

Over the world have seen their relationship with traditional media change somewhat. They have also embraced mobile and social media as effective tools in image management, as well as in tactical responses to crime and investigation, as the following section will describe.

The role of mobile and social media in policing

Tactical responses to crime and investigation

The use of mobile and social media in crime investigations covers many aspects of police work. Most obviously, platforms like Facebook and Twitter are helpful in publicizing details of a case and responsabilizing the public, for example in circumstances where someone has gone missing and their description, photo and last known whereabouts can be shared or re-tweeted (Lee and McGovern, 2014). Facebook has even developed a tool to assist law enforcement agencies to harness their potential in social media, 'Building your presence with Facebook Pages: A Guide for Police Departments' https://developers.facebook.com/attachment/PagesGuide_Police.pdf. In addition, social media platforms are used for: alerting people to crimes or crime waves that may be ongoing; for disseminating details of crime prevention programmes; monitoring suspects; gathering intelligence; obtaining information for tactical purposes about threats of mob violence, riots, or isolated criminal activity during otherwise lawful gatherings and demonstrations; identifying associates and acquaintances affiliated with persons of interest; understanding criminal networks; gleaning information to back up application for a search warrant; and liaising with police colleagues in different forces and jurisdictions. To take a few examples highlighted by a report in the US commissioned by Lexis Nexis (2012), YouTube aided police in an investigation into the recruitment of gang members and promotion of gang violence, with a video that had known gang members rapping about shooting named officers, which allowed the suspects to be identified, located and arrested; while sites like Facebook are frequently used by offenders to brag about their criminal exploits. In one case, an officer says that he requested a suspected drugs offender as a 'friend' from a fictitious profile, which was accepted. The officer reports: 'he kept "checking in" everywhere he went so I was able to track him down very easily' (2012: 14).

Meanwhile, a branch of the US Department of Justice that has come up with a name that enables itself to be known by the acronym COPS (Community Oriented Policing Services) has produced a joint report with the Police

Executive Research Forum (PERF) on policing and social media in the US, Canada and the UK. Summing up one of the most salient applications of social media, the report notes:

Social media has now given protesters the ability to informally and very quickly organize and communicate with each other in real time. Police must know how to monitor these types of communications in order to gauge the mood of a crowd, assess whether threats of criminal activity are developing, and stay apprised of any plans by large groups of people to move to other locations.

Similarly, in the aftermath of an incident of mob violence, police can 'mine' social networking sites to identify victims, witnesses, and perpetrators. Witnesses to crime—and even perpetrators—often post photographs, videos, and other information about an incident that can be used as investigative leads or evidence. (2013: 1)

The report also notes something that Boston police and the FBI may have felt when investigating the 2013 marathon bombings, discussed in the Introduction to this volume: that the strategic challenges of monitoring social networks and transforming huge amounts of data into actionable intelligence is a daunting task for police agencies, with one official describing it as 'like trying to take a sip from a fire hydrant' (ibid.).

Image management

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Image management

In addition to being harnessed as a 'push' mechanism to facilitate the solving of crimes, as described above, social media are also now embraced by police forces to facilitate dialogue between the public and the police, to 'demystify' the work they do and to try and increase their popularity (Lee and McGovern, 2014). Of course, the police are supported by a raft of employees including press officers, marketing professionals, public relations officers and corporate identity specialists, all engaged in the business of 'image work' on behalf of the police (Mawby, 2002). As Lee and McGovern (2014) highlight, the police press release has become a powerful tool for communicating the service's preferred message, while making it easier for journalists to write audience-satisfying stories about crime and policing. But when combined with the complex mix of 'traditional' mediums and social media platforms now at their disposal, the police are succeeding in managing their image in such a way that frequently bypasses journalists altogether. However, according to Mawby, while the police are under pressure to communicate openly with diverse communities, there is a danger that 'image work' can also be deployed for improper motives; for example, *misrepresentation* to mask malpractice, deflect responsibility or simply to protect themselves from outside scrutiny (Mawby, 2002;

2010). In support of this, Green (2009) criticizes some police forces in the UK for over-controlling their publicity machines and diverting attention from cases that represent negative public relations. Green claims that serious crimes such as sexual assaults and stabbings are sometimes selectively communicated in police press releases, or not communicated at all, in order that they do not get reported in the media and create an unfavourable impression of policing.

Notwithstanding such accusations, it is not surprising that the police have seized on new communications tools in the pursuit of legitimacy, as well as efficiency and control of image (Lee and McGovern, 2014). However, it is still arguably the case that PR success stories remain buried on local forces' websites and Twitter feeds, while their PR disasters go viral and make national and international news. For example, the Metropolitan Police's image management strategy came to the fore when a man died during G20 protests in London in 2009. The Met came in for criticism for issuing a press release suggesting that 47-year-old Ian Tomlinson had died of a heart attack as he walked home from the protest. The statement failed to include a vital part of the picture, which was that Mr Tomlinson had been struck and pushed to the ground by a police officer. As a result, there were six days of substantially false media coverage about the incident which the Met failed to contradict. It was only the evidence of ordinary people with mobile phone/camera footage of the protest that led to questions about the police's version of events and it later emerged that the press release had been the subject of intense argument in the police press bureau, with an earlier draft having been rejected (Davies, 2009).

The crucial role that mobile media and CCTV can play in cases where police accounts and the testimony of witnesses contradict each other is frequently underlined when these media technologies are absent. On 4 August 2011, officers of the Specialist Firearms Command Unit of the Metropolitan Police stopped a minicab, containing a passenger, 29-year-old Mark Duggan, who tried to run from the scene. Police shot him twice and he died. The actual events that unfolded in these few minutes are complex, disputed and subject to highly contradictory versions and interpretations (but see <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jan/08/mark-duggan-death-london-riots> for a useful overview and LSE's *Reading the Riots*; eprints.lse.ac.uk). Without CCTV footage or mobile phone images, the actual sequence of events can never be known for sure and, despite hearing from a witness that Mark Duggan was not holding a gun, as the officers had thought, but a mobile phone, and that when he tried to run away, he was shot by an officer within five to seven steps of him - despite appearing 'trapped', 'baffled' and holding his arms up as if to surrender - the jury decided that the killing was 'lawful' (<http://m.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-25321711>). Despite this verdict, revelations of highly controversial decisions by the Met and the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), which investigates police shootings, severely damaged public confidence. The *Guardian* quotes one 'informed Met source': 'It was

death by a thousand fuckups' (<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jan/08/mark-duggan-death-london-riots>). As a result of the poor policing decisions, which included the driving away of the taxi (thus compromising or destroying valuable forensic evidence), there was anger and frustration among sections of the community in Tottenham and, two days after the killing, riots began on the streets of London which then spread to many other cities, constituting the worst civil unrest in a generation.

These tragic cases support the view that the police may be giving an impression of democratic accountable policing, while simultaneously sustaining the restricted interests of the police service (Mawby, 2002). It could even be said that the main lesson learned by police in the wake of the milestone events mentioned above is that they must exert greater control over the conditions where brutality or failure occurs, an argument put by Monahan (2006) in response to the LA police beating of Rodney King. Nevertheless, the language of 'openness' remains embedded in police image work and police forces espouse 'open' communications and transparency as they seek to secure public 'trust' and 'confidence'. But the police service is unlikely to be grateful for the emergence of citizen journalism and is responding with more informal communication strategies of its own. ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers) rhetoric continues to suggest that the police are very happy to allow the media and the wider public to be informed about their work, but the fact that the police are increasingly sidestepping traditional media altogether and communicating directly with the public via blogs, Twitter and the like, suggests otherwise (Mawby, 2010). And while the police may publicly congratulate themselves on their openness and accountability, they regularly seem to fall foul of outside attempts to highlight their ongoing, internal, structural deficiencies.

In October 2003 a documentary broadcast on BBC1, *The Secret Policeman*, proved to be a public relations disaster for the police service. The programme showed the results of secret filming by an undercover journalist posing as a trainee police officer over a period of seven months at a national police training centre. In an eerie echo of a simulated racist attack by the young men suspected of murdering Stephen Lawrence (also filmed covertly), rookie police officers were shown voicing extreme racist opinions, and one was seen wearing a makeshift Ku Klux Klan hood. The police's PR nightmare began a month before transmission when a senior civil servant in the Home Office wrote to the BBC chairman accusing the corporation of deceit and demanding that they withdraw the programme from the schedules (*Observer*, 26 October 2003). Subsequently, in the days before the broadcast, the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police (GMP), one of the forces concerned, and the Home Office, issued defiant statements, criticizing the BBC for its methods and for going ahead with the broadcast. The day after the broadcast, however, senior officers and the Home Secretary were competing for media airtime in which to condemn the officers

filmed, perhaps having had time to ingest the horror and revulsion felt by many viewers at the scenes they had witnessed. Among the most surprising aspects of the exposé was that racial awareness training for new recruits appeared to consist of them being told the *four* racially offensive words they must not use!

To this extent, while superficially the programme might be interpreted as reinforcing the notion of a 'few bad apples', it actually hinted at more disturbing, widespread, structural problems at the heart of the police. This impression was not helped by Chief Constable Mike Todd, who threatened the BBC with a 'Hutton-style inquiry' if the programme went ahead. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the BBC's revelations, police forces have started 'cyber-vetting' potential employees; that is, evaluating job candidates' online presence and reputation before shortlisting them. As the aforementioned report by COPS (2013) states, candidates may be deemed unsuitable if they have posted comments or other content on social media sites that is perceived as damaging to the trust that a police department must earn with the public. For example, obscene, racist, or reckless comments made by a job candidate on Facebook or Twitter can disqualify candidates or raise serious questions about their judgement and character. Establishing and maintaining a sense of legitimacy is central to a police service's role in any democracy as the following discussion about *Crimewatch UK* will further underline. Fifteen years ago Richard Osborne wrote: 'The fear of crime is greater than the fear of an inadequate police force and as long as the police can win the media war through programmes like *Crimewatch UK* their control of the news flow is guaranteed' (1995: 39). Ironical, then, that in his efforts to get *The Secret Policeman* withdrawn, Chief Constable Todd's most petulant shot across the bows was the threat that the police would withdraw their co-operation from the BBC's *Crimewatch UK* (*Observer*, 26 October 2003).

Crimewatch UK

their support for *Crimewatch UK* was
news in the week following
of *Crimewatch*