Social Media: The Utilization of Social Media by Law Enforcement

Ryan Robbins

Abstract

The purpose of this research paper was to evaluate the current use of social media by law enforcement agencies in the state of Florida. This research was accomplished by issuing a survey to law enforcement agencies across the state of Florida and then comparing the survey to the 2016 survey, "Law Enforcement Use of Social Media Survey" conducted in a joint publication by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Urban Institute. This research will assess the evolution of social media and concludes with recommendations on how to improve positive social media management within law enforcement agencies.

Introduction

In 2015 I was transferred into the position of Public Information Officer within my Law Enforcement Agency. I have a background in photography and videography, and I am comfortable speaking in public. I also received tactical and investigative experience internally which gave me an excellent working knowledge of issues that would need to be discussed by a Public Information Office. With these contributing factors my transfer seemed reasonable. I thought I was equipped with all the tools needed for the job. I quickly realized on day one, my tool bag was missing something important. I was missing a working knowledge of social media. I did not have a single social media account and spent almost no time involved with social media. I become educated very rapidly on the relevance of social media and the opportunities it provided the Office of the Sheriff to have direct contact with the citizens of our county, state, country and even our world. This felt like a game changer at the time, a new form of unfiltered /direct communication between the public and law enforcement at an expanded level never seen before. This tool seemed like it had a lot of power, and when someone uses it, they should probably have a strategy and clear direction, especially when representing a government agency.

From my experience people use social media to gain knowledge, connect with others, and for entertainment. The platforms that do all three of these seem to have the most success. Entertain? What business does law enforcement have in entertaining citizens? Strait forward, by the book, that's how government and law enforcement should conduct themselves, right? Well, it seems that technology and social media has altered the blueprint of how law enforcement communicates with societies. People in the world are drawn to two forms of entertainment, I call it the Jerry Springer / Michael Jordan affect. People are drawn to seeing others at their worst or at their best. Unintentionally law enforcement brings both elements together. We respond to literal and figurative train wrecks of life and in those moments heroic actions are displayed and captured in a world

where everything is recorded. There is a reason there are so many books, movies and tv shows about law enforcement, people are intrigued with criminology.

I was transferred from the public information office and onto my next career opportunity two years later. I departed the position with improved knowledge but constantly ponder on the evolving social media culture and the effects it has or could have on law enforcement. Are we, as law enforcement agencies, using this platform to the best of our abilities? We are not in the business of entertainment, but are we using the natural resources of the Jerry Springer / Michael Jorden moments of our profession to connect and educate the public, solve crime, and recruit to the best of our capabilities?

Literature Review

Origins

In the late 1990's the world changed with the introduction of social media. This new form of communication would change the culture of the world. The sociology affects would immediately alter criminology and the way policing is conducted. (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). What is social media? By definition it is "Forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (such as videos)". (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Where did social media come from? Back in 1844, Samuel Morse sent the first telegraph. The telegraph was sent between Washington, D.C. and the city of Baltimore. This was the first form of electronic communication, but this could not be considered social media. It was not a way to communicate in a social way nor was it "online", which are two key elements to be considered social media. This was definitely a step in the evolution of what would become social media. In 1867, the telephone was invented and then in the late 1930's the foundation for computers was being developed. Many years later in the 1960's and 1970's the government and private organizations began developing ways to get computers to communicate with each other, which birthed the internet. This would be considered the beginning of social media. In the 1980's and into the 1990's people started owning their own personal computers and this would set the foundation for the accessibility of social media. In the late 1990's blogging and bulletin board systems would allow people to communicate online and would change life as we currently know it. The average person could now communicate with large numbers of people about anything they wanted to from the comfort of their own home. (Jones, 2015)
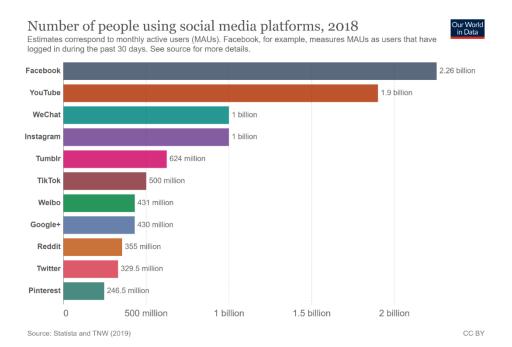
Communication by the use of computer was not a new concept, but in the 1990's the technology which allowed average people to connect with one another socially was a shift in cultural behaviors. Computers were not being used just for data transfer but was now a platform to socialize. People now had the ability at any time to express their feelings, ideas, and spread news or gather news. Six Degrees was developed in 1997 and is considered the first of social networks. Six Degrees peaked at around 3.5 million users. Friendster followed which began the ability to share videos and other media more easily. Linkedin and Myspace would be launched in the mid 2000's and would quicky expand the connection of hundreds of millions of people together. Myspace wound up

making some poor business decisions in the mid 2000's and begin to lose traction to the new king of social media which would be called Facebook. Facebook would have over 2.6 billion active users by 2015 and would connect almost a third of the earth's population. In the late 2000's Twitter and Instagram would merge on the social media scene with their versions of social networking along with other sites. (Jones, 2015)

Usage

For Law Enforcement to maximize social media technology it is necessary to understand the dynamic of the evolving movement of its development. "Our World in Data" estimated social media went from zero in early 2000's to 3.5 billion users by 2019. With Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Tumblr, Tik-tok and Twitter making up for most of that user population. Kids and young adults are more frequently using social media and some platforms seem to suit different age groups. 73% of Snapchat and Instagram users are under 25 years of age and only 3% of seniors over 65 are active users. Users are divided by age and sex on different social media sites. Women are twice as likely to use Pinterest and men are twice as likely to use Reddit. Economics will play a role in this communication as some population groups around the world use social media at higher rates than others based on social economical levels and the accessibility to technology. (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019)

The time people are spending daily on social media across the world can now be measured in hours not minutes. Life is about timing, is a common phrase but an important one when discussing communication. When to communicate is a relevant question when trying to maximize your impact of what you want to tell others. With the invention of smartphones, the average United States adult spends more than six hours on digital media a day. This includes websites, apps and gaming. Pew Research Center says people under the age of 29 are most likely to get news and information form social media than traditional forms of news distribution. In 2005, 5% of Americans used social media, by 2019 79% of the U.S. population was using social media. The effects of this significant change both positive and negative are still being measured in society and in law enforcement, which is an echo of society. (Ortiz- Ospina, 2019)

Number of people using social media platforms, 2018
Estimates correspond to monthly active users (MAUs). Facebook, for example, measures MAUs as users that have logged in during the past 30 days. See source for more details.

Our World in Data

Platform	Users
Facebook	2.26 billion
YouTube	1.9 billion
WeChat	1 billion
Instagram	1 billion
Tumblr	624 million
TikTok	500 million
Weibo	431 million
Google+	430 million
Reddit	355 million
Twitter	329.5 million
Pinterest	246.5 million

0   500 million   1 billion   1.5 billion   2 billion

Source: Statista and TNW (2019)   CC BY

Investigative Resources

Fighting crime through the use of social media is an interesting concept. Lexis Nexis was one of the first to start surveying law enforcement's use of social media. In 2014 LexisNexis indicated that 73% of law enforcement officers believe criminal cases could be solved faster with the use of social media. At that time, 75% of officers were comfortable using social media. The survey further showed 25% of officers were using social media to fight crime daily, 31% weekly, 30% monthly and 12% was less often. As of 2012, 40% of Law Enforcement was using social media to monitor special events; 34% was using it to notify the public of criminal activity; and 34% was using it for providing the public with emergency or disaster information. This study also began to identify the need for formal training in the use of social media. It indicated 75% of law enforcement officers were self-trained in the use of social media and 37% learned from other colleagues. Only 18% indicated they had some form of seminar training. Despite the lack of training and the "learn as you go process", the LexisNexis report concluded that use of social media to investigate crime was having success in interrupting criminal activity and solving crime. (LexisNexis, 2014)

Social Media is an important resource for law enforcement given the ability to communicate with a large number of people immediately. By posting on social media sites and texting, law enforcement can communicate directly to citizens without a third-party resource to distort information. Law enforcement can send important information about public safety and receive feedback regarding local issues within seconds. This is a powerful tool during public emergencies such as natural disasters, active shooter situations, or just traffic issues. The form of communication an agency uses to share information is important. Pew Research Center shows 98% of text messages are viewed within two minutes. If an agency is sending information related to an in-progress crime, a community text option may be most effective. There are some less than positive effects

of the use of social media by law enforcement. Social media communication is subject to public record. Finding ways to archive this communication has become a new challenge. Collection of this data may be needed for litigations, criminal investigations, or Internal Investigations. (Cruz, 2020)

The "Social Media Guidebook for Law Enforcement Agencies" published in 2019, states 94% of law enforcement agencies are using Facebook. Twitter is in second place with 71% of agencies, followed by YouTube at 40%. Other platforms used by Law enforcement are LinkedIn 27%, Nixle 24%, Nextdoor 20% and Google+ at 19%. Out of all the agencies using social media in the study, 91% use it for informing the public about safety concerns, 89% use it for community outreach/engagement and 86% of agencies use it as a public relations management tool. This report talks about building a road map for how agencies should plan on using social media for their jurisdiction. The fundamentals of this communication will be to allow your agency more transparency and increase trust with the community. Agencies should use social media as well to investigate crime, reduce fear, and help prevent social disorder, by getting reliable information out to the public at a responsible speed. The report explains that agencies using social media should implement four steps to be effective when using social media.

1. Establish a baseline
2. Set goals
3. Measure performance
4. Implement strategies to improve performance

This research was done by the Urban Institute and the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) office. (Tiry, Oglesby-Neal, & Kim, 2019).

Best Management Practices

Establishing the baseline for your agency is about making sure you have set policies and procedures for your social media communications. As of 2016 only 80% of agencies had a social media policy while 11% where still developing one and 9% had none. (Kim, K., Oglesby-Neal, A., & Mohr, E, 2017). It is important to always keep in mind who your audience is and who you are trying to reach with your message and understanding with each post it may be different. Are you trying to reach older citizens about scams, younger citizens about drinking and driving, or all citizens who may be a helpful eye to find a missing person? You need to know your audience so you can plan on how to structure content of your text and or the selection of the proper picture / video. Each Agency will need to establish who will have control and manage their social media accounts. This decision may be based on the agency's size and resources. Most larger agencies use a Public Information Officer (PIO) which may be a sworn officer or a civilian position, while smaller agencies may elect to have a chief executive control the social media post. A different option is another form of Command Staff, Community Policing Officer, and or a Crime Prevention Officer. (Kim, K., Oglesby-Neal, A., Mohr, E., 2017). A central group review is something agencies should consider utilizing for making sure all points of view have been considered before hitting the send button. 55% of agencies using social media use some sort of Central Group. (Kim, K., Oglesby-Neal, A., Mohr, E.,

2017). Having thoughtful oversite of your social media platform is important but agencies should be cautious not to create too many restrictions so that it no longer feels social or prevents timely responses. (Tiry, Oglesby-Neal, & Kim, 2019).

Measuring Success

Setting Goals for your social media platforms are important so you have a direction and develop measuring points and timelines. Finding ways to measure community engagement is important. This may be done by tracking the number of followers, comments, or shared posts. The Social Media Guidebook for Law Enforcement Agencies reflects that 90% of agency leaders are encouraging the use of social media which was identified as a major factor. It was reported 80% of officers are comfortable using social media for community engagement. Even with the high percentage of people using and encouraging social media, only 33% of agencies actually set goals for their agency's use of social media. A case study on the Palo Alto Police Department revealed the importance of intentionally building your following on social media. This was critical so that when information of great importance regarding public safety is posted, it will have the maximum impact in the community. (Tiry, Oglesby-Neal, & Kim, 2019).

Measuring your agencies performance of social media can be done in several ways. The Social Media Guidebook for Law Enforcement reports 79% of agencies measure progress by the number of "likes". Other ways listed are, 70% shares, 70% relationship / followers, 56% by post, 49% by conversations / comments, 39% by investigations resolved, and 20% by surveys. Some metrics may be difficult to measure based on algorithms controlled by the social media platforms. If you are not tracking any of these listed measuring points you may not understand what is working best for your agency when it comes to communication with your citizens on social media. By tracking monthly statistics of your social media activity, you may over time find patterns in the yearly analytics that show spikes in activity. The goal is maximizing your followers so you can share more information. To grow, it is important to know what causes the activity spikes and how it can be repeated. Some platforms may provide dashboard software that will provide you with the needed analytics. Another option is to partner with another organization that conducts data research for performance tracking. (Tiry, Oglesby-Neal, & Kim, 2019).

Implementation

Once you are equipped with knowing the data, tone and transparency of your social media impact, it will be time to begin implementing effective strategies. Developing relationships with individuals or other organizations who already have a large following will help expand your audience. The time of a post also makes a difference on the number of citizens you reach. The data from The Social Media Guidebook for Law Enforcement indicates posts that occur on Tuesday are least likely to be shared. There is a slight uptick on Wednesdays and Thursday's then a slight drop on Friday. Saturday through Monday there is a steady climb of activity with Monday being the day of the week with the most shares on social media. The data also shows forms of media such as videos and photos increase the chances of your post being shared. Agencies still have different thoughts on

posting jail booking photographs. Adding a jail booking photo may increase the views of a post but may be considered unnecessary stigmatization. One of the most effective strategies is the importance of regularly monitoring your social media accounts. The more employees you have responding to a post for as many hours as you can, the better understanding you will have of your social media community following. (Tiry, Oglesby-Neal, & Kim, 2019). The 2016, Law Enforcement Use of Social Media Survey indicated 86% of agencies with social media respond to followers on social media. (Kim, K., Oglesby-Neal, A., & Mohr, E., 2017). Depending on the dynamics of your community, your social media postings may create positive / negative or neutral responses. To help predict those responses, agencies must be engaged constantly to keep a finger on the pulse of the social media community. In return the agencies impact in public relations, recruiting, and solving crime will be greater. (Tiry, Oglesby-Neal, & Kim, 2019).

The tone your agency uses with social media is relevant in its outcome of its significance. A survey by Urban Institute in the "2016 Law Enforcement Use of Social Media Survey" reported 29% of agency always use an informal tone when communicating with the public. While 45% of agencies stated they sometime have an informal tone and 26% of agencies advise they never use an informal tone. The report indicated that 85% of agencies using social media use some form of humor when communicating, but informal tones by agencies are more likely than humor. The report indicates the larger the agency the more likely it is to use informal tones when communicating on social media. Once an agency opens the doorway of communication with social media it will be inevitable that negative feedback / comments will follow. Agencies will need to decide how they plan on addressing these comments. This report showed that out of the 86% of agencies that respond to citizens comments 64% react or acknowledge negative comments. (Kim, K., Oglesby-Neal, A., & Mohr, E. 2017)

Kaitlyn Perez is a Sarasota County Sheriff's Office Community Affairs Director in Florida; she writes that transparency is what citizens want the most out of law enforcement. She indicates that showing the good and the bad is needed. She notes that it is important to highlight the outstanding work done by officers and deputies daily whether it is making a good arrest or capturing wildlife in a residential area. She also says it's important to take ownership of negative events. Should a law enforcement officer commit a crime, it's best to get ahead of the story and post something instead of letting someone else tell your story. Plus, it builds trust with the community that you are not hiding information. Mrs. Perez echoed the other research in this report by stating it starts at the top. Your chief executive of your agency needs to support your social media mission and you need backing from the troops. Mrs. Perez further stated the importance of being in sync with your community who are always looking for information. With a community of over 400,000 people, she points to age differences in citizens affect the type of social media platforms you should be using or not using. She also advised the importance of maintaining a good working relationship with your traditional media. She advised the turnover is high these days in media and it is important to continue to educate the media even though social media allows direct access to the public. One of her most impactful views is on the importance of using a concept from Harvard Kennedy School which supports the idea that citizens care more about their interaction with law enforcement than they do the outcome of it. Social Media provides the ability to have that interaction

with the community in a positive manner, if handled with intentional well thought out messaging. (Perez, K.,2021)

The use of social media by law enforcement is being tracked and examined by the United States and the world media. The media over the past decade has highlighted the success and articulated its apprehensions of social media being used by law enforcement. An article in the "The Verge", discusses 33-year-old Jeremiah Perez being arrested by FBI after they tracked him down by using his IP address after he had posted statements that he had killed retired cops and wanted to kill more. Perez was using social media to recruit and encourage chaos on his Google+ account. Robertson, A. (2014). "Man arrested after allegedly pledging to shoot a passerby for 100 retweets" is an article by the Verge. The article explains a 20-year-old named Dakkari Dijon McAnuff in Los Angeles made a statement on social media that he would shoot and kill someone on the street of his community, if his twitter message was not retweeted 100 times. McAnuff also posted a picture of a rifle pointed in the direction of a roadway. Using social media, the police were able to locate the subject and make an arrest. Newton, C (2014). CNN Money reports in Dover Delaware, a police department is using Pinterest to help citizens locate missing property. In a smaller town such as Dover, using social media to help citizens locate there missing property was a success. Citizens would see their property posted online and then could respond to the local Police Department and provide proof of ownership and recover their property. Bhattacharya, A. (2015). Melvin Colon was arrested for murder based on evidence collected on Facebook. Colon had posted damaging information to a friend. Police were later able to gain access to that information by consent from Colon's friend. The courts ruled that Colon's expectation of privacy ended when he distributed information to other people online. Even though his post was sent privately, his friends had the authority to use that information however they chose. This has also created an opportunity for law enforcement to use social media in an undercover manner. Law enforcement agencies are creating fake profiles online to solicit information that can be used in criminal investigations. Facebook acknowledges that 9% of their accounts are false. In 2012 Joe Sullivan was the chief security officer for Facebook and told CNN that making fake identity profiles was against Facebook's terms of service even for Law enforcement. Even though this breaks a civil contract with a private company, the courts have still upheld the use of evidence collected in these online investigations. Some agencies have decided not to engage in using fictitious accounts but over 83% of law enforcement agencies have decided it's acceptable to do so. Not all information can be retrieved with a ruse. Citizen's private information on social media sites that do not have public accessibility must be obtained with a court ordered search warrant. Kelly, B.C.H. (2012). In 2014, the New York Times wrote about a social media post sent out by the NYPD, that had a negative result in. The New York Police Department, posted a photo of their officers with citizens on the street attached was hashtag #myNYPD. This hashtag was decided it would be a good idea by an oversite group within the police department with intentions to build community relations. Shortly after it was posted the hashtag was highjacked by persons who began positing images that appeared to be police brutality by NYPD. The New York Police department found the silver lining of the situation by adding over 4,000 new followers during the controversy. (Goodman, D.J., 2014).

Methods

A survey was designed using the standard of questions presented in the 2016 Law Enforcement Use of Social Media Survey Research Report published by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Urban Institute. The provided questions were decided based on the IACP historical research and surveys. Emails were sent to 830 law enforcement personnel; The personnel were selected by the Florida Sheriffs Association Public Information Office email list (114) and the Police Chief's Association email list (716). The email provided a brief synopsis of the research along with a request to click a Survey Monkey link. The survey consisted of 10 questions which created new measurable findings on how law enforcement agencies use technology in 2022.
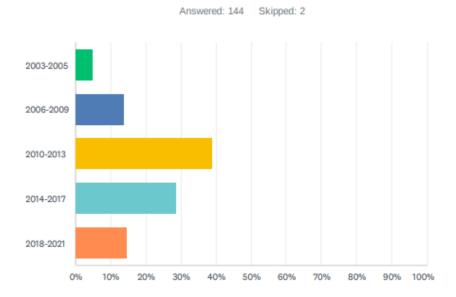
Results

Out of the 114 emails generated from the Florida Sheriff's Office Association Public Information email list, 9 emails were rejected, bringing the total of 103 emails that were successfully sent. Out of the 716 emails generated from the Police Chief's Association email list, 21 emails were rejected, bringing the total of 695 emails sent successfully. The total number of successful emails sent was 798. In the survey request email sent to the 798 emails, it included the instructions to "Please forward to the administrator in your department over your Social Media Communications. (If you have already received this email I apologize, please disregard)". This verbiage was designed to minimize the number of duplicated surveys from a single agency. Based on FDLE data, there are 399 law enforcement agencies within Florida. A total of 146 responses were recorded within Survey Monkey. The return rate on the 695 emails sent out was 21%. The return rate based on the 399 total law enforcement agencies in the state of Florida it was 36.5 %.

The first question asked respondents to indicate the year their agency started using social media. Two respondents skipped the question.

- 7 indicated 2003-2005 (4.8%),
- 20 indicated 2006-2009 (13.9%),
- 56 indicated 2010-2013 (38.9%),
- 41 indicated 2014-2017 (28.4%),
- 21 indicated 2018-2021 (14%).

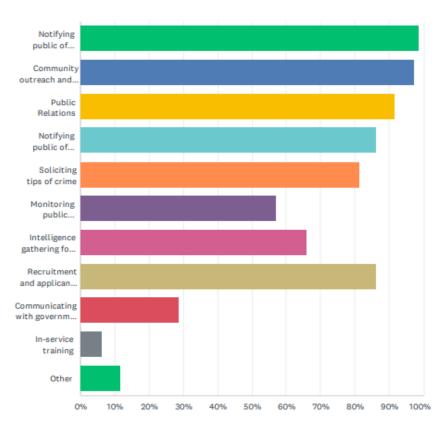## Q1 Year Agency Started Using Social Media?

Answered: 144   Skipped: 2

The second question asked respondents to indicate what their agency use social media for. Respondents were able to choose more than one answer. There were 144 respondents. Two respondents skipped the question.

- 142 indicated for notifying public of public safety concerns (98.6%),
- 140 indicated for community outreach and engagement (97.2%),
- 132 indicated for public relations (91.6%),
- 124 indicated for notifying public of noncriminal issues (traffic) (86.1%),
- 117 indicated for soliciting tips for crime (81.2%).
- 82 indicated for monitoring public statements (56.9%)
- 95 indicated intelligence gathering for investigations (65.9%)
- 124 indicated for recruitment and applicant vetting (86.1%)
- 41 indicated communicating with other government agencies (28.4%)
- 9 indicated for in-service training (6.2%)
- 17 indicated for other reasons (11.8%)

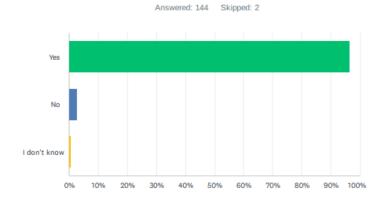## Q2 What Does Your Agency Use Social Media For?

Answered: 144   Skipped: 2

Category	
Notifying public of...	
Community outreach and...	
Public Relations	
Notifying public of...	
Soliciting tips of crime	
Monitoring public...	
Intelligence gathering fo...	
Recruitment and applican...	
Communicating with governm...	
In-service training	
Other	

The third question asked respondents to indicate if their agency has a written social media policy. There were 144 respondents. Two respondents skipped the question.

- 139 indicated yes (96.5%),
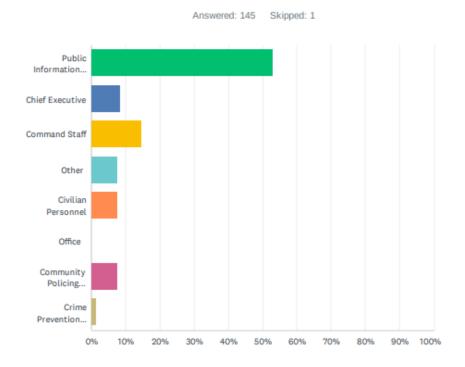- 4 indicated no (2.8%),
- 1 indicated don't know (0.7%)

Q3 Does Your Agency Have a Written Social Media Policy?

Answered: 144   Skipped: 2

Response	
Yes	
No	
I don't know	

The fourth question asked respondents who is the primarily designee responsible for managing your agency's social media accounts. There were 145 respondents. One respondent skipped the question.

- 77 indicated Public Information Office (53.1%),
- 12 indicated Chief Executive (8.3%),
- 21 indicated Command Staff (14.5%),
- 11 indicated other (7.6%),
- 11 indicated civilian personnel (7.6%).
- 0 indicated office (0%)
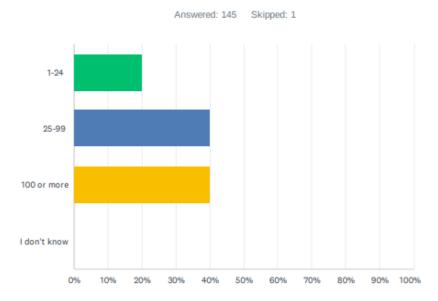- 11 indicated community policing office (7.6%)
- 2 indicated crime prevention officer (1.4%)

Q4 Who Is The Primarily Designee Responsible for Managing Your Agency's Social Media Accounts?

Answered: 145   Skipped: 1

The fifth question asked respondents to indicate the number of full time sworn personnel. There were 145 respondents. One respondent skipped the question.

- 29 indicated 1-24 (20%),
- 58 indicated 25-99 (40%),
- 58 indicated 100 or more (40%),
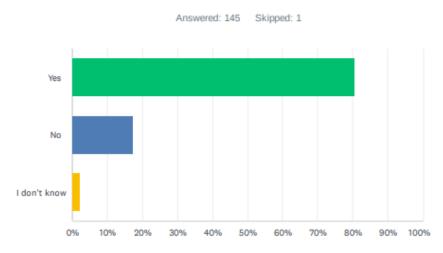- 0 indicated I don't know (0%),

Q5 What is the Number of Full-Time Sworn Personnel

Answered: 145   Skipped: 1

The sixth question asked respondents to indicate if their agency responds to user questions. There were 145 respondents. One respondent skipped the question.

- 117 indicated yes (80.7%),
- 25 indicated no (17.2%),
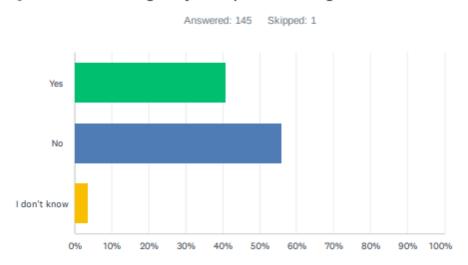- 3 indicated I don't know (2.1%),

Q6 Does Your Agency Respond to User Questions?

Answered: 145   Skipped: 1

The seventh question asked does your agency respond to negative comments? There were 145 respondents. One respondent skipped the question.

- 59 indicated yes (40.7%),
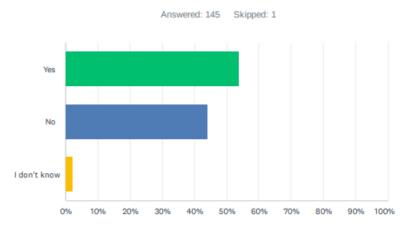- 81 indicated no (55.9%),
- 5 indicated I don't know (3.5%),

Q7 Does Your Agency Respond to Negative Comments?

Answered: 145   Skipped: 1

The eighth question asked respondents if their agency has set goals related to the use of social media. There were 145 respondents. One respondent skipped the question.

- 78 indicated yes (53.8%),
- 64 indicated no (44.1%),
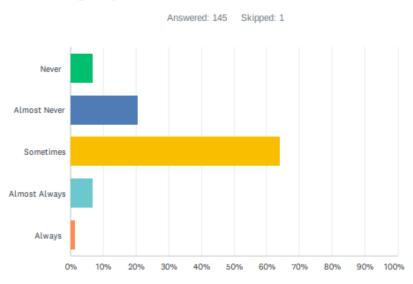- 3 indicated I don't know (2.1%),

Q8 Has Your Agency Set Goals Related to the Use of Social Media?

Answered: 145   Skipped: 1

The ninth question asked does your agency use informal tones and humor on social media? There were 145 respondents. One respondent skipped the question.

- 10 indicated never (6.9%),
- 30 indicated almost never (20.7%),
- 93 indicated sometimes (64.1%),
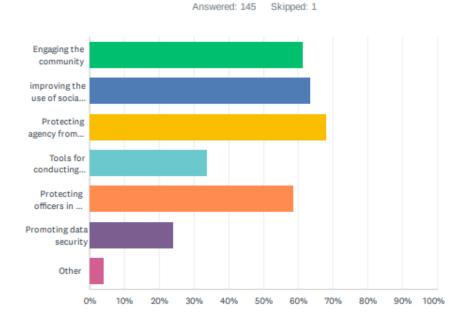- 10 indicated almost always (6.9%),
- 2 indicated always (1.4%).

Q9 Does Your Agency Use Informal Tones and Humor on Social Media?

Answered: 145   Skipped: 1

The tenth question asked respondents to indicate what training topics would be most valuable to your agency? Respondents were able to choose more than one answer. There were 145 respondents. One respondent skipped the question.

- 89 indicated for engaging the community (61.4%),
- 92 indicated for improving the use of social media (63.5%),
- 99 indicated for protecting agency from liability issues created by social media (68.3%),
- 49 indicated for tools for conducting criminal investigations (33.8%),
- 85 indicated for protecting officers in a digital environment (58.6%),
- 35 indicated for promoting data security (24.1%),
- 6 indicated other (4.1%)

Q10 What Training Topics Would be Most Valuable to Your Agency?

Answered: 145   Skipped: 1

Discussion

The research conducted within the state of Florida in this report was designed to compare with the national data collected in the (2016) Law Enforcement Use of Social Media, conducted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the Urban Institute. There was clear constituency between the reports showing a gradual climb in law enforcement agencies starting to use social media between the years of 2003 and 2010. Both surveys showed a spike in law enforcement agencies starting the use of social media between 2010 and 2013 and then a constant decline of new users from 2013 to 2021.

The ways agencies use social media was constant with the national survey.

- Notifying public of public safety concerns was 99% compared to (2016) 91%
- Community outreach and engagement was 97% compared to (2016) 89%
- Public relations use was 91% compared to (2016) 86%
- Notifying public of non-crime issues was 86% compared to (2016) 86%
- Soliciting tips on crime was 81% compared to (2016) 76%
- Monitoring public sentiment was 57% compared to (2016) 72%
- Intelligence gathering for investigations was 67% compared to (2016) 70%
- Recruitment and applicant vetting was 86% compared to (2016) 58%
- Communicating with government agencies was 29% compared to (2016) 29%
- In-service training was 7% comparted to (2016) 6%
- Other was 12% compared to (2016) 3%.

16

The research showed the use of social media has grown but the reasons for its use are constant form (2016). The most dramatic difference was the increase in using social media for recruitment and the decrease in use of monitoring the publics' sentiment of current issues. There was an increase in "other" use, which shows an increase in creativity or improvement in the technology and or both.

There was an increase in the percentage of agencies that had developed written social media policies. The research showed 96% of agencies were currently being managed by a written policy compared to (2016) 80%. This data is showing an increase in the importance of having standards and consistency for the use of social media management and legal standards. Law enforcement agencies in Florida have shown a strong increase in Public Information Officers' being the designee responsible for managing agencies' social media at 54%, compared to (2016) 25%. Chief Executive of law enforcement agencies currently at 8% manage their agencies compared to (2016) 15%. This appears to be an indication that agencies are moving towards a more specialized approach to social media management.

The research showed a decrease in some engagement of social media. 81% of Florida agencies surveyed respond to user questions compared to the (2016) 86%. The demands of trying to keep up with real time questions on social media perhaps has become a personnel issue. It takes significant manpower hours to communicate with citizens on a 24-hour media platform. This is consistent with 40% of agencies that now do not respond to negative comments compared to (2016) 64%. Each agency will most likely make these choices on a case-by-case basis by debating citizens who may be bating or trolling a government media site that appears to interact with the population. Trolling is an act by a person who makes a deliberate offensive or provocative online post.

As the use of social media has increased over time, law enforcement agencies have identified the importance of managing and measuring their social media performance. The research showed 53% of Florida agencies set goals related to the use of their social media compared to (2016) 33%. Measuring can be different based on the need or use of the social media by an agency. Perhaps it's my number of likes, followers, posts, crime tips founded / unfounded, and or public service announcements to name a few. The use of informal tones and humor is always a debate for agencies. The nature of being "social" is to be more informal than formal, but this can be a difficult line for government organizations. The research showed Florida agencies never or almost never use informal tones or humor 27% of the time compared to (2016) 26%. Florida agencies currently use informal tones or humor sometimes, almost always or always 72% of the time. The trends in tones used on social media do not seem to be changing as the use of social media evolves.

The research comparing topics that would be most valuable to an agency to receive more training could not be compared based on the questioning platform that was used in this survey compared to (2016). The research in this survey showed, out of the 147 surveys completed, the listed below shows the percentage of agencies that would like to see an increase in training in the listed topics.

- Engaging the community 62%
- Improving the use of social media 63%

- Protecting agency from liability issues created by social media 69%
- Tools for conducting criminal investigations 35%
- Protecting officers in a digital environment 59%
- Promoting data security 25%
- Other 4%

It is clear every agency would like to see more available training in the use of social media for their agencies.

One of the intentions of this research was also to identify the difference in the use of social media base on the population size of each law enforcement jurisdiction. Question number 5 in this survey attempted to identify the number of full-time sworn personnel at each agency participating in this survey. Agencies with 1 to 24 sworn personnel made up 20% of the survey. Agencies with 25 to 99 sworn personnel was 40% while agencies with more than 100 sworn personnel made up 40%. The development of the questions in the survey did not allow for each question to be subdivided by agency population size to see the difference in the responses between rural jurisdictions and jurisdictions with metropolis populations.

Technology is a neutral tool; it is neither good nor bad. The value of technology is determined by the user and how they decide to use the technology. There is an argument to be made that the conception of social media has created more chaos in the world. There are many of examples of how the style of communication through social media has destroyed relationships, caused misinformation that has affected society at the local, state, national and world levels. The ability for a single person to be able to communicate with tens of thousands of people from an electronic device that fits in their pocket has altered the way everyone does business and law enforcement is no exception. The good news is, on the flipside of this technology, it helped people find their life partners along with connecting family members together who live far apart. Having the ability to send information to large numbers of people at a rapid speed when emergencies occur, has probably saved an unmeasurable number of lives in the past decade. The data in this research shows that most law enforcement agencies have embraced the use of social media and have chosen to use it as a positive tool for communication.

It is important for law enforcement agencies to tell their own story and not rely on outside news media or social media platforms to define the narrative of what their agency is doing or its value. The old statement that you "don't argue with people who buy ink by the barrel" has expired. It is still imperative for law enforcement agencies to maintain good working relationships with other media outlets. We still need outside media sources to communicate with society because no one media source has cornered the market in the distribution of information. Law enforcement agencies should always want to reach as many citizens as possible when delivering vital public safety information. What has changed, is now law enforcement has more control over the amount of information, the style, and the speed in which it is released at.

Law enforcement agencies no matter how small or large should consider becoming their own news outlet, what would have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars in cameras, lights, sound equipment and personnel to run a studio has now been condensed into a signal smart phone. There is special equipment on the market to enhance your professional social media image, but with a creative person who has access to a smart

phone, an agency can make significant advances in social media communications. Selecting the personnel for your media relations position may be one of the most important choices an executive will make. This person will become a critical part of the organization. There are debates whether this person should be a sworn law enforcement officer or a civilian worker. I believe the answer is both. Ideally looking for someone from the private sector who has media experience especially from the video production side is vital. Having a person with the vision and talent for video production will enhance your agency's professional image and productivity. Having a sworn officer partnering with a specialized civilian is also vital, especially if that employee has a vast experience in multiple law enforcement areas such as investigation and other specialty units. This institutional knowledge is important for understanding the ripple effects of the information your agency is putting out to the public. They also have a better understanding when information should be protected related to ongoing investigations but also know when information should be released to help enhance ongoing investigations.

It is understandable that some agencies may have budget restraints making a new position just for public relations / social media seem unfeasible. A social media specialist position within an agency if managed properly should pay for itself. There are countless examples of where a missing person or wanted person has been located by the assistance of the public after an informative posting on social media was generated. In the past the time and resource of having helicopters, K9s and boots on the ground conducting investigations and searches would have cost an agency tens of thousands of dollars in man power, can now be dissolved by a quick posting to the public, in many circumstances. The catch to this scenario is that an agency must have an audience for dispersing information. This is where the informal tones and humor platforms play a role in growing your audience. To grow its agency's followers, many agencies are willing to push the line of social interaction with the public. I have called this the "Jerry Springer-Michael Jordan affect". In general people are drawn to the best of the best or the worst of the worst. Mugshots and stories of bad deeds conducted by defendants are a natural draw for people wanting to see the metaphoric train wrecks of life. It may be a sad commentary on society but an accurate one. Having assigned personnel actively posting on social media about arrest, traffic accidents and potential threats in the community like a rash of vehicle burglaries or bad weather alerts builds your social media following. As you increase your agency social media following you create more opportunity to use your platform proactively. Controlling your agency image through your social media accounts provides more opportunity to highlight the "Michael Jordan" moments that happen within your agency that would not be covered by local media. Posting successful vehicle pursuits that end with a safe arrest, K9 apprehensions or closures on long term investigations to name a few, show the dangerous and hard work your agency does on a daily basis. If an agency works to grow their followers, they will see a snowball effect in the effectiveness of using social media and ability to provide public service announcements that proactively protect and educate the community.

One of the most important things a law enforcement agency needs to do is know their audience. The diversity of the community you serve is important to understand. productive tax paying citizens will be watching your social media post, but so will those looking to commit crime and gather intel on what law enforcement knows or does not know. It is also important to understand the internal audience within your department. Are

the posts on your social media supported by the troops? Do they understand what the agency is trying to accomplish, and the style being used intentionally? The line level troops can be a force multiplier on your mission or can undermine the success of building more followers, if they do not understand the "Jerry Springer- Michela Jordan concept". It is also important to highlight as many different officers as possible in your department, so they all feel invested in the process. An agency can create an unhealthy subculture by not spreading the accessibility to a diverse group of employees by exposing them to the agency social media audiences. Citizen's love K9s and K9 officers but secretaries and vehicle maintenance teams are important as well and need to be highlighted to the public. Law enforcement agencies need to be informed what social media platforms are most popular with their citizens' demographic. Much like a financial portfolio diversity is important. An agency may find one social media platform is more useful than another and adjustments should be made. Law Enforcement agencies should be cautious, putting all their "eggs in one basket" by committing to only one or two social media platforms, as the social media world is continuously evolving and changing. It is imperative you have an assigned person to monitor and manage the social media accounts to watch for trends and to build consistencies for measuring successes and failures.

Recommendations

One of the big takeaways from this research is the desire for more training in the realm of social media. This subject matter is discussed in public relations classes but specialized classes that really drill down on how to engage the community through social media which are hard to find. Topics like shielding our agency from liability, conducting investigations, and protecting data security when using social media need to be addressed in formal training.

Another takeaway would be the importance of selecting the correct person or people to manage an agency's social media. It would be advised that a team of a sworn officer who shows interest in creatively thinking "outside the box", and civilian personnel with a strong understanding of the criminal justice system combine efforts to create a professional, educational, entertaining social media platform.

The use of social media for law enforcement purposes is still in its genesis stages. Perhaps more time is needed to help develop more formal social media training for law enforcement. This is where informal training plays a key role in the development in social media relations. Trial and error, there are not set blueprints for how to use social media for law enforcement. This lack of structure may scare agency administrators, but there is also an excitement in the idea we have found new ways to fight crime and educate the public with these tools. Law enforcement agencies may find the risk of exploring new boundaries worth the risk, especially when communicating with younger generations. Informal training in social media relations looks a lot like old fashion networking. A final recommendation is to pinpoint agencies that have productive social media engagements and send a representative to that agency to invest time asking questions and learning new perspectives that can be adopted.

Lieutenant Ryan Robbins has been with the Marion County Sheriff's Office since 2002. He currently serves as a District Commander in the Patrol Bureau. Lieutenant Robbins has been blessed to work many areas within the Sheriff's Office. He began his career as a patrol deputy and quickly became a Narcotics investigator and later a Major Crimes detective. Lieutenant Robbins was promoted within the Investigation's Bureau. He later became the Training Coordinator, Public Information Director, and Watch Commander. Lieutenant Robbins is also proud of his twelve years of dedication to the Marion County SWAT team which he held the position of Team Leader. Lieutenant Robbins received a Bachelor of Science degree in Liberal Studies from the University of Central Florida.

References

Cruz, R. (2020). The power and danger of social media for law enforcement. GCN https://gcn.com/articles/2020/07/31/social-media-law-enforcement-records-laws.aspx

Bhattacharya, A. (2015). Why police departments are using Pinterest. *CNNMoney,* https://money.cnn.com/2015/08/05/technology/police-lost-and-found-pinterest/index.html

Goodman, D.J. (2014.) Despite Twitter backlash, New York Police Dept. plans to expand social media efforts. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/28/nyregion/despite-twitter-backlash-new-york-police-dept-plans-to-expand-social-media-efforts.html

Jones, M. (2021). The complete history of social media: A timeline of the Invention of online networking. *The History Cooperative*. https://historycooperative.org/the-history-of-social-media/

Kelly, B.C.H. (2012). Police embrace social media as crime-fighting tool. *CNN.* https://www.cnn.com/2012/08/30/tech/social-media/fighting-crime-social-media/index.html

Kim, K., Oglesby-Neal, A., & Mohr, E. (2017). 2016 law enforcement use of social media survey. *Urban Institute.* https://www.urban.org/research/publication/2016-law-enforcement-use-social-media-survey

LexisNexis. (2014). Survey of law enforcement personnel and their use of social media. *LexisNexis Risk Solutions*. https://risk.lexisnexis.com/insights-resources/infographic/law-enforcement-usage-of-social-media-for-investigations-infographic

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. *Definition of Social Media*. https://www.merriam-webster.com

Newton, C. (2014). Man arrested after allegedly pledging to shoot a passerby for 100 retweets. *The Verge*. https://www.theverge.com/2014/3/13/5506208/man-arrested-after-allegedly-pledging-to-shoot-a-passerby-for-100

Perez, K. (2021). Social media has become a critical part of law enforcement. *National Police Foundation, Advancing Policing Through Innovation and Science*. https://www.policefoundation.org/onpolicing/social-media-has-become-a-critical-part-of-law-enforcement/

Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2019) The rise of social media. *Our World in Data*. https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media

Robertson, A. (2014) FBI arrests Colorado man for threatening to kill police in YouTube comments. *The Verge*. https://www.theverge.com/2014/12/24/7447127/fbi-arrests-colorado-man-for-threatening-to-kill-police-in-youtube

Tiry, E., Oglesby-Neal, A. & Kim, K. (2019). Improving community engagement through social media: Strategies for law enforcement to increase transparency, accessibility. *Urban Institute*. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/improving_engagement_through_social_media.pdf

Appendix A

Survey Questions

Hello, I am Lt. Ryan Robbins with the Marion County Sheriff's Office. I am currently in the Senior Leadership Program at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and I am conducting research on the use of social media by law enforcement. I am requesting for the administrator of your Social Media Communications within your organization, to answer 10 short questions. All data collected in this project will be available on the FDLE website at the conclusion of the research project. Please click the below link which will take you to the survey located within SurveyMonkey.

1. Year Agency Started Using Social Media?
   - 2003-2005
   - 2006-2009
   - 2010-2013
   - 2014-2017
   - 2018- 2021

2. What Does Your Agency Use Social Media For?
   - Notifying public of public safety concerns
   - Community outreach and engagement
   - Public Relations
   - Notifying public of noncriminal issues (traffic)
   - Soliciting tips of crime
   - Monitoring public sentiment
   - Intelligence gathering for investigations
   - Recruitment and applicant vetting
   - Communicating with government agencies
   - In-service training
   - Other.

3. Does Your Agency Have a Written Social Media Policy?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I don't know

4. Who Is the Primarily Designee Responsible for Managing Your Agency's Social Media Accounts?
   - Public Information Officer
   - Chief executive
   - Command Staff
   - Other
   - Civilian Personnel

- Officer
- Community Policing Officer
- Crime Prevention Office

5. What Is the Number of Full-Time Sworn Personnel?
   - 1-24
   - 25-99
   - 100 or more
   - I don't know

6. Does Your Agency Respond to User Questions?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I don't know

7. Does Your Agency Respond to Negative Comments?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I don't know

8. Has Your Agency Set Goals Related to The Use of Social Media?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I don't know
   -
9. Does Your Agency Use Informal Tones and Humor on Social Media?
   - Never
   - Almost never
   - Sometimes
   - Almost Always
   - Always

10. What Training Topics Would be Most Valuable to Your Agency?
    - Engaging the community
    - Improving the use of social media
    - Protecting agency from liability issues created by social media
    - Tools for conducting criminal Investigations
    - Protecting officers in a digital environment
    - Promoting data security
    - Other