

What is the Impact of Social Media on Law Enforcement Practices?

Capstone Project

Sebastien Houle

LAWS 4003

Bachelor of Law Enforcement Studies

Justice Institute of British Columbia

March 27, 2017

Florence Daddey

Jennifer Armstrong

Executive Summary/Abstract

This project explores the impact of social media on law enforcement practices in Canada and in other countries. This research includes an extensive literature review as a secondary research collection method, as well as primary research from interviews with different law enforcement agencies in Canada.

The main scope of this research is to study the impact and the influence that social media has on the police force. This paper will also examine the evolution in the use of social media. This study is based on the impact that the use of social media has on law enforcement in terms of public-safety awareness. Primary data from participants' interviews and secondary data from published literature have been used as data sources. The project aims to find out whether this tool is helpful, if it increases the prevention of crime, and if it is useful for investigations.

In this study, the investigation, the prevention of crime, the public relations and the information's credibility are evaluated. The data is supported by the distinct life experience of police officers, and from several independent articles.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary/Abstract	2
Background	4
Research Question and Rationale	6
Research Design and Methodology	7
Literature review methodology	9
Literature Review.....	10
The impact of the use of social media in prevention practices	10
The impact of the use of social media in investigation practices.....	11
The impact of the use of social media in public-relation practices.....	12
Primary Data Collection	12
Qualitative Design Format.....	12
Secondary Data Collection	13
Discussion/Primary and Secondary Findings	13
Secondary Data Findings	21
The impact of the use of social media in law enforcement practices.....	22
Informal Discussion	24
Limitations/Recommendations	26
Recommendations.....	26
Conclusion	27
References.....	28

Background

In our society, people's use of social media is no longer optional. People regularly access Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TV, and Radio stations. The goal of social media is to provide the public with some information and to allow them to be aware of everything imaginable.

Traditional media's goal to be the first source of interesting information is fundamental. We are now seeing that social media is taking an important place in the lives of most individuals. "Social media has grown to become one of the most influential communication channels in human history" (University of Cincinnati, 2014, Para 1).

The role of law enforcement agencies is to protect, inform, prevent crime and make sure our society is safe and secure. People encounter some aspect of law enforcement in their everyday lives. For example, police officers assure safety on the road, in people's homes, in schools, and in all public places. The public's awareness of law enforcement is generally through news reports, many of which portray police officers in a negative light without providing some insight into the police officer's perspective or point of view. They only get to know whether or not the police carried out their job properly (The National Center for Campus Public Safety, 2014). There are numerous law enforcement agencies in Canada and all of them have different ways of using social media. Some benefits from this type of communication are that it helps to enhance and preserve good relationships with the community and to promote crime prevention. Others use social media as a tool in collecting evidence and finding people in their investigations (Canadian Access to Social Media Information Project, 2013). The impact of this new form of communication has changed and influenced society and the police force. This study will examine whether the use of social media can assist law enforcement in crime prevention and in building relationships with the community by interviewing different law enforcement agencies. The goal

is to examine and compare different perspectives. The research will specifically be on finding out if social media is helpful and if it can help to prevent crime. Furthermore, it will be interesting to see if it is useful for law enforcement investigations (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2015). This study focuses on the impact of social media on law enforcement agencies, in terms of public relations, public-safety awareness, and community assistance. The main interest is to find and demonstrate that this means of communication can be helpful in increasing the prevention of crime at the community level, as well as be an efficient tool for different kinds of investigations (Shneider & Altheide, 2016). That research will provide a better understanding of the procedures on how it works (Canadian Access to Social Media Information Project, 2013). It will be interesting to know and verify the credibility of the information revealed on social media, and public-safety prevention advantages (University of Cincinnati, 2014). The aim of the study is to find out whether the relationship between law enforcement agencies and the public is positively influenced by law enforcement's use of social media and whether law enforcement agencies are able to build a higher level of trust through their use of social media. Interviewing different departments will bring a concrete perspective. The research will demonstrate the impact social media has on the community and the level of credibility of the technology (Canadian Access to Social Media Information Project, 2013).

The goal of the study is to find relevant primary and secondary data. The purpose is to gain some insight from the opinion of the department and from theories on the effect and the efficacy, as well as the influence on the community (U.S. Department of Justice, 2013). The research will examine the state of evolution between law enforcement and the use of social media. Law enforcement agencies have been contacted and employees interviewed to gain their professional opinion regarding their views surrounding this topic. The research will specifically

try to find out whether or not social media is helpful, whether it increases the prevention of crime, and whether or not it is useful for investigation purposes. This study is based on the impact of the use of social media on law enforcement in terms of public-safety awareness and community assistance. Primary data from participant interviews and secondary data from published literature is used as data sources (Creswell, 2014).

Research Question and Rationale

The goal of this research project is to identify relevant information from articles through a literature review, with the goal of recognizing different views from different demographics across Canada. Furthermore, it is also beneficial to explore the relationship between the department and the form of media used, and determine whether this creates a better result for the police in the community. Some of the participants of the primary research are with the federal police, which is involved with a wider variety of communities and demographics. Others participants are members of municipal and provincial agencies. Their perspective and insight on the use of social media gives another view of how law enforcement agencies deal with the information and whether that is an advantage for law enforcement on the prevention and investigation of crime, as well as in the area of public relations.

The literature review seeks measurable criteria, benefits or consequences. Social media's presence in law enforcement is important, just like in the lives of most people. This new growing form of communication is becoming the most influential way to give and receive information (University of Cincinnati, 2014). Although the main goal in the use of social media by law enforcement agencies in Canada is to ensure security of the community, the research shows that

there are other benefits, such as community engagement, which flow from the use of social media by law enforcement agencies.

Research Design and Methodology

Study question: "What is the impact of social media on law enforcement practices?"

The scope of this research project

1. Search of academic and professional literature describing the use of social media on law enforcement practices.
2. Conduct an interview with police agencies: purposive sampling from police agencies, a specific predefined group, are interviewed.
3. Analyze the quantitative data.
4. Compare the data from these sources and the literature and conduct a comparative analysis to look for similarities or difference between the agencies' perceptions, positive or negative impact, and the literature.

Primary data from participant interviews and secondary data from published literature are used as data sources to:

- Identify strengths and potential recommendations to strengthen and promote the use or not of social media in law enforcement practices.
- Look at the impact and the influence this new form of communication has on the police force.
- Examine the state of evolution between law enforcement and the use of social media.

- Find out if social media is helpful:
 - in the prevention of crime
 - in investigation
 - in public-safety awareness and community assistance.

It would be beneficial to know if social media has an impact on law enforcement practices. This research paper looks at how social media was first put into use by law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, this project will determine the relationship between the use of social media and law enforcement agencies' ability to carry out their policing goals. This project looks at some law enforcement agencies that actively use social media, on such platforms as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Moreover, a search was conducted on whether an online program was available for the agencies. A further search was done on whether these communications could be used as a public platform to provide information in investigations and whether these platforms would be helpful in ensuring the safety of citizens.

A consent letter, along with the interview guide, was submitted to and approved by the Justice Institute Research Ethics Board. Interviews were conducted and included questions in a structured interview of the police officers from various agencies across Canada. The confidentiality of participants was assured.

These are the different locations of the anonymous participants:

- Participant A (patrol and acting Sergeant's duties): Peel Regional (Ontario).
- Participant B (Constable working on general duty): RCMP.
- Participant C (patrol and acting Sergeant's duties): Québec Provincial Police.
- Participant D (patrol): MRC des Collines (Québec RM).

- Participant E (police Constable): Vancouver Police Department.

Individuals were reached by phone. Three participants asked and answered the questions written in an email. The other two provided their responses on the phone.

Literature review methodology

The information collected through this research comes from EBSCO database by using the Academic Search Complete, and the official police department website. The initial search terms were “police” and “social media”. Then, an exclusion was added with the scholarly journals. Moreover, a restriction to highlight the recent article was defined, limiting old theories and articles. That was helpful to launch a better research target. The search term was changed a number of times to find other articles, with a focus on the key words of “police” and “social media”. The key words for the search were: credibility of social media, prevention in law enforcement, and if it has an impact with social media, investigations seen in the news, and if they are helpful for law enforcement. The search that provided the most focus and the most fruitful hits was the search that was limited to articles from Canada only. After reviewing most of the articles provided after the final search, nine articles were chosen.

The eight articles that were the most closely related to the topic were chosen for full review among the 19 articles that were reviewed. The academic research on the topic has been both instructive and interesting. The eight articles were analyzed to find common themes. Some of them presented interesting views with the table and data comparisons. Others had interesting titles that piqued further curiosity. A review of the Toronto Police Service’s website provided information about what social media they use and how they use it to be most effective.

Literature Review

Through my literature search of relevant sources it was found that every article had different but significant information, corresponding to the impact of social media in law enforcement practices. Articles from 2010 and later were the most accurate for the research into this new form of communication. The web platform presents a significant issue because it is being used more and more. The first theme demonstrates the use of social media in crime prevention practices. The second is its implication in investigations, and the third one, is in regard to the relationship between the community and the policing agencies. Some articles do not necessarily have identified authors. This was the case with some websites like the department of police, the Department of Justice, and for other valuable books and articles found, which had a reliable background from the authors. The focus on Canadian law enforcement agencies was the main target for the literature review. Although it was a priority to read some literature from Canada, significant information was also found in articles coming from the United States.

The Impact of the Use of Social Media in Prevention Practices

Lessons are learned from two case studies where massive riots happened in 2011. The first case study was in Vancouver, when the Vancouver Canucks, a National Hockey League team, lost the championship on June 15. 155,000 fans went to see the final game in downtown Vancouver. Speculations of a potential riot circulated on social media, which drew the attention of the authorities who took the matter seriously. Quickly, (a little over three hours), after the Canuck's lost the game, police officers acted with a tactical plan that had been previously established. Through social media, officers were able to maintain communication with the public

before and after the riot, answering questions and reassuring citizens (U.S Department of Justice, 2013).

The second case study was in Los Angeles where a survey was done by police departments regarding the use of social media in the country. This issue has been questioned in different agencies. Technology is changing and this one is described as a useful tool to reach the community, to prevent crime and to investigate crime. All of the agencies consulted in the Los Angeles survey, use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn, or have their own website. Their actions are in order to transmit messages to the public and collect information (The National Center for Campus Public Safety, 2014).

The Impact of the Use of Social Media in Investigation Practices

The use of social media to assist in investigations has proven to be an effective tool for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. For instance, William Holt, of Winnipeg, turned himself in because his picture had been published on Facebook and Twitter. In Manitoba, the Northern Crest (Crime Reduction Enforcement Support team) releases lists of names that appear on its website and on social media. Because the publication of names and photos of the most-wanted individuals spreads instantly on social media, hundreds of people were informed, therefore assisting in catching criminals (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2015). Another riot occurred on August 6, 2011, in North London. After a police officer shot a man, Mark Duggan, two days earlier, on August 4, the black community reacted publicly by causing disturbances. The relationship between the police and the black community was not good. Information from social media, some of it valid and some of it exaggerated, flooded in, and at that time, the unit was not

qualified or ready to face the impact of a large amount of platform evidence. Nobody was in charge of this type of information at that time (U.S Department of Justice, 2013).

The Impact of the Use of Social Media in Public Relations Practices

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Manitoba (D-Division) uses social media. Their first social media accounts were Facebook and Twitter. They were established in October 2013 because the RCMP recognized the benefit of communicating with their local community. According to the RCMP, social media has many functions, including providing information from geographic hazards to identifying missing persons (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2015). In 2012, Hans Toch wrote about the camera phone being used against police officers, in particular to document instances of police brutality. Toch (2012) discussed the issue of credibility of the images. Another aspect looked at is the rank-and-file resistance to community-relations reforms. The author defines how the police's approach to their law enforcement practices has changed as a result of social media (Toch, 2012).

Primary Data Collection

Qualitative Design Format

The following steps of the findings are based on the approach with the grounded theory. This theory can be defined as “a qualitative strategy in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study” (Creswell, 2014). Grounded theory is a method of inquiry from sociology. The researcher derives a general abstract theory of a process, an action, or an interaction, grounded in the views

of participants. This process involves using a collection of data, the refinement and interrelationship of categories of information (Creswell, 2014).

Secondary Data Collection

The search was conducted in the EBSCO database on January 12th of 2017 using many different sub databases. These included the Academic Search Complete, full Text, Government Collection, and official police department websites. The initial search terms were “law enforcement and social media”, “prevention of crime and social media”, and “police force and social media”. After this first search, a process was undertaken to narrow down the number of articles relating to the topic. Firstly, “in Canada” was added in an attempt to limit the studies to Canadian police departments in order to make the issue more relevant to our social context. The time period was also changed in order to view the most current information, from 2010 to 2017.

- Police and social media – 3,799 hits
- Police and social media in Canada (2012- 2017) – 29 hits
- Law Enforcement social medias in Canada – 26 hits
- Impact of social media in Law Enforcement – 89 hits

Discussion/Primary and Secondary Findings

Social media has provided everyone with the ability to rapidly transmit information to a wide range of the population. Now, there are very few barriers to communicating with the entire world. Law enforcement is not exempt from that exposure. Nevertheless, there are some advantages to these worldwide links. Through the different readings and observations from the interviews, it appears that police departments are learning from each other through shared

experiences and lessons learned in the past few years." The power of the Internet—social media in particular—has brought danger home to officers and their families. They cannot shield themselves as easily from the repercussions of their jobs defending the community" (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012). The field of law enforcement is making use and taking charge of the use of social media, while being cautious of the impact that comes with it.

The results of the interviews show significantly similar opinions to the perceptions found in the literature. Whether a police officer comes from a large or smaller department, covering an urban or rural territory, the uses of social media differs, as does the impact. The agencies that were surveyed are from five different police departments in Canada. Some of them are federal, some are provincial and some are municipal. The participant's responses to the following questions are listed below:

1. What agency do you work for?

The agencies that were surveyed are from five different police departments in Canada. Some of them are federal, some are provincial and some are municipal.

- Peel Regional Police.
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police.
- Provincial Quebec Police.
- MRC Police Department.
- Vancouver Police Department.

2. What is your role within the agency?

- Peel Regional Police: patrol and acting sergeant duties.
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police: Constable working general duty.

- Provincial Quebec Police: patrol and Sergeant.
- MRC Police Department: patrol.
- Vancouver Police Department: police Constable.

3. Are you generally aware of the use of social media in your agency?

All of the officers from the different police agencies were generally aware of the different social media channels, such as, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, as well as the agency's own website. All of the officers also indicated that they understood how social media provides a different perspective in terms of the police's relationship with the community. Most of the officers felt that the use of social media promoted a positive relationship with the community. Most of the agencies had at least one officer whose role was dedicated to providing information to the public through social media. Furthermore, the agencies recognized that social media allowed them to provide another point of view from what was reported on TV news or on the radio, where stories are often hastily reported in order for a particular station to have the initial scoop, and may contain inaccuracies.

4. What types of social media does your agency use?

- Peel Regional Police: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Website.
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police: Facebook.
- Provincial Quebec Police: Facebook.
- MRC Police Department: Facebook, Twitter.
- Vancouver Police Department: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Website.

5. How long has the agency been using them?

- Peel Regional Police: 5 years.
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police:

- Provincial Quebec Police: 7 years.
- MRC Police Department:
- Vancouver Police Department: 4 years.

6. In your agency, do you have a special officer assigned to social media?

For all of the agencies concerned, the officers state that they are not allowed to write anything on social media. No opinions are allowed and they have a special officer assigned whose mandate is to give information to the public. Without permission from the department, no one is allowed to provide information to a journalist from the news media who makes inquiries about an investigation or about the department. Participant C, who works for a provincial agency in Quebec indicated that they have an officer whose job is to provide updates on the agency's website and on Facebook with regards to detachment-related news.

7. Would you consider social media a valuable tool for your agency?

a) **For investigation purposes:** The participant from Peel regional police finds that social media is definitely a valuable tool for the police. He gives examples of investigative bureaus who will use social media as a tactic to locate and or get evidence about criminals. They will also use social media for things such as amber alerts or missing people. He finds that the media department does a good job at keeping the public in the loop about what is going on. If there is a major traffic accident, they will alert the public through social media with updated road closures. He thinks they do a good job at letting the public know when individual police officers have success in catching a bad guy.

From another perspective, one participant has a negative point of view. In the province of Quebec, it is absolutely a rivalry between the police and the media. The media wants to create an interesting story for the public, with or without a credible source, even if the information can do harm to a police officer's personal life. From this perspective things are becoming worse. For investigations, most of the participants from the different agencies generally agreed that for the most part investigations do, in fact move forward with the help of the media and the public.

b) **For crime prevention:** On the prevention side, all of the agencies indicate that Facebook is helpful for finding someone, using just the name or location of the person. Facebook is seen as a good tool for those departments. According to the participant from the MRC police department, the person in charge of crime prevention is able to use social media to inform the community if they are at risk from certain crimes and to warn them to be careful. Social media provides this small community with an easy way to disseminate important information.

The participant from Peel Regional Police said that the team in charge of social media does a great job. If there is a major traffic accident, they will alert the public through social media with updated road closures. They also do a good job at letting the public know when individual police officers have success in catching a 'bad guy'.

c) **For public relations/community outreach:** The most common perspective here is that it is helpful to the public to have access to a website or platforms like Facebook and Twitter. The departments can reach citizens and inform them of incidents. For some agencies, people who are in charge of social media are also going around the city visiting high schools to provide students with information where they can. It is helpful for the departments to provide information and to inform the public directly because they are the

more credible source rather than allowing the news media to be the only source of information for the public, in that the news media's information is often "second hand".

8. **Would you say that with the use of social media, the relationship between the police and the community has improved? How?**

The answers from all the participants are generally the same and can be summarized as: the important thing to realize is that social media has the power to create a good or a bad relationship between the community and the police. The better the relationship is between media and the police department, the more likely that the public will have a positive opinion of the police agency. The more the agencies are involved with their Websites, Facebook, and Twitter, the better informed the public will be regarding police information. All of the agencies have policies regarding how a police officer, even one who is off-duty, must behave so as not to put the reputation of the agency into disrepute should an officer's actions be captured on social media. Participant C gave an example of a Constable who was off duty when he was involved in a fight in a bar. Video footage of the bar fight was posted on social media, which damaged the reputation of the constable and the police department in the eyes of the public.

9. **Does your agency express any concerns about using social media?**

The participant from Peel Regional Police indicated that the agency requires that officers be vigilant when using social media. They are not allowed to release confidential information to the public which would compromise various types of investigations. In some cases, officers have been fired for posting unethical pictures on their personal social media pages. Individual officers

who use social media have to use common sense. Another point of view from the constable with the RCMP, is that there are all kinds of people using social media. However, as a member working in the field, he thinks that Facebook has mostly been helpful, but has encountered situations where it fell short. According to participant C, when you become a police officer, you are a police officer 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You are not only a citizen, but you need to be a model for your community. An officer's credibility needs to be taken really seriously. If you make a mistake, the media will try to find the worse picture of you on Facebook to show on TV, to demonstrate how you are a bad example for the community. Then, you start to have a label, and it follows you everywhere you go. Common sense on this question is an important concern and an officer must always keep in mind that they need to be professional at all times.

10. Does your agency have a written social media policy?

Every department has policies that officers must respect, written at the discretion of their agency, and most of the time the policies are covered by the Privacy Act. Most of the departments have someone who takes care of the department's information on Facebook and Twitter, or their Website, which is intended to maintain their relationship with the public. Furthermore, it is important to know that social media does not have limits for someone who can give a personal inappropriate opinion. In that circumstance, and once this information is on the internet, it is really hard to delete it.

Positive Aspects	Negative Aspects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Valuable tool for police. Ex: In investigation will use social media as a tactic to locate and/or get evidence on criminals. - Good at letting the public know when individual police officers have success in catching a bad guy. - Improves the relationships between the community and police. - Easy access for the public to be kept in the loop of what's going on. - Relationship between the public and the RCMP is improved by the fact that they involve the public in some of their current investigations. - Facebook is really helpful for prevention and helping find someone. - Social media: promotes communication between the citizen and the police/creates a better climate in the city. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Risks: in some cases, officers have been fired for posting unethical pictures on their personal pages. - Every small thing is exaggerated, amplified/ unreliable information is easily released. - Careless diffusion of information that can affect the officer's private life/ no consideration for the human side of the individual. - Don't care about the real story, they just want to sell some false information every time they get the chance.

Secondary Data Findings

Participant A is from Peel Regional Police, in Ontario. He indicated that there are some benefits to using social media, especially in the areas of crime prevention, investigation, and providing information to the public. They have different policies in his department, similar as the other participants, but that they do not have any policy about social media use. Most of the departments that responded to the questionnaire, are working with Facebook and Twitter to communicate with the public. Participant A said something similar to the participant C. The police need to be careful about what the officer puts on social media, which could have consequences for his role and his credibility. "Police departments, like other agencies of government, are supposed to be responsive and accountable"(Reisig & Kane, 2014, page 154).

In terms of crime prevention and investigation, participant A found social media to be a helpful tool. Being active on social media provides the agency with a better response from the community when there is an emergency, such as a missing person or a motor vehicle accident.

"Personal credibility is essential for law enforcement. Through social media, people easily can attack a police officer's character. If an officer's integrity is compromised, courtroom testimony and investigations are at risk. Law enforcement officers can find their character under serious attack online at any time. Even erroneous information can reach a significant audience, to include potential jurors and internal affairs investigators, possibly causing irreparable damage to officers' reputations"(Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012, para 13).

The literature selection was made by choosing the most comprehensive and relevant articles to the research question that could be found. They were produced by the database after narrowing

down the search criteria. It is important to select articles that provide specific and different kinds of information. The keywords used were: credibility; prevention; investigation; and how long the police agency has been using social media. Each department takes a different approach in the use of the social media: how they deal with and interact with the public, what kind of impact has already been observed, and whether the specific tool is helpful. In research, it is important to find articles with various perspectives to determine the contradiction between searches, and identify the link between each idea.

"In partnership with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, the IACP [International Association of Chiefs of Police] launched its Center for Social Media in October 2010. The goal of the initiative is to build the capacity of law enforcement to use social media to prevent and solve crimes, strengthen police-community relations, and enhance services. The Center works closely with the Defense Personnel Security Research Center (PERSEREC), the Criminal Intelligence Coordinating Council and Global Intelligence Working Group, the National White Collar Crime Center, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), U.S. Department of Justice, and IACP's committees and sections."(International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2016, Para 1).

The Impact of the Use of Social Media in Law Enforcement Practices

The Toronto Police Service is recognized as one of the leading users of social media in the field of law enforcement. It started in 2007 when a few members showed some interest in this new technology. Then, in April 2010, the TPS Deputy Chief Peter Sloly decided to participate in the first international conference on the subject. All of the officers who had an interest in the subject and who were eager to learn more about the use of social media in policing were invited

to participate. The TPS invested in training, establishing policies, and guidelines with regards to the use of social media. Reaching communities efficiently was important. The priority to recruit qualified members to represent the agency was also looked at. Using social media in law enforcement practices has a positive impact (U.S Department of Justice, 2013).

From the University of Victoria, two academic researchers, Dr. Colin J. Bennett and Christopher Parson, with the collaboration of Adam Molnar, conducted research into changes in access to information with the evolution of the web. They explained the legal implications to consider when law enforcement needs to use social media to get information. Different strategies are explained regarding access to social media, like the law enforcement portal. Facebook has had this online service since 2012. When authorities subscribe, they can have access to information and receive updates on the requests made. Guidebooks are also created to inform the users on what legal conditions to respect (Canadian Access to Social Media Information Project, 2013). Legally, production orders and preservation orders are issued by authorities so that investigators can obtain the information they need. Judges and justices of the peace can issue production orders, in Canada, on a provincial basis. Preservation orders require the recipient to keep information for a period of 30 to 90 days. When actions need to be taken outside the country, there is a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty. Joint police operations involving agencies from different countries can be carried out in spite of the fact that the agencies are from different jurisdictions. Furthermore, there are existing tools that can be used to download information. With these tools, investigators do not need to go through the two other legal procedures. In this particular research, in the U.S., a survey of 1221 professionals from the law enforcement field, revealed an increasing use of social media in crime investigation (Canadian Access to Social Media Information Project, 2013).

Christopher J. Shneider conducted research in 2016 into the use of social media for communication purposes in an emergency situation. The research is mostly centered on investigations by police agencies in Canada. The author, Shneider, is an associate professor of sociology at Brandon University. He focuses on media format and police social control practices. Most of these examples are from Vancouver. (Shneider, & Altheide, 2016).

"By increasing exposure of personal information, social media has raised the threat level. This new entity has a unique nature that makes it powerful and unpredictable. Several characteristics combine to make it especially threatening to law enforcement" (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012, para 4). Law enforcement is a worldwide profession that exposes individuals to high risks. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012)

Informal Discussion

The impacts of social media on law enforcement are real. If you turn on your TV or look at platforms like Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter, you will see that law enforcement is everywhere. Police officers show up on social media in many different ways, such as through the public posting a picture or a video of an officer, or through a news agency posting a story, or through a law enforcement agency posting its own story. The important point of this research is to determine the level of the credibility in the information that is posted on social media. It is essential to know the source and who provided the information. Furthermore, this research has investigated whether this tool has a positive or negative effect on law enforcement agencies and whether it can assist law enforcement agencies in investigations and crime prevention." Today, agencies are increasingly using their web pages and social media as additional means of soliciting citizen input" (Reisig & Kane, 2014, p.154).

It is also instructive to see how law enforcement is able to build positive relationships with the community through the use of social media. Considering the literature reviewed earlier, the platforms are working. They are offering better awareness and a means to improve crime prevention in the community. All the sources consulted were useful, and with the academic journals in the JIBC Library, articles with better quality were found. Two books were at the library, one of them having more recent information. Then a Google search provided access to the some official websites of different police departments, like the Toronto Police Service, the RCMP, the Ottawa Police, and the Vancouver Police Department. These references were all reliable.

Looking at the answers from the interviews, and the secondary data, it is clear that not every police department has a great relationship with social media. Confidence in social media is not shared by everyone. In the study, one of the limitations of social media was the lack of accurate information, and the presence of irrelevant information. All citizens have a perception of what they hear and see about police work on the news on the radio, on the web or on TV. Regardless of the people implicated and its consequences, it is always a matter of who will be the first to post the information. Furthermore, it is important to understand that the media plays a role in creating the relationship between a community and the police officers who serve that community. With the increased use of social media, police officers operate in a “fishbowl”. The eyes of the media are always on them. Conversely, police agencies can use social media to enhance their relationship with the community that they serve. As the answers from the interviews showed, law enforcement agencies benefit from communicating with citizens in the community for both investigation and crime prevention practices.

Limitations/Recommendations

According to the research, it is important to realize that the police department always has more information and details than the community will ever know. The true story from the department is more often not what the media are able to describe. The video taken on the street by a bystander, a non-participant, might last a few seconds or a few minutes, but the entire intervention may have lasted thirty minutes or more. The community has no information about the background of the person involved with the police or what information or circumstances lead up to the initial contact with the police.

Recommendations

- Offer regular and periodic training to follow and stay current with the evolution of the web by email, meetings, and practical training sessions.
- Explain the benefits of this tool for law enforcement practices (prevention, investigation, and public-relation).
- Minimize online exposure and present the possible threats to the agency and its individual members and their families
- Have a designated officer in charge of online and digital communications.
- Install mechanisms to limit potential threat.
- Protect the employee with a search engine and send a personal notice by email.
- Monitor web sites to control and remove files.
- Establish guidelines on the departments' websites.
- Promote public relations. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012)

Conclusion

This paper highlights the importance of police agencies ensuring that the information they disseminate comes only from those sources officially designated by the agencies to provide information on their behalf, whether on their websites, or in Facebook feeds, Twitter accounts, or Instagram accounts. The reliability of the information they provide will be extremely important for the credibility of law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement agencies should all designate a qualified media contact person to liaise with media in order to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information provided.

References

- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2012). *Social media and law enforcement*. Retrieved from <https://leb.fbi.gov/2012/november/social-media-and-law-enforcement-potential-risks>
- International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2016). *Center for social media*. Retrieved from <http://www.iacpsocialmedia.org/Topics/Parent.aspx?termid=126&depth=2>
- Ericksen, K (2014). *Rasmussen College, law enforcement and social media team up to fight crime* Retrieved from Rasmussen College website:
<http://www.rasmussen.edu/degrees/justice-studies/blog/law-enforcement-and-social-media/>
- LexisNexis Risk Solutions. (2014). *Social media use in law enforcement*. Retrieved from <https://www.lexisnexis.com/risk/downloads/whitepaper/2014-social-media-use-in-law-enforcement.pdf>
- Reisig, M. D., & Kane, R. J. (2014). *The Oxford handbook of police and policing*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police. (2015). *Social media in “D” division*. Retrieved from <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/mb/yir-bilan-13-14/social-media-medias-sociaux-eng.htm>

Schneider, C., & Altheide, D. (2016). *Policing and social media, social control in an era of new media* (1st ed.). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

The Canadian Access to Social Media Information project. (n.d.). *CATSMI project*. Retrieved March 15, 2017, from www.catsmi.ca

The National Center for Campus Public Safety. (2014) *Future trends in policing*. Retrieved from <http://www.nccpsafety.org/resources/library/future-trends-in-policing/>

Toch, H. (2012). *Cop watch spectators, social media, and police reform* (1st ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

U.S Department of Justice. Community Oriented Policing Services. (2013). *Social media and tactical considerations for law enforcement*. Retrieved from <https://ric-zai-inc.com/Publications/cops-p261-pub.pdf>

University of Cincinnati. (2014). *Can social media actually help law enforcement?* Retrieved from <http://cjonline.uc.edu/resources/news/can-social-media-actually-help-law-enforcement/>

