Impact of Social Media and Policing

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Abstract

The use of social media platforms has been embraced in almost every part of life. Using such platforms is critical in obtaining information that may be pertinent to operations. In policing, there is the use of social media platforms. This research focuses on how the use of the platforms impacts policing.

Introduction

Social media has led to the transformation of many sectors of life in today's world. People's lives and the way they conduct their professions and other forms of activities have been impacted in a significant way. The impact has been to such an extent that the majority of adults do not stay for a day without communicating or accessing social media. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, QQ, Whatsapp, and Instagram, have become an integral part of the lives of the people in today's world. Social media enables users to access, add, and share content on social media sites with little or no restriction. Law enforcement agencies have not been left behind in recognition of the growing influence and role of social media in modern access and dissemination of information. Many policing departments have been implementing policies that address the application of social media to regulate the way it is used by the law enforcers. The use of social media has also enhanced the availability of information that police officers can use in the performance of decision-making and problem-solving processes. Social media has impacted policing by influencing such issues as recruitment, police morale, as well as publicity.

Recruitment

Effective law enforcement officers' recruitment and retention are major challenges in the police force. From the point of view of the police agency responsible for recruitment, it is important to understand the potential law enforcement officers prior to recruitment into the force. Social media creates a platform through which the policing recruitment agency can connect with

the family and friends of the applicants and recruits (Akhgar, Bayerl & Leventakis, 2019). It can

be used as a source of information for the applicants. The recruitment agency might contact some

of the people on the networks to gather information about applicants and recruits that might help

in making recruitment decisions. In other instances, most of the potential applicants and recruits

post information about themselves and their lives on social media (Schneider, 2016). The

policing recruitment agency can use this information to get a better understanding of the

applicants and recruits. The police department will have an opportunity to understand the tastes

and preferences of the applicants from their social media profiles. Consequently, they will use

this information to enhance the recruitment processes and any offers that will need to be made to

the recruits.

Social media also allows applicants to build strong connections with family and friends.

In most instances, family members and friends in the policing department have a significant

influence on applicants seeking recruitment into the law enforcement agency. Having a close

family member or friend with knowledge, competencies, and experience in the police setting

provides applicants with insight into the dynamics of law enforcement (Lee & McGovern, 2013).

Applicants can engage in interactions on social media with their family members and friends,

which will enable them to gain knowledge about the nature of the practice. Closeness with

persons in the law enforcement sector can provide a basis for demonstrating to the applicants

about the impacts of working in this profession, especially on the persons involved and their

families. For instance, individuals working in the police force can, in some instances, develop

psychological issues, including depression and stress, that are mainly linked to the work they do.

Such might cause anxiety to the people close to the affected law enforcers. In addition, police

officers might be assigned duties in weird hours, including night time or work for long hours. Such might have an impact on the psychological welfare of individuals close to them.

As such, knowing a person working in the policing department can give an individual a more accurate depiction of the nature of the practice. Social media networks have enabled people to share information more easily. People working in the police force can form social media groups through which they can post and exchange information on their practice (Akhgar, Bayerl, & Leventakis, 2019). Such information might be accessible to family members and friends in their networks, and some of them might be future applicants and recruits into the policing department. It is an opportunity for potential applicants to gain knowledge and skills about policing. In other instances, social media provides an efficient communication channel through which persons in this department can interact with other people in the community. It provides an avenue through which people can understand and seek insight into the recruitment requirements and processes. Consequently, the ability to access and gain information on the policing practice enables applicants to build their confidence prior to becoming recruited into the force. It can also discourage potential applicants by portraying an undesirable image, which in turn reduces the chances of seeking recruitment into the sector.

Social media provides a powerful element in influencing potential applicants and recruits to apply for positions in specific policing departments while helping the recruiting agency to understand them better. The social media networks have been expanding exponentially, especially following their integration with massive numbers of websites (Lee & McGovern, 2013). Consequently, most of the applicants in the policing department are on social media, where they post and share information with their friends and close relatives. As a result, they can gather information about the agencies and what they do. Applicants also have a chance to

understand policing in a better way while gaining from the information posted and shared on the

networks by persons who are already in the department or have ever had experience with its

operations. In addition, given that most young people are heavily involved in the use of social

media, they post most of their activities and progress there (Schneider, 2016). Policing

recruitment agencies can collect additional data on applicants and recruits, especially relating to

their social life and what they actually do. Such might help law enforcement agencies in

screening the applicants for their fitness to join the policing department while helping on saving

recruitment costs. Gaining a better understanding of the potential applicants and recruits into the

police force is an important step in ensuring that the best talent is recruited, which will help in

enhancing the chances of retaining high-end skills and competencies.

Police Morale

Encouraging police officers to use a work-based social networking platform might help in

improving their morale and, ultimately, chances of retention. Internal social networks are

developed through the formation of connections between police officers and other people within

the police department. The sites create an opportunity for the development of a platform through

which police officers can merge their social lives with work experiences (Schneider, 2016). As a

result of such a networking site, police officers feel connected to each other. Thus, there is a

boosted morale, which is crucial in communication.

According to Stojkovic, Kalinich & Klofas (2015):

"Motivation in communicating and interest in the message must exist for both the sender

and receiver, at least to some reasonable extent if a message is to be communicated

effectively and to avoid lack of motivation and interest" (p. 99).

An internal networking site over social media provides a space for the police officers to interact and share thoughts and ideas, which enhances knowledge sharing. Consequently, they are able to gather diverse ideas for decision making and problem-solving. Ultimately, sharing these ideas and selecting the best ones to make decisions will lead to better productivity and improved morale. The police officers have the drive to achieve even better results in their work.

Social media also helps in creating work-social life balance leading to positive emotions among police officers. For instance, for most young people, social life is a critical element of their everyday living. They access social media frequently to gather new information that is spreading across the networks. The use of social media in the police force mixes work and social lives, which leads to positive emotions for the police officers (Toch, 2012). These emotions encourage more social networking, which enables police officers to build effective personal resources, including social capital. Improvement of social networking encourages teamwork in the workplace. As police officers interact with each other, they are able to identify persons who fit into their preferences, and they feel they can work together. Every individual on the social media networks formed in the policing department knows the behaviors of their counterparts, and they can select persons with similar interests as theirs (Schneider, 2016). Consequently, social media encourages a team spirit that encourages police officers to work together as a team towards the achievement of a common objective. It enhances the positive emotions that enable them to achieve higher productivity in the workplace.

Ferguson Effect

On the other hand, social media can lead to reduced public confidence and aggression and distrust towards police officers. The Ferguson effect provides that the public opposition

might influence the police to perform less proactive policing, which might lead to an increase in cases of violent crimes. In this case, police use social media to realize purposive change.

According to Stojkovic, Kalinich & Klofas (2015):

"Purposive change originates from conscious, deliberate, as well as planned efforts by organizational members. It can be a response to changing environmental conditions or pressures, or organizational members' perceived need to change and improve aspects of their system" (p. 416).

The effect was formulated after the police noted an increase in violence and crime after Michael Brown was shot in Ferguson in 2014 (Jackson, 2017). The violent crimes were associated with public concern over the rise in police violence. Social media plays a critical role in propagating the Ferguson effect through the creation and dissemination of negative publicity about the police. Police might be forced by circumstances to act violently when in their line of work. For instance, an offender might become violent in resistance against arrest. It threatens police officers in such a way that they might be influenced to carry out drastic steps, including shooting in the air (Roorda, 2016). Unfortunately, such could lead to tragedies like the deflected shooting of the offender, which leads to public outcry. Eyewitnesses of these unfortunate events might sometimes make video records of such tragedies, which they then share with other people on social media. As the message spreads across more networks, the public might express their concerns and anger through violent protests. The public outcry and opposition towards police officers involved in such violent situations affect them negatively.

The police officers involved in these cases feel alienated from their role in the protection of the community. They develop the attitude that the members of the community are against them. In the case of Ferguson, the people viewed the police as violent, which led to the protests

(Roorda, 2016). The police cannot engage the community in their operations, for instance, through community policing. Ultimately, the police embark on proactive policing in which they only do the basic when responding to crimes. They do not provide extra effort, which in turn leads to an increase in crime rates.

Spreading negative publicity against the police also reduces their motivation and efficiency. They feel that their work is being scrutinized closely by the public. They exercise the policing role on a basic level while exercising their authority. They have some fear that the public will not appreciate their services, which reduces their ability to perform. The anti-police protests also discourage them from performing their duties across the community, especially because of the fear of facing violent protesters (Jackson, 2017). Ultimately the police will not be motivated to perform better because they are discouraged from working in the community. Social media leads to the spreading of news about the police, which might, in turn, enhance the protests across other areas, further affecting the policing roles.

George Floyd Protests

Social media played a significant position in spreading information concerning the killing of George Floyd. It led to the fast dissemination of the information through the sharing of the video that showed the events leading to death. People shared the video on many networks, especially Facebook. Social media platforms support the real-time sharing of information, which attracts the attention of people across the world (Emont & Wen, 2020). Consequently, there were protests conducted by civil rights activists to air their voice against the killing. Social media was also used to inform people about the protests, including the time and places where they were to take place. Across the world, large crowds gathered on the streets with the aim of joining the protests against the injustice that was involved in the killing.

Additionally, social media led to the spreading of negative news about the police. Most of the information that was spreading across social media networks emphasized the injustice perpetrated against the Black man (Emont & Wen, 2020). People focused on the fact that he was Black and considered the injustice to be a common occurrence. They were also keen to note that White police had a negative attitude towards Black offenders and tended to be unfair to them during times of arrest. The negative news reflected the White police officers involved in this incident as unprofessional, racist, and violent. The negativity in the news spreading across social media sparked public anger, which contributed towards the drive to get involved in the protests.

Social media also played a role by raising the public's anxiety, which influenced them to join the protests. Even in the current lockdown situation in many places across the globe, people became alarmed about the injustice served on Floyd (Emont & Wen, 2020). Most people accessed the information through social media. More communication across the networks informed people about the occurrences that followed the killing, including the protests that were occurring, which incited more of them to get involved. As such, social media supported the spreading of news and kept people updated on the events that were occurring.

Furthermore, social media enabled the global community to form a common force against racism and violent and unfair treatment of offenders. People engaging in the protests had a common voice of opposition against racist police officers. Social media enabled people to form groups and networks through which they raised their concerns in relation to ensuring a professional and ethical police force. It provided a way through which people could come together and exchange ideas to determine the way forward and to encourage police officers to treat offenders with respect and dignity.

Discussion and Conclusion

Social media has led to the transformation of every aspect of life in contemporary society. The policing department has also been influenced by the advancement of technology through social media. Social media networks provide a platform through which police recruitment agencies can access information about applicants and potential recruits, which helps in the screening process to hire the best talent. Additionally, potential applicants and recruits can access information about the police department and practice on social media. They might be given the information by family members and friends working in the police department, which then influences their decision to join the practice. Furthermore, social media connects police officers, which enables them to work as a team towards the achievement of a common objective. Team spirit encourages knowledge sharing and better decision making in the police department, which improves productivity and police motivation. On the contrary, the Ferguson effect provides that social media can lead to the spreading of negative publicity against police officers, which might lead to public anger and loss of confidence. The public reacts towards such anger through protests like the ones experienced in the case of George Floyd. Social media should be used positively to enhance the work of police officers to ensure that they enhance the security of the community.

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