public and the community they police. I also reviewed current strategies that are used by police departments around the world on social media and addressed some of the risks that arise when police use social media.

I used the Camosun College Library and the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) Library criminology and criminal justice databases to conduct my literature search. Articles that highlighted common themes that applied to this research project were reviewed to explore what the literature says about police and social media. Articles from all over the world were reviewed in order to not only see the North American perspective but also the international perspective of police using social media. Common themes were found throughout the literature. It is important to highlight that these themes were not geographically specific. Articles from Canada, the United States and Europe all shared common themes speaking of the benefits of police using social media, the different strategies used on social media by police, and the risks that arise from police using social media.

Benefits of Using Social Media

The first common theme found throughout most of the literature I reviewed is theme of the benefits that police using social media can have. When examining public opinion, communities tend to have a perception that the police department has greater community relations when they are on social media (Beshears, 2017), and the public also tends to have more trust in police agencies that engage the public on social media (Ruddell, & Jones, 2013). Social media also has the power to strengthen perceived police legitimacy (Grimmelikhuijsen, & Meijer, 2015) because the public views the police officers more as humans and members of the community rather than just police officers (Meijer, & Thaens, 2013).

This highlights a theme that when police departments use social media has a tool to engage the public three key things happen: the public sees and acknowledges the police departments efforts, the public trusts the police more, and they see the police as a more legitimate institution. In a time where the police need to be fostering good relationships with the public social media can be used as a beneficial tool in police and community relations (Harms, & Wade, 2017).

Strategies

The second theme identified the application of strategies that police agencies use on social media to ensure that their online presence is having the most impact it can have. Posts made by police agencies can be separated into three main categories. Push posts, pull posts and networking posts. Push posts are simply one-way communication posts where the police release any kind of information to the public but don't require the public to engage back in anyway. Pull posts actively ask the public to engage with either the police organization or among themselves. Networking posts aim to share informal information about the organization outside of the official policing capacity. These are the posts that show the human side of the organization (Yun, Qunfang, Xing, & Bort, 2017).

As part of the networking strategy, some police agencies allow individual officers to have personal account in an official capacity. This means that officers control accounts that are decentralized from the control of the agency as a whole. They may post about their shift, day-to-day activities and even activities they participate in off duty. There are of course guidelines provided by the agency to ensure protected information remains protected. While these decentralized accounts tend to outnumber the centralized departmental accounts within these agencies, the centralized accounts tend to share more formal information while the decentralized

accounts share information that fosters positive relationships among the public, focussing on the networking side of policing (Meijer, & Torenlyed, 2016).

Presentational strategies where officers are allowed to post on their official police accounts while off duty also shows the human side of the individual officers. Making posts about non-policing activities that take place in their everyday lives “delineates the individual officer from the organisation in an official capacity and diminishes the appearance of authoritarian relations” (Schneider, 2016b, p. 143).

What a post actually contains can actually increase the chances of it being shared. Social media posts rely on whether or not members of the public are following the police agencies page. However, if followers share the police agency’s posts on their own accounts, then it reaches out to more members of the public that do not follow the police agency’s page but follow someone who does. Posts with URL links, hashtags and pictures are more likely to be shared on other people’s walls and reach more members of the public (van de Velde, Meijer, & Homburg, 2015).

The strategies mentioned throughout the literature are not limited in the way where only one can be used at once. They are not strategies that a police agency would adopt to cover their overall use of social media. They are instead strategies that can be used all at the same time. Each individual post that police agencies make on their social media page can have certain aspects of each strategy. One post may be a “push” post like updating commuters about a car crash in the morning, the next may be a “pull” post asking the public to help locate a missing person or identify a suspect in a crime, and the next post may be a “networking” post showing police officers engaged in a community event.

Risks

The final theme found throughout the literature are the possible risks that come with the use of social media. Another thing that social media has allowed people to do is show much more of the private life than ever before. The same applies to law enforcement agencies and officers. Although one would like to think that an officer's personal life would have little to no impact on their professionalism on duty, but cases from around the world show the risks of officers having social media accounts, and how it has actually worked its way into court proceedings.

During the trial of Mr. Waters in the United States, the MySpace account of arresting officer Vaughan Ettienne was called upon as evidence during the proceedings. Mr. Waters was being charged with a felony possession of a 9-millimeter Beretta and a bagful of ammunition. He claimed that the arresting officers planted the gun to justify breaking three of his ribs during the arrest. Certain statuses that arresting officer Mr. Ettienne posted in the weeks leading up to the trial were used as evidence to question his professionalism. Mr. Ettienne made a comment about feeling "devious" just days before the trial started. Weeks prior to that, he posted as a status stating "watching 'Training Day' to brush up on proper police procedure" (Dwyer, 2009). The movie mentioned stars Denzel Washington as a detective and the movie glorifies police corruption and brutality. Those two comments were enough for the jury to question Mr. Ettienne's professionalism and Mr. Waters' felony charge was dismissed and he was only charged with a misdemeanor for resisting arrest.

Another case in New South Wales saw the trial of a man who assaulted off-duty officer Constable Robert Hogan. The defendant claimed that the incident happened while both were intoxicated. Posts on Constable Hogan's Facebook page about his drinking were brought into

court and portrayed him as an unprofessional heavy drinker (Munro, & Bibby, 2009). The defendant eventually pled guilty to a lesser charge but not before the personal life of Constable Hogan was put on display for all to see.

Another risk that is present is how officers or departments associate with other users on social media. In a case from New York, Mr. Johnson, the black defendant, was facing firearms charges. The defense linked the arresting officer, Sergeant Dustin Edwards, to a Facebook group titled “N.Y.P.D. officers who are threatened by superiors and forced to be victims themselves by the violence of the West Indian Day massacre” (Glaberson, 2011). The Facebook page essentially expresses concern and displeasure for officers who are assigned to work the West Indian Day Parade which often involves violence. Mr. Johnson was arrested in the parade area. Defense stated that because Sgt. Edwards was a member of this group where racist remarks were posted that the firearm Mr. Johnson was being charged over was in fact not his and was planted on him. The jury ultimately acquitted Mr. Johnson with Sgt. Edwards’ membership to this group being a major deciding factor in the case.

These three cases show a potential negative outcome from police officers having social media accounts where their personal and private life can be attributed to their professional careers. The social media platforms used by police encourage them to share aspects of their private lifestyles in the same way that it encourages regular citizens to do the same (Schneider, 2016b). Poor judgements made in their private lives can cast a shadow over the officer’s and potentially the agencies accountability and legitimacy (Goldsmith, 2015).

Another risk that presents itself through social media is not one that has arose because of social media but has received more attention than ever before because of social media. The subject of police brutality has been a controversial topic which media as fueled over the past

number of decades. Police use of force “rarely, if ever, photographs well” (Skolnick, & Fyfe, 1993). Major incidents of police brutality like the Rodney King incident that gained international headlines used to appear on the evening news and in the weekly newspaper. The critical element that allowed the Rodney King incident to gain the attention it did was the undisputable narrative that the video showed (Lawrence, 2000, p. 63). Now with the advancement in technology and the avenue that social media provides, the public now has the ability to record a video of any incident of police use of force, label it police brutality and post it on social media.

The strategies that can benefit police agencies on social media mentioned previously have also been used by the public in a negative way against the police. When the New York Police Department started a networking campaign on Twitter with the hashtag #myNYPD the public used it as a way of posting incidents of police use of force, titling it police brutality, and drawing attention to the issue of police brutality rather than the positive promotion that the NYPD was hoping for when the campaign first launched (Jackson, & Foucault Welles, 2015).

Summary

Although the literature shows a few isolated incidents of the negative affects that police use of social media can have, the benefits shown in the literature far outweigh the negatives. As the generation that grew up with social media starts to enter adulthood, police agencies need to engage them on social media. People between the ages of 18-60 tend to have a much more negative view of the police compared to those over the age of 60 (Jackson, & Foucault Welles, 2015). However, that age group of people is the age group that is most active on social media as the use of social media decreases as age increases (Ruddell, & Jones, 2013, Harms, & Wade, 2017). Yet the more law enforcement agencies disseminate information about crime the more trust the public has in the police (Harms, & Wade, 2017). While social media presents law

enforcement with a great opportunity to share and disseminate information, the general audience on social media appears to hold more negative views of the police. This gap may suggest that if police agencies use the proper strategies to engage more with the younger generations that lack trust in them the police can foster more positive relationships with the public.

Research Design and Methodology

Methodological Assumptions

Because the literature suggests that the use of social media by police agencies has the potential to foster a better relationship with them, build trust, and increase police legitimacy I examined how the police agencies in British Columbia, Canada are using Facebook. I examined the differences between the municipal departments and individual detachments of the RCMP. My assumption that led to this question was that because the RCMP is a federal police force, their use of social media within individual detachments would be different when compared to municipal departments. The RCMP delivers policing services to a wide range of community varying greatly in population numbers across the country. Municipal departments are responsible for providing policing services to one specific community and can tailor their social media presence to accommodate that specific community. The RCMP may face challenges to establish a social media presence suited to each individual community they police across the country. This led me to my research question of how the RCMP can effectively use social media when compared to municipal departments in the province of British Columbia.

Data Collection

For data collection I used a mixed methods approach. Qualitative data was collected by searching and analysing current literature on the use of social media by police agencies. Articles selected for this study discussed the strategies used on social media by police agencies and the

benefits of police using social media to engage with the public. Quantitative data was also collected by analysing 23 Facebook pages. 12 of the Facebook pages were RCMP detachment pages. 11 of the pages were the Facebook pages of the municipal departments in British Columbia. Data collected from these pages included the number of people who liked the page, the number of followers the page had, and all of the posts made during the month of January 2018.

The difference between “liking” a page and “following” a page is as follows:

When an individual likes your page on Facebook, they automatically opt into following your page. This means that your posts will be seen in their feed and you will be listed in their ‘liked’ directory. It’s important to know that users can unfollow your page after liking your page, which means won’t see your content very often. (Gravesandy, 2017).

All RCMP detachments that have their own individual Facebook pages were analysed. These included Coquitlam, Golden-Field, Kaslo, Kimberley, Langley, Nanaimo, North Vancouver, Port McNeil, Ridge Meadows, Smithers, Surrey, and Vanderhoof. Out of all the municipal police departments in British Columbia all but one of them have a Facebook page. The police departments of Abbotsford, Central Saanich, Delta, Nelson, New Westminster, Port Moody, Saanich, Vancouver, Victoria and West Vancouver all have Facebook pages. The police department from Oak Bay is the only municipal department that does not have a Facebook page. The Victoria Police Department also polices the township of Esquimalt and has a Facebook page specifically for that division so that Facebook page was analysed as an individual police department. I also obtained some of the social media policy from Sergeant Janelle Shoihet, a member of the RCMP in media and social media relations.

Overall, the data collected from 12 RCMP Facebook pages and 11 municipal police Facebook pages was analysed for qualitative data. Using the 2016 Census Profile released on February 8, 2017, the population of each municipality was also collected.

Data Analysis

All of the posts made during the month of January, 2018 on all of the Facebook pages were sorted into 8 categories: calls for assistance, community outreach, crime updates, missing persons updates, recruitment, reminders, traffic updates, and general updates. Calls for assistance were posts that asked the public to help identify a suspect or find a missing person, or any other type of posts that asked the public to assist the police in any capacity. Community outreach posts were networking posts that showed officers involved in the community outside of the official policing roles. This could include showing officers talking at a school or involved in a community event.

Crime update posts involved updating the public about crime in the municipality, a recent crime that occurred or a recent arrest of a suspect or suspects related to a crime. Missing persons updates were posts that updated the public on the whereabouts of a missing person, if they were found, or if they were found deceased. Traffic updates were specific posts about car accidents, road closures or whether conditions that would impact traffic.

Recruitment posts were about recruiting new officers, volunteers or civilian positions within the department. Reminder posts were general reminders about leaving your phone alone while driving, reminding the public to account for extra time in their commute for bad weather conditions, reminders to drive safely in the winter weather or other general reminders about safety. Update posts were general updates about things to do with the department, the community or other updates that didn't fit into any of the other update categories.

When analysing the posts under the classification of the push, pull and networking strategies previously outlined I classified crime updates, missing person updates, traffic updates, and general updates as push posts. Calls for assistance, recruitment and reminders were classified as pull posts because they all called upon the public to engage in some sort of activity. Whether or not the public actually engaged in that activity is irrelevant. The community outreach posts were classified as the networking posts as they were the posts that showed the human side of the police force.

For the analysis of the populations of the municipalities two of the RCMP detachments police two municipalities. The detachment of Golden-Field serves as the police detachment for both the town of Golden and the town of Field (RCMP, 2017a). The detachment of Ridge Meadows serves as the police detachment for both the municipality of Pitt Meadows and the municipality of Maple Ridge (RCMP, 2017b). For these RCMP detachments the populations of the two municipalities they police were added together.

After analysis, the data from the Facebook page for the North Vancouver RCMP detachment was excluded from the study. The North Vancouver RCMP did not start their Facebook page until January 12, 2018. I deemed that this was not sufficient data to properly compare that page with other RCMP pages and other municipal pages. Overall, the data collected from 11 RCMP Facebook pages and 11 municipal police department Facebook pages was included in this study.

Findings

Policy

In order to understand the framework that the RCMP Facebook pages were working under, my sponsor for this research project, a member of the RCMP, was able to share some of the RCMP's social media policy. The RCMP has a national social media policy, and each division or province has its own social media policy as well. Individual detachments also have the power to make their own social media policies as long as anything they add follows the national and provincial policies. The following information regarding policy is specifically related to detachments in British Columbia.

In the province of British Columbia, also known as E Division to the RCMP, there are four regions. Each region has a media relations officer as a supervisor for that region. Each detachment also has its own media relations officer. The media relations officer in each detachment is the one in charge of maintaining that detachment's social media accounts. Officers must go on a one-week media relations training course and then complete a mentorship usually under the regional media relations supervisor. When the role of media relations officer is left empty at a detachment either due to a change-over or a lack of resources the role is then filled by the regional supervisor.

Once a detachment has a media relations officer, and the decision has been made to make a social media account the officer is given a choice to start a Twitter account or Facebook account. It is usually recommended that detachments start off with a Twitter account as it is a little less labour intensive than Facebook accounts. If the decision is made to start a Facebook account, the media relations officer has to demonstrate what their long-term plan to continue the maintenance of that social media page is. Within that plan they have to demonstrate how they

will keep their Facebook page censored and ensure that it only contains appropriate content. Because other people are able to comment on Facebook posts more so than Twitter posts, the officer must demonstrate that they will be able to monitor those posts.

As for what is posted, it is entirely up to the media relations officer running that social media page what kind of content they post about. The only restrictions are those laid out in the national, provincial, and possibly local policies. When it comes to individual officers having social media accounts in an official policing capacity the RCMP does not allow officers to be identified as police officers on any personal social media accounts, nor does the RCMP provide individual officers with individual accounts.

Another policy that municipal departments do not have that the RCMP must abide by is the Official Languages Act. Because the RCMP is the federal police force, some of their posts may have to be shared in the two official languages of Canada: English and French. During the collection of data for this study, no posts were found in French on any of the RCMP detachment's Facebook pages.

Finally, the RCMP self monitors their Facebook pages. Each month the province runs statistics on what is working and what is not. The exact details of what working is and what not working is was not shared with me. However, the RCMP examines what posts are most successful and sharing the necessary information. Whatever is deemed to be working and not working is filtered down to the detachments. The detachments can then make decisions about what they want to change in their future posts based on the recommendations of the province.

Populations and Followers

To understand the differences between the communities that the municipal police departments police and the communities that the RCMP detachments police I first looked at the

difference in population between all of the communities analysed. The municipality with the lowest population policed by a municipal department was Nelson, policed by the Nelson Police Department with a population of 10,572 people. The municipality with the lowest population policed by the RCMP was Kaslo with a population of 968 people.

The municipality with the highest population policed by a municipal department was Vancouver, policed by the Vancouver Police Department, had a population of 631,486 people. The municipality with the highest population policed by the RCMP was Surrey with a population of 517,887 people. The average population of municipalities included in the study policed by municipal departments was 115,193, compared to the average population of municipalities included in the study policed by the RCMP which was 90,027. So, on average the municipal police departments with Facebook pages are responsible to provide police services to 25,166 more people when compared to the RCMP detachments with Facebook pages, making the RCMP detachments police only 78.1% of the people that municipal agencies would police on average.

The second thing I analysed was the outreach that each social media page had in relation to the number of people that police detachment or department policed so, I looked at the number of people who liked the page as well as what percent of the population liked and followed the pages. Just because a person had liked the Facebook page does not mean that they live in that municipality, so it can be assumed that the number of likes a page has does not directly reflect the exact percentage of the population of that municipality. Therefore, when it is said that a percentage of the population likes the page it means what percentage of the population the number of people that like the page reflect.

On average the RCMP Facebook pages had 2,182.91 people like their page. The most liked page was Surrey with 9,085 people liking their page. The least liked page was Smithers with only 302 people liking their page. For municipal departments, the average number of people that liked their page was 6,806.18. Vancouver had the most people who liked their page with 25,960 people. The least liked page for municipal departments was Central Saanich with only 963 people liking their page.

On average, 2.42% of the population policed by RCMP detachments liked their page. The most liked page by percentage of the population was Kaslo with 34.71% of the population having liked their page. The least liked page by percentage of the population was Langley with only 1.05% of the population having liked their page. Compared to the municipalities policed by municipal departments where 5.91% of the population having liked their municipal police department's Facebook page. The most liked page by percentage of the population was Victoria with 13.8% of the population having liked their page. The least liked page by percentage of the population was Nelson with only 2.38% of the population having liked their page.

Another ability that users on social media has is the ability to "follow" a page. The difference between "liking" a page and "following" a page was outlined previously in this report. All of the RCMP Facebook pages had a higher number of followers than they had people who had liked the page. On average the RCMP Facebook pages had 52.36 more people follow their pages compared to people who liked it. All of the municipal departments except for New Westminster, Vancouver, and West Vancouver also had more people follow their pages compared to people who liked their page. New Westminster, Vancouver, and West Vancouver had less people following their page compared to people following their page. This suggests that people who had already liked their pages decided to unfollow them and stop viewing their

content. On average the municipal departments had 52.82 more people follow their pages compared to people who liked it. This shows that between the RCMP and municipal departments there is no significant difference between the amount of extra people who follow their page compared to those who like it.

Posts on Facebook

When analysing the posts that all of the pages made I found that the RCMP made a total of 134 posts during the month of January and municipal pages made a total of 242 posts. The RCMP page that made the most posts was Coquitlam with a total of 64 posts. The average number of posts for all of the RCMP Facebook pages for the month of January was 12.27. Two of the RCMP pages had not even made a post during the month of January 2018. Port McNeil had not made a post on Facebook since December 16, 2017 and Smithers had not made a post on Facebook since June 19, 2017. The municipal page that made the most posts was Vancouver with a total of 48 posts. The average number of posts for all of the municipal department Facebook pages for the month of January was 22. Although the page that made the most posts was the Coquitlam RCMP page, that initiative is not shared by all of the detachments. All of the municipal departments had made at least 2 posts during the month of January.

For the number of posts made in each category, the RCMP made posts in 7 of the 8 categories, while the municipal departments made posts in all 8 categories. When totalling the number of posts from all of the RCMP pages they made: 11 calls for assistance, 31 community outreach posts, 20 crime update posts, 10 recruitment posts, 50 reminder posts, 7 traffic update posts, and 5 general update posts. None of the RCMP pages made a single missing person update post during the month of January. When totalling the number of posts from all of the municipal department pages they made: 31 calls for assistance, 82 community outreach posts, 53 crime

update posts, 11 missing person update posts, 20 recruitment posts, 39 reminder posts, 3 traffic update posts, and 12 general update posts.

When examining the posts made under the push, pull, and networking posts the RCMP made 32 push posts, 71 pull posts, and 31 networking posts. So, 23.88% of the posts were push posts, 52.99% were pull posts, and 23.13% were networking posts. Municipal departments made 79 push posts, 90 pull posts, and 82 networking posts. So, 32.64% were push posts, 37.19% were pull posts, and 33.88% were networking posts. While the RCMP appears to post a higher percentage of pull posts, these posts also include reminders such as not to participate in distracted driving, or to drive carefully in inclement weather. The municipal departments even out their posts among push, pull and networking posts.

When examining the posts made by the police forces that are directly related to the specific community that they police, 55.22% of the RCMP posts were specific to the community they police while 79.34% of the municipal departments posts were specific to their community. These include the posts under the categories: calls for assistance, community outreach, crime updates, missing person updates, traffic updates and general updates. These are posts that address or reference the municipality that they live in. This shows that a much higher percentage of posts made by municipal departments are directly related to the community they police and would have little to no affect on people living in other communities policed by a different police force.

Findings in the Literature

Several findings were made in the literature that highlight why police should be using social media, strategies that work on social media, and the benefits that come from officers having personal accounts attached to their policing duties. When looking at posts made by either RCMP or municipal departments regarding calls for assistance in identifying a suspect or

locating a missing person there is empirical evidence that shows that this method actually increases the likelihood that people are identified or found.

Harms and Wade (2017) found that posts on social media asking the public to help identify a suspect or locate a missing person led directly to tips that closed approximately 15% of cases from some departments. Another article, by Schneider and Trottier (2012), showed how the Vancouver Police Department used Facebook to help identify suspects of the 2011 Vancouver Stanley Cup Riot. After the Vancouver Canucks lost in game seven of the Stanley Cup finals, to the Boston Bruins in Vancouver, a massive riot ensued. Photos of the riot were quickly uploaded to Facebook. The Vancouver Police Department took an unusual approach to using social media with this incident. Police could not forcibly seize footage of the riot from bystanders or participants but were able to use footage that was uploaded by participants and bystanders on Facebook. By October 31 2011 the police had processed “over 30 terabytes of data” and “over 5,000 hours of video” (Schneider, & Trottier, 2012, p. 67) that was simply uploaded by the public. They also called on the public to tag anyone they could identify in those videos. This type of policing was termed “crowd-sourced” policing. The public did the police’s job by identifying suspects.

As stated previously in the literature review, several other strategies have been shown to increase the benefits of the police using social media. In order for the posts made by police agencies to reach more than just the people following the pages the posts need to be shared. Posts are more likely to be shared when they include hashtags, URL links, or pictures (van de Velde, Meijer, & Homburg, 2015). Strategies can also be used to increase the view that police officers are members of the community rather than just an authoritative ruling force. Allowing officers to have personal accounts attached to their policing duties shows the public the human side of the

police force and can increase the amount of trust the public has in the police (Schneider, 2016b; Schneider, & Trottier, 2012).

Discussion

The data collected for this study shows that municipal departments on average police more people in their communities, have more followers on their Facebook pages, have a higher percentage of the population they police follow them on their Facebook pages, create more posts on Facebook, and create more posts that are directly related to the community they are policing. While the RCMP has a higher number of officers, those officers are spread out among a greater number of communities. The resources that municipal departments have are much more centralized in their departments. RCMP detachments sometimes do not even have the resources to maintain a Facebook account, and when they do, that Facebook account is sometimes maintained by a regional supervisor rather than the media relations officer in the community.

The RCMP does share a higher percentage of pull posts that call upon the public to engage in an activity with the police or amongst themselves. However, these posts can be generic posts that can be shared to any community. These can be posts that ask the public to not text and drive or drive safely in dangerous weather. Municipal departments create a much higher percentage of posts that are directly related to the community they police. These posts would not make sense if posted by other police departments. This may show an incentive by municipal departments to create posts more tailored to the specific needs of their community.

Strategies that have been shown to work within the literature are being used by both RCMP Facebook pages and municipal Facebook pages. Several of the posts created by both RCMP and municipal departments contained hashtags or URL links leading followers to another page with more information.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Throughout the province of British Columbia, Canada there is almost an equal amount of Facebook pages for RCMP detachments and municipal police departments. Based on my findings municipal departments tend to create more posts directly relating to the community they police. These posts can have the power to show the public that the police are more engaged with the community. The RCMP however is limited by the resources they have in each detachment. This research project does not suggest that the RCMP are not as engaged in the community when compared to municipal departments. Literature from all around the world shows that the more police share information related to their community on social media, the more the public is likely to trust the police and there is an increase in perceived police legitimacy (Meijer, & Thaens, 2013; Grimmelikhuijsen, & Meijer, 2015; Beshears, 2017).

The RCMP may not have the ability to allocate more resources into maintaining their social media pages within each detachment. However, if they allocate the resources they have in a way that addresses the specific community they police the literature shows that three key things will happen: the public will see and acknowledge this, the public will trust the police more, and they will see the police as more legitimate (Meijer, & Thaens, 2013).

Due the time limitation of this study I was unable to examine the social media policies of any of the municipal departments and how that is reflected in their social media pages. This study could be expanded to examine the differences in social media policy between the RCMP and municipal departments, and how those difference lead to differences in the operation of their social media pages. It could also be expanded to cover multiple social media accounts rather than just focusing on Facebook.

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