Social media research and policing: academic perspectives

Jeremy Crump
Senior Visiting Research Fellow
Leeds University Business School
Outline

• The existing agenda

• 3 current areas of study
  – Big data and quantitative data
  – Networks, style and impact
  – Organisational culture

• Future research topics
The current agenda

From our analysis result the following categories that describe best practice in police social media adaptation:

- Social Media as a Source of Criminal Information
- Having a Voice in Social Media
- Social Media to Push Information
- Social Media to Leverage the Wisdom of the Crowd
- Social Media to Interact with the Public
- Social Media for Community Policing
- Social Media to Show the Human Side of Policing
- Social Media to Support Police IT Infrastructure
- Social Media for Efficient Policing
Reading the Riots
Investigating England's summer of disorder

9 August 2011
10 August 2011

[Graph showing data with various colored lines and markers]
Today Facebook has published its first transparency report, detailing law enforcement and national security requests from countries around the world. Britain requested data on 1,976 occasions, covering 2,337 users. In 32% of cases, Facebook declined to provide any data.

Thanks to the transparency reports of Google, Microsoft, Facebook and Twitter we continue to learn more about the scale of law enforcement being able to access information held by internet companies. Contrary to the claims by various politicians that the internet is a wild west, we know that Britain receives more data than any other country about Skype users, and Facebook’s data shows that the UK is the third highest user of Facebook data in the world, after the US and India.

In his introduction to the data, Colin Stretch, Facebook General Counsel says that "We strongly encourage all governments to provide greater transparency about their efforts aimed at keeping the public safe, and we will continue to be aggressive advocates for greater disclosure."

He is absolutely right. It is absurd that we learn more about Government surveillance from Microsoft, Google and Facebook than our own authorities. These figures were never mentioned during the Parliamentary debate on the draft communications data bill, nor in the annual report of the Interception of Communications Commissioner’s report.

https://www.facebook.com/about/government_requests
“A balance between security and privacy online must be struck...”

#INTELLIGENCE

Sir David Omand
Jamie Bartlett
Carl Miller
3 areas of current study

• Big data
• Networks, style and impact
• Organisational culture
Big data

We never, ever in the history of mankind have had access to so much information so quickly and so easily

Vint Cerf
Big data

1) Bigger Data are Not Always Better Data
2) Not All Data are Created Equal
3) What and Why are Different Questions
4) Be Careful of Your Interpretations
5) Just Because It is Accessible Doesn’t Mean Using It is Ethical

Big data

- Handling material in bulk
- Lack of metadata (location, individual identity etc)
- Rumour v intelligence (but this is not unique to social media)
- the reciprocity between online expression and offline action is still largely not understood

Networks, style and impact

- Size=followers
- Colour=tweets
graphs:@policingstoke – followers, degree1.5
graphs:@policingstoke – followers, degree1.5, indgree>1
Social Media and the Police—Tweeting Practices of British Police Forces during the August 2011 Riots

Sebastian Denef
Fraunhofer FIT
Schloss Birlinghoven
53754 Sankt Augustin
Germany
sebastian.denef@fit.fraunhofer.de

Petra S. Bayerl
Erasmus University Rotterdam – RSM
Burgemeester Oudlaan 50
3062 PA Rotterdam
The Netherlands
pbyerl@composite.rsm.nl

Nico Kaptein
COT
Koninginnegracht 26
2514 AB Den Haag
The Netherlands
n.kaptein@cot.nl

ABSTRACT
With this paper we take a first step to understand the appropriation of social media by the police. For this purpose we analyzed the Twitter communication by the London Metropolitan Police (MET) and the Greater Manchester Police (GMP) during the riots in August 2011. The systematic comparison of tweets demonstrates that the two forces developed very different practices for using Twitter. While MET followed an instrumental approach in their communication, in which the police aimed to remain in a controlled position and keep a distance to the general public, GMP developed an expressive approach, in which the police actively decreased the distance to the citizens. In workshops and interviews, we asked the police officers about their perspectives, which confirmed the identified practices. Our study discusses benefits and risks of the two approaches and the potential impact of social media on the evolution of the role of police in society.

Author Keywords
Police; Twitter; UK Riots; Crisis Communication; Microblogging

ACM Classification Keywords
H.5.3 Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI); Group and Organization Interfaces – Collaborative computing, Computer-supported cooperative work

General Terms
Human Factors

INTRODUCTION
On Thursday August 4th, 2011, at about 6:15 PM, Mark Duggan, 29, was shot by the police in Tottenham in the Greater London area, during an operation aimed to arrest him. Questions about whether or not Duggan shot first and whether this was an act of self-defense started a debate that put the police operation into question. On

Saturday evening, August 6th, a crowd of about 300 people gathered at a police station. What started as a peaceful demonstration, turned into a forceful riot that spread in the following days across neighborhoods and to other cities such as Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester. Buildings were set on fire and stores were looted. Thousands of people were arrested. Five people died and over 200 people injured; 186 of them police officers [2]. In London alone, 3,443 riot-related crimes were reported [25] which caused damages of over 200 million pounds [18]. During the riots, social media became a contentious topic of public debate, as offenders used different networks and mobile communication services to organize themselves—even leading to a discussion on governmental orders to shut off Twitter [14].

Yet, the UK riots also saw the entry of other users into the social media space. UK police forces likewise used Twitter extensively, in this case as an outreach channel to communicate with the public. During the riots, British police forces not only saw a tremendous growth in the number of Twitter followers. They also, for the first time, engaged with the public on such a large scale via social media, using Twitter as the main platform.

Twitter, as a microblogging system, allows its members to post messages (so-called ‘tweets’) of up to 140 characters. These tweets are displayed on a member’s page as a running stream of messages. Members can choose to follow others. Messages of people they follow are then displayed on their own Twitter page. Tweets usually are posted publicly, giving anybody the chance to access them, regardless of whether they are Twitter members or follow each other. As members can also directly react to tweets of others, Twitter becomes an interactive space of open communication. Given that effective communication is vital in containing and controlling crisis situations, Twitter with its free availability, possibility for dynamic and fast-paced dissemination and unrestricted reach seems imminently well suited for this task.

The appropriation of Twitter, and social media more generally, is, however, not straightforward for the police—not only due to extensive legal frameworks that bind police
Organisational culture

New knowledge regimes are met with resistance, not only because of the stubbornness of police occupational culture, but also because they threaten what is perceived as meaningful professional practice

Organisational culture
POLKA - Online Collaboration

POLKA (the Police OnLine Knowledge Area) is a secure online collaboration tool for the policing community to network, ask questions, share insights, discuss ideas and suggest new ways of working.

You can join POLKA if you have access to the Police National Network (PNN) or if you are on selected GSI (Government Secure intranet) networks.

Communities on POLKA

There are over 250 communities on POLKA, all managed and moderated by specialist practitioners. These include:

- Knowledge Bank
- Police Gazette
- Uniformed Operational Support - Public Order
- Uniformed Operational Support - Firearms
- Criminal Intelligence Analysis
- Service Delivery and Business Transformation
- ACPO Police Dogs
- Penalty Notice Processing
- Custody
- Police Driver Training
Themes for further research

• Ethnographical studies of police social media behaviours
• Similar studies of social media users which begin to understand the effect of police interventions. How enthusiastic are followers of police sites, and how impactful are police interventions?
• Structural approaches to police networks: who is in them? How do they change over time, and how do they work?
• In particular, how do they work in times of stress, such as a major incident or a controversial issue?
• Ethics and privacy – including legitimacy, transparency and regulation.
• Studies of the impact of social media on police organisations