

PLUGGED-IN POLICING: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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As police become increasingly active in cyberspace, questions are raised as to how they should use social media. Community sentiment should be the foundation from which social media policy is forged. This exploratory mixed-methods study examined student attitudes toward law enforcement's use of social media and assessed demographic and attitudinal variables which were related to student perceptions. Overall, students significantly supported some social media scenarios more than others, and race, privacy expectations, and authoritarianism were related to student sentiment. From open-ended responses, prevalent themes emerged; for instance, students think police are only trying to do their jobs. Responses often also pointed out differences between private and public information and domains.

Keywords: social media, policing, community sentiment, privacy

Social media has altered the way many people communicate, including how police organizations interact with society and investigate crime. For example, Cincinnati police investigators have used video discovered on Facebook to investigate serious crimes such as armed robbery (Yu, 2012). This case demonstrates how police can successfully employ social media to combat crime, but also raises questions regarding the degree to which police *should use* social media in their daily work.

In their report, the International Association of Chiefs of Police or IACP (2011a) noted that 88.1% of surveyed law enforcement agencies currently use some form of social media. This figure marks a dramatic shift in police procedures and policy, especially considering the newness of social media outlets and the fact that police organizations just recently have started to utilize social media. With this development, it is important to investigate how the public views police using social media.

Past research has suggested that public perceptions are essential for police to consider due to concerns of police legitimacy, police effectiveness, and public support (Bridenball & Jesilow, 2008; Brown & Benedict, 2002; Cihan & Wells, 2011; Schuck, Rosenbaum, &

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Hawkins, 2008). Although assessments of community sentiment toward police are important, relatively little research has been conducted on how the public perceives police using social media. The present study addresses this gap by studying a group which frequently interacts with social media and the police – college students (a fairly common sample in community sentiment research, see Miller, Blumenthal, & Chamberlain, (2013).

The main goal of this exploratory study was to investigate the degree to which college students support 11 different ways police can use social media. The relationship between these perceptions and gender, race, privacy expectations, and authoritarianism also was studied. Ideally, police administrators and officers will be able to use this study's results to create or improve social media policies that will be acceptable to the public.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLICING

The term *social media* refers to electronic communication in which users can generate and convey information, ideas, personal messages, and other content to various online communities (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Social media also can refer to websites, including social networking, blogs, wikis, and certain news sites (IACP Center for Social Media & IACP National Law Enforcement Policy Center, 2010a). The basic elements of these social media sites were developed during the 1990s and have grown much more complex (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Police organizations are increasingly using social media and developing social media policies. The IACP (2011a) notes that 48.6 % of surveyed police agencies had a social media policy, while an additional 22.1% were in the process of creating such a policy. Additionally, daily news stories describing examples of police using social media (see IACP, 2011b) demonstrate that the use of social media in policing is becoming common in many departments across the country. Websites such as IACPsocialmedia.org (2011c) and Cops2point0.com (2012) help police departments develop social media policies and suggest ways that social media can benefit police. For instance, both websites provide case studies on successful social media programs.

One way in which police have used social media relates to community-oriented policing. This policing philosophy centers on solving community issues that are criminal in nature, affect individuals' quality of life, or increase fear of crime (Peak & Glensor, 2008). Over time, community-oriented policing has been infused with problem-solving principles developed by Goldstein (1979; 1990) so that many organizations now focus on involving the community to address crime. Social media enhances this type of policing by allowing departments to engage the community and understand community perceptions of crime, quality of life, and other important issues (Stevens, 2010). For example, Facebook allows police to connect with community members in a way similar to a community bulletin board or public forum (Hodge, 2006). In Austin, Texas, police established a Facebook page that includes notices about offenders, pedestrian safety initiatives, and tips to minimize burglary risks (Austin Police Department, 2011). Police organizations have also used social media outlets such as YouTube to post videos promoting public safety. For instance,

the Belmont City Police Department (2011), in partnership with the local fire department, established an entire “channel” of YouTube videos addressing community issues such as crime prevention and emergency preparedness.

Community-oriented social media practices can help police foster community relationships, but police must use these tools effectively or risk alienating the community (see IACP Center for Social Media & IACP NLE Policy Center, 2010b). Brainard and Derrick-Mills (2011) analyzed dialogue in online police forums and found that such forums could act as an effective channel of communication between police and citizens, but police needed to improve their communication skills, for example, by having more empathy toward citizens and “actively listening” online (p. 407). Thus, although police may be using social media tools, they may not be using them effectively.

While police use social media techniques to engage the community, a majority (71.1%) of studied police agencies also use social media for investigative purposes (IACP, 2011a). Wilson (2007) emphasizes this point by suggesting that “point-and-click policing” has become an increasingly popular method for conducting investigations due to the importance of electronic evidence (p. 1224).

Investigation techniques take a variety of forms in the digital realm, with some being more intrusive than others. For example, enforcement officials can go undercover and “trick” or mislead individuals into revealing information through the creation of false social network identities (Masis, 2009; United States Department of Justice, Computer Crime & Intellectual Property Section, 2009). Police also can learn more about a suspect’s associates and find admissions of guilt (e.g., a criminal brags about his crimes) through public social media channels (Marsico Jr., 2010; Yu, 2012). Federal agents often employ social networks such as Facebook and MySpace to gather general information about gang members, their families, and friends (Wilber, 2011). This effort allows police to identify individual gang members and learn more about gang relationships and structure as a whole. Overall, there are a number of ways in which police use social media for investigations.

Investigative endeavors involving social media are regulated by department policy. For example, some departments only employ social media in cases that involve young people (Masis, 2009). Other departments have a single officer or small group who manage social media investigations (Read, 2006). Some departments also use social media on a case-by-case basis depending on the situation and individuals involved. Regardless of the exact method used, social media policy control is necessary due to legal risks and management concerns (Stevens, 2010).

Ideally, all police departments in the future will base their social media policies off of a standard model which outlines department practices. Current models such as the IACP’s Model Policy on Social Media (2010a) assist police departments in shaping policy. As noted in the following section, community sentiment should play an important role in the construction and design of these models and policies.

COMMUNITY SENTIMENT AND POLICING

Community sentiment is important to consider when studying policing. However, community sentiment research has largely been directed toward other social issues. For example, Finkel (1995) examined the importance of community sentiment to lawmakers and certain judicial philosophies. Other scholars such as Blumenthal (2003) highlighted the necessary role of public opinion in policymaking and assessed roles of jurors in the courtroom. Additionally, scholars have focused on how community sentiment is used for interpreting legal issues such as the right to die (Finkel, Hurabiell, & Hughes, 1993) and community standards regarding obscenity (Summers & Miller, 2009).

Although much community sentiment research focuses on criminal justice issues outside of policing, numerous studies address citizens' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of police and police procedure (Bridenball & Jesilow, 2008; Brown & Benedict, 2002; Cihan & Wells, 2011; Decker, 1981; Gabbidon & Higgins, 2009; Schuck et al., 2008; Shaw, Shapiro, Lock, & Jacobs, 1998). Within this body of research, various explanations are provided as to why community sentiment toward the police is critical. For instance, public hostility and distrust toward police can hinder crime control efforts (Brown & Benedict, 2002) and affect the public's willingness to support, collaborate, and comply with police (Cihan & Wells, 2011). Furthermore, public opinion allows police to gauge the effects of community relation programs (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2009).

One fairly common method of measuring community sentiment is to survey university students (Miller et al., 2013). Studies have used student samples to measure attitudes toward topics including criminal punishment (Farnworth, Longmire, & West, 1998; Mackey & Courtright, 2000), juvenile justice policy (Benekos, Merlo, Cook, & Bagley, 2002), fear of crime (Dull & Wint, 1997), death penalty (Payne & Coogle, 1998), electronic monitoring of offenders (Payne & Gaaney, 1999) and the war on drugs (Farnworth et al., 1998), among many other criminal justice topics. The current study is the most recent in this long line of studies that use student samples to understand attitudes toward criminal justice issues.

Some studies have found differences between students and community members; for instance, students and non-students differed in their reactions to medical malpractice (Reichert, Miller, Bornstein, & Shelton, 2011) and workplace sexism (Schwartz & Hunt, 2011). Many other studies, however, find no relevant differences between students and non-students (e.g., Bothwell, Pigott, Foley, & McFatter, 2006; for review of studies see Bornstein, 1999). Some researchers have determined that any differences are inconsistent and difficult to predict (e.g., Nuñez, McCrea, & Culhane, 2011).

One current position is that research using student samples is normative and generally appropriate (especially for exploratory research); however, follow-up studies using broader samples are often helpful to determine whether results generalize to broader samples (e.g., Chomos & Miller, 2013; Miller et al., 2013; Wiener, Krauss, & Lieberman, 2011). Students are an appropriate sample for this exploratory study because they are likely

more familiar with social media and have more established attitudes toward police use of social media. Follow-up studies can determine whether findings generalize past this group.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND ATTITUDES TOWARD POLICING

Demographic and attitudinal variables sometimes affect individuals' perceptions of police (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Decker, 1981) and police procedure (Cihan & Wells, 2011). Specific factors including gender, race, privacy expectations, and authoritarianism may affect individual attitudes toward police using social media.

Gender

The relationship between gender and attitudes toward policing is complicated. In general, most studies fail to find significant gender differences. For instance, Bridenball and Jesilow (2008) found that gender and an assortment of other demographic factors did not significantly influence attitudes toward police. However, Lasely (1994) notes that regardless of their race, females were more favorable toward police than males before and after the Rodney King incident. As Gallagher, Maguire, Mastrofski, and Reisig (2001) point out, gender findings can be quite erratic across different studies. Despite mixed findings among studies, gender is an important variable to consider when studying social media because there are relatively few studies researching gender differences and social media communications (Thompson & Loughheed, 2012).

Race

The relationship between race and attitudes toward policing is well-established (e.g., Gabbidon & Higgins, 2009). African Americans generally hold less favorable opinions of police than whites (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Gallagher et al., 2001; Lasley, 1994; Schuck et al., 2008; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005; Worrall, 1999). Latinos' attitudes toward police stand somewhere in between those of whites and African Americans (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Lasley, 1994; Schuck et al., 2008). Race has some relationship with perceptions of police; however, it is unknown whether this concept extends to perceptions of police using social media.

Privacy Expectations

Few empirical studies focus on individual perceptions of privacy (Blumenthal, Adya, & Mogle, 2009), and we could find no research that has examined the relationship between privacy expectations and attitudes toward police. Instead, most studies focus on helping define expectations of privacy. For example, perceptions of intrusiveness regarding specific police actions such as searching a bedroom have been studied to help understand privacy expectations (Slobogin & Schumacher, 1993). Although this information may be helpful for defining privacy expectations, it has not been applied to people's privacy expectations in the virtual realm. This relationship may be especially important to study given that much communication takes place over social media outlets (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). With these ideas considered, it is possible that privacy expectations might be related to perceptions of police using social media.

Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism refers to support for conventional values, respect for authority, and acceptance of the use of power and force. The concept of “legal authoritarianism” focuses on these perceptions in terms of the law (Martin & Cohn, 2004). There is only limited research on the relationship between authoritarianism and perceptions of police (Riley, 2006). For instance, stronger authoritarian values are associated with increased acceptance of police action among sociology students (e.g., Larsen, 1968) and support for police use of force (Riley, 2006). From this small body of research, it can be hypothesized that these trends extend to perceptions of police using social media.

STUDY OVERVIEW

This exploratory study investigates student sentiment toward police use of social media. An online survey measured student perceptions of police practices which varied in degrees of intrusiveness; it also measured a variety of demographic and attitudinal variables (see Appendix). As previously noted, this assessment of public sentiment is valuable to police for a variety of reasons including legitimacy and effectiveness (Bridenball & Jesilow, 2008; Brown & Benedict, 2002; Cihan & Wells, 2011; Schuck et al., 2008).

This study is designed to explore the following research questions: Do students have more positive sentiment toward some police practices than other practices? What themes arise from participants’ comments about various police practices regarding social media? Is there a relationship between support for police use of social media and 1) gender 2) race 3) privacy expectations and 4) authoritarianism?

Sample Description

After enrolling in various social sciences classes at a Western university in the United States, students were notified that they could receive partial course credit by participating in studies using the university’s research system. Participants could choose many different studies. Those who chose this study logged on to surveymonkey.com to participate. Many of the 155 participants were criminal justice (38.6%) and psychology/sociology (17.9%) majors, but health (5.5%) and other majors (33.7%) also were represented. Participant ages ranged between 18 to 55 years old, and the average age was 23. The sample contained more women (63.4%) than men and was 69.5% White, 7.8% African American, 11.0% Hispanic American, and 11.7% “other” races, which is racially similar to the region where the study was conducted.

Survey

Participants indicated their level of support for 11 scenarios describing police uses of social media. These actions included a range of procedures which varied in degrees of intrusiveness (see Appendix). For example, one scenario described police using Twitter as an alert system during a flood, while another scenario dealt with a police officer going undercover to pose as a suspect’s brother on Facebook. Support and opposition to these practices were measured through a Likert-format response ranging from 1 (Strongly Oppose) to

5 (Strongly Support). After being presented with each scenario, participants were asked a follow-up free response question: “What are your reasons for your support or opposition?”

In addition to these techniques, various scales were employed. Smith, Milberg, and Burke’s (1996) Information Privacy Instrument was used to measure participants’ concerns over privacy. This instrument measures individuals’ concerns of information privacy regarding organizational practices. Since police departments are organizational entities, this is an appropriate tool to measure citizens’ expectations of privacy concerning police use of social media. Items in this scale deal with how organizations handle personal information (e.g., “It bothers me to give personal information to so many companies”). The 15 items were measured using a Likert-format response ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree).

Additionally, five questions measuring privacy expectations were examined for the purpose of this study. These researcher-generated questions used a Likert-format response ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). As an example, one item stated, “The right to privacy is a necessary right.” A factor analysis indicated that the five privacy questions loaded on two separate factors. The Necessary Right, Privacy Degradation, and Privacy Laws questions loaded strongly on a “general privacy” factor (factor loadings of .75 or higher) and the Social Media Privacy and Internet Privacy questions loaded strongly on a “social media/Internet privacy” factor (factor loadings of .81 or higher). The three items measuring general privacy scale were all significantly correlated (all $r_s > .34$; all $p_s < .001$), so they were averaged to create a “General Privacy Expectation” scale. The two items measuring social media/Internet privacy were also significantly correlated ($r = .37, p < .001$), so these two items were averaged to create an “Internet Privacy Expectations” scale.

The Revised Legal Attitudes Questionnaire (RLAQ) was used to measure levels of authoritarianism (Kravitz, Cutler, & Brock, 1993). Items from this scale assess how willing participants are to defer to an authority figure and their willingness to accept judgment of those in authority, e.g., “Any person who resists arrest commits a crime.” These 23 items were measured using a Likert-format response ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Questions were also reverse coded if applicable and averaged to create the scale.

RESULTS

Students’ Attitudes

The first research question asked whether students have more positive attitudes toward some police uses of social media than others. A within-subjects ANOVA analysis using the 11 different police actions as repeated measures variables indicated a significant variation of support ($F(10,148) = 52.39, p < .001, \eta^2 = .26$). Table 1 highlights the variations in the average support for each police action.

Table 1
Student Support for Social Media Scenarios

Scenarios	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
(a)Department Facebook ^{defghij}	4.21	.89
(b)Missing Girl ^{efghij}	4.14	.80
(c)Department YouTube ^{efghij}	4.09	.89
(d)Sex Offender ^{abceghij}	3.98	1.07
(e)Flood Alert ^{abceghij}	3.91	.98
(f)Drug Dealing ^{abceghij}	3.91	1.14
(g)Reporter's Question ^{abcdefij}	3.38	1.00
(h)Suspect from Friends ^{abcdefj}	3.28	1.22
(i)Community Forum ^{abcdefg}	3.15	1.05
(j)Software ^{abcdefgh}	2.98	1.21
(k)Posing ^{abcdefghij}	2.58	1.16
Overall Support	3.60	.55

Note. Responses for social media scenarios were based on a 5-point Likert scale (1-Strongly Oppose to 5-Strongly Support); Superscript letters (i.e. ^a) on scenarios indicate scenarios that significantly differ from labeled scenario at $p < 0.05$.

Table 1 also shows that responses to most police actions significantly differ from one another. For instance, the Missing Girl scenario, which regarded police posting personal information on Facebook to find a missing girl, was significantly different from all other scenarios at $p < .05$ except for the Posing scenario, which concerned an officer posing as a suspect's brother online, and the Department YouTube scenario, which involved police posting crime prevention information on their YouTube page. Table 1 also illustrates the actions which received the greatest and least support from participants. Specifically, the action which received the most support was police posting suspect information on Facebook. The action that received the least support involved a police officer posing as a suspect's brother to obtain information about a suspect. Overall, the mean for the 11 items was 3.60 (range from 2.58-4.21) on the scale from 1 to 5 suggesting that participants were quite supportive of police using social media, although they were more supportive of some than others.

Common Themes

The themes research question addressed common themes arising from participants' explanations as to why they supported or opposed various social media actions. In all, qualitative responses were collected with response length ranging from single words to paragraphs. Within this qualitative data, common themes emerged. To ensure reliability

within theme coding, two procedures were used. The first was a coding practice session. The second was actual interrater reliability calculations. These steps ensured that the coding was not an artifact of either coder's bias and that the definitions established were understood the same by both coders.

The practice session started with the first author compiling a numbered list of all responses. Any response could contain one or more "comments." For instance, one participant response was "this method could reach many people. However, it might violate a person's privacy." This response would be coded as both Theme Five and Theme Three (discussed later). Because participants often had multiple comments and because each of the 155 participants was allowed to respond to each of the 11 questions, there were 788 comments. The first author looked for themes and came up with operational definitions for seven common themes and coded the comments accordingly. The second author then coded a random sample of responses and coded them using the operational definitions for these seven themes. The authors compared responses, discussed differences, and adjusted operational definitions so that both authors could understand them similarly. The second author also noticed two other themes and decided to include the operational definitions for these themes. This finalized the codebook (e.g., operational definitions for each of the nine themes). The first author then re-coded all the comments using the nine themes. Then came the second step, interrater reliability.

Table 2
Theme Frequency and Interrater Reliability from Qualitative Responses

Scenarios	Themes									Total
	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine	
Department Facebook	39	0	2	2	10	3	5	0	13	74
Missing Girl	3	1	9	1	32	17	9	0	12	84
Department YouTube	5	1	0	2	12	7	13	0	3	43
Sex Offender	7	10	13	2	2	0	0	0	0	34
Flood Alert	2	0	1	0	27	43	3	0	18	94
Drug Dealing	22	49	17	8	1	0	2	0	0	99
Reporter's Question	21	3	0	2	0	0	10	20	0	56
Suspect from Friends	11	32	32	11	1	0	2	0	0	89
Community Forum	14	1	2	2	6	2	10	36	4	77
Software	11	11	12	13	0	0	15	1	1	64
Posing	11	3	7	51	1	0	0	0	1	74
Total Comments	146	111	95	94	92	72	69	57	52	788
Holsti's Coefficient	.81	.89	.91	.95	.84	.90	.86	.84	.95	.88

Note. See text for definitions of each theme.

Table 2 shows intercoder reliability results. These findings were assessed using 158 randomly selected comments (20% of all theme comments). Holsti's coefficients were calculated using the ratio of the total number of codes assigned by either author and the total number of agreements. To illustrate, researchers agreed that 85 of the comments fit into Theme Five; however they disagreed on 16 (e.g., one thought the comment fit in this theme, but the other did not). This resulted in a Holsti's coefficient of $(85/101) = .84$. Reliabilities for each category indicated acceptable rates of intercoder consistency, ranging from .81 (Theme One) to .95 (Themes Four and Nine). The total Holsti's coefficient for all themes was .88, which is an acceptable level of agreement.

Explanations were analyzed using nine themes established by the researchers. Definitions and examples of each theme follow:

- Theme One addressed the idea that police were just doing their jobs and their social media usage was justified (e.g., "In today's times, police have to use all means necessary to catch criminals").
- Theme Two dealt with the idea that students believed public information on social media sites should be accessible by the police (e.g., "...the information is public so they have every right to look at his page").
- Theme Three noted students' concerns that police should be wary of accessing private information (e.g., "I believe that's personal information and [she] needs a warrant").
- Theme Four addressed how students thought social media could be abused by police (e.g., "I feel like this is very lazy and that they aren't doing their job the way that they were trained").
- Theme Five concerned how students believed that social media could contact a large number of people (e.g., "It helps inform a wider population").
- Theme Six dealt with the appropriateness of using social media. For example, some participants thought social media was a better tool than traditional media for conveying information to young people; however, they also recognized that social media may not be appropriate as a means to inform all groups (e.g., "I support this because a lot of the time, young adults don't check news programs but they do tend to pay attention to social networking sites").
- Theme Seven dealt with negative consequences or effects that might occur from police using social media in their work (e.g., "Many people may say things that could be criminal out of context").
- Theme Eight noted participants' concerns about police organizations' transparency involving social media practices (e.g., "Police methods and practices should always be disclosed").

- Theme Nine described how participants believed social media could help the police disseminate information quickly and efficiently (e.g., “[Social media h]elps spread [the] word quickly”).

Table 2 lists how often each theme appeared in response to each of the 11 scenarios. In all, Theme One was the most prevalent and occurred 146 times. The strong presence of this theme suggests that many participants were comfortable with police using social media in a variety of situations. This finding aligns with data from the first research question showing general support for police use of social media.

Gender and Race

One research question involved the relationship between gender and participants’ perceptions of police use of social media. A MANOVA, using gender as the independent variable and support for the 11 scenarios as the dependent variables, was not significant ($F(1,135) = .95, p > .05, \eta^2 = .07$). In fact, the only police action that approached significance was the Department Facebook scenario ($F(1,135) = 2.92, p = .055, \eta^2 = .03$). However, in general, women supported the Drug Dealing, Reporter’s Question, and Community Forum scenarios more than men while men supported the remaining eight scenarios more than women (see Table 3).

Table 3
Mean Support for Social Media Scenarios by Gender and Race

Scenarios	Gender		Race			
	Men	Women	White	African Am	Hispanic	Other
Department Facebook	4.39	4.10	4.25	3.67	4.35	4.18
Missing Girl	4.24	4.08	4.17	3.58	4.41	4.12
Department YouTube	4.19	4.02	4.10	3.83	4.47	3.82
Sex Offender	4.04	3.94	4.18	4.08	3.41	3.24
Flood Alert	3.96	3.86	3.94	3.50	4.06	3.82
Drug Dealing	3.80	3.97	3.90	3.58	3.88	4.18
Reporter’s Question	3.26	3.44	3.32	3.50	3.35	3.59
Suspect from Friends	3.31	3.24	3.36	2.75	3.06	3.29
Community Forum	3.13	3.16	2.26	2.75	2.71	3.29
Software	3.11	2.88	3.01	2.58	2.82	3.18
Posing	2.67	2.55	2.65	2.83	2.12	2.47
Average Support	3.65	3.57	3.56	3.33	3.51	3.56

Note. Responses for social media scenarios were based on a 5-point Likert scale (1-Strongly Oppose to 5-Strongly Support).

Table 3 also reveals data relating to racial divisions. To address the race research question, race was divided into four different categories (White, Hispanic, African

American, Other). This division helped to avoid placing groups with conflicting viewpoints together; however, the division also caused African Americans to have smaller sample numbers ($n = 12$) than other groups. Thus, this analysis should be taken with caution. A MANOVA using racial groups as an independent variable and support for social media scenarios as dependent variables was significant ($F(3, 134) = 1.70, p < .05, \eta^2 = .121$). Overall, the White and Other groups showed the highest average support for the collective scenarios ($M = 3.56$), then the Hispanic group ($M = 3.51$), and lastly, the African American group ($M = 3.33$). Univariate analyses indicate that the Sex Offender ($F(3, 134) = 6.12, p < .01, \eta^2 = .113$) and Missing Girl ($F(3, 134) = 2.72, p < .05, \eta^2 = .054$) scenarios were significantly related to race, see Table 3.

Privacy Expectations

The privacy expectations research question was examined using bivariate correlations between the 11 social media scenarios and each privacy scale. Results from the Information Privacy Instrument created by Smith et al. (1996) showed that the Missing Girl scenario was positively and significantly related to privacy expectations ($r = (154) .168, p < .05$) but no other scenarios. More significant relationships were found using the General Privacy Expectations scale which showed that Drug Dealing ($r = (154) -.180, p < .05$), Reporter's Question ($r = (155) -.217, p < .01$), Posing ($r = (152) -.282, p < .01$), and Software ($r = (155) -.288, p < .01$) scenarios were all significantly and negatively related to general privacy expectations. The Internet Privacy Expectations scale showed similar results because the Drug Dealing ($r = (154) -.285, p < .01$), Reporter's Question ($r = (155) -.189, p < .05$), Suspect from Friends ($r = (155) -.210, p < .01$), and Software ($r = (155) -.164, p < .05$) scenarios were significantly and negatively related to Internet privacy expectations. Data on these correlations can be found in Table 4.

Table 4
Pearson Correlations between Social Media Scenarios and Different Scales

Scenarios	Information Privacy	General Privacy Expectations	Internet Privacy Expectations	RLAQ
Department Facebook	.137	.010	-.153	.039
Missing Girl	.168*	.046	-.146	.047
Department YouTube	.096	.021	-.046	-.013
Sex Offender	.021	.058	-.156	.144
Flood Alert	.124	.119	.052	-.056
Drug Dealing	.020	-.180*	-.285**	.231**
Reporter's Question	-.138	-.217**	-.189*	.370**
Suspect from Friends	.034	-.067	-.210*	.261**
Community Forum	.086	-.075	-.037	.091
Software	-.048	-.288**	-.164*	.261**
Posing	-.045	-.282**	-.131	.234**

*Significant at $p < .05$

**Significant at $p < .01$

Authoritarianism

Table 4 conveys data regarding correlations between authoritarianism and attitudes toward police use of social media. Specifically, the Drug Dealing ($r = (151) .231, p < .01$), Suspect from Friends ($r = (152) .261, p < .01$), Reporter's Question ($r = (152) .370, p < .01$), Posing ($r = (149) .234, p < .01$), and Software ($r = (152) .261, p < .01$) scenarios were all significantly and positively correlated to the RLAQ scale.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this study was merely exploratory, some tentative conclusions can be made. Results indicated general support for police using various types of social media. Most police actions received substantial support (see Table 1), and many respondents believed that police were just doing their job (see Theme One in Table 2). However, some actions such as the Software scenario, which concerned police using software to actively seek out crimes, received substantially less support. One possible explanation for this difference is that actions receiving high support focused on community involvement, while policies with low support excluded community involvement. For example, the Missing Girl scenario involved community and police positively cooperating to locate a missing person while the Posing scenario did not involve the community. This explanation aligns with previous findings showing that community-oriented policing and involvement can positively affect citizens' satisfaction and perceptions of the police (Bridenball & Jesilow, 2008; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Based on these initial findings, social media actions that promote community involvement should be employed more readily than those that do not.

Another potential explanation for differences in student support relates to transparency. Transparency was a common theme addressed by respondents (see Theme Eight in Table 2) which might relate to support for certain actions. For example, the Department Facebook scenario received significantly more support than the Community Forum scenario even though both actions were similar in nature. Participants' open-ended responses indicated that the major difference between the two actions was that the Department Facebook scenario clearly disclosed suspect information while the Community Forum scenario did not. This difference suggests that the public might associate a lack of transparency with deceitfulness. Police organizations should consider this finding when deciding on how much information to release online.

Results pertaining to how demographic factors relate to student perceptions generally complemented previous findings. As previously noted, gender's effect on citizens' perceptions of police and police action can vary greatly (Gallagher et al., 2001). This exploratory study found that gender was not related to support for police use of social media. This result is similar to others finding gender is not related to citizens' attitudes toward police (Bridenball & Jesilow, 2008).

Unlike gender, race was significantly related to support for police use of social media. Results should be taken with caution, however, because of the small sample size of African Americans in the sample (and in the population where the sample was taken).

White and Other racial groups showed the most support for police actions while Hispanics and African Americans showed less support overall (see Table 3). Although Hispanics indicated lower support than other groups on some actions, they showed high support for other actions. For example, Department Facebook, Missing Girl, Department YouTube, and Flood Alert scenarios were favored more by Hispanics than any other group. This finding supports previous findings showing that race relates to attitudes toward police (Brown & Benedict, 2002) and suggests that different racial groups have different attitudes toward legal issues (Adya, Miller, Singer, Thomas, & Padilla, 2006). Additionally, this result raises questions about minority viewpoints and community sentiment. Community sentiment is important to consider in policy decisions (Blumenthal, 2003; Finkel, 1995) but so are minority viewpoints. In the future, police should try to balance these two concepts when constructing policy.

Privacy expectations also probably played a role in how participants viewed certain police actions. Table 4 illustrates that all three privacy scales showed at least one significant relationship between privacy expectations and police actions. Most of these relationships were negatively related to support for police actions; however, the Information Privacy Instrument was positively related to support for the Missing Girl scenario. This result suggests that in most cases, higher privacy scores correlated with greater opposition of police action, but in special cases, people might disregard privacy concerns to support police action.

Differences in public and private information were noted in participant responses (see Theme Two and Theme Three in Table 2). Students supported police investigations involving public information such as the Drug Dealing scenario, but they became hesitant to support actions in which privacy concerns emerged such as with the Suspect from Friends scenario. These two findings may suggest that privacy expectations significantly relate to students' perceptions of police using social media. The different scales used in this study expand upon established ideas proposing that privacy expectations should be addressed with multidimensional considerations (Blumenthal et al., 2009). Thus, researchers should make multiple measures of privacy in future research.

Authoritarianism also appeared to be related to student sentiment, especially for the more intrusive actions. Nonintrusive actions were not controversial, and therefore, were viewed as part of the police job and may have been acceptable to everyone, regardless of their authoritarianism level. For example, the Posing and Software scenarios might have been seen as more controversial and significantly related to authoritarianism scores while the Department Facebook and Missing Girl scenarios might not have been seen as very controversial and thus were not significantly related to authoritarianism scores. Overall, students with a high authoritarian score were more likely to support these intrusive policies, as expected. These findings concerning authoritarianism support past findings on the relationship between authoritarianism and police action such as police use of force (Riley, 2006).

Although results of this exploratory study are tentative, they suggest that some changes can be made to improve police policy and procedure. Primarily, police might create social media policies with greater consideration for public sentiment. Although the IACP's Model Policy on Social Media (2010a) and similar policies provide valuable insight on policy construction, these documents should further highlight the importance of public sentiment. This goal could be achieved by simply adding a section describing the importance of police image in online environments. Image and efficacy are important factors that can affect public support for police (Worrall, 1999) so police should have a keen understanding of their online image.

LIMITATIONS

Results should be taken with caution because of the limitations of this study, which are similar to the limitations of many community sentiment studies (e.g. Chomos & Miller, 2013). One limitation relates to the sample. College students encompass a large portion of the social media community (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Govani & Pashley, 2005), but they do not represent the entire adult community. For this reason, the studied group may not fully represent public sentiment toward the issue. Demographics are related to community sentiment only on some issues (Chomos & Miller, 2013); nevertheless, it is important that future studies explore a broader sample. While student samples are generally accepted in community sentiment research, it is important to follow exploratory studies (like this one) with broader samples (e.g., Weiner et al., 2011; Miller et al., 2013). A related limitation of this study was that the study did not consider age as a demographic variable. Past research suggests that age is related to perceptions of police (Bridenball & Jesilow, 2008; Decker, 1981) and thus future studies should investigate whether age also relates to support for police use of social media.

Finally, the limited number of African Americans (and minorities in general) is also a weakness of the study, as this group made up only 7.8% of the sample. Although the sample generally reflected the demographics of the area where the study was conducted, it might not reflect the sentiment of areas with different demographic compositions. Race sometimes is related to attitudes toward legal issues, although studies find mixed results (see Adya et al., 2006). To address possible bias, future research should oversample minority groups. Such research should also examine other groups of people such as 18-24 year olds who do not attend college and older adults. These follow-up studies would reduce any bias in the current sample based on limited demographics.

CONCLUSION

As American society transitions into the future, more conflicts involving police use of technology are likely to emerge. The issue of law enforcement using GPS tracking in the Supreme Court case *U.S. v. Jones* (2011) has made this likelihood a reality. It may be necessary for police to turn to public sentiment for guidance in developing social media policy. This is especially important because privacy is currently being redefined in an age

of cyberspace. Although the results of this study show fairly strong student support of community policing efforts in the realm of social media, police must still approach the issue cautiously, as not everyone will accept these actions – especially those actions that arguably violate privacy, deceive, or work against community involvement. Whenever police are actively engaged in communities, offline or online, it is imperative that the procedures they follow in regulating order are controlled in a manner that is acceptable to the public they protect. While this study is the first to investigate sentiment toward police use of social media, future studies are needed to more fully understand sentiment of the entire community.

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APPENDIX

Police and social media scenarios

1. During a flash flood, police agencies send out alerts via Twitter to help alert the community of danger. (“Flood Alert” scenario)
 - To what degree, do you support/oppose the police using this social media/networking policy? (Likert 1-5 Response)
 - What are your reasons for your support or opposition? (Free Response)
2. After a young girl goes missing, police post pictures and basic information about her on their Facebook page in order to help locate the child. (“Missing Girl” scenario)
 - To what degree, do you support/oppose the police using this social media/networking policy? (Likert 1-5 Response)
 - What are your reasons for your support or opposition? (Free Response)
3. Police Officer Joe discovers a message on a known drug dealer’s public Twitter account indicating the date and time that a drug deal is scheduled to go down. When the dealer shows up, he is taken into custody by Officer Joe and the police. (“Drug Dealing” scenario)
 - To what degree, do you support/oppose the police using this social media/networking policy? (Likert 1-5 Response)
 - What are your reasons for your support or opposition? (Free Response)
4. A patrol officer attempts to examine a suspect’s Facebook profile for information, but it is set to a privacy level that the officer cannot readily access. In turn, the officer views the public profiles of the suspect’s friends. Information found here through posts and pictures result in an arrest of the suspect. (“Suspect from Friends” scenario)
 - To what degree, do you support/oppose the police using this social media/networking policy? (Likert 1-5 Response)
 - What are your reasons for your support or opposition? (Free Response)
5. A police department begins to upload videos on YouTube which offer helpful knowledge about police operations and crime prevention advice. (“Department YouTube” scenario)
 - To what degree, do you support/oppose the police using this social media/networking policy? (Likert 1-5 Response)
 - What are your reasons for your support or opposition? (Free Response)

6. Police post pictures and a video on their department's Facebook page of a man robbing a local convenience store. Within a few hours, they receive numerous tips that help to identify the suspect. ("Department Facebook" scenario)
 - To what degree, do you support/oppose the police using this social media/networking policy? (Likert 1-5 Response)
 - What are your reasons for your support or opposition? (Free Response)
7. A police officer refuses a reporter's request to disclose the standard practices for using social media and networking during investigations. The police officer states that the information is critical to ongoing investigations. ("Reporter's Question" scenario)
 - To what degree, do you support/oppose the police using this social media/networking policy? (Likert 1-5 Response)
 - What are your reasons for your support or opposition? (Free Response)
8. A registered sex offender's social networking accounts are occasionally monitored by police three years after he is released from prison. ("Sex Offender" scenario)
 - To what degree, do you support/oppose the police using this social media/networking policy? (Likert 1-5 Response)
 - What are your reasons for your support or opposition? (Free Response)
9. Posing as a suspect's brother on MySpace, a police detective acquires a wealth of evidence reinforcing her fraud case against the individual. ("Posing" scenario)
 - To what degree, do you support/oppose the police using this social media/networking policy? (Likert 1-5 Response)
 - What are your reasons for your support or opposition? (Free Response)
10. A police organization gains access to software which has the ability to actively search through social media sites for key words and phrases associated with criminal activity. Once enough words or phrases are identified by the system, they can employ this information to help obtain search warrants. ("Software" scenario)
 - To what degree, do you support/oppose the police using this social media/networking policy? (Likert 1-5 Response)
 - What are your reasons for your support or opposition? (Free Response)

11. On a popular community-based internet forum, police post pictures of a female suspect. They provide information about her physical characteristics and last known whereabouts, but no information regarding the reason for her status as a suspect is provided. (“Community Forum” scenario)
- To what degree, do you support/oppose the police using this social media/networking policy? (Likert 1-5 Response)
 - What are your reasons for your support or opposition? (Free Response)

Information Privacy Instrument (Smith et al., 1996)

Here are some statements about personal information. From the standpoint of personal privacy, please indicate the extent to which you, as an individual, agree or disagree with each statement by marking the appropriate number (Strongly Disagree 1 – Strongly Agree 7):

- a. It usually bothers me when companies ask me for personal information.
- b. All the personal information in computer databases should be double-checked for accuracy--no matter how much it costs.
- c. Companies should not use personal information for any purpose unless it has been authorized by the individuals who provided the information.
- d. Companies should devote more time and effort to preventing unauthorized access to personal information.
- e. When companies ask me for personal information, I sometimes think twice before providing it.
- f. Companies should take more steps to make sure that the personal information in their files is accurate.
- g. When people give personal information to a company for some reason, the company should never use the information for any other reason.
- h. Companies should have better procedures to correct errors in personal information.
- i. Computer databases that contain personal information should be protected from unauthorized access--no matter how much it costs.
- j. It bothers me to give personal information to so many companies.
- k. Companies should never sell the personal information in their computer databases to other companies.
- l. Companies should devote more time and effort to verifying the accuracy of the personal information in their databases.
- m. Companies should never share personal information with other companies unless it has been authorized by individuals who provided the information.

- n. Companies should take more steps to make sure that unauthorized people cannot access personal information in their computers.
- o. I'm concerned that companies are collecting too much personal information about me.

General Privacy Expectations scale

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements (Likert 1-5 Response):

1. The right to privacy is a necessary right. ("Necessary Right" Question)
2. In recent years, the right to privacy has degraded. ("Privacy Degradation" Question)
3. There should be more laws protecting privacy rights. ("Privacy Laws" Question)

Social Media Privacy Expectations scale

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements (Likert 1-5 Response):

1. A person should expect limited privacy rights when using social media/networking. ("Social Media Privacy" Question) [Reverse Code]
2. A person does not have the right to privacy on the internet. ("Internet Privacy" Question) [Reverse Code]

Revised Legal Attitudes Questionnaire (Kravitz, Cutler, & Brock, 1993)

Please indicate your agreement with the following items (Likert 1-5 Response):

1. Unfair treatment of under privileged groups and classes is the chief cause of crime. (Reverse Code)
2. Too many obviously guilty persons escape punishment because of legal technicalities.
3. Evidence illegally obtained should be admissible in court if such evidence is the only way of obtaining a conviction.
4. Search warrants should clearly specify the person or things to be seized. (Reverse Code)
5. No one should be convicted of a crime on the basis of circumstantial evidence, no matter how strong such evidence is. (Reverse Code)
6. There is no need in a criminal case for the accused to prove his innocence beyond a reasonable doubt. (Reverse Code)
7. Any person who resists arrest commits a crime.
8. When determining a person's guilt or innocence, the existence of a prior arrest record should not be considered. (Reverse Code)

9. Wiretapping by anyone and for any reason should be completely illegal. (Reverse Code)
10. Defendants in a criminal case should be required to take the witness stand.
11. All too often, minority group members do not get fair trials. (Reverse Code)
12. Because of the oppression and persecution minority group members suffer, they deserve leniency and special treatment in the courts. (Reverse Code)
13. Citizens need to be protected against excess police power as well as against criminals. (Reverse Code)
14. It is better for society that several guilty men be freed than one innocent one wrongfully imprisoned. (Reverse Code)
15. Accused persons should be required to take lie-detector tests.
16. When there is a “hung” jury in a criminal case, the defendant should always be freed and the indictment dismissed. (Reverse Code)
17. A society with true freedom and equality for all would have very little crime. (Reverse Code)
18. It is moral and ethical for a lawyer to represent a defendant in a criminal case even when he believes his client is guilty. (Reverse Code)
19. Police should be allowed to arrest and question suspicious looking persons to determine whether they have been up to something illegal.
20. The law coddles criminals to the detriment of society.
21. The freedom of society is endangered as much by overzealous law enforcement as by the acts of individual criminals. (Reverse Code)
22. In the long run, liberty is more important than order. (Reverse Code)
23. Upstanding citizens have nothing to fear from the police.