

**POLICE AND SOCIAL MEDIA
IN ENGLAND AND WALES:
EXPLORING POLICE COMMUNICATIONS AND
IMAGE WORK IN THE DIGITAL SOCIETY**

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Dedicated to Grace, Rory, Francesca, and Violet.

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Abstract

Established news organisations have covered crime and law enforcement news for centuries. As a result, it should come as no surprise that the media is frequently the source from which the public learns the most about police activity in their communities. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate police social media activities and organisational structures to acquire a better understanding of how the police present themselves on digital platforms. Contributions to the field of police communications, specifically to the rapidly expanding field of police and social media studies, are made throughout this thesis. The conceptual framework of this research draws upon police image work, elements of community policing, and the digital society we live in. Through a pragmatic mixed methods approach, three empirical studies come together to contribute knowledge that does not currently exist regarding police forces in England and Wales.

Data analysed stems from the Twitter platform, interviews with communication experts, and a national survey of police forces. The research argues that police communications have gone through significant changes over the past decade, shifting from professionalisation to the digitalisation of police image work. The findings indicate that police communications have expanded and provide new opportunities to show the human side of policing through creative content. While police forces continue to be cautious, the study outcomes indicate that digital channels are vital for operational policing and enhancing customer service-related duties. However, opportunities for interactions within digital communities remain an area for development. Overall, this thesis provides an exploratory investigation into police social media activities, contributing to the existing knowledge base by demonstrating why digital society has changed how police forces carry out image work and community policing practices.

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Chapter One

Police Communications

1.1 Introduction

This thesis aims to understand how and why police forces in England and Wales use social media to present themselves and communicate. This study uses the concepts of digital society, police image work, and community policing to illustrate the research problem and process. The following chapter presents the existing literature concerning police communications through traditional methods such as press releases and contemporary platforms like social media. The research focuses on factual police representations on social media published through police force accounts rather than fictional or factional police portrayals in other media formats (Leishman and Mason, 2003). Additionally, the research examines the relationship between media and police. However, this is from the viewpoint of police forces rather than news media or public perspectives. The purpose of the study is to evaluate how police communications have evolved with the integration of digital technologies into police work practices, leading to a reshaped association with the media. Unless otherwise specified, the term media refers to newspapers, radio news, television news and the digital counterparts to all these formats. The thesis employs a mixed methods approach with three distinct data explorations. There are social media data, a national survey, and key informant interviews that have been compiled for the discussion chapter. As a result of this approach, an in-depth qualitative and quantitative analysis of police communications within a digital society across England and Wales is possible.

In terms of the digital society, it has fundamentally changed how people converse, socialise, work, and carry out transactions. When referring to a digital society, I consider digital technologies as so entrenched in culture that it is needless to view technology and society as separate phenomena (Lindgren, 2017). It is now ordinary to communicate, access or share knowledge, learn, shop, play

games, and access public services without leaving home using a digital device. In digital anthropology, research suggests that digital technologies are now fundamental elements in what makes us human today (Horst and Miller, 2012). Around 95% of households in the United Kingdom have access to the internet (ONS, 2020). On various devices, millions of applications are available to download at the touch of a screen. Such apps include news, productivity, social platforms, lifestyle and fitness, entertainment, and other utilities, some of which provide information on crime, victimisation, and policing.

It is important to keep abreast of new forms of communication, interaction with the public, and image control in this digital society, as well as to interpret the methods police forces adopt to communicate and represent information. With more people using Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to stay up to date and do everyday tasks, public sector organisations must use social media to connect with key stakeholders (Mergel, 2012). In addition, since the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of these platforms for civic engagement has increased even more. In this case, some academics argue that police social media practice has become a routine tool that replaces in-person interactions in demanding periods (Hu et al., 2021). Therefore, since police forces across England and Wales are subject to varying communicative working practices and image work methods, it is valuable to investigate through research ways in which they utilise digital environments to adjust their practices.

Since circa 2010, police organisations worldwide have needed to adapt their communication strategies given that social media provides better accessibility and audience reach. This adjustment gives organisations better control over their content and gives communities the option to consume content across different platforms seamlessly (Schneider, 2016). The swift streams of information on social media promote digital environments where police forces can efficiently generate and manage appearance and identity on the front stage (Goffman, 1959). Construction and management of police identity are achieved primarily through police image work, and police 'press

offices are expected to promote the work of forces to the communities they operate in' (Mawby, 1998: 27). The shaping of police identity, appearance, and mandate draws attention to both police work and legitimacy (Manning, 1992). Image work, or how the police present themselves positively to the public, can be described as the process whereby the nature of policing is reconstructed and reinterpreted as it relates to conflict, authority change, and social order (Reiner, 2007). Thus, police image work is integral for all police forces, from street patrol officers to the headquarters communication professionals (Bullock, 2016). Using the lens of the digital society concept then, this study examines police social media communications in terms of image work. As it stands, it is imperative that police brands are shaped by how they engage proactively with their audiences and the media via social media sites, as well as how they portray themselves to these audiences.

While image work is an integral part of the police's role as a public service, the topic of image work has received less attention and focus in England and Wales over the past five years, especially when it comes to the integration of new digital technologies into police forces. Each police force in has established vision statements, and image work is necessary to animate these visions to communities (Mawby, 2002a). There are many common vision statements across the forces, particularly when it comes to crime prevention efforts and ensuring that communities are protected. For example, the Metropolitan Police Service (2019) have the vision 'to be the most trusted police service in the world'. Taking a more preventative tone, West Midlands Police (2019) express the intention of 'preventing crime, protecting the public and helping those in need'. On a note that focuses on the community, South Wales Police (2019) aim 'to be the best at understanding and responding to our communities'. Inevitably, police forces cannot be static and reactive in their approaches to delivering on these core vision statements (Mawby, 2001). Attempts through image work to communicate the coveted vision are primarily achieved through frequent police visibility and information sharing to communities.

In a digital environment, the experts who handle force communications are at the heart of police image work. Every police force has a communications department, each having various names, with the most common being ‘Corporate Communications’ along with the less commonly used ‘Press Office’, ‘Media and Marketing’ and ‘Public Relations’ (Mawby, 2007: 9). As the various names suggest, these departments are responsible for communications, public relations, media interactions and managing police forces social media outputs. With most forces applying the name ‘Corporate Communications’, it implies that the police have become increasingly professionalised with communications rather than merely having a press office that serves the media (Chibnall, 1977). In part, this change was driven by removing warranted police officers from traditional press departments and employing civilian teams with the skills, knowledge, and experience in communications to develop specialised departments (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1991; Chermak and Weiss, 2005; Mawby, 2010a). They have thus become more accountable for the communications that are generated within police organisations at all levels.

For this study, corporate police social media profiles are of relevance. These accounts typically have large follower counts and post strategic content. Only corporate police accounts are examined in this study to provide a strong foundation for comparing police forces. Since departmental and individual officer accounts are hard to locate for every police force, corporate comparisons are reliable. At first thought, it might seem remarkable that digital communications could be a key component in enhancing both police image work and policing operations. However, the professional body for police in England and Wales believes that ‘an online presence in a modern world is as important as traditional policing methods such as walking the beat’ (College of Policing, 2014). Similarly, the Police Foundation (2014) assert that the police can carry out community policing with the assistance of social media to build relationships with the public to cultivate trust and confidence between the public and police. At the same time, social media will not solve every problem that police forces face when expanding police image work or operational policing

functions from the physical space. However, using social media does provide a tool that the police have needed in service offerings for some time in the digital sphere (Crump, 2011). The following section outlines the research objectives and questions for this study before moving on to the literature review.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine how and why police forces use social media in England and Wales. Among the thesis objectives, the first is to provide insight into how the forty-three police forces across England and Wales employ social media platforms within their corporate communications departments. The second step is to develop a mixed methods approach that incorporates both novel forms of social data and conventional methods used in police communications research. In the third objective, we explore how the application of digital platforms has allowed police to carry out and develop image work more effectively. With these three objectives, this study provides a wide-ranging look at police and policing social media use. The significance of this research cannot be overstated. This is because only a handful of academics have studied the use of digital platforms by the police across England and Wales, since most police social media research is conducted internationally, as the literature review will illustrate.

Even though police forces used digital platforms towards the end of 2010, there is limited empirical evidence about the types of communications disseminated, how digital platforms are integrated into corporate communications, and in what ways emerging technologies impact police image work. This research contributes knowledge to police communication research by analysing the types of content that police forces distribute on Twitter. Media relations and digital content are discussed to contribute further knowledge about corporate communications structure and operations. It then examines how digital platforms can enhance police communications and community relations. In addition, corporate communications need to be able to consider the challenges they face in technological contexts to be effective in practice and this is explored in the

latter stages of the thesis. To guide the empirical investigation, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What types of content are police forces publishing on social media platforms?
2. How are the police leveraging social media to elevate their image work?
3. Why are police forces using social media to communicate with communities?

The thesis is structured into eight chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two forms the conceptual framework for this research which concerns digital society, image work and community policing. Chapter Three focuses on the research methodology, which covers research design, data collection, coding and analysis, validity and reliability, and ethical reflections. Chapter Four introduces the first empirical research findings, a qualitative examination of the types of content police forces posts on the Twitter platform. Chapter Five delivers the third empirical findings, a qualitative endeavour consisting of key informant interviews to obtain a rich understanding of police social media practice and its challenges. Chapter Six provides the second empirical research findings, a quantitative focused national police communications survey to understand social media incorporation while also linking to Twitter data to explore differences between police forces. Chapter Seven brings all the empirical chapters together to discuss the findings, drawing on this literature review and the ensuing conceptual framework. Lastly, Chapter Eight provides research conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further research. In the rest of this chapter, a literature review concerning traditional police communications presents background context around how police organisations traditionally operate media and public relations. The literature review then discusses police usage of social media, laying the groundwork for this study's contribution of knowledge to digital police communications and image work.

1.3 Traditional Police Communications

As stated previously, this literature review examines traditional police communications through the media, focusing on crime-related media content, the police's relationship with the media, and

corporate communication departments. It is necessary to explore traditional police communications through the media to provide a basis for how police communications operated before social media became a tool of importance for police communications departments. The media play a prominent role in how communities consume information about police and crime. For instance, supplementary findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales show that the most mentioned source of crime news is television or radio at 59%, local newspapers at 32%, tabloid newspapers at 30%, and word of mouth at 28% (Moon et al., 2011: 56). Further to this, a study concerning policing in London that surveyed 2,800 people aged over 15 found worrying levels of dependence on the media for crime and police information (FitzGerald, Hough, Joseph, and Qureshi, 2002). However, more recent findings indicate that Facebook (42%), Leaflets (25%), Twitter (20%), Newspapers (21%), Television (8%), Radio (6%) and other methods are frequently used to find out how the police tackle crimes (HMICFRS, 2018). The media continue to play a role in influencing how the public consumes crime information (Reiner, 2010), but social media platforms may be overtaking as primary information sources.

1.3.1 Media Representations

Numerous studies have examined the quantity of news devoted to police and crime (Chermak, 1995; Ditton and Duffy, 1983; Greer, 2012; Rosenberger and Dierenfeldt, 2021). An investigation into traditional media coverage observes that crime and policing form a steady flow of all news items (Ditton et al., 2004). Topics like policing and crime are enticing, and the media like to produce content with added dramatisation to attract the public with sensational headlines. According to Leishman and Mason (2003: 10-11), the media tends to push out disproportionate amounts of crime content into the public domain that often focuses on violent crimes. Still, Marsh (1991) argues that violent stories can be advantageous to the police as it shows a successful police image. The freedom to publish vast amounts of content about police activities relates to the media appearing as direct communications outputs for police forces (Peelo, 2005). To this end, the media

acts as a loudspeaker that police forces speak through to reach communities. Though, sometimes police communications can become distorted or receive a dramatic hue to increase media readership or viewership.

Actual figures about crime news frequency in the media differ due to different methods used in studies. For instance, a comparative analysis of crime coverage in newspaper studies suggests that between 2% and 33% of news items centred on criminality (Marsh, 1991: 73). These figures show a sizeable change in the amount of crime coverage in the media. However, the variation could depend on the kind of media output. Reiner (2010: 179) claims that news crime coverage is most frequent in the 'popular' media outputs compared to media outputs that provide a 'quality' news offering. Exploring further, a now dated analysis of ten newspapers across the United Kingdom in 1989 found that around 13% of event-based news items related to crime (Williams and Dickinson, 1993: 40). Additionally, Williams and Dickinson (1993: 49) claim that broadsheet newspapers provided smaller crime coverage than tabloid newspapers which published double the average number of crime items and in the most striking fashion. However, a similar piece of research focusing on the broadsheet 'The Times' and tabloid 'The Mirror' between 1985 and 1991 illustrated that both newspapers devoted 21% to crime news items, indicating a tabloidisation of the broadsheet paper (Reiner, Livingstone, and Allen, 2001). These studies reveal that figures relating to crime depictions in the media varied, do not always show differences between tabloid and broadsheet papers, and demonstrate that crime and policing are key news topics to cover.

Furthermore, the content of media reporting on crime is often misleading and does not epitomise actual crime occurrences, as referred to previously with violent crimes. Studies consistently show that news items about crimes like petty theft and burglary do not appear as much as offences like murder and sexual assault (see Ditton and Duffy, 1983; Leishman and Mason, 2003; Marsh, 1991; Roshier, 1973). For instance, one examination of newspapers found that nearly 14% of front-page sections focused on personal violence crime, while almost 65% of all crime stories related to

violent offences (Williams and Dickinson, 1993: 40-1). These results are intriguing as it exposes the selective bias the media use with crime news. Besides, the preference for dramatic content shows the power the media has over which content the public consumes (Chibnall, 1977). Among Scottish newspapers, over 6.5% of news items dealt with crime; however, serious crime news featured 22 times more often than other types of news (Ditton and Duffy, 1983: 161-2). So, even though police forces provide the most information to the media (Chibnall, 1977), there is an apparent distortion between violent crimes and other crimes not considered newsworthy enough by the media.

Crime representation is distorted not only by newspapers, but by other media formats as well, such as radio and television (Reiner, 2007: 380). In a study examining drugs in the news for both newspaper and television formats in the United States, the top three frequently reported crimes for both outputs were murder at 25%, then drugs at 9% and next rape at 5% (Chermak, 1997: 696). The study by Chermak did include more newspaper sources than television items, but the individual percentages for each format were near equivalent, providing a basis to compare the results. Such serious crimes are not prioritized by the public when it comes to criminality, for example, in the context of London were burglary and muggings rather than murder or sexual crimes (FitzGerald et al., 2002: 39). Although crime priorities alter temporally and spatially, the media reports on sensational crimes more than others and the value of reporting fluctuate between formats. For instance, research contends that the strength of crime reports and criticisms of police actions appears more so in quality newspapers and infrequently in television broadcasts (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994). In contrast, crime reports featured on radio stations tend to have a reduced amount of analysis than newspapers and television (Cumberbatch et al., 1995). Thus, the evidence shows that crime reporting quality varies among media formats, but the tendency to present an unreal crime picture exists across all media types. The thesis does not consider fictional representations as the focus is on factual police representations on social media.

The literature reviewed so far suggests that the media like to focus on uncommon and unexpected crimes rather than minor offences. Media personnel decide whether a crime is newsworthy enough based on the sense that the audience will find the news report engaging (Reiner, 2007). Several elements inform decision making about whether a news item is newsworthy enough. These elements include immediacy, dramatisation, personalisation, titillation, simplification, conventionalism, novelty, and structured access (see, Chibnall, 1977). Immediacy links to the notion that speed is essential to obtain the latest reports. The dramatisation is a process of making news items spectacular for viewership. Personalisation adds value to crime news through a common enemy or a celebutante. Titillation refers to unusual and shocking stories as this presents better worth than a report that is normalised. Simplification provides news items with clear narratives to reduce the odds of being challenged. Conventionalism means the news item must represent a dominant viewpoint that the consumer can easily follow. Novelty is where a news report can offer a fresh perspective. Structured access refers to official sources of information, such as the police. There has since been an addition to these elements, such as Jewkes (2011), who incorporates risk, proximity, political diversion, and children, and Greer (2007) suggests that the visual plays a crucial role in newsworthiness judgment. The literature, therefore, generally accepts that crime reporting is not objective and is selective in making decisions.

Additionally, it is essential to this thesis to consider how the media portray the police in news items as the police now have new opportunities to present the news themselves. Research in this area is limited compared to crime representation but still provides perspective on police media depictions. A study by Chermak (1995: 33), which included an analysis of newspaper articles and television items, indicates that when police comment on reports, they often frame crime stories to strengthen the police status as crime fighters (Chermak, 1995: 33). However, when the media mentions the police in news items, less than 4% of these featured police effectiveness evaluations (Chermak, 1995: 36). Although these results do not show whether police news is favourable or critical, the

findings suggest that depending on who controls the representation, media or police, the portrayal of police effectiveness can fluctuate considerably. In another investigation, the police received mentions in only 31% of all crime news items analysed in two newspapers, despite a general rise in stories that presented a growing trend in featuring the criminal justice system (Reiner, Livingstone, and Allen, 2001: 205). Newspaper content also reveals an increase in critical reporting about the police from 6% to 17% between 1945 and 1991, with favourable and neutral stories decreasing from 11% to 6% between the same period (Reiner, Livingstone, and Allen, 2001). Therefore, police representation in the media shows increasing trends toward highlighting controversial policing aspects together with a fall in positive portrayals.

When assessing the sentiment of crime and policing representations in the media, it is understood that typical depictions of the police are favourable. Boyle (1999) even contends that the media can control crime prevalence perceptions through increased reporting on police actions and successes, causing heightened fear of being apprehended. Overstated crime detection information and a clear tendency to disseminate news about sensational crimes help generate a favourable police image as crimefighters that would otherwise balance out opinions on police conviction rates (Greer, 2007; Reiner, 2010; Roshier, 1973). In the same vein, because police rarely face criticism in media reports about minor crimes such as burglaries or petty theft (Leishman and Mason, 2003), police representation remains favourable.

Interest in the police occurs in the news when police officers are convicted or fall victim to the job, even when positive news could be reported (Surette, 2014). It has been argued that during instances of high public interest, and when police representation in the media comes to be unfavourable, there is not a large effect on police legitimacy as adverse actions often get put down to a few bad apples as opposed to police organisations being the issue (Chermak, McGarrell and Gruenewald, 2006). However, other research has shown that when police brutality occurs, the media have an influential role in raising awareness, such as the beating of Frank Jude Jnr in

Milwaukee by an off-duty police officer, resulting in distrust between police and communities that lead to a negative effect on crime reporting in black neighbourhoods (Desmond et al., 2016). The news media play some part in shaping perceptions about the police but seem to provide little information due to limited information coming from the police, causing unclear depictions of the policing practice (Rosenberger and Dierenfeldt, 2021). Accordingly, public perceptions of police effectiveness are largely shaped by the news media, leading to varying degrees of legitimacy perceptions (Chibnall, 1977). Taking into account how police force representatives communicate on social media as a means of enhancing understanding and perception of policing activities and crime, this study analyses how police forces portray themselves.

1.3.2 Police and Media Relationship

The previous section looked at media representation of crime and the police. This next section explores the relationship between police organisations and the media. This thesis makes reference to the relationship between these two factions because some of the points made within it cater to how social media practices in corporate communications departments have resulted in a shift in the nature of this relationship because of social media. For instance, social media has transformed how organisations and individuals communicate, altering public expectations of information outputs and service provisions (Mergel, 2010). The relationship between the police and the media only became more transparent in the 1970s, when the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) commissioner Sir Robert Mark implemented an official media policy for the first time. This new strategy sought to expand the amount of information provided to the media from 'tell them only what you must' to 'withhold only what you must' (Mark, 1977: 50; Mark, 1978: 134). Before this time, police forces were reluctant to provide information to the media as so to maintain control of reputation management and knowledge outputs. There is a symbiotic relationship between the police and the traditional media. As a result, there is an over-reliance on the traditional media, which often relies on police information sources for its reporting, and an absence of neutral

perspectives that inform news stories (Freckelton, 1988: 78-9). Inevitably, the media is very dependent on the police for information, and the police are dependent upon the media to distribute information to the community (Greer, 2007).

While the new policy did bring about better relations between the police and the media and strengthened police accountability, there continued to be trust issues between police officers and journalists (Chibnall, 1977). In the 1980s, the distrust between the police and the media intensified during the Thatcher government's politicisation of the forces, which led to the deterioration in relations between the police and the media (Mawby, 2002a). Research has shown, however, that over a long period of time, there appears to be little evidence of hostility between the police and the media in terms of social relations (Skolnick and McCoy, 1984). There are those who argue that it would be unrealistic to assume that the relationship between the police and the media will have a harmonious relationship always, since the police and media relations may change over time due to unpredictable events and incidents that occur in the policing world and that may influence how the media reports these events (Boyle, 1999; Hatty, 1991). The police-media relationship can be challenged by the media's presentation of incidents, particularly when certain elements are selectively highlighted within news items (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1989). The relationship exists to reflect the media and police wants and needs, whether to publish captivating news stories or to shape the police image in a good light.

Occasionally, the media-police relationship faces pressures that need to be overcome. It is common for these pressures to result in an unhappy marriage, a marriage that is subject to new challenges because of integrating new approaches to communication, such as the use of digital tools (Ellis and McGovern, 2015). Moreover, control in the relationship does not come across as fixed. It involves constant fluctuations throughout time, benefitting both police and the media depending on the respective work outcomes (Cooke and Sturges, 2009: 421). For example, in the context of police legitimacy, an examination of media and police relations found that the police

acknowledge the benefits of staying on good terms with the media to sustain legitimate representations (Chermak and Weiss, 2005). Since the police communications departments became professionalised in the 1990s, the ability of the police to be efficient in guiding the control of power, and vice versa, has resulted in a relationship that continues to have a power dynamic that continues to result in a greater degree of tension between the media and the police (Mawby, 2010a). Due to this, there are different relationships between the police and the media, and they are difficult to follow because there can be many conflicting methods of communication between reporters and communications departments. For this study, the impact of social media on police and media relations is necessary in order to understand and receive consideration from experts working in various police forces.

1.3.3 Corporate Communications

To further understand the role of police and media relationships, this section explores the research that focuses on the skilled communication departments. As mentioned beforehand, police forces across England and Wales formed professional corporate communications departments towards the end of the twentieth century. These offices hold responsibility for local and national public relations, media handling, internal communications, digital content, and other coverage distribution. This thesis is concerned with digital communications, although it also ties into media handling and public relations in general. For instance, police communications research suggests that public relations work should be considered crucial in maintaining police legitimacy (Mawby, 2002a). There are various definitions of public relations, but it is beyond this literature review's scope to examine these in detail, given the sole focus on social media rather than various police communications channels. However, a straightforward definition provided by Grunig and Hunt (1984: 7-8) fits nicely; they explain that 'public relations is the management of communication between an organisation and its publics'. This definition's simplicity and adaptability suit the police

social media context because such digital environments are employed by the police to communicate with the public and other stakeholders.

There has been a variety of research studies into police public relations since the 1950s. Before this time, there were few scholarly insights centred on how police communicate with the public. One of the earliest observations argues that activities that encompass public relations are essential, as without public relations, it restricts police efficiency and functionality (Clift, 1949). Developments in police public relations activities start with foot patrols that seek to build relationships between police and the public, then vehicle patrols that inadvertently create a communicative barrier, and community relations units that attempt to calm tensions in times of crisis (Terris, 1967). Much early work on public relations has focused on the MPS in London, which does not represent the other police public relations work across England and Wales. For instance, Schlesinger and Tumber (1994) note that media and communications innovations diverge between police forces. Therefore, it is problematic to generalise when examining changes in communications department practices unless a representative sample receives consideration.

Corporate communications help deliver the contemporary approach to public relations, which involves providing information to the public in conjunction with routine police work. It is necessary to consider why police forces have such departments since the policing model in England and Wales typically centres around creating strong relations with communities in the physical space (Rawlings, 2002). As an example, former public relations officer David Young suggests that 'a coordinated public relations system helps because it plans the work deliberately, and having planned it and set it in motion, endeavours to maintain it' (Young, 1966: 195). Thus, a strategic department enables a proactive approach to communicating with the public and other stakeholders while also having reactive resources. However, a fundamental view is that police organisations have become 'knowledge brokers' and 'expert advisors', supplying information about crime, victimisation, and prevention in the risk society, which can be defined as the organisation

of modern society in response to environmental threats (Ericson, 1994). In this way, the police spend less time fighting crime, which allows them to become better risk managers and sharers of knowledge (Ericson and Haggerty, 1997: 19). Since police forces are the primary sources of information concerning crimes and prevention, they can augment the amount of risk management that leads to preventive actions.

A significant role of corporate communications is to provide community members with information about risk, and public relations activities serve an essential role in conveying risk to the community. There are downsides to this task, as police forces cannot take on all the pressures of managing risk in society because it presents an impractical undertaking (Manning, 1978). Nonetheless, credible public relations work becomes imperative to ensure the continued existence of the police in the risk society. As Lee and McGovern (2013a: 110-112) outline, the credibility and absorption levels of risk information disseminated through corporate communications can hinge on the 'corporate reputation' to maintain police legitimacy as a knowledge broker. Thus, a dependable reputation together with expertise in risk management paves the way for communities to acknowledge police forces as prime suppliers of specialist information concerning prevention measures (Ericson and Haggerty, 1997). In this regard, corporate communications serve a qualified and informed voice that urges communities to absorb police relations work.

The theoretical position that police are core knowledge suppliers is understandable in the risk society (Ericson and Haggerty, 1997). However, there is not much tangible evidence to support this position. Several academics argue that police organisations in America and Canada are not prime sources of specialist information to communities, because police information needs to be thoroughly validated to be considered knowledge in a debate about police in the risk society (Brodeur and Dupont, 2006: 22-3). Others argue that police organisations are not as forthcoming in knowledge sharing practices which restricts the view that police are visible, reliable, and helpful in public relations work (Ferret and Spenlehauer, 2009). Despite these views, research solely

focused on police public relations highlights the considerable amount of work corporate communications departments undertake to share various types of risk-focused knowledge (Mawby, 1998). Thus, the sharing of risk information leads to a sense of responsibility on the part of communities for managing their risks. In this respect, as Lee and McGovern (2013a: 45) indicate, ‘the ability for police organisations to define risk, to both media and public, has the capacity to help govern public safety’.

In recent years, police forces have developed skilled personnel for disseminating information compared to the early and mid-20th century (Mawby, 2002a; Surette and Richard, 1995). A study that examined police communications in the American context found that while departments became professional access points to the police, they mainly operated reactively (Surette and Richard, 1995: 329). In part, this reactivity relates to a mix of mostly police officers and a lack of expert civilian staff working in communications departments. However, a growing number of civilian communications officers started to occupy these departments towards the start of the millennium, holding more public relations experience and knowledge compared to police officers (Chermak and Weiss, 1997: 12-3). In a subsequent study, researchers found that corporate communications are increasingly moving from reactive to proactive strategies based on a systematic process (Surette, 2001: 111). In addition, according to the results of the study, it also appeared that the civilian staff tended to be a mixed group of males and females with degree-level education, as opposed to the mostly male warrant officers with no degree (Surette, 2001: 114). Accordingly, it is no surprise that corporate communications in police forces across England and Wales began to gain an increasing amount of significance at the beginning of the 2000s.

In the years that followed, longitudinal explorations of how these departments functioned and managed communications around the United Kingdom emerged (Mawby, 2001; 2002a; 2002b; 2007; 2010a; 2010b; 2014). There are many investigations that relate to the concept of police image work and how police services construct portrayals of policing, to engage the public and strengthen

the perception of police legitimacy as part of the police image work concept. A thematic report about police visibility mentions that police forces have revolutionised public relations activities and 'gone are the days when officers on light duties filled the press office and marketing was limited to a stand at the county fair' (HMIC, 2001: 117). This change emerges in a survey on police communications management, uncovering that 64% of police communications departments consisted of civilian staff only who work on media handling, marketing, and public relations (Mawby, 2002a). However, this figure increased to 90% of all communications departments in a successive survey (Mawby, 2007). It is now possible for police to communicate with the public through official channels which have been designed to build public confidence in the police (HMIC, 2001: 132). In this way, corporate communications progress into an era where the police brand is being managed as a very important asset in communities and become part of the marketing communication strategy.

It should also be noted that corporate communications play a very valuable role within the police department, managing matters related to media relations and community outreach as well as various other areas relating to public relations. The core tasks that modern-day departments perform include public relations, image work, reputation management, campaigns, marketing, sharing information, building partnerships, media handling, crisis communications, and internal communications training (Mawby, 2002a). Many of these activities involve proactive effort, which is a substantial change from decades before when little thought process went into police communications (Chermak, 1995; Surette and Richard 1995). Still, there are continued internal grievances regarding the levels of reactive tasks that police communications departments routinely deal with (Mawby 2007). A prominent difference noted by Mawby is that the Head of Corporate Communications now typically features as part of the executive team, exemplifying that the communications arm is not considered a 'bolt-on' to police organisations but rather an integrated

division (Mawby, 2002a; 2008). In this regard, corporate communications have contributed to the broadening of the activities of police forces as well as improving their position and validity.

The transformation in these communications departments has led some police communicators to emphasise strong relationships with the media (Lee and McGovern, 2014: 27). Corporate communications intentions appear to show transparency, display positive narratives, provide reassurance, shape the police image, and pull in community assistance (Mawby, 2010a). These intentions are not surprising. In the Australian context, corporate communications work is 'situated on a continuum with operational policing', which means that police image work serves to assist and empower policing activities (Lee and McGovern, 2013: 119). In essence, these intentions are no different from those stated by Chibnall, who observed that there are three main objectives that need to be achieved. The police mission is to preserve the reputation of the police, facilitate the arrest of offenders, and showcase the work of the police (Chibnall, 1977). In other words, even though the core principles remain the same, the management, expertise, and skills required to make it happen have changed considerably. With the incorporation of digital technologies into these departments, there are many opportunities for police competencies to be strengthened in terms of communication, as a result of using these technologies.

1.4 Police Social Media Communications

As a continuation of the traditional aspects of police communications, this section will focus on the incorporation of social media into police communications. As popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have grown in popularity, police communications have changed in a more productive way. As a result of the widespread use of social media by communities and the media to share and consume substantial amounts of information, there has been a need to adapt and alter communication approaches for the police in order to comply with these needs (Kudla and Parnaby, 2018; Meijer and Torenvlied, 2014). It should also be noted that social media platforms have become valuable tools for police investigations as they provide a

number of benefits in terms of operational policing, for example, monitoring social tensions (Schneider, 2016; Williams et al., 2013). It is therefore not surprising that social media platforms have emerged as effective tools for corporate communications, given the large audiences, quick messaging, and low cost of accessing the platforms (Meijer and Thaens, 2013). Not only does police social media use to open the door for greater control over communications, but it also improves management over police visibility and accountability (O'Connor, 2015; Schneider and Trottier, 2012). In spite of these opportunities, the adoption of police social media accounts in the early stages of adoption has not taken off as quickly or as smoothly as it could have.

1.4.1 Uptake of Police Social Media

The uptake of social media by police forces has been a slow and gradual process, starting in 2008 until around 2011, when all police forces had a presence on the most prominent platforms. In the early years, only a few police forces became standout operators on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, whereas others remained cautious (Crump, 2011). Some police forces may have been hesitant in using social media at the beginning due to the associated risks of operating in these relatively new environments. One of the notable risks observed in the literature is police anxiety about officers or staff damaging police reputation. Allowing police officers and staff to communicate in new digital terrains could be alarming if activities go against police values, beliefs, and mandates. A similar theory is laid out by Goldsmith (2013), who suggests that the private use of social media by police officers can erode officer integrity and adversely affect the conduct of police officers. According to a Freedom of Information request from the Press Association between 2009 and 2014, a total of 828 cases were reported where police officers or staff had violated police force policies by posting unsuitable social media content on their social media accounts (BBC, 2014). Consequently, there have been instances in which police forces have had to overcome internal difficulties relating to the use of social media to benefit from the opportunities created by such digital environments to take advantage of them effectively.

Several other digital technologies have emerged in recent years, such as police force websites that have become important methods for expanding transparency in a wide range of communities (Cooke and Sturges, 2009). The need to implement police force websites and to convey information on social media fit the managerial reforms that police forces have encountered, particularly the *Modernising Government* white paper in 1999, drawing on a need for improved quality, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness in public services. Since 2010 police forces across England and Wales have faced extensive funding cuts, pressuring them to make challenging budget deployment decisions across the workforce (Holdaway, 2017). Typically, corporate communications departments would receive substantial budgets to carry out campaigns, marketing, and other public relations work, varying from a few thousand to over a million pounds in some budgetary cases (Mawby, 2007: 12). However, corporate communications need to find cost-effective methods to disseminate police content to reach communities and promote digital police visibility (Bullock et al., 2020), as most social media platforms are free to communicate and attract large audiences who are more likely to consume information quickly, providing viable alternatives to traditional media.

The emergence and adoption of digital environments also enable police to build better relationships with communities. For example, pressure mounted on the police following Stephen Lawrence's death and the subsequent *Macpherson Inquiry* to strengthen public relations (Macpherson, 1999). As a way of engaging with communities in order to boost relationships with the organisation, the police use the media as a tool to engage with communities in an effort to enhance public engagement (Chermak and Weiss, 2005). The public can only be observed as passive when the police use the media as a communications tool, but social media enables the public to be active in dialogue, creating opportunities to build stronger relations (Schneider, 2016). It has been suggested in the research that the police have not attempted to use social media to such an extent, primarily using Twitter and Facebook as a means of broadcasting information to its various users (Brainard and McNutt, 2010; Crump, 2011; Lieberman, Koetzle and Sakiyama,

2013). Similarly, a recent analysis reveals that police and public social media interactions remain one-way due to unclear social media communication strategies (Bullock, 2017: 255). In this regard, it is apparent that police forces still lack a sufficient understanding of how to incorporate social media into corporate communications in a way that will provide the most substantial benefit for the intended outcome.

Many studies on police social media use have shown that it is predominantly used as a broadcasting tool, even though its architecture allows for functions that extend far beyond this narrow one-way nature of its use. Some studies highlight that the police have participated in two-way communications with the public, but actual examples are limited (Heverin and Zach 2010; Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli and Sams, 2014). Heverin and Zach (2010) examined 5,117 tweets from thirty police department accounts in the United States showing mainly broadcast communications which is consistent with other studies, but intriguingly they also picked up on some two-way engagement work with the public. However, the samples and sizes of these police communications datasets limit generalisability, even though such findings provide a novel insight into police engagement. Still, methodological limitations aside, these practices are critical for capturing different insights. Moreover, there was an earlier report by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA, 2010) that suggested police forces should use social media to engage with the public rather than broadcast information to the public, demonstrating a lack of imagination with regard to police using social media.

In addition, the National Policing Improvement Agency recommended using Twitter to distribute news before it reaches the mainstream media (NPIA, 2010). As mentioned previously, this process differs from traditional media handling, where information gets distributed via a press release to the media, and then limited sections of communities absorb this information through articles or broadcasts. With police social media content, communities can reply to and interact with police communications through various functions (such as likes, retweets, shares, and comments),

making it an active experience. Police forces have struggled to use Twitter and other platforms to maximum potential, especially in regard to empowering two-way conversation with the public (Crump, 2011: 24). Some studies have noted the need for strategic approaches to building community trust and confidence through clear, transparent, and engaging communications (Merry et al., 2012). A study published in 2011 suggests that police Twitter messages in Dorset were most effective when they contained rich, detailed, and informative content as opposed to shorter and less informative ones (Fernandez, Cano, and Alani, 2015: 23). Essentially, this means that the more interesting the content the police publish, the more likely it is that the public will interact with the content. Although two-way communications may not be a primary occurrence, police forces must generate information that will be valuable to pique and maintain public interest (Beshears et al., 2019). In the England and Wales, there is relatively scant research on police communication strategies. As a way of addressing this gap, this research aims to examine what strategies are being used by different forces, as well as what images they create to communicate their messages.

Furthermore, communities in England and Wales as well as in other countries across the globe increasingly expect their local police organization to be visible on social media platforms and accessible to the community (Crump, 2011; Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli and Sams, 2014; Schneider, 2015). The demand for digital police visibility is not startling, as many companies, organisations and public services now have a digital presence (Schneider, 2014). In Australia, for example, there is evidence of meaningful engagement between police and communities, with police officers regularly publicising recent police work, crime prevention advice, and updates about crime risks (Lee and McGovern, 2013). These findings also corroborate O'Connor (2017), who noticed that some police departments in Canada conversed and cooperated with communities through informational and interactive communications. As Lee and McGovern (2013a: 115) argue, these communication practices generate a 'virtual presence to let the community know that the local police are successfully performing their policing'. This digital presence makes perfect sense, as

police forces worldwide needed to revamp police identity to inspire symbolic support from communities (Schneider, 2014: 14-5). Therefore, the rise of police social media has allowed police forces to bolster digital police visibility in tandem with physical actions.

1.4.2 Social Media During Crisis

Having established the uptake of social media, this literature review will now consider police social media during times of crisis. As mentioned earlier, every police force in England and Wales joined either Twitter or Facebook towards the end of 2011. Many police forces had been on Twitter for several years at this point, but nothing prepared corporate communications for a time of crisis. It has been proven that social media can be an effective tool for the police in a number of ways. In terms of its value as a source of intelligence, it is particularly valuable when dealing with disasters and social crises such as severe storms and flooding since it facilitates sending out information to reassure the public during these times of crisis (Schneider & Trottier, 2012). Additionally, social media platforms can facilitate the sharing of real-time information among residents about the most pressing issues they face daily, such as traffic or weather-related issues (Denef et al., 2013), by allowing them to communicate in real-time about the daily issues they face.

The 2011 riots in England were a significant turning point in police use of social media. This change is particularly evident when looking at followers of police Twitter accounts. For instance, the MPS follower total on Twitter increased considerably from 2,900 to over 34,000 between June and August 2011 (Procter et al., 2013: 416). This increase in social media followers shows that Twitter became a digital environment for communities to consume police communications about incidents and was also used as a clean-up tool after the riots (Ball and Lewis, 2011). What is more, based on 1,746 tweets, research shows that Twitter communications between communities and local governments through the riots centred around unplanned but effective information dissemination and cooperation (Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli and Sams, 2014).

While local government associations had some successes in using social media during the riots, this was not the case for police forces. Denef et al. (2013) showed how the MPS and the Greater Manchester Police (GMP) took two differing stances when informing the public during the 2011 riots through Twitter. On the one hand, they contend that the use of Twitter by the MPS was formal and lacked direct engagement with the public when relaying information about the riots. On the other hand, they found that the GMP took a more informal communicative approach and responded to individuals who asked questions. Likewise, the results also demonstrated that the MPS adopted a generic kind of dialogue in social media communications, while the GMP had a comparatively equal mix of generic and direct content. The varied use of Twitter by the MPS and GMP during the 2011 riots has drawn attention to the matter that police forces in England and Wales may lack clear direction in communicating with the public through social media channels (Procter et al., 2013). Despite the fact that national social media guidelines such as *'Engage: Digital and Social Media for the Police Service'* (NPIA, 2010) are acknowledged as promoting good quality engagement on social media platforms so as to promote trust between police forces and communities, the current research literature shows this is not taking place.

The communications circulated on social media proved crucial during the 2011 riots. Aside from the fact that police content could be instantly disseminated and shared numerous times, digital messages also altered the velocity and magnitude of mass mobilisation not only in terms of their impact, but also their magnitude. A review into the riots named *'The Rules of Engagement'* by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary sought to understand the police response, finding similar points to the above in terms of social media employment. For example, the review found police forces differed in tactics, with some police forces using corporate communications, specialist teams, and local policing teams to monitor tension using digital devices (HMIC, 2011: 30-1). However, aside from Williams et al. (2013), there remains a dearth of research on community tension monitoring on digital platforms, despite the clear benefits.

What the limited research does show is that the police attempted to observe social media as much as possible during the riots but were vastly overwhelmed with the volumes of information presented (HMIC, 2011). However, police forces had more success with using social media in the aftermath of the riots, assisting with public responsabilisation in the clean-up, supporting the apprehension of those involved in the rioting across the country, and promoting police investigation triumphs (Lee and McGovern, 2013). To provide an international comparison, after the Vancouver riots in 2011, the Canadian police also employed social media to gather intelligence to locate offenders (Schneider and Trottier, 2012; Schneider, 2016). Similarly, research indicates the lack of a standard and broad approach to police use of social media during these riots. The literature also reveals limited knowledge about differences in communicative practice between police worldwide. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine the differences in social media platforms within England and Wales and contribute knowledge about them from a comparative perspective by exploring such differences within the two countries.

1.4.3 Police Social Media Practice

The focus so far has been on the police use of social media in crises. This last section reviews research that centres on how police communicate on social media generally. As mentioned briefly above, an affordance of communicating policing and crime content on digital platforms is that police forces take control over information published to communities (Fielding, 2021). This control is favourable for police forces, especially those who need to act cautiously with the media

following the Leveson Inquiry¹. While there were weaknesses found in policing following the inquiry, the power in the police and media relationship swung in favour of the latter because new national measures to enhance approaches to media relations came into fruition (Mawby, 2014: 253-4). When the police took control of the direct communication with communities and other stakeholders following the inquiry, social media provided them with the ability to circumvent traditional media (Brainard and McNutt, 2010). Social media has not only enabled the ability to communicate policing messages, but it has facilitated an environment where the police can also respond to the media about crime concerns (Lee and McGovern, 2014). Still, the extent to which social media theoretically transforms police communications is questionable due to varied approaches when using digital technologies across police forces (Bullock, 2017; Crump, 2011). The main reason for questioning the transformative nature of social media is that police broadly distribute information rather than procure substantial collaborations or interactions, which restricts the benefits of communications and image work. In this thesis, the transformative nature of social media usage is addressed in an effort to expand the present knowledge about this issue.

A recent study identifies several affordances for police and community engagement, contingent on how they operate social media platforms. Bullock et al. (2020) conducted interviews with police communications staff and showed that social media platforms could afford police forces with visibility, editability, and association. The affordance of visibility implies that police can increase

¹The Leveson Inquiry, which was held following the News International telephone hacking scandal, was a judicial public inquiry into practices, ethics, and culture of the British press conducted under the stewardship of Lord Justice Leveson and led to several inquiries into the British press: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leveson-inquiry-report-into-the-culture-practices-and-ethics-of-the-press>.

their presence in the digital environment when the visibility of policing in the physical world is limited. This digital visibility can also be an essential tool for those police officers who do not perform street work often. As Crump (2011: 24) claims, social media offer greater visibility for senior and neighbourhood officers. In addition, editability relates to the power of social media to control outputs, audience targeting, and enhance content worth (Bullock et al., 2020). Editability is necessary to manage the potential risks related to having various digital presences within police forces (Goldsmith, 2013). The purpose of association is to create connections between social media content and communities, the media, and other stakeholders (Bullock et al., 2020). Such associations have become valuable assets for developing larger audiences and shaping police forces to be reliable sources for incidents, crimes, campaigns, and other information. Consequently, social media can be an influential tool for corporate communications departments, but only if applied suitably can these affordances provide clear outcomes for engagement with communities.

The types of content police forces post on social media can differ depending on the corporate communications approach. In police forces, for example, information is broadcast, interactive content is created, and messages are produced using formal and informal techniques to gather information from communities (Crump, 2011; Deneff, Bayerl and Kaptein, 2013; O'Connor, 2015; Schneider, 2016). Since the police service is a public service and they transmit a significant amount of information on a regular basis, it is pertinent that we draw from the work done in communications studies to examine how governments utilise digital platforms for obtaining information and communicating. In a study of government communications, Ines Mergel (2012; 2013) provides a framework for deciphering social media exchanges. A theoretical framework showing four major components includes push, pull, network, and transactions as the four central components (Mergel, 2013: 332). In push communications, one-way content is used to broadcast – here the communities are the audience. In pull communications, one-way content is used to foster positive relations with the public to draw in information - here communities are sensors. In

networks, content is used to support community building through two-way communications - here communities are participants or collaborators. In transactions, content is used to facilitate dealings between the organisation and stakeholders – here communities are service users. As Mergel (2013: 327) claims, with this framework, online interactions are traced to mission support and social media tactics are identified. The use of this framework in the policing context allows for a better understanding of the different content types distributed, as well as corporate communication strategies.

According to a study examining American police departments, even though there was no evidence of transactional communication, the majority of police departments had published social media communications that were related to the other three components of police communications (Meijer and Thaens, 2013). Despite the findings indicating that push, pull, and network content occurred, such content did not form part of any formal communications strategy and was typically a reaction mechanism to different situations and audiences (Meijer and Thaens, 2013). In another study, O'Connor (2017) did not observe police tweets relating to transactions but highlighted tweets relating to push, pull, and network communications. Further, research also illustrates that content primarily aims to push out information rather than pull information in, generate participation, or transact with the audiences (Brainard and McNutt, 2010). In a subsequent analysis, results showed that police Facebook activities incorporated more interaction and network type content than previously found, but still mostly centred around push and some pull approaches to communication (Brainard and Edlins, 2015). Consequently, studies examining police social media content commonly suggest the push strategy as the most effective, with pull and network showing some existence and transactions rather scarce. In light of the fact that little research has been conducted on the types of communication used by police across England and Wales, this study contributes to the knowledge about the kinds of content that police disseminate to communities.

Police social media studies also draw attention to the role platforms play in operational activity. The application of social media in American police departments helps ‘enhance citizens’ input in police investigations, control crowds, tackle crises, obtain better input in policy-making processes and attract new police officers (Meijer and Thaens, 2013: 343). Results from the analysis of Canadian police tweets highlight that the police frequently operate social media as a tool to request intelligence from the public to aid ongoing incidents or crimes (O’Connor, 2015). Likewise, Ferguson and Soave (2020) indicate that when police incorporate engaging content on social media to request intelligence about missing persons, such as images and hashtags, these posts produce better public interactions and, in theory, increase the chance of a successful operational outcome. In contrast, an analysis of an extensive collection of police tweets before and after the coronavirus pandemic started in the United Kingdom revealed minimal communications centred around operational policing (Nikolovska, Johnson and Ekblom, 2020). However, it can be challenging to untangle the different methods used to build a picture about how social media are used to pull information in and not just push information out. Thus, the research shows that police forces use social media to quickly gather intelligence from the public about incidents or crimes, especially when compared to traditional appeals for missing persons or murder investigations made in the media (Leishman and Mason, 2003).

When looking at the usefulness of specific digital platforms, Lieberman et al. (2013) found that Facebook provides a somewhat fixed environment, akin to a forum, where posts and comments stay grouped, making it an instrumental tool for operational policing. In contrast, the Twitter platform appears quite messy during high interaction periods, particularly when attempting to sift through the platform to keep pace with large amounts of information and exchanges (Procter et al., 2013). Whilst Twitter may seem a bit chaotic for operational policing, during real-time events, the platform shines as police forces can put out factual information, dispel rumours, and draw in intelligence (Crump 2011; Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli and Sams, 2014). An investigation into the

Indonesian National Police use of Instagram suggests that sharing pictures and videos of the police can produce positive public responses (Prabowo and Rusfian, 2019). Therefore, digital platforms may benefit operational policing in distinct ways depending on the types of intelligence needed and the format of content available to be utilised whilst also capturing various target audiences. As existing research does not adequately capture how police forces perceive the operation of multiple platforms for various activities, this thesis explores this area in the context of England and Wales.

It appears that social media platforms offer a solution, or advancement in capabilities, in terms of communicating the police mandate and for operational policing work. Academics argue that social media platforms can harm the police because digital environments attract content that may affect police legitimacy (Goldsmith, 2013). At the same time, an imbalanced amount of information distribution could leave communities oblivious to police content, which might lead to the public missing out on crucial information, which breakdown police and community relations (Lieberman, Koetzle and Sakiyama, 2013). However, the attractiveness of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for increasing police visibility, expanding public relations, cost-effectiveness, the swiftness of communications, and the extensive audience reach overshadow certain social media constraints (Heverin and Zach, 2010; Meijer and Thaens, 2013; Meijer and Torenvlied, 2014). What is more, the visibility of the police frequently affords a sense of protection to communities that foster feelings of safety (Duckfoot, 2012). The lack of research examining police encounters with communities on digital platforms makes it challenging to make such assumptions (Lee and McGovern, 2013), but this thesis attempts to fill that gap in order to provide a better understanding of how police use social media to assist communities in feeling safer and more secure.

Generally, the literature indicates that there is an inconsistent approach to the use of social media as a tool by police forces, and this may be due to the fact that different police forces followed different approaches during the initial uptake (Crump, 2011). Variations also relate to social media

application constraints and the risks that derive from incorporating digital technologies in organisations that are resistant to change (Bullock, Garland and Coupar, 2020; Goldsmith, 2013). Digital society has created an unparalleled knowledge environment that includes redefining the orthodox gatekeeper abilities, such as media power, about information control and ownership (Ford and Mason, 2013: 17). There will always be a demand for communications from police forces, whether from communities or the media. However, the almost complete absence of community engagement within police communications on digital platforms exemplifies the scope for growth (Brainard and McNutt, 2010; Heverin and Zach, 2011). Thus, it is important to comprehend how and why police forces throughout England and Wales have largely adopted social media as a means of communicating, the limitations and benefits related to it, and how digital platforms have become an integral part of corporate communications as they became professionalised.

1.5 Research Contribution

This thesis expands upon the literature review in a variety of ways. All findings are discussed in the concepts of digital society, image work, and community policing. These concepts aid research interpretation to determine whether police media activities result in a more informed public sphere, whether police control further streams of information to traditional media and the extent to which digital outputs adapt police methods to interact and transact with communities. Digital society is defined by significant social and technological shifts that change the ways in which people engage and communicate. As leading social networking services, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram could transform the relationship between police and the public (Bullock, 2016). There has not been an exhaustive examination of police social media practices by many territorial forces, as outlined in the literature review. Exploring how and why the police in England and Wales approach communication dissemination is a meaningful contribution to the field that centres around police digital media activities and representations. Some research has examined media portrayals of the

police, but as highlighted earlier in this chapter, these were conducted more than a decade ago, focused on a media depiction of crime, or lacked a comprehensive examination of media reporting and relationships between police and media outlets.

Existing research has revealed that police organisations are publishing increasing amounts of information via social media platforms. This research builds on this finding by indicating that it is easier for the public to keep engaged with police work when they understand more knowledge through a variety of content types. The findings contribute to the notion that police use Twitter to benefit operational policing, as gathering information from the public can assist with investigations. As a result of the new visibility of the police, complex mechanisms and dynamics of (re)constructing police legitimacy are at the heart of this when examining police image work (Goldsmith, 2010). As a result of enhanced visibility, the police can, on the one hand, reach groups and people they otherwise would not have access to. Therefore, they can deliver information more effectively. The downside, however, is that their enhanced visibility may jeopardise police reputations as *sousveillance* is also widespread. Moreover, the thesis claims that police can interact with the public in digital spaces to build digital communities. One of the key contributions of this thesis is that, in some force areas, the public can use social media to report crime problems and complaints directly to the police, demonstrating the police's commitment to providing speedy digital services.

The progression of social media use is explained in this thesis by the digitalisation of police communications, the next phase of police image work, which has taken place over recent years. The shift in the way police interact with the media and disseminate information is the result of a change in the way police use technology to communicate. As the main producer, the police must no longer rely on the media to circulate crime and police reports. Methods of communication have altered dramatically because of the internet-enabled digital sphere. According to the thesis contributions, social media platforms are a huge driver of corporate communications innovation

and development since these platforms offer unique features and lucrative target markets for both operational and community policing. As a result, the outcomes demonstrate that police organisations actively seek to employ digital platforms for transparency, engagement, and collaboration to shape the police image.

Moreover, this thesis contributes to the existing knowledge concerning police communications by explaining how some corporate communications departments have turned to social media led models. Among its central contributions is that the police have gained more influence in the relationship between the police and the media, which means they can now have more control over the material that is published in the media and, in turn, regulate how the public can access information that is not accessible. Though, due to the increased power and influence, communities have further information to digest without the extra media spin or sensationalist viewpoints in a clickbait media-focused world where misinformation can take place.

As the research indicates, police are increasingly using digital channels to enhance operational policing and to engage communities during less visible policing periods. At times when physical encounters are less likely, crime and incident information keep communities informed and boosts police presence. Visibility is important since it may be perceived as a critical aspect of the efficiency of the public service. The thesis cites a lack of officers as a reason for the need for a potent digital presence. To gain this visibility, the main corporate communications accounts post more informative content on their socials to assure communities and depict a crime-fighting image in a consistent and managed approach. Thus, this study is the first in England and Wales to investigate police actions and perceptions of social media, their goals for utilising such platforms, how social media has influenced relationships with traditional media, and contributes to a growing body of work looking into the police social media accounts content together in three diverse research methods.

1.6 Summary

This introductory chapter provides background information regarding police and social media. It then outlined the research objectives, questions, and structure. A review of the existing literature relating to traditional police communications and police social media practice presented the groundwork to answer the research questions. The core literature included is the foundation upon which this research builds on to provide new insights into how police forces communicate and achieve image work in the digital society. The chapter demonstrates how media reports on police and crime through various formats, how the media and police relationship functions, and how this can influence crime news. The power in this relationship often favours the police. This power can advance police objectives which weaken police accountability and legitimacy if the media is used to spread police propaganda. However, this relationship can protect communities from consuming too much sensational information about violent crimes and shield knowledge about police brutality that can jeopardise the legitimacy. It was also discussed that police corporate communications departments have become professionalised, developing into core departments rather than a bolt-on service.

The uptake of social media has presented many benefits and challenges to police forces, and this thesis aims to learn if these still exist over ten years later (Crump, 2011). The extent to which police forces have adapted to digital communication channels is still relatively unknown, especially from the perspective of the police in England and Wales. As explained, there is currently no national strategy for leveraging social media. These digital platforms are used by each police force based on limited resources and guidance. Therefore, this thesis intends to understand how police forces use social media platforms at the corporate level through several methods. Analysing Twitter data, a national police survey, and key informant interviews. This contribution to knowledge draws attention to the types of communications police forces disseminate to communities and other stakeholders. It maps out how police forces have integrated social media use within

communications departments, then it outlines the various ways corporate communications staff consider social media to change how the police communicate and perform image work. Before moving on to the methods and results, the next chapter sets out the conceptual framework, which delves into further detail about the concepts used to interpret the findings.

Chapter Two

Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

This conceptual framework chapter builds on the existing research examined in the opening introduction and literature review. Throughout this chapter, the conceptual ideas discussed relate to a digital society, police image work, and community policing. These concepts were selected because they draw on the digital environment, deal with the way police portray themselves to the public, and centre on community involvement and guide the understanding of the empirical results. Police communications have gone through a series of changes following the creation of the police, which are not only due to alterations in policing models or government policy. As a result of the increasing use of digital technologies, for example, police communication and presentation have changed dramatically. In addition, digital technologies also create opportunities to enhance public interactions online and facilitate the police to collect intelligence using digital media. The conceptual framework begins with digital society to outline how culture has changed because of new technologies. It then focuses on police image work and how this has shifted from informal to digital image management. Then the last section considers community policing and how this policing model applies to this thesis.

2.2 Digital Society

Society has come a long way since the introduction of technologies that digitise everyday tasks and connect the world. In the 1980s, computer infrastructure became a means to transform manual tasks into digital processes. The expansion of computer technology, news media, and media services saw the rise of what some call the information society (Webster, 2001). From a post-industrial perspective, the information society organises around knowledge intended for social control and the administration of innovation and change (Bell, 1976a). Moreover, Bell argues that

post-industrial society would change through service sector growth, increased information production, and a fall in manufacturing. 'A post-industrial society is based on services [...] What counts is not raw muscle power, or energy; what counts is information' (Bell, 1976b: 576). Instead, critics contended that the development of the service sector increased due to a significant employment downfall in the agriculture sector (Kumar, 1978). The differences in how society changed during the latter decades of the twentieth century do not support the idea that the decline of manufacturing would lead to a service-oriented economy. Thus, this thesis looks at how police forces are now turning to the use of mass communication to fit within a digital society.

In the 1990s, the internet started to cultivate vast amounts of information and facilitate communications, although restricted to Web 1.0 technologies (Ceruzzi, 2003). Following the development of the internet, a plethora of cybercrime research began to emerge in criminology. These included crimes that occur solely in the digital environment, such as hacking, cyber-attacks, and malicious malware (Yar and Steinmetz, 2019). However, cybercrimes could also transpire through computers and have actual physical consequences, known as interpersonal harms, such as child sex crimes (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones and Wolak, 2010). Research on cybercrimes distinguishes four main types: cyber-trespass, cyber-deception, cyber-porn and obscenity, and cyber-violence (Wall, 2001). The cybercrimes in the four categories fall within either computer-focused or computer-aided actions. Accordingly, digital technologies allow opportunities to cultivate new kinds of criminal acts that endanger governance and interpretation of order (Wall, 1997). Therefore, the digital domain offers ample latitude for novel criminalities.

With the growth of the internet and the influx of criminological work on cybercrimes, academics also sought to understand better how digital technologies have altered society. During the 1990s, network society was one of the early concepts to emerge. Networks driven by information and communication technologies assembled societal structures (Castells 1996). Networks are the leading form of social interactions through digital technologies and encompass a dispersed system

of nodes where communications occur in civilisation (Dijk, 2012). As such, Castells (1996: 5) states, 'technology is society, and society cannot be understood or represented without its technological tools'. The preceding passage observes the 'digitalisation of society', signifying the connection between digital and social (Stratton, Powell, and Cameron, 2017: 24). Thus, individuals, groups, businesses, organisations, and governments are heavily affected by digital processes in a digital society. For example, Lindgren (2017: 9) insists the digital society follows 'the development of the 'computing' machines into smart devices which have increasingly enabled large-scale networked connections, coordination, and communication in both automated and human-driven ways'.

In contrast to information and network society concepts, the digital society concept focuses on a new approach. Despite similarities between these concepts, digital society provides a broader framework for criminological inquiries as digital technologies progress (Powell et al., 2018). The human existence will become deluged with newer forms of digital technologies that become deeper integrated into society. Theoretically, culture and social connections shift, resulting in online and offline experiences merging. For example, the development of virtual reality and the ability to better understand the characteristics of offenders through research is now becoming possible (Van Sintemaartensdijk et al., 2022). Additionally, the advent of digital media has created an ongoing dialogue between police forces and the public, so the public may pose questions about police misconduct in real time through communications through digital means (Ellis, 2019). This impact on police legitimacy highlights how actions can spread quickly, are easily documented, and communicated in the digital society. The digital society concept identifies technologies as integrated into social and cultural norms (Stratton et al., 2017). Therefore, while there is growing importance in understanding how people communicate due to advances in technologies, it is also valuable to learn how digital society affects the police, crime, and justice.

2.2.1 *Expanding Web*

In the 1990s, the internet started to prosper, but most sites consisted of static web pages, and communications were limited. However, from the 2000s to the present day, one of the significant changes on the internet came with Web 2.0 technologies. The internet saw the advancement of user-generated content, interactions, social media, sharing tools, and communications that focus on collaboration (Lindgren, 2017: 29). At this time, the searchable 'surface' part of the internet was not the only part expanding as the unsearchable 'dark' part of the internet noticed growth. While not everything is illicit on the dark part of the internet, it is a digital environment that lends itself to underground networks, activists, organised crime, and black markets (Stratton, Powell, and Cameron, 2017). For example, the Silk Road drug market took advantage of digital technologies to mask drug selling across various countries from the police (Hout and Bingham, 2013). As a result, the internet was transforming and expanding in various ways due to the new digital infrastructure enabling social exchanges in sophisticated ways.

The digital technologies that powered the internet in the 1990s were mainly desktop computers and laptops. Yet, mobile devices have become commonplace in the digital society, meaning the internet can almost always connect to individuals through wireless or broadband technologies (Lupton, 2015). The ability to be connected on the go means the internet drastically redefined communications immediacy and flexibility. It replaces traditional communications with new social applications that are generally more engaging (Marres, 2018), with enhanced features such as content variety, group messaging, and encryption. Still, there are still a number of potential avenues for intimidation, harassment, and hostile communication available as a result of the different online forums, chat rooms, messaging applications, and other communication sites that people frequent nowadays (Pittaro, 2007; Spitzberg and Hoobler, 2002). So, even though digital technologies have increased connectivity and improved communications, there comes heightened associated risks.

Technological advancements have led to many devices in society becoming digitalised. This has allowed vast amounts of data, known as ‘big data’, to be collected when individuals carry out everyday activities. (Powell et al., 2018). Some academics claim that criminologists have not utilized big data enough since they have failed to collaborate with other research fields (Chan and Bennett Moses, 2015). It is nevertheless true that criminologists and computer scientists have successfully used big data to investigate a variety of specific events, including terrorism, riots, tensions among communities, and hate speech, despite the challenges of doing so (Burnap et al., 2014; 2015; Procter et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2013; 2019; Williams, Burnap and Sloan, 2016). As such, this research takes advantage of big data in social media data to examine large amounts of police communications. Data science methods, for example, are used to gather thousands of police tweets so that a large-scale content analysis can be conducted. As a result, social scientists are now able to collaborate with other disciplines in order to gain new insights into research problems based on big data, which is a result of the digital society.

2.2.2 *Social Media*

In the first decade of the 2000s, social media platforms such as Myspace, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, and Instagram began to gain popularity. A simple definition of social media is ‘...a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content’ (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: 61). Recent statistics show that 89% of adults in the United Kingdom access the internet daily, and social media is a routine activity for 70% of adults (ONS, 2020). These figures reveal the scale of digital society and how popular social media platforms are with people. Social media use has radically altered how information is shared, and how information is communicated and enables digital interactions and collaborations (Hemsley and Mason, 2013). Yet, the goal of social media platforms varies from platform to platform. For example, Instagram enables users to share and amplify photo and video content to start conversations.

In comparison, Facebook seeks to connect users with friends, family and businesses through profile and timeline features. Despite considering social media in general, there is a primary interest in Twitter due to its openness in providing access to data for research purposes. Twitter is a digital space to keep in touch and connect with a broad range of people and businesses through tweets, with messages that are limited to 280 characters to keep content short. Twitter users can like, retweet, and reply to tweets and follow accounts that are of interest. The value of social media is that it speeds up and improves social connections through diverse and innovative communication methods (Jue et al., 2010). Once a user sends out a tweet, this automatically gets sent to their followers and is discoverable to broader networks through liking, retweeting, or searching for the tweet's topic, like Brexit. This process is what Castells (2009) called mass self-communication, which can inevitably give social media users greater audience reach. Therefore, social media sites have become popular environments to connect in a digital society. For police forces, this opens opportunities to build online communities and present themselves through image work, and this is the main factor as to why the digital society concept feeds into the research design.

Therefore, it is no secret that social media have brought significant societal changes due to their popularity. In the last decade, technological innovation has transitioned from the informational to the interactive web (Dijk, 2012). This transition allows people to interact, share, and participate with the police and each other and facilitates interactive communication between society as a whole. The police, corporations and organisations can now express themselves directly to the public through social media, encouraging them to interact with people directly and providing them with real-time dialogue. As social media has become more popular, police are taking advantage of it to find out what the public feels about particular issues, which is crucial for improving public trust (O'Connor, 2015). In addition, the police employ various proactive communication strategies to persuade people to comply with the law, commands, and police decisions (Mergel, 2013). These

strategies have been greatly influenced by the emergence of advanced information technologies utilised by police forces across the globe.

2.3 Police Image Work

Image work is an essential but multifaceted part of police work. With societal innovations and the expansion of media formats, new image work activities have progressed. And not only in the context of the police but from a broader societal perspective. For example, the day-to-day management of image is an essential task for governments, businesses, and individuals alike (Thompson, 1995: 134-40). The police are no different, as image work ensures the public is aware of the ideals and values the police stand for and the actions which they carry out to serve and protect. As Mawby (2002: 5) defines, police image work incorporates multiple activities, including identity management, media relations, public relations, and marketing, with other undertakings that draw focus to 'activities in which police forces engage and which construct and project images and meanings of policing'. However, while these activities form the basis for police image work, the rise of social media has created novel environments for the police to have greater control over their image and communicate with the public (Bullock, 2016). The police have been able to carry out image work in a unique, creative way through social media, compared to traditional image work activities (Schneider, 2016). Therefore, to reach more people and satisfy professional customers such as journalists, conventional police image work practices should be considered alongside contemporary technical approaches.

Much of police image work gets actioned through corporate communications departments. As outlined in the opening chapter, these internal police departments share information with the media, publish content on force websites, operate campaigns/events, administer social media, and help develop the police and public relationship (Lee and McGovern, 2014; Leishman and Mason, 2003; Schneider, 2016). For the police to maintain legitimacy and accountability, as well as a positive image of themselves, it is imperative they are not viewed with hostility or contempt by the

public. Having such negative views can have a negative impact on police operations, harm the public's ability to report crime, and hinder the supply of useful information to police (Terris, 1967). Hence, in order to prevent harmful perceptions of police, corporate communications are crucial, as they serve to enable the police to communicate in a professional manner. Communication departments are staffed with unwarranted civilians, and this can constitute a number of people such as communication officers, marketing specialists, press agents, and experts in corporate identity and branding (Mawby, 2001: 44). While communications departments carry out police image work, such activities appear at all organisational levels, with frontline officers performing vital face-to-face image work. As McManus (1955: 105) claims, the police officer should have '...a profound comprehension of his relationship to society generally, of the responsibilities inherent in the use of his authority, and of some of the basic sociological factors that may affect the police-public relationship'. In theory, the police officer role is necessary for positive image depictions. Officers' image work seeks to achieve meaningful relationships with communities in tandem with the constructed messages disseminated through corporate communications departments.

The above provides a summary of what image work consists of in the policing context. However, it is necessary to delve deeper to understand how police image work has changed over time for police organisations. As Mawby (2002) asserts, there are four principal stages to police image work. First is 'informal image work' between 1829-1919, the second is 'emergent public relations' between 1919-1972, the third is 'embedding public relations' between 1972-1987, and the fourth is the 'professionalisation of police image work' from 1987 onwards (Mawby, 2002: 6). It is the central contribution of this thesis to propose that technological developments have led to the emergence of the fifth stage of police image work due to advancements in digital communication. The start of this further development is most notable in 2011 after the spread of rioting across England, as social media played a critical role for police forces in disseminating information to communities, media, and other stakeholders (Procter et al., 2013). In Chapter Seven, this thesis

refers to the fifth period as the ‘digitalisation of police image work’. From the above stages, police image work has changed and altered over time. With the rise of social media for police communications, further digital development has occurred (see Bullock, 2016; Crump, 2011; Schneider, 2016).

2.3.1 *Informal Image Work*

‘Informal image’ work commenced in a period of social antagonism concerning the enactment of the Metropolitan Police Act 1829 by Sir Robert Peel (Mawby, 2002: 7), giving rise to the Metropolitan Police, which some refer to as the ‘new police’ (Hay and Snyder, 1989: 5). Bow Street Runners² worked in parallel with the Metropolitan Police from 1829 until 1839, before the ‘new police’ became operational in London from the Bow Street Police Office in 1792. (Cox, 2012). Correspondingly, London’s metropolis was not unfamiliar with a form of authoritative policing, such as the Runners, since there was a transition from the existing night watchmen, parish constables, and civilian-led policing (Beattie, 2012). Despite this, the years leading up to Peel’s proposed Metropolitan Police Act saw much debate, rhetoric, and protest in opposition to establishing the ‘new police’. The introduction of the ‘new police’ negatively impacted English society’s values and liberties (Reiner, 2010: 42). The public discontent was attributed to the Metropolitan Police’s view of a continental policing model, containing elements of militarisation, hierarchical structure, stringent discipline, and covertness (Emsley, 1996: 25). These were

² In 1749, Henry Fielding founded a police force known as the Bow Street Runners to enforce the Bow Street Magistrates’ Court in the City of Westminster. As a result of the runners becoming London’s first professional detective force, the runners formed a body of honest, efficient, and fair investigators.

characteristics that the Bow Street Runners did not possess and contrasted the public perceptions of what the Metropolitan Police would consist of in practice.

In defiance of public opposition, there was a necessity to establish the Metropolitan Police to reduce the rising levels of criminality as the expanding metropolis became a hotbed for crime and disorder (Reiner, 2010). There was an apparent rise in crime within London following the introduction of prosecution statistics in 1805. Up to the mid-nineteenth century, these statistics indicated that many offenders received sentences for committing crimes (Gatrell and Hadden, 1972). Despite the increase, the rise in sentences might not owe to a substantial rise in criminality; instead, prosecutions became more commonplace (Hay and Snyder, 1989). Thus, the Metropolitan Police formation was desirable to combat the growing rise and fear of crime, attributed to regular prosecution statistics. There was an apparent reason behind the need to have some form of police image work, albeit informal as Mawby (2002) categorises. Still, with public opposition against the 'new police' operating contrary to traditional social principles and freedoms, image work needed to integrate into police and policing efforts to alter adverse public perceptions.

Following the Metropolitan Police formation and to alter the negative public opinion stemming from it, the 'new police' had to make a stand in differentiating themselves from both the militarised image and continental policing practices (Emsley, 2010). At the heart of the 'new police', a founding principle conveyed that the force should make a careful effort to convey an approachable image rather than the notion of power to 'cast the police in the mild, unaggressive role that has always marked them out from the police of many other countries' (Critchley, 1973: 30). To further separate the 'new police' from both the militarised and continental policing image, considerable effort went into designing the British police appearance. As Emsley (1996: 26) affirms, the 'new police' appeared visibly dissimilar to militarised personnel, wearing 'top hats, uniforms of blue, swallow-tail coats with the minimum of decoration, contrary to the short scarlet tunics with coloured facings and piping of the British infantry'. In the way of contrast, the preceding Bow

Street Runners frequently carried out police work without wearing a uniform so as not to differentiate themselves from the public (Cox, 2012: 125), consequently resonating with the covertness displayed in the continental style of policing.

Another point to consider is that rather than carrying firearms like the military or continental police, weaponry for Metropolitan Police officers remained limited to a wooden baton, and its use was authorised only in critical situations (Reiner, 2010: 72). However, when patrolling unsafe areas, police officers were issued with cutlasses at times, and those officers holding the rank of inspector or higher were permitted to possess a small pistol (Emsley, 2010). The actions taken above were an informal method in making the 'new police' unlike both the military and continental police, to rid the negative public views. Another factor to consider within the informal image work phase is police officer employment. Recruitment remains a crucial element in portraying a positive image to the public by recruiting officers who mirror the general populace (Critchley, 1973: 31). As Mawby states, police officer recruitment through low wages stood as a means for targeting the working class instead of the affluent so that officers would reflect the people living in the metropolis communities (Mawby, 2002: 8). Throughout the remainder of the informal image work period, the Metropolitan Police reduced the preconceived negative police image, owing to effective policing methods and press interest in positively portraying the police (Emsley, 1996; Reiner, 2010). As a result, the Metropolitan Police was unlike any law enforcement agency that had come before, partly due to its informal image work. It has been claimed by Mawby (2002: 11) that by the end of the informal image work period, the Metropolitan Police had become the 'best police in the world'.

2.3.2 Emergent Publicity

After informal image work, the next periodisation was 'emergent public relations' (Mawby 2002: 6). Coming from a period of little formal police and press relations, a dedicated office to distribute policing information to the press developed to operate this function in the first quarter of the

twentieth century. As Chibnall (1979) notes, on the 1st of October 1919, following discussions between the Metropolitan Police Commissioner and the Newspaper Proprietors Association, a press room was established in Scotland Yard to distribute information to members of the press twice daily. However, as Macready confirms, the Scotland Yard press room's creation was mainly due to a growth in police officers being offered bribes for information by individuals associated with the press, which negatively impacted police legitimacy and image (Macready, 1924: 416). Thus, the press room aimed to 'dissipate the clouds of mystery in which Scotland Yard was supposed to be enveloped, and to reduce the temptation to obtain information by bribes' (Macready, 1924: 417). Communications with the press make the police more transparent, reduce the likelihood of public scandals and augment police image management. Despite the positive intentions for creating the press room, during the 1930s, members of the press were still using informal 'backdoor' methods to obtain information from the police (Chibnall, 1979: 136). Therefore, the press room was not perfect for solving backhands or satisfying all press information requests (Mawby, 2002: 12). The press room establishment signifies that image administration was a primary concern due to the negative image of corruption and control of the information provided to journalists.

Even though the press still utilised unofficial techniques to obtain information, by the end of the 1930s, the press's work on policing and crime seemed in good light (Cherrill, 1954: 171). In 1945, when Sir Harold Scott became Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, an increased effort was exerted into nurturing the police and press relationship. The former Commissioner observed benefits in the press for 'formulating the public image of the force and as an ally in the fight against crime', leading to the creation of the 'Public Information Officer' and growth in the size of the press office at Scotland Yard (Chibnall, 1979: 137). As Mawby asserts, the so-called 'golden age' of policing from 1945 to the end of the 1950s marked the emergence of quintessential fictional figures such as Police Constable George Dixon from the film *The Blue Lamp* and Detective Fabian

from the television series *Fabian of the Yard* (Mawby, 2002: 15). In tandem, Loader argues that the 1950s were a period of post-war society in which the police and public relationship found itself in ‘...a time of relative, perhaps even unparalleled, social peace and consensus’ (Loader, 1997: 13).

Police and public relations deteriorated during the late 1940s and 50s following an upsurge in crime within London, low morale inside the police, and fewer officers employed since the Metropolitan Police was formed (Chibnall, 1977: 51-6). In consequence, the fanciful creations of both *Dixon* and *Fabian* indicated an embellished image of the police. Thus, a period featuring the most positive police image work between 1939 - 1945 might serve as the most plausible example. Since the public relied heavily on the police to protect themselves and their property from looters during air raids, Weinberger (1995: 129) points out that public opinion of the police increased throughout World War II. Police also served as the first point of contact for homeless, lost or grieving persons as well as those bombed-out individuals and their property. There was a noticeable decline in the positive image of the police after the end of the ‘emerging’ phase of image work, and there was a discernible deterioration in the relationship between the police and the general public as well during the post-emerging phase of image work (Mawby, 2002: 17-8). For instance, Weinberger (1995: 144-5) argues that the decay of the positive wartime police image owed to a growth in crime, notably organised crime, because of the increase in vehicle use by criminals. The public became better educated, less fearful of the police, and more knowledgeable of their rights, leading to a decline in respect for the police (Weinberger, 1995: 197).

However, it was not only the above reasons which altered the police image and relations with the public. By the end of the 1950s, the police adapted their patrolling style to ‘fire-brigade policing’, using vehicles to traverse the streets and reactively respond to crimes when they occur (Emsley, 1992: 128-9). With police vehicles, the police were unable to establish a close relationship with the public because police officers had less desire to interact with the public on the streets (Emsley, 2010), thereby creating a distance between them. However, fire brigade policing was initially aimed

at improving the relationships between police and the public (Reiner, 2010: 79). Thus, following routine police vehicle use, the police became progressively reactive rather than proactive.

Media depictions of the police changed throughout the 1960s, shifting from the friendly local bobby to hardened crime fighters. The police image received reconstruction and refinement to suit the developing themes of the press, such as ‘speed, vigour, change, technology and science’ (Chibnall, 1977: 71). For example, television representations of the police changed from the visionary ideals of Fabian and Dixon with the introduction of ‘tougher and tended’ police characters like those within the police drama *Z Cars* in 1962 (Emsley, 1992: 130). However, the police and media relationship deteriorated during the late 1960s. The media sought to report on matters beyond crime and focused more on police technological transformations and procedures (Mawby, 2002: 18). However, concerns about policing behaviour continued to be cast out of the public interest (Emsley, 1996). Consequently, police image work during the end of the ‘emergent’ phase was going through a period of change following the rise in crime, changes in policing methods, and alteration in the media depiction of the police in the press and on television screens. Consequently, Mawby (2002) indicates that the next stage of police image work focuses on embedding public relations within police departments.

2.3.3 Embedding Phase

Turning now to the ‘embedding of public relations’, Mawby suggests that the embedding phase commenced in April 1972, when Sir Robert Mark accepted the Metropolitan Police Commissioner role (Mawby, 2002: 19). Following police scandals and a ‘state of open warfare’ between the police and the press, Mark prioritised the need to rid of the negative police image (Chibnall, 1979: 140). To purge the undesirable police image, Mark improved relations between the police and the press through a better organised public relations department. Several hundred police officers were being asked to resign or be discharged from the Metropolitan Police Department after it created a separate department to deal with police complaints and a large reassignment of detectives to

different positions took place (Emsley, 1996: 179). Similarly, to strengthen relations with the press, Mark built direct and personal connections with press executives from Fleet Street to put forward his policies and negotiate informal agreements regarding police-press relations (Chibnall, 1979: 140). Mark took the opportunity to increase police accountability through the press by unlocking the police-press relationship through a new press policy, which initiated the 'withhold only what you must' directive in 1973 (Mark, 1978: 134). Although the police became more transparent with a better public relations department, it remained a balancing of accessibility to manage information flow since only select journalists were issued access by the Metropolitan Police (Mawby, 2002: 22). Thus, while public relations were becoming embedded within the police through a better-managed department, steps subsisted to restrict and shape what communications were released to the press to control the police image.

Public confidence and support were at the core of better public relations for the police during the 1970s. There is no doubt that maintaining public confidence and support is one of the most critical aspects of preserving police authority. The press plays a fundamental role in maintaining public confidence and support by publishing information that is provided to them by the police (Mark, 1977). As Mark pointed out, the new press policy in 1973 was more than simply allowing the media to gain access to the police. Rather than being passive, the press policy focused on making the police the active propagandists (Chibnall, 1979: 143). Nevertheless, as Mawby illustrates (2002: 23), to accomplish public backing, the police must 'win by appearing to lose', which underscores that keeping public support and confidence elevated during problematic situations is a predicament the police encounter at times. Therefore, it is imperative that the police be effective in their policing practices, while appearing as such in a way so as to maintain the support and confidence of the public, with the press being used as a tool for maintaining that support and confidence via open relations between the police and the press.

As Chibnall (1979) claims, the police can use press relations to attain public support and confidence necessary for broader propaganda dissemination. Despite the new press policy's best efforts, not all reporters and officers were supportive of the better intimacy between the press and police officers. For instance, as the press office was occupied with civilian staff who did not have the authority to demand certain information about police investigations, the information would sometimes be released too late to be of use for the press or not at all (Chibnall, 1977: 147). It is often the case that the press is placed in a position to struggle between publishing details of police transgressions or underplaying police brutality in situations where public scandals occur, and this can lead to difficulties in maintaining public confidence in the police. According to Chibnall (1979: 144), during the 1970s, the press usually minimised deviant police acts. It is, therefore, evident that a great deal of effort was needed to bridge the communication gap between civilians and the police. This was so that the press office could work productively as a tool for publicising the police.

Towards the end of the embedded public relations phase, Mark's successors, Sir David McNee, in 1977, and Sir Kenneth Newman, in 1982, failed to maintain the strenuous work Mark put into improving relations between the public and the press. In 1987, there were considerable weaknesses in these areas, and better attention was needed to police communications in the following years (Mawby, 2002: 24). In no way is this intended to suggest that McNee or Newman are responsible for the deterioration of police and press relations. However, both of McNee and Newman's terms as Commissioners paralleled Margaret Thatcher's term as Prime Minister. As Reiner claims, this was a period of politicised policing during severe public order situations (Reiner, 2010: 184). During this time, the police image, 'a citizen in uniform', fitted the ideology of policing by consent, but police actions included veiled brutality (Waddington and Wright, 2008: 468). However, the police image was shifting because of the increased use of riot police during public order situations and the introduction of armed police since firearm crimes increased during the end of the 1970s and early 1980s (Waddington, 1991). As Mawby argues, the police image was tarnished owing to

armed patrols killing innocent individuals, leading to public concern about paramilitary force (Mawby, 2002: 25-6). Therefore, at the end of the embedding phase, much effort was required to improve the police image and police-public relations.

2.3.4 Professional Image

As briefly noted above, from 1979, Margaret Thatcher served as the Prime Minister of a Conservative government when both crime incidents and public fear of crime stood at high levels, which led to Thatcher stressing the need for reform in police functionality (Rawlings, 2002; Sullivan, 1998). Further, Reiner argues that the Conservative government considered the rising crime rates to justify strengthening police powers and penal policy (Reiner, 2010: 97). Thus, during this time, police reform is considered within the bounds of managerial reformation or 'new public management' (Collier, 2006; Cope, Leishman and Starie, 1997). This reform focused on making the police more efficient in an operational capacity, aiming for police actions to become more effective, particularly in reducing the high crime rates (Mawby, 2002: 29).

The Financial Management Initiative, introduced in 1982, impacted the police and other public-sector organisations towards achieving better economic efficiency (Collier, 2006: 168). However, it was the Home Office Circular 114/83 which outlined extensive focus on effectiveness, efficiency, and economy of the police, indicating that the police required both better management of its objectives, methods to assess the success of objectives and to increase the number of civilian staff in the police (Home Office, 1983). In reflection, there were two types of managerialism employed to make the police more effective and efficient. 'Strong managerialism' saw the Home Office have more control over the police for policy purposes, and 'weak managerialism' centred on economic savings through tax cuts to gain electoral votes (Sullivan 1998: 307).

While signs of 'strong' and 'weak' managerialism were said to exist, the new public management model contained numerous elements to alter how public-sector organisations function to achieve better outputs. For example, several elements made up the new public management model; these

include the alteration of workforce culture, implementation of assessable standards and objectives, introduction of performance indicators, competitive environments, viewing the public as customers, and processes that reflect business management (McLaughlin and Murji, 1997: 84-5). In relating managerial reforms to police image work, these reforms impacted the number of civilian staff employed in the press office and police resources used to combat crime (Mawby, 2002b). Although the managerial reforms attempted to reduce high crime rates and improve police performance, the Thatcher government was disappointed as crime rates saw further increases towards the end of her first term (Rawlings, 2002: 213). Managerial practices were necessary as sizable parts of the police could receive performance reviews in planning to become more effective and efficient (Butler, 1986). However, for Waddington (1986), the police should not be subjected to managerial planning, as policing is complex, and incidents and crimes should be dealt with when they occur. As such, the police should assess each incident on a case-by-case basis. It was a difficult period for the police. The government invested in extra resources, centralised power, reformed police management, and crime was still a rising problem. This led to the formulation of a harmful and ineffective police image that did little for taxpayers' money in terms of real value.

Considering the implementation of managerial practices in the police and how the police transitioned to function in a business-like fashion, Mawby (2002: 6) classifies the next phase as the 'professionalisation of image work' from 1987. There have been significant developments in media culture as well as in society since the politicisation of the police that have led to the professionalisation of image work (Reiner, 2010; Thompson, 1995). During the period 1989-1999, televisions were used by the public to receive news updates at an increased rate of 800%; therefore, police departments had to accommodate large media requests for information (Mawby, 2001: 44-5). For police image work, this was an era where increased scrutiny over police actions came into greater focus as media organisations expanded (Reiner, 2008). In 1987 Sir Peter Imbert was appointed Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. Imbert had a reputable track record in

performing image work as Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police and subsequently pushed for better press relations within the Metropolitan Police (Leishman and Mason, 2011: 39-40). Imbert introduced the terminology *Police Service* rather than *Police Force* and sought to improve the police image with corporate identity consultants Wolff Olins who were hired to work with the Metropolitan Police on communication and image (Mawby, 2002: 28). Hence, the police were going through a transition phase following Mark, McNee and Newman's work to become further transparent and accessible as an organisation. As a result, Imbert sought to push for a professional and corporate image management process throughout the police organisation.

The subsequent report published by Wolff Olins titled *A Force for Change* gave recommendations on two primary concerns that powered the creation of the report, 'improving understanding and therefore the cooperation between public and police' and 'improving the way in which it communicates', noting the worsening of public perceptions towards the police and the rise in crime (Wolff Olins, 1988: 4-5). Additionally, the report states that the Metropolitan Police should establish proper channels to develop effective communication methods and generate a superior visual identity to demonstrate police values and beliefs within the organisation and to the public (Wolff Olins, 1988: 19). The PLUS programme, which was implemented after the report, improved internal and external communications, and the public were viewed as customers (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994: 108-9). From the above, it is evident that Imbert set out on transforming the Metropolitan Police for the better and tackled the feeble police image during this period. Suitably, the Metropolitan Police press office grew massively by the end of the twentieth century. It became the 'Directorate of Public Affairs and Internal Communications' housing under a hundred personnel with a substantial budget of nine million pounds (Mawby 2002: 44). Thus, police image work became more professionalized, focused, and contrasted sharply with previous phases.

As referred to in the first chapter of this study, police communications departments became professionalised in structure and operation. These departments are at the forefront of managing the police image work and communicating to communities beyond the front line, and the professionalisation has occurred internationally. For example, research has highlighted professionalised police communications shifts in Australia (Lee and McGovern, 2013; 2014), America (Surette and Richard, 1995; Surette, 2001; Brainard and McNutt, 2010), and Canada (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1989; Ericson, 1994; Ericson and Haggarty, 1997; Brodeur and Dupont, 2006). In other words, police image work has become increasingly important due to changes in quality and management over the past few years, notably during the different image work practice stages with technological advancements, government policies, and senior police officials acting as vital influences in shifts till the noughties (Leishman and Mason, 2003; Mawby, 2010a).

Mawby (2002) sets out three possible future police image work scenarios: marginal, supportive, and core. Marginal is where image work is trivial and separate from actual police work. Communications departments occupy a minor position in the organisational hierarchy to protect the police when scandals or public opposition occur (Mawby, 2002: 178). In the context of supportive, image work is part of the routine approach to dealing with the media and others, but it remains distinct from actual police work, though the departments do perform an advisory function as part of the organisational hierarchy (Mawby, 2002: 179-180). Core is where image work is fundamental for the police, rooted within the organisation, with communications staff working together with officers, so everybody becomes image workers who shape police depictions (Mawby, 2002: 181). Mawby concludes that marginal and supportive scenarios appear the most likely future situations, leaving open the potential that police forces may bring image work to the core with the importance of managing police visibility to where 'police work is image work' (Mawby, 2002: 184). The three scenarios above illustrate how image work has developed for all 43 police forces in

England and Wales, as well as the potential for image work to become even more deeply entrenched in the world of policing. This thesis examines the current state of corporate communications to determine if it is still effective.

2.3.5 Digital Visibility

Police corporate communications departments have become increasingly professionalised since the millennium. It is claimed in this research that image work has entered a new phase, the 'digitalization of police image work', and that this has set in motion various processes to develop corporate communications. This period started around 2008 when police forces began experimenting with Twitter and Facebook, however, during the mid-2000s, some police organisations did try out other social media platforms such as Myspace and Bebo for investigative purposes (Schneider, 2016). The use of Twitter to build the police image became apparent in the media in 2009 when Ed Rogerson, a Police Constable from North Yorkshire Police, shed light on the purpose of tweets for policing. According to Rogerson, his tweets aimed to provide the local community with information about police work because 'people do not see us, so they do not think we are there' (BBC, 2009). As a result, a small number of police officers acknowledged that Twitter could offer a valuable way for the police to increase their visibility to the community before corporate communications departments began to invest more time and resources in social media.

It is difficult to perform successful image work through digital media when working with a lot of diverse types of media. In the wake of widespread criticism received by the Seattle police department over a digital event that published 478 emergency call descriptions on Twitter, the department encountered challenges after the city was portrayed as being under attack (Seelye, 2011). While this seems like a harmless way to show insights into police work, it can cause harm to the police image if communities consume information in a way other than what the police intended. The police in Mumbai also received an influx of tweets when first starting to use Twitter from users reporting crimes, complaining about police officers, and requesting information

regarding traffic issues (Alok, 2016). The communications department was not prepared to handle such issues as compared to the police contact department which handles emergency and non-emergency calls. At the start of their Twitter journey, this influx tested the police departments capability to respond to communities via digital media. Such instances can negatively impact police reputation if they struggle to respond to communities on platforms that offer a less bureaucratic way to connect (O'Connor & Zaidi, 2020). When police use social media for image work, they can also encounter 'provocative comments' or trolling when trying to inform the public about police work, making the police more reluctant to digitally engage with the public (Bullock et al., 2020: 378). Thus, attempts to appear visible by documenting police work and being responsive to inquiries were challenging for some police services.

When digital image work was in its early stages, Mawby (2010b) argued that social media and websites were perceived as exploratory tools and not primary means to conduct police image work. More recent research outlines that police forces incorporate image work via social media as a central approach (Bullock, 2016; O'Connor, 2015), using platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to develop relationships with the media and interactions with communities (Lee and McGovern, 2014; Schneider, 2015). However, the extent of interactive digital image work is limited in use and can vary for police forces (Bullock, 2017; Procter et al., 2013). Even though digital media presents excellent prospects for publishing content to expand police transparency and develop community relationships, much police image work has sought to cleanse the police image instead of driving any real difference in policing (O'Connor & Zaidi, 2020). This image cleansing leads to manipulating the police image (Mawby, 2002b), providing a skewed perspective of policing that can mislead public perceptions.

A method that police forces use to perform digital image work is to bring a more human side to policing. Showing the human side of the police highlights the editability of social media, which offers police more control over how they can 'regulate expression' and 'target content' (Bullock et

al., 2020: 377-8). To regulate expression through digital image work, for example, police can bring humour onto social media, using funny pictures and memes to incorporate visual content rather than static text communications (Wood, 2020). Publishing memes is a measure to counteract the likelihood of police invisibility and generate more engagement for their social media posts (Wood and McGovern, 2020). Interestingly, in support of this argument, it has been found that content on police social media containing humour, memes, or cute animal pictures increased public engagement with police content (Wood, 2020). In light of this, recent research has looked beyond traditional image work practices. It indicates that digital image work is performed uniquely to increase visibility, engagement, and audience engagement of digital police media from physical communities by increasing visibility, engagement, and audiences. As a result, the research methodology consists of image work since it provides a comprehensive framework for interpreting how the police present themselves online. In addition, it will be used to interpret social media data, interviews, and survey outcomes.

2.4 Community Policing

This research refers to the main stakeholders of the police interchangeably as ‘communities’ or the ‘public’, as these are the principal police service consumers. Given the nature of police social media communications in publishing information to communities (Crump, 2011), it is essential to consider what community policing is in the context of this thesis. For the police to be effective in their work, there is a reliance on communities to inform the police with reports or provide tips about crimes (Friedmann, 1992). In practice, for the police to provide safety and protection to communities, assistance and interactions with communities must be required to pull in information (Dirikx and Van den Bulck, 2013). Through community policing, traditional policing approaches that emphasise police as crime fighters become replaced with models that involve communities and hold police accountable (Fielding, 1995). As a result of working with community members,

the police become more effective at reducing crime. This is because they build trust between communities and the police so they can work together to solve crime issues together.

Community policing as a model intends to build relationships with communities, reduce fear of crime, improve quality of life, and help bolster police legitimacy (Friedmann, 1992). It may also be considered that community policing concentrates on personalising the police service, revoking rigid traditional policing methods. For example, Manning (1984) claims that community policing in countries like the United Kingdom and America makes the police less bureaucratic, adding the personalisation of police through community interactions. With this less bureaucratic approach to policing, the needs and concerns of communities become front and centre with the expectation of better responses to community needs to identify and tackle crime concerns (Fielding, 2005). While most explanations of community policing focus on building trust and making connections with communities, it is still imperative within this policing model for the police to have a degree of distrust in communities to achieve their policing mandate (Hills, 2014; Manning, 1978). Therefore, in this thesis, community policing is viewed as the cooperation between the police and communities to determine and resolve community problems. Furthermore, community policing application necessitates focusing on issues of crime and disorder via police service provision.

The basic ideology of community policing suggests the approach is a policing model where the police and public build relationships, which can also help strengthen police image work due to greater police visibility (Mawby, 2002b). Internationally, police services may claim that they implement community policing, but the model can be misconstrued and not appropriately applied in practice (Friedman, 1992). Community policing can be interpreted differently between police services and police officers tasked with implementing the model on the streets (Mastrofski et al., 1995). The location of police services and social and cultural differences can make community policing challenging to implement. While community policing is a model based on better police and public relations, it can also be viewed as a process rather than a package by focusing on three

main elements: partnerships, problem-solving, and decentralisation (Russell and MacLachlan, 1999). Accordingly, community policing is not just a package that has a single aim which police services implement. Instead, it changes based on the police service attempting to employ the model and the demands of communities.

2.4.1 Partnerships

One of the main elements of community policing is the partnership between police and communities. It is crucial when community issues arise, especially those around crime and policing, that public participation is present (Skogan, 2006). Having cooperative police and community partnerships can lead to collaborative efforts that have the ‘capacity of changing the environment in which police and citizens interact, as well as the nature and quality of police services’ (Friedmann, 1992: 80). The collaborative partnership between police and communities is also fundamental in enhancing police performance when tackling criminality (Fielding, 2005). Any community policing approach would not succeed if there were no community involvement. A simple way to sustain community partnerships is to perform regular dialogue to learn about community needs so the police can deliver suitable responses and then inform the public about the steps taken (Russell and MacLachlan, 1999). However, community partnerships may be challenging to maintain, especially in areas that need this policing model the most (Skogan, 2006). Thus, community partnerships play a vital role in setting police priorities to sustain legitimacy and accountability but can be complex to support if the public, or police, are not receptive.

The community should be at the forefront of setting local policing priorities to act on the needs raised through dialogue and not the interests of senior police officials (Innes, 2003). The dialogue between police and communities is necessary as this enables the public to become coproducers, which is required to generate shared trust between both parties. Usually, police forces achieve this dialogue by holding regular meetings to set priorities and share the outcomes of police work. Moreover, these meetings help shape and control the police image and get communities involved

with policing agenda setting (Mawby, 2002b). The formation of community partnerships opens up the possibility for the police to control crime within local areas by making use of the intelligence that is supplied by communities to the police (Innes, 2003). Researchers have shown that community policing is conducted via social media by organising events online and gathering intelligence to help resolve ongoing incidents (Bullock, 2016; Lee and McGovern, 2016). This thesis aims to analyse whether police tweeting practices in England and Wales demonstrate the importance of solid police and public relations through establishing partnerships between the police and communities. This will be done by studying police tweeting practices in a digital setting.

2.4.2 Problem-Solving

Just like partnerships, another element that is crucial to the community policing model is problem-solving. Several academics and practitioners believe that problem-solving should be kept separate from the community policing model in order to maintain the essence of problem-oriented policing (Cordner and Biebel, 2005). This is in large part because community policing concentrates on bringing police services closer to the public for neighbourhood problems, whereas problem-oriented policing addresses conventional crime problems in new and creative ways. However, this thesis keeps problem-solving within the community policing model as this is important in resolving persistent crime problems the police encounter. Without such a problem-solving focus, this would render community policing akin to the traditional reactive policing model that merely seeks to make police and public relations better and not remedy issues in the community (Skogan, 2006). In addition, the community policing model allows police officers to locate and attempt to fix problems. In the practice of reactive policing, police officers in police cars become anonymous when patrolling the streets in their patrol cars to act as a deterrent to crime. This police presence opens possibilities to accomplish face-to-face engagement with the public leading to more immediate information about problems, and potential solutions, which are distinctive to a community.

As Eck (2004) claims, problems do not get solved because the police do not know about problems in communities. In a study that examined the main tactics used to solve problems, the findings outlined that community policing was key (Roth et al., 2004). In an attempt to be innovative, police forces can employ social media to solve community problems. Many police forces in England and Wales allow their police officers to keep the community informed and to invite interactions between the police through neighbourhood teams consisting of police officers and police community support officers to provide information to residents (Crump, 2011). Being creative is an integral part of problem-solving for the police, whether working with the public or with other agencies to find a solution (Eck, 2004). However, the interpretation of a problem can be problematic for police officers to define. A study that looked at problem-solving in America found that police officers are too specific in their categorisation of a problem, such as a particular individual or property (Cordner and Biebel, 2005). Therefore, if the police incorporate problem-solving into community policing appropriately and provide suitable training for officers, this could alleviate potential issues. In this thesis, an exploration of crime prevention and public safety topics will be undertaken in order to identify the methods used by the police to solve problems.

2.4.3 Decentralisation

In order to tackle locally defined problems, community policing incorporates the element of decentralisation. There are typically hierarchical structures within police organisations that tend to make it very difficult for community policing work to take place due to the formality of the system. Flattening this hierarchical structure to carry out community policing allows for more authority in lower ranks (Russell and MacLachlan, 1999). With the uptake of social media, some police forces were resistant and did not allow low ranking officers or departments to create digital accounts. A study that looked at community policing implementation found that police forces with a sizeable score for internal resistance were less likely to employ community policing in practice (Zhao et al., 1995). However, in the past five years, police forces have given police officers and departments

more opportunities to manage visibility in digital environments to target community problems and build relations (Bullock et al., 2020). In physical environments, police forces assign specific police officers and police community support officers to geographical areas, so they can go out and interact, perform image work, and gather intelligence (Mawby, 2002b). If high-ranking officers were left to make decisions about community problems, it would not work, and relations would be non-existent. Therefore, it is this decentralisation of the police that is important for police forces to be able to have the ability to perform community policing.

Skogan (2006: 36) argues that decentralisation falls between two levels; first, police inspectors who manage specific geographical areas are responsible for persistent crimes. Second, sergeants and police officers who work in neighbourhoods are responsible for the community (Skogan, 2006). The idea is to devolve the authority and responsibility further down the hierarchical police structure. Further to this, the management of police work also changes through decentralisation. For example, one study found that police officers had more time and flexibility to perform community policing work (Roth et al., 2004). Management within police forces also becomes more receptive to public feedback through community policing; from this, police work can change to reflect the communities needs and wants for a better service provision (Graziano et al., 2013). However, it is challenging to measure police officer or neighbourhood team community policing work successes as these may not be captured on official systems, like crimes solved, as time spent meeting the public is hard to determine accurately (Skogan, 2006). Accordingly, decentralisation for community policing is a constructive approach to get the best performance out of all police ranks and align focus on specific community problems compared to more persistent or specialist crimes. Overall, community policing provides a lens which allows the research design to examine how police forces seek to carry out engaging practices with the communities they work with. Overall, community policing offers a perspective that makes it possible for the study design to

explore how police departments aim to carry out engaging strategies with the communities that they are tasked with serving.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the conceptual framework, guiding the interpretation of the empirical results in subsequent chapters. A core concept was the digital society, which has created new opportunities for police forces to build digital communities through social media. It is important to consider digital society to comprehend how changes in police practice have been propelled using digital technologies. Another key concept was image work, which helps understand how the police communicate and present themselves. As this chapter underlines, image work has gone through many phases following the developments of police corporate communications departments. It is the purpose of this thesis to conceptualise how social media has advanced image work in the modern world as a result of the digitalisation of police image work. The final concept covered in this chapter was community policing. This policing model helps identify how the police enhance police and public relations to legitimise the police, solve community problems and adapt organisational structure. As a result of bringing together these three concepts, this research is able to build on ideas discussed in the previous sections to contribute new knowledge about the use of social media by police forces. In the next chapter, the methodological approach to this research is discussed. This approach is influenced by the existing literature and concepts this thesis covers.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the numerous research methods and datasets used in the thesis. It is composed of four primary parts that are separated from one another. The first examines the mixed methods approach adopted to capture the dimensions of police social media practice. The second section relates to the collection of social media data and the subsequent content analysis used to comprehend the tweeting practises of national police forces. The third section provides an overview of the custom national survey used in the project to collect data from police corporate communications departments, which was linked to social media data to provide unique insights regarding police force variation in tweeting practices. The closing section details the interviews that were done with key informants from police corporate communications departments as well as the thematic analysis that was utilised to obtain insight into the use of social media by the police.

The research framework in this chapter lays the groundwork for understanding the study's aims and objectives, which are explained in the introductory chapter. It was decided to use large-scale social data to enable comparable results across multiple forces, unlike earlier studies with smaller data samples. The survey data contribute to a contemporary and quantifiable account of how police structure digital media outputs and measure perceived digital media effectiveness. The objective of determining how the use of digital platforms has provided the police with more opportunities to conduct and develop image work procedures was a significant factor in selecting methods that would yield strong insights and robust evaluations. While social media data and the survey contribute to all the concepts outlined in the second chapter, it was determined that interviewing communication experts was the best research method for obtaining valuable specialist knowledge on image work. As a result, the following methods contribute to the thesis aims, objectives and

the following research questions: i) what types of content are police forces publishing on social media platforms? ii) how are the police leveraging social media to elevate their image work? iii) why are police forces using social media to communicate with communities?

3.2 Mixed Methods Approach

This research adopted a mixed methods approach to provide multiple insights into police social media use. There are several aspects involved in the communication between the police and the public through the use of communication technologies such as Twitter, which makes a mixed-method approach necessary in interpreting and examining the different layers of this communication phenomenon. Over the past thirty years, many pioneering research studies have been conducted to explore police communications. These studies have taken a variety of methods into consideration to explore police communications. For example, studies have taken the method of interviewing communications experts within police forces, providing rich and detailed qualitative findings on police communicative work (Bullock, 2016; 2017; Bullock, Garland and Coupar, 2020; Ellis and McGovern, 2015; Mawby, 2002a; Lee and McGovern, 2013; 2014; 2016). Correspondingly, there have also been instances where surveys examine how corporate communications operate, enabling valuable quantitative understandings (Surette and Richard, 1995; Ericson and Haggerty, 1997; Mawby, 2002a; 2007; Surette, 2001). While using social media data, studies have exhibited notable qualitative and quantitative results to comprehend digital police communications (Denef, Bayerl and Kaptein, 2013; Ferguson and Soave, 2020; Meijer and Torenvlied, 2014; O'Connor, 2015; Schneider, 2014; 2016). The emphasis here is that researchers in police communications studies have employed a wide range of methods to explore the topic. In this research design, it was apparent that different techniques afford insights helpful for this thesis. Consequently, the mixed methods design included social media data, cross-sectional survey, and interview data. In building a comprehensive understanding of police communications, it would be

insufficient to rely solely on one source of data to establish a comprehensive understanding and provide reliable insights.

There are several definitions of mixed methods research. An early definition considers ‘mixed method designs as those that include at least one quantitative method... and one qualitative method..., where neither type of method is inherently linked to any particular inquiry paradigm’ (Greene et al. 1989: 256). In another but more simplistic definition, Morse and Niehaus (2009: 9) claim that ‘mixed method research is a systematic way of using two or more research methods to answer a single research question.’ However, this research takes onboard the definition offered by Morgan (2013: xiii), who states mixed methods encompasses ‘research designs for projects that collect both qualitative and quantitative data so that using the combined strengths of qualitative and quantitative methods will accomplish more than would have been possible with one method alone.’

This mixed method process provides the ability to assemble a more holistic research project compared to other research designs that use a singular methodological approach and factor in the appropriateness of methods to the concepts employed. Indeed, it is essential to note the different benefits they bring when appraising qualitative and quantitative research. For instance, quantitative research is ‘the numerical representation and manipulation of observations to describe and explain the phenomena that those observations reflect’ (Babbie, 1983: 537). Conversely, qualitative research may be identified as ‘any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by exercising statistical procedures or other means of quantification’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 17). Accordingly, it is a central aim of qualitative research to examine the human or societal problem from a distinct perspective to draw out theory and context via an analysis of non-numerical data.

Distinctions between quantitative and qualitative research become further apparent when reflecting on explanations for research problems. Qualitative research is more subjective, focusing on detailed narratives, whilst quantitative research is objective, contributing descriptive and

inferential values (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). An additional distinction is that qualitative research is inductive, while quantitative research is deductive (Morgan, 2013: 48-9). Therefore, by combining both quantitative and qualitative elements in this project, I was able to draw out objective measurements and deeper contingent processes and meanings concerning police social media practice.

Adopting a mixed methods design renders moot the paradigm war argument often had between qualitative and quantitative researchers. This study endorses Tashakkori and Teddlie's (2003: 713) note on pragmatism: 'Pragmatism: This is a deconstructive paradigm that debunks concepts such as 'truth' and 'reality' and focuses instead on 'what works' as the truth regarding the research questions under investigation. Pragmatism rejects the either/or choices associated with the paradigm wars, advocates for the use of mixed research methods, and acknowledges that the values of the researcher play a large role in the interpretation of results.' I take a pragmatic viewpoint to develop skills in multiple methods and produce a research design that can tackle the research problem from multiple angles. However, this does not imply that research methodologies are selected based on their suitability or achievability; rather, existing research was reviewed to determine what works best in the communications field for interpreting results based on the concepts outlined in the previous chapter.

As a research paradigm, pragmatism embraces methodological plurality whereby researchers use approaches that fit within the scope of the exploration (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). In pragmatic research, a philosophical recognition of either single or multiple realities means the research methods used should reflect this position. As such, pragmatism acknowledges many methods that can effectively help interpret the experiences of human subjects (Morgan, 2007). Therefore, as a pragmatically minded researcher, it is not the mandate of this project to locate truth or reality, which continue to be in dispute between research paradigms (Powell, 2001). However, the research untangles human problems through pragmatic research practice and implements the

‘what works’ principle in exploring digital police communications (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

Despite adopting the pragmatic position in this study, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of research are valuable to consider (Bryman, 2012). Pragmatism rejects the traditional ontological and epistemological notions of reality since the pragmatist emphasises experience and its outcomes (Morgan, 2014). In terms of epistemology, there is a separation between objective and subjective ways of thinking around knowledge generation and propagation (Bryman, 2012). The divide between objective and subjective epistemology, like the quantitative and qualitative split, is not considered appropriate in this research. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) claim, the divide in epistemology is not helpful for pragmatists, suggesting a notion of practicality replaces the separation. Hence, the researcher views epistemology as functioning on a continuum (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Thus, this research encapsulates realities in the policing world to capture what is most important to solve the research problem, using several methods to understand realities through objective or subjective evidence.

When considering the design of this mixed methods study, it was important to consider the classification of the quantitative and qualitative elements, and it was determined that these are equal in weight, reflecting a quantitative plus qualitative class (Bryman, 2012: 632). For instance, the content analysis of social media data reflects both elements in parallel, meaning both the frequency and meanings of police tweets are equally important to the aims of this thesis. In the survey analysis, the focus is entirely on the quantitative measurement and links to the social media counts for modelling (to be explained further). With the thematic analysis of interview data, the focus is wholly on the qualitative. However, the qualitative research segments are not considered more important than quantitative research segments or vice versa. The research design here would be consistent with an exploratory sequential design, signifying each component follows another in the order they were carried out (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

3.3 Collecting Police Twitter Content

With the first research question of this research focusing on what types of content are disseminated from the police to the public, it was clear that social media data analysis was needed to explore police communications. The literature review revealed early on that Facebook and Twitter were two of the most prominent digital platforms relevant to the study of police use of social media (Crump, 2011). Facebook does not have an easily accessible Application Programming Interface (API), which is how researchers can connect to the backend of these platforms and obtain data in real-time and at scale. A filtered stream endpoint on the Twitter developer portal, however, provides researchers with access to a portion of tweets, allowing them to collect around 1% of all tweets in near real-time (around three million tweets per day) based on keyword and hashtag parameters. Twitter also allows researchers to use the search endpoint, which facilitates the collection of historical tweets. With the 'statuses/user_timeline endpoint', the Twitter platform allows for the collection of the last 3,200 tweets from individual accounts. It became clear that streaming data may not be appropriate for this research unless a specific event would prompt all 43 police forces to engage in tweeting. It made the most sense to use historical tweets from each police force account since no specific event occurred during data collection for all police forces. In terms of pragmatism, it was only apparent during the research design phase that Twitter would be the most appropriate platform for consistently examining police tweets; no other social media platform provides dynamic means to collect data for academic research to answer the proposed research questions.

To ensure comparability, the Twitter handles of police communications departments were identified for collection. It was decided not to include neighbourhood policing teams, specialist units, or individual officer accounts due to research capacity limitations and the focus of the research aims, objectives and questions. The statistical software environment *R* enabled the composition of a script to extract Twitter content. All original tweets posted by force

communications departments were collected between 21st February 2018 and 21st August 2018. The decision to exclude retweets in the collection came down to the reason that corporate communications departments do not create the content within such posts. For example, the retweets could originate from other stakeholders, such as fire services, health services, the media, or the public, which would create unnecessary blurred lines and distortion within the sample when performing the content analysis. For the same reason, it is not within the scope of this research to examine public responses to police tweets. However, replies from the police to users were obtained to capture interactions and transactions.

A sample of 53,551 tweets was generated in the analysis window. When considering the size of the sample in comparison with existing social media data research in police communications, most studies examine between 300 and 7,000 police social media posts (Denef, Bayerl and Kaptein, 2013; Ferguson and Soave, 2020; Lieberman, Koetzle and Sakiyama, 2013; O'Connor, 2015; Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli and Sams, 2014). While the analysis of social media content in these studies concentrates on interpreting communicating practices, this study needed a large and extensive dataset to classify tweets within the interaction framework (Mergel, 2012; 2013), which underlined 'push', 'pull', 'network', and 'transaction' communications. This collection represents the largest comparative Twitter dataset of the 43 territorial police forces in police communications research at the time of writing.

The methodology used in this study is similar to the approach used in O'Connor's (2017) study, where police tweets were categorised by exploratory content analysis, and code categories were developed as the research proceeded, rather than a predetermined list of codes which are defined beforehand during the research process. There was not a focus on events that may have seen differences between the responses of the various police forces in terms of communication practices. Rather, the aim of the research was to draw a distinction between different types of communications that police forces publish to communities and other interested parties. However,

a notable difference from the O'Connor (2017) study is that this analysis concentrates on both qualitative contexts of tweets and quantitative frequency. This process is an alternative to the singular approach, so the social media data can effectively be linked to the national survey to explore the differences between police forces. The content analysis does not focus on the count of specific words but instead on the prevalence of tweet categories (Bryman, 2012). Likewise, the categorisation of tweets needed to be robust so tweets would not fall through the gaps in the coding structure. Coding began with an open approach to understanding the general categories of tweets (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). After formulating recurring content categories, each tweet was read three times to ascertain the context and coded into the related category. Thus, the qualitative portion provides in-depth contextual understanding, whereas the frequency tweet categories provide the quantitative measurement in this analysis.

Four categories built from the interaction framework that categorises tweets by content: Informational, Operational, Transactional, and Interactional. **Figure 1** displays the overarching categories and subcategories that outline specific types of communications. Concerning informational content, the subcategories include incidents, updates, and outcomes; crime prevention and public safety advice; travel information and road safety guidance; and news, activities, and miscellaneous information. Informational tweets mainly encompass 'push' communications that seek to generate transparency, with the outcomes of building accountability and trust through information sharing (Mergel, 2013). For operational content, the subcategories consist of information appeals; requests for witnesses; or reuniting property with owners. Operational tweets serve as 'pull' communications that aim to attract intelligence from communities, with the outcome to generate community input to operational policing (Mergel, 2012: 282). For transactional content, the subcategories involve answering various enquires; responding to an incident or intelligence reports; signposting to other services. Transactional tweets comprise business-related, with the outcome of improving online service offerings (Mergel,

2012: 283). The interactional subcategories cover performing digital events; procuring interaction or participation, and conversing with others. Interactional tweets exist to improve interactions between the police and communities, with the outcome being to create networks that enable collaboration, deliberation, and satisfaction (Mergel, 2013: 332). Therefore, the classification of tweets in this content analysis provides a unique interpretation.

1	Informational
1.1	Incidents, Updates and Outcomes
1.2	Crime Prevention and Public Safety Advice
1.3	Travel Information and Road Safety Guidance
1.4	News, Activities and Miscellaneous Information
2	Operational
2.1	Information Appeals
2.2	Requests for Witnesses
2.3	Reunite Property with Owners
3	Transactional
3.1	Answering Various Enquires
3.2	Responding to Incident or Intelligence Reports
3.3	Signposting to Other Services
4	Interactional
4.1	Performing Digital Events
4.2	Procuring Interaction or Participation
4.3	Conversing with Others

Figure 1: Twitter content categories relating to the interaction framework.

An advantage of content analysis is that it is a methodical approach that others can reproduce. In making sure this analysis is replicable, there is a need to test the reliability of the coding structure, meaning an inter-coder reliability assessment is required (Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Bracken, 2002). Although a lone researcher embarked on this content analysis, it is essential to ensure that other researchers would achieve similar findings if using the same classification process. Hence, another person coded police tweets from a small random sample to calculate the agreement level between the primary and secondary coders when using the coding structure. Thus, to ensure the coding process was vigorous and reliable, a second researcher inter-coded 5,400 tweets divided evenly across the different subcategories. This smaller sample reflects 10.8% of the whole tweet

sample. The primary researcher then coded the rest of the data after testing to ensure analysis reliability and validity (Bryman, 2012).

The inter-coder test results showed an acceptable 5,138 agreements and 262 disagreements, with Krippendorff's alpha statistic (0.945) indicating a consistent interpretation of the coding structure (Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Bracken, 2002). Inconsistencies related to interpretation within overarching categories, such as when information appeals were interpreted as requests for witnesses or when crime prevention and public safety advice were interpreted as travel information and road safety guidance. In turn, this comes down to personal interpretation, and there will sometimes be disagreements when it comes to deciphering communications (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020).

This section has mapped out the process which the researcher adopted to capture police tweets. It also covered the exploratory content analysis that provides depth and breadth to contribute knowledge to the police communications field about the types of content published on the Twitter platform by police forces in England and Wales. The findings of this analysis and discussion feature in Chapter Four, whilst the quantitative measurement feature in Chapter Six, together with the descriptive and regression analysis of survey data.

3.4 National Police Survey

This next section considers the national survey of corporate communications departments across England and Wales. The survey method was selected as part of the pragmatism approach because it allowed for the quantification of responses from corporate communications departments, allowing for the comparison of results between forces and the gathering of the required context to address the research questions. The survey was constructed not to understand the structure of these departments like Mawby achieved (2002; 2007), but instead to comprehend how social media integrates within corporate communications. There are many types of surveys that this research could have adopted, such as interviewer-administered, postal surveys, or telephone surveys

(Andres, 2012). The increased availability of digital tools on the internet has made it easier for researchers to use survey software. In terms of self-completion surveys, for example, it is much easier to get a more balanced survey design, straightforward question formulation, increased density, and greater control over sampling techniques with digital tools (Evans and Mathur, 2005). Given the flexibility of digital tools, the survey software Qualtrics was the preferred instrument for this survey.

Digital surveys are a powerful tool for conducting research with many obvious advantages. The most significant benefits of using digital surveys, according to Van Selm and Jankowski (2006: 452), include reduced costs and time, increased accessibility to many possible respondents, and the possibility of providing anonymity to respondents. This research shares these strengths, especially in terms of the time-saving advantages that can be achieved when formulating and distributing the survey digitally, allowing it to be completed using a browser and easy completion. Since the population size was 43 police forces, reaching a large number of respondents was not a significant concern. Having the ability to reach police forces on a digital basis has led to the removal of potential barriers associated with other methods of conducting surveys, since it was possible to reach them electronically.

When contemplating anonymity, the capacity for respondents to complete the survey incognito was essential in this design as some corporate communications departments did not want identifiable information to be collected. Still, there are some weaknesses to digital survey tools. For instance, Evans and Mathur (2005: 197) point out that digital surveys are susceptible to appearing as junk mail, sometimes receive a low response rate, encounter privacy issues, and give an impersonal impression, among other detriments. These shortcomings were not encountered in this research, owing to the specific targeting of respondents through professional channels and attempts to create a professional experience for respondents through communication and design.

A central part of the survey method is the sampling process. This study uses a non-probability purposive sampling method that aimed to capture a census of the police force population via a two-stage process. First, a request letter mailed to all Chief Constables included a research information sheet and invited corporate communications departments to take part in the survey and interview segments of this research (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). From this letter, 24 corporate communications departments agreed to take part in both the survey and interviews. Second, to increase the number of participating police forces, a further search ensued to find department leads' contact information for the other 19 police forces. After contacting the department leads and providing them with a research information sheet, a further 14 police forces decided to partake, taking the total number to 38 (out of a possible 43) corporate communications departments who completed the survey.³

When designing the survey, it was essential to ensure a professional appearance with clear language and effective questions. Presented in Appendix 3 is the complete set of questions that were asked in the research. These questions were derived from the literature and conceptual framework to ensure that responses to the research questions would be gathered effectively. As Schonlau, Fricker and Elliott (2002) argue, the digital survey should steer away from an intricate survey design as this may deter respondents. To ensure an appropriate survey design, a set of rules guided the design process. For example, the survey should only ask questions relating to the research questions; have

³ A near census was eventually achieved, hence where inferential statistics are presented in the empirical chapters it is for reference only, and they should be interpreted with a degree of caution. Where appropriate, interpretations focus on effect sizes.

a clear appearance and direction to avert confusion; avoid language such as technical or vague terms; not use long and leading questions; or ask about more than one thing in a single question (Bryman, 2012: 254-8). The survey made use of closed-ended questions, including unordered response categories, Likert scales, and 'other' boxes for some questions to provide respondents with the opportunity to add additional responses (Andres, 2012). The survey did not use any open-ended questions as the researcher did not want to capture qualitative content, which then required further coding (Bryman, 2012). These types of in-depth questions were reserved for the interviews. In total, the survey comprised 21 questions spanning two short pages with no incomplete or partial responses recorded in the collection.

The survey was piloted by two police forces before it was distributed to willing respondents in order to make sure that the language appeared clear, the direction of the survey made sense, the questions were easy to understand, and the response categories appeared relevant (Andres, 2012: 86-7). In light of the pilot survey and the feedback obtained, the survey was tweaked so that the response categories to questions were more straightforward and relevant. After making the necessary changes, anonymous links were emailed to one nominated individual within the corporate communications departments of participating police forces to complete the survey, there were no police forces with multiple participants. The survey remained open for about a month until all the police forces responded. Although the survey software allows researchers to carry out some informative analysis, the data were instead exported and processed within SPSS software for analysis.

The data needed cleaning together with changing variable names to make the information easier to navigate and explore. Additionally, the dataset integrated a force size variable that groups police forces so to enable comparisons. The force size data comes from police service aggregated strength statistics based on active police officers (Allen and Zayed, 2019). This split in officer numbers for police forces is as follows: smaller are those with less than 1,350 officers, medium between 1,351

and 2,850 officers, and larger with more than 2,851 officers. The dataset includes a variable concerning area classification to note distinctions between ‘somewhat/mostly urban’, ‘middling’, and ‘somewhat/mostly rural’ police forces (Aust and Simmons, 2002). These additional variables allow for police force characteristics in the analysis to explore variations between forces while maintaining anonymity. Existing research about police communications has highlighted a move towards the ‘Corporate Communications’ name rather than older names such as ‘Public/Media Relations’ (Mawby, 2002b; 2007; 2010b). The information about department names does not feature in the findings due to being added as supplementary data after the collection ended. However, the frequencies from this information corroborate that the most popular name remains ‘Corporate Communications’ at 76.3% ($n = 29$), with alternative variations at 23.7% ($n = 9$) for the 38 police forces surveyed.

As part of the initial two multiple-choice questions, it was intended to determine how large and how many staff members operate social media within the organisation. Another question asked respondents to indicate which social media platforms police forces use as part of their corporate social media presence. It is noteworthy that several police departments have used platforms other than Facebook and Twitter, such as Snapchat, Instagram, and even Tinder, for one particular department. In addition to this, multiple choice questions were included that explored who receives social media training at different levels (such as police officers, special teams, and officers) as well as the approval process to construct a picture of how social media is implemented and managed by the police. Several multiple-choice questions followed, asking how many active Twitter accounts are operated by local teams, specialist teams, and officers. As well as the number of Facebook pages run by police forces. This means that these responses capture the presence of the police on these two platforms.

The next two dichotomous questions asked respondents if corporate communications target communications to specific audiences, such as different parts of communities, and whether the

police force imposes a social media policy that staff in the organisation must observe. When constructing the survey, police force perceptions of content dissemination and interactions were valuable to understand. Therefore, the next questions brought together multiple-choice responses asking what the main aims are for using social media, providing twelve options with an 'other' box in case the respondent wanted to add anything not listed. From this, the respondent could select a maximum of six main aims; therefore, this allowed the survey to capture the constructive aspects of using social media platforms. The survey then asked which content format frequently receives interactions and the regular types of content published (as well as a follow up about content interactions). In terms of format, the responses included text, images, videos, polls, and infographics, allowing for a maximum of three responses. Respondents could select a maximum of three responses for most content published and content that receives most interactions. To end the survey, a series of six Likert scale questions queried how effective social media platforms are in certain situations for corporate communications. In all, the survey gathered knowledge about police integration of social media platforms as a communications tool, providing an insight into the management of social media within the police and perceptions about social media content dissemination, interactions, and effectiveness.

Data exploration began with univariate and bivariate statistics. As mentioned above, some of the questions included five-point Likert scales measuring corporate communications assessments on the effectiveness of social media for several situations. These situations include increasing public interactions; conducting campaigns and events; appealing for information; providing reassurance to the public; crime prevention advice; and publishing policing activities. As the data falls within the bounds of non-parametric testing due to irregular distributions, a Kruskal-Wallis test examined variations between police forces. The results showed mean rank values vary between the police forces size, and this led to performing multivariate analysis. As the predictor variables are ordinal, it was appropriate to use ordinal regression and include factors that differentiate police forces'

social media integration. This modelling is related to increasing public interactions; appealing for information; publishing policing content which are the dependent variables. After this analysis, the quantitative count data from the content analysis of police tweets were linked to the survey data. The purpose of the linkage was to identify if substantial differences between police forces in tweeting practices exist. Linking survey and Twitter data is a novel process, and recent research has sought to find methods of connecting survey and social media data when focusing on individual users and consent (Al Baghal et al., 2019; Henderson et al., 2019). It is important to stress that the linkage in this thesis is operated at the level of the organisation, with force Twitter data being appended to the corresponding survey respondents. However, this does not affect the anonymity of respondents.

The descriptive statistics provide an overview of overarching tweet categories and subcategories to get a sense of the data. Besides this, a Kruskal-Wallis test on the Twitter content categories and subcategories reveals that mean rank values diverge depending on the police force size. The analysis also presents negative binomial regression modelling, as this form of regression works best for count data that has overdispersion. Models for six content types show associations between variables, indicating that some survey factors impact the content types spread between police forces. These statistics presented unexpected findings, especially regarding police forces transactional tweeting practices. While regression analysis in this study generated reliable estimates on relationships between variables, it is worth noting the limitations of the small sample size (despite achieving a near census of 38 out of 43 forces). Small sample sizes can reduce power in statistical analyses, resulting in unreliable estimates. Breaking down the sample into subgroups risks reducing cell numbers to unworkable levels. Efforts were made in the re-coding of variables (e.g., force size, rural/urban etc.) to ensure subgroup totals remained high enough to facilitate reliable estimates in all models: model results and discussion feature in Chapter Six.

3.5 Interviewing Key Informants

In the vein of existing police research, interviews with key informants from corporate communications departments form the basis of the final empirical chapter (Bullock, 2016, 2017; Bullock, Garland and Coupar, 2020; Lee and McGovern, 2013, 2014; Mawby, 2002a). Interviews were essential to this pragmatic study because they provided a more in-depth method for eliciting expert communicator insights and experiences. In addition to the Twitter content and survey, the interviews enable the development of a comprehensive analysis that considers all relevant factors and allow to focus on image work practices. The recruitment of key informants followed the same process specified in the survey section, with a letter asking for corporate communications departments to take part in the research. Likewise, the sampling method is akin to purposive sampling, a selective approach to gathering representative informants who can provide specialist experiences about a subject area which is hard to decipher without such knowledge brokers (Boeri and Lamonica, 2015). Even though 88% of all police forces took part in the survey, not all these departments had time to commit to being interviewed. The low staffing levels of departments, on top of busy daily work undertakings, led to the recurrent reasons why all surveyed police forces could not facilitate time for interviews.

Of the 38 police forces that took part in the survey, 24 agreed to take part in the interview stage with one interviewee per organisation, representing 55% of all 43 police corporate communications departments. Matching the police forces size variable included in the survey, interviewed key informants operated within five smaller, twelve medium, and seven larger police forces. The appointed informant for each police force held various positions, such as the head of corporate communications; digital media managers; social media managers; social media officers; communications officers. Given the vast geographic distances between participating police forces and the researcher, each informant was given an option of being interviewed in person or over the

phone. Ten in-person interviews took place within police headquarters, along with fourteen phone interviews from the research office.

Each key informant received a consent form outlining the interview process and ethical information (see Appendix 5). It was imperative to gather consent for interview participation, recording, agreement to be quoted, and whether the informant would like to review transcription to check for factual inaccuracies. The qualitative interview generated comprehensive insights into the working practices of police communications through open-ended questions (Myers and Newman, 2007). In comparison to the social media and survey data, the detailed information contained in interviews is not obtainable, but this works the other way around with insights from quantifiable data provided in this research. Jointly, each method produces information that is valuable for providing answers to the research questions.

The interview approach could have taken many directions, such as unstructured, semi-structured, and structured. In this part of the data collection, the decision to go with the semi-structured came down to having flexibility over questions during interviews, whether this be leading off from informant responses or bringing in new lines of thought from prior interviews to aid with information gathered (Bryman, 2012: 472). The semi-structured interview technique also affords the collection of historical knowledge, which is useful in terms of uptake of social media platforms within corporate communications (Creswell, 2013). It is also beneficial in the context of police and media relations, as several key informants had been in their roles before social media became a prevalent communications tool. Despite the advantages, there are limitations to qualitative interviewing. One limitation is bias arising from key informants in this research, meaning a limited or skewed comprehension may stem from the interviews (Myers and Newman, 2007). As corporate communications are the focus of this study, it was not in the scope of this research to interview either journalists or members of the public to obtain their perspectives. A further limitation when comparing the qualitative interview to direct qualitative observations is that

qualitative interviews tend to restrict information to the informant viewpoint (Creswell, 2013). However, direct observations would not be suitable for this research given access issues and time/resource constraints.

The semi-structured interview questions acted as a prompt containing potential queries relating to different aspects of police communications based on a search of the existing literature (see Appendices 6 and 7). At this point, it is important to note that not all questions in the prompt featured in interviews, and additional supplementary questions were asked to draw out further information from the informant when required. Given that this was the researcher's first time doing key informant interviews, it was absolutely necessary that these interviews were conducted in an effective manner from the start to ensure the success of this project. For example, Kvale (1996) asserts that a successful interviewer should meet the following criteria of being knowledgeable, sensitive, open, critical, steering, remembering, clear, interpreting, structuring, and gentle. To add to these extensive standards, Bryman (2012) suggests the interviewer should also be ethically sensitive and balanced with input. Subsequently, the criteria informed the interview process to ensure they ran effectively.

The researcher made a considerable effort to appear both professional and approachable with key informants to build trust and rapport, so they felt comfortable talking about social media practice. Informants may respond differently based on their motivations and perceptions of the researcher; hence the trust and rapport developed between researcher and informant can hinge on the success or failure of the qualitative interview (Denscombe, 2017). Trust and rapport need to be carefully constructed, as police forces across England and Wales are hard-to-access. The investigator in this research can be considered an 'outside outsider', which relates to professional academics who research the police and policing (Brown, 1996: 180-6). Therefore, the first point of contact with police forces was made through letterheaded documents, as well as courteous emails with prompt replies that intended to create trust and rapport. The extra effort was carried forward into the

interviews to ensure informants felt relaxed and understood their role in the research. However, as the key informants work as skilled communicators, it did not take long to cultivate trust and rapport between investigator and interviewee, resulting in a relaxed atmosphere in-person and even over the phone, which was unexpected at first due to the non-visibility barrier.

Interviews took place between May and August 2017, during the data collection phase of the research. For the ten interviews that took place in person, the informants decided on suitable locations within police headquarters, typically a quiet office or meeting room. The researcher discouraged the use of canteens or coffee shops as these environments tend to have a lot of undesirable background noise, making transcription tricky. An hour was planned for each interview; however, they varied between 60 and 90 minutes, with most informants more than willing to provide extra time to offer thorough answers to questions. All informants agreed to be recorded, enabling the researcher to carefully listen to the responses, with sporadic notetaking where necessary for reflection and pre-analytical thought. The questions asked loosely followed the prompt sheet, starting with questions about how the corporate communications departments have changed since adopting social media, followed by questions on whether the relationship with the media had altered since incorporating digital platforms, and the advantages and disadvantages of using social media. Owing to the semi-structured approach, follow up questions often followed informant responses to go more in-depth on some topics (Silverman, 2016: 68).

As a whole, the experience of conducting key informant interviews was a positive one. Neither in-person nor phone interviews differed from each other in terms of the quality of the responses that were received from the respondents. In the in-person interviews, each interviewee provided a tour of the corporate communications department, offering an impression of the office structure, or as one described it, the 'command centre'. Informants interviewed over the phone also described how the department was organised and operated. What was most striking was the differences in staffing levels and equipment types at the disposal of larger police forces compared to some

medium and smaller forces. Corporate communications departments that are large in size, for example, tend to have large office spaces and a large number of employees that utilise the latest IT infrastructure. Although some medium and small forces employed obsolete computing technology in smaller office spaces, thus inconsistencies were evident in the coordination of corporate communications across police forces.

After completing each interview, the transcription process began, often taking several days for each hour of recording. The software 'f4transkript' was used to make the transcription process slightly more manageable, allowing the researcher to write out interviews within the application, note down comments, slow down the playback speed, and include predefined text elements. Transcription can be problematic because it is not just about providing an accurate account of words spoken. It is essential to note the emotion and other nuances associated with communication, such as tone or body language (Silverman, 2019). In spite of the fact that tone and body language are important features, it can be difficult to capture these during an audio recording, which has the unfortunate result of allowing much valuable communication and presentation to be lost (Murdock and Scutt, 2003). To allow other researchers to replicate the analysis, sharing full transcripts and recordings is considered sound practice for ensuring validity in the research process (Bryman, 1988). A copy of an example transcript is available in Appendix 8 with some redactions made in order to conceal the identity of the force (due to confidentiality arrangements between police forces, the actual interview recordings are not shareable). To add to the strength of transcription trustworthiness, informants checked their transcripts for accuracy (Pink, 2007).

With transcription and checks finalised, the data was loaded into the NVivo software package to continue the analysis. Thematic analysis is one of the most prevalent and adaptable types of qualitative analysis used to examine transcribed verbatim interview data to develop themes (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). Thematic analysis was used, where the focus was on 'identifying,

analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke (2006: 79). During the analysis of data, an inductive approach was used where themes originate from the data. Given the extensive use of thematic analysis for interview research data, it suits the mixed methods approach of this thesis.

Boyatzis (1998: 29) claims the phases of thematic analysis should include creating codes and themes and confirming and applying the code. Within NVivo, transcripts were read multiple times to develop familiarity through deep immersion. The actual recordings were also replayed to make sure that the context of the interviews came across correctly. A reliable thematic code seeks to portray the qualitative depth of the data and has the likelihood to produce reliability and validity (Boyatzis, 1998). At the beginning of this process, the researcher jotted down notes concerning potential codes related to interview questions (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 206). In addition, many data-driven codes were identified from close inspection of the data. The origin of codes was noted, ensuring that context was not lost (Bryman, 2012). After coding completion, relations and patterns between codes were inspected, and where clear overlaps were identified, merging and hierarchies were constructed, shaping analytical thinking.

In the next part of the analysis, the codes were developed into themes. Themes do not merely emerge from the data and instead come about via the analytic process. In differentiating a code from a theme, Boyatzis (1998: 4) states 'a theme is a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at a maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon'. Informative themes are those which make sense individually whilst also fitting suitably with other related themes to provide a comprehensive premise in the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 231). **Figure 2** outlines the three main overarching themes and related sub-themes from the analysis. The themes and sub-themes were checked against audio recordings to ensure they provided a true reflection of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The interpretations based on these themes are discussed in Chapter Five.

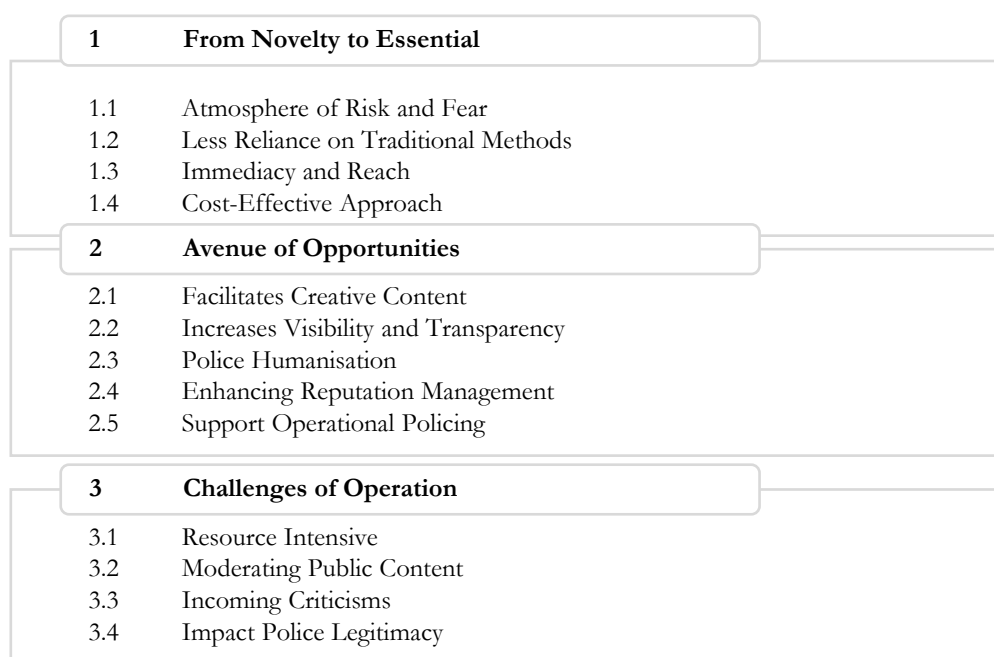


Figure 2: Main themes from interviews with key informants from 24 police forces.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

It is essential to bear in mind that in social research, the topic of ethics is intended to be used to consider potential harms and threats to the investigator, participants in the study, and other parties of interest who may be affected by the conduct of an investigation. Throughout this study, the researcher needed to take into consideration the ethics of research practice; namely, the ethical principles set out in the Economic and Social Research Council framework (ESRC, 2019). On 8th February 2017, the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University gave ethical approval indicating the data collection phase could begin, see Appendix 9. Each participant involved in the survey and interview segments of this research understood all facets of the study and needed to provide consent. The participants received an information sheet outlining what the project sought to achieve, who handles the data collection, types of data collected, data storage processes, risks and benefits of participation, informant rights, and researcher contact information. All participants also received a consent form for signing that outlined their involvement, their right to withdraw at any stage, and additional information on other legal rights.

Confidentiality is essential in this research since most police forces conduct sensitive operations that are not in the public domain. All aspects of personal and organisational characteristics got removed or redacted from the survey and interview segments of the research. Public-facing police force names and identifiable content disclosed in the social media data analysis were retained. As the police is a public-facing organisation, there was no need to ask for explicit consent. This is a permissible action as outlined in the ethical framework for publishing Twitter posts from organisational accounts (Williams et al., 2017). Therefore, according to the ethical flowchart, this study is permitted to post tweets from police forces as they are public sector organisations, however, the thesis does not include tweets from public accounts or any data that contains public user information. However, if the data collected related to a police officer who used the account for personal use, it would be best practice to seek user consent, but this was not the case for this research. Within the interview findings chapter, pseudonyms and data identification codes replaced real participant names, which is a best practice approach when concealing identities in research (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 63). All data were stored on secure and encrypted computing infrastructure following General Data Protection Regulation.

Additionally, it is essential to address data suitability when publishing research. For example, when gathering big social data, ethical understanding is necessary to prevent potential harm to participants. This awareness applies when analyses are presented in both quantitative and qualitative forms (Bishop and Gray, 2017). It is important to note that simply because data is obtained from social media sites does not mean the academic researcher should ignore or dismiss the need to ask for informed consent before publishing any information that can be identified, such as text, names, locations, and so on within academic publications. It would be quite easy to locate any examples of quoted tweets either by using search engines or by using the Twitter advanced search feature, which could then reveal the names, locations, images, or other information about those who have been quoted.

The same search process applies to other digital media, so it is crucial to understand how content can be linked back to users when analysing and presenting data outputs for research purposes. Some published research does not consider user consent or anonymity for the posts presented from data analyses. An argument for not obtaining consent or anonymity is because most social media terms of service explicitly state that user information will be accessible to external parties. Although, there is a responsibility to ensure that social network data is used ethically, like other data forms collected from human participants. A focus group study by NatCen (2014) emphasises those users of social networks consider that consent is a necessary process both morally and legally or anonymity to avoid user harm and protect researcher reputation. In addition, over three-quarters of respondents to a survey about Twitter data usage said that they would expect not only to be asked for consent but to remain anonymous in academic research publications (Williams, Burnap and Sloan, 2017). Concerning ethical challenges, the Social Data Science Lab (2021) ethical principles and decision flow chart present a process to determine how social network content is followed and employed within this thesis.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter, specific research methods are used to demonstrate how this pragmatic approach to investigating police social media communication in England and Wales is based on specific research methods. When applying a mixed method approach, the thesis investigates police force Twitter accounts through content analysis, interviews with police communications professionals using thematic analysis, and a national police force survey. In accordance with the mixed methods research paradigm, it is appropriate to make use of several different research approaches and to gather data from a variety of different sources. This method is used in this study to acquire a more in-depth understanding of police activity and portrayal on social media, connections with the media, and digital community policing activities.

Chapter Four

Police Twitter Content

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the nature, types, and scope of police forces' communications on the Twitter platform. In doing so, it expands the current knowledge on police use of social media platforms. Twitter is a platform all 43 police forces began working on to digitally control their visibility and communicate (Crump, 2011). Even with newer platforms like Instagram and TikTok expanding in popularity with a broad range of end-users, police forces continue to publish content mainly on Twitter and Facebook. Twitter is also popular amongst researchers, especially since the platform allows access to large amounts of data through multiple API endpoints that other social media sites do not make readily available (Burnap et al., 2014). A six-month period of time was taken into account in this study when the tweets ($N = 53,551$) collected from all 43 police forces main Twitter accounts were studied. For more information on the methods, refer to Chapter Three of this thesis.

The findings of the content analysis show that police tweeting practices fall within four primary themes, these being 'informational', 'operational', 'transactional' and 'interactional'. These four themes are discussed in separate sections throughout this chapter, considering the different content types within the conceptual framework of digital society, image work, and community policing. The insights provided from this analysis construct a framework for interpreting police social media content, developing on the existing literature (for example, Deneff, Bayerl and Kaptein, 2013; Kudla and Parnaby, 2018; O'Connor, 2015). This chapter provides qualitative insight into force communications and does not consider quantitative differences among police tweeting practices. Variations in the frequency of tweeting practices are statistically modelled in Chapter Six. After outlining the four qualitative themes, a chapter discussion brings the elements together to add to existing knowledge.

Table 1: Police ($N = 43$) Twitter Accounts in England and Wales statistics.

Police Force	Population ^a	Joined ^b	Following ^b	Followers ^b	Tweets ^c
Avon and Somerset	1,711,500	03/2009	234	165,448	1,279
Bedfordshire	669,300	05/2011	644	85,582	1,993
Cambridgeshire	852,500	10/2010	334	87,656	978
Cheshire	1,059,300	09/2009	767	177,274	1,018
City of London	—	03/2009	566	118,070	534
Cleveland	567,700	01/2010	63	66,530	767
Cumbria	498,900	01/2009	486	72,974	1,406
Derbyshire	1,053,300	05/2009	292	97,803	1,836
Devon & Cornwall	1,762,400	10/2009	786	84,513	953
Dorset	772,300	01/2010	272	71,133	841
Durham	633,500	07/2009	371	68,940	1,442
Dyfed-Powys	518,100	01/2010	766	46,034	932
Essex	1,832,800	05/2009	22,516	201,182	2,295
Gloucestershire	633,600	09/2010	364	70,036	619
Greater Manchester	2,812,600	02/2009	590	584,383	1,522
Gwent	591,200	02/2009	461	72,554	715
Hampshire	1,985,800	09/2009	717	193,639	419
Hertfordshire	1,184,400	06/2009	504	118,840	1,086
Humberside	932,100	04/2010	313	80,303	1,174
Kent	1,846,500	05/2010	440	172,625	703
Lancashire	1,498,300	10/2009	531	180,966	837
Leicestershire	1,093,200	11/2009	995	115,746	2,429
Lincolnshire	755,800	01/2010	128	80,242	953
Merseyside	1,423,100	04/2009	397	145,724	1,636
Metropolitan	8,908,100 ^b	08/2009	795	1,230,334	1,727
Norfolk	903,700	06/2009	282	103,771	1,301
North Wales	698,400	01/2009	157	93,528	793
North Yorkshire	824,400	07/2009	534	101,889	1,771
Northamptonshire	747,600	06/2009	711	92,673	1,528
Northumbria	1,456,600	03/2009	776	152,348	1,468
Nottinghamshire	1,154,200	10/2009	1,012	137,963	1,339
South Wales	1,331,000	09/2009	366	132,554	1,113
South Yorkshire	1,402,900	09/2009	582	174,224	1,257
Staffordshire	1,131,100	04/2009	302	123,360	1,079
Suffolk	758,600	07/2011	359	69,803	858
Surrey	1,189,900	06/2009	485	201,200	1,662
Sussex	1,703,800	07/2009	982	174,824	1,495
Thames Valley	2,407,600	04/2010	459	205,839	1,193
Warwickshire	571,000	09/2010	257	77,553	649
West Mercia	1,282,200	03/2010	535	99,326	771
West Midlands	2,916,500	12/2008	1,034	471,787	1,107
West Yorkshire	2,320,200	02/2009	1,120	205,608	3,042
Wiltshire	720,100	08/2009	263	64,699	1,031

Notes: ^aPopulation estimates for police force areas rounded to the nearest hundred, City of London population combined with Metropolitan (Allen and Zayed, 2019).

^bJoined, following and followers Twitter information accurate as of collection date 13/09/2019.

^c $N = 53,551$ Tweets. Sample covers a six-month period, and excludes retweets, from 21/02/2018 to 21/08/2018.

Table 1 presents information about corporate police Twitter accounts. The table includes the number of tweets included in the sample, joined dates, following and follower numbers, as well as area population estimates for each police force. From these data, West Midlands was the first police force to start using Twitter in 2008, with twenty-nine police forces creating accounts in 2009, eleven other forces establishing a presence in 2010 and the remaining two in 2011. There are approximately 1.2 million followers of the Metropolitan Police on Twitter, which is the largest following among the police forces. It is no surprise that Greater Manchester Police and West Midlands Police are not too far behind with 584,383 and 471,787 followers, respectively, as they cover two of the biggest areas outside London.

The statistics show that police forces have built up a large number of followers on Twitter as a result of the fact that the social media site is very open. As a result, it is difficult to identify how many followers police forces have come from the specific population of each force area in which they are located. Nevertheless, this descriptive information provides an interesting comparison of the audiences each police force can reach on a single digital platform based on the data provided above. **Figure 3** presents tweet totals for the main overarching informational, operational, transactional, and interactional categories in a stacked bar graph for the 38 police forces linked to the survey. For each subcategory, there is a stacked bar graph in Appendix 4, with a breakdown of the subcategories for the surveyed police forces.

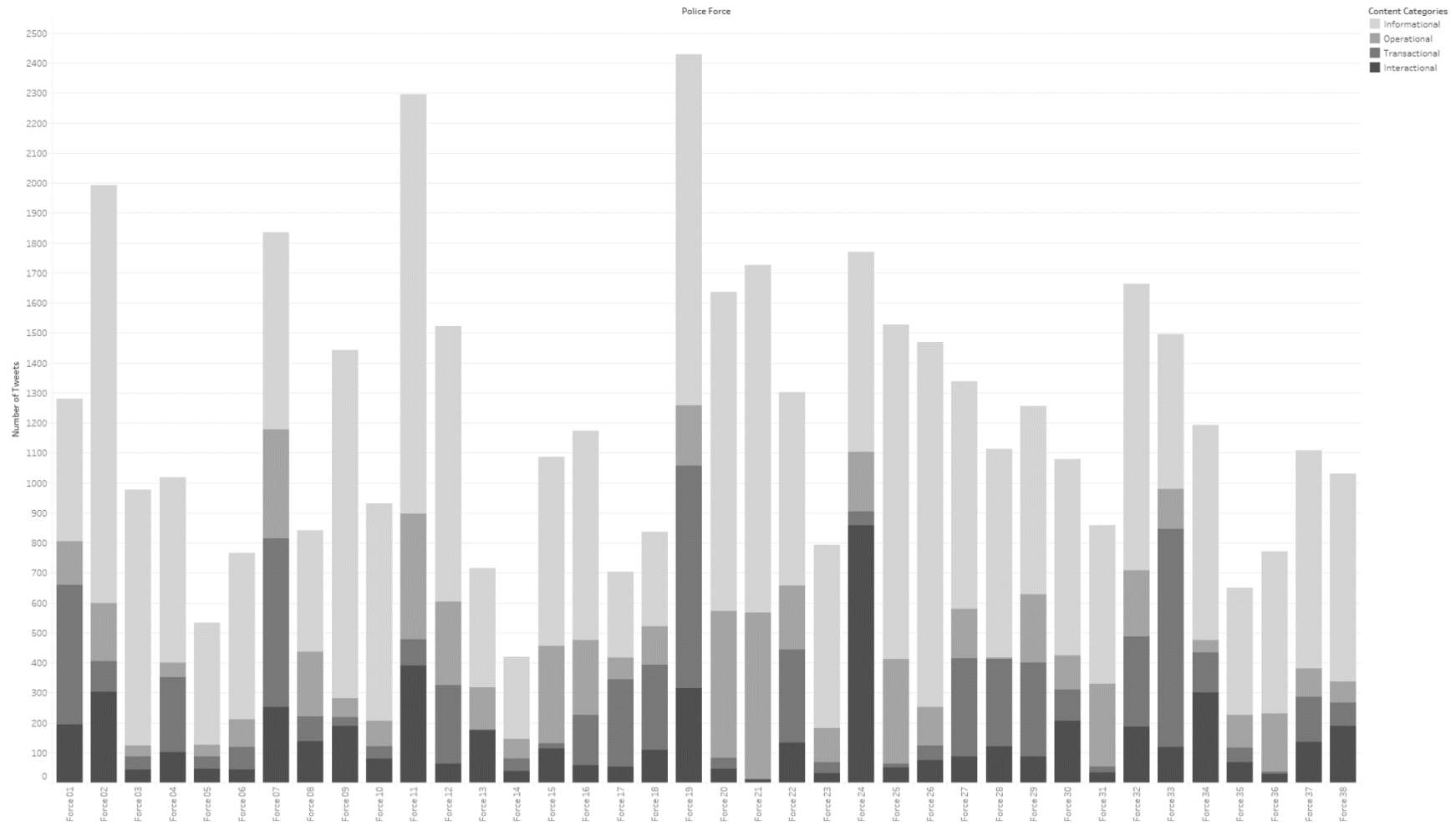


Figure 3: Twitter content categories totals for each police force.

4.2 Controlling Informational Dispersion

Since 2008 police forces have grown substantial audiences on Twitter, alongside other platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube. In existing public sector social media research, it is emphasised that police social media use centres around ‘pushing’ out information, which demonstrates little intention to procure engagement or participation (Brainard and McNutt, 2010; Crump, 2011; Etter, 2013; Waters and Jamal, 2011). These push communications are ‘one-way’ in nature (Mergel, 2012), meaning they are applied to convey large amounts of ‘informational’ content without actively seeking community responses. Academic research demonstrates little evidence that police forces go beyond conventional push focused communications. According to Crump (2011: 24), the use of Twitter by police has largely been non-transformational in terms of improving communications because they post mainly informational content through their Twitter channels. In addition, further research has shown that police social media use has not yet developed in such a way that it has incorporated a significant level of engagement between them and the public (Bullock, 2017: 254). It is apparent from these academic viewpoints that social media use by the police has not resulted in a transformation of communication between the police and the community, which means the police have not capitalised on the possibilities in enhance image work practices. It can be argued that Twitter has become simply a digital platform for police forces to state information rather than an environment for them to start conversations, engage with communities, or participate with others.

The drive to publish vast amounts of informational content is likely a strategic choice. A benefit of mainly embarking on push communications is the maintenance of control over the content on police accounts (Heverin and Zach, 2010). The proclivity for one-way communications could challenge the view that social media use is non-transformative in the police context. This is mainly because police forces are no longer jumping through the hoops of traditional media processes (Lee and McGovern, 2014). The digital society we live in is the momentum behind this change in

control, as digital media enables police forces to spread information without third-party dependency. As Schneider (2016) illuminates, police seldom need to publish information entirely through the press, and communities are no longer passive actors to information as individuals can comment on and share content. Thus, digital media formats have shaken up traditional circulation and consumption of police content.

Given that prior research highlights large amounts of push content being posted by public sector social media accounts, it was not surprising to find that informational communications made up the majority of police forces tweets at 59.5 per cent ($n = 31,854$) in this study. The main subthemes of informational communications include tweets about police ‘incidents’, ‘crime prevention’, ‘travel guidance’, and ‘news’. For the most part, the purpose of informational communications is to build a police presence through information dissemination in a digital location where communities and broader audiences populate (Mergel, 2013: 330). Informational content does not focus on community engagement, but these communications move from merely conveying information in certain instances. For example, this is evident with crime prevention advice and travel guidance tweets, which can influence or change public behaviour and prompt responses (O’Connor, 2015). The large and varied amount of police informational communications published on social media allows communities and the media to absorb a wealth of information previously unavailable, compared to news items about police and policing issued via newspapers, radio, and television.

4.2.1 Incidents, Updates, and Outcomes

Within the informational theme, ‘incidents, updates, and outcomes’ made up 24.9 per cent ($n = 7,940$) of informational tweets. These communications appear to inform communities about police incidents currently active or recently dealt with by officers on the ground. This portion of tweets has not been explicitly labelled as ‘crime’ tweets like existing research (Schneider, 2014). Most police forces would refer to crime instances as incidents when communicating on Twitter, such as

‘There is an ongoing incident taking place at X high street, please stay clear of the area’. The number of incident tweets identified in this study is comparable with preceding studies that have examined police tweets in several other countries (Heverin and Zach, 2010; Kudla and Parnaby, 2018; Lieberman, Koetzle and Sakiyama, 2013; O’Connor, 2015). As a mechanism to convey incident information, Twitter enables the police to draw community attention to police work that may otherwise be left unknown, especially since some incident items may not be considered newsworthy enough for publication through traditional news media output. Examples of incident tweets include:

Police have arrested a man on suspicion of murder following an incident in #Flintshire last night. Officers were called to an address in High Street, #Bagillt at 10.30pm on Wednesday July 18, where the body of a man was discovered.

(North Wales)

A 50m cordon is in place around Lea Croft Road, #Redditch following the discovery of a suspected World War II item. Officers are currently at the scene and EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) have been informed.

(West Mercia)

Two arrested on suspicion of drink driving after making off from police and crashing between Coxhoe and West Cornforth. @DurhamRPU and @DurhamPoliceK9 utilised.

(Durham)

In addition to police forces broadcasting tweets about specific incidents when they have occurred, police distribute routine updates for incidents to keep communities in the loop. While there is an effort to present a positive crime-fighting image through these posts (Mawby, 2010b), there is a clear commitment to keeping communities involved with police work progression. From a community policing perspective, routine updating through the swift nature of social media presents opportunities to magnify the virtual mobility of the police (Friedmann, 1992) – an almost live feed into the police work in the various counties throughout England and Wales. It empowers police forces to provide timely information to communities as well as the media about the progression of policing work, as these tweets show:

Update: Following a CCTV appeal shared on Friday last week in relation to a reported assault in #Doncaster in June, the two men pictured have now been identified. Enquiries are ongoing. Thanks to everyone who shared our appeal.

(South Yorkshire)

Update: Investigation into two people exposed to nerve agent in Amesbury, Wiltshire continues. Systematic searches are under way at a number of sites. No-one else has presented with the same symptoms linked to this incident.

(Metropolitan)

Update: Arrest in connection with shooting in Radford. A 16-year-old boy has been arrested today in connection with a shooting in Argyle Street, Radford, on Sunday 17 June.

(Nottinghamshire)

To keep communities up to speed with police work progression, police forces often share informational communications to advise communities about the outcomes of incidents or crimes. These tweets mainly occur when incidents conclude or if individuals receive a sentence through the courts. Sharing knowledge about the successes of police work generates the capacity to develop positive ties within communities as it demonstrates police effectiveness to an extent (Kappeler and Gaines, 2020):

We can confirm that the concern for the safety of a man on the roof of Central Library, #Liverpool City Centre has been resolved, and the man has been brought down safely. Thank you for your patience while emergency services dealt with this incident.

(Merseyside)

An Exeter City supporter has been issued with a Civil Football Banning Order, meaning that he is banned from attending football matches for three years following a hearing at Exeter Magistrates Court on Monday 30th July.

(Devon and Cornwall)

A man has been jailed for life after attempting to murder a woman in #Chelmsford in a frenzied attack. He was also sentenced for GBH with intent and breaching a restraining order.

(Essex)

These findings show that police forces have acquired a degree of primary control over the communications published to communities when reporting on incidents or crimes. The broadcasting of these tweets seems to foster a successful policing image. As O'Connor (2015: 10) claims, police incident tweets attempt to market police effectiveness to communities since they

reveal what the police are doing on the streets. Research indicates that depictions of police in the news media do not always shape community opinions of police effectiveness or general attitudes towards the police (Dowler, 2003: 118-9; Chermak, McGarrell and Gruenewald, 2006: 272). Other studies claim that news media consumption can influence community attitudes towards the police within certain citizen demographics, particularly around police transgressions and legitimacy (Weitzer and Tuch, 2004: 320-2; Intravia, Wolff and Piquero, 2018: 975-8). Even though research is unclear on media consumption shaping attitudes towards the police, police forces operate Twitter as a presentational tool that challenges undesirable police images in the news media and communities. In the advent of social media, the volume of police content has expanded significantly and has become a digital bridge between police and communities, allowing individuals to find out more about the police in a more informed way.

Through communicating on Twitter, police staff and officers are image controllers actively creating favourable images of policing. Constructed images influence how communities perceive police work undertakings by providing genuine representations of policing (Mawby, 2002a). Twitter provides a flexible communications output to disseminate factual incident narratives about police actions before being reported in the news media. For example, using Twitter to publish information about incidents is a transformation from a time when police forces relied solely on supplying press releases to the news media to passively inform communities about incidents or crimes (Mawby, 1998). The necessity to publish regular amounts of informative content about police work keeps pace with the round-the-clock media culture (Goldsmith, 2015). With the short character limit and news centred format, Twitter is convenient for pushing out messages about incidents and crimes for communities to consume and shape opinions.

4.2.2 *Crime Prevention and Safety Advice*

Another prominent tweeting activity is crime prevention and safety advice, accounting for 22.6 per cent ($n = 7,206$) of informational communications. These tweets appear to supply prevention tips to reduce and deter crime for various types of crime in communities:

Organising an unlicensed event such as an illegal rave, is an offence, we do have powers to remove people and seize equipment from an unlicensed events where disruptive, amplified music plays throughout the night and crimes are being committed. More here: <https://t.co/9NTPC3N3Fy>.

(Gwent)

Be aware of the dangers of 'sexting' amongst young people. If you or a child you know has shared a photo of themselves and is worried about it, you can either report it to police on 101 or call Childline on 0800 11 11 for further advice & support. #itsjustapicture? #BeCyberSmart.

(Warwickshire)

Did you know that in summer 1 in 3 burglaries are as a result of people leaving their doors and windows insecure? Remember to secure your home. To find out some simple steps you can take to prevent a burglary visit: <https://t.co/haC0K8TGS7>

(Dorset)

As part of the safety messaging in communities, attention is being diverted away from specific crime prevention messaging, encouraging greater understanding and a greater sense of responsibility for safety. The most common situations included advising people to check on vulnerable persons, highlighting environmental dangers, along with risk awareness concerning attending events:

As the @MetOffice has issued a weather Alert for #snow and #ice for the South West, could you spare 30 mins to check on your elderly or vulnerable neighbours? #WeatherAware.

(Avon and Somerset)

If your children are out and about today enjoying their summer holidays, make sure you know where they are, when they will be home and you have a way to contact them #Safe4Summer.

(Greater Manchester)

Planning on attending #Solfest next weekend? Part of the fun of a festival is the unexpected, but a little bit of planning will help you avoid a #FestivalFail. #Cumbria <https://t.co/xKjS6psnzw>.

(Cumbria)

As opposed to safety content, crime prevention campaigns circulate informative content in order to help prevent crime from occurring in the first place (Winkel, 1989). Naturally, police forces are a primary source of crime prevention information, though the extent of their working capacity is limited in these endeavours (Laycock and Tilley, 1995). Researchers studying the practice of police Twitter use have been focusing their attention on the ability to influence behaviour through the development of preventative campaigns (Crump, 2011; Heverin and Zach, 2010; O'Connor, 2015). With the preventative tweets in this sample, it is apparent that police forces are attempting to change behaviours in communities through one-way campaign work.

A study of police Facebook usage in India underlines that crime prevention communications can be applied in a two-way format, much like traditional doorstep prevention, to facilitate crime problem solving between police and communities (Sachdeva and Kumaraguru, 2015: 263). The findings of this analysis do not follow the same trend, as crime prevention and safety advice tips did not seem to pursue community interactions. It can be considered that police forces use social media to extend from regular preventative print campaigns (Mawby, 2010b). As a free platform, undertaking campaign work on Twitter is economical compared to the overheads of producing flyers and posters. While publishing crime prevention campaigns solely on digital platforms benefits cash strapped police forces, it may isolate community members with no online access.

Even with this, crime prevention tweets show that Twitter provides greater flexibility when it comes to handling the large volumes of campaign material that is published on Twitter. It is not uncommon for crime prevention messages to be published during campaign weeks or during seasonal times of the year when specific crimes are more likely to occur, such as hate crime awareness week or crimes like burglaries that are more likely to occur in the summer. For police image work, preventative campaigns can have indirect benefits as crime prevention messages show police forces actively cultivating helpful relations with communities (Mawby, 2002a). This content

encourages a police image that reflects police as preventive partners instead of law enforcers. As with community policing, bringing together local businesses, community groups, and other organisations to combat crime is an essential task for binding social control efforts (Garland, 2001). In turn, prevention tips help community policing as it generates relations between police and neighbourhoods to build trust over local and national crime concerns.

These specific types of police communications help convey preventative information and knowledge relating to risk management to a wide array of community stakeholders. In particular, communicating via social media is a positive method for delivering prevention information to educate the public. As Poyner (1993: 15) suggests, campaign work and publicity can influence public behaviours from an evaluation of various crime prevention studies. Still, the scope of the impact that social media platforms have on motivating behaviour changes is relatively undetermined concerning police communications and beyond the limits of this thesis. Nevertheless, given the number of police tweets concerning crime prevention and community safety in this sample, social media environments are a core strategic platform to spread preventative information to alter behaviours in communities for the police.

4.2.3 Travel Information and Road Safety Guidance

In a similar vein to the crime prevention content, police forces regularly publish communications concerning travel information and road safety guidance. These make up 13.9 per cent ($n = 4,421$) of informational communications on Twitter. For the most part, these travel information tweets focus on informing the public about the closures of roads, road traffic collisions or incidents causing travel disruption:

We are currently attending a road traffic collision on the A50, at the junction of the A521 Blythe Bridge roundabout. There is currently a high build-up of traffic, so please find an alternative route where possible.

(Staffordshire)

We are dealing with an RTC on Lincoln Bypass between Nettleham Road and Wragby Road and have closed the road. Please take an alternative route. We have a number of vehicles within the road closure and will be helping turn them around as soon as we can.

(Lincolnshire)

We are currently dealing with a concern for welfare incident near to junction 22 of the M25 at London Colney. The motorway has been closed in both directions and motorists are advised to avoid the area at this time. Thank you for your patience.

(Hertfordshire)

In tandem with travel information, police forces also broadcast road safety guidance. These tweets seem to target the public to raise awareness of exercising appropriate safety measures, highlighting weather conditions that may impact travel or signalling when it may not be safe to travel at all were everyday subject matters:

Wearing the right gear? Fall off your bike and tarmac will shred your shorts & T shirts in seconds. Wear a protective jacket, gloves, boots and trousers. Dress for the crash, not the ride #ridesafely.

(Thames Valley)

As weather warnings are predicted for tomorrow if you have to travel you should reduce speeds, allow extra time for your journey and leave a greater distance between you and the car in front #beastfromeast.

(Bedfordshire)

If you're travelling via public transport in these icy conditions, please allow extra time and check ahead before you travel. Follow @networkwm for any disruption updates.

(West Midlands)

Travel information and road safety guidance tweets incorporate similar content to incidents and crime prevention, but in the context of traffic updates. Most police forces across England and Wales do have specialist police roads or traffic accounts on Twitter, but police forces still employ corporate Twitter accounts for this purpose. In the existing literature, Lieberman, Koetzle and Sakiyama (2013: 451) found that 3.3per cent of police Facebook posts referred to traffic offences, which shows that Facebook may not be used to provide near real-time updates about live travel incidents when compared to Twitter. In studies that examine police Twitter content, the extent of traffic focused content has been somewhat closer to the number of tweets reported in this study. For example, Heverin and Zach (2010: 5) report in their analysis of police Twitter use in America

that 8 per cent of tweets were about road closures, traffic congestion and other travel incidents. Likewise, O'Connor (2015: 905) found that information on safety and traffic made up approximately 20 per cent of police tweets. Overall, supplying these traffic updates shows that police are actively trying to share up-to-date information so communities can quickly find relevant navigation information via social media when needed.

4.2.4 *News, Activities, and Miscellaneous Information*

The final subset within informational tweets includes content about police news, activities and various other police information representing 38.6 per cent ($n = 12,287$) of the informational theme of tweets. Tweets about police news appear to provide the public with a wealth of general information about the police organisation, including press releases that do not relate to incidents or crimes, recruitment opportunities, and responding to official reports, for instance:

A new app on officer's phones means they are able to input information directly onto police systems without the need to return to a police station to use desktop computer.

(Kent)

Assistant Chief Constable Scott Chilton has responded to the results of the National Rural Crime Survey 2018. For Scott's comments, please go to: <https://t.co/CxAproFQHB>.

(Hampshire)

We're taking part in @PoliceChiefs #GiveaDaytoPolicing this summer, with MPs invited to spend a day on patrol with our officers. We look forward to showing the work that goes on around the force. Find out more here: <https://t.co/1PFzmm>.

(Dyfed Powys)

Also contained in these tweets were messages about police activities which do not relate to specific incidents. These tweets seem to inform communities about the 'goings-on' and results of police work undertaken by local and specialist policing teams, such as police operations:

In the last year, we've issued 26 Criminal Behaviour Orders, 4 ASB injunctions and 34 property closures and we will continue to work with our Partners to tackle anti-social behaviour. Keep an eye on our posts this week to find out more #SurreyASB #StopASB #CommunityMatters.

(Surrey)

This week, officers have been out across #London as part of Op Puglia. The operation has been running for six months, tackling drug offences and associated criminality in #WestLondon.

(Metropolitan)

Project Servator sees police, partners, businesses and members of the public working together to detect, deter and disrupt a wide range of criminal activity. Watch our short film to find out more. #ProjectServator #TogetherWeveGotItCovered <https://t.co/TxYclC5Suk>.

(Essex)

Additionally, other one-way communications included signposting to stories on police websites, detailing police forces services, or other informative messages feature in this subset, for example:

It's fair to say that a lot has changed in the world in the past 20 years, and policing is no exception! Insp Barry Hickman, a Force Incident Manager tells us how he has seen demand change over the past 20 years. #BeyondtheBeat Read here: <https://t.co/OU15siB2qP>.

(Wiltshire)

Maintenance to Lancashire Police website is now completed and the online reporting function is now working so you can once again log your non-emergency incidents online. Thank-you for your patience.

(Lancashire)

Did you know, you can get the latest update on the status of a previously reported crime, by entering your crime reference number on our Local Crime Tracker: <https://t.co/M479fI8Jgb> Save time, do it online. #ClickB4UCall.

(West Yorkshire)

News, activities, and miscellaneous information tweets make up over a third of informational content. These findings support previous research that indicates that the police have become key producers of news content regarding police endeavours and setting the news agenda (Schneider, 2016). As observed from the example news tweets, not all information issued on Twitter is worthy enough for news media outlets to produce a report. The subtle importance of Twitter is that police forces can provide immediate news updates, whether trivial or significant in condition, to keep communities informed about police work. With police forces controlling news dissemination, opportunities develop to thwart misinformation or counteract news media reports that cast a shadow over police practice. It is through this content that communities can receive information directly from the source instead of having to rely on the news media outlets for information, which

could influence flawed narratives and agendas towards the police (Williams et al., 2018). News tweets do provide a wealth of information for community policing without potential third-party interpretation or adaptation. Although, publishing news tweets allows police forces to construct desired narratives. There is potential here for communities to consume information through a 'police' lens. So, it is practical that social media enables direct information from the source, but this should not mean that community voices and good journalism get overlooked.

4.3 Harnessing Operational Power

The majority of police communications on Twitter are informational, which means messages do not actively entice a response from communities. In this section, the focus shifts to an operational perspective. One of the most substantial assets for the police during investigations is public engagement to gather intelligence. Research indicates that the public performs an essential role in detecting and providing information that aids police investigations (Hagar et al., 2011; Mawby, 1979; Steer, 1980). It is not surprising that a crucial function of traditional media for the police is to carry out appeals to gather information from the public (Kingshott, 2011). The second broad theme of communications was operational tweets, making up 15.9 per cent ($n = 8,509$) of all tweets. These tweets appear to attract a response from the public to support operational policing and move away from one-way communications and become two-way in nature (Beshears et al., 2019).

4.3.1 Information Appeals

The most significant number of operational tweets were information appeals, making up 71.4 per cent ($n = 6,074$) of the theme. The purpose of these tweets is to gather intelligence from the public, which may help with a range of police investigations, such as locating missing persons, finding wanted persons or identifying individuals connected with crimes through pictures or videos, as these tweets demonstrate:

We're appealing for information after a driver returned to his vehicle to find it had been badly damaged by a corrosive liquid. The silver Range Rover Sport V8 was left in the staff car parking area at the Riverside car park, #Derby, on Monday, May 14.

(Derbyshire)

We would like to appeal to anyone who might have information concerning the circumstances surrounding this incident to come forward. We remain committed to updating the public as this incident unfolds & will do this when further information becomes available. Thank you #Amesbury.

(Wiltshire)

Police are appealing for help to trace a high-risk missing person from Edinburgh who is believed to intend to travel to Carlisle. Further information can be found via this link: <https://t.co/mZmpVsbXno>.

(Cumbria)

We are appealing for information following the release of CCTV footage from the armed robbery in Alvechurch supermarket on Sunday 1 July. If you have any information, no matter how small please call 101. Full release and images here: <https://t.co/FjSqVanieX>.

(West Mercia)

From these examples, it is clear that police forces use information appeals for a number of operational needs, whether it be knowing the location of missing persons, identifying people on camera footage, or seeking knowledge about a crime that occurred in an area. These tweets intend to pull as much information into police forces for intelligence purposes through a speedy method.

4.3.2 *Requests for Witnesses*

The second-largest number of tweets within the operational theme were requests for witnesses at 27.0 per cent ($n = 2,299$). These are similar in context to appealing for information tweets, however, here the police are specifically targeting individuals who may have been at the scene of an incident or crime to come forward and assist with police enquires, as these examples illustrate:

We are looking for witnesses after a man received a knife wound to his back during an incident in Gadesden Road, #Ewell between 10pm and 11pm on Thursday July 26. Did you see what happened? <https://t.co/PynVctzel5>.

(Surrey)

We're appealing for witnesses following a burglary in Mill Road, Great Gransden on Tuesday between 1.50pm and 5pm. £500 in cash, £300 in rand and a selection of jewellery were stolen. Anyone with information should call police on 101 quoting 35/11453/18 <https://t.co/qd62hWzuUC>.

(Cambridgeshire)

We're seeking witnesses to a robbery in Eskdail Street, Kettering, on Saturday Jul 28, between 11pm & 12am. The victim was approached by three men, who pushed him to the floor & stole his phone & wallet. Anyone with information should call police on 101.

(Northamptonshire)

Were you on Victoria Embankment on Wednesday morning around 8am? We're appealing for witnesses of a road traffic collision that happened near the junction with Temple Place. If you have any information that may assist us call 0207 601 2988. <https://t.co/3VqB9pIGTb>.

(City of London)

The tweets are more detailed when compared to information appeals, providing more precise locations, dates, and times. In theory, this could be to try and get people to think more about where they were at a specific point in time and whether they noticed anything out of the ordinary that could help with an ongoing investigation.

4.3.3 *Reunite Property with Owners*

The last type of operational content that seek public engagement is reuniting property with owners at 1.6 per cent ($n = 136$). These are the smallest number of operational tweets. These communications highlight a distinctive approach to using social media to help police forces relocate property with community members. The most frequent situations where these tweets appear are for lost property, animals and recovered stolen items:

Do you recognise this horse? We received a number of calls this morning after a horse was found wandering along the A19, prior to the B1285 junction. It has since been ushered to safety and remains secure. Please contact 101 if you are the owner or recognise this horse.

(Durham)

Bike frame recovered in drugs warrant - Is this this your bike? It was recovered from a house yesterday and we believe it to be stolen property. If you believe this is your bike, get some proof call us on 101 quoting log 146 27/03/18. #Bianchi #Stolenbike @ImmobiliseCrime.

(Humberside)

An elderly Jack Russell called Molly was found in the Pen y Clip tunnel on the #A55 earlier and she's now safe at one of our bases. If you are the owner please contact us on 101 quoting reference number W057614 Please RT and share #LetsReuniteMolly.

(North Wales)

A local officer has been made aware of the following items left in the vicinity of Tame river and Tame Drive this morning. We have no concerns for the owner but we are trying to reunite them with their belongings. Any information please call 101 and quote incident 274 18/08/2018 <https://t.co/u3rAHCbdXJ>.

(Staffordshire)

It is the purpose of operational tweets to obtain intelligence from the public through the use of social media. Nevertheless, these posts cannot be categorised as typical engagement posts since police forces only want to collect relevant information from the public, just like press conferences that aim to obtain relevant information from the public (Leishman and Mason, 2003). The overall number of operational tweets was higher than expected in this study. Other studies illustrate that parallel categorisation of police tweets like ‘person identification tweets’ is relatively low at 6 per cent (Heverin and Zach, 2010: 5). The overall sample size in that study was relatively low, and the authors only picked up on person identification and not intelligence gathering for incidents or crimes. An additional study shows that ‘missing person’ tweets were the second-highest tweets out of all content types, with crime tweets topping the list (Kudla and Parnaby, 2018: 6). That study did not have a larger sample size in comparison to the Heverin and Zach study, but it did seem to capture many more content categories. However, this content analysis demonstrates that police forces in England and Wales are using operational tweets in a variety of ways and not only to identify missing persons. Twitter is a wide-ranging tool to pull in intelligence, attract witnesses, and reunite property with its owners in a small number of instances. An excellent way to implement community policing is to establish a rapport between the police and the public. This is done to help resolve an incident or crime and create a sense of cooperation between the two, for example, in the case of providing information to the police or sharing a tweet with others who may be able to offer the required information. This can make the police appear more engaged and willing to work as a team with the community.

4.4 Inconspicuous Transactional Environment

The data so far shows police forces are using Twitter for informational and operational purposes. As part of the existing police and social media research, one aspect that has not been considered is the possibility for the police to interact with their customers through transactional activities, such as reporting an incident or getting an update about an investigation. According to Mergel (2012), observing transactions is rare in the public sector, so small sample sizes may not pick them up. However, early in the analysis, it was observed that police use Twitter to respond to public messages centred around service-related police work. It is unclear whether transactional communications occur on other social media platforms which police forces use, such as Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube, since these platforms are mainly image or video orientated. In the case of Twitter, the public does appear to reach out to obtain responses to inquiries, report incidents, and provide intelligence. Transactional communications made up 13.6 per cent ($n = 7,309$) of the entire sample. It is not straightforward to understand how the public is using Twitter to contact the police for service-related purposes, as not all police forces reply to public tweets, although the public tweets that police forces replied to in this sample do shed light on an under-examined area of police social media practice that is interesting to examine.

4.4.1 *Answering Various Enquires*

The most substantial number of transactional communications involves police forces answering enquiries about a whole range of police matters, making up 63.8 per cent ($n = 4,663$) of all transactional tweets. These public enquires mainly revolved around asking about ongoing incidents, the progression of investigations, contacting specific departments, recruitment queries, complaints, and other various matters as demonstrated by these police responses:

@— Hi Ryan, we try and look into as many as we can and assess things on a case by case basis. We can only proceed were there is enough evidence, but we do get a lot of calls. We are sorry if you feel we do not take this seriously but we do.

(Avon and Somerset)

@— Good morning. Unfortunately we are no longer able to accept lost property. Our advice would be to see if you can identify who the phone belongs to by switching it on and calling one of the contacts, if it is not locked. Many thanks.

(Kent)

@— We received a report on 28 June in relation to comments made on social media. The matter has been passed to the division where an investigation is underway.

(Sussex)

@— Hi. We are sorry to hear about the incident. Our officers are doing their best to help. If you have a crime reference number, you can follow up incidents on our website: <https://t.co/sOQMwVKaKu>.

(Thames Valley)

@— Hi Abdul, thanks for getting in touch! Our PC recruitment is actually opening very soon. Keep an eye on this website: <https://t.co/uQO0B0oEz9>. Best of luck.

(West Midlands)

The above tweets illustrate how social media is being used as a customer service function. It is unclear whether these tweets generate prolonged dialogue between police and the public. However, this does demonstrate that the police are sometimes attentive to enquires which are not related to reporting crimes, but rather questions that the police 101 number or station front desk would typically answer.

4.4.2 *Responding to Incident or Intelligence Reports*

The next type of transactional tweets relate to police forces responding to an incident or intelligence reports, representing 30.2 per cent ($n = 2,210$) of those communications. It is important to note that many police forces clearly state that the public should not report anything through social media on their Twitter profiles. The notice to prevent reports is because police forces do not have the ability within communication departments to handle these messages. However, some police forces have started experimenting by giving police contact centres control of these main accounts out of office hours or having dedicated police contact centre accounts which allow public reports through Twitter (see Chapter Five). The following examples show how police forces are responding to such tweets from the public:

@— Hi if you can message our contact centre @MetPolCC they will take some details and have this looked in to further for you. Many Thanks.

(Merseyside)

@— Hi Mike, are you aware if the dog is still on the loose? are you able to give a more precise location as to where this was? any more details you can provide would be great and I can get this passed on to officers. Kind regards, Web Team.

(Suffolk)

@— Hi Rich, our phone-lines can get busy in the evenings so if you're struggling to get through on 101, you can always report online at <https://t.co/fGgWWmBcsA>.

(Gloucestershire)

@— Hi Samantha, do you have any dash cam footage of this? Can you report this using the online form please with as much detail as you can: <https://t.co/IYmwj0ExAK>.

(Cheshire)

@— Hi. We can't take reports via social media but if you have evidence of someone using a mobile phone while driving, you can report this to us via our website <https://t.co/svduhljr1X>. Thanks!

(Avon and Somerset)

Although police forces state they do not accept reports about crimes and incidents on social media, the tweets above show that some forces do attempt to provide a response, so people are not left unanswered. It is difficult to provide answers for ongoing incidents, so for the most part these tweets direct the public to the force website or non-emergency number to report.

4.4.3 *Signposting to Other Services*

The lowest number of transactional tweets in this sample involved the police signposting the public to other services at 6.0 per cent ($n = 436$). These types of tweets are responses to enquires or incidents where police action is not required, such as when an incident may be a civil matter rather than a criminal one. The services which police forces signposted the public the most are local authorities, government organisations and charities:

@— Hi Mazzy. If regular noise, or any other form of anti-social behaviour is causing alarm or distress to you, please report it to your local council, who work with partner agencies, residents, landlords and businesses to tackle these issues.

(Leicestershire)

@— Morning Lisa, thank you for contacting us, can you please ring the Council Enforcement Officer of your area to report this as they cover parking issues in Bus Stops. Many thanks SWP.

(South Wales)

@— Hi Carol, the original content is unavailable but you can report animal cruelty to the RSPCA and it will be looked into. More details here: <https://t.co/CAW8nOMhq1>.

(Avon and Somerset)

@— Hi David. Abandoned vehicles should be reported to the local council. You can find details on that here: <https://t.co/KFQMZt9vUC>. Many thanks.

(Nottinghamshire)

@— Hello Dan. Thank you for letting us know. We would suggest the best thing to do is report the car to the DVLA for no tax and MOT - The best way to do so is here <https://t.co/E1Hd32vp3v>.

(Bedfordshire)

These three transactional tweet types demonstrate how social media can be a valuable digital space to answer questions that potentially reduce strain on emergency and non-emergency telephone lines when a physical police response is not required. The police forces in England and Wales have substantially changed how the public can report incidents in a non-emergency or share intelligence through websites. Such websites provide alternatives to attending a police station through faster online reporting and act as a digital platform to shape police identity and presentation (Sillince and Brown, 2009). It is similar to police website reporting in that these transaction tweets aim to respond to various inquiries to substantiate police responsiveness (O'Connor, 2015), which works toward achieving community policing in the digital age. Growing digital contact points is necessary as police and communities must expand with modern communication channels, primarily as society relies on modern technologies to converse and interact (Lindgren, 2017). As can be seen from the description of account profiles on the Twitter platform, it is evident that police forces do not welcome the use of social media in reporting incidents. In spite of this, as Twitter is one of the easiest ways to contact businesses and organisations, it is likely that there will be a growing expectation from communities to use these platforms to contact the police in non-emergency situations.

4.5 Limited Interactional Exchanges

The police have found several uses for social media: informational tweets which seek to push out information, operational tweets which aim to pull in information, and transactional tweets that make Twitter a service environment. Despite these efforts, research suggests police forces have struggled with using social media to interact with the public (Crump, 2011; Heverin and Zach, 2010). Even though social media provide digital environments to build trust between the public and organisations through interaction (Warren, Sulaiman and Jaafar, 2014), interactions with the public may be challenging due to organisational barriers or not understanding how to exploit social media as collaborative tools (Mergel, 2013). As far as professional police tones in communication are concerned, they can sometimes cause interactions to appear in a formal manner that does not work well in a digital environment (Brainard and McNutt, 2010), which does not imply a welcoming police image when it comes to trying to build community engagement.

There is emerging evidence that police have adapted their social media use to incorporate communications that aim to boost police and public interactions (Denef, Bayerl and Kaptein, 2013; O'Connor, 2015). However, some research findings outline those interactions can be quite limited in police social media practice (Heverin and Zach, 2010; Kudla and Parnaby, 2018). Operational tweets intend to enhance relations between the police and communities but focus solely on drawing in intelligence, while transactional tweets intend to respond to service-related enquires. Interactional tweets, however, seek to build relationships between the police and the public, creating a digital community with content that is less formal in style. The interactional tweets in this sample made up 11.0 per cent ($n = 5879$), and included digital events, procuring public collaboration, and participation and conversing with others.

4.5.1 *Performing Digital Events*

One of the most innovative approaches to using social media in this sample was performing digital events at 32.1 per cent ($n = 1,889$). The most frequent types of digital events were 'tweetathons'.

A tweetathon is an extended event where lots of tweets are published about a particular topic. The police forces in this research typically carried out tweetathons to highlight the demand police contact centres encounter and the kinds of calls that come in real-time from the public. These are usually followable through unique hashtags that are searchable on Twitter to view all associated tweets from police and other Twitter users:

Our Tweetathon is now LIVE! Keep an eye out for the different incidents that come in and get involved using #FCRLIVE <https://t.co/4TYx0BQ66L>.

A caller has reported that they lost control of their car which is now blocking a road in the north of the county #FCRLIVE.

A call from a member of the public reporting someone breaching their bail conditions #FCRLIVE.

Call from a concerned member of the public about a child being left alone in a locked car in the #Shenfield area.

A partner agency has called us about a shop lifter in #Chelmsford. #FCRLIVE.

Our officers have been dispatched to an address in #Harlow after we received reports of a domestic incident. #FCRLIVE.

Man calling to say he's found a bin bag of suspected drugs whilst looking for his cat. We can't be sure but it sounds a lot like meowjuana #FCRLIVE.

Abandoned 999 call from a woman shouting. Line cleared. Our call takers are attempting to make contact. #FCRLIVE.

Thank you to everyone who has got involved with and supported #FCRLIVE. Our 24-hour Tweetathon is now over. #MoreTimeToFightCrime <https://t.co/fHjy7sAzd2>.

(Essex)

Welcome to our 24-hour Tweetathon giving you a live insight into the demand and range of incidents we're called about over 24 hours. #NYP247 #Behindthescenes.

A Selby resident has had some large items stolen from outside the front of her house during the day yesterday. #NYP247 #Behindthescenes 172.

A neighbourly parking dispute, owner of property can't get their car out of the driveway. #NYP247 #Behindthescenes 220.

Handbag stolen from a business in Harrogate within the last 30 minutes. Michael Kors brown tan bag contained an iPad, purse, cash, paperwork. #NYP247 #Behindthescenes 278.

Concern about family member's deteriorating behaviour. Mental health related incident. We'll work with partners to make sure they receive appropriate help. #NYP247 #Behindthescenes 315.

Concern for the safety of an elderly man on a mobility scooter seen going round a busy roundabout at Clifton Moor in #York. #NYP247 #Behindthescenes 379.

That's it folks, normal Twitter service has now resumed. Thank you for all the great feedback. We hope you've found our #NYP247 #Behindthescenes Tweetathon interesting & informative. Please let us know what you thought of it.

(North Yorkshire)

The tweets above show how social media can be used innovatively to inform the public in real-time about what is going on within the police force. The main purpose of the tweets then is to give the public insights into the types of calls police receive daily which would otherwise be unknown. Another type of digital event police forces frequently carried out was question and answer events. With these events, the public is encouraged to ask questions by sending in tweets containing the associated hashtag to the person taking over the main police force Twitter account (for example, senior police officers, detectives, police officers, police departmental staff etc.). Question and answer sessions tend to focus on the person's work in the police or about a specific topic that relates to the specialism of the person answering the questions:

Get your questions ready for our Gwent Cyber CSO who will be taking all your questions from 5pm on our #TwitterTakeover @GPCyberCSO #cybercso #questions <https://t.co/Vp8S3jPWKF>.

Hi everyone... Gwent Police Cyber CSO here to answer your questions until 7pm - Ask away and throughout the takeover I'll be sharing some handy cyber advice for you all #cybercso #twittertakeover #gwentpolice.

A bit about scam e-mails... They can be VERY, VERY deceiving and can catch the best of us out - even I've received e-mails whilst in this role which have almost caught me out. I've got some top tips to avoid falling for these... #cybercso #twittertakeover.

There's usually a sense of urgency with SCAM e-mails. You've won something, you've got a refund, there's a problem with the account - these are all typical SCAM e-mails. SCAM e-mails sometimes ask you to open a link or an attachment which contain malicious software #cybercso.

(Gwent)

LIVE: Online chat with Public Protection detectives. Do you have questions about keeping yourself safe online? Are you concerned about what your children are getting up to on their devices? Join our online chat from 8am-4pm today.

Q: What is grooming? A: Grooming is about building a relationship with a child in order to abuse them. This can be far easier online, as groomers can pretend to be anyone #onlinechat.

Q: What would happen if two people under 16 had consensual sex? A: It's an offence to engage in sexual activity with an under-16 and having sex with someone aged 12 or under is rape, regardless of whether they said yes #onlinechat.

Q: What's sexting? A: Sexting refers to sending and receiving naked pictures, underwear shots, sexual pictures, rude text messages or sexual videos. They may come from a boyfriend or girlfriend, or they may come from someone they've met online #onlinechat.

(Nottinghamshire)

The question-and-answer session tweets are interesting because this shows innovation in how police forces can make social media platforms an interactive environment. These tweets seem to seek engagement with the public and to inform them about crime problems or share preventative information. Further to this, these tweets also allow the public to connect with officers and staff from specialist departments, such as the public protection unit, when such policing work is carried out far away from public knowledge and understanding.

4.5.2 *Procuring Collaboration or Participation*

Other interactional police communications posted on Twitter appear to centre on increasing police and public interactions, these being tweets aimed at procuring collaboration or participation at 30.4 per cent ($n = 1,787$) of total interactional communications. These tweets attempt to make the public aware of how they can engage with the police both online and offline. Including asking the public to attend community meetings, family activity days or tweets welcoming the public to talk with police officers while out and about, for example:

Residents of #Kempston, #Kingsbrook and #Cauldwell; join @NorthBedsPolice and @ACCBedsPolice tomorrow (Tuesday) at your community priority setting meeting at 7pm at Faraday Square Community Centre. What do you think our priorities in your area should be?

(Bedfordshire)

Hinckley Road explosion – public meeting tonight | The emergency services and @Leicester_News are holding a public meeting for local residents and businesses this evening at Dovelands School, in Hinckley Road, and starts at 7.15pm. <https://t.co/EH4JKeTRZM> #Leicester.

(Leicester)

This Friday, officers will be at #Barnsley town hall from 12-7pm for anyone who wants to find out about Neighbourhood Watch and how they can get involved. Everyone's welcome! There will also be crime prevention advice on offer.

(South Yorkshire)

If you're looking for something to do today with the kids then look no further... #policeinterceptors will be at Ingleby Barwick Family Fun Day from 1pm to 4pm. A bit of rain doesn't put them off! @ClevePol_Dogs.

(Cleveland)

Further to procuring offline interactions through digital communications, police forces also posted tweets that were focused on online interactions. These tweets mostly focused on collaboration with the public, asking for the completion of surveys on a varied number of topics:

We've worked to identify where we can best work with @DC_Police. A merger will help reduce duplication and make the most of our resources, preserving local policing. Visit <https://t.co/SFEgVpKEd8> + take the survey. #7ReasonsToMerge #FuturePolicing #Dorset.

(Dorset)

Can you help us complete this survey which has been designed to better understand what the police and other authorities in Essex can do to improve safety on our roads. #ThankYou <https://t.co/c4fSCeQMP5>.

(Essex)

What are your views on building social cohesion, and how to tackle extremism? @greatermcrc wants to hear from you – complete the survey! <https://t.co/5VKJf0OSvC>.

(Greater Manchester)

To improve our understanding and develop our response to reports of Sexual Harassment – we have launched an online survey. This survey asks our communities to come forward and share their experiences of Sexual Harassment. <https://t.co/kQ4OSp0tvR>.

(South Wales)

The above procuring collaboration or participation tweets appear to be used as a method to link the online and offline work the police do. In particular, it seems as though these tweets urge people to become better members of the community and to engage more completely in their own local areas by the corporate communications teams.

4.5.3 *Conversing with Others*

The last type of interactional tweet in this analysis shows the police conversing with others., making up 37.5 per cent ($n = 2,203$) of interactional tweets. Generally, these tweets were less formal in tone and more conversational compared to other forms of police Twitter content. These

communications mainly comprised of police forces replying directly to public tweets, police accounts and other stakeholders, as these examples demonstrate:

@— Ah look at these two!!! What an adorable pair :) Thank you for sharing this.

(Norfolk)

@— We hope you're okay and we can pass your kind words on to the team who were down there this morning. Also thank you for helping out!

(City of London)

@— Thanks for this message. Did you get the name or collar number of the officer? If so we'll pass this message on.

(Derbyshire)

@— We were a bit worried because of the hot weather, but they all stayed on their feet.

(Cheshire)

According to the tweets, the police sought to connect with the public through online discussions as well. In sending out these tweets, the police made a clear attempt to reach out to the public in order to start a dialogue and in some instances elicit a comment from them.

4.6 Discussion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a comprehensive overview of the many types of police communications available on the Twitter platform. There is a noticeable shift from conventional practices such as issuing press releases to the media and interacting with the public in person and during meetings held by community liaisons (Mawby, 2002b). The results agree with some of the prior findings while also pointing to specific differences (Heverin and Zach, 2010; Kudla and Parnaby, 2018; Lieberman, Koetzle and Sakiyama, 2013; O'Connor, 2015; Waters and Jamal, 2011). It is noteworthy that the analysis revealed that police forces use Twitter for a variety of purposes. It is clear that there is a need to expand beyond the use of informative communication techniques to reflect the requirements of operational and digital community policing. However, as the large percentage of informational content reveals, police forces are still reactive to technological changes rather than proactive in establishing creative ways to communicate with the

public (Mergel, 2013). It is imperative that police departments continue to modify their digital communication strategies when it comes to the changing needs and behaviours of the general public in digital settings. Thus, a credible police image is constructed through strategically managed communications (Manning, 1978; Mawby, 1998) because this is crucial for the work of police image construction. As a result, communications are implemented to enhance the police image work, presenting the police as legitimate, professional, and treating the public with integrity.

Social media communication can also expand police accountability (de Graaf and Meijer, 2018), because the use of digital media can lead to better organisational transparency and the dissemination of information (Mergel, 2013). Twenty-first-century policing has adapted to various technological changes in everyday workings to appear both professional and efficient (Manning, 1978). The capacity to deliver information quickly through Twitter underscores police competence and professionalism. This does, however, allow the public and other interested parties to provide direct feedback on police content (Jackson, 2015). Tweeting generates an increasing expectancy or appearance of 'open police organisations' through digital technologies (Meijer, Curtin and Hillebrandt, 2012; Mergel, 2012). As outlined in the literature review, having an open police organisation means communities can use social media to absorb information, comment, ask questions, praise, or criticise police work. As a result, openness, transparency, and accountability between the police and communities are all made easier by the proliferation of digital media (Bertot, Jaeger and Grimes, 2010: 269). In actuality, the frequent exchange of information improves the likelihood that police forces will be transparent and responsible to the communities they serve and to other stakeholders.

Increased exposure and awareness to incidents or information appeals could cultivate a sense of fear in communities (Lieberman, Koetzle and Sakiyama, 2013). Existing research shows a relationship between media coverage of crime and fear of crime (Gerbner and Gross, 1976; Romer, Jamieson and Aday, 2003; Weitzer and Kubrin, 2004), however, this relationship is complicated

due to various factors. These factors include news distribution formats (i.e., newspapers, radio, television), fictional, factual, or factional media content, diverse audience demographics, and individuals lived experiences (Leishman and Mason, 2003). The news media can provide a distorted picture of crime since serious incidents containing violence appear more often than less violent incidents (Chadee and Ditton, 2005). Informational tweets observed in this analysis offer at least a counterpoint to the news media which allows the public to make their own interpretations and therefore offer an alternative source to the news media. Although crime information intake through the news media may link with fear of crime, this is unclear due to a lack of consistent and robust research findings (Hollis et al., 2017). Because of this, claiming that media coverage of incidents, crimes or information appeals is a cause of public fear is difficult to prove.

There is emerging research on social media and fear of crime, drawing a nexus between the two. It is argued, for example, that social media makes communities more aware of incidents and crime occurrences than traditional news coverage forms (Jones, 2017). Another study suggests that social media consumption in young adults may increase fear of crime depending on perceptions of safety (Intravia et al., 2017). This research brings attention to increased alertness and partial increase in fear of crime, but there is no apparent causative connection. Research identified that police content posted on social media about crimes and incidents is 'disconcerting' to the public due to the fact that it can increase their fear of crime as a result (Lieberman, Koetzle and Sakiyama, 2013: 456). Though, if social media is going to be used effectively to inform communities about police work and build community relations, perhaps police communications should not be observed as disconcerting if appropriately expressed. Arguably in instances where certain features of messages, such as imagery of recovered items like large knives, firearms, or videos of violence from incidents, could foster a 'natural' increase in fear of crime for some (Dowler, 2003: 120). Therefore, police forces ought to be mindful of displaying graphic imagery and sharing communications that minimise fear creation.

It is through digital media that the public has numerous ways of consuming information about police work and crime on social media and other websites at their disposal. Various sources, such as news media sites, enthusiast pages, local community groups, and influencer accounts, can play a role in influencing attitudes toward crime fear (Wood, 2018). As there are countless sources to obtain information in the digital sphere, this diminishes the risk that police social media activities are central contributors to increasing fear of crime. Rather than absorbing potentially unfounded information, community policing practice could play an essential role in ensuring that fear of crime does not increase within communities due to everyday physical interactions (Dekker, van den Brink and Meijer, 2020). Any increase in fear of crime may be an indirect consequence of police forces attempting to broaden transparency and accountability through communications (Williams et al., 2018), especially as information communications feature as the largest content category in this research. However, the capacity of communities to easily access police information minimises media exaggeration surrounding significant crimes (Gerbner and Gross, 1976), bringing police and crime reporting closer to reality. Consequently, if there is a relationship between social media and fear formation, police social media profiles are only one aspect, albeit a significant one, in a very complicated digital environment.

An apparent lack of direction and formal guidance for all police forces across England and Wales has resulted in cautious social media use (Crump, 2011). This caution is apparent in the low percentages of transactional and interactional content in this research. These results are coherent with Heverin and Zach's (2010) study outcomes, which show that the police rarely engage with the public compared to informational content. However, when police forces did engage with the public, it seemed for some police forces there was an apparent effort to open discussion. In contrast, other police forces would provide little or no comment, stemming further conversation. These findings contradict those of Schneider (2016), who suggests that interactions were quite frequent for police on social media. However, the methods used here are different since this

analysis looks at the organisational level accounts instead of officer level accounts, so this could explain why there is a disparity between the findings.

The Heverin and Zach (2010) as well as the Brainard and McNutt (2010) study outcomes both support the notion that there are few interactions as found in this analysis. If police forces are provided with additional guidance and ongoing support at the national and regional levels, as well as further training opportunities for their communications staff, they may be able to expand interactional communication with their communities. Even though there is not much appetite for the police to interact or transact with communities, the public may respond well to increase engagement which is not only beneficial for image work but also for community policing. For example, allowing police contact handlers to answer public inquiries on social media could better respond to transactional type communications. After all, social media for the police is best described as a combined tool for community policing and image work (O'Connor, 2015). Therefore, police forces need to be aware that the communities on digital platforms may well feel reluctant to interact with the police if the Twitter feed is full of one-way communications. This is reminiscent of not seeing a police officer on the street which impedes community relationship development or seeing a police car drive past and not having the chance to open dialogue with an officer about crime and policing issues.

4.7 Summary

It has been the purpose of this chapter to explore the practices of police tweeting in England and Wales. Social media afford the police opportunities to construct and communicate their image and mandate through digital technologies (Bullock, 2016; Crump, 2011; Goldsmith, 2015). The findings establish that police forces are using the Twitter platform for a wide variety of content dissemination. First, police forces are using the digital environment to publish informational communications. These aim to shape the police presence online and provide the public and other stakeholders with information about police work. Second, the police use Twitter to benefit police

work through operational communications, drawing intelligence from the public, which could assist with police investigations through the power of content sharing within networks. Third, creating digital communities between the police and the public appears to be the central aim of interactional communications through conducting specific digital events on Twitter, collaborating with the public and communicating in a less formal approach. Fourth, the police are using social media as a setting where transactions between the police and the public can occur, underlining the convenience and speed of Twitter to reach out to police for asking questions or reporting incidents that may not necessitate an immediate police response. Therefore, Twitter is a digital environment employed by police forces for various purposes such as pushing out information, pulling in information, collaborating with the public and completing transactions. However, the communication practices evident on Twitter may not reflect how police forces use Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube as these platforms have different audiences, content focuses (text, images, video), and unique functionalities which make them distinctive.

Chapter Five

Corporate Communications Experts

5.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to build on the knowledge of the previous content analysis chapter through qualitative interviews with corporate communications experts. The interview findings here develop from similar research, which has also used interview methods to understand how police corporate communications departments go about their work (Bullock et al., 2020; Lee and McGovern 2013a). Twenty-four police forces took part in these interviews, representing 55% of all police forces in England and Wales. The key respondents interviewed frequently carry out police image work and can be considered ‘image workers’ (Mawby, 2002b). The data were analysed using the code and retrieve technique to generate themes, and the findings are separated into three main areas, which relate to research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The first theme, ‘from novelty to essential’, discusses the uptake of social media and how this has changed traditional police communications. In the second theme, ‘avenue of opportunities’, the various perceived benefits of social media are examined. While the third theme, ‘challenges of operation’, explores the difficulties the police forces encounter when communicating and presenting themselves in digital environments.

5.2 From Novelty to Essential

As discussed in earlier chapters, police corporate communications departments have become occupied with civilian staff to professionalise communication outputs. It is now rare that police forces allow police officers to work within such departments (Mawby, 2010b). Certain civilian staff are experts in communications, typically possessing experience dealing with the media through conventional processes (Leishman and Mason, 2003). However, new positions such as social media leads and development trainers for existing staff have enabled the police to accommodate growth in social media provisions (Schneider, 2016). Existing research outlines that the police

perform a gatekeeping function to supply information to the media, which they depend on to generate content about crime and policing (Chibnall 1977). When police forces started taking up social media, this was seen as a novel communications process, an atypical way to communicate the police mandate (Crump, 2011). After the 2011 riots, police forces quickly realised that social media was not just an unconventional means to communicate. Social media now plays a central role in public relations, media relations, and operational policing (Heverin and Zach, 2010; Procter et al., 2013). At the beginning of the interviews, the opening questions were intended to yield answers relating to police social media uptake and how traditional processes changed. In line with the previous literature, a prominent theme emerged that police social media use has evolved from a novelty to an essential practice within corporate communications departments.

5.2.1 Atmosphere of Risk and Fear

The uptake of social media has been a careful process for some public services. In one comparative analysis, it is argued that police have taken a less risk-averse approach to how social media has been employed when compared to the courts (Johnston and McGovern, 2013). However, for some forces, senior police officers influenced how social media was used due to organisational risks (Bullock 2018). Similar to earlier studies, the open nature of social media platforms prompted a reoccurring subtheme of risk and anxiety over the use of digital platforms (Lupton, 2015). The openness of digital media caused some police forces uptake to be slower than others and this potentially explains why it took nearly three years for all forces to join Twitter (Crump, 2011), as one interviewee explained ‘For a lot of police forces where they have perhaps been slower to adapt to social media, it is because they see it as a risk management situation.’ (Allison, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 19). According to one study conducted by Meijer and Torenvlied (2014), there was initial concern about the control of decentralised social media accounts, but over time, the accounts were regarded with more confidence. Although there is little research on such police social media accounts, it is not surprising that corporate communications staff consider social

media as a risk to police forces, as there is sufficient scope to damage the police image and legitimacy.

Several police forces have attempted to reduce the associated dangers by gaining access to all police social media accounts (officers, local units, specialist units, and departmental accounts) in order to ensure that all content is controlled centrally. If the content was deemed inappropriate, the account could be accessed to take it down (Police Foundation, 2014). Respondents in interviews recognised that there remains persistent anxiety about things going wrong, especially in terms of content being shared in large volumes that could harm the police image: ‘There is still a fear of social media and the awareness that once you put something out there, you lose control of it’ (Kevin, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 10). For police officers, the possibility of disciplinary action if they do ‘something wrong’ on social media can cause anxiety (Hesketh and Williams, 2017). This risk of disciplinary action can discourage officers from utilising social media completely, which can have serious repercussions for local communities if officers are unwilling to participate on digital platforms: ‘There’s always a risk with anything in policing; people don’t want to do anything that might take on additional demand, that’s not critical...’ (Phillip, Smaller Sized Police Force, Interview 20). Comparably, Bullock (2018) noted that officers were cautious of reputational risks and additional workload since social media is not typical police work. However, for a few respondents, there was a sense that this atmosphere of risk and fear would soon diminish across police forces: ‘I think gradually comms in general, probably nationwide, are becoming less scared of social media and becoming freer with it’ (Nicole, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 5).

5.2.2 Less Reliance on Traditional Methods

Although there were risks and anxieties associated with the use of social media in corporate communications, there was a driving force behind utilising digital platforms so as to break away from traditional work processes or to better fit them together so that they work harmoniously together. Police forces have found it challenging to manage and control policing messages when

inaccurate media reporting has dominated (Mawby, 2010a). The relationship between the police and media is complex, and power in the relationship often shifts in balance (Lee and McGovern, 2013). The police have for a long time been dependent on the media to communicate police content through processes like press releases and interviews. According to Schneider (2016), the advent of social media platforms for police forces has allowed them to bypass the media for most of their content publishing requirements, directly disseminating information to the public via digital channels instead. All respondents stated that the police no longer need to rely on the media for information dissemination and that the media needs the police more than the police need them: ‘The way to put it is they [news media] need us more than we need them, and it used to be we needed them more than they needed us, that is the shift’ (Karen, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 16). The freedom to move away from traditional communication processes allows police forces to have significant control over the information presented to communities (O’Connor, 2010). Nonetheless, the control over information distribution has not been simple, as several respondents emphasised that it has weakened connections with the media:

We have had a few sorts of disputes with the media because they were always the first people we would contact, we needed them, but we don’t need them as much anymore. They have become a little bit sort of ‘Where are we getting our information from?’... ‘Why is it going on to Facebook first?’. So, after the last few years the media obviously they want to be the first to know the story, and the problem is we were having so many stories... well not stories but updates, that we didn’t feel that some of them were newsworthy enough for the media.

(Kelly, Smaller Sized Police Force, Interview 18)

As outlined in the existing literature, without the police the media can find it difficult to access accurate information (Chermak 1995; Chibnall, 1977). This can lead to tension building within the police and media relationship, tipping the power toward the former. However, it only takes one incident to occur on social media, through ‘new visibility’, to impact police legitimacy and push the power of the relationship into the hands of the media (Goldsmith, 2010). Although for most respondents, the ability to be the leading publishers of police content meant they could portray the ‘facts’ to communities: ‘Social media allows us to publish the facts and the truth of the case as

we know up to that point, or any particular subject, rather than have it spun' (Harrison, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 13). The ability to control the 'facts' takes away the opportunity for the media to put a spin on a press release straight away, which has been a continual concern for the police because of sensational style click-bait articles in the press (Mawby, 2010b). Likewise, this capacity allows police forces to disseminate more relevant crime information and corporate messaging, rather than the more severe and sensational stories the media like to pick up on. This is beneficial for community policing as social media permits police forces to publish information on lower-level problems communities care about day-to-day (Skogan, 2006).

Respondents frequently revealed that police communications departments had altered their approaches to content distribution. These approaches typically fall into two main types, 'social media distribution' and 'simultaneous distribution'. Traditionally police forces would provide press releases straight to the media, but now they can take a social media-led approach. This means the media must obtain information from police accounts rather than reporters ringing up corporate communications departments (Mawby, 2002b): 'We've aimed to become a social media-led comms department, whereas we've traditionally relied upon our press department.' (Kevin, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 10).

As noted above, publishing on social media first can cause some tension within the police and media relationship. Thus, some respondents revealed that to reduce such tension, they publish content about crimes on social media, police websites and to reporters: 'We break it [news] at the same time, so we will send it to the press, and we will also put it on our social media sites' (Victoria, Smaller Sized Police Force, Interview 1). Since the use of social media has decreased in the past few years, it has evolved from a novel tool into something that is crucial whenever it comes to police communication.

5.2.3 *Immediacy and Reach*

Another prominent subtheme from the interviews was the immediacy and reach of social media. One of the issues with traditional media processes is that it can take a while for the news to break. For example, a newspaper will usually have to print news stories the day after they occur through morning dailies (Chermak, 1997). Digital society has made it so much faster to consume information, such as news, that it is hard not to consume large amounts of information while scrolling on Twitter or browsing news apps (Stratton et al., 2017). Respondents outlined that the immediacy of getting information out of the police using social media was incomparable to any other publication service:

‘There is definitely speed... well, speed full stop. We can get our messages out really quickly to the people that need to see them’

(George, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 11).

Some respondents related this immediacy to being able to sustain an authoritative police voice. As Lee and McGovern (2013a) claim, public relations help promote the police voice, which can shape the police image and lead to the legitimisation of the police position in control: ‘We have got a real, authentic and authoritative voice on these social media channels, that people take on board, so that makes a big difference’ (Elliot, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 22). However, having authoritative voices on social media can make it problematic to then keep silent when challenging situations arise, as large numbers of individual voices start conversations about incidents, crimes, or police transgressions (Wilson et al., 2011). In the same way, that immediacy is essential for police corporate communications departments to publish content, the number of people the police can reach is valuable. Digital society allows people to connect and for endless amounts of information between networks to flow (Lindgren, 2017): ‘The reach of the people who have chosen to follow you, the power of algorithms within social media and the way information is shared is very valuable to policing’ (Karen, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 16). The reach on social media platforms enables police to build up audiences on Twitter, and this is typically signified by the number of

followers an account has. Having an audience on social media enables police forces to control their audience (Manning, 1978). However, one issue with building up large followings on social media is that it skews the target audiences, which leads to police forces missing those whom they want to reach, for example, vulnerable persons or people who dislike the police:

We only hit the audiences that support us already, and we very rarely go beyond that, I mean in an appeal where something horrible or tragic has happened you will get people who don't support the police, you know sharing it. But, on the sort of crime prevention level or on promoting trust, we can do an amazing campaign promoting some work we are doing around theft or anything, any crime, we can do an awesome campaign and it goes down well with our Facebook audience and we get loads of positive comments, but it's not actually getting any interaction from the audiences who don't trust the police, which is who we need to connect to the most.

(Nicole, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 5)

The majority of respondents said that growing audiences on social media is vital due to the fact that it can help extend the scope of publishing beyond the reach of traditional media outlets: 'We have our own audiences and we have got audiences larger than our local newspapers have on social media' (Gregory, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 21). As O'Connor (2015) asserts, social media can help build audiences and enhance existing connections.

5.2.4 Cost-Effective Approach

Nearly all respondents mentioned that the value of social media is advantageous for expanding digital police visibility. As Bullock et al. (2020) argue, digital communications afford cost-effective police visibility when compared to expanding physical police presence: 'It's cheaper, that's the answer, it is cheaper for us, there is no budget there anymore, and it's free' (Kelly, Smaller Sized Police Force, Interview 18). Communicating on social media platforms reduces the costs to publish content (Leiberman et al., 2013). Cost reduction is especially apparent as police forces have needed solutions to circumvent cuts to police budgets and resources (HMIC, 2014). Respondents found benefits in social media through austerity cuts, but this limited the number of print campaigns conducted. However, a plus side to this is that communications were now cost-effective and provide less excess: 'I mean, for one it's better value for money – it's cheaper – there's no wastage;

you're going direct to the people that you do need to' (Sarah, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 9). As a result, digital media presents new possibilities for the police to avoid spending vast amounts of money on expanding police visibility, advertising, and crime prevention campaigns. However, this does run the risk of alienating those in communities who do not have access to digital technologies or those who do not actively seek out police content while browsing the internet and social media.

5.3 Avenue of Opportunities

The following broad theme outlines several prominent opportunities that have arisen through the uptake of social media for police forces in England and Wales. These opportunities have further extended communication and image work possibilities (Manning, 1997). The subthemes present how the digital society we live within has changed components of police image work, such as marketing, public relations, media relations, identity management and visibility (Mawby, 2002a: 5). The changes in these components of police image work result from the growth of the internet and the ability of the police to further promote their activities through digital approaches. For example, police departments that use internet platforms to distribute news releases without relying on third-party adaptation have gained better control over their communication voice and image work than they had previously (Leishman and Mason, 2003). With the growth of social media platforms, further opportunities have surfaced for the police to control, manage, and perform image work and help shift policing models like community policing into the digital society.

5.3.1 Facilitates Creative Content

The application of social media has allowed police forces to produce creative content and further accomplish image work's spheres of activities (Mawby, 2002a). The initial content published on social media by police forces was limited to plain text, with little creativity put into the content. As one respondent describes:

‘It was very much a text-based, one-way, ‘let’s see how this works for us’. Very few images, no media content, we relied upon YouTube for any videos at that point’

(Kevin, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 10).

Some respondents referred to this type of content as broadcast material. Content of this nature aligns with the traditional one-way nature of police communications (Heverin and Zach, 2010). The initial use of text-based content can perhaps be attributed to risk. The risk of breaching laws concerning what the police can publicly disclose, fear of getting things wrong on social media, and the novelty of publishing communications that are comparably dissimilar to traditional processes. A respondent comments on the evolution of police social media practice through the incorporation of new content types:

I can say honestly that a lot of it was text-based updates, it was writing a press release. I think in the police there is a big fear of getting things wrong. We are tied down by a lot of media laws, a lot of laws in general, so we are very process driven, and a lot of our updates were very much stale text getting the information out. Which does work, you know it gets shared and we still got a lot from that. But, I think gradually we had encouraged people to start using images at least, so we tried to say, ‘even if there is no picture, but you need one to put with this, here is a folder full of stock graphics so that it looks noticeable’.

(Nicole, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 5)

While the content was bland and text-based, to begin with, it is now more likely to incorporate a broad range of visual elements, such as images, videos, infographics, and memes (Wood, 2020). There was a strong consensus among most police forces interviewed that producing more successful and creative content through various methods is vital to increasing police satisfaction. The use of imagery, for example, has been widely incorporated into police social media content. As one respondent explains: ‘I think the main thing is we do try to use images as much as possible, we find using an image with a tweet, or Facebook post, will tend to get more attention than just a plain text one’ (Adam, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 17). Beyond the use of this content by police communications departments, police officers also can regularly publish imagery as some police forces equip officers with smartphones which gives them the capability to digitally show the operational duties they carry out directly to the public. One respondent commented on this process: ‘They can literally take photos as they are out and about on duty, upload them, write

something about them, bang! And they're done' (Ryan, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 15). Subsequently, post imagery provides police forces with the opportunity to document visual narratives that contribute to image work digitally.

Additionally, police forces often employ video content to draw in bigger audiences to their social media content. A significant aspect of social media activity for the police is promoting force initiatives and campaign work within the marketing sphere of image work (Mawby, 2002b: 316). Images and video are core content types when undertaking these activities, particularly as police forces want the public to absorb the information they are publishing and engage with it. It is noted that some police forces have dedicated internal video production capabilities, so they can create professional content to disseminate (Lee and McGovern, 2014). With campaign work, video content aids police in exemplifying the emotional effects of crime, which is difficult to achieve compared to a traditional static print campaign. A respondent expressed this contrast when speaking about a video campaign concerning an incident of illegal mobile phone use while driving, which resulted in the death of several people:

We did a video with the family saying exactly what had happened on the day, you know... what they had to go through to raise awareness. And, we also released the dash cam footage of it happening to tell the full story, and to allow people to see the other side of it. When you are on your mobile phone you think it is ok, but then they suddenly have to look at a video of a family that has suffered because of someone else's mistake, and we released that as a video and that was seen... I think it has been seen by 7,000,000 people that we can track, but it was also televised. I think if we hadn't have done a video, you would never have been able to know that family. Within a statement you can't get a level of emotion, or you just can't get that sort of feeling from a statement that has been given to the press, but you can put it into a video.

(Nicole, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 5)

Social media can assist the police in reaching larger numbers of people by generating creative content within the marketing sphere of image work, specifically in comparison to traditional modes of campaign work. However, this does not imply that all campaign work is now exclusively completed through social media, as traditional methods still play a role in campaign work. For example, following the widespread public disorder in August 2011 in England, Greater Manchester

Police launched an operational campaign on social media called #shopalooter, together with posters in the physical environment, displaying pictures of suspect faces to help identify them (Denef, Bayerl and Kaptein, 2013: 34). This campaign illustrates how social media can be effectively employed with traditional campaign work modes to attain further reach. There is still a place for traditional outputs, but social media has superseded them to an extent and has enabled far superior content based on the interviews conducted by police forces, which, according to one of the respondents, is more engaging and effective than putting up posters or sending out newsletters:

We did this [named campaign], I think it was called, and we had one of our colleagues dressed up as Santa and we had him pulling a piece of paper out of a sack, and on that piece of paper we superimposed wanted people during that period, and it worked really well. And, it is really heartening because you can do the same campaign year in year out because we are the police, and there are lots of seasonal crimes and things that always happen. But, that was really nice because it put a little bit of humour into it, it tapped into the social media channels of that in terms of putting some of the quirky things out there, but it got results and at the end of the day that is entirely why we are here, we are not just here to have laughs and jokes, which we kind of did. But ultimately, our focus was getting our messages out there and getting people to understand we are looking for those people and can you help us and help spread this message, you know let's really use these channels and use the way these channels are used to our advantage.

(Elliott, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 22)

In the same way that imagery and video content have enabled more creative content, the rise of live streaming functions through social media platforms, such as Facebook Live and Twitter Live, presents several prospects for police forces. For instance, live streaming has meant that image work activities with police-community consultation groups can now expand from small public gatherings in local community halls (Mawby, 2002a: 174). As one respondent highlighted: 'Live video then takes public meetings which are held in one location and makes them go further, so it enables those who can't get out the house, they can have a voice and listen to what's going on' (Kathryn, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 7). Incorporating physical and digital meetings in tandem connects the police with community members who may not otherwise attend. The inability to attend meetings has been observed as a limitation of police-community consultation groups. This means that meetings may not represent the actual communities they intend to support

(Goodson, 1984). Accordingly, live streaming opens a digital portal for the public to actively engage and interact with their police force on local issues which might otherwise be overlooked or failed to notice in communities, however this does require communities to be active on social media platforms police forces choose to carry out such content.

Streaming live for specific events on social media has also become more prevalent in pursuing engaging content rather than broadcasting content (Heverin and Zach, 2010). For example, several police forces frequently host question and answer sessions to use content centred around public engagement, as a respondent explained: ‘We are now trying to evolve using social media as a direct engagement portal with the public, so rather than we did this at an event [...] do that Q&A online, do it live, and open your portal up’ (Jessica, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 23). In turn, this provides the public with the opportunity to talk directly with police officers about specific topics or freely ask questions. While not all police forces provide this direct engagement portal through live streaming, generating such content is creating increasing pressure for the police to perform image work that keeps up with digital advancements. This is similar to other technologies that pressure the police to have several types of ‘image workers’ (Mawby, 2001: 45). Thus, police ‘image workers’ need to keep up with the novel opportunities available through social media to expand such activities.

Furthermore, live streaming content has also been used to illuminate the varied work the police undertake. This can include providing the public with live images of ongoing activities through officer accounts, local and specialist policing accounts, and formal events such as award ceremonies through the leading corporate social media accounts. A respondent commented on the value of using live streaming: ‘When we use Facebook Live and we give people live real-time insights into what we’re doing or something that’s happening, we get fantastic responses’ (Ryan, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 15). Live streaming adds a further dimension to the role of social media to assist with the image projection capabilities of police forces. It creates the

opportunity for police forces to show segments of real police work, somewhat like the constructed television media portrayals produced to display the glossy crime-fighting illustrations of policing (Leishman and Mason, 2003). While not all police live streaming shows glossy depictions of policing, several police forces encourage local and specialist teams to engage in this content to illustrate police work in real-time.

In the same way that live streaming is able to enable the public to connect with their police through digital meetings and the ability to see the work of the police, live streaming content is also able to be used creatively for recruitment. It is no surprise that social media has been utilised as a gateway to publicise information concerning recruitment, similar to police recruitment advertisements being shown next to online episodes of popular police television series (Schneider, 2014). However, the utilisation of live streaming to portray images of policing, discuss the daily work practice, and ask questions to police officers is beneficial. For example, it has been argued that representations of the police on television programmes, whether fictional, factual, or factional depictions, serve as a 'positive recruitment tool' for the police (Lee and McGovern, 2014). Social media can be considered as an enabler to expand the ability to conduct image work through live streaming for the public who like the idea of joining the police and those who may not, as one respondent noted:

If you put up a poster saying 'we are going to be in this village hall tomorrow night doing a Q&A on PCSO recruitment' which we did the other night, you might get a few die-hard people who really want to be PCSO, they will change their schedule around, they will have to get childminders for their kids and they'll be at that hall. But if you give them an easier way to do that you'll get hundreds of people and you'll even capture those people who aren't quite sure they want to be a PCSO, and they will tune into this while watching television on the evening. And, then seeing this Q&A they'll think this is amazing and maybe they will apply, that is the benefit of doing it.

(Jessica, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 23)

As outlined above, live streaming has enabled police forces to be imaginative in using social media to disseminate more creative content to the public. However, this was not the case for all police forces interviewed. The practice of live streaming has been approached with caution and is

comparable with the experimental uptake of social media at the beginning (Crump, 2011). The risks surrounding live streaming, namely the unpredictability of something going wrong during the live process, is a central factor as to why police forces do not adopt this form of content: ‘We are getting a lot of requests for live streaming, and we are very supportive of that, but equally, we are aware of the dangers. When you are live streaming if something happens, we cannot control that’ (Kevin, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 10). Due to the potential risks, forces tend to only embark on ‘safe’ live streaming, which is unlikely to go wrong: ‘We did a Facebook Live for a two-minute silence. We have also done Facebook Live for a commendation ceremony’ (Kelly, Smaller Sized Police Force, Interview 18). Even though live streaming content has been beneficial in certain instances, police forces are apprehensive about the scenarios used for live streaming content to minimise the chance of negatively impacting the police image.

5.3.2 Increases Visibility and Transparency

As noted above, social media platforms are empowering police forces to partake in digital two-way engagement with the public. In conjunction, social media platforms further permit the magnification of police visibility and broadening of transparency. For most key respondents, the increase of police visibility was a recurrently discussed opportunity because of social media usage: ‘It gives us the visibility, which when accompanied by physical visibility and engagement it amplifies that’ (Kathryn, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 7). With the advent of digital society, there has been a vast expansion in mediated communications and the augmented management of visibility (Thompson, 1995). For the police in the digital society, the opportunities to increase visibility through social media stem from having a variety of police accounts on multiple social channels.

The variety of police social media accounts has enabled greater access and attainment of information concerning the police and policing activities for a broad range of end-users. For the public, this is particularly useful if police work is not directly visible: ‘Social media gives us the

opportunity to show what our officers are doing if it is not being seen by the public, we can promote the good work that they are doing in the community teams' (Victoria, Smaller Sized Police Force, Interview 1). In terms of image work, the opportunity to publish social media content that aids in increasing police visibility is extremely valuable. In the work undertakings of police press officers, presenting a positive image of the force is not always an explicit activity that is categorised as part of their responsibilities (Mawby, 2002a). It is true that with social media, however, there will now be a greater responsibility on their part to present positive images, as press officers will be primarily publishing digital communications. The police communication departments are now fully aware of the importance of spreading police visibility across all types of social media accounts to achieve a consistent image, and it is an important activity that they now routinely carry out to achieve that image.

There have been challenges facing police forces in England and Wales for more than a decade as a result of economic austerity measures taken by the government. Inevitably, this has contributed to police officer numbers dwindling over this period (Crawford, 2014). Respondents noted this as one reason for generating social media accounts for local policing teams and individual police officers: 'As visibility of police officers on the street decreases because of budget cuts we can kind of make up by increasing their visibility online, by creating more accounts and making sure we cover a wide geographical area' (Jessica, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 23). These local policing teams and officers social media accounts can be used effectively in several ways to further police visibility, whether that be publicising activities or performing community engagement (Crump, 2011: 22). As police forces have taken the opportunity to develop and amplify digital visibility on social media platforms, a recent survey regarding public perceptions of police forces found that 44% of the respondents had not seen uniformed foot patrols in their communities in the past year (HMICFRS, 2017: 14). Appropriately, 83% of the respondents thought it was essential to have physical police visibility in their communities (HMICFRS, 2017: 13). While this

survey did not take digital police visibility into account, physical police presence is still significant to the surveyed public. Owing to the challenges of economic austerity which police forces continue to face, social media is affording a digital extension to counteract the apparent reduction of physical police visibility:

I think in this day and age there are you know less police officers on the street, not sure if we are allowed to say it like that. But, you know there aren't, that is just a fact and resourcing wise it is really difficult to have an officer on a street corner all the time, it is just not like that anymore. So, I think we found it really important that our officers are seen to be where our communities are, so I think it is about recognising that people want that engagement with their local police, they want to be able to talk to them, and we want them to be able to talk to us as well. And, if we can't have a physical presence all the time then maybe we can have a digital presence.

(Nicole, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 5)

In the same way that social media extends police visibility in the digital sphere, police transparency is also being increased through social media practice. The meaning of transparency for the management of visibility relates to presenting a clear and approachable police image, conveying information about the assembly and procedures for making decisions, preparedness to undergo impartial assessment, and disseminating information about complaints and their investigative outcomes (Mawby, 2002a: 71-2). Social media allows forces to communicate content more quickly than traditional press releases to sustain transparency. This is because information about incidents is more likely to spread on social media before police forces can comment on the specifics of an ongoing incident. Consequently, this paves the way for narratives, claims and counterclaims to ascend on social media platforms (Schneider, 2016: 120): 'When we didn't have social media – we could work more to our own timescales around what information we released, where now... a lot of the time it's dictated by what might already be out in the public domain' (Michelle, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 14). The necessity to be transparent through releasing information is particularly apparent when prominent incidents of crimes occur, where there have been advancements in police investigations, and when criticisms of the police surface. The pressure to release information on social media can also be challenging for the police, especially with incidents of high public interest:

The police force is under an inducible amount of pressure to make a comment, particularly on social. Myth and rumour will swell, and then you have the risk of public order or public disorder as a result. Because you cannot when somebody has died as a result of police contact go and make comment, it needs to be investigated independently by the IPCC, and they need to be the ones giving comment.

(Harrison, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 13)

Due to the open nature of social media platforms, organisations such as the police are required to show their authenticity through authority, identity, engagement and transparency (Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody, 2010): ‘For transparency purposes, we are a very open police force, and we put a lot out there in terms of what we get up to, what we get right, and what we don’t get quite as right’ (Gregory, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 21). Social media facilitates novel opportunities for police forces to be increasingly transparent (Bullock et al., 2020). For example, the ability for the public to communicate directly with senior police officers is becoming more straightforward within digital environments: ‘In terms of transparency, you can send a tweet to the Chief, and he will reply to you, it makes our job difficult sometimes, but that is the level of transparency you would never have before’ (Allison, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 19). As a result of the active presence of senior officers on social media platforms, the public has greater access to segments of the police force that previously would have been hard to connect with due to their lack of engagement on social media. However, these accounts must be viewed as strategic accounts, which allow the public to observe the kind of image that officers are seeking to portray when it comes to policing.

Using multiple channels contrasts with the traditional mode of publishing communications through corporate communications departments (Chermak and Weiss, 2005). Having multiple outputs aligns with the third future trajectory of police communications proposed by Mawby (2002b: 320), where various outputs carry out external communications to expand the openness of the police. The media, for example, are encouraged to go through other police outputs for information for several police forces: ‘We have asked the media to go directly to the team that’s put it out – ask them the questions – and we also include in the training that we expect whatever

they put out' (Sarah, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 9). Various police outputs are now conducting image work activities with the media which were previously limited to the scope of corporate communications departments (Mawby, 2002a).

5.3.3 *Police Humanisation*

Community policing seeks to achieve the humanisation of the police through the cultivation of meaningful relationships between the local police and the public (Goldstein, 1987). In the digital sphere, key respondents underlined that social media had become another environment that empowers police forces to present themselves online in a 'human way'. This way of operating on social media follows from the early years of police social media uptake, consisting of one-way, impersonal, and formal communications:

'I think previously, we were very... corporate. We have started to introduce a bit more humanisation to the tweets, depending on the nature of what we're delivering'

(Danielle, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 12).

The idea of showing humanity, or the 'human face' of the police, within image work activities is not novel. Showing the humanity of the police is of crucial importance and has this been included within police mandates for decades (Mawby, 2002a: 118). However, social media allows police forces to show this humanity on a grander scale, with further possibilities to project the human faces and aspects of policing: 'I think it has put a massive human face on policing and an immediate face on policing, and ability to tell the truth as we see it straight from the horse's mouth' (Mark, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 2). As Deneff et al. (2012: 25) propose, communicating on social media in a human manner enables the public to become more receptive and trusting of the police. Thus, distributing content that presents the police as human, rather than a uniform, may also aid in removing public stigmas and predispositions about the organisation:

For me it is humanising the force a bit, we want people... and this is a really interesting point that I kind of learnt quite early on in my time working here, we don't want the public to be scared of the police. So, you know, if you get people who say, talking to their kids, 'If you are not good, I am going to call the police on you'. There is a real thing of we don't want parents to do that, and a lot of the activities and a lot of the engagement we do, we

really try to push away from that scary police side. We really want people to actually happily come to us, because if we can have that relationship with young people early on and that we are not someone to be feared, unless you are a criminal, not to be fearful to come up to us and ask us questions and engage with us.

(Elliot, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 22)

The tone is often used to project a human image of policing on social media. It has been argued that corporate police force accounts are dissimilar to police team and police officer accounts, with the former being more formal in tone (Bullock, 2016: 6). While this might be the case when the police publish critical communications, corporate police accounts also try and present the human side of the police: ‘I think that was a big shift for all police forces that our... we spent years perfecting our corporate tone, and then in the last few years, we have chosen to drop that on social media’ (Karen, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 16). Thus, some police forces are changing the tone of social media content to connect with the public in an informal manner. When police forces aim to increase two-way engagement with the public, the tone of social media content must be more informal (Denef et al., 2012). In some instances, respondents referred to the use of informal communications to facilitate public engagement: ‘And then the other thing that it allows us to do – and we do this, even on our main corporate accounts – is you can show a bit more humour; you can be a bit more reactive and a bit more conversational in the way that you put yourself across’ (Phillip, Smaller Sized Police Force, Interview 20). Adapting the tone of content can humanise the police on social media through image work activities. A more informal and personable approach is not only advantageous for creating better content for distribution and for connecting with the public in a more casual and friendly manner, but it will open the door for negative comments if the tone is too unprofessional.

5.3.4 Enhancing Reputation Management

Managing the reputation of the police stems back to the creation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829, where projecting an approachable image of the new police to the public was crucial in gaining acceptance (Critchley, 1973). In the digital society, public relations and marketing activities still

assist with the reputation management of police forces. For police communications departments, reputation management can be conducted through image work by lucidly presenting police activities to the public (Mawby, 2002b): ‘We just try to present a nice honest picture of what policing is like in [named county] and engage with people that might have different views on what our performance is like, and that all kind of contributes to our service that we provide’ (Gregory, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 21). Through digital visibility, reputation is managed by providing the public with portrayals of the police using various content types (O’Connor, 2015). In turn, portrayals of the police on social media, whether published by the police, the public or the media, contribute to public perceptions (Schneider, 2016). Consequently, social media has helped shift reputation management into the digital age for police forces.

While reputation management can be achieved on social media, quite a few key respondents were keen to express that this was not straightforward: ‘I think that... you know... for us, the focus is not about overtly managing reputation; it is about engaging positively with our communities’ (Ryan, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 15). For police in Canada, Twitter has been used with mixed success for reputation management (Schneider, 2014). The fluctuation between the various formats of informational and interactional content to directly engage with the public provides the police with a novel opportunity to manage reputation (O’Connor, 2015: 5-11). This is because social media affords the police greater control over the images of the police projected to the public.

5.3.5 Support Operational Policing

Before social media, police forces would seek help from the public through methods such as publishing appeals for information and witnesses through the media and performing door-to-door inquiries (Mawby, 2002b). While these methods are still used today, social media is progressively being used to gather sought-after intelligence and information from the public. One respondent describes this progression: ‘It has changed, we have moved from looking at social media as just an engagement tool to looking at it as an operational asset’ (Harrison, Larger Sized Police Force,

Interview 13). Accordingly, police forces have progressed their social media strategies to satisfy a broad range of organisational needs, including broadcasting information, engaging with the public, and gathering operational intelligence.

Many police forces reluctance to utilise social media for operational policing stems from their reluctance to adopt social media. Observing that social media can yield benefits for operational policing has altered attitudes within police forces. A respondent explained the greater interest in social media when operational benefits started to be realised: ‘I think when they could see the good results the demand increased. CCTV images, people being identified quicker, missing people being found quicker, intelligence coming over...’ (Kelly, Smaller Sized Police Force, Interview 18). For operational policing, publishing appeals for information and requests for witnesses can aid in hastening the intelligence-gathering process, and this is particularly useful in the current climate where officer numbers are stretched (BBC, 2017). Several respondents commented on the effectiveness of using social media in this capacity: ‘...just a handful of people post onto our social channels, but the results we get and the time we save from officers going door-to-door, engaging with surgeries, and engaging with local media, we can have results almost in hours’ (Gregory, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 21).

It is impossible to say how much intelligence is being gathered from the public through social media. However, many respondents mentioned that social media is directly having a positive impact in assisting operational policing: ‘Our social media accounts are absolutely supporting frontline operational policing in terms of tracing missing people; supporting investigations; finding suspects from CCTV appeals, and we know that that works for us’ (Ryan, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 15). The value that social media has to offer operational policing has been demonstrated in this section. This clearly illustrates that social media is a highly effective tool for performing image work in the field of policing.

5.4 Challenges of Operation

The past two themes underline how social media has gone from a novelty to an essential tool and that social media creates an avenue of opportunities for police communications. The last broad theme from the key respondent interviews is the ‘challenge of operation’. All respondents found social media challenging in some form. Thus, social media is not a true panacea for police communications and image work. There have been many obstacles which police forces have faced in the learning process. The extensive array of social media platforms to choose from makes it difficult for police forces to keep abreast of the latest platforms. These platforms offer many possibilities that can help change police practice quickly (Goldsmith, 2015), yet it can be incredibly resource-intensive to track new platforms to engage with the public: ‘Trying to keep abreast of all those different usages because that is your customer you are trying to engage with, and you have to engage with them in the platform that they use’ (Liam, Smaller Sized Police Force, Interview 4). Bullock et al. (2020) found police forces considered it challenging when it comes to keeping up with new platforms and often contemplated whether it was worth the time and resources to try and reach different audience demographics, such as younger people. The police also face challenges when trying to get content viewed by as many people as possible, and this is without trying to facilitate two-way community engagement. To do this, police services try and publish social media posts before the public or other stakeholders get the opportunity to do so (Lee and McGovern, 2013). Therefore, by using social media platforms, police forces have the opportunity to try and stand out and make their content go viral. Still, there are also challenges that arise from the algorithms that are in place on social media platforms, which make it challenging for content to go viral.

5.4.1 Resource Intensive

Key respondents repeatedly stressed that doing social media work on top of their other responsibilities was a ‘tough ask’. Smaller teams were mainly ‘omnicompetent’, where staff

performed all corporate communication tasks, whereas larger teams tended to be ‘role specific’, where staff operated one specialised role such as social media or press relations: ‘We are now what you call omnicompetent communications and engagement specialists, we do a little bit of everything’ (Kelly, Smaller Sized Police Force, Interview 18). However, seemingly splitting the structures of corporate communications teams does not solve the problem social media presents in terms of effort. Social media are environments that are active 24/7 (Lindgren, 2017). Corporate communications departments typically operate on 9 to 5 timescales, which causes inflexibility in offering a ‘full’ service provision: ‘We pretty much assume that we don’t have an activity from 23:00 and 06:00. I think eventually this will become a 24/7 operation, so that is going to impact on staffing if we are going to maintain that service’ (Mark, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 2). This raises questions over the challenges of how social media is monitored outside of regular work hours, especially in cases where the public attempt to engage.

A few respondents stated that police contact centres monitor police accounts outside of working hours in case any incident reports came in, but this was not standard practice given widespread resource constraints. When resources hinder the ability to engage, the police image can suffer as they can appear unresponsive to community needs (Mawby, 2002a). It was not surprising to learn that the majority of police forces, even if they already have reasonably sized teams, would like more staff working on social media to bolster the police digital service offerings: ‘Really it is that resourcing side of things that is the biggest problem for us [...] It’s getting more hands-on and using it more effectively’ (Gregory, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 21).

5.4.2 Moderating Public Content

Following the resource-intensive side of social media practice, another challenge is moderating public content. Each social media platform is different, but a commonality is fostering digital communities (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). A challenge in digital communities is monitoring comments that the public post in reply to content the police have published. As image workers,

corporate communications staff are responsible for ensuring that police profiles do not include harmful or toxic comments that could affect the police image or the broader community: 'We try and make sure that we are actively monitoring and engaging with the community about what is appropriate and what isn't appropriate on our pages' (Gregory, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 20). Social media platforms can be breeding grounds for hate speech, mainly when trigger events occur such as terror attacks, political votes, or localised events (Williams et al., 2019).

Accordingly, police forces need to be mindful and carefully look out for offending posts which could promote extreme narratives: 'Some people started putting on really derogatory comments about travellers, and if we leave it on there, we are effectively publishing it if we don't take it down' (Adam, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 17). While respondents outlined that every effort is made to remove public content which is offensive, sometimes there are not enough resources to monitor every single post that gets published on digital platforms: 'If people are being incredibly racist, or actually committing a hate crime on our post, we can't allow that to stand but we also do not have the resources to go after everyone' (Harrison, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 13). In this regard, social media becomes a place where corporate communications should monitor content engagement to ensure a safe and respectful digital community. There is, however, a risk that the police, if there is such a large quantity of obscene or offensive public content, may be unable to uphold the responsabilisation of people commenting on police posts.

5.4.3 Incoming Criticisms

The next subtheme from the interviews concerns the influx of incoming criticisms, which are not considered offensive or illegal. Respondents spoke about people who reply to content asking why police are posting on social media: 'We get the odd comment, 'Why are you doing this; why aren't you out on the beat?', because people don't understand [...] that we're not police officers' (Laura, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 6). One issue with police use of social media is not knowing how the public will interpret content (Schneider, 2014). Some respondents stated that they had to

train police officers in best practices to minimise the risk of getting into a situation where many negative comments get published on a post: ‘If you get a police officer smiling because they’ve seized a car, they [the public] hate that. It’s trying to teach officers to look approachable but not smile and look smug’ (Kelly, Smaller Sized Police Force, Interview 18). A clear effort is being made to portray a positive image of the police in the public eye. However, while it may be the case that the public is supportive of police work, there will be some people who disagree with such representations of the police. Respondents would not delete critical comments, but sometimes they would respond to open dialogue with communities about the issue raised. Some of these respondents observed an increase in self-moderation in the digital communities during the period when comments intended to criticise police over trivial matters were being posted. A significant part of this trend can be attributed to community policing (Skogan, 2006), whereby police social media accounts have been actively promoting positive messaging and favourable image work, which attracts supporters of the police who counter any negative or antagonistic speech:

We started seeing people who had followed us for a long-time start being advocates for us, and start answering people’s questions before we even got there, or telling them ‘Why are you being so negative to police? If you ever needed them, you’ll regret what you are saying’. They started speaking up and we hadn’t seen that for a very long time. It was purely just us trying to say well... sometimes what the members of public say back to these people, we were like... thank god you said it because we wouldn’t be allowed to say that.

(Karen, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 16)

5.4.4 *Impacting Police Legitimacy*

This next subtheme is somewhat similar to incoming criticisms but concerns public messages that take explicitly aim, justifiably or wrongly, at police legitimacy. Effective communication and coordination between the police and the public can increase police legitimacy, which is favourable when police forces struggle with a lack of resources (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer, 2015, Meijer and Thaens, 2013). However, respondents remarked on the issues surrounding the sharing of information which are often minor in context but attempt to discredit the police image: ‘The common thing is the picture of the police officer eating lunch in McDonald’s, or the car parked

on double yellows, or in a disabled bay' (Karen, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 16). Content posted in this manner is pedantic and seeks to taint the police image without any apparent purpose, other than trolling the pages to illegitimate the portrayal. Respondents also specified that in a small number of instances, some members of the public started targeting police officers to obtain a reaction from them that caused negative perceptions to spread on social media: 'I think we noticed over the last 5-6 years is that people being keen to scold officers, and they will video them and try and prompt a response' (Allison, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 19).

There have been a few studies that examine attitudes towards police legitimacy on the internet and social media. Intravia et al. (2017), for example, identified that public perceptions were negatively influenced when reading news online but more favourable reading using social media. Another study found that people who use the internet to consume information were less likely to have a positive perception of legitimacy (Graziano and Gauthier, 2018). Respondents were mindful that things can surface on social media which might be edited or captured in a way that attempts to remove positive police actions: 'We have had incidents where someone will be arrested, and a video will come out and the video will be edited or cut short and will perhaps not show us in the best light' (Harrison, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 13).

Respondents noted that they would not always respond to videos, particularly in cases that were live investigations, and it was difficult to comment until the situation was understood fully. If something had gone wrong with police actions, corporate communications departments would then release a statement to address the matter and manage any potential implications to legitimacy (Goldsmith, 2010): 'It is something that we have to manage, but you know we deal with things correctly at [police force], we don't shy away from these things so if it enables the public to examine us, hold us to account' (Gregory, Medium Sized Police Force, Interview 21). However, some respondents noted that corporate communications would respond to videos that involved police disinformation, typically using police body-worn video cameras that showed how the whole

incident unfolded. This type of engagement with the public on social media can help legitimise the police image and provide clarity (Lee and McGovern, 2013):

What has changed is that all our frontline officers have now got body worn video, and I think that is the game changer. You may have somebody filming someone being held to the ground, but eventually the footage will come out from the officer who may have got kicked first or they did something else, equally though if they didn't do their job properly, they are dealt with.

(Mark, Larger Sized Police Force, Interview 2)

5.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the results of the thematic analysis from interviews with key respondents. Social media is now a tool that is integrated within corporate communications departments' everyday working practices. Respondents recognised that creative content was needed to solicit further police visibility and engagement with the public. Most respondents were aware that social media was not just a broadcast tool, and that engagement was an opportunity to develop police image work to connect with the public. There is no doubt, however, that according to many respondents, there has been a change in how many police forces approach how they communicate their mandate. Akin to community policing practice, there is an effort to show the human side of policing on social media. This helps the police create favourable police images to inspire trust between police and communities. Social media was also perceived to enhance reputation. For example, respondents outlined that social media enabled the construction of positive images to help improve police status.

In the digital society, the shift in corporate communication practices is the result of skilled and confident employees who are willing to take on new challenges and create new avenues of opportunities to connect with communities and achieve image work. One of the key themes that stood out from the analysis was that an atmosphere of risk within police forces still existed due to the unpredictability of those that use social media platforms. However, the prospect of becoming less reliant on the traditional work processes, such as relying on the media, outweighed the risks.

All interviews revealed that the immediacy and reach of social was a desirable feature of using social media. Social media has become a popular tool for circumventing austerity measures over the past ten years. However, the interviews revealed that the resources required to use multiple platforms are a challenge that is unlikely to be met under current funding conditions.

Chapter Six

National Police Survey

6.1 Introduction

The results in this chapter stem from a national survey of police forces in England and Wales. The survey findings are linked together with Twitter data from the content analysis outcomes in Chapter Four. Respondents of the survey include individuals from police force communications departments who manage and publish content on social media at the corporate level. In design, the survey consisted of 21 questions and was distributed using the Qualtrics online survey software. Questions asked were predominantly closed-ended, consisting of multiple-choice and a series of Likert scales (see Appendix 3). The linked Twitter data includes the content category counts from the 43 police forces to compare tweeting practices. Survey descriptive statistics outline how the police structure and manage social media communications. Combining the social media data provides additional knowledge about how police use Twitter in similar and distinct ways.⁴

There are four main parts to this chapter. The following section describes the univariate and bivariate statistics to understand police social media use management and structure. In the section after, the effectiveness of social media for several situations (such as public interactions, appeals for information, and campaigns and events) are analysed with non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis tests

⁴ It is important to note that the inferential statistics presented in these results should be interpreted with a degree of caution as the sample is non-random (indeed it is close to a census of forces). Where appropriate, the focus of interpretation is placed on effect sizes.

and ordinal logistic regression to understand if there is variation in the views of police forces towards social media use. After this, the analysis then links the survey and Twitter data together, performing additional non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis tests along with negative binomial regression to examine variations in tweeting practices amongst police forces. Finally, after presenting the results, a discussion clarifies how the findings relate to the existing literature and the thesis conceptual framework. Overall, this chapter stages an innovative and exploratory approach to collecting, analysing, and linking survey data with online communications to better understand police views and usage of social media. The analysis for this chapter was guided by three hypotheses:

H1: Smaller strength size police forces will likely perceive social media as less effective than medium and larger sizes for various uses.

H2: The police forces that are smaller in strength size may publish less frequent social media content than medium and larger ones.

H3: Police forces with a greater amount of local, specialist, and officer social media accounts will publish more varied tweets.

6.2 Police Social Media Statistics

The survey analysis enables insights regarding how police forces embed social media into corporate communications departments. **Table 2** presents univariate and bivariate statistics. In total, 38 out of 43 police forces in England and Wales responded to the online survey, meaning that 88.3% of police forces are represented in this analysis. This relatively high representation is comparable to studies that have surveyed police forces about communication practices in the past (Mawby, 1999, 2002b, 2007, 2010b). To compare differences, police forces were grouped into three sizes according to Police Service Strength figures. These groupings were then used as the dependent variable as implemented in preceding police research (Hong, 2016; Jones and Williams, 2013).

6.2.1 *Univariate and Bivariate Statistics*

In this study, police forces sized 'Smaller' (28.9%), and 'Larger' (28.9%) were equal in representation, with 'Medium' (42.1%) sized being the largest. The split between area classification was also similar, with 'Somewhat/Mostly Urban' (39.5%) the largest, followed by 'Middling' (36.8%), and Somewhat/Mostly Rural (23.7%). Respondents were asked how many corporate communications staff they have and how many worked on social media. Just under three-quarters of police forces had corporate communications with 11 to 25 (65.8%) staff members, with the remainder having between 1 to 10 (18.4%) and 26 plus (15.8%) staff. Smaller police forces had considerably fewer corporate communications staff in comparison to both larger and medium sized forces. The percentage of corporate communications staff tasked with social media duties also varied across police forces. Half of corporate communications departments had 11 to 25 (50.0%) staff working on social media; the next highest was 1 to 10 (42.1%), followed by 26 plus (7.9%). As compared to their medium and larger counterparts, smaller police forces were proportionally more likely to have fewer staff dedicated to social media activities than their larger and medium-sized counterparts.

The survey outcomes show that the police use a broad range of social media. Forces were typically operating between 5 to 6 social media platforms on average, with Twitter (100%), Facebook (100%), Instagram (92.1%), YouTube (92.1%), and LinkedIn (78.9%) amongst the most popular. Less frequently used social media platforms include Snapchat (36.8%), Flickr (34.2%), Pinterest (13.2%), Tumblr (5.3%), and Tinder (2.6%). There was found to be a tendency for larger police forces to have a greater presence on social media platforms than smaller and medium-sized ones. When looking at localised Twitter accounts, the largest number of accounts was 11 to 25 (44.7%), followed by 26 plus (34.2%) and then 1 to 10 (21.1%) accounts. For specialist policing Twitter accounts, 1 to 6 (42.1%) was the biggest, then 7 to 12 (31.6%) and then 13 plus (26.3%) accounts showing less. Most forces had between 1 to 29 (60.5%) police officer Twitter accounts, with 60

plus (21.1%) and 30 to 59 (18.4%) less frequent. A breakdown of police Facebook pages, which includes corporate, officers, local and specialist pages, shows 13 plus (47.4%) as the largest, followed by 1 to 6 (42.1%) and 7 to 12 (10.5%) pages.

It was important to understand how many police forces target communications on social media, as different communication types can be aimed at specific communities and audience demographics, such as appeals for information or crime prevention advice. Interestingly, thirty-two (84.2%) police forces declared that they actively target communications, leaving six (15.8%) forces indicating that they do not target specific audiences. There were not any statistically significant findings attributed to the targeting of communications. As social media adoption has been somewhat risk-averse during the uptake process, one of the survey questions asked if there was a social media policy that all police officers and staff had to comply with in order to be able to use social media effectively. Thirty-three (86.8%) police forces stated that they had a policy, and five (13.2%) forces did not enforce such a policy on the workforce, showing no difference between police force size.

Several questions within the survey related to the way police govern and provide training for social media platforms. The first question asked who is responsible within the police to approve social media accounts for all police ranks, teams, and departments. The results show that approval from a 'Digital/Social Media lead' (57.9%) was the most common, then 'Head of Communications' (23.7%), with 'Chain of command' (10.5%) and 'Approval not required' (7.9%) resulting in the least common approval processes. In addition, smaller sized police forces were statistically more inclined to have social media account approval through 'Head of Communications' compared with medium and larger sized police forces.

Table 2: Univariate and bivariate statistics.

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Coding</i>	Sample Total		Police Force Size	
		<i>N/M</i>	<i>%/SD</i>	<i>%</i>	χ^2 (df)
Communications staff	1 = 1-10	7	18.4	45.5	11.91 (4)***
	2 = 11-25	25	65.8	54.5	
	3 = 26+	6	15.8	0.0	
Social media staff	1 = 1-10	16	42.1	63.6	4.00 (4)
	2 = 11-25	19	50.0	36.4	
	3 = 26+	3	7.9	0.0	
Number of social media platforms	Scale (1 to 10 platforms)	5.55	1.37		
Social media platforms used	1 = Twitter	38	100	100	29.49 (20)**
	2 = Facebook	38	100	100	
	3 = Instagram	35	92.1	72.7	
	4 = YouTube	35	92.1	90.9	
	5 = LinkedIn	30	78.9	63.6	
	6 = Snapchat	14	36.8	18.2	
	7 = Flickr	13	34.2	18.2	
	8 = Pinterest	5	13.2	9.1	
	9 = Tumblr	2	5.3	0.0	
	10 = Tinder	1	2.6	0.0	
Local policing Twitter accounts	1 = 1-10	8	21.1	27.3	1.97 (4)
	2 = 11-25	17	44.7	54.5	
	3 = 26+	13	34.2	18.2	

Specialist policing Twitter accounts	1 = 1-6	16	42.1	27.3	2.85 (4)
	2 = 7-12	12	31.6	45.5	
	3 = 13+	10	26.3	27.3	
Police officer Twitter accounts	1 = 1-29	23	60.5	63.6	1.26 (4)
	2 = 30-59	7	18.4	18.2	
	3 = 60+	8	21.1	18.2	
Police force Facebook pages	1 = 1-6	16	42.1	45.5	0.28 (4)
	2 = 7-12	4	10.5	9.1	
	3 = 13+	18	47.4	45.5	
Target communications	0 = No	6	15.8	27.3	3.25 (2)
	1 = Yes	32	84.2	72.7	
Have a social media policy	0 = No	5	13.2	9.1	0.75 (2)
	1 = Yes	33	86.8	90.9	
Approves social media accounts	1 = Head of Communications	9	23.7	45.5	7.22 (6)*
	2 = Digital/Social Media lead	22	57.9	45.5	
	3 = Chain of command	4	10.5	0.0	
	4 = Approval not required	3	7.9	9.1	
Receives social media training	1 = Communications department	31	81.6	72.7	7.39 (16)
	2 = Local policing teams	31	81.6	72.7	
	3 = Specialist policing teams	28	73.7	81.8	
	4 = Police officers	32	84.2	81.8	
	5 = Special constables	30	78.9	72.7	
	6 = Police community support officers	32	84.2	81.8	
	7 = Other police staff	29	76.3	72.7	
	8 = No training provided	5	13.2	18.2	

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Aims of using social media	1 = Public engagement	34	89.5	90.9	20.56 (22)
	2 = Inform public about priorities and services	11	28.9	45.5	
	3 = Prevent and detect crime	24	63.2	54.5	
	4 = Promote local and specialist policing activities	19	50.0	45.5	
	5 = Increase public confidence and trust	30	78.9	72.7	
	6 = Conduct campaigns and events	21	55.3	54.5	
	7 = Provide public reassurance	29	76.3	72.7	
	8 = Inform the public about incidents	13	34.2	54.5	
	9 = Distribute news about police force	14	36.8	45.5	
	10 = Expand visibility of the police force	11	28.9	27.3	
	11 = Publicize police force less formally	13	34.2	18.2	
Frequently published content	1 = Information about incidents	8	21.1	18.2	12.94 (12)
	2 = Appeals for information and witnesses	34	89.5	81.8	
	3 = Crime prevention and safety advice	10	26.3	18.2	
	4 = Campaigns and digital events	19	50.0	36.4	
	5 = Local and specialist policing activities	16	42.1	45.5	
	6 = Police force news	16	42.1	45.5	
Content type with best engagement	1 = Text	11	28.9	9.1	13.16 (8)*
	2 = Images	36	94.7	90.9	
	3 = Videos	32	84.2	81.8	
	4 = Polls	5	13.2	9.1	
Area classification	1 = Somewhat/Mostly Rural	9	23.7	36.4	7.00 (4)
	2 = Middling	14	36.8	45.5	
	3 = Somewhat/Mostly Urban	15	39.5	18.2	

Notes: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.
 $N = 38$ police forces across England and Wales.

The next set of questions aimed to understand social media use across corporate communications departments. A multiple-choice question asked respondents to identify the aims of using social media. The most popular aims were ‘Public engagement’ (89.5%), ‘Increase public confidence and trust’ (78.9%), ‘Providing public reassurance’ (76.3%), ‘Prevent and detect crime’ (63.2%), ‘Conduct campaigns and events’ (55.3%), and ‘Promote local and specialist policing activities’ (50.0%). The least popular aims of using social media included ‘Inform public about priorities and services’ (28.9%), ‘Expand visibility of the police force’ (28.9%), ‘Publicise police force less formally’ (34.2%), ‘Inform the public about incidents’ (34.2%), and ‘Distribute news about police force’ (36.8%). There were no significant statistical differences in social media use aims between the sizes.

Respondents were asked to select the most frequently published content for the corporate police social media channels. The regular content types published were ‘Appeals for information and witnesses’ (89.5%), ‘Campaigns and digital events’ (50.0%), ‘Local and specialist policing activities’ (42.2%), and ‘Police force news’ (42.2%). The least regular published content was ‘Crime prevention and safety advice’ (26.3%) and ‘Information about incidents’ (21.1%). The final survey question asked respondents which content types (text, images, videos, and polls) received the most public engagement. The results note that police forces receive more public engagement for content that includes images (94.7%), videos (84.2%), text (28.9%), and polls (13.2%) coming in last. The poll content type likely came the lowest because police forces rarely publish these interactive posts compared to other content types. Interestingly, the findings highlight that medium police forces receive more engagement on video, polls, and text-based content than smaller and larger forces.

6.3 Social Media Effectiveness

Through a series of six Likert scale questions, respondents were asked about the effectiveness of social media platforms across different functionalities. The Likert scale implemented in the survey was a five-point scale (1 to 5) consisting of ‘Not effective’, ‘Slightly effective’, ‘Moderately

effective', 'Very effective' and 'Extremely effective'. The responses to the six 'Effectiveness of social media platforms for...' questions were conveyed in ranked discrete values. These are ordinal data requiring the use of a non-parametric test for analyses. From the list of choices, police forces deemed social media platforms most effective for 'increasing public interactions' ($M = 4.11$), 'appealing for information' ($M = 4.05$), and 'conducting campaigns and events' ($M = 3.79$). Social media platforms were deemed less effective for 'publishing policing activities' ($M = 3.61$), 'providing reassurance to the public' ($M = 3.58$), and then 'crime prevention information' ($M = 3.18$). Thus, there was an apparent trend from respondents that two-way communications were the most effective practice for digital communications.

6.3.1 Effectiveness Between Police Force Size

In order to compare between police forces, the rank-based non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test establishes if there were any statistically significant differences between groups, producing mean rank scores. **Table 3** shows the results from several Kruskal-Wallis H tests for the six 'Effectiveness of social media platforms for...' variables between the three distinct size groups: smaller ($n = 11$), medium ($n = 16$) and larger ($n = 11$). The distributions of all six 'Effectiveness of social media platforms for...' variables were not similar between the three police force size groups, as assessed through visual boxplot inspections. Following statistically significant results for the Kruskal-Wallis H tests, pairwise comparisons were run using Dunn's (1964) procedure, with a Bonferroni correction, to establish dissimilarities between groups.

The forces answered questions about the effectiveness of social media platforms for increasing public interactions. This analysis showed a statistically significant difference in the 'Effectiveness for increasing public interactions' variable between police force size groups, $H(2) = 11.10$, $p < .004$. The mean rank scores indicated that the smaller sized (mean rank = 10.77) tended to rank the effectiveness of public interactions the lowest, followed by (in rank order) larger sized (mean rank = 22.55), and then medium sized police forces (mean rank = 23.41) the highest. The post

hoc analysis showed differences between smaller and medium sized ($p = .005$) and smaller and larger sized ($p = .022$), but not between medium and larger sized police forces.

Table 3: Effectiveness of social media platforms between police force size groups.

	Sample Total		Police Force Size (mean rank) ^a			Kruskal- Wallis H
	M	SD	Smaller ($n = 11$)	Medium ($n = 16$)	Larger ($n = 11$)	
Effectiveness for increasing public interactions	4.11	0.98	10.77	23.41	22.55	11.10***
Effectiveness for conducting campaigns and events	3.79	0.74	12.73	22.56	21.82	8.13**
Effectiveness for information appeals	4.05	0.86	11.73	22.41	23.05	8.63**
Effectiveness for providing reassurance to the public	3.58	0.91	12.09	24.91	19.05	9.64***
Effectiveness for crime prevention information	3.18	0.89	13.73	23.09	20.05	5.44*
Effectiveness for publishing policing activities	3.61	0.71	12.55	24.97	18.50	10.02***

Notes: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

^aHigher mean rank scores indicate more responses toward the more effective end of the five-point scale.

In addition, police forces were then asked about how effective social media platforms are for undertaking campaign work and digital events. Assessment of the 'Effectiveness for conducting campaigns and events' variable uncovered a statistically significant difference between police force size groups, $H(2) = 8.13, p < .017$. The mean rank scores present that smaller sized (mean rank = 12.73) were more inclined to rank the effectiveness of conducting campaigns and events on social media the lowest, after that larger sized (mean rank = 21.82), with the highest being medium sized police forces (mean rank = 22.56). The post hoc analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between smaller and medium sized police forces ($p = .022$), but not between smaller and larger sized or medium and larger sized police forces.

Gathering information from the public for a variety of policing needs is also a typical social media objective. Aply, police forces were asked how effective this process was through social media content. Examination of the 'Effectiveness for information appeals' variable displayed a statistically significant difference between police force sizes, $H(2) = 8.63, p < .013$. The mean rank scores showed that smaller sized (mean rank = 12.73) rank the effectiveness of appealing for information on social media the lowest, next larger sized (mean rank = 21.82), and then medium sized police forces (mean rank = 22.56) the highest. The post hoc analysis presented statistically significant differences in responses between smaller and medium sized ($p = .027$) and smaller and larger sized ($p = .033$), but not with medium and larger sized police forces.

Similarly, social media platforms are commonly used to provide reassurance; for this reason, police forces were asked about the effectiveness of digital channels to provide such public reassurance. The analysis of the 'Effectiveness for providing reassurance to the public' variable outlined a statistically significant difference between police force size groups, $H(2) = 9.64, p < .008$. The mean rank scores specified that smaller sized (mean rank = 12.09) were more inclined to rank the public reassurance the lowest, with larger sized next (mean rank = 19.05), and the highest being medium sized police forces (mean rank = 24.91). The post hoc analysis identified a statistically significant difference between smaller and medium sized ($p = .006$), but not amongst smaller and larger sized or medium and larger sized police forces.

Crime prevention information is another common strand of police social media content. Analysis of the 'Effectiveness for crime prevention information' variable displayed that there was not a statistically significant difference between police force size groups, $H(2) = 5.44, p < .066$. Nevertheless, the mean rank scores express that smaller sized (mean rank = 13.73) tended to rank the effectiveness of crime prevention information through social media the lowest, next larger sized (mean rank = 20.05), and then medium sized police forces (mean rank = 23.09) the highest.

However, there was no statistically significant difference between size groups, so the post hoc test was not conducted.

Given the frequent promotion of policing activities through social media platforms, police forces were asked about the effectiveness of social media for this specific function. The analysis of the 'Effectiveness for publishing policing activities' variable shows a statistically significant difference between police force size groups, $H(2) = 10.02, p < .007$. It was presented from the mean rank scores that smaller sized police forces (mean rank = 12.55) tended to rank the effectiveness of publishing policing content through social media the lowest, following larger sized police forces (mean rank = 18.50), and then medium sized police forces (mean rank = 24.97) the highest. The post hoc analysis showed a statistically significant difference between smaller and medium sized police forces ($p = .005$), though not amongst medium and larger sized police forces or smaller and larger sized police forces.

6.3.2 *Effectiveness Ordinal Regression*

In total, three ordinal regression models were fit to the 'Effectiveness...' variables for increasing public interactions, information appeals, and publishing policing activities. Ordinal regression is the most suitable method to apply when the dependent variable is ordinal, like a Likert scale. The independent variables applied in the models relate to police force characteristics and embedding social media factors based on theoretical appropriateness. These include police force size, area classification, communications staff, local Twitter accounts, specialist Twitter accounts, officer Twitter accounts, target communications, social media policy, and the number of social media platforms in use. **Table 4** shows the independent variables regressed onto the dependent ordinal variables. Diagnostic results showed all models had a robust fit to the observed data.

Table 4: Ordinal regression predicting the effectiveness of social media platforms.

	Effectiveness for increasing public interactions				Effectiveness for information appeals				Effectiveness for publishing policing activities			
	B	SE	Wald	Exp(B)	B	SE	Wald	Exp(B)	B	SE	Wald	Exp(B)
<i>Police force size</i> (Ref: Larger)												
Smaller	-0.72	1.47	0.24	0.48	-2.31	1.40	2.71	0.09*	-1.30	1.46	0.79	0.27
Medium	3.86	1.88	4.23	47.91**	1.47	1.38	1.14	4.37	3.70	1.41	6.84	40.65***
<i>Area classification</i> (Ref: Somewhat/Mostly Urban)												
Somewhat/Mostly Rural	-4.07	1.48	7.47	0.01***	-0.78	1.19	0.42	0.45	-0.40	1.22	0.11	0.66
Middling	-0.23	1.12	0.04	0.79	1.16	1.07	1.17	3.19	0.13	1.04	0.01	1.14
<i>Communications staff</i> (Ref: 1 – 10)												
11 – 25	-0.32	1.27	0.06	0.72	-0.43	1.25	0.11	0.64	1.67	1.47	1.28	5.34
26+	0.33	3.01	0.01	1.39	-0.41	2.21	0.03	0.66	2.63	2.24	1.27	12.57
<i>Local Twitter accounts</i> (Ref: 26+)												
1 – 10	-0.41	1.61	0.06	0.65	-1.81	1.43	1.58	0.16	-0.43	1.45	0.08	0.64
11 – 25	1.78	1.63	1.18	5.93	-2.38	1.31	3.26	0.09*	1.22	1.23	0.98	3.40
<i>Specialist Twitter accounts</i> (Ref: 1 – 6)												
7 – 12	2.56	1.53	2.80	13.02*	2.95	1.36	4.69	19.15**	2.48	1.15	4.66	12.03**
13+	-2.46	2.01	1.50	0.08	-1.33	2.03	0.43	0.26	0.97	1.90	0.26	2.65
<i>Officer Twitter accounts</i> (Ref: 1 – 29)												
30 – 59	3.50	1.84	3.60	33.22**	2.31	1.81	1.63	10.12	0.57	1.54	0.13	1.77
60+	1.76	1.46	1.45	5.81	1.34	1.51	0.79	3.85	1.36	1.44	0.88	3.91
Target communications	1.59	1.25	1.62	4.93	1.27	1.18	1.17	3.59	2.64	1.32	4.00	14.08**
Have a social media policy	3.01	1.32	5.19	20.42**	2.51	1.27	3.89	12.29**	2.35	1.42	2.73	10.54*
Number of social media platforms	0.75	0.53	1.95	2.11	0.55	0.50	1.24	1.74	-0.48	0.56	0.75	0.61
<i>Model fit</i>												
-2 log-likelihood		32.749				33.100				33.660		
df		15				15				15		
sig.		0.005				0.005				0.004		
N =		38				38				38		
Pseudo R ²		0.63				0.64				0.66		

Notes: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

The remainder of this section presents the model results for the dependent variables where several independent variables are positively or negatively associated with the three dependent variables. The police force characteristics showed that medium police force size was significantly positively associated with the public interaction dependent variable; this means medium sized police forces were more likely to consider social media effective for increasing public interactions when compared to the larger sized police force reference category. The effect size for this is 47.91, which is inflated due to low cell counts, so further research is needed to substantiate this result. The model also indicates that the smaller police force size was negatively significantly associated with the effectiveness of social media for appealing for information, signalling that smaller police forces did not find social media as effective for appeals compared to larger sized police forces with an effect size of 11.11. At the same time, medium police force size was positively associated with the effectiveness of social media platforms for publishing policing activities, which shows that medium police forces considered social media platforms as very effective for publishing policing activities. This effect was 40.65, again this is very large, and further research is needed to understand this result further.

In terms of police area classification, the somewhat/mostly rural area was significantly negatively associated with the somewhat/mostly urban reference group. This reveals that rural police forces tended to view social media as less effective for public interactions. However, the models did not show any other significant associations between police force areas for appealing information or publishing policing activities. There were also no statistically significant results for the staffing level variable when associated with any dependent variables. Although the model does show positively significant results for specialist police Twitter accounts group 7 – 12 compared to the 1 to 6 accounts reference group. This result signifies that police forces with between 7 to 12 specialist Twitter accounts consider public interactions, information appeals, and publishing policing activities effective through social media platforms. The effect sizes across all three models show a

large effect against the reference category. This might be because such police forces with a high number of specialist accounts are more open to the benefits of social media

Having police officer accounts within the 30 – 59 bracket was positively significantly associated with the public interaction dependent variable compared to the 1 – 29 reference group. Although the effect size 33.22 is large, it is due to low cell counts, and further investigation into the number of meso and micro-accounts in the police forces would be beneficial. Similarly, the local policing accounts from 11 – 25 were negatively associated with the effectiveness of social media for appealing for information compared to the reference category with an effect size of 11.11. Regarding targeting communications, this emerged as predictive with the publishing policing activities, but not any of the other two dependent variables with a large effect size of 14.08. Having a social media policy within police forces was also positively associated with perceived effectiveness in social media use across all three dependent variables, with large effect sizes for all three models. However, this finding might be a proxy for an unobserved factor or a reverse correlation. Lastly, the number of social media platforms did not associate with any of the dependent variables. Overall, the ordinal regression results demonstrate that some police characteristics and social media factors are associated with the perceived effectiveness of public interactions, information appeals and publishing policing activities for the forces in this research.

6.4 Linking Twitter Data

After the analysis of the main survey findings, social media data was linked to the survey data. This was achieved by connecting the tweet content categories for each police force as count data. For the purpose of comparing tweeting practices and organisational size, all forty-three police forces' tweets are included at this stage. However, in the successive negative binomial regression analysis, the social media data are reduced from forty-three to the thirty-eight forces that completed the survey. In total, the number of tweets added to the linked dataset was $N = 53,551$, with the following breakdown of tweet content categories: informational $n = 31,854$; operational $n = 8,509$;

transactional $n = 7,309$; and interactional $n = 5,879$. The subsequent comparative analysis contributes further to the findings examined in the qualitative interpretation of Twitter content (see Chapter Four). At the time of writing, the existing literature on police social media use does not compare police forces tweeting practices by way of linking a national survey (Kudla and Parnaby, 2018; Nikolovska et al., 2020; O'Connor, 2015). The next subsection presents the results by comparing police forces tweets using the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test.

6.4.1 *Comparing Tweeting Practices*

When comparing total police tweets, there was a significant difference across the three police force sizes. Further analysis of Twitter content types indicates one main category, and five subcategories, have statistical differences. The other three main categories and eight subcategories did not demonstrate any statistical significance between force size groups through Kruskal-Wallis H tests. This is somewhat expected, as police forces post similar communications across social media (Harms and Wade, 2017). The data here were also run through the ANOVA test, the parametric alternative, and the results were comparable and are available upon request if needed.

Table 5 shows the examination of the total amount of tweets for all police forces. The test summary reveals a statistically significant difference in the total tweets between police force size groups, $H(2) = 4.83, p < .089$. The mean rank scores indicated that the smaller sized police forces (mean rank = 15.96) tended to post less on Twitter, followed by larger sized police forces (mean rank = 24.42), and then medium sized police forces (mean rank = 25.31) posting the highest number of tweets. The post hoc analysis showed differences amongst smaller and medium sized police forces ($p = .042$), as well as smaller and larger sized police forces ($p = .080$), but not between medium and larger sized police forces.

Table 5: Categories of Twitter content between police force size groups.

	Sample Total ^a			Police Force Size (mean rank) ^b			Kruskal- Wallis <i>H</i> (2)
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Smaller (<i>n</i> = 14)	Medium (<i>n</i> = 16)	Larger (<i>n</i> = 13)	
<i>Informational Tweets Total</i>	31,854	740.79	339.38	19.04	21.75	25.50	1.79
Incidents, updates, and outcomes	7,940	184.65	134.94	14.71	23.16	28.42	8.25**
Crime prevention and public safety advice	7,206	167.58	153.34	21.86	21.19	23.15	0.17
Travel information and road safety guidance	4,421	102.81	99.62	23.04	24.88	17.35	2.72
News, activities, and misc. information	12,287	285.74	182.02	20.32	22.38	23.35	0.41
<i>Operational Tweets Total</i>	8,509	197.88	182.65	18.07	24.00	23.77	2.03
Information appeals	6,074	141.26	169.50	15.14	25.78	24.73	6.24**
Requests for witnesses	2,299	53.47	50.88	22.68	24.47	18.23	1.83
Reunite property with owners	136	3.16	2.87	18.43	26.56	20.23	3.60
<i>Transactional Tweets Total</i>	7,309	169.98	182.73	15.61	27.59	22.00	6.80**
Answering various enquiries	4,663	108.44	114.79	16.36	26.78	22.19	5.15*
Responding to incident/intelligence reports	2,210	51.40	62.35	15.04	28.56	21.42	8.70**
Signposting to other services	436	10.14	15.29	16.07	27.53	21.58	6.32**
<i>Interactional Tweets Total</i>	5,879	136.72	142.98	20.64	24.88	19.92	1.35
Performing digital events	1,889	43.93	115.99	20.11	24.97	20.38	1.43
Procuring collaboration or participation	1,787	41.56	33.46	20.11	23.03	22.77	0.47
Conversing with others	2,203	51.23	47.60	20.57	26.88	17.54	4.23
<i>Police Tweets Total</i>	53,551	1245.37	534.65	15.96	25.31	24.42	4.83*

Notes: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

^a $N = 53,551$ Tweets sample covers a six-month period excluding retweets (21/02/2018 – 21/08/2018).

^bHigher mean rank scores indicate a greater number of tweets within coded categories.

Out of the four main content categories, 'Transactional' communications were the single main content category which showed a difference between the police force groups, $H(2) = 6.806, p < .033$. This is interesting since transactional tweets are the least observed type of police communication on Twitter, especially with informational communications (Crump, 2011). The mean rank scores signal those smaller sized forces (mean rank = 15.61) tend to post less transactional communications on Twitter; then larger sized forces (mean rank = 22.00), meaning medium sized forces (mean rank = 27.59) post the most transactional tweets. The post hoc assessment showed differences amongst smaller and medium sized forces ($p = .027$), but not between smaller and larger or medium and larger sizes. Thus, even though only one main category showed a statistically significant difference between police force sizes, several content subcategories did turn out to be more varied across organisational size distributions.

The sum of 'Incidents, updates, and outcomes' tweets was dissimilar between police force size groups $H(2) = 8.253, p < .016$. The mean rank scores imply that smaller sized forces (mean rank = 14.71) were least likely to post substantial amounts of content about incidents and crimes, then medium sized forces followed (mean rank = 23.16), with larger sized forces (mean rank = 28.42) tending to post the most for this subcategory. After running a post hoc analysis, the biggest difference observed was between smaller and larger sized forces ($p = .014$), however, there was no indication of significant variations between smaller and medium or medium and larger sizes. Another large subcategory of tweets that shows differences between police forces is 'Appeals for information' $H(2) = 6.241, p < .044$. When examining the results of the post hoc test, there were no substantial differences amongst any force sizes at the .05 significance level; however, smaller, and medium police forces did come close in pairwise comparisons ($p = .062$).

Another subcategory that showed different distributions across police forces is 'Responding to incident or intelligence reports' $H(2) = 8.709, p < .013$. Mean rank scores suggest that smaller sized forces (mean rank = 15.03) were unlikely to respond to incidents or intel reports on Twitter.

Larger sized forces came in next (mean rank = 21.42), and medium sized forces (mean rank = 28.56) tend to act on these transactional type tweets. The greatest distinction noticed after running post hoc analysis was between smaller and medium sized forces ($p = .010$). Though, there was no indication of significant variations between smaller and larger or medium and larger police forces. The final subcategory of tweets that illustrates variations between police forces is 'Signposting to other services' $H(2) = 6.329, p < .042$. When assessing the post hoc output, there is a disparity amongst smaller and medium ($p = .036$), but not for smaller and larger or medium and larger sizes.

6.4.2 Predicting Twitter Content

In this part of the study, independent variables from the survey are linked and used to predict communication practice on social media. Six of the content subcategories from the Twitter analysis were fit to a negative binomial regression model. Negative binomial regression is the most appropriate method to apply when modelling count dependent variables that are over-dispersed. The independent variables employed in the models relate to police force characteristics and embedding social media factors based on theoretical relevance. These consist of police force size, area classification, communications staff, local Twitter accounts, specialist Twitter accounts, officer Twitter accounts, target communications, have a social media policy, and the number of social media platforms in use.

Tables 6 and 7 show the independent variables regressed onto the dependent count variables. The subsequent diagnostic results define how the negative binomial model compares to a model without any predictors, the intercept-only model. Starting with 'Incidents, updates, and outcomes', the model significantly predicted the dependent variable over and above the intercept-only model, $\chi^2(15) = 46.844, p < .001$. For the 'Crime prevention and public safety advice' variable, the model fit and predicted the data well, showing a significant outcome, $\chi^2(15) = 36.959, p < .001$. With the 'Performing digital events' variable, the model continued to perform better than without any predictors, $\chi^2(15) = 28.603, p < .018$.

Table 6: Negative binomial regression predicting ‘Informational’ and ‘Interactional’ content.

	Incidents, updates, and outcomes				Crime prevention and public safety advice				Performing digital events			
	B	SE	Wald	Exp(B)	B	SE	Wald	Exp(B)	B	SE	Wald	Exp(B)
<i>Police force size</i> (Ref: Larger)												
Smaller	-0.40	0.21	3.76	0.66**	-0.06	0.20	0.11	0.93	-1.44	1.23	1.37	0.23
Medium	-0.30	0.17	3.12	0.73*	0.03	0.16	0.04	1.03	-0.27	0.76	0.13	0.75
<i>Area classification</i> (Ref: Somewhat/Mostly Urban)												
Somewhat/Mostly Rural	0.01	0.18	0.01	1.00	-0.39	0.17	5.23	0.67**	-0.09	0.84	0.01	0.91
Middling	-0.21	0.15	1.97	0.80	-0.13	0.15	0.78	0.87	0.44	0.88	0.25	1.56
<i>Communications staff</i> (Ref: 1 – 10)												
11 – 25	0.38	0.20	3.52	1.47*	-0.53	0.19	7.21	0.58***	-0.43	0.82	0.26	0.65
26+	0.69	0.31	4.83	2.00**	-0.11	0.30	0.15	0.88	-0.48	1.40	0.11	0.61
<i>Local Twitter accounts</i> (Ref: 26+)												
1 – 10	-0.43	0.20	4.37	0.64**	0.47	0.20	5.57	1.61**	0.12	0.92	0.02	1.13
11 – 25	-0.19	0.17	1.26	0.82	0.22	0.17	1.73	1.25	1.60	0.79	4.04	4.96**
<i>Specialist Twitter accounts</i> (Ref: 1 – 6)												
7 – 12	0.63	0.15	16.80	1.89***	-0.25	0.15	2.75	0.77*	1.32	0.78	2.85	3.75*
13+	0.45	0.26	2.83	1.57*	0.75	0.26	8.34	2.13***	3.24	1.27	6.49	25.71***
<i>Officer Twitter accounts</i> (Ref: 1 – 29)												
30 – 59	-0.05	0.22	0.05	0.95	-0.34	0.21	2.51	0.71	-0.82	1.04	0.62	0.43
60+	0.46	0.19	5.74	1.59**	-0.35	0.19	3.34	0.70*	-2.34	0.98	5.66	0.09**
Target communications	0.29	0.18	2.62	1.34	-0.16	0.17	0.87	0.84	-0.04	1.17	0.01	0.95
Have a social media policy	-0.66	0.19	11.72	0.51***	0.24	0.18	1.76	1.28	-1.02	0.84	1.48	0.35
Number of social media platforms	-0.08	0.07	1.16	0.91	-0.08	0.07	1.23	0.91	-0.20	0.37	0.29	0.81
Constant	5.62	0.56	100.65		5.61	0.54	107.32		4.34	2.97	2.135	
<i>Model fit</i>												
-2 log-likelihood		46.844				36.959				28.603		
df		15				15				15		
sig.		0.001				0.001				0.018		
N =		38				38				38		

Notes: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

Table 7: Negative binomial regression predicting ‘Operational’ and ‘Transactional’ content.

	Information appeals				Requests for witnesses				Responding to incident or intelligence reports			
	B	SE	Wald	Exp(B)	B	SE	Wald	Exp(B)	B	SE	Wald	Exp(B)
<i>Police force size</i> (Ref: Larger)												
Smaller	-0.62	0.30	4.30	0.53**	0.42	0.39	1.15	1.53	-0.95	0.49	3.66	0.38**
Medium	-0.05	0.24	0.04	0.95	0.62	0.32	3.65	1.86**	0.78	0.40	3.76	2.18**
<i>Area classification</i> (Ref: Somewhat/Mostly Urban)												
Somewhat/Mostly Rural	-0.45	0.25	3.12	0.63*	-0.64	0.34	3.61	0.52**	-0.90	0.42	4.53	0.40**
Middling	-0.16	0.22	0.52	0.85	0.55	0.29	3.65	1.74**	0.28	0.36	0.63	1.33
<i>Communications staff</i> (Ref: 1 – 10)												
11 – 25	-0.01	0.29	0.01	0.99	0.32	0.38	0.71	1.38	0.74	0.49	2.26	2.10
26+	0.22	0.45	0.23	1.24	0.61	0.59	1.09	1.85	1.07	0.74	2.07	2.93
<i>Local Twitter accounts</i> (Ref: 26+)												
1 – 10	-1.06	0.30	12.42	0.34***	-0.57	0.39	2.05	0.56	-0.09	0.49	0.04	0.90
11 – 25	-0.25	0.25	1.00	0.77	0.38	0.32	1.39	1.47	0.29	0.41	0.50	1.33
<i>Specialist Twitter accounts</i> (Ref: 1 – 6)												
7 – 12	0.36	0.22	2.66	1.43*	0.41	0.29	1.94	1.51	-0.01	0.36	0.01	0.99
13+	0.28	0.38	0.53	1.32	0.60	0.50	1.41	1.82	1.29	0.63	4.12	3.65**
<i>Officer Twitter accounts</i> (Ref: 1 – 29)												
30 – 59	0.13	0.31	0.19	1.14	0.66	0.41	2.54	1.94	-1.76	0.52	11.30	0.17***
60+	0.66	0.27	5.60	1.93**	1.50	0.36	17.02	4.48***	-1.12	0.46	5.80	0.32**
Target communications	-0.11	0.25	0.20	0.89	-0.69	0.33	4.30	0.49**	0.28	0.43	0.44	1.33
Have a social media policy	-0.25	0.27	0.82	0.77	0.04	0.35	0.01	1.04	-0.32	0.45	0.53	0.71
Number of social media platforms	-0.23	0.11	4.41	0.78**	-0.25	-0.15	2.88	0.77	-0.29	0.18	2.61	0.74*
Constant	6.59	0.80	67.16		4.13	1.06	14.97		4.71	1.31	12.90	
<i>Model fit</i>												
-2 log-likelihood		32.856				32.468				34.808		
df		15				15				15		
sig.		0.005				0.006				0.003		
N =		38				38				38		

Notes: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

The 'Information appeals' variable model showed a statistically significant result, performing much better than a null model, $\chi^2(15) = 32.856, p < .005$. Likewise, the model performed sufficiently for the 'Requests for witnesses' variable with a statistically significant outcome, $\chi^2(15) = 32.468, p < .005$. The final variable analysed with the model was 'Responding to incident or intelligence reports', which improved the intercept-only model, $\chi^2(15) = 34.808, p < .003$. In general, for various dependent variables, the model consistently predicted police social media content based on independent survey variables.

The negative binomial model results outline that several independent variables are either positively or negatively associated with the six social media content dependent variables. For example, when holding all other variables constant, smaller police force size was significantly negatively associated with 'Incidents, updates, and outcomes', 'Information appeals' and 'Responding to incident or intelligence reports'. This finding means smaller size forces are less likely to post such content by a factor of 1.9 when compared to the larger size reference category. A reason for this is that smaller police forces have fewer resources in comparison to larger sizes. In the same way, the results also reveal that the medium size was negatively significantly associated with the content 'Incidents, updates, and outcomes', and positively associated with 'Requests for witnesses' and 'Responding to incident or intelligence reports'. Again, this finding implies that medium size forces are less likely to post the mentioned social media content when compared to the larger size police organisations by a factor of 1.4 for 'Incidents, updates, and outcomes', but more likely by a factor of 1.86 for 'Requests for witnesses', and 2.18 for 'Responding to incident or intelligence reports'.

When looking at the area classification variable, using the somewhat/mostly urban as the reference category, somewhat/mostly rural was negatively connected with the content types 'Crime prevention and public safety advice', effect size 1.50, 'Information appeals', effect size 1.58, 'Requests for witnesses', effect size 1.90, and 'Responding to incident or intelligence reports' with an effect size of 2.50. However, the middling area classifications were positively associated with

the 'Requests for witnesses' tweets with an effect size of 1.74. These results highlight some variation in content dissemination based on force area type. Somewhat/mostly rural appear to be the most reluctant in posting a wide variety of social media content. With the examination of communications staffing levels, forces with 11 – 25 and 26+ staff appear to significantly associate with 'Incidents, updates, and outcomes' positively, with 1.47 and 2.00 effect sizes. Similarly, the 11 – 25 staff grouping positively linked with 'Crime prevention and public safety advice' with an effect size of 1.72. These results indicate that compared to the 1 – 10 reference group, the two informational content types listed tend to be posted more via larger staffing teams.

When considering the numbers of social media accounts within police forces, those with 1 – 10 local Twitter accounts show a significant negative association with 'Incidents, updates, and outcomes', effect size 1.56, and 'Information appeals' tweets, effect size 2.94. However, intriguingly, the 1 – 10 local account group is significantly positively linked with 'Crime prevention and public safety advice' content. In addition, the 11 – 25 local account group has a positive involvement with the 'Performing digital events' dependent variable compared with the 26+ reference group by a factor of 4.96. Moving onto specialist account groups, forces with either 7 – 12 and 13+ were significantly positively connected to the 'Incidents, updates, and outcomes', 'Crime prevention and public safety advice', and 'Performing digital events' with large effect sizes when comparing to the reference category. In addition to these three categories, 7 – 12 specialist accounts were significantly positively associated with 'Information appeals' tweets, and the same for 13+ specialist accounts with 'Responding to incident or intelligence reports' compared to the 1 – 6 reference group by a factor of 1.43 and 3.65 respectively.

The results for individual police officer accounts show that the 60+ group has a positive association with 'Incidents, updates, and outcomes', effect size 1.59, 'Information appeals', effect size 1.93, and 'Requests for witnesses, effect size 4.48. However, the 60+ group also had negative associations with the content categories 'Crime prevention and public safety advice', effect size

1.42, 'Performing digital events', effect size 11.11, and 'Responding to incident or intelligence reports', effect size 3.65, when compared to 1 – 29 reference grouping. In all, there is a slight trend when examining the predictions of different account types, as the results show that police forces with a greater number of local, specialist and officer accounts on Twitter are more likely to post informational and operational tweets in contrast to interactional and transactional content. In addition, the targeting communications independent variable was significant in having a negative association with 'Requests for witnesses' tweets by a factor of 2.04, while having a social media policy also significantly negatively predicted the 'Incidents, updates, and outcomes' content by a factor of 1.96. The last variable measured within the model was the number of social media platforms. The outcomes from the regression show that using a greater number of social media platforms has a significant negative connection to both 'Information appeals' and 'Responding to incident or intelligence reports' content categories with effect scores of 1.28 and 1.35.

6.5 Discussion

The topic of police use of social media has enticed the interest of many criminologists in recent years. Moreover, their resulting research has investigated police social media communications with various quantitative and qualitative methods (Bullock, 2017; Heverin and Zach, 2010; Meijer & Torenvlied, 2014; Lieberman et al., 2013; O'Connor, 2015; Schneider, 2016). Much like the content analysis of police tweets in this research, existing literature has mainly focused on asking questions about what police communicate in the digital society. Unfortunately, though, there has been a shortage of research that examines the organisational characteristics of police forces and ties this together with social media practice. To this end, the aim of this research was to gain a better understanding of the organisational characteristics of police communications and to determine if they can be predictors of the various types of social communication identified so far.

It has been revealed through the analysis of the survey results that police communications departments are increasingly digitalising. This is because they are moving away from using only a

small pool of social media platforms in order to communicate with the public (Crump, 2011). All forces participate in macro-scale corporate communications, meso-scale local or specialist content, or micro-scale police officer posts. Thus, it is evident that from the number of social media accounts in operation, digital visibility is a core asset to modern policing to reach and target as many sections as possible of communities (Ruddell & Jones, 2013). Inevitably, there are now many ways for content dissemination to open the opportunity for reputational risk (Mawby, 2002a). However, broadcasting information through social media promotes a positive image and legitimacy through novel digital policing strategies.

This study centres analysis around one of the main organisational characteristics, police force size, based on strength statistics (Allen and Zayed, 2019). Previous research has indicated that the greater the force size, the more likely the organisation is open to innovation (Morabito, 2008; Nowacki and Willits, 2016). Relating to the first hypothesis, the results predict that police force size does factor in the effectiveness of social media for various purposes. These results illustrate that the smaller size forces in all the six functions significantly differed from medium or larger organisational sizes. A reasonable explanation for why smaller size forces experiences social media as less effective is that they cannot use digital platforms to their full potential, although, the number of communication staff working did not prove to be a significant factor within the ordinal regression model. Despite this, there is still an emphasis that force size influences the effectiveness of social media practice. As Nowacki and Willits (2016) consider, when sizeable police organisations pursue interests in technologies, it is more likely that they will be open to further technological embedding and development. So, due to the more favourable perception of digital communications, it is probable that police forces will continue to embrace future developments that materialise in the digital society.

Even though police forces embrace digital communications, it is hard to measure if the police have thorough strategies for the macro, meso and micro-outputs to ascertain whether social media adds

value to the community policing style. In many cases, the positive comments expressed about the success of digital communications are not based on any formal research that aims at assessing the improvement of the relationship between police and communities because of the use of digital media (Ruddell & Jones, 2013). At the macro corporate communication level, the second hypothesis predicted that smaller forces publish content less frequently than medium and larger ones. Implying that the greater the force size, the more frequent the information dissemination occurs to communities. Across the various social media content categories, it emerged that if a force were smaller in strength, it would likely post fewer communications than the medium and larger forces. Results show that smaller sized organisations publish significantly less transactional content that acts to digitise a service interaction between police and communities. The existing literature generally underlines that police forces tend to play it safe and stay clear from meaningful interactions by broadcasting information (Brainard and McNutt 2010, Crump 2011, Lieberman et al., 2013). However, this research shows differently, as police forces attempt to create meaningful interactions through the various content types. Again, though, it is limited by the strength the police have at their disposal.

It is likely that force size alone does not define whether forces publish less or more content to communities. Communities may demand greater amounts of content based on the greater societal reliance on digital technologies. In the context of a global pandemic, police forces ought to remain digitally visible to communities when there are reduced opportunities to be physically found. And not appearing digitally can lessen the ability to construct a legitimate image (Lee and McGovern 2013). One approach police forces appear to employ to expand digital existence is to populate various meso and micro level outputs that share localised and specialist information to offer a multifaceted digital police image (Mawby, 2010a). The third hypothesis posited that police forces with more local, specialist and officer social media accounts would publish a wider variety of tweets. There is good support for this hypothesis, with a mixture of results showing that various

local, specialist and officer accounts predicted several communication categories. Having such a broad output array throughout the various organisational levels and connecting with communities could enhance the police legitimacy and trust (Mawby, 2002b; Warren et al., 2014). Those forces, who use meso and micro communications create a layered communicative approach that pushes towards the digital community policing model.

6.6 Summary

Overall, this chapter has highlighted diverse findings from the national survey of police forces and linked those data together with quantifiable Twitter data. Based on the results from the survey, it appears that police forces have made considerable progress since their initial adoption of social media. Digital communications have now become commonplace and have been embedded into police organisational structure and daily work activities. However, the results reveal that there is no singular approach to how best to incorporate social media into the policing world nationally. There were significant differences between police force sizes. Smaller forces tended to be less established with social media when compared to medium and larger sizes. This understanding is even more evident when the survey questioned respondents about the effectiveness of social media for various uses. When examining the linked Twitter data, the outcomes illustrated that there were significant differences between police force size for some content categories. In particular, 'Incidents, updates, and outcomes', 'Information appeals', and all 'Transactional' content emerged as significantly dissimilar between size groups. Again, smaller police forces would be less inclined to publish those types of content to the scale medium and larger forces can produce. Therefore, there still seems to be a hesitance amongst police forces towards social media or an imbalance in resources to publish content to the extent that bigger sized organisations can achieve for digital community policing and image work.

Chapter Seven

Discussion

7.1 Introduction

Police forces in England and Wales seek to portray themselves as successful, communicative, and proactive community partners. There has, however, been a steady decline in the ability of police to maintain the police image offline. This is due to a lack of resources and changes in police practices over the past few years. Social media is now playing a more prominent role in generating a digital police presence, allowing them to remain visible to communities. It is clear from the three empirical chapters that digital technologies, such as social media, are now commonplace in police forces. Coexisting in a digital society means the police and communities can now communicate via the internet, which allows organisations and individuals to push and pull information in increasingly complex networks of actors. The outcomes of this thesis suggest that the police benefit from social media use in a variety of ways, and build upon previous research (Bullock, 2016; Crump, 2011; Lieberman et al., 2013; O'Connor, 2015; Schneider, 2016). However, social media is not a panacea when it comes to police communications. Given the lack of research in the area, there is still much to be learned about the affordances and pitfalls of police digital platforms and how police use them for image work.

This discussion aims to synthesise all three empirical chapters to address the research questions, thereby contributing additional knowledge on how and why police consume and produce digital media. For ease of reading, the research questions that guided the thesis are: i) what types of content are police forces publishing on social media platforms? ii) how are the police leveraging social media to elevate their image work? iii) why are police forces using social media to communicate with communities? As reflected in the previous chapters, this thesis primarily focuses on social media use from the corporate communications perspective; however, some discussion

draws on local and specialist teams and police officers where the data provides additional insights into the answers to these questions.

7.2 Expanding Communications

It is apparent throughout this thesis that police communications have fundamentally changed since web 2.0 technologies became embedded within the digital society. In the early years of uptake, only a handful of police forces communicated with freedom on social media as many remained cautious (Crump, 2011). Due to the inherent risks of functioning in these relatively new communication spaces, certain forces may have initially been hesitant to utilise social media. A leading risk identified in the literature is that officers and staff fear jeopardising the police image. In support of this, the interviews with corporate communications experts emphasised an atmosphere of risk. Despite this concern, the social media data analysis showed rich online content disseminated by police through macro (corporate communications), meso (local and specialist teams) and micro (police officer) channels. These various online communications perform core functions of police work, especially those related to maintaining and managing connections with the communities they serve. The goal of this section is to provide an overview of the research question, which aims to assess the types of content police forces disseminate on social media as part of their day-to-day operations.

Many of the online police messages can be attributed to corporate communications. Traditionally, they perform a critical function within the police, handling various tasks centred on media relations and community outreach (Lee and McGovern, 2014). The social media data analysis uncovered that corporate communications departments now publish wide-ranging content types in varying amounts, extending their scope beyond the historic communication work. When reflecting on historic police communication directives, the police focused on telling communities only what they must know. They then progressively moved towards restricting only necessary information when professionalising police communications (Mawby, 2002a). Examination of the Twitter content

published by all 43 police forces demonstrates an apparent shift and openness to what the police are willing to share with communities. This openness may benefit policing, as it provides digital information that informs the community of the duties and tasks of their local force.

The data largely supported the interaction framework, which asserts that digital communications serve multiple purposes, such as pushing out information, pulling in intelligence, interacting with the public, and conducting transactions in a social space (Mergel, 2012; 2013). The existing literature points to the reality that police content generally focuses on pushing information toward communities which is effective for image work and community policing (Bullock, 2017; Crump, 2011; O'Connor, 2015). This narrative is supported by the results of this thesis. The intent to produce vast quantities of informative content is almost certainly strategic. Maintaining control over police and crime narratives is a benefit of relying heavily on push messages (Heverin and Zach, 2010). The digital society we live in provides the impetus for this shift in control since digital media allows police forces to disseminate information without relying on third parties. There is also evidence of an emerging trend in which specific police forces are using Twitter more for operational and transactional purposes, but less for interactive content, indicating that the police have not fully reaped the benefits of the digital society. It may be claimed that social media sites such as Twitter fit predominantly into the push component, allowing for increased information flows between organisations and their viewers (Lindgren, 2017). However, the police could utilise social media more to engage with and target audiences in imaginative ways that push the limits of image work.

7.2.1 Primary Source

The literature review summarised research about crime reporting that shows the media tend to present a distorted picture of crime and policing to the public, with violent crimes and police failings featuring the most (Chermak, 1997; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994). The police devote significant resources to media operations, especially with their local media. However, the

relationship between police and media seems fraught with scepticism, and the police continue to be dissatisfied with the relationship. In support of previous research, it appears as though the media have little control over their relationship with the police, given that the police do not need to conform to news values with which they do not always agree to secure crime coverage (Chibnall 1977; Leishman and Mason 2003; Reiner 2007). Frequently, interviewees mentioned that they prefer to break their own news via social media distribution or simultaneous distribution, rather than letting the media release information first. According to some academics, the media maintain some power over their relationship with the police, even though the police are the gatekeepers of critical information for journalists' survival (Cooke and Sturges 2009; Mawby 2010). According to corporate communication experts in this study, the media's influence in the relationship appears to be declining dramatically as a growing number of police departments embrace digital platforms.

In contrast, media dependence on the police as a primary source of information for crime stories is crucial because it threatens a healthy public sphere which can hold the police accountable. If the police are constantly given the defining voice in the news items, they effectively define what communities know and think about policing and crime. This casts doubt on the idea that the police and the media have developed a mutually beneficial partnership (Freckelton, 1988). The police have perhaps gained too much authority in digital culture, making it difficult to hold them accountable without substantial information from outside sources. It is noted in the interviews that some communications experts consider social media as a positive development because it enables them to exert greater influence over news content. The rationale to support this claim is that the power to control the truth eliminates the chance for the media to twist a press release, which has been a constant worry for the police (Mawby, 2010b). Though, in circumstances such

as the Sarah Everard case⁵, the media plays a crucial role in informing the public about facts that the police may choose to conceal in order to retain a positive reputation.

Social media communications from police afford the possibility of correcting this distortion around crime and police reporting. As indicated in the interviews, most respondents voiced dissatisfaction with police and crime portrayals in the mainstream media. There was also a strong sense of dissatisfaction among respondents about the reluctance on the part of journalists to broadcast facts that appear to contradict the style of traditional journalism. Direct online communication with the public counteracts this resistance. Content types like incidents, updates, and outcomes can provide a factual trail for the media to pick up news items and for communities to receive information straight from the source. Social media usage has assisted police in circumventing the media to communicate straight with communities and reduce the potential for media spin on news stories. In order to ensure information is shared with the public, interpret stories and defend their actions, it is crucial for police forces with social media to create their own agenda in order to present their own perspectives by putting their own spin on a police or crime story to promote information to the public.

As an example, the content analysis describes that a quarter of the informational tweets sought to inform communities about a range of crimes, not just those covered in sensationalist journalism as observed in the literature review (Chibnall, 1977). According to the interview findings, there is

⁵ Sarah Everard was kidnapped while walking home to the Brixton Hill area on the evening of the 3rd of March 2021. Wayne Couzens, an off-duty Metropolitan Police officer, kidnapped her, and she was later found murdered.

great power gained for image work as social media allows police to control the crime narrative and dilutes media manipulation. A further advantage of this capability is that it enables police forces to provide local communities with more relevant crime information that is relevant to their community needs. It is crucial for community policing to implement this process as it enables officers to disseminate information on lower-level issues that communities care about every day, furthering their engagement with the police.

7.2.2 Emerging Engagement

In addition to replacing traditional media processes, police departments are also gathering intelligence from the community. For example, operational tweets such as appeals now appear more frequently to gather intelligence when crimes occur. However, the results of this study contrast with those of Heverin and Zach (2010), who claim that police departments in the United States routinely tweet about serious crimes such as violence and murder without requesting intelligence from communities. To better understand operational content types, this research separated operational tweets into three thematic categories: information appeals, witness requests, and reuniting property. As indicated in the findings, information appeals are among the most frequently published communications from police on social media. It was noted in the interviews that many successes in catching wanted persons were linked to such online communications. Therefore, it is clear from this research that online communications assist police investigations and front-line policing via intelligence retrieval through appeals. Taking this into consideration, it suggests that corporate communications departments may have transcended the traditional role of business functions and are now playing more active roles in operational policing. The reason for this is that they provide support not only to the police as a central strategic communications output but also to the various teams and other departments within the police force in their various tactical or strategic functions. This thesis continues to evidence that the communications arm of police organisations is not a 'bolt-on' function but rather an integrated service (Mawby, 2002a).

The other advantage of using social media is that, aside from the fact that it differs from traditional media in terms of the information that is provided, it allows the police to engage with the public in meaningful ways rather than relying on the passive methods of traditional media communication. Recent research argues a need for effective strategies for fostering community trust and confidence via honest, engaging communications (Merry et al., 2012). This study's content analysis demonstrates how social media facilitates police interact with the public in a timely and direct manner through interactions and transactions. As police forces become more community-oriented online, it will be necessary to request public feedback on police objectives, such as crime priorities and scoping areas for tactical deployments, that involve communicating with the public on a large scale. However, interactions with the public may be hampered by organisational constraints or a lack of awareness regarding the development of image work, especially for the use of digital platforms as collaborative tools (Mergel, 2013). Interactional exchanges were the least frequently observed communication type in this analysis of tweets, supporting the idea that police forces continue to struggle with employing digital tools to communicate informally. In spite of the fact that interactional content is not common, police forces must continue to engage in these communications to generate public attentiveness. They must also maintain the interest of the public in making interactions more meaningful, thus fostering the formation and development of new relationships in digital environments. This is especially at a time when social media platforms are seen as an opportunity for citizens to interact and conduct business.

7.2.3 Economical Alternative

The efficiency of social media platforms in terms of cost is another finding that is in line with previous studies. Corporate communications must find cost-effective ways to disseminate police information to the public and increase its visibility on social media in light of shrinking police budgets (Bullock et al., 2020). When faced with departmental budget restrictions, communication

specialists could not praise social media enough for decreasing costs. As a result, the use of print campaigns has declined, particularly where forces have adopted a social media-driven marketing strategy. The relatively high number of crime prevention tweets supports the theme that campaigns are now a common occurrence on digital platforms and give police the ability to push campaigns for specific periods when they occur, such as Black History Month and National Hate Crime Awareness Week. In addition, regular campaigns provide the potential to alter behaviour at minimal expense. Studies examining police Twitter operations emphasise the significance of the potential to modify behaviour through preventive advertising initiatives (Heverin and Zach, 2010; O'Connor, 2015). As several respondents pointed out, the foundation for crime prevention measures has a clear emphasis on behavioural change, which corroborates the existing literature.

Another indicator of the shift in cost-effectiveness is the primary duties of communications. According to respondents, their corporate communications function has evolved during the previous decade. The major focus currently appears to be on assisting and controlling frontline policing by improving digital visibility and public interactions. For instance, in the interviews, the use of social media was referred to as an asset for transparency. In terms of openness, social media allows forces to disseminate information faster than traditional press methods. According to Mawby (2010b), the aims of contemporary corporate communications departments are to display transparency, reassure the public, generate awareness of unsolved crimes, project positive narratives, and display a positive image of the police. As transparency was identified as a crucial component of an effective digital police presence, the vast array of informational police content on Twitter demonstrates that forces are working diligently to achieve high levels of transparency by disseminating vast quantities of information to communities. This information also serves as a cost-effective strategy to help frontline policing resources by increasing community awareness of police actions. It is generally agreed upon that the presence of the police in neighbourhoods and communities is necessary for the safety of the public and crime prevention. (HMICFRS, 2017).

Therefore, the findings tend to lend credence to the premise that digital media can contribute to the openness of the police in a manner that is both cost-effective and helpful to the fundamental goals of corporate communications.

7.2.4 *Adaptive Content*

One of the ways in which corporate communications attempts to be creative in its use of digital resources is by increasing the number of social media platforms that are employed across forces. The public expects a police presence online (Crump, 2011; Schneider, 2014), yet with so many channels available for posting material, the interviews indicated that when a notable incident starts to develop it is challenging to reach target audiences. Although most police forces use popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, the survey results support the assertion that some police forces are experimenting with unconventional platforms such as Snapchat, Pinterest, and Tinder to engage with their audiences. On average, police forces use between 5 and 6 platforms in corporate communications. Extending the use of social media corresponds to recommendations that police forces connect with members of the public through suitable social media channels (NPIA, 2010). As a result, the innovation highlights both the breadth of corporate communications operations and the talents and expertise that specialised communication professionals bring to the table.

With the advancement of digital communications, the police are better equipped to oversee what information is made accessible to the public and media. In agreement with what Bullock et al. (2020) observe, social media platforms afford police forces visibility and editability. It is clear from the survey findings that police forces have a wide range of outlets to publish from, and that corporate communications play a critical role in regulating exposure across police organisations. As noted with the COVID-19 pandemic, this is critical because the police are likely to increase their digital presence when physical visibility is limited. This digital visibility may also be an essential tool for departments, teams, and officers who do not often perform police work in public view.

Additionally, police appearance usually provides a sense of protection to communities, fostering sentiments of security (Duckfoot, 2012). The survey results present that the main purpose of using social media is to provide reassurance to communities. When assessing the types of content disseminated, it is the informational content that is most likely to project this sense of protection, as these are the tweets that frequently showcase police work and offer safety advice to the public.

Respondents also emphasised the editability of social media, which offers the ability to convey the human aspect of policing, which is difficult to accomplish when contacts with communities are limited. The tone of the content is often used to present a personal police image, yet corporate communications have been criticised for being a little too formal in tone (Bullock, 2016). In support of this perspective, the content analysis revealed that the human component of police was challenging to distinguish, mainly appearing in the limited interactional exchanges. There is no question that showing police humanity is one of the most critical aspects of bridging the gap between the police and public, and it has been incorporated into police mandates for decades (Mawby, 2002a). Arguably, communication outputs are a substantial reflection of police organisations, so displaying the human side of policing is desirable. Therefore, corporate communications departments have developed to suit the demands of a new digital era. Consequently, corporate communications departments have evolved to meet the requirements of a new digital era. Moreover, these agencies have strengthened their position and importance within policing by expanding and enhancing their communication channels.

7.3 Digital Image Work

There is no doubt that image work is an essential yet diverse aspect of the police profession. A variety of activities, including identity management, media relations, public relations, marketing, and other endeavours, draw attention to police actions that shape and promote images and meanings of policing (Mawby, 2002a). New image work activities have developed because of social advancements and the proliferation of digital media types. Given that police communications have

expanded through a broad range of communicative types, this has driven further developments in image work practices. Image work is divided into four phases: Informal Image Work, Emergent Public Relations, Embedding Public Relations, and Professionalisation (Mawby, 2002a). With the growth and reliance on police social media platforms since 2008, it is evident that the fifth phase, titled 'Digital Image Work,' is widespread among the police. The digital image work phase consists of image management operations accomplished mostly through digital media technologies in order to communicate and show police work in order to build community relationships.

The following discussion section relates to the research question, which asks how police forces are using social media to perform and improve image work. With the freedom to disseminate much information regarding activity, there is a contrast to the traditional media role that served as a leading image output mechanism during the past century (Peelo, 2005). However, image work conducted via social media can vary from those found in print, radio, and television formats. When asked about the sorts of information the police routinely post on social media, one of the most frequent and enthusiastic responses was 'creative content'. The use of social media has enabled police to create original material and expand the scope of their image work beyond the boundaries of traditional media structures (Mawby, 2002a). In interviews, corporate communicators emphasised that they were shifting away from 'dull' text-based content in order to pique community interest. The content was more likely to include various visual components, including photographs, videos, and infographics, a finding corroborated by the survey. These 'rich' informational experiences were thought to enhance community engagement and signify image works progression in the digital society.

7.3.1 Image Administration

The emergence of social media has allowed the police to exert more control over their image (Bullock, 2016). While digital image work is still in its early stages for many forces, it is developing and becoming further embedded, as evidenced by the existence of different digital media

integration across police force sizes in the survey analysis. In addition, corporate communications teams are presenting the police image directly to communities through various methods, rather than simply exhibiting police activities through traditional processes (Brainard and Edlins, 2015). This is a clear divergence from the professionalised image work phase where there was an overreliance on the media to act as output for the police to act as the primary output for image work. Although the police do encounter challenges with social media, the media and communities have gained openings to scrutinise and counter the police image due to digital openness, speed, and editability. Nonetheless, as revealed by the findings of this thesis, police forces may combat unfavourable police images by rapidly posting counter messages.

It has been argued that image work undertaken by police has served to contextualise and cleanse the image of police rather than to alter policing practice (O'Connor and Zaidi, 2020). The findings in this thesis provide partial support for this because most of the social media content does seek to deliver positive police representations by simply broadcasting favourable images to communities. There are elements of police practice that have been altered due to digital media, such as supporting investigations to gather intelligence and offering service-related exchanges that display a contemporary police image. However, whilst the interviews with corporate communications indicate that the police consider themselves as engaging and interacting with communities through the various content types, it is difficult to identify what constitutes significant engagement for image work and if social media has changed this police practice. Even though the dissemination of information regarding police accomplishments may be a factual effort to engage the public, it also serves to reinforce police legitimacy and competence (Lee and McGovern, 2018a). This further enhances the sense of legitimacy and confidence that the exercise of police work is justified. It also contributes to the perception of corporate responsibility and the sense of responsibility for corporate communication. As a result of this, the police are more effective than they were before, and they are more credible from the standpoint of an external observer.

Consequently, if the police rely excessively on informational content, this may have a negative effect on police image work, as it may appear to be exaggerated propaganda rather than an attempt to create participation, which may not be conducive to establishing a credible police image. As demonstrated by the data, the police may generate engaging material, such as digital events, and move away from propaganda-style communications to reduce the possibility of relying heavily on informational content.

7.3.2 Innovative Practice

The findings of all three empirical studies support the assumption that social media are no longer considered exploratory tools and are instead viewed as indispensable for image work procedures. However, it has been contended that social media and websites were seen as exploratory tools rather than fundamental instruments for police image work in the early stages of uptake (Mawby, 2010b). It is difficult to foresee how professionalisation can adapt in a way that combines modern digital technologies for corporate communications departments inside the police forces, as these departments are typically viewed as formalised (Lee and McGovern, 2014). Nonetheless, police forces have come to rely on digital channels as important support functions for proactive and reactive policing activity, as well as a means of maintaining engagement with the community during periods of diminished police visibility caused by a shortage of resources (Brainard and Edlins, 2015; O'Connor, 2015; Schneider, 2016). Thus, according to the findings of this study, image work has become the key rationale for integrating social media into everyday police work.

What best illustrates the evolution of digital police image work is the evolution and inventiveness of image work performance. Since 2011, each police department has maintained at least one Twitter account and a Facebook page. Yet, the survey highlights that some forces digital channels have deviated from the typical social media platforms that are suited to different audiences. It was discovered that police forces find it difficult to keep up with new platforms and often question whether it is worth the time and effort to reach out to other target audiences, such as younger

people (Bullock et al., 2020). However, several police forces have attempted to branch out and conduct image work in environments like Snapchat and Instagram, where there are different audiences, and content presentation is quite different to that posted on Twitter and Facebook. Mawby (2002b) asserted that, in the future, image work might potentially include numerous communication channels. Subsequently, social media provides these additional outputs and permits corporate communications, policing teams, and officers to construct images of policing in a variety of ways to add an extra layer of community targeting and engagement.

According to the data presented in this thesis, when police organisations use digital media for image work, they operate in challenging environments and frequently seek to generate content that distinguishes them in order to increase their visibility. However, the ability to communicate with audiences is limited by digital platforms algorithmic constraints, necessitating novel actions to increase the police messages reach (Wood, 2020). This is a new challenge for police image work and one that was highlighted in the interviews where communication experts highlighted the demands of producing content in various formats that seek to capture attention and attract interest in policing work. Methods that are often used by police forces include the use of humour, cute dog images, and memes to take advantage of visual culture on social media (Wood and McGovern, 2020). This demonstrates that police forces have moved beyond the phase of professionalisation in which communicators were required to publish only formal press releases, as the media would then make the release more engaging for their audiences. In line with this, it was learned that posting memes generated more active involvement from communities on police Facebook pages; however, producing this content can raise legitimacy concerns if the content is wrongly interpreted (Wood, 2020). Thus, in order to remain current with new techniques that can portray the police image, corporate communications must deviate from established communicative norms in order to convey the police image effectively through digital images.

Since the nineties, there has been a general trend toward improving police force openness, transparency, and accountability (Mawby, 2002a; Kingshott, 2011). In terms of image work activities, the capacity to create social media content that promotes police visibility is quite advantageous (Mawby, 2002a). Despite this, police communication departments are aware of the fact that increasing police exposure via various forms of social media may not always be helpful to create a positive image for the department. Respondents in interviews were keen to point out that social media has increased opportunities to generate negative visibility. Existing literature has noted, similarly to this study's conclusion, that a limitation of digital tools is that everything is examined and scrutinised. For instance, Fielding (2021) claims that although social media is the most modern communication technology that can transform police presence, organisational naivety often hampered image work progression. Still, due to reducing risk around increased public and media interests, the survey results show that many forces now have an active social media policy, which signals to officers and staff the 'dos and don'ts' of social media to manage reputational risk regarding the police image.

7.4 Developing Communities

To encourage community participation, the police utilise the media to communicate with residents and to foster positive relationships with the organisation (Chermak and Weiss, 2005). This research has found, however, that when looking at the use of Twitter by police forces, a significant part of what corporate communications post on social media involves trying to establish digital communities to establish corporate identities. As indicated by the rising emphasis on community policing practices on social media, the ability to communicate with the public in various ways at scale is becoming critical as the police become more community-oriented online (Denef et al., 2013). For example, communities are now armed with social media tools that enable them to compel others, such as police forces, to listen to their concerns. The data from the content analysis reveals that communications stretch further than just providing visibility. There does seem to be a

genuine effort to connect with the public. The formation of communities online can start simply through the police providing informational content to communities, making them more aware digitally of what is going on in the physical settings. This is advantageous for community policing since social media enables police forces to disseminate information on lower-level issues that communities care about daily (Skogan, 2006). The dissemination of informational communications can serve as the foundation for the formation of digital communities.

7.4.1 Digital Relations

As a model, community policing aims to foster connections with communities, alleviate the fear of crime, enhance the overall quality of life, and contribute to police legitimacy (Friedmann, 1992). The police efforts to establish communities through Twitter seem to be consistent with the community policing model aims. This means that we now live in a digital society where the physical setting alone is not the most appropriate way to engage with communities. It can be considered that a mixture of engagement through both digital techniques and foot patrols is what now works better in practice. As discussed previously, the potential to reach new audiences and strengthen existing relationships via social media extends community-building efforts in the digital society, potentially contributing to increased physical interactions. For example, interactional communications such as procuring collaboration or participation seek to educate the public on the many ways in which they might interact with the police, both online and offline. It seems these results are in line with what O'Connor (2017) found when looking at police tweets in Canada, where he claimed that police were using Twitter to create online communities in order to assist them in developing crime prevention efforts.

Some researchers argue that organisations must develop trust among the public to generate meaningful and trustworthy community involvement (Warren et al., 2014). To accomplish this, digital communities can be created to generate engagement and enhance relationships between stakeholders. As the content analysis shows, police do actively try to procure collaboration,

whether through offline events or through digital activities like surveys. Moreover, the survey results have indicated that the primary aim of police social media function is public engagement. Engagement comes in various forms, but when referring to the interactional framework (Mergel, 2013), meaningful engagement comes in the form of collaboration between police and communities. Thus, for community policing to be effective, social media platforms must enable joint police and community engagement (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2014). However, the content analysis findings indicate that collaboration between police and communities does occur, although on a much smaller scale than other forms of communication in the interaction framework.

The communication experts in interviews consistently stated that it was important for engagement to take place. There seems to be a genuine desire inside corporate communication to interact and collaborate with communities, but on a daily basis, this may be difficult to accomplish with present resources. In addition, when police departments want to improve two-way communication with the public, the tone of their social media posts must be more casual (Denef et al., 2012). Respondents made explicit references to the use of informal communications to enhance public involvement in communications. This demonstrates a degree of adaptability in social media communication; although the police appear formal when delivering essential information, they must change the material to be more personal to foster a community environment. Such adaptability complies with the fundamental philosophy of community policing which implies that it is a policing model in which the police and the public develop connections to be collaborative. For instance, connections between police and community members may result in collaborative activities that can alter the environment in which police and people interact, as well as the police service quality (Friedmann, 1992). As a result, social media sites as digital communities enable this type of collaboration to occur, and perhaps more swiftly than it would in a physical community. Furthermore, when examining community policing, issues might not be resolved because the police are unaware of community concerns. The research on community policing has indicated

that community policing is an essential paradigm for conflict resolution to prevent crime from occurring (Roth et al., 2004). In some instances, there is a clear desire to enhance how community issues are taken on board within policing using digital tools. By combining physical and digital gatherings through interactional content, the police may engage with community individuals who might not usually participate. For example, live streaming for specific events on social media has grown in popularity, as shown in the interview results. This is a means of chasing engaging content rather than simply broadcasting material (Heverin and Zach, 2010). Another approach is using local and special teams or individual officer accounts who may be special points of contact within communities to obtain information around local issues. Being innovative is a necessary component of police problem-solving, whether the police collaborate with communities or with other stakeholders to work on solutions (Eck, 2004). It is evident from the interviews that corporate communicators are attempting to be innovative; however, their efforts are often hindered by resource constraints. In order to achieve these goals, it is important to acknowledge that digital consultation has become a method by which the police have started to collaborate with community members, as the findings indicate.

A straightforward strategy to maintain community relationships is to engage in frequent communication to ascertain community needs, allowing the police to respond appropriately and notify the public about policing efforts achieved. However, it may be argued that community collaboration is developed to assist others in managing their risks and is driven by risk mitigation rather than real cooperation (Ericson and Haggerty 1997). Informational content like crime prevention and road safety advice all aids to the responsabilisation of communities. Though, suppose there is a lack of engagement from the police to take an interest in community needs. In that case, that may diminish the level of community interest to take information content onboard. The lack of interactional content with communities found in this study may demonstrate a lack of interest. The public needs to observe the police as part of the community who empower the public

to take responsibility for their safety (O'Connor, 2015). One of the more personable approaches to this is holding digital events such as question and answer sessions with a variety of police officers and police staff to provide insights into the policing world but also offer useful information to the community by answering questions that would be difficult to ask the police on a routine basis.

7.4.2 Decentralising Communications

With the proliferation of social media, several forces resisted the trend, refusing to allow lower-ranking officers or departments to register digital profiles. This goes back to the interview findings, whereby respondents outlined that an atmosphere of risk still existed in some cases, which puts police officers and staff off using social media in a professional setting. This supports the work of Hesketh and Williams (2017), where officers feared disciplinary consequences if they posted something improperly on social media. Since the advent of community policing, there has been a continuous devolution of communications away from professionals and toward the frontline. In a small number of forces, officers of diverse ranks are urged to contact and communicate directly with members of the public and the media through social media platforms to establish a prominent online presence. As Crump (2011) claims, all police forces empower police officers and local teams to educate and engage communities better to understand the crime problems (Crump, 2011). Thus, the community policing model involves decentralisation to address local challenges, and social media is part of that process.

It is evident from the survey results that decentralisation does exist within police communications, as many police forces had various numbers of accounts for different teams and officers. Furthermore, police forces have increased options for officers and departments to control their exposure in digital contexts to address community issues and create relationships (Bullock et al., 2020). However, there have been some issues with the decentralisation of police communications. It is essential to emphasise that the online presence of police officers is not always supported. This is because there have been several controversies involving police officers personal and professional

social media activities which underlines public scepticism about police culture (Goldsmith, 2010; 2013). Thus, a risk of decentralisation is that social media fosters and promotes informality and pushes users to seek popularity via the development of online identity as an internet personality which might not be the best thing to do as an officer in a community policing role. Respondents were keen to share that they rarely had issues with bad social media practices, given that training is provided by corporate communication and that social media policies are in place to mitigate the risks. All but three forces surveyed have a system in place to approve decentralised social media accounts, and this was mainly the social media lead within corporate communications departments. As a result, decentralised community policing can be viewed as a positive strategy to maximize the performance of the entire police force, thus allowing attention to be directed toward the specific needs of each community. And for communications, it enables communities to collaborate with their local policing teams and gain greater insight into more specialised areas such as firearms, police dogs, and drones without the need to interact with the corporate side.

7.4.3 Community Scrutiny

It is established that the police have powerful digital channels to facilitate public input, which encourages digital consultations unrestricted to physical locations (Mawby, 2002a). The digital society provides numerous platforms for people to communicate and direct opinions toward police forces in full view of others. The literature suggests that this encourages openness and accountability between police and the community (Bertot, Jaeger and Grimes, 2010). However, not all interview respondents regarded this as a positive development and thought the police might expose themselves to further public criticism. Occasionally, public communication attacks the legitimacy of the police, regardless of whether the messages are considered valid or not. Effective communication and cooperation between the police and the public may help to promote police legitimacy, which is beneficial when police departments face resource constraints (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer, 2015). According to some respondents, corporate communications

were required to teach teams and police officers best practices to avoid getting into a situation where unfavourable comments flood in following a misjudged communication. However, if the public engages with the police to express opinions or criticisms regarding crime or service effectiveness, there is scope for the police to take such comments on board and feedback to relevant personnel to act on in communities.

While respondents acknowledged that the public expression of negative opinions on social media might be problematic, most suggest that corporate communications would allow such remarks to stay if they did not include abusive language. According to some respondents, digital communities have begun to moderate information critical of the police over minor breaches of trust (Skogan, 2006). For example, interview respondents provided examples of instances where platform users launched a torrent of harsh remarks against the police, and in response, without the police having to intervene, other users jumped to their defence. The issue of how communities perceive content that demonstrates police success can be ambiguous (Schneider, 2014), especially if it reflects officers displaying unnecessary egotism about their efforts. Thus, despite attempts to depict the police in a favourable light, communities may reject tainted police content even if it contains positive outcomes, requiring police to take that into account when developing content.

Dialogue between police and communities is key to positive relationships (Lee & McGovern, 2014). An unexpected finding within the content analysis was transactional communications. As highlighted in the literature review, a study on social media use concluded that while most police departments used a combination of push, pull, and interaction strategies, transactions were not evident in digital communications (Meijer and Thaens, 2013). However, the results in this thesis show that there has been a clear progression in strategic tweeting practices, especially when examining tweet types within the interactions framework (Mergel, 2012). For example, police forces posted communications focused on answering inquiries, responding to intelligence reports, and signposting to other services. Also, the results of the survey revealed that larger police

departments publish more transactional content, which, in theory, could be attributed to greater resource capacity and is moderately supported by statistical modelling.

Even though respondents recognised the advantages of police use of social media, they also found it challenging. From the time participants discussed social media, it was clear that they regarded it as another area that needed to be monitored. Indeed, throughout the interview process, every communications personnel mentioned how their department was responsible for putting information on police social media platforms and monitoring what was coming in from the public. Indeed, many expert communicators discussed how police contact centres might in the future have access to social media accounts to monitor incoming communications that could otherwise be missed due to a lack of resources. As when scarcity of resources constrains police participation, their image suffers, as they look inattentive to community needs (Mawby, 2002a). Therefore, corporate communications experts, as image professionals, are responsible for ensuring that police social media remain controlled to reduce any potential unfavourable impacts.

7.5 Summary

This discussion chapter has synthesised the three empirical chapters to provide a holistic understanding and implications of police social media practice in relation to the existing literature and conceptual frameworks. Police communications have expanded, with police forces using digital environments for several purposes, including distributing information, collecting intelligence, connecting with the public, and processing transactions. These findings answer the research question which seeks to understand the types of communications the police now disseminate. Social media has become the leading communications method that is incorporated into the daily operations of corporate communications. Often, creative material is required to increase police visibility and interaction with the public. The research considers that social media is no longer a broadcast medium and that digital channels have evolved into critical resources for transitioning police image work into a new phase known as digital image work, where digital media

has established itself as a primary medium for image work operations. The discussion provided here provides evidence to support the claim that the digitally focused periodisation of image work supports the research question that is aimed at determining whether or not image work has been adapted to the digital environment. As police forces have now firmly created a digital presence, there is a key focus on developing communities through collaborative engagement. In regard to constructing digital communities, decentralisation substantially expands the opportunities for the public and public to strengthen collaborative relationships. For the last research question, the discussion highlights that police forces have involved novel communication channels which push to improve and develop community policing to suit the digital sphere.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This research focused on investigating how police communications have transformed with the introduction of social media. Three main objectives, along with the research questions, drove this thesis. The first objective was to provide novel insights into how the 43 police forces in England and Wales use social media platforms within corporate communications departments. The second objective was to produce a mixed methods approach that combines big social data with traditional methods. The third objective was to investigate how digital platforms have given police new opportunities to carry out and develop image work practices. After reviewing the existing literature, a pragmatic methodological roadmap was created. It was the intention that this thesis would be exploratory, to understand how new methods can link together with traditional approaches to expand knowledge on the subject matter. From the existing research, it was clear that interviews and surveys with police communications experts were the most appropriate means to collect data for two separate empirical investigations (Mawby 2002, 2007; Lee and McGovern, 2014; Surette, 2001). However, due to the limited research on police social media practice at the inception of this thesis, it was challenging to decide which social media platform to focus on for the third empirical investigation. Studies had begun examining Twitter data within criminology (Waters and Jamal, 2011; Williams et al., 2016), so it was decided that owing to good data accessibility and all police forces operating on the platform, Twitter would be the most appropriate digital platform to examine. These three data collection methods enabled the thesis to contribute knowledge that builds on previous research through content, thematic, and statistical analysis. The following section discusses the knowledge contributions made by this thesis. The last section of the chapter considers potential future research directions for police and social media studies.

8.2 Knowledge Contributions

The first empirical chapter examined the tweeting habits of police forces in England and Wales. Many police forces use social media to disseminate informational content. Thus, the public and other stakeholders may learn more about police action and how policing is carried out in communities. The study also revealed that the police use Twitter for operational communications to gather information from the public that could aid in police investigations. Interactional communications appear to be meant to build digital communities between the police and the public through digital events on Twitter and to engage with the public. Furthermore, when people have questions or complaints, they do contact police forces via social media, exhibiting a quick response to customer service issues. Therefore, this analysis highlights that the police use the Twitter platform for a variety of objectives.

In the past few years, social media has become one of the most crucial components of corporate communication operations. The respondents agreed that it was necessary to develop unique materials to increase police visibility and interaction with the general public. It was apparent to most respondents that social media was more than just an avenue for broadcasting information to the public. Participation provided a chance to build police image work and to communicate with the public. In general, respondents agreed that the way in which many forces express their work through digital means has changed in recent years. Taking the example of community policing, there is an attempt on social media to highlight the fact that police officers are human beings as part of their job. As a result, the police are able to portray a favourable image of themselves so that they are able to maintain a rapport between officers and communities that are based on trust.

It was established that social media is used to enhance police reputation. For instance, respondents described how social media facilitated the production of favourable images that improve police standing. What is more, individual corporate communications departments now have the ability and confidence to operate new channels for image work and community engagement in the digital

society. One of the primary findings was that an environment of risk persisted inside police forces due to the unpredictability of people who utilise social media sites. However, the benefits of reducing reliance on conventional methods, such as dependence on the media, outweigh the disadvantages. All participants indicated that the rapidity and reach of social media were desired characteristics of its use. There is no doubt that social media has been credited for its success in overcoming austerity measures over the past decade. However, the interviews revealed that the resources required to maintain multiple platforms are a barrier that is unlikely to be overcome under the present financial climate.

Survey findings showed that police forces around the country have adopted digital communications as standard practice and integrated them into their day-to-day operations. However, findings from this study point out that combining social media with police at the national level is not an easy task. Compared to medium and larger sized organisations, smaller forces have a more challenging time in making a name for themselves on social media. A clear illustration of this is the responses to questions concerning the efficacy of social media for different contexts. There were considerable disparities in police force size for several content categories based on the related Twitter data. For example, a substantial difference was found between the different size groups in the informational and transactional content. Similarly, smaller police forces would be less likely to post the same information on digital platforms than medium and larger sizes. Subsequently, there seems to be a reluctance among police forces to embrace social media or a resource imbalance that prevents them from publishing information to the level that larger organisations can for digital community policing and image work.

8.2.1 Image Work Digitalisation

It was found that police communications have gone through a significant digitalisation process. This digital transformation is due to differences in how the police liaise with the media and circulate communications through technologies. There is no longer a need for police to rely on the media

to operate as the leading publisher of crime and police reports. Digital society, facilitated through the internet, has changed how people communicate. This shift has significantly impacted broadcast information, intelligence gathering, public networking, and organisational transactions. Mawby (2002a) outlined four distinct stages in the history of image work. However, this thesis moves on from the preceding professionalisation period due to the rapid expansion and increased dependence on social media platforms, indicating a shift to 'Digital Image Work' activities.

The necessity for clear communication outputs is no longer an optional element of contemporary police effectiveness; it has become a critical component. The content analysis indicates that communities are inundated with police and crime material across many content categories, supporting the interaction framework (Mergel, 2012; 2013). The results imply that social media platforms are a significant driver of corporate communications innovation since these platforms provide unique features and lucrative target audiences. Findings concur with existing studies where informational and operational tweets are the most prominent content types. However, this thesis also contributes to how police conduct service-related transactions and interact with communities. Therefore, the outcomes show that some police forces actively seek transparency, participation, and collaboration through digital channels.

This thesis further contributes to the police communications literature by explaining how corporate communications departments have shifted attention to a social media led model as digital technologies have become the primary resource for information production. As a result, the police have greater authority in the media-police relationship, which leads to further influence over information released in the press and control over information kept from public access. The findings indicate that an increase in control can also lead to increased transparency, since communities have more content to digest without being exposed to added media spin or sensationalist opinions. The relationship between the police and the media was traditionally perceived as unbalanced in favour of the police, as they controlled access to crime-related news

(Chibnall, 1977). However, this research discovered that this is not a perspective held by most communication experts, who believe that the police had less power in the relationship for an extended period. For example, an argument that emerged from the data was how social media and transparent communications had essentially altered the contact between the police and the media. There is evidence from the interviews conducted and the content analysis that social media enables police forces to write news creatively, thus diminishing the influence the media has over public interpretations of the news.

As a support function for dealing with the press and unwanted publicity, the bulk of corporate communications departments were historically operated by police officers in decentralised teams dispersed around police forces. However, the police began modernising and professionalising their public relations divisions over time (Mawby, 2002a). It was clear from the interviews and survey that corporate communications remain professionalised with civilian experts at the helm. However, with the digitalisation of police image work, corporate communications now feature specific social media teams or have omnicompetent staff across all communication responsibilities.

This study found that communications departments often vary in structure and practice, meaning no set approach to communications across police forces exists. Corporate communications are now exclusively staffed by civilians in centralised teams as a central department in police forces. The survey results indicate that communication requirements have increased in size since Mawby (2007) surveyed forces over a decade ago. Even though there were some similarities between how police forces use social media, this thesis supports the notion that there remains a variation in the number of communications staff, social media platforms in use, different aims of using digital media, and various levels of local, specialist and officers' Twitter accounts. Thus, communication departments have moved on from being scattered functions that are not accepted as real police work to an operationally critical component of policing within a digital society. As a result, each

of the three empirical studies contributes to why communications departments have progressed in image work.

8.2.2 Communications Development

This thesis has established that police often bypass conventional avenues to broadcast and connect with communities. However, without the emergence of social media, such a shift would not have been conceivable. After the 2011 riots, it became evident that police forces still had a lot to learn about social media. Apart from its promise for data sharing and intelligence gathering, digital instruments have not been wholly realised or controlled as efficiently as they could have been (HMIC, 2011). It was shown in early police studies how chronic disorganisation, sporadic adoption, and inconsistent use of police on social media occurred (Crump, 2011). The interview findings add to our understanding of the risk climate inside police forces during uptake and how the riots spurred improvement. In addition, there was widespread worry, both centrally and decentrally, about the dangers of social media misuse and the potential repercussions. Comparatively, similar findings were made for police forces worldwide and in England and Wales (Heverin and Zach, 2010; Procter et al., 2013). Following the adoption of social media by all police forces, this study discovered a rapid growth in police involvement on these platforms, but differences in application exist.

The police have grown to depend on digital channels as critical support for operational policing and keeping communication communities active during less visible policing. The thesis has already shown that the relationship between police and media has changed. Though, when thinking from a community policing perspective, the results from the content analysis contribute that content concerning crimes and incidents keeps the community informed and aids in police visibility at times when encounters with the police are reduced. Visibility is essential for police forces as it can be observed as a crucial factor in the efficacy of public service. However, a lack of police funding has inevitably led to a decline in police officers throughout the past decade (Crawford, 2014). In

interviews, respondents expressed that the decline in officer numbers meant corporate communication had to help frontline policing have a digital presence. This presence was achieved by posting more informational content through decentralised frontline policing accounts. This objective is primarily to reassure communities and to portray the crime-fighting image of law enforcement in an informative manner.

Before the Internet, operational techniques utilised by the police included publishing public information requests in newspapers and conducting door-to-door investigations (Mawby, 2002b). Even though these approaches are still in use today, social media is increasingly employed to collect information from the communities that are desirable for police investigations. The thesis further substantiates and expands preceding police communications literature by revealing that digital media are a driving factor in the police exploring further operational benefits instead of simply publishing new stories about police work. Information appeals and requests for witnesses were amongst the most frequent social media posts disseminated to gather intelligence. These findings again demonstrate how image work activities have become digitalised further to strengthen the community presence of police forces. Therefore, it was discovered that the speed of social media for gathering information supports the argument for police to continue using social media to speed up investigations into criminals, missing individuals, and witnesses.

The insights concerning transactional communications are among the most intriguing contributions of this thesis. Businesses and organisations are increasingly performing customer service duties on social media platforms. Whether it is corporate communications innovation or pressure from community requirements, there is an obvious indication that police seek to offer customer service functions in a non-emergency capacity on Twitter. Transactional content makes the police appear responsive to community demands, which is a valuable opportunity for image work and community policing. However, this finding further underscores that smaller sized police forces were less likely to perform this type of communication work on Twitter. The thesis also

contributes a further understanding of the specific forms of interactions between police and communities. Forces now seem to be more comfortable communicating with less formal communications with the public, mainly through digital events and when procuring cooperation or participation. Therefore, the argument put forth in this thesis supports the position that police forces are beginning to branch out from informational and operational content toward using social media as a collaborative tool.

When looking at the responsabilisation of communities, this thesis shows that there are two main categories. First is 'crime prevention and safety advice', and the other is 'travel information and road safety guidance'. In addition, numerous respondents highlighted the importance of behavioural modification as the cornerstone for crime prevention initiatives. Police forces are a vital source of information on crime prevention, but their capacity is restricted (Laycock and Tilley, 1995). Several studies investigating police Twitter procedures emphasise the importance of influencing behaviour via preventive campaign efforts (Crump, 2011; Heverin and Zach, 2010; O'Connor, 2015). It is clear from the preventive tweets in this thesis that police departments aim to modify community behaviours via one-way campaign activity. It may be argued that police departments utilise social media to supplement their usual preventive print efforts (Mawby, 2010b). Since Twitter is a free platform, its campaign activity is cost-effective compared to the overheads associated with printing leaflets and posters. Thus, focusing entirely on digital platforms aids cash-strapped corporate communications departments; it may ostracise community members without access to digital technologies.

This study and existing literature show that police forces regularly undertake similar campaigns on recurring national issues (O'Connor, 2015), such as hate crime awareness week. However, partnering with police forces on campaigns and initiatives is one method corporate communications may use to combat growing costs while increasing message reach and consistency. Evidence indicates that police organisations already collaborate passively

for operational material; for instance, information requests are retweeted across forces (Ferguson and Soave, 2020). However, this study omitted these retweets to avoid disseminated content duplication. Cooperation between corporate communications departments nationally seems to be non-existent. There was support for police-to-police communications through interactional tweets, yet these rarely contained instances of collaboration. Due to a lack of resource sharing, much duplication and reinvention occur in diverse police situations. Campaigns integrating many forces may improve the cost-effectiveness of the participating forces and the quality and consistency of crime prevention campaigns, which benefits corporate communications. As a result, more consistency within police settings will become increasingly important in the future, distorting established force boundaries.

8.2.3 Demand Management

As previously stated in the interview results, this thesis asserts that social media is a resource-intensive endeavour. Concern was expressed about resources, staffing, and the department's future ability to meet the growing demand for police services. This demand is a serious concern, especially as additional budget constraints are likely and social media becomes a more demanding service provider for community policing. When resources limit the police's capacity to participate, their image suffers, as they look inattentive to relevant issues (Schneider, 2014). Thus, police forces were concerned about their capacity to expand, highlighting a potential worry for police social media practice in the future. Suppose more emphasis is not centred on evolving with the times and becoming more digital. Then, it may impair the ability to undertake image work. Particularly given that corporate communications departments often function on a nine to five routine, impeding their ability to provide a comprehensive service.

In addition, this thesis contributes knowledge about one of the main advantages of digital technologies, cost-effectiveness in terms of police prominence. Almost all respondents emphasised the significance of social media for increasing digital police prominence.

Consuming social media channels to communicate lowers the cost of publishing material (Leiberman et al., 2013). Considering the need for forces to circumvent budget and resource cuts, cost savings are evident. Thus, when compared to the growing physical police presence, digital communications provide a more cost-effective method of increasing police visibility (Bullock et al., 2020). Through austerity measures, respondents discovered advantages in social media, but this reduced the quantity of print advertising done. Consequently, digital media enables police to avoid spending significant sums on increasing police presence, advertising, and crime prevention efforts. However, potential overreliance on digital tools risks alienating community members who lack access to digital technologies or do not deliberately seek out police information while using the internet and social media.

Interviewees agreed that the police still had a long way to go before fully utilising social media, especially in improving participation through communications. Although the police employ digital channels to convey more incidents and crime coverage than those published by conventional media, they seldom use digital media to engage people in discussions about policing issues in general. Both the content analysis of Twitter posts and thematic analysis support this argument. In addition, one of the challenges the police face is monitoring public comments in response to information police have published, such as a live incident. Corporate communications, as image professionals, are responsible for ensuring that police profiles do not contain harmful remarks or post information that could threaten investigations which could lead to damaging police reputation or impacting negatively on digital communities.

The police could potentially operate their social media accounts to inform the public about why the police are allowed to share certain information and why communities are not allowed to post information that has the potential to jeopardise an ongoing inquiry. Though, as noted in the interviews, police forces frequently leave their communities to self-regulate; but, as police get more engaged, the possibility of repressing public material increases further. Therefore, it remains to be

seen whether the police begin to embrace social media to increase engagement practice and improve their governance of digital communities.

The impact on police legitimacy is also considered to be a problem on social media. Especially where the police are publicly scrutinised for minor issues, like having lunch breaks at fast-food restaurants or parking a response car in a poor position while reacting to an emergency call. This type of content is tedious and seeks to tarnish the police image for no apparent purpose other than harassing the police on social media to seek delegitimisation. If something happens within the policing world which severely impacts police reputation, it was found that corporate communications are usually the department that attempts to negate any negative impact on the police image. For example, corporate communications teams will issue a statement to address the situation and handle any potential fallout (Goldsmith, 2010). They will post evidence such as body-worn videos to exhibit how an incident occurred to dissipate any misinformation that has been circulated within communities. However, this is not always a quick action that can be taken. The respondents in the interviews acknowledged that they would not always reply to posts which impact police legitimacy, particularly for live investigations, as providing a comment was difficult until the issue was wholly understood to determine how to proceed. Therefore, as supported by findings across the empirical explorations, digital communications effectively strengthen communication operations to ensure that messages are received and acted upon.

8.3 Limitations and Further Research

Although this research has contributed additional knowledge to the police communications literature, there are several limitations. The first limitation of this thesis is the research scope. This research focuses on macro corporate communications outputs rather than the meso local and specialist team level or micro police officer perspectives. Although the thesis provides varied findings throughout, it would have been interesting to gain further insights into how meso and micro police communications operate compared to macro communications. However, there are

several drawbacks to doing such a broad research study. For example, if the study attempted to provide a complete picture of macro, meso, and micro-outputs, it would have overlooked the perspective and depth presented in the three empirical studies. Similarly, it would have been challenging to get a substantial sample of policing teams and officers from all 43 police departments to take part, especially as it was already difficult to get corporate communications departments to partake. This would have caused greater obstacles in capturing additional perspectives given the resources and time available. However, this presents opportunities for further research to expand knowledge in these areas through a large-scale survey of officers social media perceptions.

This research raises considerations about how police image and community policing might be explored further on social media. According to the findings of this study, police interactions with communities on social media are visible to a far bigger audience. In this way, the police communicate to a broad range of end-users because police information and messages are visible to much larger audiences. As a result, future studies should investigate how police officers, staff, and residents perceive social media image work and the outcomes for community policing. In terms of social media analysis, future research should go deeper into different sorts of police social media accounts. The current study was limited to corporate communications Twitter accounts. However, during the exploration, it was discovered that police officers and staff were effectively using meso and micro-Twitter accounts. Further investigation into if and how these accounts contribute to police image work and provide digital communities is necessary.

In addition, this study does not examine whether the content analysis communication categories also apply to other platforms that the police use to communicate with diverse audiences. Social media platforms have limits in regard to allowing academics to acquire information in easily workable forms. This greatly restricts the capacity to collect vast volumes of data equivalent to the scale of the tweet collection used in this study. Other social media platforms, such as Facebook,

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Instagram, and Snapchat, encompass content formats and features not found on Twitter. Assessing police operations on other platforms would also reveal more information about how the police engage with various audiences. For example, images, videos, and emoticons may be seen on these digital platforms as they are more visual in architecture. Since the emphasis of the social media study was on textual material, these qualities were not considered. Hence, it is essential to look at the various social media content formats in this context. Therefore, future research that uses novel social media data would further extend police and social media knowledge.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Request Letter



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Research Request Letter

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www.cardiff.ac.uk/social-sciences

Researcher: Arron Cullen.

Research Project: Police and Social Media in England and Wales.

[Date]

Dear [Name],

My name is Arron Cullen, a researcher in the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University. I am writing to request the opportunity to interview the lead individual responsible for the communications published on social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, for [Police Force]. The title of the research project which interviews are being requested is 'Police and Social Media in England and Wales'. The Economic and Social Research Council funds this research.

This research project is state-of-the-art in terms of the data and methodology used. For example, the primary data utilised is big social data collected from the social media platform Twitter. Data will be collected from the Twitter accounts of forty-three police forces in England and Wales. Meaning that content published on Twitter by each police force will be analysed to comprehend the types of information police forces disseminate to the public.

While the mentioned data provides a large amount of comprehensible knowledge, it is also essential to understand how police forces use social media in practice. This is likely to be varied across the forty-three police forces in England and Wales, mainly since most police forces individually manage the type and volume of content distributed to the public. Therefore, it would be valuable to conduct interviews with the individuals responsible for publishing information to the public through new digital avenues. The researcher will also request a short survey to be completed securely online to capture information not suited to interview.

It would be preferable to hold the interviews either on a face-to-face basis, over the telephone or via video link. However, if there is an alternative preference that the interviewees would prefer, this can be mutually agreed. The face-to-face interviews will be conducted at the desired location of the interviewees. All interview types will last approximately one hour and recorded with a Dictaphone and electronically transcribed by the researcher. The interviewees will then be allowed to request a copy of the transcript to check for and amend any factual errors.

Concerning the interview content being used in research publications, the interviewees will be fully anonymised. Thus, no revealing personal details will be published. Furthermore, once the thesis has been completed, the research findings and conclusions will be available for all participating police forces to read via a digital copy. This research will be beneficial for contributing police forces to ascertain how such digital communications are being managed and applied.

I hope the brief overview of this study is of interest and value, and that the participation of police forces will help shed much-needed light on how police forces interact with the public. Please read the included research information sheet for further details about the research project; this information sheet will also be sent in conjunction with the interviewees consent form.

If you would be willing to provide the opportunity to interview the lead individual responsible for the publication of social media communications, please respond directly to my Cardiff University email address (CullenAL@cardiff.ac.uk). Alternatively, if you would prefer to send a response by letter, please use this address:

**Professor Matthew Williams c/o Arron Cullen, Cardiff University,
Glamorgan Building, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff, CF10 3WT.**

This research has been approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University. There are no anticipated risks associated with participation.

If you have any queries, please feel free to contact Arron Cullen.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,

Arron Cullen
Researcher.
School of Social Sciences.
Cardiff University.
Email: CullenAL@cardiff.ac.uk.

Professor Matthew Williams.
Research Supervisor.
School of Social Sciences.
Cardiff University.
Email: WilliamsM7@cardiff.ac.uk.

Appendix 2: Information Sheet



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Research Information Sheet

Tel +44(0)29 2087 5179
Fax +44(0)29 2087 4175

www.cardiff.ac.uk/social-sciences

Researcher: Arron Cullen

Research Project: Police and Social Media in England and Wales.

This document is sent in conjunction with the interview consent form; it summarises the 'Police and Social Media in England and Wales' research project.

About the Project

This research project seeks to examine police communications on social media in England and Wales. The Economic and Social Research Council funds this research.

This research aims to understand how the forty-three police forces in England and Wales are using Twitter to disseminate information to the public and how police forces use social media in general for communications and present themselves.

This research utilises state-of-the-art methodological approaches to examine the gathered big social data. The amassed big social data will provide the researcher with a substantial amount of qualitative and quantifiable knowledge regarding public interactions with the police, and the use of the social media website Twitter by the forty-three police forces in England and Wales.

However, it is imperative to comprehend how police forces use such communication channels to connect with the public and their main aims and objectives of using social media websites such as Twitter. Therefore, interviews and surveys are being requested to understand police forces standpoints on this topic matter directly.

Accordingly, this research adopts a mixed methodological approach, using both quantitative and qualitative research procedures to produce full-bodied findings and conclusions.

Who is responsible for the data collected in this research project?

The sole researcher of this research project is Arron Cullen. He is a mixed methods researcher in the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University and is researching in the field of Criminology. The research supervisors are Professor Matthew Williams and Professor Pete Burnap.

Arron Cullen holds a Bachelor of Arts (with Honours) in 'Criminology and Criminal Justice', and a Master of Arts (Distinction) in 'Terrorism, International Crime and Global Security'. His academic interests include: policing, cybercrime, terrorism, organised crime and hate crime.

Subsequently, the individual responsible for the data collection and analysis for this research project is Arron Cullen. The role of both supervisors is to monitor the progress of the research project. Therefore, interview data may be accessed by the supervisors for this purpose.

What data is being collected in this research project?

As outlined above, the data being collected for this research project is varied. For the most part, big social data deriving from the social media website Twitter will be collected to understand the types of content distributed by police forces.

Furthermore, interviews will be conducted with key personnel from the forty-three police forces in England and Wales. This is to comprehend how each police force utilises social media platforms to disseminate information to the public and their main aims and objectives in communicating through social media channels with the public.

The researcher is also asking participants to complete an online survey that will ask closed questions about how social media is operated within communications departments. These are closed-ended questions which are not suited to interviews.

How is the interview being conducted, and the data stored?

Interview data will be collected using a Dictaphone during either a face-to-face, telephone, or video link interview, which will last approximately one hour. Face-to-face interviews will be held at the desired location of the interviewees. The recordings of the interview will then be transcribed electronically by the researcher. The interviewees may request a copy of this transcription and can correct any factual errors.

All the data for this research project will be stored on an external encrypted military grade hard drive kept in a secure facility at Cardiff University. Backups of this data will also be stored on Cardiff University's secure computer network.

None of the data collected for this research project will be shared or distributed to any other organisation. The voice recordings of all interviews will be kept until six months after completing the research project. Following this point, they will be permanently deleted.

What is involved in participating in this research project?

As stated beforehand, the interview will take approximately one hour, and the researcher will not exceed this assigned timeframe. If a shorter or longer interview timeframe is necessary, this can be discussed and mutually agreed between the researcher and interviewees.

The interview will consist of a series of semi-structured questions relating to social media websites use by the police force the interviewees work for.

The dates of interviews for each of the police forces in England and Wales will be wide-ranging, this is to fit in with the researcher and interviewees schedules. The date and time of the interview will be jointly agreed well in advance of the chosen date.

Once the interview has been conducted, no further participation is required unless the interviewees request a transcription of the interview, to check and suggest the amendment of any factual errors.

The researcher will contact the interviewees if clarification is required for any part of the interview during the transcription phase.

What are the risks involved in this research project?

There are no potential risks involved with the participation of this research project. Interviewees will be fully anonymised within the research publications.

What are the benefits of taking part in this research project?

This is a state-of-the-art research project, which involves the examination of novel data. Each participating force will receive a digital copy of the primary publication of this research project.

What are your rights as a participant?

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or subsequently cease participation at any time.

Will I receive any payment or monetary benefits?

You will receive no payment for your participation. The researcher will not use the data for commercial purposes. Therefore, you should not expect any royalties or payments from the research project in the future.

Additional Information

This research has been reviewed and approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University. If you have any further questions or concerns about this research project, please contact Arron Cullen (CullenAL@cardiff.ac.uk) via email.

Appendix 3: Survey Questions

Q1: How many staff work within the communications department for this police force?

- 1 - 10
- 11 - 25
- 26+

Q2: How many communications department staff are tasked with publishing social media content?

- 1 - 10
- 11 - 25
- 26+

Q3: Which social media platforms are currently used for police communications? (check multiple answers if required)

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Google+
- Snapchat
- Flickr
- Pinterest
- Tumblr

- Tinder
- Other (please specify) _____

Q4: What is the approval process for creating social media accounts for this police force?

- Head of Communications
- Digital/Social Media Lead
- Chain of command
- Approval not required
- Other (please specify) _____

Q5: Who receives social media training within this police force? (check multiple answers if required)

- Communications Department
- Local Policing Teams
- Specialist Police Units
- Police Officers
- Special Constables
- Police Community Support Officers
- Other Police Staff
- Do not provide social media training

Q6: How many local policing units have Twitter accounts for this police force?

- 1 - 10

11 - 25

26+

Q7: How many specialist units have Twitter accounts for this police force?

1 - 6

7 - 12

13+

Q8: How many police officers have professional Twitter accounts for this police force?

1 - 29

30 - 59

60+

Q9: How many Facebook pages does this police force have?

1 - 6

7 - 12

13+

Q10: Does this police force have a social media policy?

Yes

No

In the process of creating a social media policy

Q11: What does this police force consider to be the main aims of using social media platforms?
(maximum of six responses)

Public engagement

Appendices

- Inform the public about priorities and services
- Prevent and detect crime
- Promote local and specialist policing unit activities
- Increase public trust and confidence
- Conduct campaigns and events
- Providing public reassurance
- Inform the public about incidents
- Distribute news about the police force
- Expand visibility of the police force
- Publicise the police force in a less formally
- Other (please specify) _____

Q12: Which forms of content receives the greatest number of interactions on social media platforms? (maximum of three responses)

- Text
- Images
- Videos
- Polls

Q13: What are the most regular types of content published on social media platforms? (maximum of three responses)

- Police force news

- Appeals for information and witnesses
- Crime prevention and safety advice
- Information about incidents
- Local and specialist policing activities
- Campaigns and digital events
- Other (please specify) _____

Q14: Does this police force publish targeted communications for different audiences on social media?

- Yes
- No

Q15: How effective are social media platforms for increasing public interactions?

- Extremely effective
- Very effective
- Moderately effective
- Slightly effective
- Not effective at all
- Do not know

Q16: How effective are social media platforms for conducting campaigns and events?

- Extremely effective
- Very effective
- Moderately effective

- Slightly effective
- Not effective at all
- Do not know

Q17: How effective are social media platforms for appealing for information?

- Extremely effective
- Very effective
- Moderately effective
- Slightly effective
- Not effective at all
- Do not know

Q18: How effective are social media platforms for providing reassurance to the public?

- Extremely effective
- Very effective
- Moderately effective
- Slightly effective
- Not effective at all
- Do not know

Q19: How effective are social media platforms for crime prevention information?

- Extremely effective
- Very effective
- Moderately effective

- Slightly effective
- Not effective at all
- Do not know

Q20: How effective are social media platforms for publishing policing activities?

- Extremely effective
- Very effective
- Moderately effective
- Slightly effective
- Not effective at all
- Do not know

End of Survey

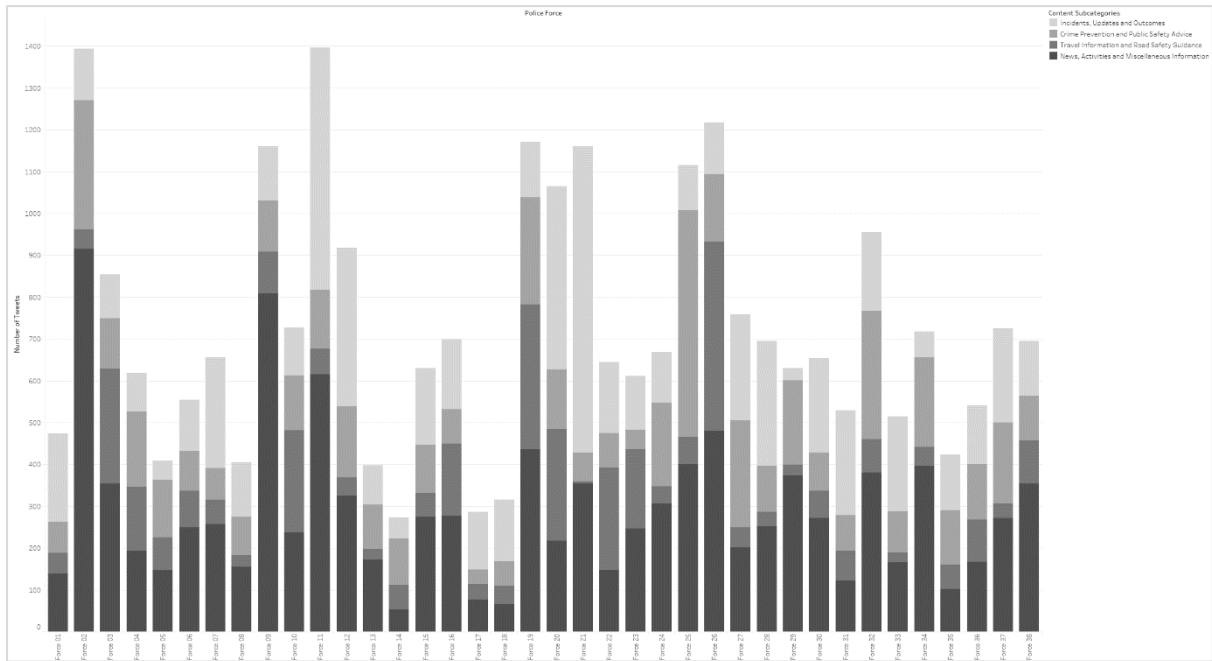
Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Your response has been recorded.

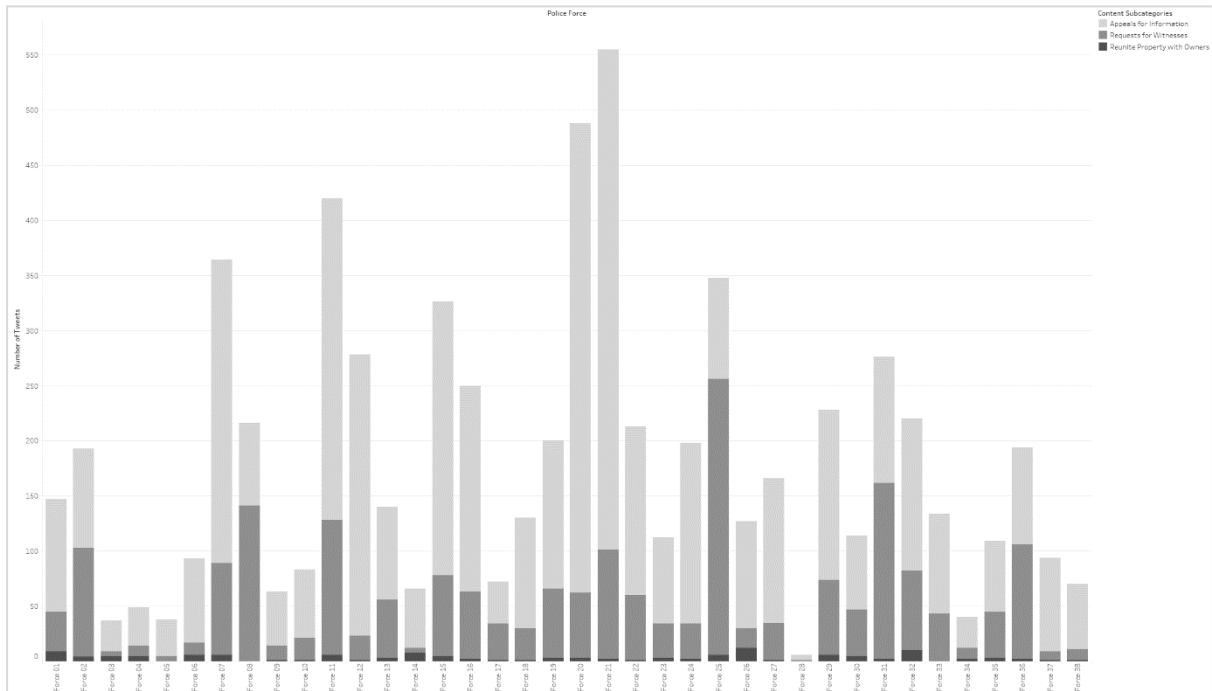
If you have any questions, please contact Arron Cullen.

Email: CullenAL@cardiff.ac.uk

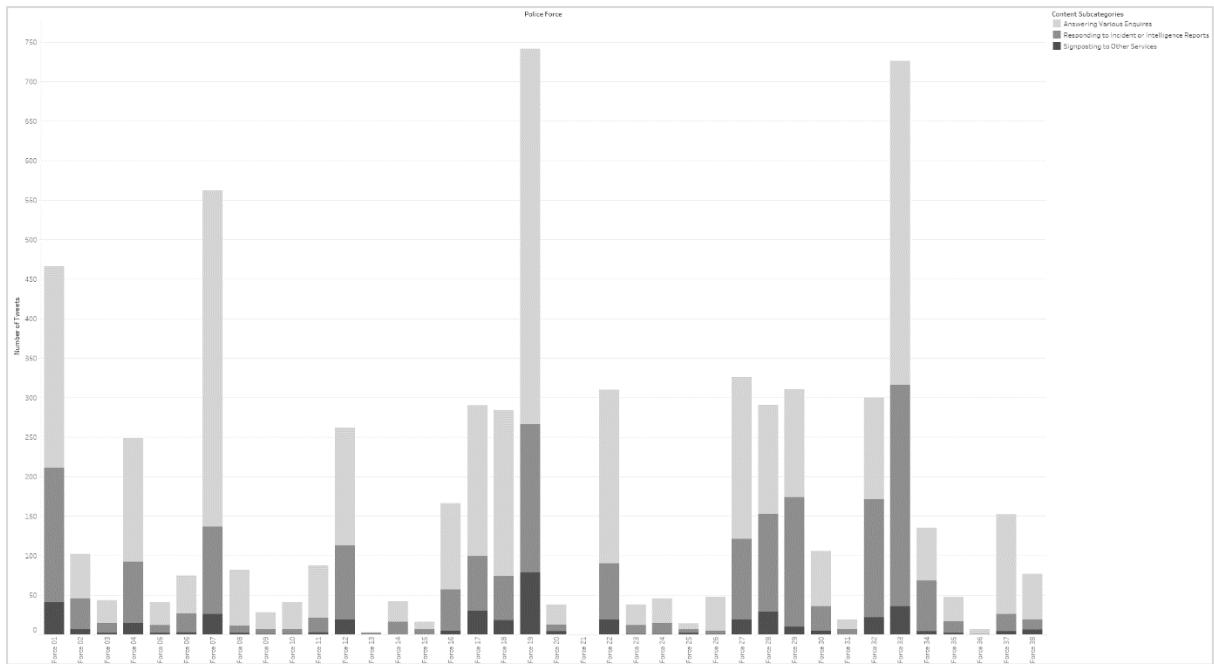
Appendix 4: Content Subcategories



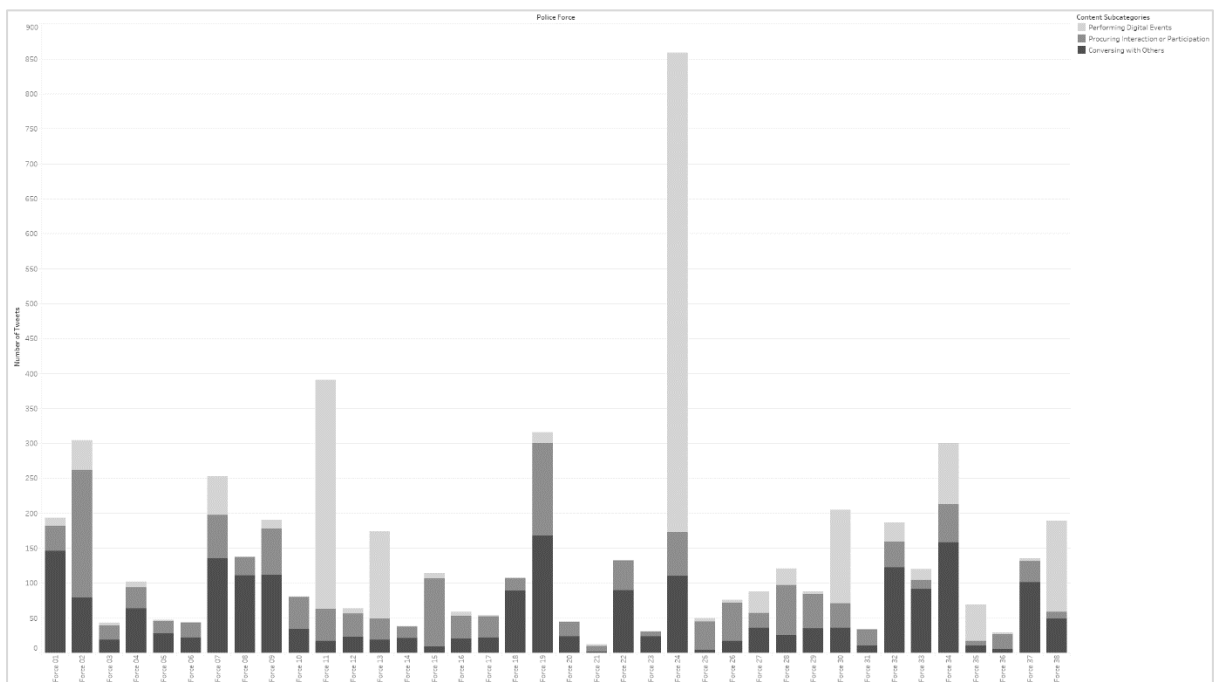
Informational: Tweet content subcategories totals for each police force.



Operational: Tweet content subcategories totals for each police force.



Transactional: Tweet content subcategories totals for each police force.



Interactional: Tweet content subcategories totals for each police force.

Appendix 5: Consent Form



School of
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Research Consent Form

Tel +44(0)29 2087 5179

Fax +44(0)29 2087 4175

www.cardiff.ac.uk/social-sciences

Researcher: Arron Cullen.

Research Project: Police and Social Media in England and Wales.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the police and social media project.

The ethical procedures for academic research undertaken within the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University require that interviewees explicitly agree to be interviewed and to understand how the information contained in their interview will be used in the context of academic research and publications.

The proposed interview will take approximately one hour. There are not any anticipated risks associated with your participation, though you do have the right to stop the interview or withdraw your participation upon till the completion of this research project. However, if you have any concerns, you are encouraged to discuss these with Arron Cullen at any point in time.

This consent form is necessary for the researcher to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Therefore, could you please read the accompanying information sheet and then sign this form to declare that you approve and comprehend the following conditions:

- The interview will be recorded by Dictaphone, and a transcript will be produced, you may request a copy of the interview transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors.
- The transcript of the interview will only be analysed by Arron Cullen as he is the leading researcher for this specific project. However, access to the interview transcript will be limited to Arron Cullen and the supervisors of this research project Professor Matthew Williams and Professor Pete Burnap. A fully anonymised transcript of your interview may be published in the Appendix of the thesis.
- Further to this, any summary interview content or direct quotations from the interview that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be fully anonymised. This is so you cannot be identified, and complete care will be taken to ensure that any other information provided within the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed.

- The voice recordings of interviews will be kept upon till six months after the completion of the research project; after this period, they will be permanently deleted.
- Any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval.

Quotation and Recording Agreement

In regard to being recorded during the interview and being quoted within publications, please could you initial next to the following statements:

- I agree to be quoted directly. I also comprehend that my personal details will not be circulated in any publications, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- I agree that the interview will be recorded with a Dictaphone to ensure that the transcription of the interview is accurate.
- I agree that all or part of the content of my interview may be used within academic publications, informative articles, and other media such as spoken presentations.

Request Interview Transcript

If you would like to review the transcription of the interview, please initial the box below:

- I would like to review the interview transcript or other data collected during the research project relating to my participation in the interview phase.

By signing this form, I agree that:

- I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I do not have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time.
- The transcribed interview, or extracts from the interview, may be used as described in the above ‘quotation and recording agreement’.
- I have read the Information sheet and understand the purpose of this research project.
- I do not expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation.
- I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality.
- I have been able to ask any questions that I may have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Participants Printed Name:

Participants Signature: Date:

Researchers Printed Name:

Researchers Signature: Date:

The 'Police and Social Media in England and Wales' research project has been reviewed and approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University.

Contact Information

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Researcher:

Arron Cullen
Researcher.
School of Social Sciences.
Cardiff University.
Email: CullenAL@cardiff.ac.uk.

If necessary, you may also contact the supervisors of this research project:

Research Supervisors:

Professor Matthew Williams.
School of Social Sciences.
Cardiff University.
Email: WilliamsM7@cardiff.ac.uk.

Professor Pete Burnap.
School of Computer Science and Informatics.
Cardiff University.
Email: BurnapP@cardiff.ac.uk.

Appendix 6: Interview Prompt



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Semi-Structured Interview Questions

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- How has the communications department changed since the adoption of social media?
- In what manner has the relationship with the media altered since the uptake of social media?
- What are the preferred social media platforms used for police communications, and why?
- What are the best and worst aspects of using social media for police communications?
- How have social media platforms helped with police image work?
- Why has there been an irregular adoption of social media for police communications?
- How have the types of content changed since this police force started using social media?
- What is the process for publishing and regulating social media communications?
- How is social media content kept consistent and manageable across all platforms?
- Why do local and specialist policing units have their social media accounts?
- How has the public adopted to local and specialist policing units' social media accounts?
- How likely is this police force to engage and interact with content posted by the public?
- How has this police force used social media platforms to target communications?
- How does this police force adapt its communications for the different geographical areas?
- Why is running campaigns and events on social media platforms valuable?
- How has this police force pushed for more significant public interaction and engagement?
- How have social media platforms enabled this police force to be more transparent?
- How have social media platforms impacted police legitimacy?

- In what ways does this police force measure the success of social media communications?
- How does this police force use direct messaging functions on Facebook and Twitter?
- How does this police force obtain public feedback on social media communications?
- How do you think the use of social media platforms will change going forward?

End of Prompt

Appendix 7: Interview Schedule

Ref	Gender	Alias	Size	Method	Date
INT5	F	Nicole	Larger	Telephone	19/05/2017
INT10	M	Kevin	Medium	Face-to-face	23/05/2017
INT24	M	Keith	Medium	Telephone	25/05/2017
INT17	M	Adam	Medium	Telephone	25/05/2017
INT6	F	Laura	Larger	Face-to-face	30/05/2017
INT1	F	Victoria	Smaller	Telephone	05/06/2017
INT23	F	Jessica	Medium	Face-to-face	06/06/2017
INT2	M	Mark	Larger	Face-to-face	08/06/2017
INT4	M	Liam	Smaller	Face-to-face	09/06/2017
INT3	M	Steven	Medium	Face-to-face	10/06/2017
INT18	F	Kelly	Smaller	Face-to-face	14/06/2017
INT16	F	Karen	Larger	Telephone	15/06/2017
INT9	F	Sarah	Medium	Telephone	16/06/2017
INT21	M	Gregory	Medium	Face-to-face	20/06/2017
INT12	F	Danielle	Medium	Telephone	20/06/2017
INT8	F	Emma	Smaller	Telephone	21/06/2017
INT15	M	Ryan	Larger	Telephone	04/07/2017
INT7	F	Kathryn	Medium	Telephone	11/07/2017
INT11	M	George	Medium	Telephone	18/07/2017
INT20	M	Phillip	Smaller	Telephone	19/07/2017
INT13	M	Harrison	Larger	Face-to-face	20/07/2017
INT19	F	Allison	Larger	Face-to-face	26/07/2017
INT22	M	Elliott	Medium	Telephone	07/08/2017
INT14	F	Michelle	Medium	Telephone	10/08/2017

Appendix 8: Interview Transcript



School of
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Transcript Ref: INT21

Tel +44(0)29 2087 5179
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www.cardiff.ac.uk/social-sciences

I: Interviewer

Researcher: Arron Cullen

P: Participant

Contact: CullenAL@cardiff.ac.uk

I: How has the Communications department changed since the adoption of social media?

P: Ok, so yeah, I joined [police force] just over... so over nine years ago and it was only about a year later that we fired up our social channels. So, we launched our Twitter account and Facebook page both in 2009 within kind of a short period between them, and yeah it has fundamentally changed the how we operate as a Communications department. Before that time, we used press releases, sometimes with web addresses at the end and we prayed that the papers would print those, and that people may see the link and then come to our website. It's completely changed it around now we have our own social channels, we are publishers ourselves, we don't really need to rely on newspapers really to try and divert people towards our content or to read about our items, we have our own audiences and we have got audiences larger than our local newspapers have on social media. Erm... pretty much you know both [local newspaper] and [local newspaper], we have a larger following, so we are primary publishers ourselves, so really, it's changed our mindsets in terms of how we both approach the media and the type of content we put out there, and you know, become more publisher and more features orientated stream rather than serving the press with releases about incidents in their area.

I: Great, so what new positions have been created in terms of the department structure because I know you are the [job title], so is there a team of you now?

P: There is yeah, we are three strong at the moment, we just literally interviewed last week for a fourth person and that is... that fourth person is entirely around the social side of things, because we just got so much going on we need more hands on it. So, the way it is organised is that we have a media relations team that work with ourselves and they primarily handle enquires from the press, but they are also... they have evolved as well to do more social elements and they are now producing more features, so they are content producers. What my team does then, is take the content that they produce and add value to it to enhance the readership of it, make sure it is reaching the right people and to spin it, so it fits our social platforms better and provides that advice to them. So, we've kind of grown together with it, both the media relations team and myself, the media relations team is growing, they are adding another member to their team to help them produce more content, and give them more hands-on, and they are producing more video content which is potentially going to spin off into a specialised video producer role depending on how the year goes, so that is our focus on that increasing. My team, you know at one point there was only one person in that team and that was me for about six months as we transitioned, originally it was two but went down to one and then now we are on three and moving to four. We changed our model in early 2015 when we realised the emphasis we needed to start placing on the social accounts to actually have a bit more ownership on those and publishing more to them, so we added a third person and we changed... instead of just being generic administrative roles we changed them to focus one externally and one internally just to kind of balance that out and give clear responsibilities to each of the individuals in the team.

I: Going back to when you were talking about the media, how has the relationship with the mass media altered since the adoption of social media?

P: Yeah, it is funny, we were having conversations about that just this very week in terms of you know... we still very much and it can't be underestimated we still very much value the traditional media. We still rely on them, they are our partners, you know they help us with all our objectives, you know not just getting people locked up, finding criminals and all that kind of thing, but also with the confidence side of things, so we absolutely value them. But, we rely on them less to you know do these features for us, we kind of do that work ourselves, and so it's... I mean I am one step removed from dealing directly with the media but the conversations I've had with the media relations team around their dealings with the traditional media is that it is a tricky situation, in that naturally the newspapers want content and they want that exclusively, and it is trying to balance out and trying to keep them onside, keeping them involved in the process, keeping them engaged so they give our content prominence, also not taking away from our own ability to publish content and our own ability to break content via our own channels. We have our purposes, you know we want people to come to our Facebook pages, to our Twitter streams, to *Like* us and to rely on our pages for... you know to get this exclusive content, so that they then *follow* us in the future and then maybe help us with an offence that happens in their area down the line. So, it is all about building our own audiences as well as serving the press.

I: Ok, thanks. What are the preferred social media platforms used for police communications, mainly out of Facebook and Twitter because they are probably the ones you use mostly?

P: Sure, I mean they are both really important for us, and not to sit on the fence they both serve a different purpose. I guess if you are talking about pure performance, Facebook for us has vastly improved results, and not just in terms of the reach we get via what we post on that

channel, but also literally the results we get back into the contact centre, people phoning up saying 'I have seen this on your Facebook page'. We very rarely hear that about our Twitter stream that somebody has clicked on a tweet and read a release and things like that, we very rarely get feedback that it's come through that channel. But, we often get feedback here about intelligence being received about identities, missing persons, all that kind of thing that we post on there, about having seen it on our Facebook page. So, both ways, we find that Facebook really does get more results, you know if we wanted to be general about it, our Twitter reach is probably around 10-20% of what we would reach on exactly the same story on our Facebook page, and similarly for engagements with it as well, it is a similar kind of spread there.

I: So what are the best and worst aspects of using social media for police communications?

P: Best and worst... I mean best is that we are getting our information, our releases, our appeals, and sometimes very critical appeals about very vulnerable missing children straight to people almost instantaneously, we can put that in front of them. You know, years back that wouldn't have been the case, but now you can within moments of it being confirmed that someone is missing we can have that on our Facebook page with a photo and that... missing persons are one of the content types that gets the most engagement and gets the most shares and things like that, and it's not unheard of to have a missing person reach you know 150,000 - 200,000 people within a very short space of time, you know you're talking a couple of hours so we get a lot of traction off that. The immediacy of it for us and giving us the opportunity to be our own providers is probably the best side. The worst side, and I would hesitate to call it the worst side, obviously with having these platforms is a resource requirement to manage the communities on there, we are not a one-way publisher, we are very much two-way publisher and we value the relationships we build up on there and the communities we build up there because they're not just translating to happy communities online but they translate to happy communities on the

streets. So, it is a challenge and you know that is why we are taking someone else on-board because we need more hands-on managing the comments that we get through, that we have to respond to, we don't ignore them we check every single one. We have got software that allows us to do exactly just that, to make sure that no comment goes unseen, either a comment on our Facebook post or a mention received on our social accounts and monitoring what comes into all our social accounts that we own. So yeah, that is a real challenge for us to make sure that we are providing that two-way conversation, that dialogue, on our social accounts.

I: That is interesting. So how have social media platforms helped with police image work?

P: We have an unfiltered ability now to put our own content out there. You know, it is not interpreted by the local media, but it is kind of our... not PR, we are not really an organisation and we are not really a police force that spins things, or you know tries to paint too rosy a picture, because we know exactly there is very little stomach for that, you know people quickly find you out and we don't really go down that route at all. We just try to present a nice honest picture of what policing is like in [county] and engage with people that might have different views on what our performance is like, and that all kind of contributes to our service that we provide, it all kind of spins around into one big cycle.

I: Ok, thank you. Why has there been an irregular adoption of social media for police communications?

P: I mean I can only talk generally about our own kind of pressures, and that might be something that translates across the other forces. But really, social media exploded... you know we are talking 2007, 2008 and 2009 when they all started getting real traction and awareness. And, that kind of coincided with the austerity issues creeping in, where we had real, very drastic,

resource restrictions on just how much we would get not just for software, but also human resources, and we have lost a lot of numbers here. So, during that period where it was really building up, and gaining that traction, we faced restrictions in the amount of people we could point at it, certainly that was the case in [police force] and that we wanted to do more on these social channels and knew the opportunities that lay in wait, but we just couldn't afford to get the people to do a good enough job. I know some forces have a bit more of a lenient view on how they manage social media, I mean at [police force] we take a really conscious resourceful aware, risk-aware approach to our social media channels. So that we never start up a platform without properly planning out exactly how we are managing that, how we are managing the interactions on that, and how we are getting the content on there. You know, we only just launched our Instagram channel a couple of months ago, we're 1200 followers strong on that, and that came about because we started to get a bit more capacity, we wanted to do it for a long time you know we wanted to be on there for year or two, but it was identifying that we had the capacity that we were in the right place and that we could put the effort into getting the content for that. And, you'll see if you go on it we publish something just about every day and even weekends, and that's just kind of having the right resources in place to get that either self-produced content or crowdsourced from the many officers we have out there with social accounts. So going back to the knob of the issue, I think the irregular adoption is just down to human resources, to be able to provide that professional service on there, I mean there may be an element there of attitudes in forces that it is difficult to bring things forward, but I think that has changed a lot, certainly in [police force] ever since I started, attitudes towards social media have changed a lot and the London riots back in 2011 that changed a lot of attitudes and the value of it, so there is maybe an element of that as well. We all share practices between forces, we are all very conscious of what other forces are doing, we speak with each other fairly regularly to share best practice, so I think you will start seeing a convergence now that... austerity hasn't really gone away, it is not an issue anymore, but certainly in [police force] we are getting more resources put towards it, and I think

other forces are as well. You know you will have ones that have gone quite far ahead, you know the Met, GMP and West Midlands, ones that have a lot more resources and a lot more budget, they have kind of accelerated away and kind of got there early dawn, but we are all kind of catching up now, we are coming on stream with a bit more resource.

I: So how have the types of content changed since this police force started using social media?

P: Yeah, as I said, we are more features orientated and that's kind of evolved over the last year or two, that we are self-producing more in-depth features rather than... either split between campaign work which is kind of focused on an issue, and you know the pure press releases around incident appeals and things like that. I think we have evolved into more as I say feature-based content which could be around... you know not things that are immediate issues, not things that we are trying to you know... like a knife amnesty and things like that, larger scale campaigns. But actually, it's kind of nice to do content that gives people a bit more of an insight into the force. But, if one thing that has changed over the last few years or whatever, is that more emphasis on that more human side of things, and going onto you know that's kind of the reason why we set up the Instagram account, to give a bit more of an insight into the people behind the badge and a lot of forces do that, I've seen a lot of good examples out there and it's proved really popular. You know, we do exclusive content for our Instagram channel, that just shows officers behind the scenes and that wouldn't have been heard 7, 8, 9, 10 years ago.

I: Have you used Facebook Live or Periscope yet?

P: Yeah, we have done a number of Facebook Lives this year, we are quite recent to it and we plan on using it a lot more. We've always had in mind that Facebook Live would be a brilliant tool to bring people direct to any large-scale press conferences that we have. I guess fortunately

in a way, not fortunately as a team because we've not been able to do it, but fortunately we have not really had those, we've only had since the notion came around. So, we have not really exploited that too much but we are starting to use it more for bringing people live to our award ceremonies, we've done it for that so people can see people getting long term service awards, and good conduct awards and all that kind of thing, also we have seen people sworn in as well so we've done a little bit of that. I mean we have got a few more things coming up, with Facebook Live we are putting more emphasis on it. Periscope not so much, although we are early days and we may go down that road if it is appropriate, but we are looking at Facebook Live just because our audience is bigger, we get bigger reach on that and it's kind of where we are putting our resources right now, we've purchased a bit of equipment to kind of service that as well, just to make it look professional. We didn't want to do a half job on that and have wobbly smartphones, we've actually got some nice kit behind it as well.

I: That sounds great. So what is the process for publishing and regulating social media communications?

P: Ok, I guess talking about corporate communications you know the centric driven content, that is largely driven by the media relations team as I mentioned before, they kind of set the content direction for the force, and my teams role is to assist them in giving our expertise in how best we can present that content and opportunities with the platforms that we have. So, it is largely driven by the media relations team depending on whether it is an issue that has come up, or it's something they have in their portfolio that they'd like to you know present forward in terms of raising confidence in a particular area or you know tackling an issue in a particular area that relates to them. So, typically, they would be the driver of the content and then we'd take the content, craft it for the relevant platforms, and then become the publishers for them, you know coordinating with them, you know this strategy around it going live, and that's with our central

accounts. Our other accounts, and we've got more than 120 of them, we put those in the hands of the officers themselves, and we don't run them for them. But, what we do is we make sure that when we hand over the account, they go through quite a rigorous training process and that's one thing that when we started doing individual Twitter accounts is that from day one we had the correct guidance and policies in place. So that they had a backup whenever an officer went on that and had a query about it they always had something to rely on to give them that steer on what is correct and what isn't correct to publish on social media. And, they get a very thorough training package alongside that, a kind of one to one, two to one kind of training environment. And, we have always been quite strong on that, I was talking about this the other week internally, in that you know if we picked one thing that [police force] does really well it is making sure all the people who take on the responsibility of owning a force account, and it is a real responsibility because you are responsible for the professional outlook of the force, you know it is directly affecting confidence in communities. So, we take it really seriously and that's one thing we've always done really well, we've always had the right material available, we've always done the right amount of training. Fortunately, we've had very few issues in terms of what officers have put out there, you know we've not been on the front page of the [tabloid newspaper] or anything like that for an inappropriate tweet, or ripped apart by the [tabloid newspaper], and I think that logic comes down to both the values of the organisation which I think are quite strong and honourable, but also for the training that we provide.

I: Ok, brilliant. How is social media content kept consistent and manageable across all platforms?

P: Yeah, we started with Hootsuite, and we still use Hootsuite because we think Hootsuite it still provides a role in terms of Twitter accounts, as an at a glance overview I don't think it can be reliable to be honest, you know the speed that you can kind of get an overview of what's going

on via our Twitter accounts is on parallel. But, we realised a little while back certainly when we started getting the individual platforms that it wasn't good enough, both to manage our Facebook account, I still think it is fairly poor for that, but also for managing all the individual Twitter accounts that we've got, it was just too cumbersome. So, we use Sprout Social, and that's the platform we have been on for around four years now, we did a kind of evaluation this year whether it was still correct, and we still use it and you know not switched over. For us its real strong points, going back to what we talk about earlier, it allows us to see every single comment that comes in, every single mention that comes in, every single comment on our Instagram account now comes into one feed that can at a glance be dealt with or dismissed. We've looked at SocialSignIn and we don't think it was quite strong in that area, Sprout Social also gives us a nice performance dashboard in terms of how well they are used, what the response rate is like, what the response times are, so we can keep an eye on whether some of our individual officers that are using other accounts whether they need a little bit of assistance, upskilling, retraining, that kind of thing, just to get them as a more kind of continual publisher.

I: So why do local and specialist policing teams have their own social media accounts?

P: Yeah it gives them a clear identity, you know they have got a lot going on, we had these very same conversations when started talking about the more specialist like operational support accounts. You know, is it something that we could do as a short-term feature on our main account, but the enthusiasm from the officers and the year-round coverage that they provide, and not just about you know... taking our Armed Response Unit as an example, we talked about you know we could do a campaign on imitation firearms which is a real issue for them and things like that, but really what this individual account allows them to do is not only express themselves but also have that year round conversation, and not just you know campaign things, but it paints the reality of their role that they are not just firearms officers that turn up for firearms incidents,

but they are general purpose police officers that turn up to all manner of offences. So, it gives people more of an insight and a connection with these officers, it makes them more approachable which is especially important for us given recent events. So yeah, we like them to have their own identity, you know I think one of our strongest individual accounts is our roads policing one, they do a really good job, it is really insightful and I was perhaps ignorant of the range of work that they do and the amount of vehicles that they tackle in a day, you know these non-insured, non MOT vehicles that they take off the road. There are scores of them that they take off the road every single day, and I hadn't really appreciated that until they started that account, just the breadth of their work and I'm sure the public get a similar sense or see what they deal with on a day to day basis. So, we are more than happy for them to have their own individual accounts, and you know they've got those individual accounts they can put out their own messages, if ever we want to communicate some of the bigger messages they've got, we can always retweet and bring that to our main account and give them that visibility.

I: How likely is this police force to engage and interact with content posted by the public to the police force Twitter and Facebook accounts?

P: I would say very likely, I think that's one thing again we do quite well is that any serious questions we get in we handle, either it is something we can respond to immediately or we plug them into the department internally that can help, or our partners, a lot of the interactions we have on Twitter becomes more of for us... the queries we are getting are more service orientated on Twitter, a lot of those are signposting queries, so noise nuisances things like that, that our partners primarily deal with, it is about pushing those back. So, as I say we have got Sprout Social, we look at every comment that comes in and make a judgement of it, whether it is a service query that we need to handle, kind of a customer service query that we might need to handle in terms of putting them through to our contact department, or through other channels if

they are dissatisfied with the service, we are very honest about you know we don't always get things right, and we try and learn from those, so we always like to push people the route of dissatisfied reporting if that is the right method, complaint reporting if that is the right method, we don't shy away from that. So yeah, it goes across to the... if comments are inappropriate we are conscious about you know we like our Facebook page to be family friendly, we've got swear filters in place, but we also look at things that fall outside the swear filters and that might need handling, you know colloquially and things like that. So, we keep an eye on them for that to make sure that there is nothing inappropriate on there, I've looked at other forces social media accounts and they maybe take a bit more of a lenient view on it, given some of the things posted on there. We try and make sure that we are actively monitoring and engaging with the community about what is appropriate and what isn't appropriate on our pages.

I: That is great, thanks. So how has this police force used social media platforms to target communications to minority groups, different genders, and diverse age groups?

P: Yeah, I mean, this is something we... we do a fair amount... I mean on our Facebook page, I mean Facebook primarily if you are talking about slicing up demographics Facebook is perfect for that because of the tools it has, Twitter less so. But, Facebook every single day we are targeting messages to communities, and that's largely geographic targeting, each day we can put out 10-20 press releases and I would say that only about a quarter or even less than that go to all of our followers, the rest are targeted just to the communities. So, we do a lot of that and we are very conscious of maintaining our audiences on Facebook, so that we are not spamming them with too many things, because we do put out a lot of press releases every single day, so you know we don't want each person getting 15 or 20 of them so we are quite hot on that. In terms of targeting you know other demographic groups, be it gender or minority communities, we do a bit of that and generally it is dependent on the content, we can craft them, be it different

messages for age groups, we may work it like that, so one message on our topic goes to an older age group and one to a younger one. We have not done that a lot, but we do it where appropriate, one that leaks to my head was really the knife amnesty that we had last year where we target young males with a very different message to one that we may be targeted to young to middle-aged women, you know very different messages in terms of handing over knives or getting people to say 'do you know someone with a knife be it a partner or a son?', something along those lines. So yeah, where appropriate we will start thinking about can we craft this in different way and utilise the tools that we've got on the platforms to deliver a different message to the different people, just to get the best result that we possibly can and make sure that the right people are seeing the right type of content.

I: Is running campaigns and events on social media platforms valuable for this police force to communicate with the public when compared to traditional methods?

P: I guess it is exactly what we have talked about in terms of that immediacy, posters and things like that when I walk through the organisation you know are primary methods, you know these are what we call the empty belly posters which are kind of these pre-printed posters with a big white space in the middle that we put a little bit of content that we stick you know in a community centre and things like that. Those are still happening, it is still a very important part of our communications, but in terms of campaign work this knife amnesty is exactly what I've gone on about in terms of being able to target communities directly and getting them engaged with it and directing them digitally to their local knife amnesty bin and things like that, kind of geo-targeted. So, it is an inherent part of what we do in terms of campaign work, you know it is probably we build our comms response around that in the primary instance and then the rest kind of comes around it. You know we are always thinking about when we get a new campaign, what can we do on which particular channel, can we explore new channels, to really provide the

best bang for the buck. I think one of the strongest things we have done recently was when the change in the regulation around using mobile phones at the wheel came in, and we immediately thought about... we kind of got around in a group and thought about how can we communicate this in the best way, and you know we decided to craft a video, a fake Snapchat video, to show that you know the potential use of it... a lady singing along, doing a Snapchat video and crashes the car and that's captured. And, we focused our campaign entirely around that and got really good results from it, and the video went viral, it was in the [tabloid newspaper] and the [tabloid newspaper] and this, that, and the other. The actress phoned me up after seeing her face everywhere, so it has changed the nature of what we do completely and as I say we virtually think social first and the rest kind of drape around it.

I: In terms of events as well, do you carry out question and answer sessions on Twitter or Facebook?

P: Yeah, that's one thing actually we have done for a while, we have explored for a while, before we did them on Facebook and less so on Twitter we used a piece of software called CoverItLive and we termed it a Virtual Surgery, and we launched those ostensibly to really explore whether we could host a digital meeting for SNTs, so rather than them sitting in a library for an hour, could we hold a digital version of that for an hour to see if that enabled more people to come online and chat with them. Now back in, I want to say 2010-2011 when we explored it we didn't really get the uptake that we wanted on it, and down the line we went with the Twitter accounts for our SNT officers to try and provide a bit more of that long-term community visibility, engagement, issue raising and all that. We have used that software more and more for topic-based content, you know be it a drug abuse campaign and things like that we have trialled it in. Now recently, we have not done one yet, in the future we may use that less so externally and really focusing more on Facebook Live Q&As, and things like that. Twitter, we've not really

done one of those Q&As on there, we have kind of contemplated but never really plunged into it. But, we can entirely see a Facebook Live Q&A in the future, and we have got a couple in the pipeline that I can't talk about, but you may see that coming up in the next weeks or months when they launch.

I: How has this police force pushed for greater public interaction and engagement with its social media communications?

P: I think, there is only so far you can go in terms of crafting people, we're not as obvious to go please share this post or anything like that, to try and get engagement that way. We largely think the content dictates that, interesting content, and engaging content it almost leaps out at you if it's naturally the right topic for it, sometimes it catches us off guard in terms of the popularity of it, but we think just getting the right content in front of people will naturally draw out that engagement. So, we try and let the content do the talking, I mean talking about being caught off guard, we had one just coming up to a fortnight ago, we had two large beer silos being moved by road, we had to shut the [road] so the trucks could drive down it backwards because these absolutely enormous beer silos that were going to the... brewery and we put the message out there to alert people that the roads would be closing at this time, as we do with large-scale events, and we kind of thought it was unusual, a bit interesting, let's put it out there. But, in the end, the main Facebook post, we did a couple of them, reached 660,000 people just for moving these grain silos. So, we can't always predict what is going to be engaging and interesting, sometimes the public dictate that for us, and that is something we have learned about as we have been managing the Facebook page, is that there are some topics that people go absolutely wild for, missing persons, young missing person typically get massive amounts of engagement, anything to do with animals and dogs, in particular, gets massive engagement, so that is one thing that really caught us out at really early doors. There was a press release about a guy leaving a dog

chained up outside a bank while he went in and someone walked off with it, that got an enormous amount of engagement. So sometimes it can catch us off guard, that's you know, I say we try and pull out interesting content and put that in front of people, sometimes we try and force that a little bit, we have a budget set aside for promoting content, so if we think we have got particularly interesting content or content that we desperately want to put in front of people and try and get engagement with, then we'll put money behind it and boost that post. And, we use that for appeals where there are particularly high-level appeals like murder enquires, very vulnerable missing persons, we will put a bit of money behind that you know to try and get eyes on that who won't traditionally see them. But also, campaigns and things like that, that we desperately want to put in front of people, again going back to the knife amnesty there was a sum of money put aside specifically for that, and we do it more and more for campaigns we put money aside because we know there is only going to be so many people that will see our messages, that will *Like* a police Facebook page, people that may be interested in our content but would never *Like* our page for whatever reasons that they have. So, we have to try and make sure that we get that content in front of people because they may be people who can help or be affected by that content.

I: So how have social media platforms enabled this police force to be more transparent and accessible to the public?

P: Massively, I mean that is one thing with the SNT' twitter accounts, that was one of the key reasons we pushed ahead with it. The anecdote we give is that, people sometimes complain about you know 'I don't see my police officer that often in my community' when we know they are always out and about and they're always walking the streets, and the anecdote is someone sat in their house, a police officer going past there window and might appear at that window going past for a half a second, a second at most, the Twitter account gives them that long term

visibility so that a member of the community can go on and see that, their officer was not outside their house but was in the community and had been doing these actions, so that is a long term record of that. Someone can always go on and say 'ok my bobby is around, he was doing bike marking at Tesco', 'he was dealing with an ASB issue on the park', things like that, 'I can see now that my officer is dealing with those issues'. Whereas before, there was a perception of that old age complaint, not seeing them around, see we really wanted that to give, you know a bit more of an insight into what our officers get up to. And, for transparency purposes we are a very open police force, and we put a lot out there in terms of what we get up to, what we get right, and what we don't get quite as right. And again, those platforms allow people to see what we are doing and also engage with us and ask us questions, and we can hook them up in terms of getting a response to them about things they have seen or point them in the direction of our Freedom of Information department if it is statistics they want and things like that, so they can get the official stats. So, yeah, absolutely it gives people a greater insight into what we do.

I: How have social media platforms helped with public confidence and trust beyond other traditional techniques?

P: Yeah, we did do a survey on this I believe a couple of years back, it was an evaluation of our SNT Twitter accounts, just to see really what impact those have had. You know, we started the project initially with a few test accounts and about a year later I believe it was, we did a survey to see what impact it had, the public... calling off the top of my head, some of the questions were around 'are you more likely to report things?' and 'are you more likely to engage with your officers?'. And, all of those come back an overwhelming yes, we had improved the image of the police force and the officers, but also we had improved the notion that people will be more likely to engage with us and provide that Intel, to pick the phone up and report an issue. So, I truly believe they have served that purpose.

I: How have social media platforms impacted on police legitimacy?

P: Yeah, I hesitate to use the word issue because that denotes something negative, I think as a police force our outlook is... again we are an open honest police force we own up to our mistakes, we deal with misconduct and our officers are very aware when they are out there that any incident they deal with there is typically someone with a smartphone recording their actions. So, as a force we have had had issues, but I hesitate to use that word, incidents should I say, or you know times where people have posted videos of our officers going about their duties, that they believe to be you know falls short of the standards expected of a police officer, and sometimes we agree and sometimes not. Yeah, it is something that we have to manage but you know we deal with things correctly at [police force], we don't shy away from these things so if it enables the public to examine us, hold us to account, then fine that is what we will take on board. On the flip side of that, going to the point in terms of painting the picture of an incident that is something we have to deal with, sometimes these smartphone recordings only capture a small period of that incident and don't get the front and back of that. So, that is something we maybe have had to handle in terms of painting the full picture of why an officer maybe reacted in a certain way, like you know the smartphone doesn't show the offence leading up to that, but also on the flip side of that we have our own recording devices now in terms of officers have their own body worn video devices, and so they are able to capture their... whatever events they go to. So, we have got a record ourselves of how that actually played out, so we can talk to public about what our devices have, but also internally when we are talking about misconduct or things like that then we have got a record there to show how the officer may or may not have acted in the most appropriate way.

I: In what ways does this police force measure the success of social media communications, do you just use Sprout Social?

P: Sprout, or the native analytics within the platforms themselves are quite strong, so yeah after particularly big campaigns or you know noticeably successful post we will pick apart a bit more of the statistics behind that. Looking at things like the time of day, who has engaged with it, what spread is that engagement and where has it gone. It is something that actually we want to do a little bit more of, and that's you know the extra person who I get in my team potentially gives us a bit more capacity in the overall team to kind of drill into those details a little bit more, to step back and analyse that a little bit more, give it bit more breathing room to explore. So yeah it is something we look at and something we are mindful of, and it is things like you know what is the best time to publish a particular piece of content, you know to target a particular demographic and things like that, it is all these things that we take into account, so we can examine our past successes and plan for the future.

I: Ok, pressing forward now. How does this police force use the direct messaging functions on Facebook and Twitter?

P: We don't, we are perhaps looking at it and I know a few forces have gone live with that in the last year or two, in terms of offering I think some forces call it a digital desk, so allowing their content management teams to handle any messages that come in via those channels. We deliberately closed our channels, you know Twitter you can't really shut down, we do say in an emergency call 999 or call 101 and things like that. So, with Twitter we will handle service enquires that come in, and sometimes DM people where we need a bit more info so we can't point them in the right direction. So, we handle that as a team but Facebook direct messages we actually closed down, we had it open I believe for about the first year of us having that page, but

we are not a 24 hour team, and we can't provide that support and you know the potential there is that out of hours we could receive a very serious message from... say for example a vulnerable person that was contemplating suicide or something like that. While we didn't have that situation, there was a potential for that to happen, the risk was too great and a lot of the service queries that were coming in there were more contact centre queries, so not really ones we could handle and essentially we would be a conduit to the contact centre in terms of handling a new report or an ongoing report or incident and things like that. So we took the decision there to kind of close that off and only open it when we could adequately resource it, and make sure that those risks were addressed. And, this is something potentially looking down the line when we look a bit more at our digital self-service offerings, you know our digital contact methods, that is something that we may take into account as just one of the spreads of ways that people will be able to contact us digitally. You know, we have got online crime reporting launched a couple of weeks ago, and we'll be looking at more channels like that to just take a little bit of pressure off our contact centre and provide more convenience for the public, so they can contact us in whatever method suits them.

I: What would you change about the use of social media for police communications?

P: If I could have more people that would be awesome, there is a lot of demand on us and a lot of expectations around social channels, there is only so many we can tackle with the people that we have, and you know I'm not being critical or anything like that, but you know we could always use more people and more hands-on. We are getting there, and I guess we'd like to be on more channels and have more people pointed at it, you know we've got this extra person coming in, but I know a few other forces that have significantly more people in this area and are able to be a bit more flexible to meet the demands internally about you know... things like Facebook Live coming in, you know that has presented us with resourcing issues just with staffing in terms

of out of hours coverage and you know during hours coverage where we've got annual leave going on and things like that. So, really it is that resourcing side of things that is the biggest thing for us you know if I could change right now in how we use it, getting more hands-on and using it more, effectively. We get such great results from it, the more people you put at it the more platforms we can cover, the more engagement we can have and the more results we can get, and more cost-effective results as well. You know, it's one thing we've not really talked about in this entire conversation, but you know for what we do we are a relatively small team, and if you wanted to condense it down, you know just a handful of people that post onto our social channels, but the results we get and the time we save from officers going door to door, engaging with surgeries and engaging with local media. We can have results almost in hours, and we have had that where we've put an appeal out, and within an hour and a half someone has phoned up with an identity of a person in CCTV and things like that. You think about how much time may have been spent with an officer going door-to-door and trying to get something in the traditional media and the time lag on that, maybe it's only an extra day, that is a very cost-effective way for us to you know solve that crime or solve that crime that maybe would never have been solved because we never had that opportunity before. The return on investment is massive with social media, it really is.

I: How does this police force obtain public feedback on social media communications?

P: I guess a large amount of that is just listening to all the comments that we get and feed those back to the media relations team, feed them back to the officers, so that where we've done really well the officers get that feedback and where we've not done so well we feed that back as well, you know pass that public perception on about how an officer may have appeared or some strategy that we maybe didn't get quite right. We look at every comment that comes in and provide that feedback, so that is everyday kind of stuff. Every now and again we will fire up a

survey of some kind just to you know if we have got a particular topic that we want to look at, or we are thinking of exploring new channels, then we might kick off a proper survey and just get people's opinions a little bit more formally that way, albeit still you know a very easy way of getting that feedback back to us.

I: Ok, great. Expanding on that a little. How has public sentiment posted on social media platforms affected the way this police force operates both online and offline?

P: I would say yes, it has made us a little bit more mindful in some areas I guess in terms of public perceptions to some of the campaigns that we've had. Some of the messages that have gone out where we have had negative feedback about how certain things have been perceived, naturally we will take that on board and if we are ever thinking of running something similar in the future then we will be mindful of what we've done, maybe adjust the language or adjust the tone and things like that and try and make it more successful. It is all about the evaluation going forward, it is not just about the analytics and the reach and this, that and the other. It is also about you know what messages we receive back on that and what we could do better in the future. So yeah, in terms of has it affected how we police? Yeah, I would say absolutely.

I: Great, so last question. How do you think the use of social media platforms will change going forward?

P: It is difficult to predict, you know it is like Instagram coming out it is like Snapchat coming out, it is these kinds of platforms that you can't predict are going to appear and be so successful. I can only see it growing, I can't see any pulling back the drawbridge or anything like that, I think we are here now, we are invested in it and we can only invest in it more going forward. So, all I can see really in the future is more channels, more people involved, more platforms, so yeah just

a general expansion on that, more messages going out and a lot more video content. Certainly we are getting great results on that, you know it is a no-brainer really in terms of just the way content is going online and on social media channels it is going a lot more video based. So we are reacting to that, we are putting the resources behind that training, software, hardware and things like that to generate more video content and being smart about how we generate that content so that it is more accessible. Even though it is time-consuming, burning subtitles into those, so the auto-playing Facebook page it means that people can watch that without turning the sound on, because you know that it is not entirely appropriate in most situations, so we are evolving around that, and for us at [police force] that's a large part of where our future goes.

End of Transcript

Appendix 9: Ethical Approval



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8th February 2017

Our ref: SREC/2185

Arron Cullen
SOCSI

Dear Arron

Your project entitled 'Police and Social Media in England and Wales' has now been approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Cardiff University, and you can now commence the project.

If you make any substantial changes with ethical implications to the project as it progresses, you need to inform the SREC about the nature of these changes. Such changes could be: 1) changes in the type of participants recruited (e.g., inclusion of a group of potentially vulnerable participants), 2) changes to questionnaires, interview guides etc. (e.g., including new questions on sensitive issues), 3) changes to the way data are handled (e.g., sharing of non-anonymised data with other researchers).

In addition, if anything occurs in your project from which you think the SREC might usefully learn, then please do share this information with us.

All ongoing projects will be monitored, and you will be obliged periodically to complete and return an SREC monitoring form.

Please inform the SREC when the project has ended.

Please use the SREC's project reference number above in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Alan Felstead

Chair of the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee