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## **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

### **Enhancing police legitimacy through the use of Twitter -- A Mixed-method Study of Police Communication via Twitter in England and Wales**

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Enhancing police legitimacy through the use of Twitter  
– A Mixed-method Study of Police Communication via  
Twitter in England and Wales

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A Thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

Police legitimacy is a core concept in policing as it is closely connected to the fundamental element of “policing by consent”, affecting the rightfulness of the state police’s exercise of power and citizens’ decisions as to whether or not to obey police instructions. Developments in technology have significant impacts on policing and the broader ‘visibility’ of policing. Increased scrutiny of policing practices has the potential to expose, and bring to the fore, negative images of individual police officers, which is likely to lead to scandals and even reputational crises for the police organisation. Thus, the new visibility of policing on social media can significantly affect police legitimacy. This research examines police communication at the local force level via social media, namely Twitter, to engage with citizens. It questions if, and how, the police enhance and repair legitimacy via Twitter, comparing the different operational tactics of deployment of social media.

Employing a mixed-methods research design, this study explores the current police communication via Twitter in two police forces located in England and Wales. Fieldwork has been conducted in the offices of the two force corporate communication branches (as called corporate communication department in Hawshire), in particular, seven semi-structured interviews and two focus groups with nine Communication Officers from Hawshire and five interviews and one focus group with three officers from Lionshire Police force, one communication training session in Hawshire, and a two-night’ shift patrol with an undercover team of Lionshire Police. Building upon the analysis of interviews, focus groups, and field notes, documentary analysis of the official communication guidance and training materials from the two forces, ACPO, NPCC, and the College of Policing was employed, and a total of 840 and 1521 posts were collected respectively from police corporate Twitter accounts for analysing themes and patterns of the police tweets. In so doing, this thesis provides a comprehensive assessment of how Communication Officers operate police Twitter,

how different individual police forces use social media, and a wealth of data to suggest how the police conduct image work via social media.

This research proposes that police forces attempt to enhance police legitimacy via social media, both for external and internal audiences. In order to achieve a positive and active engagement, individual police forces employ different communication strategies to encourage public engagement, producing various themes within the posts. Internally, the Corporate Communication department people were making efforts to communicate with police officers to enhance a sense of occupational satisfaction and self-legitimacy by posting positive stories of the police and signal markers of policing work. Externally, the police used Twitter to present an image of holding shared values with their different publics, especially seeking to provide evidence of effective policing and trustworthiness. In so doing, the posts served to also 'teach' police officers to be self-legitimate, and jointly produce and enhance police legitimacy.

In addition, while there are many advantages of the police use of social media, this study suggested that the 'new visibility' (Goldsmith, 2010) of the police on social media is, paradoxically, one of the obstacles hindering Communication Officers' willingness to use social media. The heightened visibility has the potential to threaten individual officers' careers, as well as the organization's reputation. In order to minimize such risks, Communication Officers were required to conduct communication under strict rules and constraints - both on and off duty - therefore striking a balance between promoting the police image and managing the risk communication. At last, it is noted that while there are differences between the posted themes in the two research sites, both police forces acknowledged the importance of appearing personable ('being human') when conducting communication via Twitter – in other words presenting police as approachable and likeable characters. However, rather than emphasizing an *engaging* character on *all* police corporate Twitter accounts, this thesis argued that different police Twitter accounts with varied focuses and functions are likely to be more conducive in communication and enhancing police legitimacy.

‘Yr wyf drwy hyn yn datgan mai canlyniad fy ymchwil fy hun yw’r thesis hwn, ac eithrio lle nodir yn wahanol. Caiff ffynonellau eraill eu cydnabod gan droednodiadau yn rhoi cyfeiriadau eglur. Nid yw sylwedd y gwaith hwn wedi cael ei dderbyn o’r blaen ar gyfer unrhyw radd, ac nid yw’n cael ei gyflwyno ar yr un pryd mewn ymgeisiaeth am unrhyw radd oni bai ei fod, fel y cytunwyd gan y Brifysgol, am gymwysterau deuol cymeradwy.’

Rwy’n cadarnhau fy mod yn cyflwyno’r gwaith gyda chytundeb fy Ngrichwylwr (Goruchwylwr)’

‘I hereby declare that this thesis is the results of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. All other sources are acknowledged by bibliographic references. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree unless, as agreed by the University, for approved dual awards.’

I confirm that I am submitting the work with the agreement of my Supervisor(s)’

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# **CHAPTER ONE. Setting the Scene: (Re)Constructing Police Legitimacy on Social Media**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Legitimacy plays a vital role in the relationship between the state, citizens and their police. The development of social media communication is an activity that places police legitimacy under intense pressure and scrutiny. The primary focus of this thesis is the exploration of police officers' perceptions of social media use, and those elements which affect the construction of police legitimacy via social media communication. It is a study which is both theoretically and empirically informed. The empirical research draws on a mixed methods research design to facilitate a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how the police use the social media platform of 'Twitter' to communicate and negotiate legitimacy with the public in the era of the information age. Researching how official, dedicated police Twitter accounts are being operated requires a design of methods and analytical approach that uncovers and captures the subjective and objective aspects of the account operation - namely, (1) the police's own understandings and experiences of using the 'corporate account', as well as, (2) how the communication is presented to the public via police corporate accounts. This is considered within the context of technological and political changes in the broader 'field' of policing (Byrne & Marx, 2011; Fielding, 2021, p. 18; Smith et al., 2017); the influence of internal occupational cultures; and the legitimization needs of the police, emphasizing the role of image management and the power of online communication.

Today, police use of social media tools to engage with citizens has become a pervasive phenomenon in the UK and elsewhere around the world. It has received considerable attention in recent years from the public, academics and professionals, particularly in the context of police image work (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Bullock, 2018a, 2018b; Goldsmith, 2010; Sandhu & Haggerty, 2017). Police image work has gained status as an orthodoxy in policing, as the means to perform public engagement and thus increase perceived police legitimacy (Bullock, 2018a; Mawby, 2002b). Social media

communication has arguably become installed as the dominant form of interaction for understanding the 'new visibility' (Goldsmith, 2010) of the police in a highly mediated society, and it informs police communication strategy and tactics in the UK aimed at reducing social distance from the public and enhancing police legitimacy (Crump, 2011; Meijer, 2015; Meijer & Thaens, 2013).

A positive contribution of both practices has been to significantly raise the level of focus and debate about police legitimacy in a new way. However, neither *police image work* nor *social media communication* addresses the presence and impact of antecedents and contingencies on the adoption of social media into current policing cultures and practices, and the impact this has on police legitimacy. These antecedents and contingencies appear to derive from three main sources:

- i) pre-existing and changing perception of police legitimacy by different groups of citizens (Goldsmith, 2010; Reiner et al., 1978; Reiner, 2010).
- ii) a fundamental transformation of the communication market (Castells, 2009; Mansell, 2002; McChesney, 2007)
- iii) the dialogic nature of police legitimacy (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012; Tankebe, 2013).

These sources are expanded upon in the following chapter. Combined, they demonstrate complexities that are currently missing from our understanding of the nuances of police legitimacy via social media communication in the era of social networking.

## **1.2 Approach and Methods**

Communication via social media is a new area of policing activity which is difficult for police institutions to control (Denef et al., 2013), yet arguably this phenomenon is becoming increasingly important (Crump, 2011; Procter, Vis, et al., 2013). This thesis aims to provide an empirical exploration of how police communication has adapted to changes in the techno-social circumstances that the society has been connected by the ever-increasing use of the Internet, mobile communication and social media networking (Rainie and Wellman 2012), and how Twitter is used as one communication channel to enhance police legitimacy. The research thus also aims to better understand the concept of police engagement with the public via social media and the factors that underpin and impact it. It addresses such questions, focusing on the role of social media and police use of Twitter as tools to shape and influence such engagement – and legitimacy - with the public. To this end, the orienting question underpinning the thesis is: How do police forces use Twitter to enhance police legitimacy?

The initial qualitative phase of this study explored the experience and understanding of police officers and staff from what I shall call 'Hawshire' and 'Lionshire' police forces, respectively, through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with Communication Officers in each force. Observations of their communication training helped to elicit an understanding of how these police forces introduce communication via social media and expect their officers to operate the corporate accounts on behalf of the police. Non-participant observation, while accompanying an undercover team patrol, highlighted the importance of balancing public engagement and avoiding exposure of sensitive information, as observed during an undercover patrol. Communication Officers would delete information and mosaic pictures that might expose operations while keeping the audience informed of how they were performing their police work.

In the next stage of the empirical investigation, tweets were collected from the two forces' corporate Twitter accounts, and closely analysed in order to examine the common themes communicated by the police. I was interested in exploring what strategies the police use to engage with the public, and what factors impact on and shape the level of tweet engagement. It is through analysis of the police-initiated communication themes and communication strategies that we can draw a picture of and understand latent police intentions as police organisations seek to communicate with their publics, so, in the words of one officer, enabling them to 'win the public's heart' and support, thus increasing public understanding and potentially enhancing police legitimacy.

The following five inter-related research questions frame this research:

- How do police Communication Officers in Hawshire and Lionshire Police differently view and understand the use of social media?
- How are Communication Officers trained by their organizations to operate online communication?
- How do police Communication Officers use the corporate account?
- Are there differences in the way different forces communicate with the publics via twitter?
- What is the role of police online communication in the structuration of police legitimacy?

### 1.3 Concept and Manifestation of Police Legitimacy

Police legitimacy is a core concept in policing scholarship and is especially germane for *police image work* and *social media communication*. Before discussing the concept more fully, I will outline some broader definitions and discussion related to legitimacy, and other core concepts that frame this study, including the 'police' and 'policing'. While this thesis specifically engages with the version of police legitimacy within the context of police image construction and social media communication, it is nevertheless still worth acknowledging other theoretical considerations regarding the concept of legitimacy and how it can be applied in the policing context.

Police legitimacy is a concept that interrelates closely with the police and policing. Weitzer and Reiner (1985, pp. 4–8) define the term 'police' as 'a specialised body of people given primary formal responsibility for legitimate force to safeguard security'. Although there are multiple bodies providing security services to the public, such as private security companies, public policing is considered to have a substantial and symbolic linkage with politics and the state that regulates social behaviours and maintains social security (Mestrovic & Fenton, 1985; Rowe, 2013). Reiner (2010) suggested a narrowing down to the definition of policing so as to avoid this term becoming a package for all activities that contribute to maintaining social order. In Reiner's practical definition, *policing* is 'the creation of systems of surveillance coupled with the threat of sanctions for discovered deviance' (ibid. p5). Therefore, in this study, I chose the more focused definition of this term, that while many groups and institutions contribute to providing safe-guarding activities to the citizens, *policing* here refers only to the activities conducted by the state and the 'public' police.

In general, the public police connected to the state are seen as having legitimacy to conduct certain activities. Therefore, it is important to explore what legitimacy means in general and in the context of policing. Legitimacy is, in policing scholarship, the foundation for police authority (Tyler, 2004; Tyler & Fagan, 2010). Authority, as Arendt

(1970) suggested, is an attribute rooted in society, which can be granted to individuals, organizations and social groups, and it is characterized by the unconditional approval of those who are required to obey, without the need for coercion or persuasion. A legitimate police force has public support and voluntary compliance, and public belief that the police power is rightful and can be properly exercised (National Research Council, 2004; Tyler & Wakslak, 2006). Building upon the Weberian theory that legitimacy is defined as the *belief* of citizens that a regime is legitimate (Grafstein, 1981), Tyler argued that legitimacy in policing is primarily the feeling of obligation to obey the decisions and requests of the police (Tyler & Wakslak, 2006; Tyler 2006). Such obedience is voluntary, not because of the fear of punishment nor personal morality of abiding by the law. It persuades people that deference to the authorities, the police, in particular, and act in accordance with the requirements of the law is the right thing to do. Legitimacy thus secures people's voluntary obedience towards the law when the police cannot exercise power.

Furthermore, police legitimacy is also reflected in the belief that the police share the mainstream moral values of the society (Tankebe, 2009b). Hough et al. (2010) argued that a sense of shared values and the subsequent group identity partially form the power given to the police to exercise (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015). The idea that legitimacy is related to moral principles of people can be traced back to Beetham (1991, p.69) where he holds the view that rules need to be justified with regard to the prevailing beliefs and values in a society, otherwise "the powerful can enjoy no moral authority for the exercise of their power, whatever its legal validity; and their requirements cannot be normatively binding, though they may be successfully enforced". To Beetham (1991), the *belief in legitimacy* (Weber 1922, 1978) fails to reflect the aspects of legitimacy that have little to do with beliefs, such as conformity to legal rules, and he advances a conceptual scheme of "legitimacy-in-context" (Skinns et al., 2017; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). This scheme contains a structure of legitimacy that can be applied to all societies rather than to some specific types. While it has been argued that despite social-structural, political and cultural differences, societies from



distinct areas and notions share the same underlying structure of legitimacy (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003), people of different social groups may view legitimacy differently due to the social inequalities, such as ethnicity, social class and gender. To Beetham, power is legitimate if it meets three elements: *legality*, *shared values* and *expressed consent* (Beetham, 1991), and he suggested that societies with distinct social-structural and cultural backgrounds share this same underlying structure of legitimacy. Building on this, Tankebe (2013) further discussed the layers of legitimacy in policing context, articulating *lawfulness* and *shared values* as the two fundamental pillars of police legitimacy. Added by the work of Bottoms and Tankebe (2012), *self-legitimacy* is included as another dimension of police legitimacy, which constructed the theoretical framework of this thesis.

*Lawfulness*, also termed *Legality*, is described as “the first and most basic level of legitimacy” (Beetham 1991, p. 16). In a liberal democratic society, the lawfulness of police authority is rooted in the notion of the “rule of law” (Tamanaha, 2010), which focuses on the due process and equality, with equality being delivered through the generality of the law (Allan, 2003; Tamanaha, 2004). The police are therefore entitled by the law to exercise power during the policing practice, such as stop and search. Another dimension of the lawfulness of police legitimacy lies in *how* those powers are exercised. Police are meant to strictly follow due process of the law and act in an unbiased and objective manner (Tamanaha, 2004). Besides, it is also essential for the police to respect people’s legal rights conferred by the law, for instance, treating members of the public with respect, allowing them time to give statements or explanations and making fair policing decisions (Allan, 1998; Tamanaha, 2004; Tyler, 1990, 2004; Tyler & Fagan, 2008). This process is termed “procedural justice” by Tom Tyler (1990), which emphasizes that police exercise power in a way that follows the laws and produces fair decisions. Police in England and Wales have certain amount of discretion when enforcing the law, for example, they have rights to search persons and vehicles without a warrant in specific situation. Procedural justice is essential in appealing public’s support and cooperation during the encounters between the police

and individual citizens. Although it has been argued that there is a gap between the requirements of law and front-line police activities (Crank, 2014), the *legality* of police is of the great importance for public assessment of police legitimacy.

*Shared values*, another crucial element in the legitimation process, has many functional aspects (Bradford et al., 2012; Tankebe, 2013). In a practical context, shared beliefs and values of society institutionalize the accepted source of power and specify the corresponding attributes to exercise that power. Citizens comply with the law only to the extent that the law is the representation of recognized social values, which requires the acceptance of both the powerful and those subjected to power (Beetham, 1991; Coicaud, 2002). Therefore, the police are accepted as a legitimate authority when they enforce the law in ways that are recognized and acknowledged both by themselves and those subjected to it. However, the notion of shared values between the police and the public is problematic in a community that consists of people who have diverse backgrounds. People from different minority ethnic backgrounds may have distinct beliefs and values, and policing may be disproportionately applied, thus their experiences of police encounters vary. Whilst the attitudes and confidence toward the police presented an increasing trend of confidence among different socio-demographic groups in recent years (Bradford, 2011), confidence towards the police from black and ethnic minority groups remains relatively and consistently lower. Besides the support from the white middle-class population, police are expected to engage and represent the values and norms of different groups in order to earn – and win - their support. In this context, perceptions of police engagement with the community are a central component in gaining public support and trust, which further enhance police legitimacy (Loader & Mulcahy, 2012; Reiner & Newburn, 2000; Weitzer & Reiner, 1985).

Tankebe (2014) suggested that in a liberal democratic society, three normative expectations can be extrapolated from Beetham's concept of legitimacy, namely *distributive fairness or justice*; *procedural fairness or justice*; and *performance or*

*effectiveness* (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012; Tankebe, 2014b). *Distributive justice* refers to how a police organization allocates the resources among the policed when facing conflicts of interests or needs (Petersen & Roemer, 1997). Police resources, as Lerner & Clayton (2011) argued, can be divided into two different types as *concrete* and *symbolic* resources. The former type means the physical resources that can be observed, such as police patrols, policing activities, and police personnel; while the latter can send symbolic meanings of the police but cannot be quantified, like ethical policing, police dignity and professionalism. An assessment of police distributive justice is to find out how fairly police distribute these two kinds of resources among different social groups, for example, different ethnic groups. The longstanding and critical debate about the police's practice of stop-and-search which is directed disproportionately towards minority ethnic groups can jeopardise the element of distributive justice of police legitimacy (Bradford & Loader, 2015, p. 206; Murray, 2014; Waddington, Stenson, & Don, 2004).

*Procedural justice* relates to delivering the symbolic resources among the public (Lerner & Clayton, 2011). There is a wealth of research focusing on procedural justice, which was initiated by Tom Tyler, and rather than considering institutions holding the authority to exercise their power, the focus is on *how* they exercise that power (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1990, 2004; Tyler, Goff, & MacCoun, 2015). Through interviews with citizens in Chicago to investigate their attitudes, experiences, behaviour and expectation of law enforcement, Tyler argued that rather than following instrumental requirements, people mostly obey the law for normative reasons because they believe the authorities had the right to enforce the law. And the belief in the rightfulness of authorities was heavily dependent on and influenced by the treatment they received in the criminal justice system, e.g. in court proceedings or encounters with police. This treatment, also known as a "teachable moment", is crucial for forming or undermining the public's perceptions of the legitimacy of police and the subsequent content of people's cooperation and compliance (Skinns et al., 2017, p. 603; Tyler, 2011; Tyler, Fagan, & Geller, 2014).

The last normative expectation emanating from the idea of shared values is *performance or effectiveness*, which focuses on the police capability of achieving effective and robust results in fighting crime and disorder and increasing the risk of sanctions for wrongdoers (Tyler, 2004). Literature that focuses on the effectiveness of the police tends to examine the influence of legitimacy and police effectiveness upon the public's compliance and cooperation with the police (Hinds & Murphy, 2007; Kochel et al., 2013; Tankebe, 2008). Legal authorities can, on the one hand, use incentives to encourage cooperation and obedience, and on the other hand, legal authorities need to show that they serve the best interests of society and meet a normative criterion, which requires competency and effective in their tasks (Beetham, 1991). Therefore, the police would need to *present* effectiveness in policing work, including fighting crimes and deterring disorder, not only to fulfil an instrumental function, but also to meet a normative consideration for enhancing legitimacy based on the social contract (Coicaud, 2002). In addition, Tankebe (2009) found that in developing nations such as Ghana, police effectiveness is closely associated with residents' willingness to cooperate, from a utilitarian perspective. He suggested that in places which have high levels of violence and police corruption, obligation to obey the police, namely police legitimacy, is not derived from consent, but from perceptions of current police effectiveness in fighting against crime. Tyler and colleagues (2007) suggested the basis of legitimacy can impact its consequences. In this vein, compliance does not exclusively derive from a normative or moral basis, but is due to instrumental or utilitarian reasons, such as fear or intimidation (Kochel et al., 2013), therefore it does not reflect legitimacy of the police, nor have the same impact as that where obedience is based on consent from the citizens (Tankebe, 2009a). In this context, police effectiveness contradicts the nature of police legitimacy, namely voluntary consent (Lipset, 1959). As Tankebe (2012) claimed in his later research, however, an essential point to distinguish the utilitarian consideration from normative criteria of cooperation in terms of police effectiveness, is the citizens' consideration of their interests.

Along with the lawfulness and shared values, *self-legitimacy* has been addressed by Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) as another dimension of police legitimacy. Termed as the “power-holder legitimacy”, which refers to “the self-belief that rulers have in their moral right to govern” (ibid, p.149), they argued that the self-awareness of being legitimate and having rights to exercise power by police themselves are important to enhance police legitimacy inwardly. Self-legitimacy of the police is a precondition for audience legitimacy, that is, only when the police, the power-holders bear the belief in the moral rightness of their own legitimacy they can make claims to others who are subjected to their rulings (Barker, 2001). Also termed “internal legitimacy”, Boulding (1976) suggested that the sense of self-legitimacy could be beneficial for the stability and effectiveness of authority as its loss can lead to “disorganization of behaviour and an inability to perform an assigned role”.

More importantly, as society has become more diverse, the assessment that the public view the police as legitimate and trustworthy, has been shifted from the “sacred” (where the police have an iconic status to maintain a well ordered England) to the “profane” (where the state police function as just another public service) that the public confidence is now “tentative and brittle ... to be renegotiated case by case” (Reiner & Newburn, 2000, p. 162). In this vein, police legitimacy is *dialogic*, which involves claims to legitimacy by the police and responses by audiences (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012). In particular, the police will have to first stand by the rightfulness of their exercise of power, and then prepare to put forward revised claims to legitimacy when a relevant audience has rejected one or some aspects of their original claims.

## **1.4 Image Management: Articulating the Connections Between Police Image Work and Police Legitimacy**

### **1.4.1 Image Management: the Development of Police Image Work**

The police as a state authority has multiple functions and symbolic meanings, with its main tasks still considered to be keeping social order, fighting crimes, and acting as the “peace-keeping” role (Banton, 1964; Walker, 1996). In light of different aspects of policing, the police need to construct an image that is recognized and accepted by the public, gains their confidence and support and secures consent with the actions of police institutions (Reiner, 2008). The process of shaping the image is what Aiello (2014) termed the “self-portrait” of police – a *controlled image* - which is constructed through “ceremonies, visible daily activities, props and symbols, and special knowledge and techniques [that] constitute resources by which police can mark, claim, display, defend, and reaffirm their mandate” and identity (Manning, 1992a, p. 144). In a broad sense, the image work of the police, or positive representations of the police to the public, involves “the continuous reconstruction and reinterpretation of the nature of policing as matters of social order, conflict and authority change” (Reiner, 2008, p. 314).

The media have been an influential, and often fractious, factor in shaping and promoting police images to the public (Emsley, 1992; Allen et al., 1998; Reiner, 2008). While the media attempt to maximize their audiences and revenues, they are fulfilling the role of the “fourth power” that scrutinizes and challenges state institutions on behalf of the public (Davis, 2004; Ringen, 2003, p. 34). The media depend on the police as prime news sources. In turn, the media is an important concern to the police as the policing has been a matter of symbolism as much as substance (Leishman and Mason, 2003; Loader, 1997; Walker, 1996), and media representation of the police “has always been one key aspect of the general debate about media and crime, and constitutes an important arena within which the legitimacy of the police has been contested and

constructed.” (Reiner, 2008, P. 317). The relationship between the police and the media has been complex that characterized by cooperation as well as tension. As Sir Robert Mark, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner from 1972-7, puts it, an “enduring, if not ecstatically happy marriage” (Chibnall, 1979, p. 135).

Studies have found that the police are in a dominant position in this discordant relationship, trying to manage their media image in different ways through controlling the flow and content of information released to the media (Manning, 2001; Reiner, 2008; Mawby, 2002). The first attempt to formalize a police-media relation can be traced back to the establishment of a press room at Scotland Yard in 1919. Although the limited functions of the new press rooms were unable to fully satisfy the needs of the press and some police personnel were observed selling information to the press, the birth of the police press office became a potent symbol of concerns from the police about information control and image shaping (Mawby, 2002a). It was not until the late 1960s that other forces in England and Wales started to employ professional teams and units to control police related information. During the intervening period the police were suspicious to the media reports and attempted to influence the way in which the media representations of them portrayed to the public. For example, during 1920s, the police have played essential roles in campaigns to censor cinema due to the condemned ill-treatment of the police and concerns about its negative consequences to audiences and social orders (Fielding, 2013).

A more organized approach was taken by Sir Harold Scott, the Met Commissioner in 1945 who extended the scope and extent of the Scotland Yard press office and formed “mutually beneficial relationships with newspaper editors” (Scott, 1954: 91-2, cited in Mawby, 2002, p. 306). By providing the fullest and earliest information to the press on police activities, fair and full information on the police activities was reported which encouraged the support and cooperation of the general public (Scott, 1954, p. 92). Scott’s initiatives were the predecessor of the communication policy later deployed by Robert Mark in the 1970s. Mark constructed a more systematic approach to police-

media relations that he launched a memorandum in 1973 which, for the first time, encouraged police officers to disclose information to the media. While this policy had strict control of information, the new openness of the police was seen as the template for police-media relations, which at very least, changed the media-driven narrative of police and policing work (Mawby, 2002b; Reiner & Bunyan, 1976; Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994).

In order to better manage and actively release information and liaise with the press and build stronger community relations (Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Walker, 1985), a liaison role within the police organization, Public Information Officers were created, after the publish of The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967) and the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals (1973). The adoption of the means of a formal 'communication department', albeit in the early days, signalled the start of binding police image management into policing activities, which was a conscious organizational move to fostered legitimacy (Mawby, 2002a). Before the advent, and rise, of the Internet and social media, it was largely the role of Public Information Officers to deal with the press and news media, "feeding" them information and stories about police and crime (Ericson, 1982, p. 8; Mawby, 2002b). To maintain effective communication, Public Information Officers usually employed communication skills tactically to gain public and political support, maintaining the relationship with the media and responding (smartly) to police scandals. The police spokesperson is, therefore, the result of the need for professional responses to the media and manages public image and performance of the police (Farkas & Manning, 1997; Manning, 1992), which is essential for building and rebuilding the legitimacy of the police organization (Chermak & Weiss, 2005).

However, with the rapid development of news media industry and technologies during the 1980s, a primary transformation of the police-media relationship occurred in the context of the social and cultural shifts - interpreted as post-modernity. Changes in



technology and routines of social life have interacted with each other, and impact social and cultural life through the increasingly popular mass media (Thompson, 1995). The media in different kinds of forms, such as televisions, radio, videos, or the Internet, became omnipresent that closely attached with individual's routine lives. The demand for police-related stories and news increased while the contact between the police and the public decreased (Greer & McLaughlin, 2010; Mawby & Gisby, 2009). The increasing scrutiny of the state police has compelled the police to acknowledge the significance of proactive control of the public image. It is within this vein that the police began to produce media content *themselves* and realised the importance of image-managing activities to (re)build their legitimacy in a time when the police are less physically but more visible to the public (Wood & McGovern, 2020); that is, in the late modernity, physically the police are less seen and interact less with the public but have a higher exposure on media and social media.

This situation has shifted further with the advent, and subsequent, rise of the internet and a range of communicative technologies (Lee & McGovern, 2013a). As Lee and McGovern (2013, p. 124) note, 'not only has the Internet created a new space through which police organisations can now share information and communicate with their 'stakeholders', but it has also enabled a greater capacity for the police to respond to never ending demands for information and content from the public and the media on issues of crime'. However, this new landscape also enables the police to construct their own images and attempt to enhance police legitimacy through communication. In particular, the prospect of social media brings new opportunities for the police to construct public images for an audience that they can struggle otherwise to reach, and so gain their support and trust – (re)construct police legitimacy.

#### **1.4.2 The (new) Visibility of the Police**

The visibility of the police, including police personnel and policing activities, has been a centrepiece and crucial component of modern Western-style policing. Originally, in

Britain, the birth of the New Police in 1829 established a comprehensive system and unique symbols for the police to be recognized. For example, recognizable uniforms and labelled police vehicles all contributed to police public visibility and facilitated their effectiveness. These markers highlighted their presence and symbolized their lawful and authoritative identity to the citizens and people whom they encountered (Paperman, 2003). As “by far the most visible of all criminal justice institutions”, police visibility is a critical component in policing in that it impacts how they appear to the public and determines reactions from their audience (Chermak & Weiss, 2005, p. 502; De Cremer & Tyler, 2005). Initially, this visibility of the police can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and before when the distinct forms of policing were different from those which define policing today, for example, the system of ‘watchmen’, although it was extensively mocked; and other similar forms of policing involved citizens taking on the role of “keeping peace” in turn (Reiner, 1992; Tilley, Gathercole, & Lowenthal, 1991). In the defined term of policing today and in this context, visibility was largely based on direct engagement or up-close observation between the police and the citizens. However, the *secondary visibility* of policing arose along with the rapid development of the news media industry, such as newspapers and television (Thompson, 2005). Police related stories and images in such publications expanded the policing images to a wider audience without direct experience with the police. For example, the police were criticised mocked in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for failing to catch Jack the Ripper and many satirical pictures and comics relating to this were published in the newspapers. People were thus able to make a moral assessment of police activities, even those without direct experience of the police. The Rodney King incident in 1991<sup>1</sup> became the benchmark of the rise of visual recording technologies, and demonstrated the impact of police secondary visibility, that police misconduct recorded by individually owned cameras or videos can be instantly broadcast domestically and internationally (Lasley, 1994; Levesley et al., 2005). Since then, the numbers and scope of rendering police

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<sup>1</sup> Rodney King incident: On March 3, 1991, Rodney King was the victim of police brutality by the Los Angeles Police Department when he was arrested and beaten by LAPD officers for drunk driving. This beating was filmed and the footage sent to a local new station, which caused news media coverage internationally and a public furore.

personnel and police activities even more visible increased considerably (Seib, 2008). Along with this increase, more police-related scandals or misconduct came into public attention (Goldsmith, 2010). In this sense, this new, citizen controlled - *sousveillant* visibility of individual police officers can damage the reputation and image of the police as an organization and as representatives of state authority (Mann, 2004 2016).

Goldsmith (2010b, p. 915) suggested that the public visibility of the police can be classified *from positive to negative* and *from formal to the informal*. Negative visibility, such as breaches of the law or illegal activities, could diminish their legitimacy as it undermined the expectation that power should be exercised within the framework of legality, even when no one is watching (Tester, 1994, p. 5). The police, therefore, intend to pursue positive visibility in both formal and informal situations, maintaining the appearance of 'normal policing' through intentionally *giving* a performance to the audience (Goffman, 1959, 1974), also termed as "image management" or "self-presentation" in the marketing field (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Mawby, 2002). However, "normal policing", which means to do the right thing by the "officially accredited values of the society" (Goffman, 1959, p. 53), is challenged dramatically by the influence of the secondary visibility of the police, especially in the context of the omnipresence of image recording technologies and mobile phones. In order to diminish negative impacts on the police image, the repair work includes responding to, and controlling, the circulation of police deviance activities or events that are spread rapidly and widely in the online world (Brodeur, 1981; Kappeler & Kraska, 1998; Schneider, 2015, 2016). Regardless of how scholars have named the way of maintaining police image on social media differently, such as *presentational strategies* (Farkas & Manning, 1997) or *repair work* (Goldsmith, 2010), what has remained unchanged in all these forms of practices is its "direct relation to the legitimation process" (Coliandris, 2017, p. 6; Goldsmith, 2010b; Manning, 1978; Mawby, 2002).

Furthermore, the rapid popularization of image/video recording techniques and communicative platforms within the general population amplify this secondary visibility,

particularly as social media sites enable the upload and sharing of visual materials from individual users with anyone using the same tool. Mann (2004) termed this phenomenon as *sousveillance*, or undersight, meaning inverse surveillance of the power holders, watching 'from below' as a form of holding those in power to account (Goldsmith, 2010; Mann, 2016). Social media exaggerates the *sousveillance* as it encourages circulating user-generated content and information. It brings both opportunities and challenges for police image management, exposing the police and police image to greater contest and scrutiny and increasing the visibility of police misconduct such as violence and scandals (Brown, 2016; Goldsmith, 2010b; Greer & McLaughlin, 2010).

Additionally, there is a risk of police public relations campaigns being 'hijacked' by specific groups. For example, Russell (2018 p. 334) addressed the impact of LGBTI rights discourses on reshaping the public image of police authority, and suggested that a pro-gay image of the police can lead it to be "challenged, rejected and undermined in contested 'spaces of pride'" and 'networked counterpublics' (Ammaturo, 2016; Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015). The rise of policing's new visibility (Thompson, 2005) due to social and mobile media platform means that the police and their policing activities have become more visible than ever, enlarging the potential for the public to criticise and engage with the police in new ways (O'Connor, 2017).

The new visibility of the police on social media has the capability of undermining police image in the form of a challenge to police legitimacy (Coliandris, 2017; Lee & McGovern, 2014; Schneider, 2015). Of course, police legitimacy has been previously and continuously challenged in different aspects since the birth of the New Police, such as in protests, riots or conflicts. Taking efforts to maintain the police legitimacy is not new. What is new, however, is the impact of social media on the landscape of engagement since the topics, stories, images or videos circulating online are able to gain people's attention quickly, which complicates the police image and can jeopardise police legitimacy because these contents cannot be controlled by the police (Broxton

et al., 2013; Schneider, 2015). Furthermore, the new visibility of the police has a significant impact both on police accountability and legitimacy (Goldsmith, 2010). With the mode of social media transmission, repeatedly viewing, debating and circulating particular incidents enables wide discussion of particular events, especially those involving the police that have enormous news value, such as the last minutes of George Floyd's life, the African American man who was killed by police officers in Minnesota (Jewkes, 2015). Although this incident happened in the US, the video "Killing of George Floyd" and its relevant fragments have been circulated over 100 million times in Twitter, as well as other social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Such cases, especially those involving apparent police brutality, can evoke intense public attention and wide dissemination on social media, for instance, the death of Floyd triggered immediate protest of policing behaviour, with the first protest taking place on the very next day, 26 May 2020. In addition, protests have been widespread both nationally and internationally: 286 cities in the US with a municipal population of at least 100,000 had witnessed protests by June 16, 2020, and protests have been found in other countries around the world, including Canada, Europe, Oceania, Asia, and Africa, calling out racial discrimination and police brutality (CNN, 2020). In the UK, people protested the perceived discriminatory policing of BAME groups even in the Covid-19 pandemic situation where social distancing was required (Dave et al., 2020). Social unrest as such leads to intense criticism and external pressure upon the individual police personnel, police organisation and, ultimately, the government (Goldsmith, 2010).

The composition of the audience is another reason for the increasing challenge of controlling the new visibility of the police. Users of social media tools are incredibly varied with different personal biographies, social backgrounds, political preferences and ethical values, which therefore leads to different reactions towards the police visibility as they have different views about, and experiences with, the police. Thus, some repair work of the police image is needed to maintain an image of the "proper

behaviour” of the police and its visibility, either by proactively providing police-related stories, or responding to the negative comments.

The challenge of this new visibility of the police is not the only concern for them; as Wood and McGovern (2020) suggested, the threat of *invisibility* of policing on social media in the era of the information age is another problem to be dealt with. That is, while the police can use social media to speak to a large audience that they can hardly reach physically, only a limited range of social media users can be notified by the police messages due to the operation of social media algorithms (Bucher, 2012). In particular, an increasing number of social media users discover and follow news sources that are restricted to the content they "like" in their personalized Facebook feed (Anderson & Caumont, 2014). This selective recommendation and news coverage by algorithms can lead to what has been called the “echo chamber” effect, a social media sharing experience that echoes one’s beliefs and views to others and back again (El-Bermawy, 2016, para. 7, cited in Fitzpatrick, 2018). This can re-enforce the perception and understanding of the police of people who already hold certain stances, such as support or criticism. Given that social media have blurred and challenge the dominance of traditional media in terms of producing and sharing news in the ‘post-broadcast era’ we now inhabit, this demonstrates the potential significance of police-originated communication and image work through social media (Merrin, 2014).

#### **1.4.3 The Contribution of Police Image to Police Legitimacy**

The new visibility of the police on social media has the potential to undermine and challenge the police image, resulting to the degrading of police legitimacy. However, police can use the same means to portray, construct and re-build their images through *giving*<sup>2</sup> desired images of policing activities, such as reports of positive stories of the police, actively engaging with residents and offering timely updates to the community (Bullock, 2018a). Along with the rise of digital equipment and social media, the

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<sup>2</sup> This comes from Goffman’s interpretation of impression management that there are two kinds of sign activities: the expressions which we intentionally give and those which we unintentionally give off (1959, p. 14)

increase of the secondary visibility and new visibility of the police is believed to have “enhanced police legitimacy and professionalism” (Ariel et al., 2016, p. 747). In turn, police legitimacy and professionalism are helpful to endorse the police’s public image as a legitimate authority, which Ericson (1982) terms as *police image work*. Mawby (2002, p. 5) further defined this term as “all the activities in which police forces engage and which construct and project images and meanings of policing. These include overt and intended image-management activities, but also the less obvious, the unintended, the mundane practices of police work which communicate images of policing”. Police image work, thus, requires strategic promotion in news media (Chermak and Weiss, 2005) and, now, also on social media sites (Bullock, 2018a; O’Connor, 2017; Schneider, 2015, 2016).

The general contribution of police image to police legitimacy can be summarized from Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer's work (2015) in that how the public view and conceptualize the police as a legitimate authority depends not just on direct experience with the police, but also the transparency and indirect engagement of the authority with the public through mainstream or social media (Meijer, 2015). In particular, whether the police image, on social media, is seen as legitimate relies on the transparency of the information provided and the interaction with the audience, and the presumed capacity of social media to improve information transparency and enhance citizen participation (Bertot et al., 2010; Mossberger et al., 2013). Other suggestions are that (1) police action in using social media has a symbolic meaning of connecting with society as a modern organization (Bekkers & Homburg, 2007). This image of modernity can facilitate the perceived legitimacy of the police (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015), and (2) social media communication has the potential to shape users’ minds on the rightfulness and justification of police exercising power, which is important to deciding whether to support and give consent to the police (Castells, 2013). Through the power communication perspective, “the way people think determines the fate of norms and values on which societies are constructed” (Castells, 2007, p. 238); when people believe in the lawfulness and rightfulness of the police that is constructed via social

media, it is likely that people would choose to view the police as legitimate authority. In this context, an intended police image portrayed and circulated on social media, presented as lawful, effective, and treating people with respect, could be used to enhance police legitimacy, which is closely related to legality and presenting shared values (Beetham, 1991; Tyler & Fagan, 2008; Bradford et al, 2012; Tankebe, 2013).

Continuously engaging with relevant stakeholders in their environment takes a vital role in securing the legitimacy of organizations (Suchman, 1995). As Suchman (1995, pp. 587–588) suggests, the substance of perceived effectiveness of an organization is to meet multiple needs and expectations of its audience by “producing concrete, meritorious outcomes”. Where social media can fit in this legitimation process is the enhanced transparency and engagement of the police. Through providing a convenient method of interacting with the police, social media enables the citizens to receive messages from the police and participate in the police-related discussion, increasing perceived police effectiveness and can yield positive perceptions towards police legitimacy (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015). Besides, citizens participating in policing engagement on social media can itself enhance policing effectiveness. For example, social media is often used to collect information from the audience (Harms & Wade, 2017; Procter, Crump, et al., 2013) in terms of assisting criminal investigations. When individuals are enrolled in the process of helping the police, their inputs can benefit policing work, thus enabling the policing to be more efficient. In this way, audience evaluation of the performance of the police can be significantly heightened (Fledderus et al., 2014).

*Perceived procedural fairness*, another important trait of police image and the source for the perceived police legitimacy, can also be impacted by social media (Hawdon, Griffin, & Ryan, 2003; Tyler, 2004, 2006). This attribute is based on citizens’ perceptions of fair treatment by the police, which entails different forms of performance, such as receiving treatment fairly and respectfully, and being given a voice during an encounter with the police (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1990). As Tyler & Degoe, 2004,



(1995) found, citizen support increases when they feel procedures are fair, and their positive response to the police, such as following police orders and decisions, can, in turn, further improve the experience of the encounter? Overall then, an image of the police on social media that is transparent, engaging and treats the audience fairly and with respect can build up police legitimacy.

Nevertheless, police legitimacy can also be undermined due to the challenges brought by new visibility (Goldsmith, 2010). Scrutiny by the public and anyone else on social media can pose threats to police legitimacy through jeopardizing perceptions of effectiveness and procedural fairness (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013). For instance, when police do not respond to citizens' inquiries or post no follow-up to unsolved cases, the public may view the police as being less effective. The police image on social media can thus have a negative influence on police legitimacy. In summary, the contribution to police legitimacy widely claimed for the police image on social media is that improving or enhancing the perceived image among the public, proactively constructing an image that is seen as effective and procedurally fair, can foster generalized cooperation and compliance, felt as a public duty.

## **1.5 Social Media: The New Landscape of Police Image and Legitimacy Construction**

### **1.5.1 Bobbies on Social Media Sites**

In 2008, police in the UK started to experiment with the use social media but this was based on the initiative of individual police officers, and received different levels of official support from the endorsement of individual police forces to the sponsorship of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) (Crump, 2011). The #GMP24 Twitter campaign first presented to the public the diverse and complex role of policing in terms of securing social order and fighting crime. According to the Chief Constable of the Greater Manchester Police of that time, Sir Peter Fahy, the aim of the #GMP24

campaign was to raise awareness of the heavily loaded policing work among politicians and residents (Crump, 2011); through providing the public with an overview of the policing work, it can hopefully “strengthen their support for officers and staff, who do extraordinary work in difficult circumstances” commented Jim Battle, the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner of that time (Duggal, 2014). This was the first attempt by the police in the UK to make their voice heard to a wide audience, and explain the different aspects of what they do on a day-to-day basis, dispelling some myths around policing. It was successful as many mainstream media and newspaper covered this campaign, such as The Guardian, The Times and BBC News. However, it was not until the 2011 Riots that was seen as a turning point for the police to realise the importance of social media in policing, which was capable of clarifying rumours during the riots, sending out timely information, appealing for information and photographs, and reassuring the public (Crump, 2011; Denef et al., 2013). There has been a growing awareness in the police service of the potentials of social media to expand engagement and image work. One evidence was the publication of the national guidance *Engage* (NPIA, 2010), which outlines purposes and strategies of police using social media, particularly Twitter and to a lesser extent Facebook, to facilitate local policing and community engagement. *Openness, Accountability and Engaging* have been highlighted in this document as ways to improve police communication (NPIA, 2010).

Social media provides the police with multiple benefits. On the one hand, it functions as a source of intelligence and facilitates the process of sending news out to reassure the public during disasters and social crisis, such as earthquakes and floods (Kaigo, 2012; Yates & Paquette, 2011). On the other hand, it also enables the transmission and sharing of real-time information among residents about daily issues that concern them (Denef et al., 2013), informing users of the most current situation about community safety issues, such as traffic or weather conditions.

With all these benefits, the police in the UK and elsewhere in the world have been consciously conducting social media operations as a part of policing activities. All forty-

three police forces in England and Wales have corporate Twitter accounts and they have also employed other forms of social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram and Flickr. As social media can be used to facilitate neighbourhood policing and community engagement (Crump, 2011), different strategies of communication have emerged, supported by the College of Policing, and conducted differently by individual police forces. For instance, through the perspective of governmental communication, Meijer & Thaens (2013) proposed four strategies regarding public communication: (1). *Push*, the traditional way of sending information out to the audience with no feedback nor interaction, one-way and focused on reputation management, such as press releases or news broadcasting (Crump, 2011; L. Zheng & Zheng, 2014); (2). *Pull*, a way of communication that encourages audiences' input and giving information, like inviting the audience to answer questions or customer feedback surveys; (3). *Networking*, a highly interactive communication method that aims at provoking mutual or group discussion, such as online campaigns involving discussion and replies, comments and queries from the audience; and (4). *Transaction*, an under-discussed method of communication that has a high level of engagement and achieves actual transaction between the organization and individual users of the social media by regarding audiences as partners of the organization.

In police communication strategies, a combination of Push, Pull and Network strategies occurs most often and the Transaction model has been noted for not being overtly present (Meijer & Thaens, 2013). While Meijer (2012) believed the actual operation of these strategies is the result of individual officers' reactions to specific circumstances, police organizations have released formal guidelines on how to respond and engage with the citizens strategically, such as the *Engage* by NPIA in 2010. With varied communication strategies employed by police organizations, along with the reinforcing influence of pre-existing situational characteristics of the policing environment, for example, local crime patterns, different police images were constructed (Nardi & O'Day, 1999). For instance, Meijer and Thaens (2013) compared and contrasted three police departments in North America and found that Boston

Police Department emphasized a push strategy and thus presented a transparent image of police activities, whereas Toronto Police Department highlighted the strategy of networking, portraying a police image of engaging and focusing on building up long-term relations between police and citizens. However, research on police communication strategies in the UK is relatively rare. In order to close this gap, my research will explore what strategies are being used by two selected forces, one in England the other in Wales, and what images are being constructed by them.

### **1.5.2 (Re)constructing Police Legitimacy Through Social Media Communication**

The proliferation of social media has changed the form, effects and construction process of police image work. The growth in everyday use of digital technologies is making the terrain of policing, news media and public relations increasingly complicated and competitive with respect to control over information and the way it is presented. Furthermore, while the police image is, for most time, the representation of the police and policing, the digitalized police visibility can be different from the operational policing and police corporate identity (Ellis & McGovern, 2016), as the perceived policing is the result of police image work, rather than the actual policing operations. As Lee & McGovern (2016, p. 1294) asserted, “many police organizations are for all intents and purposes media organizations”. In particular, police use of social media is more than a form of posting information to bypass the mainstream media, but an integral part of policing work to present the image of the police to the public. As police organizations are now increasingly adopting social media as a means of image management (O’Connor, 2017), how they engage strategically with the audience and media via social media sites, and their self-representation is core to shaping the *police brand* (Bullock, 2018b).

Achieving police legitimacy – that is, gaining public support, trust and cooperation – has been an ongoing ‘problem’ - in need of a solution - for the police worldwide (Mawby, 2002 p. 8). As one of many responses, image management, as well as other methods,

have been employed to deploy the police's public image. For instance, Meijer and Thaens (2013) pointed out that in America, social media is being used by the police to "...strengthen the public image of police department, to control crowds, to tackle crisis situations, to obtain better input in police-making processes and to attract new police officers". In Australia, the aim of police engaging with the citizens via social media is to "create a *virtual presence* to let the community know that the local police are successfully performing their policing" (Lee and McGovern, 2013a). In Canada, Schneider (2016, p. 14) suggested social media has become an important channel for the police to shape their image in the modern age in order to "encourage symbolic support" from an increasingly disconnected community. Social media communication, therefore, plays an important role in shaping police image, which is capable of facilitating police legitimacy.

First, the police can endorse each piece of information sent from their social media accounts, increasing the accountability of their public image and working effectiveness, thus enhancing the police legitimacy. Social media communication enables the police to control what information and stories to send to the public (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, 2013c), bypassing the news media and their gatekeepers and engaging with the audience. This ensures the messages delivered to the public are fully controlled by the police and unedited by the media institutions. In addition, having the police as an endorsement, the audience can trust the information and engage with the police, which facilitates the *perceived effectiveness* of the police, an important component of police legitimacy. Besides, police can portray different aspects of policing through engaging and comprehensive stories, such as using police animals, promoting personnel recruitment, warnings about extreme weather or road closures, rather than just through criminal incidents or crime prevention tips.

Second, social media allow the police to set the scene for information posted, managing the context of the press releases by offering explanations, responses or interpretations to the public (Leishman & Manson, 2003). In other words, the police

can have complete control over the format and content of information, which allows them to shape stories and images in ways that are distinct from the news media. This activity reduces the necessity for the police to feed news organisations individually and increases the opportunities for them to engage with their audience directly. In this vein, perceived procedural fairness can be enhanced if the police treat each response from the audience fairly and with respect. As all the comments and responses of a posted tweet can be viewed by people who have access to Twitter, how the police behave themselves and engage with comments is another important reference for building police legitimacy.

Furthermore, communication via social media expands the landscape of police engagement with the public by extending public interaction from the street to the net. The police can respond to public enquiries, provide crime prevention tips, collect information and ask for help via social media, at least showing willingness and interest in cooperating with the public. Although it has been found by some researchers that most police forces use social media for *pushing* news to the public, while ignoring the dialogic nature of social media communication and not giving much consideration to public feedback or the transactional strategy (Crump, 2011; Kelly & Finlayson, 2015; Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Procter, Crump, et al., 2013). Recently, some police organizations have made progress on user engagement through multiple strategies and policies, for example, a ‘meme strategy’ has been used in some police forces to increase user engagement (Lee & McGovern, 2013b; Wood, 2020; Wood & McGovern, 2020). Wood (2020) found in order to increase user engagement with the official police social media accounts, New South Wales police implemented this meme strategy on its Facebook communication and was successful in meeting its goals by effectively eliciting feedback and engagement from users. And careful use of humour in communication can also add humanity to police communication, which contributes to public engagement (Bullock, 2018b). Such strategies represent a positive way of police engaging with the audience on social media, as Wood (2020, p. 4) termed, “strategies intended to increase the reach of police messaging on social media”. Given that

strategic use of social media by the police to enhance their legitimacy is only likely to expand, it remains the key focus of this thesis to examine how these strategies are used for promoting police legitimacy. The aim and objectives of this research is to add to the understanding of the means through which police aim, via Twitter, to enhance police legitimacy.

## **1.6 Thesis Structure**

This thesis sets out to explore all of these varied debates about social media, the new visibility, and police legitimacy. Based on this literature review of police legitimacy trajectories, and the impact of social media on police legitimacy, this study will investigate how the new visibility of the police can reshape the police image, and how individual police forces use communication strategies to improve their image, in an attempt to enhance police legitimacy.

The thesis is organised into six chapters. This first, introductory chapter has briefly outlined the main focus and aims of this thesis, as well as providing an overview of the central theoretical perspectives on the police legitimacy and police communication with the public in the era of social media. In this chapter, I have also contextualized police image work against the background of the information age in which social media has become a main communication channel which includes reference to the risks of the police's new visibility.

Chapter Two will provide a more comprehensive review of the police legitimization literature to explore the historical meaning and functions of the police legitimacy and the impact this history has on contemporary police communication approaches. The developments in social media and the shift of policing due to police reform in England and Wales are then explored to demonstrate how and why police communication via social media matters, and in what ways these changes impact on police legitimacy.

Chapter Three provides a detailed discussion of the two research settings and the methodologies I employed, describing how the empirical elements of this mixed method study were designed and conducted in order to explore the main research questions. Besides, this chapter also provides a reflexive discussion about my role as a researcher– a combined identity of a student from a UK university and a police officer from China. With the unique angle of conducting policing research in two police forces in England and Wales, I try to explore the narratives of police use social media with a semi-inside outsider perspective (see discussion in 3.3.2). Further to this, there will be a discussion of how the corporate communication teams have been embedded within Hawshire and Lionshire Police, as units for building up police reputation and image. The chapter ends with a consideration of ethical issues in this study.

The next two chapters, Chapters Four and Five, present the key findings from the empirical data. Chapter Four investigates how the Communication Officers operate police corporate accounts by analysing data generated from interviews and observational fieldwork of non-participant engagement processes in the two police corporate communication units. Drawing from the changing external environments of police communication, including the revolution of networking technologies, developments in media industry and varied police reforms initiated by the Home Office (Chan, 2007; Mawby, 2002), this chapter explores how, *inside the organization*, the Communication Officers perceive and utilize police Twitter and how they were trained by their police forces. After a discussion of the criticisms of police use of social media, the chapter describes how Communication Officers perceive and produce police communication via Twitter.

Chapter Five continues to explore police narratives about using Twitter from the organizational perspective, as well as the police communication on Twitter, *outside the organisation*, with the public. It investigates the official communication guidance and media policy in the two researched police forces and uses this documentary analysis to build a picture of how the forces direct and evaluate their communications. The main



themes in the use of and response to police tweets are described and discussed. By comparing and contrasting the empirical data from the two police forces, together these two findings chapters provide a rich, deep-level interpretation and discussion of police communication with the public via Twitter.

Finally, in Chapter Six, the core research findings are revisited and discussed in relation to the orienting questions and concepts presented in Chapters One and Two. In particular, I explore how these findings contribute to the main research themes and questions of the study. The thesis ends with a section on the overall conclusions and future research direction of the study, which includes a consideration of the implications for police communication via social media and police legitimacy, as well as a discussion on the limitations of this research.

## **1.7 Research Contribution**

Many policing studies acknowledge that the legitimacy of the police is neither innate nor static. It requires constant negotiations with the public (Mawby, 2002a), demonstrating the police's legality, and the shared values the police have with the general public, and the belief in the moral rightness of their own legitimacy from within the police (Tankebe, 2013; Barker, 2001). However, police legitimacy is continually subject to challenge and reconstructed in the information era where the forms of engagement and police visibility have been shifted significantly within the social media context. The information era, which directly impacts the way people engage with each other and "see" the police, as well as the broader social impacts of assessing police work, is an important backdrop to this study of policing communication. This influence can be observed at the management level of the police, where forces in England and Wales have adopted social media into corporate communication, setting communication plans and strategies in a top-down manner, as well as the experience and recognized changes that were recounted by individual Communication Officers.

The 'new visibility' of the police has a marked influence on the complex mechanisms and dynamics of (re)constructing police legitimacy, and it is these processes that are a central focus of this thesis (Goldsmith, 2010; Thompson, 1995). The influence can, on the one hand, expand the *reach* of the police to groups and people that they otherwise find difficult to speak to, therefore promoting the effectiveness of information delivery. On the other hand, their enhanced visibility increases the possibility of jeopardizing police reputation as *sousveillance* (Goldsmith, 2010; Mann, 2016) via social media can expose and exaggerate any errant policing activities (Goffman, 1959) - and thereby undermine police legitimacy. Of course, other changes in society can also have a similar impact on these processes and police legitimacy in general, and this study is not blind to other environmental factors, such as the changing nature of police occupational culture and developing relationships between the police and different citizen groups (Jennifer Brown, 2007; Chan, 2007; Jones & Newburn, 2001; Loftus, 2009; Sklansky, 2007). Nevertheless, the information era is characterized by significant social and technological shifts that are capable of changing ways of engaging and the communication habits of individuals. Twitter, as a major social networking service, has the potential to change the nature of the relationships between police and citizens (Bullock, 2018a). A core element of policing is that it relies heavily on the support and consent of the policed. However, police legitimacy is fragile and continually subject to re-negotiation on a case-by-case basis in an era of virtual engagement. As such, this thesis is a timely exploration of how the police (re)construct legitimacy in the social media communication context.

The research underpinning this thesis contributes to extending the understanding of how the police use of social media (Twitter, in particular) in an attempt to enhance their legitimacy, both inwardly and outwardly. Internal marketization has been adopted within police organizations in order to increase the satisfaction of the job and instill a sense of self-legitimacy within individual police officers. Police also strive to enhance their legitimacy outwardly via external marketization of police communication. In particular, expectation management and visual marketization were utilized to help

construct the reputation of a police organization. All of these communication practices have been, to some extent, influenced by police occupational culture and in turn, have reshaped aspects of police culture. I also argue in this thesis that for the purpose of enhancing police legitimacy, not *all* police social media accounts need to be engaging. Just like different police departments have varied functions and missions, each police Twitter account (and other social media accounts) is reasonable to obtain different functions and focuses. In this context, police use of Twitter is likely to be more conducive to enhancing police legitimacy since police Twitter accounts with different functions can focus on their specialized content, rather than being limited only to the numbers-of-likes-oriented engagement.

## **CHAPTER TWO. Constructing Police Legitimacy on Social Media**

Police today use many different kinds of social media, such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, to conduct various activities in the UK and other countries around the world, such as broadcast information, increase public engagement, collect intelligence and build up images. More importantly, social media is arguably an important tool for the police to maintain and build up their legitimacy, with the capability of engaging with wide audience and gaining their understanding and support. This chapter will explore the development of these policing approaches – the motivations and strategies on which police communication via social media is based. In particular, literatures regarding police legitimacy, police image on the media, and police use of social media will be explored and discussed.

By doing so, this chapter will first consider the functions and characteristics of police communication and the key shifts in its development. Through exploring core functions and principles of the police, the following section will illustrate the basic elements that constitutes police legitimacy by asking “why does police legitimacy matter?” in England and Wales since the birth of the ‘New Police’ in 1829. The public support and consent are fundamental pillars of police legitimacy, and it is therefore that the police managed to secure public support by strategically communication and present a favourable image to the public (Brookes & Grint, 2010; Loader & Mulcahy, 2003; Mawby, 2002b; Reiner, 2010). While there are arguably many factors that could impact public perceptions of the police and criminal justice system, the mass media, especially news media, play an important role in shaping police public image, influencing the public opinions and attitudes of the effectiveness of policing, and thus impacts police legitimacy (Chibnall, 1977; Lovell, 2001; Mason, 2002). Therefore, the second section of this chapter will address the development of media representation of the police and how this police-media relationship changed in line with the changing police community relations. From a civilian watchmen system in the twentieth century, towards a professional manner of image management today that there were special department

and personnel within police institution to deal with the media inquiries and public communication, the way the police communicate with the community has changed significantly. The last section will focus on the new visibility of the policing and how police use social media to directly communicate with members of the public and conduct image work (Thompson, 1995). In the context of the highly mediated external environment of policing, including the advancement of communication technologies in the 21 centuries, police reforms and changes in media industries, social media as a response of improving police engagement with the community and image management, brings both opportunities as well as challenges for the construction of police legitimacy.

## **2.1 Why Does Police Legitimacy Matter?**

### **2.1.1 Functions of the Police Institution in England and Wales**

In England and Wales, “the police” in a broad sense refers to a body of organizational entities that receive state funding, created by the Home Office with the purpose of regularizing and professionalizing the older localized policing systems, and centralizing them to some extent (Emsley, 1991). These complex organisations are both bureaucratic and operational that employ a range of staff to conduct tasks that fulfil organizational objectives, which are mainly relating to maintaining public order and social security, preventing criminal acts and detecting incidents that may lead to crimes, and contributing to the initiation and functioning of criminal justice procedures (Emsley, 1991, p. 1; Manning, 2010, p. 44). While there are plural bodies of institutions that provide security services to the public, in this research, the activities conducted only by the state police were referred as the *policing*.

Manning (1997, p. 47) have described the policing as a “traditional occupation, essentially unchanged in form since the early nineteenth century”, based on which we can uncover the “assumptions by which modern policing is governed”. Through the

perspective of social relations, Loader and Mulcahy presented an argument for understanding the symbolic meaning and functions that form the basis of modern policing.

*“... policing remains closely tied to ... collective identity, and capable of generating high, emotionally charged levels of identification among citizens... police institutions are able to evoke, affirm, reinforce, or (even) undermine the social relations and belief systems of political communities, serving, in particular, as a vehicle through which recognition within such communities is claimed, accorded, or denied.”*

Loader & Mulcahy, 2003, p. 39

Given the close relationship between the policing work and citizens, Reiner (1985) argued that order maintenance, rather than law enforcement is the core function of the police mandate (Banton, 1964; Newburn, 2003). Police are historically considered as a crucial representative of the dominant norms and values of society, and the police resource is the authority generated by the potential for the legitimate use of force (Loader & Mulcahy, 2003; Reiner, 1985). Of course, police organisations in England and Wales have reformed in different times and ways since the time even before the foundation of its centralised uniformity in the early nineteenth century, such as the amalgamation of watchmen and constables from nearby boroughs during the early 1800s that urges provincial forces to merged into a more formal, centralised and paid police forces. After a chronological evolution, a centralised modern police organisation has been established following the County and Borough Police Act 1856, and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 has regulated the actions of the police in England and Wales, particularly in relations to policing activities of arrest and powers of entry (Emsley, 1996, 2014). However, some symbolic and enduring characteristics of policing remain, and thus suggest that the core functions of the policing would stay despite the police reforms in different kinds. By arguing that police reforms proceeded within certain parameters, some scholars believed that the narratives about the golden eras of the policing have been overstated by academics (Emsley, 1991; Fielding &

Fielding, 1991; Loader & Mulcahy, 2003; Mawby, 2002b). According to Loader and Mulcahy (2003, p. 96), the period of the immortalized British Bobby, which is termed the “golden age” of the policing, is a police force of the imagination. In other words, the concept of golden era of policing depicted a blueprint of what and how the policing and police officers ought to be. This imaged and standardized version of the police does not exactly reflect the reality of policing and the British police as a whole, at any time, nor does it reflect the internal operational systems of police organisations that prioritizes certain functions over those expected.

Nonetheless, with the development of modern policing, different views on the priority of police functions have emerged, which relates to the essential philosophies of public policing and the possible direction of policing reforms. These disputes reveal tensions between the primary functions of police organizations and how they should achieve their objectives. Should the police primarily serve as the *force* that represents the state authority, or a *service* that prioritize civil affairs and public order. In other words, what roles do the police primarily conduct – the enforcer of laws, crime busters or officers who maintain and produce order in society? In terms of the relationship with the public, on what approach do the police gain the compliance and consent from the public – through a coercive and militarized manner of force using, or a minimum use of force and a morally accepted service? Although it has been pointed out that these discussions were rather dichotomies to the complex realities of the police work (Bittner, 1970), they reflected the debates about the core functions and principles of public policing in England and Wales.

### **2.1.2 Principles of Public Policing: Policing by Consent**

The year of 1829 is commonly regarded as the time that the “New Police” were founded in England and Wales. The traditional Whig histories concluded that the late Georgian and early Victorian society were consensual, but were threatened by rising crime committed by individuals (Emsley, 2008). These individuals were the minority that were

excluded from most people within society. The new police were the solution of the government to deal with these brewing threats (Critchley, 1978; Reith, 1938). In the perception of the Whig histories, the gradual acceptance and spread of policing through parliamentary legislation was an evidence of the success and superiority of the Metropolitan model of policing. According to Reith (1952, p. 20), the patriarch of the Whig police historians, the superior British policing system – one that is opposed to a state-directed *gendarmerie* is at least part of reasons for the British success during the twentieth century in the two world wars period. However, the revisionist historians contrasted this view that they saw the late Georgian and early Victorian society as a society that was fragmented internally mainly by class conflicts in the context of industrialization and capitalism. The new police were “an instrument for controlling and disciplining a burgeoning, and increasingly self-confident and non-deferential, working class” (Storch 1975, 1976; cited in Emsley 2008).

These dichotomous perspectives between consensus and conflict views of society have long existed in the discussions of policing and police history. Drawn from the orthodox history of the police, the principal objective of the new Metropolitan Police was the prevention of crime (Reiner, 2008). With a focus on “security of person and property, the preservation of the public tranquillity, and all the other objects of a police establishment” (Reith, 1948, p. 62), the new police prioritises functions of order maintenance, rather than “detection and prevention of crime” that emerged in the late twentieth century (Innes & Sheptycki, 2004). In this context, Sir Robert Peel initiated the distinguishing characteristics of the new police as the “civilian force, with minimal distinguishing uniforms and no arms, and with limited arrest powers” (Manning, 1997, p. 77). These characteristics were the early foundations of the doctrines of policing by consent, which are attempted to generate public support and confidence through a police system that is distinguished from militarized institution and the representation of various groups and objectives. The doctrine of the British police was largely originated from the Peelian Principles that the “police are the public, and the public are the police” (Reith 1956, p.187, cited in Reiner 2000, p.21), which through the orthodox perspective,



demonstrated the consensual style of the British policing, or as Reiner (2000, p.21) termed, the principles and representations of the police is the “crystalized power of the people”.

The elements of successful marketing of the police were to eliminate the various strands of the opposition to the new police that came out of the top and bottom of the social hierarchy (Reiner, 2008). According to Marshall (1950), a precondition for marketing the police as a paragon of virtue was the “the slow, faltering and never complete incorporation of the mass of the British population into a common citizenship” (cited in Reiner 2008, p. 319). The image of the British bobby that they promote is depicted as a citizen in uniform, operating minimal force, subject to the rule of law rather than any party politics and is working by public consent not coercive powers. This model of virtue would protect the public from crime and disorder more effectively than a force that relies on the state's monopoly of violent means, its unique advantage lies in cultivating public support. This echoes the notion that public perceptions of police legitimacy are central to the effective practice of the policing and even the existence and accountability of the police in a democratic society (Alderson, 1979). Given that citizens would give consent to the police, comply with the law the police enforce, follow police decisions and instructions in encounters, police require and are dependent on the individuals voluntarily consent and support to function effectively, ethically and legally (Bradford, Jackson, & Hough, 2013; Tyler, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2011). Otherwise, police would fall into a more repressive manner that emphasizes the use of force, which contrasts the “less use of force” of Peelian Principles and undermines their claims of acting on behalf of those they police (Bradford et al., 2013; Tankebe, 2009). Furthermore, with the limited resources and capability to fight against crimes and keep social order, and conduct surveillance on the areas of ‘risky’ communities where largely the working-class lives and carries out activities, gaining trust and support from the public turns to be an effective method to guarantee policing effectiveness (Tyler, 1990, 2004; Tyler & Fagan, 2008). In democratic societies, the police must rely upon citizens’ voluntary compliance, securing people’s consent and

voluntary compliance in ways that follow their decisions and instructions and obey the law, in order to better serve and protect the public and maintain social order in the immediate and long term (Easton, 1975; Parsons, 1967; Sarat, 1977; Tyler, 2004; Tyler & Fagan, 2008). Hence, that the police are recognized as a legitimate authority by the public is essential on moral and political grounds, which contributes to gaining public support and confidence, and is crucial for securing people's voluntary compliance with police decisions and obeying the law.

To secure consent from their various publics, police need to constantly communicate and act in ways appealing to the values held by different sections of society and deliver policing services legally, ethically, impartially and in a way that is expected (Hough, 2010; Jackson, Bradford, Hough, & Murray, 2012; Jackson, Bradford, Stanko, & Hohl, 2012; Mawby, 2002b; Reiner, 2010). As Castells (2013, p. 3) noted, communication is vital for any public sectors including the police due to its capability of shaping and influencing how people think and feel about specific issues, and further impacting on both individual and collective ways of response and action. In particular, the police need to earn consent from the public via different efforts, such as being a visible presence in society, subject to the rule of law, accountable to the courts, exercising limited force while presenting to the public the effectiveness of crime control, and emphasis on police *service* rather than police *force* (Hohl, 2011; Reiner, 2010). With strategic communication, police can influence people's perception of policing and police legitimacy to gain public consent.

### **2.1.3 Trajectory of Police Gaining Legitimacy**

Police legitimacy is not innate, but is impacted by environmental contexts, especially prevailing social and economic conditions (Hohl, 2011; Loader & Mulcahy, 2001a, 2001b). One perspective to understand police negotiating legitimacy is through the *structuration theory*, which focuses on the concept of mutual constitution of society and individual actor (Berger & Luckman, 1967). Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984) proposes

an ontology of social action that addresses a fundamental dualism in social theory. The dualism – “duality of structure” - refers to two distinct perspectives for the explanation of social phenomena, which attempt to explain the relationship between social phenomena either as products of the action of human actors based on their interpretation of the world, or as the results of influence by objective social structures. Structure is described as the set of enacted rules and resources that mediate an actor’s cognition and behaviour as well as the diffusion of practices. In the context of policing, the police activity is a structured phenomenon that is being drawn upon by the police and citizens in their actions, and police legitimacy acts as the ‘norms’ in this phenomenon that mediates relations between the rights and obligations expected by those who participate in a series of interactive contexts. Through engagement, the notion of police as the lawful authority and have public support and consent is re-enforced and reproduced during each encounter with the individual agent, and equally subject to be destroyed if the production process is in contrast to the structure. While the theory has received much criticism for a lack of concise exposition (see for example, Bernstein, 1989), Giddens (1979, p. 69) suggested that structuration is an ongoing process rather than treating structure as a static property of social systems (cited in Currie, Galliers, & Galliers, 1999), and he described the duality of structure as the “essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices: structure is both medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices”.

Since the middle of twentieth century, Britain witnessed a revolution of technology and a recession of economics after the Second World War, the external environment of the British policing landscape experienced significant changes. In order to counteract the post-war austerity and the general dissatisfaction about the state bureaucracies, the Thatcher government adopted reform to the public sector that has been identified as ‘managerialist’ or ‘new managerialist’ (Loader, 1996; McLaughlin et al., 2001; McLaughlin & Murji, 1997; Pollitt, 1993). Under the managerialist management model, the police came under closer scrutiny and were subjected to reduced budgets and resources from the Home Office and were expected to be more efficient and financially

accountable (McLaughlin & Murji, 1997). This period witnessed social and political challenges towards the police. The British Crime Survey (1982) suggested that the level of public confidence and trust in the police has been decreasing due to rising crime and what was seen as the failure of the police to address this (Smith & Gray, 1983). Dissatisfaction with the police regarding their management, performance and particularly the failure to reduce crime, reached a peak by the 1990s, and damaged police reputation. Furthermore, a number of corruption scandals also occurred and miscarriages of justice as a result of police misconduct came to light, such as police brutality, racism and corruption. In order to cope with this reputational crisis, the government launched a series of inquiries and a legislative programme to reform the police service.

However, along with the reform of the police, a trend of “policing beyond the police” has emerged, which was the result of a more complex division of labour in the areas of policing and security. As Loader (1999, 2000) suggests, the idea of the police as the monopolistic provider of public order and safety has been replaced by a more pluralized and fragmented group of policing bodies. The pluralization of policing means that the police are now better perceived and understood as part of a variety of organizations with policing functions and allied processes. As the police are joined on stage by an array of different actors, late modern policing is conducted in partnership with different social agencies that provide policing functions (Crawford, 2013; Wood & Shearing, 2013).

In 1993, the government published initiatives regarding the structure of the police under the title *Police Reform: A Police Service for the Twenty-first Century*. By setting key objectives and priorities that the police will be expected to meet, the police are directed to focus more on fighting crimes while identifying those ancillary tasks which can be left to private security companies where appropriate (Loveday, 1995). These objectives, on the other hand, became a target of police performance measures, which were monitored by the Home Office, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and

the new police authorities. For the police organization, this can only be achieved through structural reforms that fundamentally change the composition and focus. This led to a 'commodity policing' model and a shift in the relationship between the police and the public to a 'supplier-consumer' model (Heward, 1994; Loader, 1996). The policy initiative from the Public Sector Productivity Panel in 2001 announced a *Customer Focused Government – From Policy to Delivery*, suggesting a customer-oriented approach to facilitate improving public confidence and satisfaction, which advocated that public sectors including the police can benefit from treating the public as customers (Barker, 2001). Policing has shifted to a more business-like model, which is measured with inputs and outputs of police 'performance' (Crank, 2003; McLaughlin & Murji, 1997). As Loader (2000) argued, the marketization of the police has blurred lines of responsibility for crime fighting and prevention, which used to be considered as the sole responsibility of the monopolistic public sectors, like the police, from the government. It should be noted that while the contemporary 'pluralized' policing field comprises a multiplicity of public, private and voluntary organisations, the state police have maintained their powerful 'symbolic aura' as key players in the delivery of policing and security (Brodeur, 2010; Loader, 1997).

After that, the managerialist framework and the pluralization of policing contributed to the reform of the police from the government, and policing functions, which in particular, have stimulated debate about what is the primary role of policing, the police 'force' or a police 'service'? (Punch, 1979b; Reiner & Newburn, 2000; Waddington, 1999). The traditional police force focused on crime-fighting and securing "policing by consent" from the public to fulfil legitimacy, whereas a policing service, on the other hand, can be fulfilled by the "extended policing family" (Flanagan, 2008, p. 7; Reiner & Newburn, 2000). This places the goal of 'preservation of public tranquillity' and emphasis on partnership with different policing bodies, rather than the law enforcement, as its core role (Reiner, 1994, p. 153). The latter model increasingly makes policing a service to choose and returns the responsibility and risks of crime prevention to individual citizens who have come to be redefined as risk-monitoring consumers of security services.

With the expansion of the commercial market for policing, “policing beyond the police” not only contrasts the idea that the “policing by the government” is replaced by private sectors that provide policing services in a number of settings, it also makes it more difficult for the government to supervise or guide the policing markets, whether it is to exert some control over the distribution of policing goods or to subject policing service providers to democratic accountability (Loader, 2000). In other words, pluralization and commodification is a development which raises questions for governance, accountability, ethics and equity. Although the adoption of the managerialization of the police was intended to enhance policing effectiveness, which is an important factor for maintaining police legitimacy; it is argued that the business-like model of policing can, paradoxically, undermine police legitimacy (Terpstra & Trommel, 2009).

## **2.2 Police Legitimacy and the Media Representation of the Police: The Power of the Mass Media**

The media representation of the police and the police’s performance is crucial for the police to communicate with the public and enhance their legitimacy. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the media encompassed numerous different organisations and communication styles. In addition to traditional outlets, like the press and broadcasting organisations, new media have emerged and combined and adopted in, such as the digital TV channel, mobile technologies and the Internet. The relationship between police and news organizations has been complex and tenuous. On the one hand, as the “window to the world” (McNair, 2003, p. 23), the news media enables people to access information outside their immediate experience with digestible and short pieces of stories as most people lack the direct encounter experience with the police (Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Feilzer, 2010). The majority of the public prefer a comfortable distance from the police and acquire policing related information via mass media (Choi et al., 2020). Thus the media serve as the main source of constructing people’s understanding of the police, crime and criminal justice issues (Chibnall, 1977; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1991;

Lovell, 2001). It is claimed that the police recognize that the news media “provide key opportunities to do legitimization work and news generally are part of the ‘policing apparatus of society’” (Ericson et al., 1989, cited in Chermak and Weiss 2005, p. 503; Hatty, 1991; Kasinsky, 1994; Maguire & Wells, 2002; Manning, 1992).

In addition, the media is of fundamental importance in the construction of public attitudes toward the police and criminal justice (Harris & Jones, 2020; Intravia et al., 2020). Many researchers have pointed out that the majority of public knowledge about crime and justice is derived from media consumption (Ericson et al., 1987; Graber, 1980; Roberts & Doob, 1990; Surette, 2007). Stories and reports relating to crime and policing activities on the media are seen as crucial element in developing and shaping people’s perceptions and attitudes toward police organisation. Tyler and Blader (2013) argued that personal experience can impact people’s attitudes towards the police and the criminal justice system, while the media presentations are able to shape public opinions of the police and the estimated police efficiency in the long run. As such, the perception of criminals, crime activities, the policing and the police who enforce laws is largely determined by their portrayal within the media.

Furthermore, the news media enables the police to promote engagement with the members of the community through a positive image (Selke & Bartoszek, 1984). It is an integral part of policing to engage with the community in varied ways. Police are an accessible bureaucracy through technology and other methods that they used to deliver services to the community (O’Connor et al., 2021). The depiction of crime and police in the news can inform the citizens of their surroundings and police services provided, and thus, is seen as an effective method to conduct public engagement (Lovell, 2001). In that context, the new media is important for the police organization to promote the engagement and promise of community policing (Chermak & Weiss, 2005).

More importantly, being labelled the “fourth power” that is charged with responsibilities of scrutinizing and monitoring social organizations, including institutions of the government, and guarding the law (Davis, 2004; Ringen, 2003, p. 34), the news organisations are not, and cannot afford to be, perceived as simply a propaganda tool that government agencies use to manipulate public opinion: on the contrary, with the help of the media the public can be made aware of illegitimate state actions (Chermak and Weiss 2005, p. 503). The mass media symbolized public scrutiny of institutions and individuals with power, such as the government, public sectors, police organisations and politicians. This is crucial in western societies, especially when the controlling institutions or individuals are funded by state or local budgets, or when individuals hold considerable power above and beyond those held by the public. Since the police represent the most powerful repressive force that a country can use over civilians, the media function as the means of public control, monitoring that, the state monopoly of the means of violence that are exercised *internally*, is conducted under the rule of the law (Giddens, 1991). When these provisions are violated by the government institutions or public sectors, the media can inform the public and through this present external pressure. The media and their reports can therefore have the public trust, based on their source and audience, which is the key to police legitimacy.

However, the media can distort objectivity when trying to fulfil the role of entertaining members of the public. The “‘romantic’ notion of the media as a guardian of democracy can be contrasted to that of the media as frivolous entertainment and ‘big business’” (Feilzer, 2007, p. 24). The media stands accused of delivering stories representing the interests and benefits of the powerful and reproducing dominant ideology and distorting reality (Lippman, 1956; McNair, 2003). In that context, the media representation of the police and crime stories can be skewed by varied elements, including political spectrum, ideology and the news values (Greer, 2007; Jewkes, 2004). The media can exaggerate, dramatize and, in the most extreme cases, create stories relating to crimes in which the police officials are the most referred sources (Chermak, 1995; Ericson, 1989; Fishman, 1980). On the side of the police, not only



are they prepared to deal with the media inquiries through specialized training and professionalized responding system, such as the spokesperson of the police, but they are also actively exploring other ways to communicate directly with the public without the media (Chermak and Weiss, 2005). The adoption of Internet communicating techniques is one of such efforts, for instance, the majority, if not all, police force in the England and Wales, has an instant chat option within their webpages, bridging the communication with the members of the public that provides them with timely responses.

Another mainstream critique towards the media is that the repeatedly misrepresenting the amount of crime and the prevalence of certain types of crimes that imply the incompetency of the police, can cause the increased levels of fear of crime and moral panics in society (Ericson et al., 1991; Hall, 1978; Liu, 2006; Reiner et al., 1978). The representation of crime in the media has close relations to people's perception of the threat of public security and has a substantial influence on fear of crime. By focusing and reporting on specific criminal activity or an unlawful issue, the media can influence public opinion towards the police and their performance and contribute to the subsequent public debate. In addition, the media are often accused of influencing the legal process by provoking a widespread perception of guilt or innocence before, or after, a verdict in a court of law, which Greer & McLaughlin (2011) termed "trial by media" (Greer & McLaughlin, 2012). As it plays an important role in shaping people's perceptions of the criminal justice system, including the police, and the disproportion coverage of crime can lead to public distrust of the police, which undermines police legitimacy (Sparks, 2001). It can further bring pressures on policy makers, resulting in changes to the criminal justice process and penal policy, such as increased statutory sentences and tightened rules of procedure for criminal prosecution (Newburn, 2007). It has traditionally been a key player of the general debate and research on the media, crime and society, and this makes it an important ingredient in constructing and affecting police legitimacy.

Therefore, the news media is a force that police organizations and police managers need to contend with to manufacture and maintain a legitimate reputation (Chermak & Weiss, 2005, p. 501). It is from this starting point that the following section will review the media representations of the police since the eighteenth century where most people lack immediate experience with the police and could grasp knowledge and information about crimes through media representations; and how those representations could affect police legitimacy.

### **2.2.1 Media Representations of the Police before the Second World War**

In eighteenth century, the 'policing' system was fragmentary that consisted of entrepreneurial and citizen bodies, such as the watchmen recruits. This inheritance of the Middle Ages was either corrupt or incompetent that a rational and professional organization for public security was needed (Emsley, 1991). It was believed that the old patterns of policing were incompetent and corrupt, and a series of proposals had been put forward to urge for reforming the police organization (Reiner & Bunyan, 1976). The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed the increasingly powerful debate of the criminal justice and the reform in a context of Enlightenment and the rise of mainstream utilitarian thinkers, like Beccaria and Bentham. This view was reflected in the booming "science of police " in many parts of Europe, which attempts to analyse the techniques that effectively manages and disciplines the population of modern society (Reiner, 2007, pp. 345–347).

During the late of eighteenth and early nineteenth century, there was a strong and widespread hostility towards the police, evidenced by the long-lasting struggles and debates around the creation of the new police (Emsley, 1999; Weitzer & Reiner, 1985). The root of the opposition to the new police came from both, the upper and lower classes of the society – the middle classes were the most grounded support of the police idea (Reiner, 2008). It was not until 1829 that Sir Robert Peel created the Metropolitan Police – also termed as "the new police" and initiated the objectives and

principles of the police (see the discussion in 2.1.2). Followed by the County and Borough Police Act 1856, the centralised police force eventually spread through England and Wales. However, during the early nineteenth century, “the peculiar jealousy of the British people towards the central powers of the state, their abhorrence of military intervention into civil affairs, their dislike of state espionage and of any form of heavy policing’ (Thompson, 1980, p. 204) resulted in suspicion of the police. The police, during this time, was resisted for fear of a continental model which cast the police as the centralized power of the state (Chapman, 1970; Emsley, 1992; Mawby, 2002b; Reiner & Newburn, 2000).

While Robert Peel, as well as the first two Commissioners of Metropolitan Police marketed the police in a way that appealed to the public through different approaches, such as the citizen in uniforms and a non-military style, it is noted that the police were not wholly accepted by local communities where structures of policing had been developed provincially (Emsley, 1992, 2008; Taylor, 1997). There were several models found among the provincial police other than the Metropolitan after the county police legislation of 1839 and 1840, for example, the Gloucestershire employed the constabulary system based on the Irish model, and some boroughs put the former watchmen in uniforms and renamed them policemen (ibid, p. 76). Throughout the 1840s and early 1850s, hostility to the police continued in both boroughs and counties not only for political radicals, but also concern over the cost of the police. It was not until the launch of the County and Borough Police Act 1856 that boosted the centralization and greater uniformity of the provincial forces. Thereafter, uniformed police were introduced and gradually accepted among counties and boroughs (Emsley, 1991).

Reiner (2008) have suggested that the essential element of the successful marketing of the police was that Peel, as well as Rowan and Mayne, the first two Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police, managed to defuse the varied strands of the oppositions. Through constructing an image of the new police as “a citizen in uniform”, they subtly

combined the representation of the British bobby as both “paragons of virtue” and “panaceas for crime and disorder” (ibid, p. 318). This image has its unique advantage in gaining the general acceptance that it replaced the opposition image of the police as a tyrannical pariah in the perceptions of the majority of British people (Reiner & Newburn, 2000, Chapter 2). As Emsley (1996) argued, the recognition and acceptance of the police is one of the important reasons for the prosperity of the Victorian society. However, the level of acceptance between the working class and the middle class remains distinct (Brogden, 1982; Storch, 1975): the middle class who owned more social influence and power had higher level of acceptance and more positive attitudes towards the police as the police safeguarded the social order and wider benefits mainly of their interests. Police legitimacy remained less secure in the working class, which was reflected in the ballads and music halls that portrayed the police as unethical and alcohol addicted characters (Mark, 1978; Reiner, 1994; Storch, 1975).

Since the nineteenth century, conflicts about the establishment and acceptability of the police were represented in the media of the time, such as the press, novel and musical hall (Miller, 1988). Detective stories were a favourable subject of popular literature and journalism from the mid-1840s, evidenced by stories like *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, by Charles Dickens. Likewise, police characters are popular in crime fictions whereas the main heroes were mostly private detectives or amateur sleuths, the policemen in contrast, were described as incomplete or ineffective (Rafter, 2006; Reiner, 1981, 2008). The most renowned crime fictions were the classic detective novels by Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, and the private detective novels of Hammett, the police portrayed as minor characters, often appeared negatively as corrupt or comic (Reiner, 2008). Cinema, another medium of mass entertainment early in the twentieth century, also found contained anti-social aspects of its representation of crime and the police (Reiner, 1981). The police were presented sometimes as inefficient and dull in comparison with private detectives, which led to dissatisfaction with the police. In 1910, the International Association of Chiefs of Police initiated a resolution condemning the cinema’s treatment of the police, and John Percival, the Chief Constable of Wigan

declared that “the cinema is responsible for the increase in juvenile crime” when responding to an inquiry by the National Council for Morals in 1916 (Mathews 1994: 27, cited in Reiner, 2008). Thus, a report representing all police Chief Constables proposed the establishment of a censor for cinematograph films, which were believed to be responsible for the increase of juvenile crime.

The conflicted representation of police stimulated concerns about either the supposedly anti-social aspects of the representation of crime, or the alleged threats to police authority (Rafter, 2006). The late 1920s witnessed the most significant public debates regarding the police power in the first half of the twentieth century (Weitzer & Reiner, 1985). Concerns raised about the reliability of police evidence, the rough handling of demonstrators, the over-zealous policing of indecency and the possible use of intimidation during questioning, and have been frequently reported by the press, which increased conflicts between the police and the middle class (Mawby, 2002a; Wood, 2013). With the advances of the popular press, the police became a valued but uncooperative news source, some police officers were found selling news to reporters in the pubs due to the expansion of journalism and increased competition followed (Chibnall, 1977). Consequently, the concerns over this informal news exchange system reached the level of parliamentary complaints, thus compelling the police to reclaim police legitimacy and employ formal mechanisms for image management, which will be discussed below (Mawby, 2002). Although some officers were suspicious, even hostile, towards journalists, the impression of the police at this stage was a paradoxical mixture (Brogden, 1991; Chibnall, 1979). While the police were predominantly seen as a uniformed and authoritative institution, some brutality in street level policing enlarged the antagonism to the police, especially by those from the working class. As noted by Brogden (1991) the image of the police in this period was one of respect co-existing with antagonism against their brutality.

### **2.2.2 Media Representations of the Police Since 1945: A Fading Halo of the Police and Their Deteriorating Relations with the Community**

From 1945 to the end of the 1950s, the post-war period witnessed the time when police legitimacy was highly recognized, namely the 'golden age' of policing (Reiner, 1994; Reiner & Newburn, 2000). Police folk heroes such as PC George Dixon were created as icons of the British police officer and the symbol of an ideal police-public relationship (Berry et al., 1998; Mawby, 2002a). The police enjoyed the large amount of positive public images as the Metropolitan Police was once described as "the best police in the world" (Mawby, 2002, p. 11). Although the character of Dixon has been criticised as being irrelevant to the police by the 1970s, and even in the 1960s, this fictional character has been a benchmark for measuring police behaviour later in the century and to an extent even today (Cashmore, 1994; Emsley, 1996). Meanwhile, media reports contributed to police legitimacy construction in this period. The police have been portrayed as brave and honest crime fighters, or "Crime-Busters", as Chibnall (1977, p. 71) termed it. This immediate post-war period were the glowing years for the press treatment the police until it became reversed in the late 1960s (Reiner & Newburn, 2000).

By the turn of the 1960s, there was a profound cultural and social change that changed the basis of police legitimation (Reiner & Newburn, 2000). Culturally, the post-war period saw a slow decline in compliance, an increase in decolonization<sup>3</sup> worldwide, including the British colonies, and a widespread challenging of authority (Miliband, 1978). And socially, a sustained economic recession occurred in the early 1970s, resulting in high level of unemployment and social unrest. Meanwhile, technological development and globalization have produced a structurally excluded "underclass" that "the majority class does not need to maintain or even increase its standard of living"

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of decolonization refers to the process whereby a nation establishes and maintains its domination of foreign territories. And it particularly applies to the dismantlement of the colonial empires established prior to World War I throughout the world, including the Britain. See discussion by Hack, Karl (2008). *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. Detroit: Macmillan Reference. pp. 255–57

(Dahrendorf, 1985, p. 101). This group of excluded minorities has become increasingly criminalized due to hopelessness and the pressure of being left out (Cram, 2013; Currie, 1998; Reiner, 2007). With the increased crime rates, the image of the police showed a decline and the relationship between the police and certain communities became fractured and distant (Emsley, 1992; Reiner & Newburn, 2000). The introduction and use of motorized patrols and other technologies in policing that moved away from foot patrols towards car patrols made police officers less visible in the community (Mawby, 2002a), resulting in decreased community involvement in policing, recently termed 'abstract policing' as it was characterized by impersonal, formal and distanced relations to the policed (Terpstra et al., 2019). This is widely seen as the change that has distanced the police from the public (Bittner, 1990; Critchley, 1973; Emsley, 1992; Holdaway, 1977; Reiner & Newburn, 2000; Weinberger, 1995). At the same time, other elements were also contributing to threatening the police image, including the deteriorative relations with the media. Press reports goes beyond crime and policing, emphasizing on the changes in procedure and technology that meant journalism recast the police image into a "less lovable, but better equipped" character (Chibnall, 1977, p. 71).

The televised version of policing image also deteriorated in both factual and fictional coverage (Reiner, 2008). Policing methods changed and there were several police scandals involving corruption and resulting miscarriages of justice. The increasing number of confrontations with lower working class and other excluded populations, such as black and minority ethnic groups, was one of the causes of the deteriorating policing image (Waddington, 2013). These growing social conflicts, along with the tensions between the police and media, eventually resulted in a loss of public confidence and support in the police and brought up questions about policing and the police legitimacy, which led to more general suspicions of the exercise of the state power and the core issue of "consent" (Reiner et al., 1978).

Although different strategies were employed for improving police-media relations and enhancing the transparency and openness of police information (Chibnall, 1979), public trust and support to the police were falling apart in the 1980s, particularly after severe riots such as the Miners' Strike during 1984-1985 (Mawby, 2002). The police were reported using tough handed, even brutal, tactics towards the public, and while some sympathy was given to the police, especially those murdered and injured in the social unrest, such as PC Blakelock who was killed in the Broadwater Farm riot in 1985, there were also concerns regarding the capability of the police to maintain social order (Gifford, 1986; Graef, 1989b). In addition, police were criticised for being overly involved in politics during this period, which is the opposite of what the Peelian Principles claim about depoliticization of the police (Reiner, 2000b). The police use of visibility aggressive methods to cope with social disorders raised public fears of the police, and their alignment with the Thatcher government was derided as "Mrs Thatcher's boot boys" by the political left and newspapers (Chesshyre, 2012), criticizing the loss of policing basis – consent by the public. (Emsley, 1996; Graef, 1989b; Hall et al., 1978).

In addition, the media also highlighted a number of violent conflicts between the police and black and other ethnic minority groups, especially young black men in deprived neighbourhoods (Smith & Gray, 1983). During the 1970s, a concern about street crime, such as robberies, became elevated to a moral panic about 'mugging', perpetuated within the media and seized upon by the police (Hall et al., 1978). Black youths living in the inner city were seen as troublesome and potentially criminal. The Metropolitan Police, as a response, conducted disproportionate stop and search actions against young black males and exercised aggressive policing power. 'Operation Swamp' was the catalyst of the 1981 Brixton riots where police aggressively performed stop and search on many black and minority ethnics, throwing them into the back of blacked-out police vans (Jefferson & Grimshaw, 1984). Police relationship with the ethnic minorities, especially the black youth, has been consistently tense despite the recommendations of the Scarman Report following the 1981 Brixton riots (Smith &



Gray, 1983). Mawby and Wright (2005) noted that issues of police accountability in relation to discriminatory practices were subject to heated discussions and concerns were raised regarding deaths in police custody.

The outburst of the Brixton riots was a wake-up call to the threat from insufficient support and trust of the police, which urged renewed policing strategies in response to the alienation of communities (Tilley, 2002; Vito, Walsh, & Kunselman, 2005), in areas of poor community relations, particularly with minority ethnic communities in light of racist views from some police officers. While Scarman's theory of "Bad Apples" has been criticised for essentially blaming individual officers holding prejudice towards the ethnic minorities, the concept of *institutional racism* by contrast has been coined by the Macpherson Report two decades later. This 350-page report was the inquiry of the death of Stephen Lawrence, who were killed by a group of racist white people and the investigation of the killing had been pointed out as "a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership" (Macpherson, 1999, p. 21). With the following recommendation of *zero tolerance* for racism in society, this report transformed the debate about policing and racism, and resulted a series of changes in practice and the law within two years after its publication (Lea, 2013). Furthermore, the mediated social conditions during this period, such as the changes in the media industry, the reform of the police, the increased crime rates which peaked in the mid-1990s as well as constantly reported police scandals, like corruption, overt use of force and malpractice, combined to build up public dissatisfaction towards the police, which impacted the perceptions of police effectiveness and competence (Mawby, 2002). Police legitimacy thus was severely damaged.

This culminated in the need for urgent re-legitimation of the police, given that police legitimacy is a fundamental element of "policing by consent" in the England and Wales. Regaining public support and trust in the police is the 'solution' to enhance police legitimacy and thus became the priority for the police. Various methods have been conducted to achieve this goal. For example, many have noted that police engagement

with the community can benefit effective policing work and regain public support and confidence (Jackson & Bradford, 2009). The subsequent police reform and conduct of new policing models by the Home Office, such as 'neighbourhood policing' and 'reassurance policing', were arguably the product of this and focus on improving the relationship between police and the community through police partnership engagement work, such as the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and neighbourhood meeting (Casey, 2008; Quinton & Morris, 2008). The aim of neighbourhood policing is to encourage citizens to participate in collective efficacy for crime control and collaborate with the police, through which to promote police legitimacy and deter crimes (Barlow & Barlow, 1999; Bullock & Sindall, 2014; Maguire & Wells, 2002; Manning, 1991). The What Works Centre for Crime Reduction (WWCCR) was launched in 2013, focusing on re-balancing police relationships with the communities through approaches such as changes to the organizational culture of the police and other crime reduction practitioners in the long term, the identification of resources for crime intervention, and increases in the effectiveness of policing. Besides, another aspect to enhance police legitimacy and alleviate relations with members of the community was for the police to actively engage with the media, through which the police could maintain a positive public image and communicate with the public, and the following section will discuss this in detail.

### **2.2.3 Image Management in the Police: Changing Communication Strategies**

The police's involvement in image-management activities, such as actively maintain public relations, could be regarded as a new phenomenon that derived from modernity and exists in an environment of increasing hostility towards the police, is consumer driven, and requires external mediation (Cooke & Sturges, 2009). Yet Mawby (2002b) argued that this practice of police image management has long existed and lied at the heart of policing in the UK since the inception of Peel's New Police (Churchill, 2014; Flanders, 2011). When considering how the police attempt to conduct their image work

and interact with the media industry, Mawby (2002b, p. 7-26) suggested a four-conceptual phase regarding the image work of English police:

- 1) Informal image work (1829 - 1919)
- 2) Emergent public relations (1919 - 1972)
- 3) Embedding public relations (1972 - 1987)
- 4) The professionalization of police image work (1987 – present)

In the first phase, with the principles of policing by consent, it became the priority for the New Police to present an image, from recognizable uniforms and practicing manner when dealing with the public, that suggests their differences to the repressive, French-like, state police regime and aid with their acceptance with London's citizens (Emsley, 1996; Mawby, 2002b; Reiner, 2008). The image management of the police organization in this period was uncoordinated, which is in contrast to a planned and formal strategy that set by the police department to its individual police officers to perform intentional and structured activities (Brown, 1970; Hodges, 1987; Young, 1966). This was firstly evidenced by the establishment of the New Scotland Yard Press Bureau in 1919 by Commissioner Macready, for the purpose of handling police-press relations and manage the information released to the press (Chibnall, 1977, 1979; Macready 1924, cited in Mawby, 2002). Described as maintaining a liaison function, the Press Bureau worked with the press to ensure the provision of accurate information to the media and asking the press not to report certain information to interfere with police investigations (Moylan 1934, cited in Mawby, 2002; Chibnall, 1979).

However, while Macready's intention was to establish a particular platform, via the Press Office, enabling the press representatives to communicate with the police officer for information required to report public, the remit of this office was to liaise with the media, answer inquiries, and confirm the source of the information provided by the press (Rock, 2014; Young, 1966). This reactive design is more of a fact checker rather than communication channel (Brown, 1970). Added by Wood (2013), this office was

unstructured and informal that was rather established because of, at least partly, the rising number of complaints and scandals towards the new police during the interwar years. Although the Press Bureau was not seen as the same as the public relations office created later in the police department, it was the first recognized and formalized police department that dealt exclusively with the media. It illustrates an organizational self-awareness within the police of the need to manage their public image and heralded the transformation of police-media relation to a more formal communication enterprise operating from a central point (McIntee, 2016). It was also the turning point indicating police concern regarding their official image and police information made public and led to the second phase of police image management – “Emergent Public Relations” (Mawby 2002, p. 7).

The second period of police image management was characterized as formation the formal channel for the police to liaise with the media. While there was police suspicion of the press in the early 1930s, efforts have been made by the police to influence the way in which the press portrayed their image and develop a mutual beneficial relationship with the press (Mawby, 2002). For example, having realised that “publicity became an indispensable part of our armoury”, Sir Harold Scott, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner (1945 to 1953) made significant contribution to develop this relationship via the readjustment of the Press Bureau, including extending the Bureau’s size, and appointing professional journalists as the Public Information Officer to deal with the news editors (Scott, 1954, p. 99, cited in Mawby 2002, p. 15). Following by the landmark character PC George Dixon, which was first introduced in *The Blue Lamp* in 1950, the police representation on the mass media and news media was favourable in general, and thus benefitted police legitimacy within this “golden age” period.

However, the social conflicts and cultural changes of the 1960s witnessed the deterioration of police image and legitimacy, as discussed previously in section 2.3.3. With the developments of diversified forms of the media, the first head of public

relations at the MPS, Gregory (1970) realised that the police are no longer the principal voice in a rising news-aware society, and it is likely that the police are excluded from some ongoing conversations. He emphasized the importance of police maintaining the public relations to compete with all the other voices that were “clamouring for recognition in the press” (ibid, p. 282). Echoed by the initiative made by the 1962 Royal Commission, in which a focus of “cultivating good relations between the police and public” had been proposed, it also suggested that chief constables should make the best use of local resources to accomplish this ambition (Young, 1966). Following this Commission, in 1964, a report made by George Scott, the Chief Constable of West Riding Constabulary, and Commissioner Sir Joseph Simpson, recommended that specialized personnel should be assigned to be responsible for public relations and receive proper training for this purpose. The following year saw the establishment of the first official Public Relations department in West Riding Constabulary, with its primary remit to “coordinate the public relations work already being done by various departments to provide a speedy source of accurate information to the press, and generally to make deliberate, planned and sustained efforts to establish and maintain mutual understanding between the West Riding Constabulary and the public” (Young 1996, p. 198, cited in McIntee, 2016). Other police forces soon formed their own public relation departments as well (Gregory 1970, cited in Mawby 2002a).

The introduction of the official Public Relations department marked a significant transformation in police communication with the public and the media and started to release official information in the name of the police. The 1962 Royal Commission was seen as a symbol of centralizing the English police in ways that transferring powers and control of external communication from constabularies to the Government, which was the long-held ambition of the Home Office (Kingshott, 2011). Similarly, the mandate of police image management has been centralized started from the set-up of the Scotland Yard Press Bureau (McIntee, 2016). Rather than engaging with the media and conduct police image work by individual officers, the Press Bureau took charges of these duties as uniform news releases, then the public relations department became

the official voice of the police while individual officers were discouraged from talking with journalists and the press (Kingshott, 2011).

By the turn of the 1970s, paralleled to the changing social conditions such as the economic recession and changes in media industries, the police were plagued by various crises (Reiner, 2000b). The way both the police and the media communicated and worked had been changed as a result of these developing technologies. The press, along with other media, drew constant attention to the police and their relationships with the police became severely strained (Mawby, 2002a). In that context, the existing police image and its operation mechanism appeared to be no longer suitable, which calls for a readjustment of provision for rebuilding the police image. The appointment of Sir Robert Mark as Metropolitan Police Commissioner in 1972 lifted the curtain of the third phase of police image work – “Embedding Public Relations” (ibid, p. 19). At the time of becoming Commissioner, with the aim of increasing police legitimacy, Mark (1978) suggested to use the media impacts to rebuild police image and increase public accountability. However, Mark was aware of the hostility of the media towards the police, and he described the relationship between the Metropolitan Police and the press as “mutual distrust and dislike” (ibid, p. 123). In order to improve this situation, a new media policy was introduced by Mark to radically change this relationship from “the principle: ‘tell them only what you must’ ... to ‘withhold only what you must’” (Mark 1977, cited in Mawby 2002, p. 21). While this new policy was designed as an attempt of increasing transparency and openness of the police, the police however, balanced this new mechanism of information release with strict control – “Press Identification Cards” (Chibnall, 1979; Mawby, 2002a). Under this control, it is possible to access information for those with Press Identification Cards only that were issued at the discretion of the MPS. It is through controlling the personnel who were eligible to access information that the MPS and the police could ensure the flow of information (Mawby, 2002a). Thus, by taking an active rather than passive role in disseminating information, the MPS and the police took on a more powerful position in decisions of what to release to the media, and this further distorted the already asymmetric

relationship between the police and media towards being more beneficial to the police (Chibnall, 1975; Shpayer-Makov, 2010).

Grunig (1989) described this communication method as a “press agency/publicity model” that the public relations department as the voice of the police, disseminate information and news stories to the press and the public in a one-way manner. Also termed as a “push” strategy, the police during this period were primarily sending out stories without expectations of feedback and engagement (Meijer & Thaens, 2013). And in the perspectives of Grunig and Grunig (1992), this method of communication has been closely associated with propaganda.

The appointment of Sir Peter Imbert as Commissioner of the MPS in 1987 started the fourth phase of the police image work – “Professional Public Relations” (Mawby, 2002a). One of the significant characteristics of this period was the recruitment of external specialists into the public relations department. Prior to that these roles had been staffed by internally trained police officers (Mawby & Gisby, 2009). Until today the police public relations department is mostly consisted by non-warranted police staff who are specialized or experienced in working for the press, in journalism, marketing or public relations (McIntee, 2016). This was a wider trends related to the context of media reform prompted by the advancement of the Internet and diversified forms of the mass media, and this trend of professionalization of police communication was also found in other countries such as the America, Canada, Australia and France (Ericson, 1989, 1994; McGovern & Lee, 2010; Murray & McGovern, 2014).

Another salient feature of this phase is the changing direction of police image work, evidenced by the naming of the public relations department from the “Press Office”, and “Press and Public Relations” to “Corporate Communications”. The current name suggested the increasing degree of corporatism in police communication and a clear transition in the strategic operation of police communications (Ericson, 2006; Ericson & Haggerty, 1997; Morgan & Newburn, 1997). The police are marching from a press

agency model towards a decentralized, dialogic and two-way model of communication (Meijer & Thaens, 2013).

The question remains, however; how have the police promoted public engagement while maintaining a positive image among the citizens? The College of Policing (2013) define *engagement* as “the process of enabling citizens and communities to participate in policing at their chosen level”, ranging from providing information, assurance and reassurance to the residents, encouraging them to identify local problems and apply solutions, and enabling them to impact the priorities and decisions of policing activities. Through engaging with the police, the public can better understand the legitimacy of police activities and question police effectiveness and service qualities. Evidence has shown that effective engagement and collaborative problem solving can increase public confidence towards the police and further enhance police legitimacy (Myhill & Bradford, 2012; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Policing by consent, the dominant philosophy for policing in England and Wales, requires public support and cooperation for policing activities. Having better knowledge of how policing may affect individual residents and their communities and having a say in influencing policing priorities and decisions, the residents can adjust expectations from policing and enhance the willingness of cooperation with the police (Tyler & Huo, 2002). To this end, ideally police engagement with the public can happen at any time when necessary, either one-off or repeated in a period of time; in any forms, either formal or informal; and focuses on any issues of concerns, such as specific community issues, or policing delivery (College of Policing, 2013).

Generally, the term ‘public engagement’ refers to the direct encounter between the police and the public. This includes forms initiated by the police, including policing activities such as stop and search, investigation or community talks; and initiated by the public like asking for help or making inquiries (Jackson et al., 2012a). Studies have found that personal experience with the police, the public engagement, can have significant impact on public confidence in policing, further advancing the perceived



police effectiveness, legitimacy of the criminal justice system and the legitimacy of the police (FitzGerald, Hough, Joseph, & Qureshi, 2002; Jackson & Sunshine, 2007; Reisig, Bratton, & Gertz, 2007; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003).

Given the various dimensions of the concept, at its heart, public engagement is about meaning management (Bernays, 1928). While many practitioners have pointed out that there is an asymmetrical relationship between the police and public during personal encounters which can do more harm to public satisfaction if the encounter is poorly handled, the police manage to actively reach out and communicate with different, often competing members of society to negotiate the confidence, and survival of the organisation or brand (Broom & Sha, 2013; Skogan, 2006). Social media, as the rest of this chapter explores, has radically altered the communications landscape for police forces.

## **2.3 The Changing Landscape of Police Image Work: Bobbies on the Net**

### **2.3.1 The Emergence of Social Media**

The term social media refers to a set of online platforms that are used to promote social engagement among different individuals and groups who may not meet or communicate in the real world (Fisher, 2009). This approach is derived from the social network sites (SNS) since the 1990s. Boyd and Ellison (2007) proposed a definition of social network sites (SNS) to describe their characteristics that made it possible for individuals to update their profiles and engage with other users within the same system, with the motivation of information sharing and communication. However, in their most recent chapter, an updated definition has been made provided:

*A social network site is a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other*

*users, and/or system-level data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site.*

Ellison & Boyd, 2013, p. 9

Although the nomenclature of the connection and forms of interactions may vary from site to site, the nature of SNS is to list and make individual's social networks visible and engage to people who are also users of the system.

The first recognizable SNS, Six Degrees, was launched in 1997 (Six Degrees.com). It allowed users to create personal profiles, connect with their friends' accounts and, started in 1998, to allow surfing user's friends lists. After this service closed down in 2000, a new wave of SNSs began to attract people wanting to connect with friends and those who aimed to facilitate their business online. From 2003 onward, the new launched SNSs gave priority to the profile-centric form, trying to replicate the success of Friendster (Leeney, 2018). Besides, some websites have implemented the function of public display of connections – a significant feature of SNSs, and attract users to connect with others while searching web pages, such as Flickr and YouTube. MySpace differs in that it regularly adds features based on user demand and allows users to personalize their pages (Boyd, 2006). With the advances of communicating technology, Facebook and Twitter were built in early 2004 and 2006, respectively. Until today, Twitter is one of the most successful and widespread social microblogging applications with a large number of users inside and outside the UK.

By the turn of 2011, a broader shift occurred among the wide social media, with social networking sites becoming more media-centric rather than profile-centric (Ellison & Boyd, 2013). Most social networking sites were designed for presenting the most recent updated content – a media stream, in the form of Facebook's News Feed and the on the login interface of Twitter. Each individual use's stream is updated with

content posted by those whom they have chosen to follow. An increasing trend of media sharing, in the forms of text, pictures, video or audio, became universal. In that context, users are not only willing to participate more in sharing and browsing these streams, but media websites will also actively push this information to users. These streams, as Naaman and colleagues (Naaman et al., 2010) terms them as “social awareness streams”. Thereafter, social media with sophisticated algorithms for information push services has become popular, for example, if one frequently “focus on” another user or browses their profile through high-frequency contact methods, then this user will often receive updates from the target person, and *vice versa*, evidenced by WeChat; Another common example is that one can always receive advertisements in social media streams about items one has recently viewed on other websites. However, this information push system and its algorithms is beyond the scope of this thesis, which will only focus on the Twitter posts that are generated by the users themselves.

The popularization of social media brings significant changes in society. One salient impact is that it transited communication models among people at large, from a Business-to-Business to an integration of Business-to-Business and Business-to-Client and many others. From the perspective of organization communication, the communication model between the government and the public was traditionally a one-way path, that government disseminates information to the public through the news media and does not receive feedback (Heverin & Zach, 2010). The rapid development of technology innovation witnessed the shift from informational web (Web 1.0) to the interactional web (Web 2.0), which provides people with opportunities to participate, interact and disseminate information with the government and each other, and opens up more opportunities for interactive communication among society (Edwards et al., 2013a; Pascu & van Lieshout, 2009). Social media thus created an opportunity for governments, corporations and organisations to communicate directly with individuals, encouraging real-time feedback and mutual interaction (Zerfass & Schramm, 2013). Police, as the body of government, recognised the importance of the rise of a

cyberworld that on the one hand, allowed them to find out what people feel about a specific problem, which is important to improve the public trust to the police (Bridenball & Jesilow, 2008). On the other hand, the police trying to persuade people into complying with the law, commands and police decisions by various proactive strategies, and this too, has been affected by the introduction of new information technologies, including social media (Bittner, 1990; Manning, 1992a, 1992b, 1996; Reiss, 1992).

Furthermore, social media play an important role in promoting community engagement. For example, the community consultative meetings that came out of the Scarman Report (Scarman, 1981), has been originally created as a platform for increasing communication and interaction between the police and the community (Fielding, 2005). However, despite its widespread implementation today, the community consultative meeting has been heavily criticised for various reasons, such as the ill-defined nature of the concept of the community, the lack of a clear understanding of diversity within a community that is being policed, and the non-representative residents that participate in the meetings (Fielding, 2005; Kane, 2000; Klinger, 1997; Reisig & Parks, 2000; Smith & Gray, 1983; Stratta, 1990). Social media, as a response to the relations between the police and the community in general, has been used by the police to interact with the public and increase the transparency of policing (Bullock 2018). Social media is seen to be more effective in reaching a wider representation of community, which opens extra channel for the police to engage with community members, rather than sticking to community meetings. The importance of social media to promote community engagement has also been acknowledged by the government that the HMIC (2011) report *Rules of Engagement* encouraged the police to engage in the digital form of communication (e.g. the Facebook and the Twitter), which benefits proactively neighbourhood policing.

Social media can also have an impact on police culture. In most forces, it is civilian police officer who operate the corporate social media accounts on behalf of the police institution. Social media thus empowered the police officers in terms of the impact of

their work on the one hand, and on the other hand, changed the methods of surveillance from police supervisors (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997; McIntee, 2016). The introduction of social media rendered the police organizations more transparent as well as generating resistance to the risk of being scrutinised by supervisors and technology. In addition, in the context of police communication, the old paradigm that the police disseminate information to the media, who then reproduce as news stories to the public, has been shifted to a new model that the police need to cater to both the media and the wider public, directly communicating information and responding to inquiries and feedback. This has created new job positions and responsibilities, namely Communication Officers or Digital Media Officers; newly formulated policies on dealing with the media, and an increasing scrutiny by outsiders, such as the media and a wider public. It reflected that new technologies, namely, social media, introduced *into* police can shape, and impact organizational structure and routines, which influence the police occupational culture (Manning, 1996).

Using social media networks including Twitter to engage the public has become a normal part of policing. However, academic research and reflections of how social media is used in policing are somewhat limited. To date, researches are more concerned about the analysis and prediction use of tweets from the public rather than the police, for example, the relation between the box-office's revenue of a movie and the sentiment expressed towards the movie via social media (Asur & Huberman, 2010); the tension online was used to foresee the 'anticipatory governance' (Burnap & Williams, 2015), and the predictive nature of social media communications to civil unrest incidents (Edwards et al., 2013a; Procter, Vis, et al., 2013). From the perspective of police communication, the following discussions will focus on one product of social media, Twitter, to explore how the police construct image and attempt to maintain legitimacy via Twitter communication.

Twitter was originally designed for sharing messages via short message service (SMS) in that it allowed users to post short textual messages in the system, and the content

can be read by any other users of Twitter. The maximum length of a tweet is 140 characters (Boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010). Initially created in 2006, Twitter is seen as one of the most successful and widespread social microblogging applications with a large number of users inside and outside the UK. About 45% of UK online adults (45.9 million) use Twitter, with 37% of them (20 million) using it daily.<sup>4</sup> As of the first quarter of 2019, Twitter has 330 million monthly active users, and 139 million daily active users worldwide (Statistics 2019)<sup>5</sup>. Similarly in the U.S, figures show more than 69 million monthly active Twitter users in the 3rd quarter 2017.<sup>6</sup> With an easy method to access and to share real time and brief information, Twitter is one of the most well-known and successful social networks worldwide and serves the role of information production, broadcasting and updating during social events and disasters (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Lee Hughes & Palen, 2009; Starbird et al., 2010; Zhao & Rosson, 2009). With the prevalence of this communication tool, it becomes an essential part in policing work as it enables the police to “contact” a wide audience that they can hardly reach through the traditional “encounter” engagement. Every police force in England now has at least one corporate social media account, namely a Facebook page and Twitter accounts. Many, if not all, forces keep numerous local accounts as well as several corporate accounts.

### **2.3.2 Adoption of Social Media in Police Organization**

In light of an increasingly mediated society and significant changes in the media industry, the police appear to have only cautiously adopted social media (Crump, 2011; Medi@4Sec, 2016). Dekker and colleagues (2020) asserted that this was due to the existence of barriers to technological innovation, which reflects a broader pattern where state/public organizations, including the police, are hesitant to adopt social media fully into the organizational processes (Bretschneider & Mergel, 2013; Mergel,

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<sup>4</sup> See the data from RoseMcGory, last accessed date: 15/01/2021: <http://www.rosemcgory.co.uk/2017/01/03/uk-social-media-statistics-for-2017/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/> last access: 03/12/2019

<sup>6</sup> See the data from Statista, last accessed date: 15/01/2021: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/274564/monthly-active-twitter-users-in-the-united-states/>

2013; Oliveira & Welch, 2013; Picazo-Vela et al., 2016). The adoption of social media in the public sectors can impact the internal processes of an organization and the ways in which the organization engages with the broader public externally (Criado et al., 2013). Many challenges of integrating social media in public organizations have been identified, ranging from the introduction of new techniques, to sustaining and embedding these new technologies in the institutional structure and organizational culture (Dekker & Bekkers, 2015; Mergel, 2012). Earlier research within this vein mainly focuses on the structural barriers within the public sectors, slowing down and even impeding the use of new technologies (Meijer, 2015; Mergel, 2012; Picazo-Vela et al., 2016). Other challenges were related to personnel and technical capacity, in particular the number of information technology staff personnel and their IT skills and competencies, financial capacity and legal issues, such as privacy (Moon, 2002). Technological challenges, such as the availability of hardware and software, were also noted (Eynon & Margetts, 2007). Narrowing down to the police, adoption of social media in police organizations will meet challenges in different aspects; for example, it requires a massive investment of resources, such as hardware and software for social media operation and management (Jones & De Guzman, 2010). Extra personnel needed to maintain an active online presence, engage with the community and cope with the public requests (Edlins & Brainard, 2016; Fowler, 2017; Heverin & Zach, 2010; Omanga, 2015). Furthermore, barriers in the management have been identified such as lacking clear protocols, guidelines and rules for police use of social media and responding suitably to inappropriate, even offensive expressions via social media, such as hate speech (Meijer & Torenvlied, 2016; Trottier & Fuchs, 2014). As Ernst et al. (2021) suggested, while the technological innovation processes within a police organization can be stimulated by some social factors, such as specific skills and competencies, the organizational factor is one of powerful causes of inhibiting this process.

Moreover, the occupational culture of the police can also function against the development and adoption of new technologies, such as social media work (Bullock,

2018b; Dekker et al., 2020a; Eynon & Dutton, 2007; Eynon & Margetts, 2007; Van De Velde et al., 2015). For example, the renowned strong sense of solidarity between rank-and-file officers and a cynical view of the world (Reiner, 1992) of the police officers can naturally resist the scrutiny of outsiders. This bond of solidarity among officers within police organization “will defend, back up and assist their colleagues when confronted by external threats, and ... they will maintain secrecy in the face of external investigations” (Goldsmith, 1990, pp. 93–94). In addition, Dekker et al. (2020a) pointed out the mismatch between police culture and social media culture and the inability of well-adjusted communication styles on different social media platforms, can hinder the willingness of police to use social media. In addition, the pragmatic nature of the police also adds to this resistance, since officers just want to get the job done with least ‘fuss’, which can lead to the reluctance to adapt and innovate (Reiner, 2000b; Loftus 2009). When new technology and associated practices have been introduced, especially those which brings the police under enhanced oversight by the public and media, the police occupational culture can act as an obstacle to some extent. For example, Bullock’s (2018) research in an English police force found that the claimed potential of social media to extend public participation in policing is frustrated by organisational and cultural barriers. In her analysis, the deployment and development of social media use is impacted by organizational, technological, personal, and cultural dynamics. This resistance has also been noted in my research (see discussion in 5.4.1). Therefore, efforts at organizational and managerial levels are needed to overcome these barriers in order to adopt social media, both within the police mindset and everyday practices.

The creation of rules and guidance for communication and that to regulate standardized practices were employed, nationally and locally, to overcome structural barriers. For instance, guidelines for social media use were introduced regarding post standardized inquiry and responses that protect the privacy of suspects or victims and avoid breaching policing operations (ACPO, 2013, later the National Police Chiefs's Council, NPCC). Following the *Guidelines for the Safe Use of the Internet and Social*



*Media by Police Officers and Police Staff* from the ACPO (2013), most police forces produced communication guidelines or media law for their organizations based on ACPO documents, setting up regulations and policies for social media operation in order to secure consistency and uniformity of the use of accounts, and specifying rules in relation to ensuring security and legal compliance of the police accounts by adjusting privacy settings (ACPO, 2013; Fernandez, Dickinson, & Alani, 2017). Thus, individual police force can better monitor the operation of social media and deliver training for Communication Officers accordingly (Metropolitan Police, 2017).

### **2.3.3 Social Media as a Catalyst in Community Engagement**

Adoption of social media in policing has nevertheless raised heated discussion in policing literature. A number of researchers found that social media is beneficial for the police operation in varied aspects, such as contributing to the openness and transparency of the police, and facilitating citizen participation (Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Bullock, 2018b; Crump, 2011; Schneider, 2016). Early in 2011, police forces in some European countries, such as the Netherlands and the England and Wales, adopted social media as part of their routine operations (Denef et al., 2013). The first use of social media in British police can be traced back to 2008; it was mostly used by individual officers with a varying range of official support (Crump, 2011). Since then, police organizations have mainstreamed this practice and started using social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to fulfil three main tasks: (i) *Providing Information* (ii) *Engagement*, and (iii) *Intelligence and Investigation* (The Police Foundation, 2014). By now, all the police forces have their own social media accounts, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Social media has emerged as a new tool for public engagement, rather than just a communication tool, to provide the police with new and alternative channels to directly interact with the public.

In recent years, research and reflection in this area has developed to focus on police use of social media in terms of its content (Crump, 2011; Lieberman et al., 2013), police

communication strategies, and how police use of social media is shaped by the joint effects of organizational, individual, technological and cultural dynamics (Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Bullock, 2018a; Crump, 2011; Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015; Lieberman et al., 2013). Mayes (2021) found that police departments in the United States used Twitter and Facebook to fulfil community-oriented goals, such as humanizing individual officers and increasing transparency. While it has been demonstrated by some that this new information technology has limited influence on police practices and perceptions by the public, through an empirical investigation of different communication strategies in three North-American police departments, Meijer and Thaens (2013) claimed that social media use could increase the transparency of police activities. Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2015) found that perceived police legitimacy can be increased through enhanced transparency albeit to a limited extent. And the enhanced police legitimacy, in turn, benefits the community engagement and police relationship with the public.

However, empirical studies to support such claims are few and far between, and this is especially the case in the UK context. Police studies relating to social media use have primarily focused on the content, benefits and risks of social media usage (Crump, 2011; Denef et al., 2013) and how police operate social media to engage with the public (Bullock, 2018b; Denef et al., 2013; Harms & Wade, 2017; Meijer & Thaens, 2013). In contrast, studies, especially from an empirical perspective, investigating the role of social media usage in the police legitimacy construction process are few (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015). It is against this background of limited information and evidence that this thesis sets out to redress the balance by providing a comprehensive empirical exploration of how the police deploy social media, and its broader implications for police legitimacy. While the police use of social media has now become a routine and normalized aspect of policing, there remains little understanding of how social media assists the police to enhance legitimacy. My research aims to make a contribution to understandings of police legitimacy from the perspective of their use of social media and communication with the public. It draws on both qualitative

interpretation and quantitative analysis to address the question of the role of social media use and police communication in facilitating police legitimation.

#### **2.3.4 New Visibility of Policing and Police Communication**

The external environment of the police, which they engage with and operate in, has become increasingly mediated (Ericson, 1994; Ericson & Haggerty, 1997; Garland, 2001; Goldsmith, 2010; Thompson, 1995). As a study from Parliament Street Research Team (2014) notes, “Facebook and Twitter are the defining products of our age, tools that have changed the way we interact, communicate and live.” Police communication with the public has been altered significantly, from various social and technical aspects, resulting in potential threats to police legitimacy. For example, social media challenges the traditional prevailing industrial practice of the media, one which demands that police stories and images must necessarily be portrayed and described to the public by the established news media, and one where police officers need to speak to the individual citizen to gather information that helps with the investigation. Police now can bypass the established media to broadcast their news and stories and communicate directly with people who stay on the same social media tool. This leads to the issue of “management of visibility”, which concerns how the powerful seek to manage and stage their visibility in front of others in order to construct public images via self-presentation management (Thompson, 1995, pp. 134–140). The accompanying development of joint communication media changed the relations between people (Firsov, 2021). In particular, the technological changes, as well as the restructuring in the media industry, altered the mode of communication between the police and the public, and also contributed to the process of news media globalization (Neveu & Surdez, 2020). In this context, there is an organizational need for the police to manage a public image via effective communication, as one dimension of the legitimation process. This visibility management is more than merely the manipulation of impressions (Goffman, 1959), but with more substance, to combine the

transparency and accountability of policing with the image management process (Mawby, 2002).

Moreover, one of the driving forces of police use of social media comes from the profound changes in the media industry, both organizational and technological, compelling the police to re-assess and re-adjust the way of broadcasting information and communicating with the public. Organizational changes in the media industry, especially in the change of news distribution formats, such as the 24-7 news mediasphere, have resulted in higher demands for news stories and materials (Greer & McLaughlin, 2010). Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube enable news stories to travel widely instantaneously; any individuals with internet access, in addition to media journalists, can produce and help to spread news 24-7. This impacts on police forces since the police have long been a regular source of information, such as news about crime and social incidents, for the media (Mawby, 2010; Reiner & Greer, 2012). Besides, the development of technologies in the media also brings influence on the police. The era of social media and panopticon-like scrutiny of public sectors, meaning that the police are watched and observed by people who have access to the social media, compelled the police to control what had been posted to the public. While the police are scrutinized by anyone who has access to social media, they have used these same technological advances to deliver their advantages to the public, such as posting good news stories about themselves, and some police have initiated an online programme to publicize proactive policing (Chermak & Weiss, 2005). Police not only need to 'present' on social media sites, but they also must continually provide services for the public online, such as providing an online inquiry and live chats (NPIA, 2010). Thus, advances in media and network technologies provide the police with both risks of being scrutinized by the media and the public and opportunities to directly communicate with the public and construct their public image.

Today, with the spread of web technologies and communication tools, social media use and information technology has increased significantly. Data collected by the Office for National Statistics (2019) suggest that approximately all adults aged 16 to 44 years in the UK are now competent internet users (99%). 87% of the population have daily or almost everyday access to the internet, and 72% are using social media or instant messaging services regularly. The statistics reported that in 2019, there were 13.7 million Twitter users in the UK (Rose McGrory, 2019), although many users felt frustrated with the online safety issues via using Twitter, such as the bot networks or misinformation<sup>7</sup>. Police communication with the public thus plays an integral part in the construction of police image and power among the public, as Fielding, (2021, p. 18) recently claimed that “social media communication can displace more traditional media.” Police in England and Wales have been using Twitter for over a decade (Crump, 2011; Johnston & McGovern, 2011). By 2008, West Midlands police force registered a corporate Twitter account, and by 2011 all police forces in England adopted their corporate Twitter accounts (Crump, 2011).

With the characteristics of user-generated content and decentralized mechanisms of information exchange, social media can benefit the police in many aspects (Bertot et al., 2012; Picazo-Vela et al., 2012). It not only facilitates police operations, such as criminal investigation and intelligence collection, but also has consequences for engaging with the public and communities, and responding to the public initiated dialogue (Crump, 2011; Manzoor, 2015; Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Meijer & Torenvlied, 2016; Schneider, 2016). The common understanding of police use of Twitter is to manage information flow, keep the public informed about road and weather conditions, clarify rumours, and serve as a reassurance function (Procter, Viz, et al., 2013; Ruddell & Jones, 2013; Stott & Reicher, 2011). At the same time, Twitter also serves a surveillance function. As Fuchs and Trottier (2015) argued, it monitors different activities of individuals and social groups in different social roles with data-driven

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.rosemcgrory.co.uk/2019/01/07/uk-social-media-user-statistics-for-2019/> last access: 03/12/2019

technical features. The popularity of Twitter allows new possibilities for data collection and analysis by both state and private companies, including the police, such as intelligence monitoring, sentiment analyses and attempts at predicting terrorist attacks (Alsaedi et al., 2017; Burnap et al., 2014). In addition, Bérubé et al. (2020) noted that social media is of great importance for the police to collect intelligence and spot social tensions, especially during social crises. Social media can also act effectively to reassure members of the public in relation to crimes and incidents and broadcast news during an emergency, such as earthquakes or floods (Saroj & Pal, 2020). For example, the police used Twitter to trace social unrests, targeted suspects and reassured citizens during the London riot 2011 (Deneff et al., 2013).

## **2.4 Conclusion**

My purpose of this chapter has been to provide a critical overview of the research in the broad area of police image work. Through reviewing existing knowledge regarding police legitimacy, media representation of the police, and police use of social media, it has charted a canvas for studying the police use of social media as a central concern of this thesis.

There have been debates on the core functions of the police in the UK, either as a force that use coercive method or a service that prioritize civil affairs with minimum force, to maintain social order and fighting crimes. From the orthodox history of the police, the principal objective the of New Police is prevention of crime and gaining the support and consent from the public is an effective way to achieving this aim (Manning, 1997; Reiner, 2008). Traditionally, the mass media was the main avenue for the public to access crime stories, and the police, as the main body in fighting crimes, were also frequently reported. However, the police and media interests were interrelated as that the police release information to the public through media reports, and the media

manufactured the police image to appeal to their audience and maximize marketing, while some argued that the police were in dominant position of this relationship.

The media representations of the police are at the heart of police image work, which plays an essential role in appealing to citizens and maintain police legitimacy. It was not until the emergence and wide spread of social media that altered the communication landscape profoundly. Social media provides the opportunities for the police to communicate with the public directly while at the same time, bringing more scrutiny to the police thus presenting a threat to police reputation and legitimacy. Police directly communicate with the public is essential because such communication conducted can not only demonstrate *what* the police are planning to express, but it also reflects who the police view as the possible audience, and what image they wish to construct. In other words, it is through their communication strategies that the police reveal themselves, their anxieties and priorities. Yet there are few studies that combine police use of social media, relationship with the media and police legitimacy to comprehensively investigate police communications.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of police communication there have been comparatively few studies focusing on police communication via social media. With the introduction of social media as part of police communications strategy, a growing number of researchers have started to look at this avenue and explore the barriers and effects of police use of these platforms. Studies from the UK (Bullock, 2018b, 2018a; Crump, 2011; Dekker et al., 2020b; Goldsmith, 2010, 2015; Procter, Crump, et al., 2013) and America (Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Heverin & Zach, 2010; Lieberman et al., 2013; Meijer & Thaens, 2013) took the dominance in this area while scholars in other parts of world are also contributing to the research on police communication via social media. From the perspective of the police, the majority of studies have been looking at either-

1. Effects, characteristics and barriers of social media usage; principally concentrating on exploring how the police conduct social media communication and what restrains there may be. Research in this groups is usually investigating the results and impacts of specific event, such as research on the 2011 London riots (Crump, 2011; Denef et al., 2013), or through interviews, content analysis and fieldwork to examine what factors mediate the use of police social media (see for example, Bullock, 2018a). There are also debates regarding how to evaluate the use of social media as success or failure, and how to measure the effectiveness of social, and digital, media use (Mergel, 2014).

2. The relationship between communication strategies via social media and the presented police image. This area has traditionally based in the critical sociological perspective that investigate the relationship among police, media and society in terms of power dynamic and control. While the police are often placed at the dominant part in the relationship, there are different interpretations and arguments that for example, the police themselves do not always see themselves as the controlling party (Lee, Lewis, & Powers, 2014; Surette, 1998). This situation has been shifted since the rise of social media, the introduction of the Freedom of Information Act (2000) to increase the transparency of public organisations and the new rules that direct police-media relations due to the Leveson Inquiry (Mawby, 2014).

In the UK, individual police forces have pioneered to employ social media started from the Facebook and Twitter account in 2008. Until today, all police forces in England and Wales have multiple social media channels with constabulary management, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, and an active online presence. Although there is resistance noted within the force with regard to hierarchy management, flow of information management, and whether the use of social media could diminish the authority of the police and thus threats police reputation and legitimacy, police benefited from social media in various ways, like facilitating crime investigation, effectively collect information, increase public engagement, and towards the promising



area of using tweets sentiment to predict hate crimes (Burnap & Williams, 2015; Coliandris, 2017; O'Connor, 2017). Meantime, while the increased public scrutiny has potential threats to the police reputation and legitimacy, the police have been using these same technological advances to reach to a wide audience and portray an image that they wish to present. As Bullock (2018b) suggests, the core of the new visibility of the policing is to enhance transparency and accountability of policing with the image management (see also Mawby, 2002).

## **CHAPTER THREE. Understanding Police Communication on Social Media: Methodological Considerations**

This chapter will set out and justify the research design and methods used in this study. In order to explore the complex process of enhancing police legitimacy via the use of social media in two police forces, I decided to utilize a mixed-methods approach. The chapter is divided into three main parts. The first section revisits the research questions underpinning this study and describes the epistemology and the methodology I chose for exploring these in both qualitative and quantitative phases of the research. The second part discusses the ethical considerations for undertaking the empirical research in this study, especially the ethnographic component. The final part of the chapter outlines and justifies the methods used in the different phases of this research, namely the qualitative approach used in the first and last phase, and the quantitative analysis carried out during the second phase.

### **3.1 Making Sense of Police Communication on Social Media**

#### **3.1.1 Research Questions and Methodology**

As I explained in Chapter One, the orienting focus of this research is on how the police construct and renegotiate legitimacy via social media. Many facets and layers can impact upon the process of legitimacy construction, such as social practices involving “economic, technological, environmental, cultural, political, and military” effects (Castells, 2009, p. 15), and social media communication that mediates the power relations between police and the public (Fuchs, 2012; Giddens, 1984a). Historically, the primary pillars of research epistemology have been either constructivism/interpretivism or positivism/postpositivism (Creswell et al., 2007; Feilzer, 2010). Constructivists advocate qualitative research methods, believing that reality implies multiple aspects of knowledge and can be understood only through “subjective inquiries”. This is contrasted with positivists who place emphasis in objective and

value-free quantitative research methods to examine and discover the 'one and only' truth of a reality (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Creswell & Clark Plano, 2007). As Sechrest and Sidana (1995) note, the development of a pragmatistic view, which advocates the use of mixed methods in social research, has the potential to reduce some of the limits associated with singular research methods. "Mixed methods research is therefore an attempt to draw on and legitimate the use of multiple approaches in answering research questions, rather than restricting or constraining researchers' choices" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). By utilizing qualitative and quantitative techniques within the same framework, mixed methods research can incorporate the strengths of both methodologies, and can increase the validity of research findings by using multiple independent methods of data collection and analysis (Jick, 1979). More importantly, employing mixed methods enables the researcher to choose and apply approaches most suitable based on the underlying research questions, rather than on preconceived biases about which research paradigm should dominate in a research design (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In this respect, using the concurrent triangulation design meant that separate qualitative (interviews, focus groups and observations) and quantitative (tweets analysis) methods could be used to confirm findings within one study thus offsetting the weaknesses and strengths in one method (Creswell et al., 2003, p. 183; Jick, 1979).

However, there have been criticisms towards the mixed method approach, notably that methodological purists insist in the dichotomy of world views and research methods (Creswell & Clark Plano, 2007) and therefore argue against mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches. For example, Sale et al. (2002) criticised the uncritical acceptance of mixed methods research and claimed that some researchers may overlook the potential assumptions and disproportionate differences between the two paradigms. While some scholars argued against the incompatibility thesis and instead pointed out that researchers should follow a pragmatic approach and conduct research with 'what works' (Howe, 1988), Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) noted that a single researcher can find it difficult to employ both qualitative and quantitative research -

especially if two or more approaches are designed to be carried out concurrently. In this case, a research team may be required. Besides, mixed-method research requires the researcher to have, at least, an understanding and knowledge of *both* qualitative and quantitative methods independently and the ability to mix varied methods appropriately (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

This research aims to explore phenomena as complicated and subjective as the behaviour of individual police staff and police organizations, especially in the context of the rapid development of police communication in the digital age (Reiner, 2010; Zavattaro & Sementelli, 2014). There are various layers and elements of police communication that can be analysed. For example, the widespread adoption of Twitter by police organizations raises a number of questions for social inquiry: what do police officers think about their own use of social media to communicate with the public? What topics do police organisations tend to post? How many tweets do police organisations post? And how do the public respond to those posts? Hence, rather than concentrate exclusively on one perspective and ignore other aspects of police communication, this study focused on the broader picture, employing both qualitative and quantitative methods in an iterative manner in order to investigate the inter-related and interdependent elements of police communication. Therefore, for this research to explore how the police construct legitimacy through different layers, I chose a pragmatism paradigm using mixed methods for the research.

The research design involved using qualitative research methods, i.e., observing and interpreting routine policing work, and conducting semi-structured interviews with social media operators in police forces, as well as quantitative research methods, i.e., reviewing the collected tweets from the forces' Twitter accounts. Combined the two methodological approaches allowed me to interpret police use of social media narratives and to analyse how police use of social media helps maintain a desired police image (Creswell et al., 2007; Dewey, 1925). Moreover, in order to better

understand the differences in communication strategies between individual forces, I conducted these methods comparatively in two police forces.

The primary research question underlying this thesis is, “How do police forces use Twitter to enhance police legitimacy?”

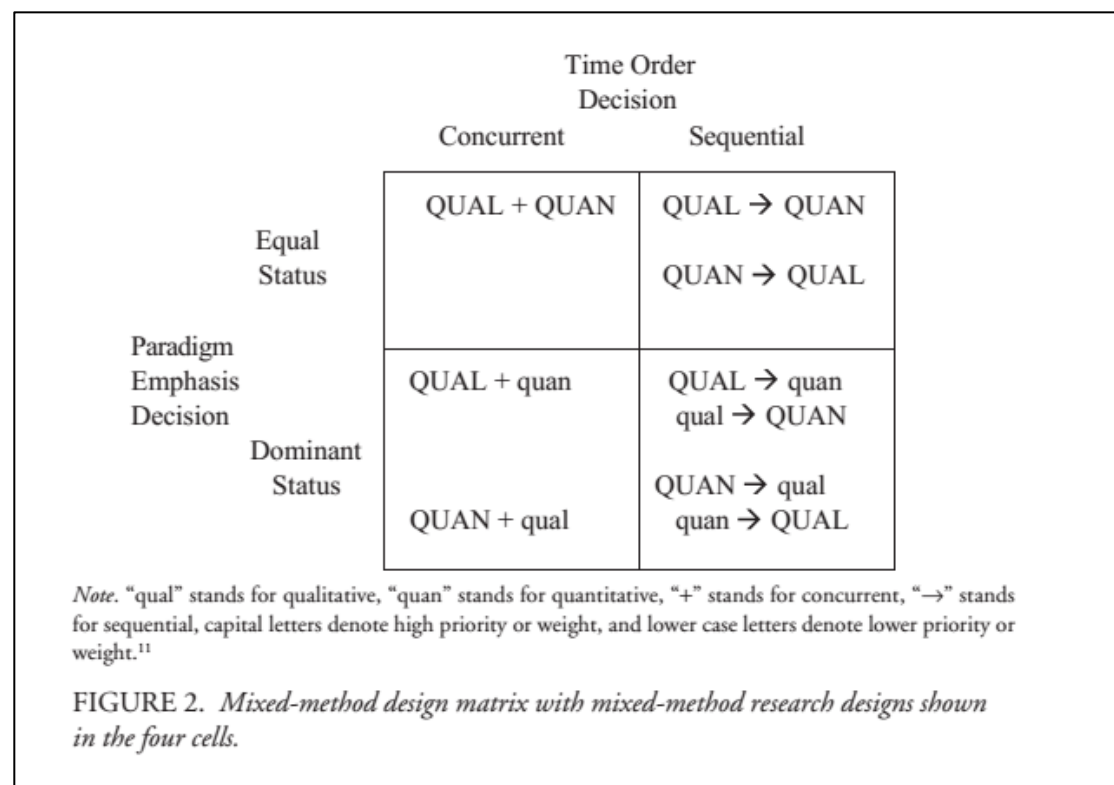
The secondary research questions are as follows:

- How do police Communication Officers in Hawshire and Lionshire Police differently view and understand the use of social media?
- How are Communication Officers trained by their organizations to operate online communication?
- How do police Communication Officers use the corporate account?
- Are there differences in the way different forces communicate with the publics via twitter?
- What is the role of police online communication in the structuration of police legitimacy?

Since police communication with the public via communication techniques like Twitter incorporates multiple facets, it was necessary to devise a mixed-method approach to carefully interpret and examine the different layers of this social phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2011). Through eliciting multiple kinds of data and evidence in research, that allows “words, pictures and narrative to be used to add meaning to numbers” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 21), the mixed-method approach enables the advantages of each separate method to compensate for the weaknesses of other methods employed (Cho & Trent, 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Small, 2011). To draw on only one source of data would be insufficient to construct a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell et al., 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). In my study, I believed that the use of qualitative data alone would be inadequate for investigating police communication and their use of social media, or for exploring the level of public engagement with each tweet. At the

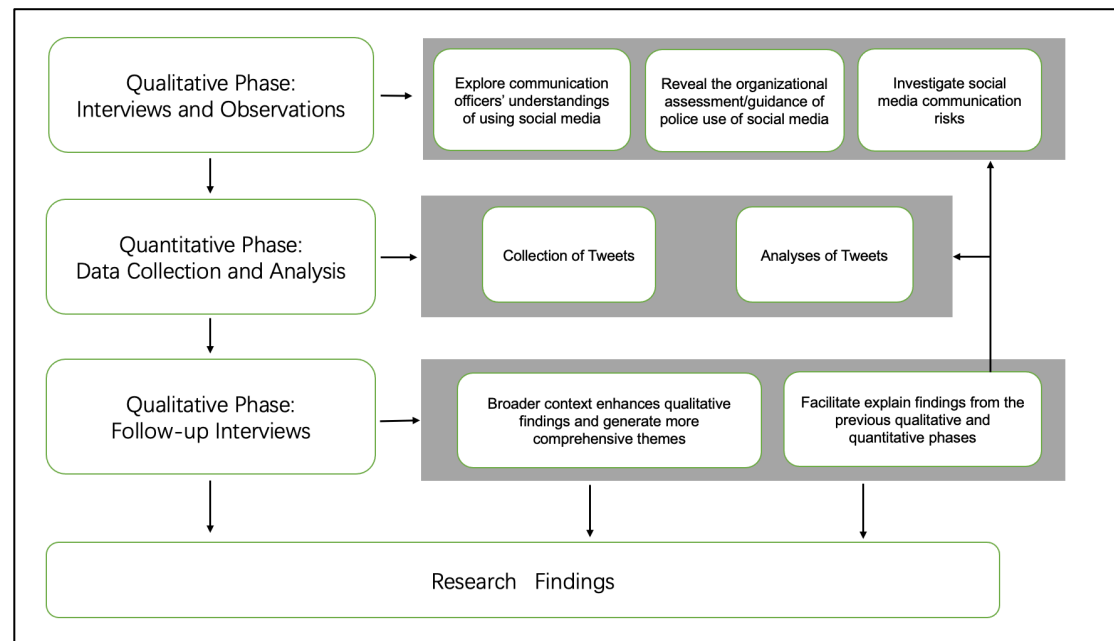
same time, drawing on an exclusively quantitative approach would neglect to provide a deeper, more integrated picture of the police communication strategy or expand the understanding of police legitimization of social media usage. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative methods were combined as part of the iterative three-phase process. In what has been termed by Creswell and Clark Plano (2007) as an ‘embedded design’ the methods in this research were used to answer different research questions with an appropriate approach and data. Inspired by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie’s (2004, p. 22) four categorizations of mixed-methods research (see Diagram 1), namely the Equal Status + Concurrent, Equal Status + Sequential; Dominant Status + Concurrent and Dominant Status + Sequential, I employed research methods in the Dominant Status + Sequential manner as “QUAL – quan – qual” (see Diagram 2).

Diagram 1 Mixed-Method Research categorization



Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 22

Diagram 2 Research design sequencing



In this research design, priority was given to qualitative methods of inquiry as this study aimed to explore a specific research question with no hypothesis in mind (Creswell et al 2003). As Jick (1979: 603) puts it, qualitative methods illuminate elements of the context of the research that “allow the researcher to examine the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives by allowing new dimensions to emerge”. The purpose of the ‘embedded design’ is that the initial qualitative data facilitates quantitative results and primary contextual explanations, while the follow-up quantitative data is used for a further demonstration of the observations, and to examine the relations between different communication elements (Creswell & Clark Plano, 2007). After that, a further iterative qualitative phase is carried out for a further explanation, which helps to develop the findings from the quantitative phase (see Table 1). Research methods used and data collected can be seen in Table 2.

Table 1 Timeframe of Research

	Time	Research Methods	Research Objects
Phase One	2018.01-2018.04	Literature Review Ethics Approved in April 2018	Acquire Necessary Knowledge
	2018.04	First Contact with Hawshire Police	Access Negotiation
	2018.05	Pilot Interviews	Conduct Pilot Interviews
	2018.07	First and Second Observation in Hawshire Police (Two-day);	Conduct Office-based Interview, Focus Group, and Non-participant in a Communication Training
		Fist Contact with Lionshire Police	Access Negotiation
	2018.11	First Observation in Lionshire	Conduct Interview and Focus Group in the Communication Office
	2019.01	Second and Third Observation in Lionshire (Two-day)	Non-participatory Patrol with the Covert Team
Phase Two	2018.11	Collect and Analyse Tweets by R Program	840 posts from Hawshire Police; 1521 posts from Lionshire Police
	2019.04	Collect and Analyse Tweets by Screenshots	839 posts from Hawshire Police; 1514 posts from Lionshire Police
Phase Three	2019.01	Third Observation in Hawshire	Conduct Follow-up Interviews

Table 2 Research methods and data collected

	Interviews	Field Observation	Documents Acquired	Online Data
Hawshire Police	7 semi-structured interviews 2 pilot interviews 2 focus groups	32 hours office-based observation 3 fieldnotes participated in 1 Communication Training	1 Communication Guidance and Training material	840 posts collected by R Program  839 posts collected by Twitter Screenshot
Lionshire Police	5 semi-structured interviews 1 focus group	16 hours office-based observation 17 hours participated in Covert Police patrol 3 fieldnotes	2 Social Media Guidance Document (1 old and 1 updated version) 4 Social Media Assessment Document	1521 posts collected by R Program  1514 posts collected by Twitter Screenshot

### Phase one

In the first qualitative phase of the study, a literature review has been primarily conducted to acquire an understanding of police communication before access into the fieldwork. Next, I conducted observations of routine communications work based in the corporate offices of the Hawshire and Lionshire force in July and November 2018, respectively. During the observations, I carried out seven semi-structured interviews and two focus groups with nine digital and social development officers from Hawshire and five interviews and one focus group with eight Communication Officers from



Lionshire Police force. Following that, non-participant observation was employed in a range of settings; in the offices of the two forces' corporate communication departments, at a communication training session in Hawshire, and a night-shift patrol with an undercover policing team of Lionshire Police. This served to provide a deeper interpretation how Communication Officers view and understand social media usage and how they were trained to operate online communication. Building upon the analysis of interviews, focus groups, and field notes, documentary analysis of the official communication guidance and training materials from Hawshire and Lionshire Police, ACPO, NPCC, and the College of Policing was carried out to investigate how the Communication Officers were trained to operate online communication, as well as what regulations and rules are there for the Communication Officers. In this phase, a total of 67 hours were spent during field observation.

## Phase two

At the end of the qualitative phase of research in November 2018, I initiated the quantitative phase. This was designed so that I could analyse the methods and strategies used by the police to communicate with their various publics. In November 2018, a total of 840 and 1521 posts were collected from the Twitter API (Applied Programming Interfaces) respectively from Hawshire and Lionshire Police corporate Twitter accounts using an R Program, forming two initial text datasets (Datacamp, 2020). And Twitter Screenshots<sup>8</sup> was used in April 2019, for obtaining the images of the above tweets from the two Twitter accounts, resulting two initial imagery datasets. However, there were 1 and 8 posts missing at this point, which might be the result of intended delete by Communication Officers, or the *tweets with limited visibility*<sup>9</sup>. Through content analysis of tweets posted during the given time period by the researched forces, I was able to categorize the characteristics and patterns of posting

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<sup>8</sup> Twitter Screenshot: a plug-in system for Chrome that supports the automated capture of tweets as pdf. files

<sup>9</sup> Tweets with limited visibility: "There are some instances when a Tweet is unavailable to view, such as a Tweet from an account you do not follow that has protected Tweets, if the account has blocked you, the Tweet was deleted, or if the Tweet is from a deactivated account." From the help.twitter.com, Last access date: 15/03/2021

tweets between these two forces. The aim of this phase was to explore the emergent themes of the posts and investigate what characteristics of a tweet can affect the number of received engagement, which is indicated by the numbers of retweets, comments and liking of a tweet.

### Phase three

The final qualitative phase included follow-up interviews with police Communication Officers, so I could ask for further explanation and clarification of the findings emerging from the previous study phases. This method, termed the “synergistic effect” (Greene et al. 1989: 259, cited in Hesse-Biber, 2010, pp: 5), helps to offset and develop results from different research phases and methods by revealing the relationships between them. In my case, this involved using my understanding of police use of social media and the posted tweets to demonstrate different attributes of a tweet that may shape the public image of the police, and impact on the level of public engagement, hence helping to enhance police legitimacy. It is through both subjective interpretation of how the police use Twitter to engage with the public, and objectively describing the level of engagement of each tweet, that this research can provide a comprehensive understanding of how the police try to (re)construct their legitimacy via Twitter communication.

### **3.1.2 Abductive Reasoning**

An abductive manner of data collection and reasoning was adopted to increase the validity of analysis (Andreewsky & Bourcier, 2000). In particular, abductive design means that the researcher generates “new” knowledge in the process of “going back and forth” between suitable theories and empirical observation (Feilzer, 2010; Kirkeby, 1990; Taylor, Fisher, & Dufresne, 2002). In this process, empirical data is collected alongside theory interpretation, which leads to an iterative “theory matching” loop (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In this study, prior to carrying out the actual research and fieldwork, a literature review was conducted, which gave me a general understanding

of the police use of technology, police use social media and police legitimacy. With the preliminary theoretical framework of police communication in mind, I started the *first* phase of empirical work in two police forces and collected data accordingly in April 2018 and November 2018, respectively. The particular concern during the field observation was to discover how the police use Twitter and communication with the public via social media. With research progress ongoing, some issues emerged that have been either under-described by the literature or contradicted it (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Popper, 1959). Therefore, I went back to the two police forces again for a *second* round of interviews with some Communication Officers in January and February 2019, respectively, enriching the empirical data to facilitate building up a more comprehensive understanding and interpretation of what had been observed. This iterative process allows a systematic development of research data and analysis, increasing the validity of the research, and helping the researcher to start identifying and making sense of the data (Andreewsky & Bourcier, 2000; Bergman & Bryman, 2014).

In my study, different research methods were adopted in different phases in order to answer the core research questions. To answer the first three sub-questions of this research: (1) *How do police Communication Officers view and understand the police use of social media?* (2) *How are they trained by the organizations to operation police communication?* and (3) *How do police Communication Officers use the corporate account?* Interviews, focus groups and field observation with corporate Communication Officers and staff who directly operate police social media were carried out. Additionally, police communication policy and regulations from both forces and the College of Policing were analysed to find out how police operate communication with the public from the institutional perspective. With the description and analysis from the first and second research phases, I was able to conduct a comparative analysis to answer question: (4) *How do different police forces communicate with the public via Twitter?*

In order to answer the last sub-question (5) *What is the role of police online communication in the structuration of police legitimacy?* I needed to revisit all the research findings, go back to the police force and speak to the Communication Officers again to interpret police communication via social media and validate my research findings.

## **3.2 Ethical Considerations**

### **3.2.1 Procedural Ethics**

In social research, the topic of ethics is associated with considerations of the potential harms and threats posed to the researcher, any participants in the research and other parties of interest by the conduct of research and behaviours of the researcher. Guillemín and Gillam (2004) distinguished two dimensions of ethics in qualitative research, namely the 'procedural ethics' and the 'ethics in practice'. The former refers to a situation where the researcher meets the procedural requirements of an Ethical Committee and uses proper language and expressions to persuade the research institution to supply ethical approval. The latter describes the actual ethical issues and dilemma arising during the fieldwork. The 'ethics in practice' discussed here not only suggest any unplanned ethical dilemmas occurred during the research, but also decisions made by the researcher that may lead to an 'ethically important moment' (ibid. p. 265) that could result in further unforeseen ethical risks. This section will address issues and considerations in both the expected 'procedural ethics' as well as the 'ethics in practice.'

To ensure the procedural ethics of this study, I applied for ethical approval via Bangor University's institutional ethics committee. My research has been carried out with careful ethical consideration in the categories of informed consent, research confidentiality, and diminishing potential threats to the participants and myself. The latest Data Protection Act 2018 was strictly followed during the entire fieldwork. Each

signed consent form and handwritten notes are kept in a locked cabinet, and digital notes and interview transcripts are kept in a password-protected university network computer with access granted only to the researcher. I recognized the potential ethical dilemmas when designing the fieldwork that the limited numbers of participants in each police force resulted in possible threats to their confidentiality and risk of exposure (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Because it is noted that usually, a specific group of police employees are involved in operating the social media, and some positions of police communication have very low numbers of police staff (McIntee, 2016), reporting viewpoint from a specific job position would have risks of exposing the participant. In coping with this threat, to preserve research anonymity, the *ethical compromise* (Watts, 2011) is to use pseudonyms for the police forces that I researched and the participants whom I interviewed. Also, the exact number of police officers and staff in each corporate team will not be mentioned for the same reason. Furthermore, I shall avoid presenting any identifiable characteristics of the police forces and their precise policing areas in the *Findings* and *Discussions* chapters as best as I can, minimizing the possibility of exposing a particular individual. In addition, the topic of the research was not sensitive, and no risk of harm was present to both I and participants. The Ethics Committee of Bangor University approved my application, and the ethics approval was received in April 2018.

### **3.2.2 Ethics in Practice**

Following the agreement with the Bangor Ethics Committee, I conducted fieldwork in Hawshire and Lionshire forces respectively. My fieldwork with Hawshire Police involved observations in the corporate communication office, interviews and focus groups with police Communication Officers, and non-participant observation in one of their communication training sessions. In Lionshire Police, in contrast, I was granted access to the corporate communication branch office for observation, interviews and focus group with Communication Officers, and a two-night shift patrol with an undercover policing team of Lionshire Police officers. The unexpected patrol with the

undercover team was the result of compensation provided by the gatekeeper of the Lionshire force, the manager of the digital media team, who had originally arranged for me to patrol with the City Police unit to observe how they use social media. However, this proposal had been declined by the City Police unit due to security concerns; instead, the undercover police unit agreed to take me on patrols to witness them using social media. This was one of the important “ethics in practice” matters which arose, that my acceptance of this offer led to the new ethical dilemma of getting a signature for the consent form. It was the Sergeant of the undercover unit who accepted the gatekeeper’s arrangement of taking me out on patrol, and then informed the on-duty patrolling officers. Thus, I did not take formal consent from the on-duty undercover officers but being introduced by the Sergeant instead. Despite explaining my objectives and purpose of the observation to the on-duty officers during the fieldwork, it was still an ethical dilemma as I patrolled with officers who did not voluntarily participate in my study, though did not they object. Following the request of the Sergeant from the undercover police unit, no record in any form was taken during the patrolling practice. I took no notes nor records, memorized as much as I could during the patrol, and afterwards manually compiled written fieldnotes. The conversation between the on-duty officers, and among all the people within the car, thus was recorded only partially in my fieldnotes. As an ethical compromise, I selected and reflected contents from the fieldwork that only have relations to do with police use of social media and the rest will not be mentioned. In addition, during my observation of the communication training process in Hawshire Police, I could not take all the participants’ consent. Ideally, I should have introduced myself and my research to all the trainees and asked their permission to observe them in the classroom. Due to the numbers of trainees and limited time for training, the gatekeeper and the communication training officer gave consent to my observation in the classroom with other trainees and informed all the trainees of my presence at the beginning of the class.

The standard ethical norms required the researcher to send research information leaflets, consent forms and the contact information for the researcher to all the potential

participants, allowing enough time for each respondent to choose whether to participate or not voluntarily. However, in my research, I had no prior knowledge and information about any potential participants of the police force, thus leaving me no chance to provide information and consent forms in advance but relying on help from the gatekeepers. As compensation, I provided the necessary research information leaflet, consent form and my contact details and those of my supervisors to the gatekeepers of both police forces, leaving plenty of time for them to consider and decide whether to permit my access. In terms of securing consent from the individual interviewed police officers and staff, I was introduced directly to staff by the gatekeeper, which saved much time in finding the subjects and building trust, whereas possible disadvantages arose in the potential bias of participant selection. Their cooperation had been guaranteed mostly by the gatekeeper, while I introduced the research background and possible risks to each of the participants before they signed the consent form. Two police staff indeed refused participating because they were too busy, while the other respondents agreed to participate and signed the appropriate consent form.

### **3.3 'Seeing' Police Communication: Research Sites and Access**

#### **3.3.1 Research Sites: The Hawshire and Lionshire Police Force**

The qualitative fieldwork was conducted in the corporate police communication branches of Lionshire Police and Hawshire Police forces, located in England and Wales, respectively. Hawshire Police force was chosen as it was easily accessible, and I used the snowball sampling method to reach to the Lionshire Police. It is acknowledged that there are disadvantages to these sampling methods that critics argue that convenience sampling can bring biased finding as it cannot represent the whole population (Gass et al., 2005; Leiner, 2014). While snowball sampling is a useful methodology in qualitative, exploratory and descriptive research with respondents that are hard-to-reach or few in numbers, the sample composition can be influenced by the

initial choice of the first participants (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Magnani et al., 2005). Given the time and funding restrictions, however, using the convenience sampling is the most practical and effective way as it saves time on travel and reaching out for participants. In any case, I do not intend to generalise from the findings of this study rather to illustrate and explore police organisation's current social media practices using comparison and contrasting data. Bernard (2002) states that it is the researcher who decides the research aim and the scope of the researched and gets access to approach those people who are capable and willing to provide information based on their knowledge, expertise or experience (Bernard, 2002; Lewis & Sheppard, 2006). Thus, having a relatively easy access to participants is vital for conducting fieldwork. Therefore, I approached Hawshire Police first.

Both Lionshire and Hawshire Police are public, state police forces that are responsible for large and socially varied areas. Lionshire Police provides policing services to the metropolitan area of Lionshire, covering over 400 square miles in England (HMICFRS, 2020a). Around 2.8 million people live in this area, 16% of whom belong to ethnic minority backgrounds, which contribute diverse socio-economic characteristics to different communities. Along with the high flow of tourism, the university in Lionshire has over 100,000 students, which benefits the local economy and leisure activities. Concerning crime, Lionshire Police have to deal with large numbers of a variety of crimes committed with on average, 32,496 crimes reported per month in 2018/2019 and the most common type of crime reported was violence and sexual offences, which exceeded 108,000 cases reported in 2018/2019. After five years of rising crime rates, from over 333,000 during 2014/2015 to more than 407,000 during 2017/2018, the year of 2018/2019 saw a decrease in crime (a drop to 389,000) by 4.4% compared to last year in Lionshire (Boyle, 2020). Also, due to pronounced inequality in the area, police have to face the challenge of various crime patterns in different areas. According to their police and crime plan, three priorities have been identified for the local policing, namely *Keeping people safe*, *Reducing harm and offending*, and *Strengthening*



*communities and places*. It is, therefore, natural to expect Lionshire Police to communicate the above topics frequently via their online channels.

Furthermore, Lionshire is a vibrant, racially mixed area. The whole population covered by the force is estimated at 2,750,120 in 2021 (World Population Review, 2021). While the White British ethnic group remains the largest ethnic group, accounting for 59% of the population, according to the 2011 Census, there is dispersal of ethnic minority groups from wards in which they have previously clustered (Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity, 2013). The results from World Population Review (2020) show, for example, that the city has the third-largest Chinese population in Europe and the largest Jewish population in the UK outside of London. The 2011 census found that the racial and ethnic composition of Lionshire was 66.7 % of White, 17.1% of Asian, 8.6% of Black and 4.7% of mixed race. The 2001-2010 period saw a significant change in racial and ethnic population that since 2001, the percentage of Christians in Lionshire has declined from 62.4% to 48.7%, the share of Muslims has climbed from 9.1% to 15.8%. Similarly, the group of people with no religious affiliation has increased from 16% to 25.4% (World Population Review, 2020). With its diverse ethnic and religious composition, it is essential for the police to keep good relationship with their communities, during both face-to-face encounters and online communication.

Comparatively, Hawshire Police force is located in Wales, UK, covering more than 2,000 square miles with over 400 miles of coastline (HMICFRS, 2020b). Hawshire Police provide services to an estimated population of 698,400 persons in 2018 (Government Welsh, 2020). Within its jurisdiction, there are large proportions of rural area (52%) and nearly the same proportion of urban places (48%) (Feilzer & Trew, 2012). Large numbers of tourists travel to Hawshire every year due to the renowned tourist attraction, and the two universities in the region's towns bring 18,000 students seasonally (Study at Welsh Universities 2020). With a distinctive culture, unique landscape and places identified as national trust properties, the tourism industry plays a vital role in the local economy and communities of Hawshire estimated to create over

37,000 jobs and generating around £1.8 billion each year (Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, 2010). Therefore, it becomes an essential task for Hawshire Police to deal with incidents and crimes relating to the tourism industry. Also, like other parts of the UK, Hawshire experiences unpredictable weather and climate, and the geography of the coast and mountains leads to more severe winds and rains, which is likely to cause safety issues to local people and tourists – another issue relating to public safety and order that the police need to concern themselves with.

Hawshire is also a bilingual (Welsh/English) area, with sections of the local population (19% of those aged 3+) having the ability to speak Welsh, either as a first or second language (United Kingdom Census, 2011). Although it is a minority language, Welsh has official status and is widely used in the local public sectors, such as the government, schools and hospitals. As a result, the Hawshire Police provide bilingual services both in real-world interactions and online. Most residents live in rural areas with a wide gap between wealth and poverty which has been explained as leading to certain crimes due to substantial deprivation (HMICFRS, 2020b). Furthermore, Hawshire Police serves a busy port which facilitates cross-border trade and migration, and are subsequently also engaged in investigating and responding to cross-border crimes and human-trafficking crimes. Based upon the PCC's plans, *domestic abuse, modern slavery, organised crime, sexual abuse (including child sexual exploitation) and delivering safer neighbourhood* are identified as the policing priorities today (The Office of the Police&Crime Commissioner for Hawshire, 2020). Thus, it would not be surprising to see the Hawshire Police communicate the above topics more often via their online channel.

### **3.3.2 Negotiating Access**

Acquiring formal access to the police force is a time-consuming process because the researcher has no official status or right to command formal police cooperation (Brown, 1996). The police have no obligation to accept formal cooperation with academics; it

is the researchers' task to make cooperation worthwhile to the police through promoting the potential benefits of research, such as illustrating the contributions they will make not only to academic research but also to police work or policy development (Reiner, 1992, 2000b). Traditionally, researching 'in' and 'on' the police has been far from easy as the police are characterized as suspicious and resistant to outside scrutiny (Loftus, 2010; Punch, 1979a; Reiner, 2000b). The relationship between police and academics has been noted as combining 'two worlds' into a 'dialogue of the deaf', for example, people in policing organization and academia usually have different interests and focus, and may speak different languages, including the use of academic terms or police jargon. This may negatively influence the interaction due to mutual misunderstanding (Bradley & Nixon, 2009, p. 423).

Given an increased emphasis on evidence-based policing and a 'what works' agenda for the police in the United Kingdom, government budget cuts to policing, advances in the development of technology and the changing nature of crimes (Lumsden & Goode, 2018), the police are required and expected to "do more with less" and find out "what works". Manning (2005) noted that some current emphases in research on policing are driven by funding, focusing on fashionable questions rather than theoretical contributions. He argued that such research acts as a 'mirror', which reflects the interests of government. However, academic work about the police can also act as a 'motor' for innovative policing development, as well as a 'mirror' to reflect police practices, or sometimes both of these (Innes, 2010). In this way, academic results can be used by the police to make changes in practice and policy and improve policing work (Waddington, 2010). Moreover, policies and practices in policing could benefit from systematically use of evidence and from past research. Through implementing research findings into the process of policy making and policing practices, policymakers, police and academics collaboratively filled the *implementation gap* (Fleming, 2010). In this context, a more open and 'equal partnership' cooperation has been urged (Bradley, Nixon, & Marks, 2006, p. 190).

It is also germane that effective cooperation between the police and academia helps the police to re-legitimize themselves, via gaining academic credentials and enhancing their research through multiple perspectives (Engel & Whalen, 2010; Reiner & Newburn, 2000). A genuine police-academic partnership helps establish police legitimacy as, on the one hand, it embodies the openness of the police to the outsiders, although academics are arguable seen as people with special knowledges and expertise than ordinary citizens (Reiner, 2000a). On the other hand, the collaboration between police and academics is also an opportunity for the police to understand outside concerns and adjust their actions, which represents the characteristics of "civilian force" and helps to enhance public confidence in the police (Engel & Whalen, 2010; Mastrofski et al., 1996; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006). Therefore, the engagement between police and academics has seen a shift so that today the police are more open to academics and collaborative research (Innes, 2010). In fact, the new Police Educational Qualifications Framework requires new police constables to be trained in Evidence-Based Policing and the cooperation with universities is the evidence of their willingness to strengthen the collaboration with academics (College of Police, 2020).

In this research, Lionshire Police already had some cooperation histories with the local university. So, they would be prepared to consider my fieldwork application besides the endorsement of their peers (Duke, 2002; Reeves, 2010; Wikes, 1999). However, the corporate communication branch may not have much previous experience of academic cooperation. My presence in both their corporate office and with the undercover patrol team was unexpected to many officers. A member of police staff told me that what they were trying to achieve is broad public engagement, and my "somehow managed" presence could be seen as proof of their progress. Also, when I was allowed to sit in one of the patrolling cars with undercover team officers to observe how they conduct their routine work while publicizing their work via social media, one of the PCs told me that it was rare for them to take a student out on operational policing work. They explained that this was because their work involves tackling serious crimes, and they had rarely worked with educational organizations before. Therefore,

accepting me as an outsider to carry out research in their organization indicates their attempt to be open to the public, and willingness to (re)claim legitimacy with the public.

In the process of gaining access, I firstly approached to the (at the time) Chief Constable of Hawshire and negotiated permission to conduct field work. With his permission and help, one of the senior officers soon contacted me, inviting me to the Headquarter of Hawshire to discuss the fieldwork details. During the first meeting in Hawshire Headquarter, I briefly introduced my research objects and fieldwork designs to the senior officer who in charge of the digital and online communication of the police force, and one of his colleagues. As Warren and Rasmussen (1977) note, the first impression made in fieldwork plays a vital role in determining the subsequent data access and research success. Therefore, I used the semi-inside-outsider's position, my role as a Chinese police officer, to negotiate my entrance (see discussion in 3.5.1). While waiting for the final decision about my approval, the senior officer helped me to contact one PCSO and a Police Sergeant, both of whom were experienced in using police social media. These two police officers met with me and gave me a brief introduction about their experience of the use of local Twitter accounts of Hawshire Police.

The situation in the first contact with the Lionshire Police is slightly different. At the end of second-day observation in Hawshire Police, the manager of the Digital and Social Development Team emailed the communication manager of Lionshire Police, proposing for me to continue the research fieldwork there. The endorsement from a police officer seems hugely influential, and I soon received the Lionshire manager's reply. The manager of corporate communication branch of Lionshire, appeared to show genuine support for this research and fieldwork, appointing one of the senior managers to contact me for further details. However, I was introduced only as the university student, without mention of my identification as a foreign policewoman. Although the help from senior officers in both police forces helped me to overcome the first obstacle in gaining formal access into the police, it did not guarantee acceptance

and support from other individual officers within a police organization; instead, I needed to continually build trust and negotiate with different members and sub-groups who might hold different recognition and receptiveness to the research and its legitimacy (Marks, 2004). For example, the first contact by the senior officer with the two district officers in Hawshire Police force was accepted and arranged smoothly, in contrast, in the following ten months, I initiated a follow-up meeting with them, and I received no responses despite multiple attempts.

During the access negotiation, I continually found myself in the position of a salesperson who was attempting to convince 'buyers' to accept the products or services of this research (Engel & Whalen, 2010). The outside-outsider researcher always finds it hard to maintain access because it is the police force who have the absolute right and control to abort the research if they believe anything unpleasant may happen, or they just have no interest in the results (Cram, 2018). On the other hand, policing work is influenced by changing political and operational factors so that most police-related research plans need to allow flexibility of time and sources regarding the fieldwork situation (Tompson et al., 2017). While accepting and cooperating with researchers, policing practitioners may encounter internal pressures (Fleming, 2012), such as a change of personnel. It is natural that police prioritise resources to demanding tasks, such as critical public incidents or emergency issues, rather than to partnership working (Foster & Bailey, 2010; Stephens, 2010). Thus, the unforeseen delays of a police-related research and recalibration of timescales and cooperation resources can happen often. This is reflected in my research experience in Lionshire Police when the gatekeeper of the Lionshire proposed a patrol with the undercover team when he found the city police force could not take me on patrol as planned due to the safety reasons. Initially, the City Police unit had been chosen as it was the department that had extensive experience in using social media. However, Sergeants from the City Police unit would not grant this application for safety reasons as none of them accept the gatekeeper's suggestion about arranging my field work. Instead, the Manager of undercover unit agreed to take me in the patrolling team for

observation. I accepted this new arrangement and adjusted my schedule accordingly to participate in patrolling.

Another unforeseen delay happened when I attempted to start the follow-up interviews - phase three in the field work. Since the end of first observation, it took me nine months to re-connect with my initial contacts for further interviews. Although it is understandable to face the uncertainty of time when doing police research, this anxiety of losing access to police force troubled me throughout the whole period of fieldwork.

### **3.4 The Fieldwork**

The first phase of this research explored through qualitative data how police Communication Officers view and understand the police use of social media. Firstly, in order to understand their perceptions, two pilot interviews, seven formal interviews and two focus groups with Communication Officers were employed in the communication branches of Hawshire; and five interviews and one focus group in Lionshire Police forces. The aim of this phase was to explore the views and opinions of police officer or staff who have experiences in operating police social media. Therefore, random sampling was not feasible. Purposive sampling of interview participants was employed in line with the qualities of the informant (Bergman & Bryman, 2014; Bernard, 2002; Lewis & Sheppard, 2006). Thus, individual practitioners with specialist knowledge and experience were deliberately chosen and approached for an interview. However, even though purposive sampling has been criticised for giving possibly biased results, for this research it is valid that interviewees were chosen for their ability to discuss, and experience of using, social media use by the police (Bernard, 2002; Godambe, 1982; Topp et al., 2004). The sample of Communication Officers was selected primarily due to their professional role and from recommendations of knowledgeable people, which was the most practical way of

approaching the key informant who have the knowledge for the researched topic and first-hand experience (Seidler, 1974; Smith, 1983).

### **3.4.1 Interviews**

#### **3.4.1.1 Pilot Interview**

Before interviewing police Communication Officers and staff, two pilot interviews have been carried out with a Police Community Support Officer (hereafter refer as PCSO) and a Sergeant who had been recommended by the manager of digital and social development team of Hawshire Police. I approached the workplace of the interviewees by train, situated in two nearby towns. Both pilot interviews have been undertaken in the separate offices of the interviewees and they were actively engaging in the conversation. It was important to adjust and clarify some of the interview questions on the schedule before the formal interview (see Appendix 3). Thus, during the informal meeting with PIN1 and PIN2, a draft interview schedule had been prepared and used as the pilot interview questions. After the two informal meetings, a clearer view of police using social media had emerged, which enabled me to readjust and reshape the interview questions and schedule. The informal meetings were not audio-recorded; instead, I made handwritten notes during the discussion and wrote up field notes as soon as the meetings ended.

The two pilot interviews have made me realised that there are police officers or staff in different positions using social media on behalf of the police. The views from a corporate Communication Officer could be distinctive from those of a PCSO who worked in the community; thus, interview questions had to be continuously adjusted to fit each role of the interviewee. A semi-structured interview which contained open-ended questions was therefore designed in order to encourage participants to provide as much detail on their role and experience as possible (David & Sutton, 2011). While some general questions were included for the practitioners to be at ease with the interview, open-ended questions were tailored to elicit individual interviewee's



following comments based on a different role. For example, a question “*How do you deal with the inquiries from the local news media?*” was designed for the Press Officer who is in charge of responding information and news appeals while the question “*What types of the campaign do you usually organize?*” was tailored for the interviewee who is responsible for marketing.

#### **3.4.1.2 Recruitment: Building Trust with Individual Interviewees**

Following the pilot interview, I started to recruit research participants and prepare for interviews and focus groups. The recruitment of interviewees was mostly conducted with the help of the gatekeepers of the two police forces. After access had been granted, the gatekeepers became the people who helped me to reach the key informants of this research. In Hawshire Police, the corporate communication manager, permitted my presence in the communication office and during the training, and arranged for individual officers to participate in my interviews. After I started fieldwork within the force, the manager of the Digital and Social Development of Hawshire contacted three police officers who were experts in police Twitter usage via email, two of them agreed to participate in this research while another refused due to the time constraints. The remaining five participants were introduced face-to-face in the corporate communication office when I started my fieldwork in Hawshire. Most (6/9) interviews in the Hawshire force have took place in the corporate communication office. There are three exceptions, one officer who did not work as the members of corporate communication office and the interview was conducted in his private office; interviews conducted in a meeting room with two PCs who came Hawshire for communication training. Likewise, the manager of the digital communication unit in Lionshire Police, informed the staff in the communication corporate branch office and arranged a two-night shift agenda for me to patrol with the undercover team.

Arguably, the dependence on senior officers to grant access and supervise recruitment could cause biased answers from the lower rank officers. Moreover, objectivity could be questioned in that the chosen participants were likely to be seen as “reliable” or “safe” to the management or hold a particular view regarding on social media use. To this end, I minimized the risk of possible bias of pre-selected participants by approaching as many interviewees as possible. During my fieldwork in Lionshire, there were not many employees in the corporate communication office, I made efforts to approach Communication Officers from different units for the purpose of getting answers as much as representative. In addition, to minimize the possible bias in answers from the lower rank officers, I clearly explained to each participant that the research was being conducted independently under the supervision of a university and assured them that they could withdraw or stop the interview at any time during the interview. Luckily all the interviewees agreed to participate and signed the consent forms. Although the dependence of being introduced to the participants can lead to possible bias or omits of selecting participants, as a defence, this can hardly been avoided since without their referral and introduction, I, as an outsider of the organization (see the discussion in 3.5.1), would not be able to identify who would be the key informants (Bergman & Bryman, 2014; Bernard, 2002).

According to Tompson and her colleagues (2017, p. 185) successful research means that “building trust is embedded into the whole partnership lifecycle, but intensifies as the research is executed”. Although the senior officers gave me the initial formal access to the police, constantly engaging and renegotiating access with individual members of that organization was necessary as the approval of access by the senior officers does not automatically achieve the voluntary collaboration from the individual officers (Belur, 2014; Buchanan et al., 1988; Marks, 2004). The key success of renegotiating access with individual members is often dependent on the personality of the researcher, which includes the researcher’s personal characteristics, and ways of behaving, feeling and interacting (Tompson et al., 2017). It is suggested that a researcher can benefit from social skills via ‘self-awareness’, such as carefully listening

and responding, showing interest in the interviewees, using accessible language and showing courtesy to police traditions and work (Cockbain, 2015). For example, respect and value towards the police culture is the primary quality for me when researching with the police, which is, in part, familiar to me given my police officer role in China (Braga & Davis, 2014; Rojek et al., 2015). However, as an outsider to the UK police, I explored and observed the unfamiliar police occupational culture with a curious and critical perspective. Basically, I accepted whatever I was offered as a fieldwork opportunity from the two forces, such as some re-scheduled research dates and the re-arranged plan for joining the undercover police team on patrol, as noted.

Furthermore, my identity as a female university student may, to some extent, have facilitated my gaining trust by being as seen as 'naturally' harmless and innocent (Easterday et al., 1977; Warren, 1985). Arguably, female researchers tend to be stereotyped as in a role of 'harmless, unthreatening and slightly incompetent', especially when researching in police organizations which had been perceived historically as bureaucratic structures with dominant characteristics such as a culture which is 'macho' and preoccupied with 'maintaining dominance' (Box, 1987; Choongh, 1997; Horn, 1997, p. 300; Loftus, 2009). The communication department, however, may have different demographic features and, therefore potentially a different occupational culture. For example, I noted a stark difference during the observation in the police demography of personnel working 'in the field' and 'in the office'. While there was an almost equal distribution of male and female officers or staff in the office environment, the majority of officers in the undercover team I observed in this research were male (12/13). During the patrol where there were more potential risks, I noticed more protective gestures compared to observation in the office. This was commented on by Horn (1997) and Warren and Rasmussen (1977), that in the context of "policing on the street", the female researcher is often perceived as more naïve and vulnerable, and therefore requiring more protection and support. But this protective attitude is not only for me as a researcher; it is for anyone who is considered to be an "outsider" to the team, who can significantly affect the type of data that is accessed (Brown, 1996).

In the first night shift of the patrol, one female corporate police staff member and I were asked not to go outside the undercover car during the whole process of shift, while the male police staff member who joined in the patrol next day was asked to go outside and took pictures on the spot for Twitter posts. Even though I see this as a courtesy towards a female outsider, the different treatment given to the same job position is reflective of the protective practice to females and outsiders. Or it might be the result of suspicion towards the outsiders that people who do not belong the organization, are only given partial access; they see only what they are *allowed* to see (Ericson, 1982).

Last but not least, being repeatedly tested by practitioners is another facet of gaining access and credibility (Engel & Whalen, 2010). My identity as an Asian woman conducted research in the male-dominated organization may be a hindrance as the police were long being criticised as “institutionally racist” (Macpherson, 1999; see also Rowe 2013). For example, during the observations, most interviewees and observed police officers or staff treated me with professional respect, yet two older interviewees in the Lionshire Police force explained their work in specific details in the way that they might talk to a child, which may be the result that they regarded me as a foreigner who may not understand the language. Besides, being a police officer in China indeed increased my semi-insider status, while bringing more questions along with when researching in the police forces in England and Wales. This is because, on the one hand, the system and operation of police and policing work are distinctive between the UK and China with varied social, political and cultural factors; my being a policewoman can thus possibly make me naïve and ignorant about the local policing normal to the UK police officers and staff. On the other hand, police and staff in the UK would naturally assume that as a policewoman I have a previous understanding of police work in a similar occupational culture (Reiner, 2000a), and therefore interviewees may be prepared to share more information with me.

According to Marsh (2018), the Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset Police, the International Coordination Committee has been maintaining and developing

international policing relationships to a wider extent with both individual countries and international organisations, like the United Nations and European Union. Since the People's Republic of China joined the United Nations as a founding member in 1945, it has participated actively in international policing cooperation. Although conducting this research has no direct relations at all to my Chinese police identity, it may imply that helping me is a means of helping a fellow police officer from another country, which increases the chance of knowledge sharing. In addition, policing and police communication in China can be different in many aspects to that of the UK due to the distinct ideology, politics, social structure, and police occupation culture (Reiner, 1985). As an essential constituent of Interpol, policing in China can generate interests of its peers and lead to a dialogic discussion and professional knowledge sharing. In this context, I, as a representative of the Chinese police officer, can provide some understanding of the philosophy and strategies of policing in China, thus increasing the likelihood of opening a conversation. For instance, some interviewees in Hawshire Police asked me questions about policing practices and the use of police social media in China. My answers from an insider's perspective could be tested against their professional knowledge and experience as police, which enhances my credibility to the interviewee and promotes more information in turn. In the fieldwork with the undercover team, PCs shared some working experience and policing knowledge when they were aware that I was a foreign policewoman, such as the use of police technology, intelligence surveillance, and views about police-public relationships.

#### **3.4.1.3 Interviews in the Corporate Communication Branches**

There were seven police officers from Hawshire Police, and five police officers from Lionshire Police who participated in interview. In most cases of the interview, I approached the individual interviewee to sit next to him or her at their office desks in an open office to conduct the interview. While this can raise concerns of the confidentiality, since it is possible that the interviewees were overheard by colleagues,

two factors minimized this risk. One is that the open office in Lionshire was large, and the interviewees were seated far away from each other. Besides, no other colleagues were around the interviewees when I interviewed individual officers. The other is that the interviewees kept their voices low, either because they did not want to disturb colleagues or because they worried about being overheard. Only one police specialist invited me to a meeting room for an interview because he had no office in the police force. Interviews with both communication managers in Hawshire and Lionshire Police were carried out in their offices, and the duration ranged between fifteen (with an internal Communication Officer in Lionshire) and ninety minutes (with a Digital and Social Communication Officer in Lionshire). For instance, some interviewees shared their experience and opinions in a great passion, which led to a lengthy interview that exceeded one hour, whereas some interviewees responded briefly and concisely to questions making the interview rather short.

Each interviewee was ensured anonymity with the researcher explaining at the beginning of each interview or focus group that names and personalized features of participants would not be reported. Confidentiality was also explained and ensured with each participant prior to giving consent. It is well acknowledged to them that any information given within the interview or focus group will be kept in confidence and referred only by a pseudonym, but will be used as quotes or references in the thesis and subsequent publications.

### **3.4.2 Focus Groups**

I conducted one focus group in Hawshire and one in Lionshire, respectively. In Hawshire, two PCs who were believed to manage the police tweets well were recommended and contacted by the gatekeeper, and they took part in the focus group after the Communication Training in a meeting room of Hawshire. Almost two hours were spent during the focus group with the PCs. Comparatively, two and a half hours were used for the focus group in Lionshire with participants from the Corporate Media

Image (hereafter referred to as CMI) unit. Initially, I was introduced by the gatekeeper to the head of the CMI team, the FG3. Before the interview with him started, two colleagues of the CMI unit came to the office, and agreed to participate in the focus group. The focus group with CMI Officers was set up in their office.

Participants were invited to take part in a focus group based on their job position and expertise experiences. For example, while the two PCs from Hawshire were responsible for different policing, one sworn police officer and one traffic police officer in particular, they have similar experiences operating police corporate accounts as individuals. And one of the important reasons the gatekeeper recommended them was because the social media accounts they were responsible for were well managed. Likewise, the three participants from Lionshire came from the same team of the Corporate Communication Branch and had the same job goals and similar work experiences.

### **3.4.3 Observations**

Alongside the interviews and focus groups, a total of 67-hours of observations were conducted in both forces. In particular, when conducting fieldwork in Hawshire Police, I spent two days from 9am to 5pm, at the scheduled date, observing and interviewing in their corporate communication office. The aim was to explore how different roles of the Communication Officer from the corporate communication department work together. In addition, I was invited by the manager of digital and social development to one training session for communications officers as well. The non-participant observation was employed at this training session in order to understand what police organizations expect from corporate Communication Officers and how they are trained. The corporate communication team organised it, and the Digital and Social Development manager was the trainer. There were eight participants in that training, including police officers, police staff, PCs and PCSOs. All were responsible for at least one social media account of Hawshire Police corporate account. The training lasted

about one hour and twenty minutes and ended with practicing with the newly launched communications system, which was introduced by the Hawshire Social Media Team for better managing the operation of different corporate accounts. The main topics of the training included the rationale of using social media, current main channels for police to publicize news and communicate with the public, and the importance and potential risks of using photos (see discussions in Chapter Four). Several examples of police misuse of Twitter were used to demonstrate the negative effects caused by Twitter misconduct, which led to some discussion about participants' own experiences of using police social media. The training officer demonstrated the new communication system of the Hawshire Police and assigned two tasks for the trainees to practice.

During fieldwork in Lionshire, the observations of routine communications work of Communication Officers in their one open office and a two-night shift with an undercover team of Lionshire force was arranged. I went to Lionshire Communication Branch office from 8am to 4pm on the scheduled date, observed and interviewed individual Communication Officer when they are available. The two-night shift patrols on two consecutive nights from 7pm to 4am with an undercover team was under the arrangement of the gatekeeper of Lionshire force. During the first and second day of patrol, there was one Communication Officer each from the corporate communication team joining the practice. Their main job was to set up a new Twitter account posting tweets for the undercover team during the shifts. While PCs of the undercover team driving and conducted other policing work, such as arrest suspects; it was the corporate Communication Officer who edited and posted tweets via the corporate account. Therefore, I was able to observe how Communication Officers rhetorically unpacked policing work on social media, observing *What cases and incidents have (not) been mentioned? What did the Communication Officer highlight and left out in the posts? And what pictures were taken and used in the posts?* This brought in rich, qualitative data for analysing how Communication Officers present policing work including the secretive work of undercover policing, and how they understand and actually use social media.



The communication training in Hawshire and night patrols with the undercover team in Lionshire enriched my understanding of police use of social media. While the communication training provided me with an opportunity to learn what the force expects their Communication Officers to do and achieve, the latter experience enabled me to observe the complete process of making, editing, modifying and sending a police tweet. The fieldwork supplemented my understanding of police communication via social media, such as how to use and edit the pictures required for posting on Twitter, what topics the police generally avoid discussing, and how to phrase tweets to minimize the risks of exposing sensitive information.

### **3.5 Analysis of Different Data**

#### **3.5.1 Seeing From a Semi-Inside Outsider's Perspective**

Demonstrating the reality of research, or presenting the storied reality of the research experience, involves a discussion of the subjective and reflective influences that the researcher brings to the research (Madden, 2010). For example, the material assistance and treatment a researcher can obtain from the police will be affected by their own status and their relationship to the force (Reiner, 2000b). Brown (1996) proposed four research roles to describe the relationship between a researcher and the researched police organization, which are: "inside insiders", an identity ascribed to police officers who themselves conduct police research; the "outside insiders" referring to those officers who carry out research on the police after deciding to leave or having to leave the force (such as retired officers); "inside outsiders" meaning researchers are not police officers but who have official roles in the police force or have been employed by governmental organizations or police forces with responsibilities for policing research; finally the "outside outsiders" are researchers who have no official status and responsibilities within or for the police force. In my case, however, I do not neatly fit into any of those categories. My university student's role in the UK makes me the outside outsider to the UK police force as I am not employed by the police or any other

parts of government institutes with responsibility for UK policing. But, at the same time, I am a police officer in China, which makes me something like an inside insider's identification to the police in a broader context. Since my identity as a police officer in China has no direct relation to this research, and I am not commissioned by either UK police or Chinese police, then the inside insider's category does not exactly fit me in this stance either. Thus, inspired by Brown's (1996) categories, I define my position as one of "semi-inside outsider" to the police in the UK, as I can be identified as "inside" the police profession who has relevant experience and knowledge about police and policing, but yet remain an "outsider" to the police in the UK.

In this study, I used the "semi-inside outsider" identity to conduct the fieldwork, including negotiating my access to the police organization, conducting interviews and focus groups, and going on patrol with the undercover team on a two-night shift. It is apparent that my "outsider" student identity is more likely to gain the permission of gatekeepers of both Hawshire and Lionshire Police, through which to discuss my research and arrange access in the organization. Nonetheless, this "outsider" identity also raised resistance from the police that traditionally, the police have been vigilant of outside scrutiny, which mostly from the academics. It is argued that researchers were too theoretical and only interested in data and academic publications (Perez & Shtull, 2002; Young, 1991), especially if the topic is related to investigating the behind-the-scene narratives and practices of police communication. And this suspicion will be enhanced when the researcher is perceived as an outsider (Brown, 1996; Reiner, 2000), which can lead to inaccurate reports and delayed and unusable findings to the police (Fleming, 2010). In this research, such a claim had occurred during the fieldwork in Hawshire Police, when the gatekeeper introduced me to one of his colleagues outside the office, the colleague greeted me with the joke that I paraphrased as "what do you, a PhD student, want to find out? Is it their (the Hawshire Police) weaknesses and then inspire them?". Although this can be read as a harmless joke, it illustrates that the distrust to outsider has been rooted in police culture (Young, 1991).

On the other hand, my role as a police officer in China could stimulate interest during the fieldwork because interviewees were interested in the policing practice and technologies in my country. This resulted in the interviewees responding actively to questions and throwing out questions to me. Through answering their questions and exchanging policing knowledge, this “semi-inside” role benefited me in renegotiating access and gaining trust with the individual police interviewees in both police forces (Burgess, 1984; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). For example, during the patrol with the undercover team, one of PCs asked me about how Chinese police target vehicle theft, and what technology do police in China often use? I answered that the wide use of CCTV and electronic registration plate recognition system are effective in targeting car criminals. My answer evoked a discussion on police use technology in different countries. They commented that the technology today can indeed help police in crime investigation and apprehending suspects, and said that although the social media has not been used often in the undercover team, it can also be helpful in gathering information and reassuring the public. This trust of the “semi-inside” role is likely to make the participants more interested in sharing policing knowledge and provide genuine answers (Brown, 1996). Thus, I conducted the fieldwork experiencing a mixture of attitudes including *both* suspicion towards an outsider and trust as an insider.

### **3.5.2 Analysing the Qualitative Materials: Coding and Interpretation**

Borrowed from the Grounded Theory Analysis (Bryman, 2008; Charmaz, 2003, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1999), I employed a grounded theory approach to analyse the qualitative materials, which involves several different and equally important stages, namely data organizing, line-by-line coding, focused coding and selective coding. Initially, for one that uses the Grounded Theory analysis, all the collected qualitative data should be unlocked and understood, allowing the researcher to grab basic meanings of materials and see what initial categories presented as described by the interview participants (Holton, 2007). Next, the researcher needs to fracture the data

(Charmaz 2014, p. 341) by adding a code to each line of text Charmaz (2003, 2014) suggests that through examining each line of the textual material, can a researcher explore early concepts of events and actions that reflected within the data. This stage enables the researcher to notify the basis for the exploration of other coders as they occur within and across other qualitative materials in a comparative approach, making sense of the early concepts as they start to emerge as categories within the interviews (Charmaz, 2003). These line-by-line codes then become develop into the next stage of analysis as one can fit, adapt, combine and conceptualise these codes from different samples into more meaningful categories (ibid). During this approach, through constant reflection and comparison of texts, codes and memos, the line-by-line codes should be reduced and conceptualised into more encompassing categories (Charmaz, 2014). As these larger codes emerge, analysis evolves into becoming more focused on conceptualizing the stimulus beneath these more prominent codes. The researcher will focus on reconstructing the data and identifying a more focused and selective understanding of the emergent categories, theorizing a set of more focused codes to reflect the relationships within the categories (Bryman, 2008). In this way, the researcher can develop a core category from within and across the data. The core category and the focused coding can thoroughly address and validate relationships between the focused codes, integrating different meanings from other categories (Dey, 2007).

In this study, there are three types of qualitative materials, namely (i) the interview and focus group data, (ii) observational notes and (iii) documentary materials (training materials and social media guidance from the two police forces). Firstly, transcripts of interview and focus groups, field notes and documentary materials were read and then re-read whilst listening to the audio recordings of interviews and focus groups, allowing for a submersion within the data. Initial coding followed a line-by-line approach where descriptive codes were applied to almost every line of interview respondents' words. Charmaz (2014, p. 166) advocates this approach arguing that codes should reflect action and events, therefore line-by-line coding generally reflected terms where

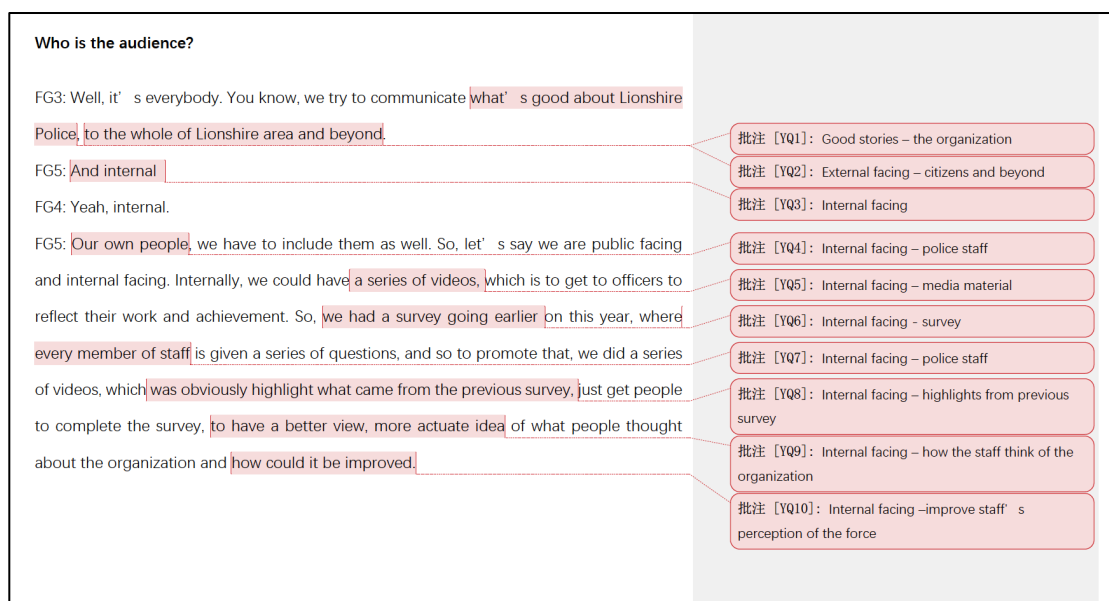
respondents addressed experience of using social media; such as searching information, engaging with the public, posts about police work, and informing the public of preventive information. This process of line-by-line coding enables me to see the event and situation from the interviewee's perspective (Charmaz, 2014), and also allows me to develop a systematic analysing structure of the data. As Bryman (2008) notes, generating elementary codes from the research texts is the first step in making sense of the collected data.

With the development of the line-by-line codes, I started to write memos and used the 'NVivo 12' to facilitate coalesce codes into focused codes. Memos were used to record any ideas and concepts that emerged during the coding process and helping me to group the line-by-line codes into categories that were identified as consistent throughout and across the materials. As Charmaz (2006, cited in Bryman 2008, p. 543) noted, the importance of generating the focused codes lies in that these codes are to be taken into further stage of data theorising and conceptualising, thus, one needs to focus on the most common and frequent codes.

NVivo 12 was employed as an effective tool for managing and grouping large data sources (Basil, 2003). I used NVivo to assist the storage, management and coding of data, and also to go back to the research materials and compare different samples in the abductive reasoning process. While Bazeley, (2013) questions the use of computer software to aid qualitative research, as it cannot interpret the meanings and connotation of texts, NVivo in this research acted as an important management tool to simply retrieve process. The understanding of texts, development and group of codes were still subjected to my interpretation. Besides the qualitative materials, memos were inputted into NVivo and these were subsequently coded in conjunction with interview and focus group transcripts, thus facilitating a constant comparative coding method.

The below is an example of coding that I extract data from line-by-line coding until the data is consolidated in the focused coding through which analytical ideas about the

content and audience of police communication have been presented. This “emergent process” that combined line-by-line coding and focused coding allows me to explore and develop unexpected ideas (Charmaz, 2014 p. 143). For example, in the focus group with CMI members of Lionshire, three interviewees discussed the production of social media content as seen through the lens of binary identity, and the views they use are “public facing” and “internal facing”. They describe one of their communication goals – to present what is good about Lionshire force, and the possible audience including the citizens, other social media users, and the police staff within the force.



As the example above shows, the process of line-by-line coding invokes further ideas and concepts that describe ‘actions’ (Charmaz, 2008), which facilitates me to draw on a more comprehensive picture of who the police intent to communicate with and what the police attempt to communicate. My initial line-by-line coding reflected the code of “External Facing” and “Internal Facing”, along with a further comment describing the communicate subject, form and audience, such as “media material”, or “police staff” in this example. Identifying that “External Facing” and “Internal Facing” constantly appeared throughout this focus group and other interviews, I wrote memo accordingly and parts of it were shown below.

*It is noted that some communication officers have aware of the different distribution of communicating audience. They have varied strategies, and even goals to communicate with different audiences. While one of the external communication goals is to present good stories of the organization, the internal communication goal seems to have figure out how the police staff think about the organization and improve this perception.*

*– From the memo of the focus group with CMI members*

Through an iterative process of comparing the transcripts of interviews, focus group, and memos, and comparison across different interviews, I was able to identify the focused codes, which have been used as further analysis for conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2008). The “Internal Facing”, for example, became understood to suggest a dimension that the goal and strategy the police use during communication. Through varied forms and media content, the police are targeting the internal staff as the communication audience to improve their perceptions of the organization and enhance their views of the rightfulness and importance of working as police officers. After a similar process of linking and comparing different codes and developing a theoretical explanation of the concepts from which they are generated (Charmaz, 2014), the code of “Internal Facing” became conceptualized into the focused code of “Self-Legitimacy.” This was an illustration of how the theoretical code was extracted from and within the data.

### **3.5.3 The Collection and Analysis of Tweets**

In recent years, data from social media, such as social media communication tools, social networking sites and micro-blogging services (Edwards et al., 2013b; Williams et al., 2013), has been widely adopted for research purpose. The use of Tweets as research data can be found in different research areas, such as in sentiment analyses and the prediction of future events (Asur & Huberman, 2010; Tumasjan et al., 2010); data mining and intelligence generation (HMIC, 2011); monitoring of community tensions (Wall & Williams, 2013; Williams et al., 2013); and discourse analysis, such as the impact of hashtag use on policing activities during protests (Earl et al., 2013;

Tremayne, 2014). The aim of this phase of research was to reflect what strategies do police employ to conduct communication via Twitter and what topics do the communications cover. Through analysing context, media attachment and frequency of posts, the police's communication style can be explored and can be contrasted with the findings from the first qualitative phase – Communication Officers' understanding and experience of using corporate social media accounts.

In my study, I chose the corporate accounts of Hawshire and Lionshire to collect posts. As noted, Hawshire is based in Wales, and many of the locals speak Welsh. Thus, Hawshire has two corporate accounts, one in English and one in Welsh. Due to that it is more practical to analyse how different force operate Twitter account using the same language from a comparative perspective, I targeted the English version of Hawshire's corporate account as the research subject. In particular, tweets from Hawshire and Lionshire Police corporate Twitter accounts (@HSPolice and @LSPolice) ranging from 00:00:00, 1 January 2018 to 23:59:59, 30 June 2018 were collected as research data. The tweets posted on the Twitter profile @Hawshirepolice and @Lionshirepolice are targeted at the general public. In such a case, no informed consent is required for data collection, analysis and citation (Fuchs, 2017, Chapter 2; Townsend & Wallace, 2016). Despite that, I informed both the gatekeepers of the two police forces that my intention to collect and analyse their posted tweets. The Hawshire's gatekeeper was supportive and provided some Twitter information<sup>10</sup> (the corporate tweets from April to June 2018) from the internal website, including the text, time of post, retweets, replies, likes, user profile clicks, URL clicks, hashtag clicks, and so on, of each tweet, whilst Lionshire Police did not offer the Twitter data.

R program and Twitter Screenshots<sup>11</sup> were used for the collection of posts from the above Twitter accounts on 20 November 2018 and 4 April 2019 respectively. However,

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<sup>10</sup> These tweets were not used as an analysis sample because there was a lack of comparative data from Lionshire, and these tweets do not cover the whole period of the targeted research time, which is from January to June 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Twitter Screenshot: a plug-in system for Chrome that supports the automated capture of tweets as pdf. files



this asynchronous data collection resulted in inconsistency of the total amount of tweets collected. The tweets collected by R were 840 for Hawshire and 1521 for Lionshire, whereas the Twitter Screenshots took 839 and 1514 posts from Hawshire and Lionshire accounts, respectively. One explanation was that the twitter operators – the Communication Officers delete some tweets, or, very unlikely, they were posts with limited visibility as protected tweets<sup>12</sup>.

The archive of Twitter posts created was manually organized and grouped for coding and analysis. Being inspired by Crump (2011), Deneff et al. (2013), Heverin & Zach (2010), I first coded the collected tweets from Hawshire Police via an inductive manner that gathered tweets into some macro topics, such as “policing work”, “community” and “traffic”. In total, fifteen topics were common issues that most police forces deal with on a daily basis. Fifteen topics had been identified during this first coding. The second step of coding was to further refine and classify codes under different topics. For example, there are five kinds of codes under the macro topic “policing work”, namely “police operation”, “police personnel”, “department achievement”, “recruitment”, and “police duty and service”. The next step then combined and merged these two groups of codes, and re-applied them to all tweets from Hawshire Police, making up code set 1. The approach has been repeated and applied when coding tweets from Lionshire Police, generating code set 2. The two sets of codes have been employed in the analysis presented in Chapter Five and Six.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This Chapter has discussed the mixed methods research design that underpins this study. The research design consists of three interrelated methods to provide varied aspects of exploring police use of Twitter in two police forces based in England and Wales. The methods were sequenced following a qualitative-quantitative-qualitative

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<sup>12</sup> According to Twitter.com, there are some instances when a tweet cannot be viewed: 1. The account has protected tweets, 2. The account has blocked the viewer, and 3. The account has deleted the original tweets.

manner. The initial qualitative phase built up a background picture of police understanding of using social media in Hawshire and Lionshire Police forces respectively, exploring their opinions and attitudes regarding the police communication via Twitter, and generating key issues and topics to investigate for the second quantitative phase. The last qualitative method was conducted to complement, explain and interpret the findings from the first and second phases. These three phases thus provided a comprehensive comparative study approach to the two police forces, and this is crucial for providing a deep and nuanced understanding of how police operate social media to communicate with the public in order to enhance police legitimacy.

## CHAPTER FOUR. The Organizational Vision of Police Use of Social Media

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe how different police forces view, introduce, and evaluate the social media use. It illustrates, from the organizational level, the rationale of the police using social media, the communication goals and how a social media account is being evaluated within the force. The orienting research question that will be addressed in this chapter is: *How are Communication Officers trained by their organizations to operate online communication?* In particular, the chapter explores what content has been presented during the training, and how the training was organized.

This chapter will firstly discuss what the two police forces expect their Communication Officers to achieve with corporate twitter engagement, from an organizational perspective. Having a clear picture of the organizational expectations for police corporate communication is of utmost importance for Communication Officers and staff to operate effectively and satisfy organizational objectives. Following the publication of national guidance for police communication *Engage* by the UK NPIA (2010), many police forces in the UK set out their own organizational rules and communication policies, in order to actively manage and provide suggestions to their corporate communications teams. The *Guidelines on the Safe Use of the Internet and Social Media by Police Officers and Police Staff* (ACPO, 2013) and advice on *Digital and Social Media Use* from College of Policing further sets up principles for police to safely use social media to maintain the public's trust and confidence, safeguard sensitive data and personal information, maximize the reputation of the police service, maintain public safety, and protect police officers' private lives. Following these national guidelines on police communication and engagement, many police forces, including the two forces included in this research, addressed the rationale and expectation of social media communication in their force policies and procedures and training documents to assist police officers and staff to operate social media accounts.

In order to provide insights into what the policies and communication training involves, this chapter will draw principally on the communication training and official documents provided by the Communication Officers from the two researched police force, comparing and contrasting how individual police force differently set out communication strategies. Research data was generated from my observation notes and the organizational communication policies and communication guidance of both forces. In particular, I collected and analysed one training document from Hawshire Police corporate communication team and eight documents from Lionshire corporate communication branch (including two guidance and procedure documents in relation to social media communication, one PowerPoint used in communication training regarding a significant incident that occurred in Lionshire, three official assessment documents regarding a specific policing campaign initiated by the corporate communication branch). Then, I used the field notes from communication training observation from Hawshire Police to discuss the training method and content provided to its Communication Officers, and the subsequent social media usage evaluations.

## **4.2 The Expectation From the Police Organization**

### **4.2.1 Making Regular Updates**

Both police forces emphasized a “regular update” instruction when using corporate social media accounts. Hawshire Police employed a *“Use it or Lose it”* slogan to describe the importance of police using social media in communication training. In order to demonstrate a regular presence of police online, Communication Officers of Hawshire Police were expected to have a “regular flow of updates” and provide responses promptly (Corporate Communication team of Hawshire Police, 2019). In the communication training document, two examples (The Terror attack London<sup>13</sup> on 7<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The 7 July 2005 London bombings, often referred to as 7/7, were a series of coordinated Islamist suicide attacks in London, England, that targeted on the London transit system during the morning rush hour.

July 2005 and The Lee Rigby attack<sup>14</sup> in 2013) have been highlighted for illustrating the innovation of social networking and the importance of providing timely information to the public. In the case presented, it took 28 minutes for news of the London terror attacks to be widely spread in 2005, whereas only 11 seconds accounted for the news of the Lee Rigby murder to be released on Twitter, and 22 seconds were used for this news to be live watched on YouTube. The challenge for police communication is the fact that social media makes news available to the public almost instantly. The public can learn about what happened and whether the police have handled it properly through stories, pictures, and videos in social media. If the police make mistakes or update information postponed, they will lose the initiative to interpret what happened and guide public opinion.

The cases reflected the enormous demand for information today that urges the police to provide timely information, immediate response, as well as regular updates (Manning, 1996). Likewise, Lionshire Police stated in the communication training that each Twitter account should be regularly logged-in, and actively used to upload information for the community. This strategy is to ensure the followers of the police account to maintain the right “level of involvement and engagement”. During my interview with a training officer of Lionshire, a phone call came in to ask about the account suspension. This training officer explained to me that the Twitter account had been suspended for not posting anything within two months.

*We tried to keep our users up to date as much as possible. As you can see this is red (the suspended account on this officer's operational interface), so any time they have reached a two month without logging in, we will suspend them. (IN12)*

This policy attempted to ensure a regular log-in and updates of each social media account of Lionshire Police. As College of Policing (2013) suggested that with the easy

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<sup>14</sup> On 3 December 2013, a British Army soldier, Lee Rigby, was attacked and murdered outside Woolwich barracks by in south-east London.

access and increasing use of mobile internet, “an online presence is part of everyday lives”. Regularly updated information on social media was believed to be beneficial for the police to improve their visibility online, strengthening the familiarity of police presence on social media and can reduce the social distance with the public (Lee, Lim, & Lee, 2015). Jackson and colleagues (Bradford, Jackson, & Stanko, 2009; Jackson & Bradford, 2009) further explained that regular presence of police is perceived as representatives of the community, maintain social safety and civility, and it is “*important for police to tell their stories*” (IN5). Moreover, it could be this symbolic function – the reassuring presence of the immortalised ‘bobby on the beat’ – that enhance the confidence in policing, which is important to ground police legitimacy (Bahn, 1974; Jackson & Sunshine, 2007).

#### **4.2.2 Be the Trustworthy and Legitimate Information Sources**

Both Hawshire and Lionshire Police stated clearly in their training and policies that it is essential for them to be regarded as a *reliable, trustworthy and legitimate information source*. Building trust and confidence in policing work is one of the fundamental tasks of police communication (Mawby, 2002). It is because trust and confidence in the police cannot only enhance the active public participation in police services and police work, but also secures the compliance with the law (Jackson & Bradford, 2010). Once the police are found to be trustworthy and reliable, and capable of being a *civic guardian* by the public, a social alignment between the police and the neighbourhood will be created and secures public confidence and support (Loader & Mulcahy, 2003). In order to fulfil this goal, maintaining open and honest communication is beneficial to achieve this social alignment and enhance police legitimacy since police online communication is being overseen by the media and the citizens (Goldsmith, 2010). In this context, Lionshire Police made it clear in the communication policy that:

*“Communicating effectively with the public is vital to building confidence in the police and its staff and is vital to maintaining democracy. It helps to create trust and respect, reassuring the public that we invest time in creating different channels of communication to engage with the many different people that make up our diverse communities.”*

A similar concept was present in the training document of Hawshire Police which highlight this expectation:

*“Build trust and confidence in our work”,  
and,  
“Act as a trusted source of information.”*

In order to construct the image of being a trustworthy and legitimate resource, Hawshire Police encouraged Communication Officers to use multimedia such as photos, videos, live streams and so on, to increase the reliability of posted information. *“An image on the shift is more convincing than a paragraph of descriptive texts”,* (IN1) noted by the digital manager of the corporate communication team. By comparison, Lionshire Police emphasized the legality and lawful processing of posts, for example, there were communication laws and policies that need to be strictly followed, like *No visual image or identifiable information on people who are under 18* and *No victim blaming whatsoever*. Moreover, these rules and policies have been attached within the communication software, which enabled officers to read and check before each post. In order to construct normative communication messages, Lionshire Police gave specific *Dos and Don'ts* guidance in the training based on different types of posted information, such as:

*For General Appeals:*

*Do:*

- *Outline of incidents*
- *Description of offenders/vehicles/stolen property*

*Do not:*

- *Put names of suspects*
- Anything that will identify victim

Most tweets of Lionshire corporate account were following the guidance. In addition, standardized posts – based on a script – have been designed for the police to form an image of well-organized as well as legitimate (Bullock, 2018a). Lionshire Police formulated corresponding communication rules according to different scenarios to ensure the legitimacy and regularity of each post. Under this context, most, if not all, posts from Lionshire Police were standardised and could be secured with the procedural legality, presenting an online police image with professionalism. On the other hand, through posting evidence-based tweets, such as the records from body-worn cameras or images from a patrol shift, Hawshire Police intended to present the public that the information they posted were real, objective and trustworthy. These efforts noted from both forces were meant to enhance the reliability and credibility of the policing information, which is beneficial for the public's confidence towards the police (Bradford et al., 2009).

#### **4.2.3 Responding to Every Message from the Public Without Getting into an Argument**

Lionshire Police asked the digital officer to *respond to every message from the public*. It means all different kinds of enquiries from the public on social media has to be checked and replied, including the “*outbounds, inbounds and direct messages, basically all the interactions*” (IN12). During the interview with the Digital Communication Officer from Lionshire, she showed the operation interface of her Twitter to me, which was the management version of analytic communication tool (see the discussion in 4.4). There were many unread messages from the public that needed replies. However, all these replying were managed by her alone.



*With the corporate one, the main Lionshire account, it is me. We can get between, it depends, today is not a bad day, so we will probably get 20-30 text messages. I say that is not bad, but it is actually really good for us. And on Monday we can easily walk into anything from 50 to 400 messages. (IN12)*

As Martin (1999) notes, although fighting crimes and catching criminals are considered as the proper police work, many police officers, like most of the Communication Officers, spent a small amount of time, or even no time on tasks that contains these elements. The majority of *police work in reality*, especially in this study, is tedious and involves repetitive paperwork but has no excitement and no violence involved (Loftus, 2009). Communication Officers are likely to receive many similar questions or comments in their routine work but “no comment” is not an option in the communication strategy of Lionshire Police (IN10). It was partially due to that the sense that refuse to reply would “lead to speculation and distrust of the police, and loss of confidence in the force” (Lionshire, 2014). As it has been put in the *Roles and Responsibilities* (2014) of Lionshire Police communication policy that can only be viewed internally, Lionshire Police encouraged corporate Communication Officers to “*provide information and will always respond wherever possible*”. This suggested that Communication Officers would have to answer numerous repetitive questions, which consumed hours and had no creativity. To cope with this work, one Communication Officer created a “cheat sheet” that has all the standardized answers to the most common asked questions, “*otherwise it will take me too long to write the same reply.*” (IN12).

Furthermore, there were several fields that Lionshire Police do not want Communication Officers to get involved in, namely the *politics, racial issues, football and military issues*. This was because some issues are “*never ends well for us*” (IN12), such as the question “which one is the best football team?”, an answer of either name of a football team would be criticised by the fans of the other team. Besides, police should avoid posting any information that may lead to discrimination or conflicts

towards a certain group of citizens. Any expression that appeared to “*support discrimination against any group, or encourages racial, religious or homophobic hatred*” has been strictly forbidden in police communication (ACPO, 2013, p. 7). Furthermore, in the requirements of replying to comments, “*Do not get into an argument*” has been particularly outlined by Lionshire Police with bold red letters. The training officer explained that getting an argument with the public was not allowed under any circumstances. The reason was that the police getting involved in an argument would not do good in community relations, which could be crucial in enhancing police legitimacy, or helped with a criminal investigation. Researchers also suggested that police should avoid arguing with the public as any police behaviours online would be expected offline, thus police online communication has been expected to be delivered according to the same standards as the policing activities in the real world, that is, do not get involved in arguments (ACPO, 2013; Hinds & Murphy, 2007).

However, there were interviewees who seemed opposite to this idea. One interviewee commented that not every police decision or behaviour can be understood and supported by the citizens. Thus, the police ought to explain and respond to citizens’ doubts or queries, including giving reasons, adhering to their position or accepting public criticism. (IN5) Argument, in the context of police communication, is the action that the police defend or explain themselves with a set of reasons. As some Communication Officers responded as follows:

*“If we had bad publicity, but we think it was the right decision, if you do not agree, that is fine. We have good police reason to do this. And we just say, you do not like us, but we had to do this.” (IN5)*

*“Sometimes, I will fight back (on Twitter), to defend ourselves. I will defend ourselves as police.” (PIN2)*

The excerpts above were quoted from Communication Officers from Hawshire Police. On the one hand, it may be because there was no such policy as “no argument” in the

organization that restrained police officers from fighting back to the public on Twitter. On the other hand, these quotes reflected some police officers' willingness to stand up for themselves when dealing with issues regarding right or wrong. It is crucial for police to deliver the proper messages to the public, even if those messages may not always be appreciated. The use of Twitter to express attitudes of the police and justify public conception about the policing was an attempt to manage public' expectation (Goldsmith, 2005). In a nutshell, this discussion illustrated different policies in the two police organizations, suggesting that there are no unified rules of police communication in all circumstances.

#### **4.3 Social Media Training: Communication Purpose and the Coping Methods**

Law enforcement institutions have been aware of and recognized the significance of police communication in policing, even way before the birth of online communication. Many police forces in England and Wales offered training and classes for police communication, including the two researched police forces in this study. Communications training has been an opportunity for police institutions to present their personnel with the organization's expectations, strategies and policies in public communication, thus forming a standardized behaviour of corporate communication. Hawshire and Lionshire Police regularly organized training on social media usage for their Communication Officers with different forms and delivery methods. In particular, some communications training in Hawshire Police were designed and delivered by the corporate communication team in a "book-and-deliver" manner that individual police officers and localized police forces submitted a training request to the corporate communication team in advance, and then receive tailored training either based in the corporate communication office or the localized police force. Other than that, Hawshire Police corporate communication team offered training classes to Communication Officers on an ad hoc basis, and individual Communication Officers would be dispatched to the headquarter for training.

In Lionshire Police force, by comparison, communication training was compulsory for each officer who used social media in the name of the police organisation. An officer has been required to finish the communication training before being granted access to the corporate social media, and the subsequent social media performance would be carried out under the communication policy and supervised by the corporate Communication Officers. Furthermore, a social media account would be subject to a ban should inappropriate behaviours be found, and the individual officer would be investigated based on the damage caused to police communication and be invited for retraining hosted by the corporate communication branch. There were many training sessions found for Communication Officers in Lionshire Police, usually “*twice a week, and in the region of 10 people at each session*” due to the constant development of social media and the movement of personnel in the institution (IN10). The training sessions were usually intense and needed to be requested in advance, as was explained by one training officer:

*So, they have to book in advance because we only tend to allow ten users, well ten people to come at a time. Now, some officers try and request it the week off and are like ‘I need training this week’. I was like, ‘no chance, literally.’ I am constantly doing this all day. So, I only have certain days available. Wednesday tends to be my main day, and people know that is my main day and be like ‘I want to book in on Wednesday’, and I was like, ‘ok we have only got a certain amount of spaces left’. So, they will message me about training, and I will basically have to say no. Like last week, people messaged me, and they are not getting in there until at least March unless somebody cancels. Because they have already technically asked for training, they will then be put in first. (IN12)*

By comparison, the communication training in Hawshire Police was less intense or as regularly organized. Though the corporate communication team provide scheduled training for officers who used social media, some officers and PCSOs found that training was less systematically organized. For example, when I discussed this with different interviewees about social media training, they said there were few training

opportunities, only some PowerPoint and documentary materials provided. Likewise, two PCs of Hawshire Police in a focus group asserted that the communication training opportunities were limited when asked about when did they receive the first communication training.

*FG1: It was probably a half-day training, in the police station I was working, originally when I was first requested one. When I looked online, the document with the attachment to read, like a slideshow, a PowerPoint, sort of presentation. I thought it was a similar one (to the recent training document). So, we have to read through that, make sure people applied it often, and then, the corporate team, I think, come down, and gave us a half-day input. And it was, once in a while?*

*FG2: Yeah, yeah. I did not have that much, yeah.*

*FG1: And there was a couple of them now; it was quite personal training. Sort of, one to one, it was only two, maybe three hours. Just general chat, and then, they let you in, here you go.*

*YaXian: So, this was like, this year, or a few years ago?*

*FG1: When I first started using social media, when I first requested, it was five years ago, and that was all the training.*

*FG2: Same for me.*

It can be drawn from the interviews and focus groups in Hawshire that the communication training was fragmented in terms of training frequency and organization form. As for the content of communication training, both Hawshire and Lionshire Corporate Communication team prepared training materials, including PowerPoint slides and printed guidance documents for communication. They both stated the purpose of social media use at the beginning of the training:

- *Improve the visibility of policing activity to our communities*
- *Provide timely, accurate updates about ongoing incidents*
- *Build trust and confidence in our work*
- *To build a receptive audience for when we need to distribute vital information*
- *Use humour to show a human side of our organisation*
- *Act as a trusted source of information*

*From Hawshire Police Training material*

- *Communicate with members of the public digitally*
- *Deliver the latest policing updates*
- *Promote local meetings and events*
- *Support active content on the website*
- *Be a reliable, trustworthy, approachable online source*

*From Lionshire Police Training material*

Based on these two materials, there were similarities in both forces' communication purposes, such as enhancing the digital visibility of policing activity, providing timely policing information, and being a trustworthy source of information. This suggested that regularly presenting an effective, reliable police image was, to some point, the consensus concept of police using social media. Police effectiveness, or performance, has played an important role in the public's shared values towards legal authorities, indicating that they are capable of serving the best interests of the society while meeting a normative criterion (Beetham, 1991). On the other hand, the concept of police being reliable could produce and reproduce public trust and support, promoting the legitimisation structure of the police (Giddens, 1979). Therefore, both the police forces attempted to present an effective and trustworthy characteristic via social media communication to enhance police competence and legitimacy.

Hawshire Police also suggested the importance of a receptive audience, and one of the key strategies in communication was to use humour to reduce social distance and maintain good engagement with communities. Whereas Lionshire Police regarded social media as an extra tool to facilitate other policing work, such as *promote local meetings* and *support content of the website*. The differentiated focus on social media

use reflected, to some degree, the varied policing priorities of the two forces. In particular, one of the prioritized policing tasks of Hawshire Police was delivering a safer neighbourhood (The Office of the Police&Crime Commissioner for Hawshire, 2020), where a good engagement with communities and trust of the police was needed, and the strategy of using humour could help achieve this goal. In contrast, while *strengthening communities and places* has been regarded as one of policing priorities of Lionshire (LCA, 2020), the force employed social media as a supporting tool for *keeping people safe* and *reducing harm and offending* through sending prevention information and safety tips (see discussion in Chapter Five).

Furthermore, both forces employed the case-study for interpreting social media use during Communication training. For example, in the observation of communication class of Hawshire Police, the training officer used some tweet examples posted by one of the Communication Officers in Hawshire, encouraging trainees to discuss whether the content of the post was appropriate (see Picture 1, now deleted by the Twitter user). The exemplified tweet was about placing a drunk driver in custody, and it was the picture attached that generated concerns. While some officers felt the photo of the ticket had the potentials of evidence exposure, other proponents found it was acceptable as there was no personal information or signature appearing on the ticket. This photo was only used to suggest that police were “on the beat” and performing their work rightfully and legally. Although I did not participate in any Communication training organized by Lionshire Corporate Communication team, I found similar case-study content from the training PowerPoint slides provided by Lionshire communication training officer. Such case-studies were mainly used as a reference for discussing the right or wrong operation of social media accounts, which enables Communication Officers to understand the communication risks on social media and remedies where possible.

Picture 1 A controversial tweet posted by one of the Hawshire Police officers

One drink driver off the road tonight, blew 93 in custody, legal limit being 35!!  
 Excellent spot by @HawshirePolice CCTV operators again, we intercepted and  
 placed him in one of our en-suite rooms for the night #ExcellentResult  
 @HawshirePolice

Subject Signature	BrAC	TIME - BST
TEST	$\mu\text{g}/100\text{ml}$	
Blank 1	000	00:31:19
Simulator Check 1	033	00:31:48
Blank 2	000	00:32:21
Breath Specimen 1	099	00:33:31
Blank 3	000	00:34:01
Breath Specimen 2	093	00:35:46
Blank 4	000	00:36:16
Simulator Check 2	033	00:36:46

I certify that in this statement, reading  
 one relates to the first specimen of  
 breath provided by the subject named  
 above and reading two to the second, at  
 the date and time shown herein.

Operator Name: [Redacted] D4  
 Rank: PC

Operator Signature

Though the discussion of a posted tweet could generate different ideas and opinions that may benefit the following communication operations, it is argued that having a standardized rule or policy can better instruct individual behaviours, especially when it represents the performance and image of the police organization as an entity (Bullock, 2018a). As Fielding (1984, p. 570) noted, police forces gave police officers discretion through regulating the legitimization of individual personnel's actions – "restricting the range of legitimizable discourse." Lionshire Police force, for example, used a case



studies and standardized requirement in the communication training. Rather than encourage a debate, they told the trainee officers what is regarded as of right or wrong when giving case examples and noted *Dos and Don'ts* against different situations. This was to clarify the formal requirements of a police role, describing expected standards and practices in the working context for the individual trainees (Fielding, 1984). In particular, six types of situations that required proactive sending of messages to the public have been highlighted in Lionshire's communication guidance, namely *General Appeals*, *Arrest Appeals*, *Charge Appeals*, *Raid Appeals*, *Sentence Appeals* and *Wanted & Missing people*. In order to cope with these situations, different requirements of *Dos and Don'ts* were listed accordingly making them easy to follow. One of the training officers commented as follows:

*So, we basically say what do we use social media for, communicating with the public digitally, giving completion updates more in meetings and events, any content on the website, and being trustworthy and approachable online. Updating it, what do we have to do, we have to keep the engagement, delete anything inappropriate, constantly check and update with any relevant information, responding and do not get into arguments, a lot of officers do. (IN12)*

Training officers in both Hawshire and Lionshire Police provided general information about social media use, communication platforms within the force, monitoring tools and communication strategies to the trainee officers. As Fielding (1984) asserted, training provided the grounding of law and order, sensitizing the trainees to be aware of the legal and organizational regulations. Training officers highlighted the strategies and organizational communication policies to achieve institutional communication goals. However, different forms of organizing and delivering communication training to the Communication Officers within an organization reflected how the corporate team view and manage the process of public communication, and how they monitored the use of different accounts. Both Hawshire and Lionshire Police set communication training in the form of "one-to-one" or "one-to-many," delivering primary use and

organizational policies of using corporate social media, embarking on discussions of the social media operation and using case studies to reflect what is appropriate or not in communication with the public. The differences between the two forces were that the Lionshire corporate communication branch delivered training systematically and frequently and provided more detailed organizational policy documents for guiding the communication based on the different purposes of communication. In contrast, Hawshire Police training was mostly in a “respond to demand” manner, and there were fewer and less well developed policies for social media use.

#### **4.4 Evaluating Social Media Use: Analytic Software and Quarterly Meetings**

Since social media has been well anchored within bureaucratic systems, including the police. Hawshire Police started adopting Twitter in 2011 and Lionshire Police joined the Twitter in 2012. The management of police organizations employed different forms for evaluating the effectiveness of social media use. In this study, both forces used external analytics software to facilitate monitoring and evaluating the operation of each corporate account. The analytics software in Hawshire Police, according to IN2, could monitor the performance of each social media account of the police force, calculating the “sessions of use, time, posts and engagement of an account, and gives a score about the input.” Rather than focus on the numbers of increased followers, or how much time officers spent on Twitter, it was the engaging actions that matter (IN1, IN2, and IN10). I was shown the management version of the analytics software during the interviews with the training officer in Hawshire. A score was sought on each organizational account, suggesting their average performance and engagement input.

*The score that something they calculate, is a combination of sessions, time, length, post out, dealt with messages, and it gives you a score. It is about your input. (IN1)*

*It is basically the value of the team member, for using social media. So, if you had someone, someone at total session time, say he is got 27 hours on it, but if his post was zero, then his*

*score will be really low because he spent 27 hours on it, but he has done nothing. It just gives you an idea of who's using it well and who is not. So, the main thing, like I said, and this one here, is, I can see which team set up, how much information they have put out, so this local policing team account has been sent messages, 132 dealt with, that is great, then there is another local policing team account, a lot dealt with, but not a lot put out. Here is our control room, loads put out, but they really do not deal with come in. So, this really tells. (IN2)*

From the excerpt, Hawshire Police evaluated the use of police Twitter account based on, at least partially, the score of analytic software. While a high score indicated that the account was operating well, Hawshire Police did not suggest a specific 'punishment' for users with low scores. Comparatively, Lionshire Police demonstrated the extensive use of external analytics software for account management, and have particular measures for accounts with low scores, for example, inviting the Communication Officer for a re-train of operating social media communication (see the discussion in 4.3). The training officer in Lionshire introduced the management tool during our interview that in order to make the analysis more comprehensive and accurate, the corporate communication branch has been continuously updating and changing the software there three years, based on their needs and budgets.

*...From 2013/2014, we started using this analytic software, so every three years, we tend to have a company come in, so that can be from whomever bases, try to sell us their system...cause we paid a fortune for these systems, we want them to work, and this one is a bit flaky. I think we are trying to go for (another system) the next period; it just seems more beneficial for our users. With that many systems, we found this one works best, to actually manage our users and content. (IN12)*

The excerpt above indicated the organizational evaluation focus of operating Twitter. That is, the use of an account, rather than the time spent on the social media platform, was more important to Communication Officers in both Hawshire and Lionshire Police forces. Different analytic software made the combined use of social media into a score,

which became an indicator of target and competition for Communication Officers to pursue. However, some interviewees asserted that some policing work could not be quantified, such as going on patrol on the street and talking with the public. In this respect, the formal ratification on the score was argued for underestimating the importance of operational police work, as one interviewee in Hawshire put it in a focus group:

*FG1: The evaluation comes from the member of the public, and I think if they evaluate this good, by likes our tweet, by commenting, I think, that shows we do something right...we need to engage with people, that is the way ... I think that is the best way that we get evaluated by the public; we are not here to be evaluated by people in the office, it is by the public, they see what we are putting out.*

It could be found out that police officers, especially ones who work at the frontline, such as PCs and PCSOs in this study, have different understanding and focus on police communication than that of officers in the corporate office. The dependence of a score to evaluate social media use was due to the perception that this performance regime has been the management method to keep the police practice accountable (Smith & Gray, 1985). However, although some officers criticised this system, it paradoxically brought positive effects to police communication. During the interview with the training officer in Hawshire, he regarded the score as an indicator for competition and showed a positive interpretation on it: *“Look at mine (score), I am catching up on that one now”* (IN1). The sense of competition would, to a certain extent, encourage Communication Officers to use social media more in order to obtain a better score through posting more tweets and engaging actively with the citizens. Thus, this evaluation method was considered to have a beneficial impact on social media usage.

Another facet of this performance regime was that whether the Communication Officers realise how they were evaluated. In Hawshire, it seemed that only the officers who worked in the corporate communication team – the management level – could see

these scores, other Communication Officers in localized police divisions, Specials or PCSOs could not see their communication scores, nor did they have a clear idea about how this evaluation being performed. For individual Communication Officer, the incentive for operating social media was not just to pursue higher scores, especially as some of them may not even realised the existence of the social media evaluation. Other sources of motivation came from the recognition and encouragement of the chief constable of the organization. As two PCs in Hawshire discussed in a focus group as the following:

*YaXian: Is there any evaluation system for using social media?*

*FG2: No, not anything formal, in place.*

*FG1: No.*

*FG2: I think, people, like the deputy chief constables, he does (the evaluation) obviously. One time he came over and spoke to me. The first thing he mentioned was twitter (laugh). So, they obviously quite aware, obviously, just by looking, I think they know.*

*YaXian: Are there any formal documents for evaluating Twitter usage?*

*FG2: There is a policy, a policy document of how to use it, what to do, what not to do, I think.*

*YaXian: So, there are no formal things to evaluate?*

*FG2: No, not that I am aware of, no.*

*FG1: As long as the way the deputy chief does, he reviews it. He is playing Twitter and seeing the interactions we have in public, and it is coming up in a positive way.*

The two PCs' views echoed other interviewees' experience that either they did not have information on the evaluation regime (PIN1 and PIN2), or they considered different methods of evaluating (IN7). It demonstrated that most of Communication

Officers in Hawshire Police were not fully aware that they were evaluated and how they were evaluated. Although this may leave room for the Communication Officers to post tweets with personal twists, some officers would misconduct social media usage or lack of motivations due to not knowing the evaluation regulation. In contrast, individual officers knew the evaluation results and communication targets in the Lionshire Police as the results would be displayed within the organization quarterly and annual meetings. Before each quarterly meeting, one Digital Communication Officer would go through all the posted tweets from the corporate accounts over the last three months, and evaluated the performance of all the accounts manually. Using the score of external analytic software as a reference, this Communication Officer would assess the accounts' input and engagement practice in terms of the numbers of posted tweets, the numbers of likes, retweets and comments the account receives, and the number of tweets, likes, and comments that the account retweeted from other accounts. In the interview, she used data from last week to explain to me how this evaluation being performed:

*So, every quarter, we will do a quarterly report, that is, we do every single account, that is a hundred and ten accounts. Individually, me and me-along some, have to go every single one, find out the followers, find out the reach, how it is increased etc. etc.*

*If we just do last week (evaluation), this is just last week for the main account only. We have 253,000 followers basically on Facebook, but 1.1 million people saw us, saw our posts, saw our profile. Same with this, 575,000 plus 23 million people saw us (on Twitter). So, we sent out 84 posts altogether, and we have 244 DMs (Direct Messages). There are lots of differences as well, like, posts and reaches as well, that is basically the same thing, and we got engaged so that we could see exactly how we engage with the public. We can see here, the most engaged user for the last week is the member of the public. So, this is the person that comments on our stuff the most, retweets our stuff, likes our stuff blah blah blah. The most active user is the internal user, like myself on my team or an officer. We show up there. Here are basically other results, so this account has*

*basically commented on one of our posts, it shows that. And they have also posted something to us. As we can see they have had 53 interactions. (IN12)*

It could be seen from this interview that the numbers of posts, replies, interactions, the numbers of increased/decreased followers, and the most/least active users and followers were the basic information to be evaluated. The corporate communication branch would list the best and worst ten accounts to all the Communication Officers in the quarterly evaluation meeting internally, setting examples of good and harmful use of social media. In the annual meeting, senior officers and managers from different units of corporate communication teams would participate and discuss the communication operation with a view to refining and improving for the next year. After reviewing and grading all the organizational accounts, attendees would discuss and set up the communication plan and strategies for the following year. By setting examples and targets, Lionshire Police displayed and encouraged the Communication Officers to compete and improve overall communication and engagement level with the public. The acting manager of the digital communication team explained the assessment method in detail:

*We have the quarterly report that we do every three months. We tend to have the yearly meeting, which would be included, it did involve me, the digital media officer and the head of the department, along with a senior officer from public relation unit and a senior officer from the press office. And corporate media image unit as well. Because I am just really talking about Twitter and Facebook here, but there are also other sides of it, the Flickr and YouTube site, which composes it.*

*But, yes, we have a yearly meeting to decide what the strategy is for the next year and what we want to get involved with them and what we want to do. We will go through. There are other parts of evaluation as well, which we do individually but as a yearly group meeting, we will pull off as much analytics as we can. (IN10)*

As suggested by the interviewee, the quarterly report meeting and yearly meetings of Lionshire emphasized a thorough investigation of each account's performance, displaying excellent and less satisfying use under the organizational rules and publicizing internally to the Communication Officers. Thus, Communication Officers could have a better understanding of the expected use of tweets approved by the organization and could improve their communication strategies accordingly year-on-year. Moreover, through different evaluation perspectives that come from the Press Office, the Public Relations, CMI team and the Digital Media team, the communication strategies for the coming year would be discussed and determined. Through this vein, the comprehensiveness and practicality of the plan could hence be enhanced.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has, firstly, explored the official guidelines for online communication from the two police organizations and corporate posts. It is found that both forces acknowledged the importance of social media communication and organized training for their Communication Officers. While Hawshire Police has no specific regulations or scripts for Communication Officers to operate accounts, Lionshire Police issued more detailed policies on the format and content of the information posted on Twitter accounts (Bullock, 2018b). Both forces intended to construct an approachable and reliable image of the police and provide trustworthy and timely information to the public, which is important for strengthening public confidence towards the police and, in turn, enhancing police legitimacy. In order to construct the sense of being involved and engaged, Lionshire Police specifically require the Communication Officers to reply to every piece of public information, and refrain from falling into disputes and arguments with the public.

Drawn from this study, individual forces have distinct rules and regulations in terms of social media use. Training has been conducted in a 'one-to-one' or 'one-to-many'



format and would facilitate trainees acquiring a basic understanding of using the corporate accounts. A third-party software has been adopted by both forces for better supervising and evaluation. Through presenting the examples of good and harmful use of social media to the Communication Officers and written guidance, the communication training was designed to ensure the standardization and normatively of the police communication, although this may result in tedious and template tweets (Bullock, 2018a). The evaluation methods were distinct due to the scale, structure, and layout of the communication branch, yet the focus on social media engagement and input were found in both police forces. That is, rather than spending long hours on social media to increase the number of followers, it is the *reach* and *engagement* of an account that matters. To the two researched forces, the numbers of comments, retweets and likes an account received were the primary indicators of its engagement level, which played an essential role in the communication evaluation.

## **CHAPTER Five. How Corporate Communication Officers View and Produce Police Tweets**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This Chapter will focus on how the police themselves in Hawshire and Lionshire forces understand and perceive police use of Twitter. It illustrates what individual Communication Officers in the selected forces think of the police communication via social media, and also what they aim to achieve through posting tweets with their understanding of their roles, and what advantages and challenges they have been coping with regarding the external environments of police communication. These broader environments, as noted, include developments in technologies, the growth in social media, and national and local political shifts, which combined to influence policing territory both online and off-line, impacting on police communication with the public, police legitimacy, and the social expectations of external audiences of the police (Reiner, 2008; Manning 2002). On the other hand, these environments also benefit police in that they can expand the scope and resources for information gathering, improve relationships with different social groups, and strengthen transparency and participation of the public (Bretschneider & Mergel, 2013; Meijer & Thaens, 2013).

The methods used in this phase of the research, and on which the discussions in this chapter are based, are the semi-structured interviews and focus groups with Communication Officers, observations of one communication training class of Hawshire Police, observations of two-night patrol shift with an undercover team of Lionshire Police, and observations of routine communication work of the corporate communication branches of Hawshire and Lionshire Police forces. A dataset was generated from the interviews, focus groups and observation field notes. The chapter first analyses how the individual Communication Officers understand the police use of Twitter, exploring their attitudes and experience towards social media use. Along with fieldnotes of the patrol with an undercover team in Lionshire Police, I will illustrate what

the police aim to present to the public from within the internal setting, and their attitudes toward social media usage.

Research questions that guide and will be addressed in this chapter include: *How do police Communication Officers in Hawshire and Lionshire Police view and understand the use of social media?* This chapter will present findings on Communication Officers' opinions and experiences regarding police corporate Twitter accounts' operation. More specifically, the discussion will focus on the purposes of using the corporate Twitter account and communications officers' experience of using it. Following the findings of how Communication Officers from the two police forces strategically operate Twitter, the latter part of the chapter will present what benefits and risks the police communication via social media may encounter. More importantly, the discussion will present arguments of why communication via Twitter with the public is a crucial part of police legitimation.

## **5.2 Purpose of Police Use of Twitter**

Police communication has changed considerably over the last century, and social media is one of the main driving forces in this development. Changes in communication and social practice brought about by companies such as Facebook and Twitter were frequently referred and mentioned throughout my interviews and focus groups involved in police communication. It is noticeable that all the interviewees without exception, acknowledged and highlighted the changes in police communication. In the eyes of police Communication Officers, the functions, effects, and ideology of communication via social media were entirely different from the "old traditional communication" practices (Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Lee & McGovern, 2013b). Thus, the use of social media, particularly Twitter, has been developed and taken seriously by the police forces in the UK since 2008 (Crump, 2011). One Digital Communication Officer from Lionshire explained this as follows:

*Social media has lots, lots, lots of advantages. We used not to work in this way, we did not go out on street to ask everyone, 'do you know this guy?', 'have you seen him before?'. No, we do not, because that would not work. But now, social media changes everything, when we want to talk to someone, or when we are looking for some missing people, we just post this information online, and it is the public who actually helped us to close the case by providing information... they helped the policing work out by using Twitter. So, we need to make good use of it (the social media). (IN12)*

When asked was social media calls for information actually yield positive information?

This Communication Officer confirmed and commented, *"it did actually work, especially on looking for missing persons or people we want to talk to. it is quite helpful."*

(IN12) This study found that the interviewees believed that the rationales for using social media include at least the following three aspects.

### **5.2.1 Reputation Management**

Data collected from the interviews suggested a significant focus on the use of social media is for the purpose of *reputation management*, which from a marketing perspective could be regarded as an overall strategy of an organization – to construct a reputation and maintain it through external communication with stakeholders and the public (Yakis-Douglas & Whittington, 2011). Reputation management has the potential to improve the image of an organization and its legitimacy through external communication, which involved deliberate designs and programs in influencing people's attitudes and expectations of the organization, and could improve, maintain and repair people's views on the qualifications and characteristics of the organization (Elsbach, 2012). Data generated from the interviews suggested that Communication Officers were attempting to improve the police reputation via methods like creating a brand personality and telling positive stories.

### 5.2.1.1 Brand Personality Construction

Efforts to “set human characteristics associated with a brand” is called *brand personality construction* (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Communication Officers in Hawshire and Lionshire Police were found trying to convey interpersonal characteristics through the police social media accounts, such as being “trustworthy”, “interesting”, and “likeable” (IN2, IN3, IN12, IN15 and FG3). In order to actively present the police with vivid personalities and enhance the relationship with the public, many Communication Officers employed the method of “humanizing the Twitter account” and six out of seventeen respondents said they tried to add more human traits when posting tweets, such as using the first-person narratives and a sense of humour. During the research, Communication Officers expressed the prevailing view that the characteristics of the police corporate account should be transformed to be “less corporate” (IN3 and IN15). In other words, some “personal twists” (FG1 and FG2) should be added in order to make the account more “approachable” (IN2 and IN14). It was asserted that “it is constantly trying to do things that make police officers look like human beings, rather than machines” (FG3 and FG4). As the following excerpt from interviews in Hawshire demonstrates:

*It is trying to make everything more personal, rather than corporate. Because we are corporate account, it can be quite serious. I think we try to make it more interesting, and it is not like doom, all the time, about us, you know, there is fire, there is an accident, like we cannot have a bit of laugh, a few nice things that are happening as well. I think that is mainly one of my main roles. (IN3)*

*I want people to look at our social media and say, ‘Well, it is a really, really good site, it is easy to understand, you know, I want to follow them, I want to see what is going out on it’. (IN2)*

The brand personality is noted as a powerful driver to build and communicate meaningful consumer-brand relationships and to establish a positive attitude towards

the brand (Biel, 1993; Sung & Tinkham, 2005). Consumers may use the brand to create, reshape and reinforce their self-concepts to the organization and the products it provided (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). In the context of police communication, citizens are more likely to establish a positive attitude and trust towards the brand – the individual police force, when the brand personality of the police has been accepted and recognized. By adopting a marketing perspective, these two researched police forces were imbuing the police social media with a personality that attempts to persuade the public to distinguish the brand from other police forces (Sung & Kim, 2010). For example, the Communication Officers of Hawshire suggested that they hope citizens to recognize their corporate account as *“the interesting police Twitter account”* (IN2), whereas IN15 from Lionshire force attempted to shape their corporate account as a *“legitimate information source”*.

#### **5.2.1.2 Telling Good Stories**

Another method observed in the two police forces to facilitate reputation management was to advertise good stories about police officers and the police organization (Lee & McGovern, 2013). This strategy has been acknowledged by interviewees from both Hawshire and Lionshire Police. Communication Officers across the two research areas have emphasized the role of ‘good story of police’ and ‘good engagement with the public’ in police communication, mostly because they helped to create the police image as trustworthy, engaging and professional, and are beneficial for public engagement. For example, one Digital and Social Development Officer of Hawshire even described her primary role as *“... to find and publicize good news stories about the police”* (IN3). Similar comments have been found in interviews with another Digital and Social Development officers as follows:

*I am trying to move away from the news agencies that put out bad press about the police. You know, let us put the positive stuff out there, let us put the bright stories out. (IN2)*

Positive stories and images of police have played essential roles in police reputation construction (Lee & McGovern, 2013a). Messages conveyed in good stories of policing could reflect certain positive characteristics of police officers, therefore shaping an online character that is morally inclined and trusted by the public. As an organization that is 'by far the most visible of all criminal justice institutions', police have long been concerned about how they appear to the public for it would play a crucial role in determining public reactions to the police and police legitimacy (Chermak & Weiss, 2005, p. 502; De Cremer & Tyler, 2005). And a police image that is morally recognized by the public could be beneficial to build up police legitimacy. This explains why the police were attempting to post tweets that match the values of different groups, such as in this research, supporting sexual minority groups or BAME. Moreover, many positive stories of the police were about the results of successful police enforcement, or the police officers' personal achievements, as in one Digital Communication Officer's phrase, "*We have achieved this, and we have done that successfully.*" (IN12) These stories represented satisfying policing performance and were helpful to enhance public's perceptions of police effectiveness. The perceptions of police legitimacy could thus be increased with the development of trust in the police (Hawdon et al., 2003).

Meanwhile, I also found that the police were attempting to distract from negative stories of policing, especially when it involved apparent impropriety, such as police use of force. This attempt used in police communication was for (re)securing public faith and confidence in the police (Lee & McGovern, 2013a; Levitt, 2009; Lieberman et al., 2013; Newburn & Hayman, 2002). For instance, an example of a potentially damaging police publicity incident was demonstrated by the manager of Digital and Social Development of Hawshire: A few years ago, two police officers ran over a dog in their police vehicle because the dog was loose and wandering around a busy public highway, and somebody reported this incident on Twitter. The breaking news led to a large amount of public criticism of the police, such as complains and retweets on social media and

comments under different online news reports. The following describes how the communication team coped with this unwanted publicity:

*It was not as black and white as it seemed but grey, which is, you know, there was a dog, it was lost, we could not catch it, we knocked it over (fast speed), which is not great. When we have got over 60000 comments on it in the first 12 hours, straight away we realised we had made a mistake. We wanted to retract that mistake, but it was international. What you were able to do then was look at where we went wrong and learn from that, provide some reassurance and some updates around the incidents, the events and basically where the storm was. And hope, you know, at the end of it, people would actually appreciate there was a real danger. (IN1)*

The above comments showed that the police were acutely aware when a story goes wrong and consciously made efforts to (re)construct their image on social media by adding personal traits, posting good stories, and managing negative publicity. With the empowerment of information technologies, the ubiquitous nature of mobile media and cameras has, to some extent, diminished the effects brought by the good story of the police as it enabled the public to instantaneously record and upload contrasting images/videos/stories of the police through social media (Thompson, 2005). This significantly heightened the risks of damaging police reputation in a way previously unseen (Bradshaw, 2013; Brown, 2016; Goldsmith, 2010; Thompson, 2005). Positive stories, thus served as remedies and a reassuring function to cope with 'policing on thin ice' and the 'new visibility' of police (Goldsmith, 2010; Brown, 2016).

### **5.2.2 Maximize Police Engagement with the Public**

The theme of "Maximize police engagement with the public" refers to the police organization's intention to increase the impact of police on the public through social media. From my interviews, engaging the community has been heralded as a vital aspect of policing in the two forces. Seventy-one per cent (12 out of 17) respondents thought interaction with the public was one of the main tasks of using Twitter, especially



those who worked as the managers of digital and social development, marketing and public relation officers, and digital and social development officers in both police forces. The engagement of the public was seen as an essential indicator for Communication Officers rather than the increasement of followers as they wanted people to actually “read the tweets”, instead of just “pass it” (IN1) or “scrolling it” (IN11). The acting manager of digital team commented as follows:

*It is all about interaction, it is all about the engagement, I do not really care how many followers we have got, so there is just over a million Twitter followers and 600,000 Facebook fans. It is not to attract people to follow us, I mean, we have got thousands of followers on Twitter. There is only 2.4 million (citizens) in Lionshire anyway. Our priority is not to attract followers, our priority is to inform people and get them to speak to us. If we have got any issues and fight crime via social media. It is very rare that we look at how many followers we have got. (IN10)*

According to the interviews, the focus for the communication has changed from accumulating follower numbers to message delivered and received. The Communication Officers were expected to pay more attention to the quality of posts rather than quantity. The shift in emphasis on the message *read* rather than the message *sent* indicated that the police were more concerned about the message delivered to the audience, rather than just putting out posts. To achieve this goal, Communication Officers have adopted different methods to make the account visible to the public, such as: “*knowing the demographics of the audience that content can be tailored and posted on different social media platform in order to increase the reach*” (IN7); “*pictures and images should be used to make messages reach to the public*” (FG1 and FG2); and “*retweet some positive feedback from the public will increase the reach to followers*” (IN1).

It was also noted that different Communication Officers have varied understandings and concerns regarding on the use of Twitter. Interviewees occupied different positions

within the corporate communication team in the two police forces, which means they focused on and were involved in various aspects of Twitter usage. For instance, the Digital and Social Communication Officers were concerned about maximizing the police reach to the public, while the Press Officers usually emphasized the importance of releasing news that interpret a story from the side of the police. The combination of concerns and efforts of Communication Officers in different positions added up to the different emphasizes and strategies of Twitter usage, thus constructing the multi-dimensional aspects of police communication.

Furthermore, in the context of the austerity era during the 2007-2008 financial crisis, a gradual reduction has been applied to police funding by the Home Office (Kingshott, 2011; Loader, 2013). The cumulated 20% 'real-terms' cut to policing led to a reduction in the number of police officers whilst the police were faced with increasing tasks and new emerging crime threats (Brogden & Ellison, 2013; Greig-Midlane, 2019). It is of great importance to maintain policing services to the public with limited budgets. Social media, therefore, has been suggested highly beneficial to extending police publicity and providing timely and effective updates.

*When you look at policing in general, we have had austerity and cuts to frontline officers and reduced budgets. More workload and fewer staff. Social media is allowing us to fill the gap where we do not have as many offices on the streets as we used to have. So, for a member of the public to be able to see what we are doing and that we are dealing with crime and the concerns they have in communities, even if they see it on their phones or their computer screens, at least they are seeing that as opposed not to see anything happening which is a huge concerning. (IN1)*

It can be concluded from this excerpt that social media has been seen as an effective method to cope with the situation of austerity in police as well as reassuring the public due to the low cost of access and maintenance (Procter, Crump, et al., 2013). Besides, the transparency of policing has been improved by social media and the public could

gain a better understanding of the police service, which could, to some degree, increase police legitimacy (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015). From this perspective, Twitter served as a *broadcaster* to enhance the police's reach of the public via actively posting messages (Crump, 2011). However, Priti Patel, the Home Secretary, posted a tweet on her personal account, accusing the role of social media officer as "unnecessary jobs, ... wasting taxpayers' money" (@patel4witham, 27 August 2019). This was in the context of increasing police numbers and spending the additional funding provided on police constables rather than other police staff. While this accusation could be partially the manifesto of the heated discussion on fair pay for police officers and police staff, it does not fully consist with views of my interviewees.

### **5.2.3 Intelligence and Information Monitoring**

Intelligence and information monitoring refers to the theme that the police rely on social media to keep up with what is new in society and monitor information that is beneficial for policing work (Bérubé et al., 2020; Manning, 2002; Ratcliffe, 2002). Twitter can function as sources of intelligence for policing, helping with crime investigation, providing real-time information about safety issues and information sharing (Crump, 2011; Meijer, 2015). The interviewees agreed with this interpretation, particularly those who worked in digital and social development team and press office team of the two police forces. The general feeling was that using Twitter can help with crime investigation in a way that the traditional policing method can hardly achieve, such as walking the beat, calling for witnesses or information from the community. According to one Digital Communication Officer, this function enabled the police to efficiently target the people they want to speak with and located missing persons within a much quicker period. The following remarks reflected the widely held view that social media is commonly used in gathering information for policing work.

*If we need information, we would post on social media because we have known for a while that we have got a huge audience, and at least one person must have seen that person, or one person must have seen that happening. So, if there is RTC or someone is breaking into a building, or even just simply someone has lost a dog or something, someone must have seen something; someone must have seen somebody suspicious, they might have dashcam footage of a car that would have mentioned. So, posting on social media is a huge advantage for us. Sometimes we get names, we get pictures, we get dashcam footages, we get the exact location of some people.*

*We can also keep an eye on what people post as well. So, what we actually have, we have a buzz monitor<sup>15</sup>, this basically creates, like a hashtag. A hashtag works when anybody talks about it, we can see that. By using the hashtag “asklionshire”, if anybody asks a specific question, say we push out in a chat, like a webchat; basically, this is a platform where you could ask us questions, such as ‘Why don’t you attend that crime’, or ‘why aren’t there any officers on the beat?’ stuff like that. Anything you want to ask us by using the hashtag “asklionshire”, we will usually answer. Anything to do with arson, for example, or if we are not aware, we can just search arson, then if anybody talks about it, we can basically pull and reply: ‘can you give us more information, we want to investigate this’. So, any information that we are trying to get, we are trying to look for, we will do it by the buzz monitor. Not only that as well, but when people post about it, like drugs, or anything like that, what we will do is, we will search it, because people like to post pictures, you do not think we can look at, and they do not think that we can access it, but we can. So, you cannot hide from us. (IN12)*

This quotation demonstrated how the Communication Officer searched for information and monitored intelligence via Twitter. Social media benefited the intelligence-led policing model as it conveys valuable information provided by social media users voluntarily (Burcher & Whelan, 2019). For example, the tensions detected from Twitter

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<sup>15</sup> Buzz monitor: the process of tracking the mentions of a topic or brand name across the Web and social media platforms. It is used as a tool for buzz marketing.

could be used to predict certain behaviours of the users in terms of hate speech and violence regarding targeted social groups, such as minority groups (Burnap et al., 2015; Burnap & Williams, 2015). This function has been noticed and utilized by the police in this research when several years ago, a terrorist attack happened in Lionshire and a bomb exploded in the city centre. According to one Digital Communication Officer, the information spotted on Twitter made the police aware of this emergency and immediately allowed them to take actions. As this Communication Officer explains:

*So, this is what we did in the golden hour. The first tweet we received was very soon after it initially happened. That is when we started to notice the trends. We physically got them in tweets. So, before we even got a call, we got a tweet. We recognized the issue. We wanted to preserve and protect life, so we sent out officers as quick as we possibly could. (IN12)*

Even during the crisis, Lionshire Police were mainly relying on Twitter to collect and publicized information. According to this Communication Officer, who participated in police communication during this incident, there were countless pieces of information and images that the public posted on Twitter that the police became aware of. As termed by the acting manager of the Press Unit, the Lionshire Police adopted a *social media only* policy during the crisis that they posted all the updates and prevention information through social media, and officered used social media as a source of intelligence as well.

Furthermore, it is noted that the police were using social media actively to respond to and clarify rumours or fake news before they could spread further and have serious consequences. Interviewees reported that responding to rumours is also crucial in intelligence monitoring work. For example, Lionshire Police posted a tweet responding to a piece of fake news that has been spread online, clarifying the situation and reassuring the public (see Picture 2).

*We had a 24/7 feed up giving everything that was happening. Just basically replying to everything. Loads of rumours, just squashing those rumours before they started causing alarms or concerns and started scaring people. Just basically reassuring the public that we have got this under control, we are dealing with it. Because that is what you want to hear. Say you are looking on social media because you like gossip, don't you? You like going through, and you want to find out what is happening, what people are saying. So, we are showing a presence, just show that we are reassuring people and being friendly. (IN12)*

Picture 2 A post by Lionshire Police responding to fake news



It is essential for the police to clarify rumours for the public as it sends out messages on behalf of an official authority and the community rely on the police's position, which

embodies and represents the state government (Oh et al., 2013; Weitzer & Reiner, 1985). In particular, police releasing information to the public is a way of “*interpreting stories from our side*” (IN5), which is of significance as the police can now bypass the third party of news media, directly communicating with the public instead (Mawby, 2010). And social media could help to fulfil this goal, as the following makes clear:

*What we do now for the last year, two years, maybe a year, is we put as much as possible on social media and on the website, and the same time, send it here (points at the newspaper), because it means that more people, especially young people, are reading that. And they don't read this (newspaper), this is for older people, they don't read it because it is old fashioned. Also, the journalists from this (newspaper) will take the information and change it, to make it huge and dramatic. And we think, no, the best way is, they (the newspaper journalists) are going to do that, we cannot stop them. But if we want the public to get our version, our interpretation of the message. You can see it, on social media, it's on our website, before the newspapers. (IN5)*

What this Communication Officer described above refers not only to the police interpreting a story from their side, but also reflected a common situation between police and the media, in particular, the ‘competition’ for news and information. It is important for the police to capture their audience’s attention and trust during this ‘competition’, especially when it contrasts with a story presented by the media. In this respect, the police have a better chance of quickly controlling the narrative and gaining public trust and support (Chermak, 1995; Chermak et al., 2006). Therefore, it is crucial for the police to establish its own agenda via social media to promote information to the public, interpret stories and defend their actions through presenting their perspectives by putting their ‘spin’ onto a police or crime story.

### 5.3 Police Communication via Twitter in Practice

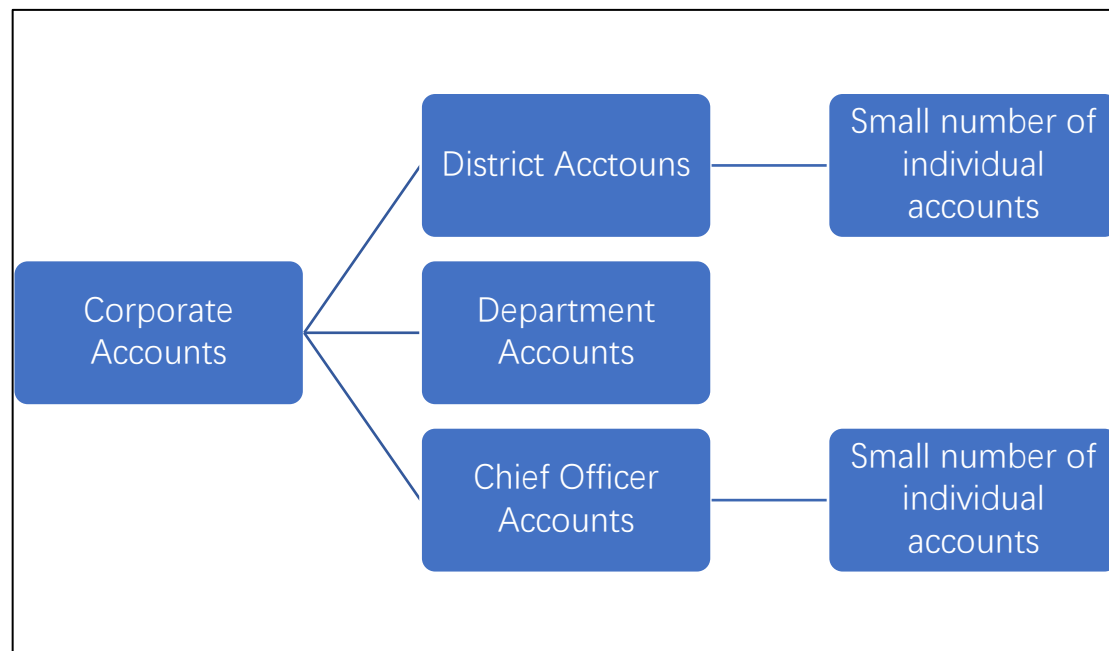
In the communications strategies, both Hawshire and Lionshire Police forces set different layers of Twitter accounts. The corporate Twitter accounts of Hawshire Police were organized in three layers (see Diagram 3), constituted by one hundred and thirty Twitter accounts that are distributed into the ten police districts of Hawshire (IN1). The main corporate account is @hawshirepolice, supported by 1) district accounts<sup>16</sup>, 2) department accounts, and 3) Chief Officer accounts, and a small number of individual accounts included in district accounts and Chief Officer accounts respectively. Comparatively, one hundred and eleven social media accounts across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, and YouTube were managed by Lionshire Police, serving the eleven police divisions of Lionshire. The main corporate account is @lionshirepolice and operated by members of the corporate communication branch. Four further corporate Twitter accounts were noted, including a police music band accounts, a HR department account, a Special Constables team account, and a traffic department account. Usually, the Communication Officers in corporate communication team have full access to all the accounts within their chosen analytics software, and officers in local police divisions and some PCSOs could use individual accounts and the divisional police accounts.

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<sup>16</sup> The district accounts refer to the Twitter accounts operated by local or divisional police team. I use the title for consistent with the terms used by the interviewees in this research.



Diagram 3 The layout of social media structure in Hawshire Police



I also noted in this research, the layout of social media accounts has been changing within the development of using social media in both Hawshire and Lionshire Police. Initially, Hawshire Police set up Twitter accounts for *“every officer with their own names”* but later *“took a lot of them away”* (FG2) due to management issues (IN1). According to the manager of the Digital and Social Development Team, running a large number of social media accounts could be challenging, for example, they used to note some fake Twitter accounts that looks familiar with the actual police accounts. It could, therefore, cause unforeseen risks to the public who are looking for help via social media and might potentially damage the police reputation. Following a different strategy, Lionshire Police first set up the account layout based on geographical features and gave the traffic department a separate account because it does not belong to any specific area. According to the acting manager of the Digital Communication Unit of Lionshire, a geographical structure was preferred over business areas.

With the development of social media, Lionshire Police added more accounts to different functional teams, such as the undercover team I observed. This increased in departmental accounts developed could be the results of 1) the force had gained more experience and confidence in managing social media accounts, and 2) different police teams could help engage with the public via varied aspects of policing. However, it is noted that there is a clear line between corporate accounts and divisional accounts in terms of social media strategy. First, corporate accounts tended to deal with queries and issues of higher priority because geographically, the corporate account represented the whole area of the force and has greater legitimacy and a more substantial audience. The localized accounts, on the other hand, were mostly influenced by local contextual issues and update information and stories in their area, contributing to up-to-date information on neighbourhood policing. Tweets of localized accounts were mainly about “small” stories that focused on neighbourhood and community (IN2), more locally concerned, and were of “here and now” messages (FG1 and FG2).

*FG2: Then... the local account is more of, ‘what we are doing now, what we are doing in our community, and this is who we just arrested’, more sort of day-to-day things happening, rather than something in a big picture.*

*FG1:...In the Town C, there is a lot of people coming to the town centre, and the local police account tweets lots of what is going on there, it was good information, it was providing people with correct information.*

Another distinction between corporate accounts and localized accounts was the “characteristics” of different account. “Formal” and “corporate” are adjectives mostly used by interviewees (10/17) to describe the features of corporate accounts. Compared to localized accounts or individual accounts, interviewees thought corporate accounts should be the “best of the best” (IN2). This was because it dealt with the whole area of the force rather than a specific division or neighbourhood (IN10),

communicating the big picture through social media and maintaining the brand of the force. Other reasons also included that it “provide[d] professional message and professional opinions” (IN1); it has “wider audience”, “bigger influence”, and may affect the whole area (IN15). Furthermore, as the representative of the police force, corporate accounts were used when feeding into conversations at a different level, such as a national conversation on policing or replying to national media interests.

Nonetheless, there was considerable recognition concerning the gap between how interviewees thought the corporate accounts were currently communicating and how they ought to be. The majority of interviewees (14/17) felt that it is necessary to maintain police corporate account formally due to the nature of policing. However, they suggested this formal side should be combined with either ‘less formal’ sides or ‘engaging personalities’ to improve the reach and impact on the public. Several interviewees (6/17) were supportive of this claim that they believed the corporate account should be formal and business oriented, while other interviewees suggested that a ‘soft side’ to the corporate account could increase the engagement with the public (IN3). The following excerpt was selected as an example:

*It (the corporate account) is still quite formal, that is one of the things that we are going to look for a change. At the moment, that would just be posted on social media when really... it probably should be tailored, more to our social media audience, because they would not necessarily find that as engaging, as someone who had read a newspaper or something like that. So, we are looking at changing our tone in there, but I would say, at the moment, I would say it is more informative, and that is the sort of characteristic. It is not very exciting. (IN15)*

Though the Communication Officers were aware of the importance of injecting an engaging and humanizing face to the corporate account, it remained formal and remote to the public. The corporate account was, according to IN12, supposed to deal with more severe cases and large numbers of messages with a professional image,

whereas a district account with a “personal twist” can better engage with the local communities.

### **5.3.1 The Power of Images**

Different Communication Officers employed varied approaches to present the police force’s image to the public via social media. The disparity between Communication Officers’ communication strategies was considerable, with some interviewees from Hawshire Police suggesting that posting good stories about the police and policing service is essential for police to present themselves (see the discussion in 5.2.1.2), because “*it helps more people to see it, and also got more Likes to share stories across the sites*” (IN3). While others described a different communication approach through the perspective of using images to communicate (FG3, FG4 and IN11). In the focus group, the CMI officers, for example, highlighted the importance of image use in posts to prevent people from misinterpreting the meaning of text or language use. The meaning of images, on the other hand, is regarded as universal in this context.

*FG5: Well, language changes as well, read something from 100 years ago.*

*FG3: No (suggesting that he cannot understand something from 100 years ago).*

*FG5: If it is not English, I would not be able to understand what they say, so that involves image. Image means the same, not difficult to interpret what images show to you.*

*FG3: I can take photographs of two people laughing together, and that is universal. You know, a police officer talking to a member of the public, laughing, you could speak English, you could speak Japanese, you could speak a language from Africa, you could write a press release, and only in English, because that is what you understand. But everybody understands images, and the image would still convey the same emotion for another 100 years. And that is, for me, that is the fundamental power of an image.*

The situation described above that “*police officer talking to a member of the public, laughing*” projects an example of good community engagement between the public and the bobby, evidently supporting the CMI officer’s point that an audience with different backgrounds could easily decode the meanings conveyed in images. In terms of image types used in posts, interviewees of the two forces responded differently. For instance, interviewees from Hawshire Police reported that they mainly used “*photos were taken during patrol*”, or “*photoshopped pictures with police labels*” (IN1). The two most common reasons given for this were that all the posted photos must have copyrights, and a photoshopped image by the corporate communication team or a picture taken by the officer himself has the least copyright risks. Additionally, some photos would be chosen because they are “*more interesting*” and sometimes “*out of public’s expectation*” (IN3), such as the Chief Constable’s selfies. Usually, higher-ranking officials such as the chief constable, are considered serious and remote, which is contrast to the childish action – taking selfies. Therefore, a selfie of a chief constable, especially when he is selfie-ing with other police officers, can potentially reduce social distance between the high-ranking officials and police officers on the one hand, and presents an equal and engaging image of the police due to such contrasts. By comparison in Lionshire, one Digital and Communication Officer felt strongly that pictures of animals in tweets can have significant effects on getting likes and retweets:

*...Because wherever we put animals, people, you know, it goes... social media goes crazy. What we find is, we have been doing this for years, that we can pick up trends and patterns. So, we know, that image makes differences. The times that we post out without images, we maybe get 2 or 3 retweets or likes, but when we put an image on, it can be seventy, an image can make all the differences. We noticed that, we actually have done that before, where we have tested it that we send one message out without putting a picture, and we send the same message with a picture. You gonna see it straight away, with the image. Because when you are scrolling, when you scroll through the twitter account, you do not notice the text, you noticed the images. (IN11)*

The experiment conducted by this Digital and Communication Officer and his colleagues indicated that social media users are more attracted to images rather than texts, especially to those pictures about animals. People scroll their Twitter page to browse information, and information with images can be decoded almost immediately while reading the text information requires more time and attention (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). Within this social context, an image with engaging content has better chances to win people's attention and interaction (Cardenas et al., 2013). Other than that, another quasi-experiment mentioned by this Digital and Communication Officer was that they posted two tweets with the same text content, one attached an animal picture while the other did not, and it turned out that the one with animal images received much higher public engagement in the end. As this Digital and Communication Officer pointed out:

*(The image of) animals, has a massive impact on 'likes', it is amazing. So, what we do is, we do some tweets from the day, or whatever, towards the end of week we might put out one with the dogs, and horses. Because that is what people like. That is what they want. It is amazing, you just look, 590 (refers to an example, likes), again. So, we send that twice (laugh). Look, this one is to do with Halloweens, it is only 15, 15 (refers to the Likes and Comments of a tweet). But if you put a dog or a horse on, it just goes amazingly high. We have learnt that, we learnt that years ago, that is the crazy thing. You could have an old man who has been hit by a bus, really sad. But you will not get anyone retweet that, as soon as a dog or a horse, (the numbers go) straight away... So that you know you are going to get 400 likes. The cuter the pictures, the better the response you will get. (IN11)*

This excerpt once again indicated that people do not actually pay much attention to the specific text content on Twitter, but mainly be attracted by the pictures they like. It also suggested a stereotypical trait of "The British love their animals." Communication Officers have realised the power of animal images as the above mentioned Digital and Communication Officer commented "we have learned it years ago". Thus, the police began to frequently send tweets with animal images to attract users' attention, even if

the content of the tweets sometimes had nothing to do with police work. This move seemed to strengthen the “interaction” with followers, but arguably only to get likes. It contradicts, however, the purpose of police communication, which was intended for the public to engage with the *content* of police tweets.

The opinion of PIN2 came from a different angle. Working as a police officer and then a Sergeant for decades, this interviewee is experienced in policing work and has been in charge of several police localized Twitter accounts for years. PIN2 pointed out that while the corporate account stays “*formal and post serious information*”, a local policing Twitter account could have more interpersonal touch and have distinct characteristics by appearing “*pink and fluffy*” to the public. This refers to a feeling that the police are non-threatening and approachable to the public. This interviewee explained that she constructed the accounts through utilizing images of young female police officers laughing with the public, therefore buying into the trope that usually, woman officers have a better relationship with the community, have better interpersonal skills and empathy in helping the vulnerable, especially those who suffered from violence or sexual abuse (Brown & Woolfenden, 2011; Miller, 1999b; Page, 2007; Schuller & Stewart, 2000). I wrote the following field note after my conversation with her:

*PIN2 believed that the corporate account is ‘far too corporate’, which means they are less personal and less characterized. Compared to the localized team account, the corporate account usually broadcast news only and use official tones more often, while the team account appears to be more approachable. She also referred to the account she managed as ‘pink and fluffy’, which presents a characteristic of being lively and cuddly. She showed the account to me, demonstrating that images with a feature of fluffy and feminine, which contains the pink element literally; and images with ‘fluffy objects’ such as toy bears or cuddling dolls, usually get more likes or engagement.*

*– Fieldnotes in Hawshire Police*

The interviews with PIN2 reflected another facet in policing work that female officers are historically regarded as the symbols of the soft side of the police organization where traditionally masculinity and power were celebrated (Crank, 2004; Loftus, 2009; Smith & Gray, 1985). Women officers are considered less aggressive and employ less confrontational styles when interacting with the public (Rabe-Hemp, 2009; Silvestri et al., 2013), and are more likely to deal with the soft work of police services, such as community work (Martin, 1999). Thus, with the advent of community policing in the UK, such 'feminine' traits are found crucial in community policing and women serve as the communicators and problem solvers (Lonsway, Wood, & Spillar, 2002; Miller, 1999). It was partially the reason why PIN2 – a female officer – would like to use more women officers' image attached to the tweets, delivering the message of 'engage with the community' and 'no confrontation'.

FG3 in Lionshire, however, suggested an alternative explanation about this "animal and soft images make a difference" issue. In his view, the "soft and pink" feeling and animal images have similarities regarding their connotative "harmless and cuteness nature", which played an important role in arousing public goodwill.

*FG3: Not all of our female police are soft (laugh), by all means, but I know some very tough female officers (laugh), and there are some very soft male officers. you know, it is not necessary, it is not about gender, it is about the characteristics of the person. But, yes, the public does, kids will tend to respond to people who look more like their moms, you know, they will, that is, it is the human nature, isn't it? Children will run to women rather than men because the nurturing roles of women. Little puppies and things, or that kind of stuff, helps break down barriers. That is what is really all about.*

Generated from the above interpretation, pictures with puppies, children and female officers or animations could have a common feature that can be considered as non-threatening and cute. It is noted that cuteness can also cause compassion and tenderness, and further encourages attention and care of the observer (Griskevicius



et al., 2010; Thompson-Booth et al., 2014). Therefore, those working within communication teams saw it advantageous for police forces to use many pictures with “cute” characteristics, such as a puppy, kitten, and horse. Because the cute pictures are more likely – and were confirmed by the “experiment” in Lionshire Police twitter usage mentioned above- to increase the public engagement and break down barriers. In this context, posting tweets with animal pictures is not just about getting likes, but express the notion of *shared value* of the police and the public by showing pictures that could arouse public empathy. Police legitimacy, as Tankebe (2009b) has pointed out, is reflected in the belief that the police share the general public’s mainstream values. By “breaking down barriers” (FG3), Communication Officers presented a non-threatening civilian side to the public, and enhance police legitimacy through illustrating the shared understanding and beliefs of society.

### **5.3.2 Citizens in Uniform: Ethos of British Police**

The doctrine of the British police originated from the Peelian Principles that the police are citizens in uniforms. Being described as the guardian of the general public against criminals and dangers, the characteristics of the police in England and Wales are those of a civilian force that maintains public order with minimal force, which is distinct from traditional continental models, such as the French model (Emsley, 1992; Reiner, 2000b). Officers in both Hawshire and Lionshire force expressed great pride in pursuing the police career. A retired police officer in Hawshire Police commented that although he loves teaching and left the police organization and being a teacher for three years, he still chose to come back to the police serving as a Special Constable. As he explains:

*It is a good job (being a police officer) actually. It is rewarding as well, and that is why I love teaching and came back to be a police officer. Because I had been in the police from the age of 18 to 48. So, my 30 years was there and then three years away, and I came back, and I am still here now. (IN7)*

It was echoed by other interviewees that there is special career pride for being a British police officer. One Communication Officer in Hawshire asserted that the British police has a unique ethos compared to officers in any other countries that *“we do not carry them (guns), do not feel comfortable. Also, we wear the uniform properly. So, we do not look like police in America and New York. Sometimes you see the police eating hamburgers, smoking. Not looking good, and some other countries in Europe and they are, fat (whispering). You cannot catch people if you are fat.”* (IN5) This mirrored comments by FG3 and FG4 during the focus group:

*FG3: British policing has a different ethos to most of the police in other countries. If you go to France, the police are much more an arm of the states, police living in barracks, like an army. And they are not, in many places, very popular with the public.*

*FG4: Yeah, a different level really, from culturally.*

*FG3: If you go to Spain, there are three different levels of policing, but you will see they are all armed, they all have guns, that is much more, sort of...*

*FG4: Intimidating.*

*FG3: Yeah. But we always try policing by consent, by working with the public, rather than telling the public what to do, that is not our job. We do not tell people what to do unless it is breaking the law.*

Interviewees from both police forces mentioned the unique ethos of British police, which included *“properly wear uniforms”*, *“do not carry guns”* and *“working with the public”*. However, these descriptions contrasted what Reiner (2000) terms as the traditional police role that is crime oriented and celebrate violence and excitement (Crank, 2004; Smith & Gray, 1985). The conflict of the recognized police ethos could be the by-product of the development of neighbourhood policing in the UK (Fielding, 1995). The neighbourhood policing emphasized crime prevention over crime fighting, as Tilley (2008, p. 376) described ‘policing *with* and *for* the community, rather than

policing of the community'. Within this context, it is less important for a police officer to be physically intimidating than but to be multi-skilled. One interviewee from Hawshire described this shift as follows:

*IN5: I think to be a police officer, to be a good police officer, you have to have a lot of skills. Maybe 50 years ago, you did not need to, all you need is to be...(acting)*

*YaXian: Being strong?*

*IN5: Be strong. But now, you have to be diplomatic. You have to use your brain, not just be physically strong.*

Neighbourhood policing may not be the only drive behind this shift. The rapid development of networking techniques could be another boost in this changing of police culture that it encouraged a shift in policing style from physically catching criminals to an intelligence-driven approach. For example, rather than physically trace criminals, CCTV footages, facial recognition, thermal imaging and automatic number-plate recognition system enable the police to effectively detect, deter and disrupt criminality including tackling organised crime and traffic crimes (Gannoni et al., 2017). In this context, the physical qualities of police officers have become subordinate, and other soft skills such as interpersonal skills, community skills and skills of using communication techniques were given more credits (Tilley, 2003). This has been particularly pointed out by the older police officers during interviews. With nine years of serving in Hawshire Police, IN5 witnessed the impact brought by modern communication techniques, commented that *"social media is completely changing the dynamic of the way you give information... And the method is changing every six months, you have to learn different techniques in time"*. Another interviewee of Lionshire, FG3, who have over thirty-year working experience, also mentioned the momentous changes brought by the communication techniques in the focus group. For example, this interviewee pointed out that they used to hire post-boys to physically deliver the manually edited news-tape to the local news station, waited for hours to

have the news broadcasted and received no feedback from the public. By comparison, the police now can send a piece of appeal via social media, having the information shared and retweeted, and receiving a large number of responses within seconds. Therefore, neighbourhood policing, as well as the advanced development of technology contributed, to some extent, to the changing of police culture to less physical, confrontational characteristics.

### **5.3.3 Multi-Faceted Representation of the Police**

As noted in Chapter Three, in the jurisdiction of Lionshire Police, there are diverse minority ethnic communities. One of the CMI Officers explained in the focus group that:

*FG3: We got the whole areas. There are populated by people from different parts of the world. So if you go about a mile that way, you will find it is almost 80 per cent of Muslim people; If you go another mile of the road, it is probably 80 per cent of Jewish people; If you go five miles that way, it is probably 60 per cent, 70 per cent people from the Caribbean, Africa background. We got people from everywhere, from Poland and Eastern Europe.*

This excerpt indicated the diversity of communities within the jurisdiction of Lionshire Police. In order to better serve and represent the communities that has a diverse cultural and ethnic background, the police have tried a number of different approaches, and recruiting police personnel with different ethnic background was one of such efforts. According to one interviewee, the traditional recruitment pattern has favourably focused on “*English, white people*” and heterosexual police officers. It is now “*changed completely the way we recruit people, trying to bring more diversities*” (FG3). In particular, more officers of minority ethnic background, different sexual orientations and women have been recruited in recent years, which brings benefits to the police relations with the community, as well as to police legitimacy (Decker & Smith, 1980; Foster, 2003; Russell, 2017). One reason for such changes could be that, highlighted

in the Peelian Principle, the police need to be representative to the policed, as FG3 demonstrated in the focus group:

*FG3: The force reflects the people who live here, rather than us imposing a law over the people. Sometimes you have to do difficult things, you know, sometimes you have to take away people's liberties, and sometimes people will say when you do that. If we arrest somebody who is a Muslim, they will be angry. And the first thing they quite often say is that 'You arrest him because he is a Muslim.' No, because we think you committed a crime, and we do this across the board, and you may well off being arrested by a Muslim officer, not somebody else. It is trying to show the fairness of the system.*

The explanation above demonstrated the rationale and necessity of employing officers with diverse ethnic background. The changes in police recruits reflected a more open attitude towards homosexual and minority ethnic officers in the police organization. More importantly, police are starting to use homosexual and minority ethnic officers as a marketing point to deliver the message of "openness and equality". It is regarded as one method for the police to bond with the community, especially those from minority groups; and in the hope of gaining the legitimacy from people who used to be remote from the police and suspicious of them.

## **5.4 Risks of Police Using Social Media**

### **5.4.1 The Conflicts Between Different Parts of the Police**

Although none of the interviewees were vocally opposed to social media usage, there was, nevertheless, resistance to the police use of social media observed during the fieldwork. For instance, at the first night shift of the undercover team of Lionshire Police, One Digital Communication Officer (IN12) from the corporate communication branch gave a brief introduction about corporate Twitter usage to the manager of the undercover unit of Lionshire Police (IN16), and registered a personal account for him

at the briefing room of the undercover team. IN12 briefed IN16 that it is his choice to post messages via Twitter to present to the public about their work when necessary, encouraging interactions and followers from the citizens. IN16 listened to all the induction and regulations of police use of Twitter, and replied, *"thanks for the account...but we are the undercover team. I will definitely not use that"*.

Of – perhaps obvious – significance here is that risk of exposure towards undercover policing practices and covert police officers. Unlike the 'mainstream', uniformed police culture, undercover police's occupational culture emphasizes becoming invisible with hidden identities (Cockcroft, 2007; Foster, 2003; Loftus et al., 2016). This contrasts sharply with the *raison d'être* of "present police work and engage with the public" inherent to social media communication and which is promoted by management. Hence there are tensions between different functions of the police and between different departments within the same organization. The above extract also reflected an officer's cynicism towards the management emphasis on such initiatives. Researchers noted that in the police organization, there is a chasm between the rank-and-file officers and senior officers (Graef, 1989a; Reuss-Ianni, 1983). From my perspective, this chasm has been exposed and exacerbated by the need to engage with the public in the social media era. The disagreement with the management was aggravated by what the rank-and-file officers saw as impractical and unnecessary. As a result, the rank-and-file officers presented a negative attitude towards the social media operation.

Other than police officers from the undercover team, some Communication Officers have reservations about, and little interest in using social media. Reflected in the communication training session that some Communication Officers showed a negative attitude to social media training and practice. They were not motivated to operate social media, but rather complied to the direction of their superiors to participate in such training. According to the training officers of Lionshire corporate communication (IN11 and IN12), if a Communication Officer was willing to learn how to use social media

during training, it is likely that s/he would be able to use social media well in practical operations, and vice versa. With this respect, officers who were on request by their superiors to attend the training rather than of their free will, were more likely to have a less satisfying performance of operating the corporate account:

*I think the problem is sometimes you have people in training, and they do not want to touch social media. Then I am like, 'why are you here?', they are like 'oh, my boss sent me', I am like, 'ok....' (IN11)*

The extract above demonstrated that technical innovation could meet challenges inwardly within police organizations (Chan, 2001). Several reasons may explain this opposition to Twitter usage. First, officers were worried that the inappropriate use of social media might cause threats to police image and reputation due to the ubiquitous impact of social media (HMIC, 2012; McIntee, 2016). As ACPO (2013, p. 7) reminds police officers that they "...should be mindful of the viral effect of the Internet and social media and the potential for the smallest piece of information to be upscaled beyond all expectations." Second, due to the extensive scrutiny of policing and police officers online, the 'new visibility' of policing brings extra pressure and concerns to police officers when using social media (Goldsmith, 2015). The police are subject to observation by the media and anyone with the access to mobile techniques and portable recording equipment with functions to upload information on the Internet. As the manager of Digital and Social Development Team of Hawshire illustrated in the interview that *"I believe the body-wear camera is good for us, because it protects us in some ways, you know, we are watched and recorded when enforcing the law. We have to be very careful"* (IN1). Finally, Communication Officers were expected to have *"a full range of knowledge"* (IN5) in terms of social media use. *"It is their job to know the media law and policies, and what to send out"* (IN10). The breaches of media law may lead to severe consequences from account suspension, re-training, to even *job loss* (IN1). For instance, Lionshire Police would suspend social media accounts if s/he deems them to be misused by an Communication Officer. Members of the

communication department in Hawshire also presented examples of cases of job loss due to misuse of social media during training, which alerted Communication Officers to the need to pay close attention to the content posted via social media. This severe consequence restrains Communication Officers' willingness to use social media to some extent (Bullock, 2018a) that they were worried about the inappropriately use of social media might jeopardize their career.

#### **5.4.2 The Sense of Mission and Off-duty Use of Twitter**

Nevertheless, many police officers have adjusted to the ubiquity of social media and were willing to participate in learning about social media use and operating corporate social media accounts. As described by one of the training officers in Lionshire, *"Thankfully, a lot of them are embracing social media. They were scared at first, and now they love it, enjoy it. Some people even do it in their own time"* (IN11). With increasing interests in social media and other incentives, such as the sense of responsibility, some Communication Officers were self-motivated to regularly log-in to the account and interact with the public. This Digital Communication Officer further explained that maintaining an account could make officers realise the responsibility of the job of representing the police online and thus bringing a sense of satisfaction for helping the public. In this respect, the satisfaction towards the job and organization would be increased, which is important for enhancing Communication Officers' self-legitimacy (Mawby, 2002a).

*Sometimes, because from the inside, I feel a little bit positive, you know, I have done something good, and it is the same with these people. They feel like, I helped someone out, I felt good. I feel that I am responsible for these accounts: they asked me a question, I helped them out, I feel satisfied that I helped them out. So, I can understand from that point of view, that some of them do it well because they feel responsible. And that is another thing of social media, you kind of do have some responsibility over the account. When you are tweeting stuff, you do need to maintain it as well. So, you have to make sure it is being looked after, people might send direct messages,*



*and that's why a Digital Communication Officer goes through those direct messages because she knows she has lots to go through, and that is why we choose this communication tool because we are offering the service because this is a real person behind this message. (IN11)*

We can draw from the training officer's comments that public feedback could, at least to some point, enhance the sense of satisfaction and responsibility of Communication Officers, who were likely to be motivated internally to help people via using social media. Drawn from the Peelian principles that the police were created to defend and protect citizens in need, and through which to ground the police's moral legitimization (Beetham, 1991). Helping others has the potential to fulfil a sense of career achievement and achieve a sense of mission in a policing career (Reiner, 2000). In this respect, engaging with citizens via social media could increase police effectiveness through helping people, which is important for forming police legitimacy (Jackson, Bradford, Stanko, & Hohl, 2012b). It further boosts the sense of responsibility of the Communication Officers, enhancing the perception of self-legitimacy and confidence of the rightfulness of exercising police powers, thus increasing the working effectiveness and police legitimacy externally (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012; Mawby, 2002a). Driven by the sense of mission, some officers would operate social media even during off-duty hours. As this training officer put it, *"because it (Twitter account) can be accessed by any mobile devices. Some of them actually answer the questions when they are not working"* (IN11).

However, there were concerns about police use corporate accounts after work. While helping the public was regarded as a way of achieving career pride, it could be problematic that police officers operate the corporate social media accounts during off-duty as it was opposite to the *Guidelines on the Safe Use of the Internet and Social Media by Police Officers and Police Staff* (2013):

*“Police Officers and police staff should avoid using the Internet and social media off duty after consuming alcohol or when their judgement may be impaired for other reasons.”*

*– Quote from ACPO, 2013 p. 5*

Communication Officers working off-duty could be problematic and involves ethical challenges (Davids, 2006). Whether on or off duty, any action of the corporate account reflects on the force. As Schneider (2016) noted, police officers, especially the ‘frontline people’ who use Twitter on behalf of the institution work as the representatives of the police. Their strategic communication via Twitter posts may glue police relationship with the communities, whereas any inappropriate use of social media could also lead to the decline of trust in the police and jeopardise police legitimacy. That is why the communication policies in Lionshire Police explicitly mentioned that *“all who use such sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, are still expected to conform to professional standards of behaviour, even when using private accounts.”*

#### **5.4.3 Encrypted Information: Use of Police Jargon and Dark Humour**

The concept of police occupational culture among individual officer is germane for understanding the tweeting practice I observed. Selznick (1950) believed that in the police service, thinking and actions of police officers become institutionalized and valued in themselves. This view is named the institutional perspective and is used to explore rationale and meanings that underpin behaviours that are taken for granted within an organizational environment, such as the police (DiMaggio, 1991). In the context of policing, it is common that police officers use jargon to communicate with each other as it creates a sense of solidarity and excludes outsiders (Kingshott et al., 2004). Reflected in tweets, there were jargon noted in some Twitter posts. Many Communication Officers (6/17) were attempting to avoid using jargon as it creates communication problems among the general public (Baldi & Gelbsten, 2004). One interviewee commented on this phenomenon as follows:

*IN7: Because we tend to become very, very institutionalized, and then we start using jargon, police jargon. So, jargon within our conversation, and you see this with some of the messages that go on social media, on Facebook and all of those social media tools, those police officers will put an abbreviation in like RTC.*

*YaXian: RTC means?*

*IN7: Road Traffic Collison. But they are assuming that people always know what we're talking about. And that is what you have got to look at when you say something. You are using this communication tool; you have got to make sure that your audience understands the message. It is very important because if they do not see your message and do not understand your message, and if it is not in a language that they can communicate with you, you are missing the point.*

This extract demonstrated that the use of police jargon could harm public engagement to some extent. As one of the representations of police culture, police jargon can enhance the bond between police officers and exclude other external characters, strengthening the internal sense of solidarity within the police culture (Kingshott et al., 2004; Manning, 1992b; Westley, 1970). However, it can also confuse the audience who are not familiar with the abbreviation and lead to a gap in understanding. Many Communication Officers have realised this problem and have been making efforts to avoid this. For instance, One Communication Officer in Hawshire advocated the use of “*simple language*” in the posts (IN2). He further reported that if a Communication Officer was uncertain about a post’s wording, one Digital and Social Communication Officer would help to (re)phase the content. Likewise, in Lionshire, one of the training officers pointed out that police communication should be “easy to understand for the public” (IN12), and IN14 would ask other colleagues to re-read and re-word posts before they are sent out.

Furthermore, the tendency of displaying dark humour was also noted during the fieldwork. The warped sense of humour, as Loftus (2009, p. 10) suggested, is a part

of police culture that officers play “jokes about the personal tragedies they routinely encountered”. Particularly in this study, dark humour was sometimes deposited in police tweets, yet resulted in severe consequences. The following fieldnote extracted from the communication training in Hawshire was an example:

*The training officer presented several posts to the Communication Officers as cases study material. He asked the interviewees to distinguish the good posts from the bad ones. One of those was Merseyside Police responding to a tweet sent to its official Twitter account following Everton’s 6-2 victory over Sunderland. A Twitter user wrote to the police “Hello. I would like to report an incident of rape that occurred at Goodison Park, Liverpool, on November 1<sup>st</sup> at 3:00.” In response, Merseyside Police wrote: ‘Just to confirm there was no actual rape for me? Sunderland certainly got caught with their pants down though.’ Although the force deleted this tweet soon in two hours and posted three tweets apologizing and pledging to carry out an investigation, it is without a doubt that the force came under fire due to the jokes. Moreover, according to the training officer, the police staff who posted this tweet left the force after this joke issue.*

*Fieldnotes – Communication Training in Hawshire Police*

Humour is important in police work as it acts as a coping mechanism for the unpredictable and dangerous nature of the police occupation, and serves the function of enhancing the defensive solidarity among officer (Loftus, 2009; Mayhew, 2001). The dark humour, however, like police jargons, could only be perceived and accepted internally, within the police organization. Once these elements were presented on social media to the general public, it would potentially cause harm, confusion and misunderstandings, which may jeopardize police legitimacy.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter explored the views and understandings of Communication Officers working within police organisations regarding social media use, highlighting several

factors involved in the purpose and experiences of police use social media. The most significant finding is that communication strategies have been crafted and used in Twitter communication to help the police construct a favourable image and gain public understanding and support – enhance police legitimacy. Through helping citizens via social media engagement, the sense of career satisfaction of Communication Officers could, to some extent, be strengthened and highlights – for them – the rightfulness of the police work. With the enhanced of self-legitimacy, Communication Officers are likely to increase the working performance, which may impact the police's external performance and effectiveness, thus, in turn, further enhances this aspect of police legitimacy.

The external environment of police communication has been changing rapidly, bringing both opportunities and potential risks for the police's engagement with the public, especially via social media. Police are managerially encouraged to use social media to assist policing work (ACPO, 2013; Brown & Quinton, 2013; Crump, 2011), and specialized departments and branches have been created and strengthened to conduct this communication work, such as the corporate communication team in Hawshire and the corporate communication branch in Lionshire (Mawby & Gisby, 2009). Communication Officers used different methods to conduct police communication via Twitter. Of key relevance is that they attempted to conduct reputation management through constructing unique brand personalities and telling good stories about the police. Additionally, Communication Officers used Twitter to monitor the trending topics in public social media communication and other intelligence that might be helpful for assisting criminal investigations.

Furthermore, incorporating communication tools like Twitter into public communication has the potential to both reflect the changing police culture as well as create new cultures within police departments (Skogan & Hartnett, 1997). For example, the community policing ethos of British police is reflected in social media communication that the police were presented as “open, friendly and approachable” characters. In

addition, the traditional masculine ethos of the police that was dominated by white male officers (Loftus, 2008), the police image has been changing to be more diverse, at least from the representation of the social media. The recruitment of police officers from sexual and racial minorities as an example of this changing police culture, and representing officers with diverse backgrounds suggested their attempts to be more representative to the public, which is an important factor in construct police legitimacy.

## Chapter Six. Understanding Police Twitter Practices

### 6.1 Introduction

The previous finding chapters explored how the Communication Officers inside the two forces viewed and operated police tweets based on their different roles. How they were trained, and their use of twitter monitored and evaluated by the organizations. Communication Officers utilized various methods to unlock the main functions of social media, which I have identified as the following key themes: *reputation management, maximize police reach to the public, intelligence and information monitoring, and engagement with the community*. To understand the extent to which the organizational requirements are achieved, and how the police tweets have been presented to the public, this chapter will further explore how the police use Twitter to communicate with their external audiences under the managed agendas. Research data was generated from tweets posted via their corporate accounts.

In particular, this chapter will try to find out what categories of tweets are posted by the two police corporate Twitter accounts, and what strategies were used for communication. In the UK, following the national guidance and principles of social media use (ACPO, 2013; College of Policing, 2013), different police organizations tailor their posts in line with the communication needs of the force and local characteristics of the communities within force areas. The posted tweets are the product of policing communication that is viewed by and affects, each social media user, influencing the public perceptions and expectations about the police in a broader context. In this research, tweets from Hawshire and Lionshire Police corporate Twitter accounts (@HSPolice and @LSPolice) ranging from 00:00:00, 1 January 2018 to 23:59:59, 30 June 2018 were chosen as research data (see Chapter Three). The text of each tweet, along with the time of post, hashtags used, users mentioned, and numbers of retweets, comments and likes were collected. As in, this resulted in 344810 words of Twitter text of Lionshire posts and 182685 words of Hawshire's. Through a

descriptive analysis, the next section will address the content of police posts and the level of their engagement, making comparison and contrast of the tweets posted on the corporate Twitter accounts of Hawshire and Lionshire Police, and explore the different strategies applied in the police communication.

## 6.2 The Corporate Twitter Accounts of Hawshire's and Lionshire's

Hawshire Police joined the Twitter platform and made its first post in 2009. The main corporate account (@HSPolice) is now following 167 users and maintaining 94,100 followers, whereas the main corporate account of Lionshire Police (@LSPolice) has 588,600 followers while following 584 users. Both accounts stated on their profile pages that the corporate accounts are monitored from Monday to Friday. In particular, they inform people that the corporate Twitter accounts are *not* for reporting crimes and provide emergency and non-emergency numbers of the UK on the profile pages for anyone who may need these as this has been following the guidelines of ACPO (2013).

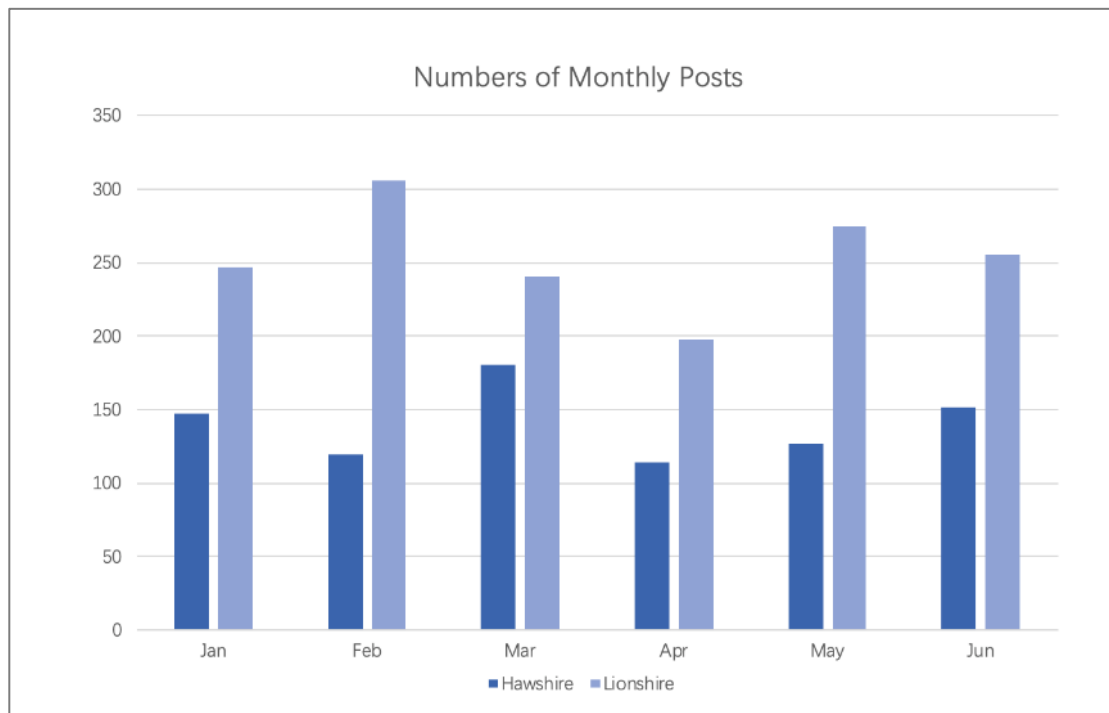
Both Hawshire and Lionshire Police are active users of Twitter. Under the organizational *"regular updates" policy* (see 5.1.1), Communication Officers use the corporate accounts daily, including weekends. In total, Lionshire Police posted 1521 tweets as almost twice as that of the Hawshire Police (840 posts) in the six months (see Table 3).

Table 3 General Information on posts of Hawshire and Lionshire Police

	Num. of Posts	Mean of Monthly Posts	Mean of Daily Posts
Hawshire Police	840	140	5
Lionshire Police	1521	254	8



Diagram 4 Numbers of Monthly Posts by Hawshire and Lionshire Police



Data suggested that Lionshire Police has a higher daily post (8 tweets per day) and monthly post (254 tweets per month), whereas these figures in Hawshire Police were 5 and 140 respectively (see Diagram 4). This could be the result of 1) the greater population in Lionshire and a population that is generally younger than that of Hawshire, 2) more crimes and incidents have been identified and dealt with by Lionshire Police, based on data from the UKCrimeStats (UKCrimeStats, 2020), 3) Lionshire Police Twitter account has more followers, and 4) regularly communication will encourage more interaction from the public and brings more followers, forming a communication-feedback-response-engagement circle.

### 6.3 Tweeting Strategies Used by Hawshire and Lionshire Force

Presentational strategies were commonly used in police work that it is 'the predominant means by which the police present their mission, mandate, and actions to the public at large' (Manning, 1997, p. 119). Police employed various methods to self-presentation

to the public in order to control of information, construct reputation and images, and maintain the legitimacy and credibility of the institution (Ericson et al., 1991; Manning, 1997; Wall & Williams, 2007).

Based on an analysis of American government e-communications, Mergel (2012, 2014) proposed “Push, Pull, Networking and Transaction” strategies for social media use. Following on this, Meijer and Thaens (2013) found out that most police departments in America employed a combination of ‘Push,’ ‘Pull,’ and ‘Networking’ strategies in social media performance, while there is little supporting evidence of the use of ‘Transaction’ strategy. Similar results have been found elsewhere that Brainard and Edlins (2015) reported that many police departments use social media as a tool for *pushing* information into the public domain rather than interaction or collaboration. Although police use of Facebook showed some positive signs of network building and engaging with the public, the majority of police departments remained a ‘push’ strategy in social media operation (Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Crump, 2011; Lee & McGovern, 2013c; Procter, Crump, et al., 2013).

Being inspired by Crump (2011), Deneff et al. (2013), Heverin & Zach (2010) and Mergel (2012b), this research analysed posted tweets based on the purpose beneath each tweet. Terms including “Push,” “Pull,” and “Networking” were used to describe the communication models of each post, and a set of themes and subthemes were generated from the coding process, which will be discussed in the following section. In terms of strategy use, data suggested that there is a considerable difference between individual police forces. Using the categories adapted from Meijer & Thaens (2013) and Mergel (2014) typologies, evidence suggested that three communication strategy models (Push, Pull and Networking, excluding the Transaction) were used by both Hawshire and Lionshire forces in different combinations and to varying extents (see Table 4).

Table 4 Communication Strategies Used by Hawshire and Lionshire Police Forces

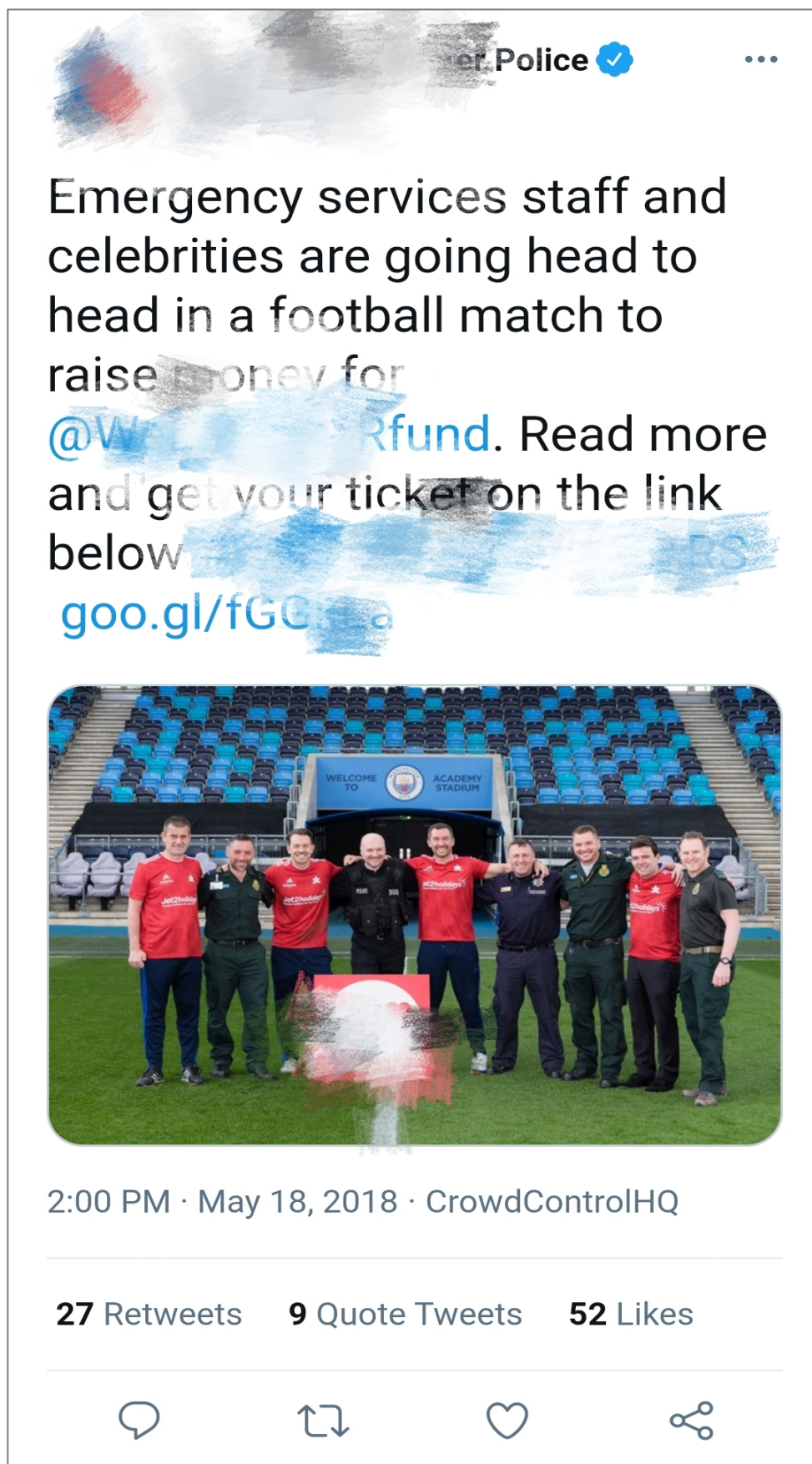
Strategies Used by Hawshire and Lionshire Police Forces					
Themes	Push Strategy	Pull Strategy	Networking Strategy	In Total (Posts %)	Missing Posts
Hawshire Police	<b>426</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>839</b>	<b>1</b>
	50.7%	16.2%	33.1%	-	-
Lionshire Police	<b>532</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>709</b>	<b>1514</b>	<b>7</b>
	35.1%	18.0%	46.9%	-	-

The key to distinguishing between “Push” and “Networking” post is the narrative: “Push” messages are usually in the form of introductions, informs and marketing, without requiring a public response, and the tone is more official, such as Picture 3. By comparison, the “Networking” type of information focuses on attracting and inviting the public to interact, mostly using colloquial expressions, as illustrated by Picture 4.

Picture 3 An example of a “Push” post



Picture 4 An example of a "Networking" post



According to the analysis of tweets, “Push” (50.7%) was the most used strategy identified in Hawshire tweets, showing a dominant style of sending information to the public. Following was the use of Networking strategy in Hawshire Police that 278 tweets have been posted under this category, in order to serve the purpose of community engagement and networking building. This is consistent with the major research of police communication that most police organizations are likely to broadcast news to the public (Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Crump, 2011; Lee & McGovern, 2013c; Procter, Crump, et al., 2013). This reflected that Hawshire Police employed a broadcasting-oriented approach in communication, emphasizing on news sharing. As the manager of the Digital and Social Development department commented that *“I think we were too robotic and it was too much of us trying to say we have something to tell you, listen to what we have got to say as opposed to that we have some important information, we would like you to listen and perhaps come back to us if you got any information and help us” (IN1)*. In comparison, Lionshire Police employed the Networking strategy the most (46.9%) that 709 posts were identified to reach to the public proactively and reactively. The “Push” strategy was also frequently used (35.1%) for sending and sharing news to the public. Both the two forces used the Pull Strategy the least that 16.2 and 18.0 per cent of posts were sent out, asking for assistance and information from the public.

From the above data, I found that Twitter has been actively used in both the researched police forces. As Crump (2011) suggested that while Twitter opens up a two-way discussion between police and the public, the use of the “Push” strategy in police communication is nevertheless the most frequent. In addition, the use of a “Networking” strategy from both forces was quite common in this study. This strategy showed the public that the police were attempting to connect with the community, which has the potential to shape an engaging character of the police.

#### **6.4 Tweeting Themes Used by Hawshire and Lionshire Police**

The nature of police-initiated communication via social media is about expectation management, as it may affect the public's perceptions of policing work and construct a general picture of what can be expected from the police (Mawby, 2002). As Rosenbaum and colleagues (2005) argued, public expectation towards the police can be influenced by many factors, including the direct or vicarious experiences with the police, living environment, political beliefs or other consumption of media products, such as newspapers or social media (Surette, 1998). Twitter, as one of the leading social media tools worldwide, is now being strategically deployed by individual police force to serve different communication goals, as identified in Chapter Four.

In order to fulfil varied communication purposes, Communication Officers in Hawshire and Lionshire operated and maintained the corporate tweets through different strategies, covering a wide range of topics to enhance the influence of the police and increase public engagement. Based on the tweet analysis, I identified three communication models, and sixteen themes, plus five subthemes in this research (see Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 5: Tweet categories of Hawshire Police

Strategy	Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Number
Push	Crime and incident related Information		Introduce a type of crime, deterrence and victim support Providing information or updates on an incident	17
	Police-related Information	Police Operation	Report police work on the scene and preparational work for events, and updating case investigation	63
		Police Personnel	News about people of police families, including officers being awarded honours, police finished a training class. News about an individual’s achievement or retirement	22
		Department Achievement	News about police unit or departmental achievements	15
		Recruitment	Provide information on job recruitment	85
		Clarification	Clarify issues that should or should not be the matter of police  Introduce police service and police value	30
	Court Sentencing		Announce a court sentence, or people received a custodial sentence	6
	Traffic/Weather Information		Post real-time information on traffic and weather Give suggestions on park or road closures	186
	Police Estate		Information about police equipment, animals and technologies	2
	Total numbers of <i>Push</i> posts: 426			
Pull	Person Identification		Post and request information on target individuals, such as suspects, wanted people or mission persons	75
	Appeals		Ask assistance from the public for information or witness statements regarding an incident or a crime	61
Total numbers of <i>Pull</i> posts: 136				

<b>Network ing</b>	Feedback	Updates on previous information, such as the result of a missing person or updates on a police request	75
	Date/theme-based Engagement	Information about: 1. Police are participating in social or community events, activities, games, interviews, and charities 2. Celebration news on particular festivals or ceremonies 3. Promoting theme-based campaigns	71
	Prevention Information	Offer safety tips Raise awareness on a particular issue	43
	Remembrance/Pay Tribute	Information about public remembrance or police officer memorial	4
	Clarification	Clarify rumours or incorrect information	3
	Partners	Show support to other departments, groups, or communities	34
	Others	Post non-work-related information, such as photos of cities and scenery	5
	Respond to the Public	Replying directly to the public	42
<b>Total numbers of <i>Networking</i> posts: 277</b>			
<b>Total numbers of Hawshire posts: 839</b>			



Table 6: Tweet categories of Lionshire Police

Strategy	Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Number
Push	Crime and incident related Information		Introduce a type of crime, deterrence and victim support Providing information or updates on an incident	48
	Police-related Information	Police Operation	Report police work on the scene and preparational work for events, and updating case investigation	162
		Police Personnel	1. News about people of police families, including officers being awarded honours, police finished a training class. And news about an individual's achievement, heroic behaviour, attestation or retirement 2. Police personnel and activities in old times	81
		Department Achievement	News about police unit or departmental achievements Annual report of the force	13
		Recruitment	Provide information on job recruitment	6
		Clarification	Clarify issues that should or should not be the matter of police Introduce police service and police value	26
	Court Sentencing		Announce a court sentence, or people received a custodial sentence	152
	Traffic/Weather Information		Post real-time information on traffic and weather Give suggestions on park or road closures	30
	Police Estate		1. Information about police equipment, police animals and police technologies 2. Police estate in old times	24
	<b>Total numbers of <i>Push</i> posts: 532</b>			
Pull	Person Identification		Post and request information on target individuals, such as suspects, wanted people or mission persons	74
	Appeals		Ask assistance from the public for information or witness statements regarding an incident or a crime	196

	Engagement Invitation	Ask the public to participate in surveys, or to leave comments on live streaming content	3
<b>Total numbers of <i>Pull</i> posts: 273</b>			
<b>Network ing</b>	Feedback	Updates on previous information, such as the result of a missing person or updates on a police request	14
	Date/theme-based Engagement	Information about: 4. Police are participating in social or community events, activities, games, interviews, and charities 5. Celebration news on particular festivals or ceremonies. 6. Promoting theme-based campaigns 7. Police museum events	134
	Prevention Information	Offer safety tips Raise awareness on a particular issue	117
	Remembrance/Pay Tribute	Information about public remembrance or police officer memorial	31
	Clarification	Clarify fake news, rumours, or incorrect information Police statement	24
	Partners	Show support to other departments, groups, or communities Introduce a partner's social media account	26
	Others	Post non-work-related information, such as photos of cities and scenery	9
	Respond to the Public	Replying directly to the public	354
<b>Total numbers of <i>Networking</i> posts: 709</b>			
<b>Total numbers of <i>Lionshire</i> posts: 1514</b>			

As is shown above, both forces employed “Push”, “Pull” and “Networking” communication models that the majority of posted themes were overlapped while some minor distinctions. Generally, there are five themes under the “Push” model, namely *Crime and Incident-related Information*, *Police-related Information*, *Court Sentencing*, *Traffic/Weather Information* and *Police Estate*, all of which were meant for broadcasting information to the public without requiring any feedback. In the “Pull” model, two themes (*Personal Identification* and *Appeals*) were commonly used in both forces while there is a new theme “Engagement Invitation” has been identified in Lionshire posts. Eight themes (*Feedback*, *Date/theme-based Engagement*, *Prevention Information*, *Remembrance/Pay Tribute*, *Clarification*, *Partners*, *Others* and *Respond to the Public*) under the “Networking” model have been identified in Hawshire Police and Lionshire Police (*Feedback*, *Date/theme-based Engagement*, *Prevention Information*, *Remembrance/Pay Tribute*, *Clarification*, *Partners*, *Others* and *Respond to the Public*). In the following section, I will introduce some of the key characterized categories of tweets found in this study.

#### **6.4.1 The Engagement Invitation Posts**

Posts identified as the “Engagement Invitation” were tweets that the police directly asked the public to participate in surveys about satisfaction on police services and encourage the audience to join in some online campaigns, such as a live stream or a live chat on Twitter (see an example as Picture 5). This is a positive gesture of the police to engage with the public, presenting an active attitude to invite members of the public to participate in police-initiated programmes. In this research, Lionshire posted 3 posts of engagement invitation tweets while Hawshire did not directly ask the public to participate.

Picture 5 Example of a tweet under the theme *Engagement Invitation*



Police-initiated online communication is known to be more focused and has higher engagement compared to public-initiated ones (Sachdeva et al., 2016). Through displaying topics about safety awareness programs, operation reports, and policing activities information, the police attempt to influence the public's feelings about community safety (Crump, 2011). It is also a demonstration that the police are endeavouring to fulfil their job, including preventing crimes and maintaining social order (Welch & Fulla, 2005). Like the above example, Lionshire Police sent a message to the audience via Twitter, presented that they were prepared to listen to the opinions and suggestions from the public and hold themselves accountable to the citizens. In this vein, the police are likely to broaden the influence of online campaigns and increasing the level and degree of public interaction (Murphy et al., 2008).

#### 6.4.2 The *Feedback* Posts

The theme *Feedback* is of particular importance in police communication inspired by Enzle & Ross (1978) and Ryan, Mims, & Koestner (1983). It refers to information that gives updates or feedback regarding previous messages that the police published, which allows the audience to see the developing of a conversation and the results of previous participation. For example, the content of a feedback posts includes a missing person has been found, or some progress has been made on an investigation based on responses to requests for assistance inquiry the police had previously posted (see Picture 6). The aim of feedback posts can be understood as the acknowledgement to the public engagement through presenting the developments. In most cases, information from the public was the biggest drive to such developments (IN12). This type of information served at least two main functions: first, the police could actively

engage and bond with the members of the public by expressing their gratitude and highlight the importance of the public's assistance in policing work (Atkinson, 1957; Brickman et al., 1975; Lewin, 1938; Tolman, 1932). Second, through presenting progress, which was mostly positive, the police also praising themselves for effectively fulfilling their police work. The former was consistent with the social value of the moral dimension and strengthens the police legitimacy in the way of public consent and support, while the latter highlighted the efficiency of the police, which is also crucial for grounding police legitimacy. In addition, positive feedback has the potential to enhance intrinsic motivation, which increase the public's willingness in assisting the police in the future (Enzle & Ross, 1978; Ryan et al., 1983).

Under this category, Hawshire Police sent 89 posts (8.9%) of Feedback posts, providing the public with the results or the developing progresses of an incident or a missing person, appreciating their help in offering information and retweeting. Lionshire Police, on the other hand, posted just 14 tweets (0.9%) under this theme.

Picture 6 Example of a tweet under the theme *Feedback*



### 6.4.3 Direct Messages

Another pattern of communication noted in the two sets of police tweets is the *direct message*. This category refers to the kind of police communication that directly responds to members of the public. Rather than post information to a wide audience of the police account, it responded to specific individual citizens who participated in police-initiated program or asked questions to the police. In terms of content, this category does not have a particular communication topic, rather, it is more of the Communication Officer's personal response to public inquiries (see Picture 7).

Lionshire posted near a quarter (354 posts, 23.4%) of posts under this category while there were 42 posts (5%) found from Hawshire.

Picture 7 Example of a tweet under the theme *Direct Messages*



This post (Picture 7) was one of many responses triggered by an online program, “#LoveYourPetDay”, initiated by the Lionshire Police. On 20 February, Lionshire’s corporate account asked the public to share their pet’s pictures and responded to each user who participated. The cartoon emoji used in the post is beneficial for changing the perceptions of the police as a distant and rigid authority (Schneider, 2016). In addition, this communication pattern may further expand the decentralization effects of the police and attach a personal twist to the corporate account. As noted by Heinström (2003) that individuals are more likely to approach a responsive and easy-going character. A police Twitter with engaging characteristics is reasonably more popular among the public. Through personal replies to individuals with emojis (a cat and a police car in this case), this strategy could facilitate answering public inquiries and present an image of easy-going, humorous, caring, and open to conversations.

#### 6.4.4 Remembrance and Tribute Posts

Another salient characteristic of police using Twitter is the *Remembrance/Pay Tribute posts*, which commemorated and mourned victims of an incident, often at the national level but also locally. Drawn from tweets of this study, victims included police officers who died in the line of duty (see example in Picture 8), people who were killed in a terrorist attack, and individual citizens who died in incidents. Both forces sent posts under this category that 4 posts (less than 1%) were noted from Hawshire and 31 posts (2%) from Lionshire.

Picture 8 Example of a tweet under the theme *Remembrance/Pay Tribute*



The example above targeted not only the public, but also the police officers as the audience. These hashtags, “WeStandTogether”, “ThinBlueLine” and “courageandsacrifice” reflected that police work is full of unprecedented risks and dangers and highlighted their collective occupational identity as the police (Punch, 2009). By memorizing one of the members of the police team, the corporate post displayed symbols of the shared cultural values in the police, increasing the sense of solidarity and self-legitimacy (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012; Reiner, 1985). Moreover, the post above was retweeted from the UK Police Memorial (@ukpmemorial), which suggested the commemoration of police officers who died in duty is not restricted to an organization locally. Distant police organizations and other officers would commemorate and maintain a collective reflection of the dangerous nature of police work (Sierra-Arévalo, 2019).



Secondly, tweets about memorizing the victims of a terrorist attack in the Greater Manchester were categorized into the Remembrance/Pay Tribute theme. On 22 May 2017, there was a suicide terrorist attack in the Manchester Arena and causing the death of twenty-three people, including the attacker. On the same day the following year, both forces posted tweets about a public remembrance event of this attack (see an example as Picture 9).

Picture 9 Example of a tweet under the theme *Remembrance/Pay Tribute*



According to Connerton (1989), the commemoration is a specific type of ritual action, which resulted from social cohesion and moral unity in a society. Police highlighted and enhanced the sense of social connection and collaboration through using



hashtags such as #westandtogether and #rememberingtogether. Moreover, different police forces, including the Hawshire and Lionshire forces, posted similar public service of remembrance on the same day, creating a specific social convention to present the past and reflected the collective social practices in memorizing the loss in the terrorism, suggesting the solidarity of the police across difference forces (Tota, 2004).

Furthermore, victims who appeared in the remembrance/pay tribute posts also included ordinary citizens. There are posts identified, from the two forces' accounts, about ordinary citizens who lost their lives in accidents, such as a car crash. These victims were with different demographic background ranging from babies, young male adults to the elderly (an example can be seen in Picture 10).

Picture 10 Example of a tweet under the theme *Remembrance/Pay Tribute*



These posts did not seem to be related to one another as these ordinary victims were not directly relevant to the broader theme. However, as Santino (2003) reminds us, the deaths of individuals index common issues of concern to the public, such as car accidents, fatal collisions or even terrorist attack. There are possibilities that the Lionshire force paying tribute to the individual's death in public was due to that it served

an important role in informing the public of fatal incidents in the society, alerting the members of the public to keep safe as well as the important role of the police in keeping people safe. Moreover, the remembrance may also comfort the families of the victims.

However, there are some differences between the generated themes from the two police forces. Under the theme *police personnel*, Hawshire Police commonly posted stories, news, and introduction about members of the police ‘family’, such as PCs, PCSOs, and Specials Constables. Whereas Lionshire Police frequently posted information on police attestation<sup>17</sup>, policing practice, activities or police officers back in the 1950s and 1960s. It is an identifiable pattern of Lionshire Police to share old pictures of police personnel and police activities, which suggested a collective memory and value with the public about the concept of immortalized British bobby back in the 1950s and 1960s (McLaughlin, 2007; Wulf Kansteiner, 2002). Besides, Lionshire Police commonly posted an introduction of the newly recruited police officers under this theme. The newly recruited police officer has been introduced with their names, brief experience and serving areas, showing the public that they are ready to protect and serve.

Furthermore, while both forces posted tweets about police officers’ graduation from internal training, the Lionshire force posted information about police attestation more often (10 times from Lionshire compared to 2 times from Hawshire Police). It is noted that Lionshire force valued police attestation as a set of photos were used to record this event, demonstrating the scenario that the police officers are taking the oath to serve and protect in front of the Queen. This is an essential ritual for the police that *“every police officer and every special constable is required, on appointment, to be attested by making a declaration in a prescribed form before a justice of the peace in the force area concerned.”* (Police Reform Act 2002 Explanatory Notes<sup>18</sup>). The police

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<sup>17</sup> Police attestation: Before being sworn in as a Constable, and receiving their police powers, all police officers and Special Constables must be formally attested before a Justice of the Peace

<sup>18</sup> The online source from Legislation.gov.uk:  
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/30/notes/division/4/1/18/2?view=plain> Last Access 22/04/2020

attempted to exploit their willingness and determinations to serve the community and enforce the law by presenting the police ritual in public, which has a symbolic meaning of the “police are citizens in uniform” (Reiner, 2008, p. 318). In this respect, these posts have potentials to highlight the lawfulness of police legitimacy and increase public confidence towards the police officers.

#### 6.4.5 Court Sentencing Posts

The *Court Sentencing* posts identified are tweets that announce the results of court processes to the public (see Picture 11). For example, the contents usually related to someone being put in prison, someone is sentenced, or someone is released, and similar. This category of posts was employed mainly by Lionshire Police that 152 (10%) posts have been found, whereas there were only six posts (0.7%) identified from Hawshire.

Picture 11 Example of a tweet under the theme *Court Sentencing*



The delivery of *Court Sentencing* to the public is a way of reassuring the public that the “*criminal system works*” (IN5). It also reflects the results of police fighting against crime, which is valued as one of the proper police work by many officers (Chan, 1997; Loftus, 2009; Martin, 1999). Such posts aimed to demonstrate the effectiveness of the criminal justice institutions, including the police, and raise public awareness of the consequences of committing crimes. “*As long as these posts did not violate the Press law and Social Media Use regulation, it is practical and feasible for the police to publish the results of a court hearing*” (FG3). By showing the public that the police and the criminal system are working properly, it is more likely that public’s perceived fear of

crime can be reduced, thus increasing the confidence to the police (Jackson & Bradford, 2009). In this respect, police legitimacy could be morally accepted and acknowledged by the citizens.

### **6.5 Suspension, Blocking and Deleting: Monitoring Police Twitter Accounts**

In order to secure an active engagement with the public, it is noted that police organisations conducted comprehensive management and monitoring of social media: on the one hand, police social media account would be suspended if it is not updated or shows evidence of interactions within two months (see Chapter Four); and specific posts would be deleted if they would result in disputes and arguments online. On the other hand, social media managers would delete offensive comments made by the members of the public and block their accounts if necessary. For example, hate speech is prohibited in the UK by law as it promotes violence and social disorder, and this policy also extends to the social media platforms. Social media services such as Facebook and Twitter, however, have been criticised for not having done enough to prevent hate speech on their sites towards people based on characteristics like race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation (Vega, 2013). Although social media services have responded by publicizing policies<sup>19</sup> that condemn hate speech and racism, the current solutions they have announced are dependent on the individual reporting offensive comments (BBC Technology, 2017).

Concerns about the appropriate use of social media has been applicable for the police use of Facebook and Twitter as well. Both Hawshire and Lionshire Police used a profanity filter<sup>20</sup> attached in social media to delete offensive comments and hate speech. It seems very normal for the police to use profanity filters in communication and according to interviewees from Hawshire, they used the profanity filter on

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<sup>19</sup> Facebook's policy can be found here: [www.facebook.com/ communitystandards#hate-speech](https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards#hate-speech). Twitter's policy can be found here: [support.twitter.com/articles/20175050](https://support.twitter.com/articles/20175050).

<sup>20</sup> Profanity filter, also known as language filter, is a software subsystem which modifies text to remove words deemed offensive by the administrator or community of an online forum.

Facebook to delete swear words and offensive comments. One Digital and Social Development Officer in Hawshire commented that *“If anyone tries to swear or anything like that on it (Facebook), they will be able to comment, but it will not show to members of the public”,* and *“A lot of the time, they do not notice because they can still comment. It is just that they do not know it has not gone out to everybody”* (IN3). However, offensive posts have to be deleted from Twitter manually as Twitter does not have the automated filter setting. *“We have to keep engagement, delete anything inappropriate, delete anything offensive, like offensive comments that slipped through the filter. We need to check it constantly. We have to monitor our posts and delete any post that is bullying or aggressive towards another.”* (IN12). Lionshire Police used an external profanity setting that was built into the management software for Twitter posts. The corporate Communication Officers define certain words in the system, and these restricted words will be automatically deleted in their account comments. As the Digital Communication Officer explained to me during our interview that:

*... these are all banned words, all the ones will be automatically deleted. Here, these are all my automatic deletes, these are moderated, which means these are words that might be spelled wrong. You can see those are the same words used different variations, because the public get to realise, they catch out what we’ve deleted and what we have not (laugh). They tell you what the system misses. I will give them that.*  
(IN12)

The above excerpt explained how the Communication Officers dealt with offensive comments on social media and that both profanity filters and manual efforts have been employed. It also reflected that the police often received unfriendly comments on their posts (Twitter) or Facebook pages. Some of these comments came from “Do-gooders” who are individuals considering themselves as “principled anti-police activists” and would criticise the police and policing work to confine police reputation (Reiner, 2000b, p. 95). They are a proportion of police’s social media followers who would criticise whatever the police post. Police Communication Officers would delete these comments if they were regarded as bullying certain people or groups, including the

police. **Concluded from interviews**, other reasons to delete comments also involved that 1) the organization required the Communication Officers to avoid getting involved in arguments, such as the social media guidance from Lionshire (see the discussion in Chapter Four), 2) Discussions flowing from offensive comments and hate speeches were often unpredictable and unrelated to the original text. As one of the CMI Officers explained that *“when we post something out, and they (the public comment) will start talking about something completely different, start talking about each other’s mums and stuff like that”* (FG3). Therefore, comments on a police tweet could turn into a pointless argument if the police do not delete them. It is a way of image management as what the public sees is the filtered comments and engagement.

Furthermore, I found that police would delete posts occasionally, either from an individual officer’s account or the corporate one. This is evidenced as I collected tweets for the first time with the R program in November 2018, and took screenshots of tweets of the same period again with Twitter Screenshot in April 2019. It turned out that there was 1 post missing from Hawshire and 7 posts missing from Lionshire Police. Moreover, tweets from individual police accounts were also subject to deletion to prevent further concerns. For example, I found that the individual police officer had deleted the tweet used in the case discussion (for example, Picture 1). This tweet was about posting the image of a ticket for drunk drivers and was used as the case discussion during Hawshire communication training. My best guess is that the officer did not want to involve in further debates about whether it is appropriate for the police to post “evidence” via social media. Therefore, to simply delete comments and tweets are methods that secure a decent image of the police and arguably minimize further negative impacts on the police reputation and broader legitimacy.

## **6.6 The Internal Communication: A Sense of Job Satisfaction**

A significant finding that emerged during the observation and interviews with Communication Officers is that the two police organizations have been employing

different methods to increase officers' satisfaction towards their jobs and the organization, such as one-to-one communication, surveys and, most importantly, the social media. Both Corporate Communication teams of Hawshire and Lionshire Police have an *Internal Communication Officer* position, which mainly focuses internally on the police organization and ensures the information flow among police officers. Communicating with police officers, to help and reassure, is also part of the Internal Communication Officers' duty, as the Internal Communication Officer in Hawshire commented:

*Sometimes I need to find out, you know, if there are any problems, that maybe some more communication will help officers to understand what they need to do. If they are confused about certain situations, or they need help. If that's happened, officers need to communications, need staff to help them, I will. (IN6)*

Rather than direct communication, this Internal Communication Officer also used social media to post information in public, with the police officers as the main audience. For example, he posted a series of tweets about the police code of ethics via Twitter, which sets and defines the exemplary standards of behaviour for police officers. According to the interview, I assume that these tweets could function broadly in three dimensions: 1) Showing the public that the police officers from Hawshire would conduct policing work with a high level of moral and ethical standard, such as *honesty and integrity, authority, respect and courtesy, equality and diversity*, and so on; 2) Encouraging the police officers within Hawshire Police to deliver service to the public with the high professional standers; and 3) Reminding and presenting the *police officers* within Hawshire Police that they were officers with such values as they are qualified officers employed by the police. From the internal Communication Officer's perspective, social media could be used to "connect" with and encourage police officers to improve their sense of occupational pride. He explained him posting tweets about the code of ethics as follows:



*So, we recently post, the internal stuff, you know, the code of ethics, the values of the police. We put that on the social media as well, so you can show the public that what we are expecting from people works here, right? So that's give confidence to the public that we work with good values. And, police officers can also see them, which reminds them to work in such values.*  
(IN6)

Similar findings were noted in Lionshire Police that police officers in Lionshire were given surveys regarding the scale of job satisfaction. This was evidenced from the focus group discussion with CMI officers of Lionshire that they used to make a series of videos in order to promote police officers fulfilling the survey. While they acknowledged that scepticism in the police culture could prevent police officers from filling out surveys (Chan, 1996; Loftus, 2010; Paoline, 2004), they were making efforts to overcome those difficulties, and making videos internally is one such attempt. In this context, CMI officers believed that police officer is an important group of audience of the corporate social media accounts:

*YaXian: You may have an idea on who the audiences are, in terms of police social media account?*

*FG3: Well, it's everybody. You know, we try to communicate what is good about Lionshire Police, to the whole of Lionshire area and beyond.*

*FG5: And internal.*

*FG4: Yeah, internal.*

*FG5: Our own people, we have to include them as well. So, let's say we are public facing and internal facing. Internally, we could have a series of videos, which is to get to officers to reflect their work and achievement. So, we had a survey going earlier on this year, where every member of staff in Lionshire are given a series of questions, and so to promote that, we did a series of videos, which was obviously highlight what came from the previous survey, just get people to complete the survey, to have a better view, more actuate idea of what people thought about the organization and how could it be improved.*

*We like to do more public faces stuff, police officers quite ... I should treat my words carefully, (laugh), it's difficult to get messages through, within, sometimes.*

*FG3: Police officers can be quite cynical; they tend not to believe what people tell them. Because they deal with criminals all the time. So, if you go out and you arresting people, you think that they are lying to you all the time, you mind says, that becomes automatically, 'I don't believe.' So, when the organization then tells them something, then the mind says the same, so we have tried, and try to overcome that.*

This discussion reflected that some researched police culture within policing (Reiner, 2010; Loftus, 2009) have, to some extent, impacted and been impacted by the social media communication and shed light on that the police organization is trying to win the acceptance of police officers – through the social media (Chan, 2001; Smith et al., 2017). As one of the 'working personalities' (Skolnick 2011; p.39; Reiner 1992), police cynicism refers to a pessimistic and suspicious attitude of the police officers towards their job, the public and society as a whole (Caplan, 2003). While occupational cultures may vary in different positions of a police organization, Paoline (2004) claimed that cynicism is one common theme in police culture. This research reflected that cynicism do existed in police organizations, evidenced by the above discussion and the following findings in *Use of Symbolic Markers*, and police organizations made efforts to counter this suspicious and resistance of officers by providing one-to-one communication and using surveys to find out ways and aspects that the organization can develop for the police officers. These efforts from both forces were meant to provide a better sense of belonging and occupational pride for the individual officers, convincing them that their roles and policing powers are rightful and justified (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012; Boulding, 1967; Tankebe, 2013). The assumed rationale for convincing police employees of the value of their everyday job is that the sense of belongings is important, as it may lead to an enhanced sense of belongings and a better external performance when encountering citizens (Mawby and Worthington, 2002). In this respect, the police officer's satisfaction with the job and confidence of exercising policing power have potentials to enhance police self- legitimacy from the dialogic perspective (Bottoms &

Tankebe, 2012). To this end, social media has been adopted to facilitate promoting job satisfaction and self-legitimacy of police officers.

## **6.7 Media Attachment and Engagement with Tweets**

### **6.7.1 Multi-Media Attachment and Engagement with Tweets**

*Engaging with the community* is one of the core tasks for policing service in England and Wales (College of Policing, 2013). Many police forces regard it as one of the essential goals of social media usage. As discussed in Chapter Four, the score of an account presented on the external communication management software used in both police forces indicated how well the account engages members of the public. An alternative reference of a tweet's engagement level could be found in the numbers of public responses an account receives, namely the *retweets, comments and likes* of a tweet. These numbers reflected the popularity and engagement of a single post, because *"a person will engage with us by commenting on our stuff, retweeting our stuff, and liking our stuff, all sort of stuff if he is interested in the tweet"* (IN12). One could infer that the Communication Officers judge whether a tweet has good public interaction based on these numbers, *"the higher the numbers, the higher the engagement of the tweet"* (IN12). Thus, Communication Officers have explored a range of methods to increase the *engagement numbers* of a tweet.

I found that media attachments in a tweet were commonly used as such a method to promote engagement numbers. Communication Officers attached different forms of media in a post, such as photographs, a piece of video or audio record, a piece of music and links to other websites. As demonstrated in Table 7, Hawshire and Lionshire Police posted *nearly half* of the tweets with media attachments (45.0% of Hawshire tweets and 41.0% of Lionshire tweets). While tweets with no attachment made the most significant portion (55.0% and 59.0%), it was partially because police frequently

used *direct messages* to engage with the public. There were five categories of media attachment identified in this study (Diagram 5):

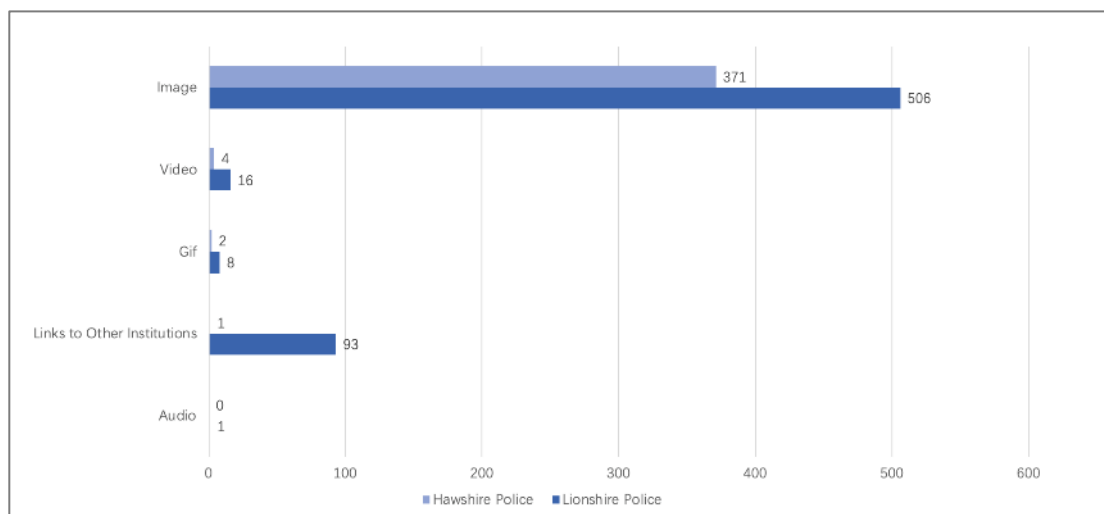
1. Image
2. Gif
3. Video
4. Audio
5. Links to other institutions or websites

Table 7 Tweet Posted with or without Media Attachment

Different Forms of Media Attachment							No Media Attachment			
	Image	Gif	Video	Audio	Links to Other Institutions	In Total (Posts %)	Retweet	No Attachment	In Total (Posts %)	In Total (Posts %)
Hawshire Police	<b>371</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>840</b>
	44.2%	0.2%	0.4%	-	0.1%	45.0%	2.7%	52.3%	55.0%	-
Lionshire Police	<b>506</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>624</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>897</b>	<b>1521</b>
	33.3%	0.5%	1.0%	-	6.1%	41.0%	0.7%	58.3%	59.0%	-

Images were the most popular form of media used in police tweets, that 371 out of 378 posts with media attachments from Hawshire Police used images (see Figure 9). Likewise, in Lionshire, 81.1 per cent of tweets with media attachments had an image or images attached (506 out of 624). Other forms of media attachment like gif, video, and links to other institutions were employed in both police forces, with one audio attachment used by Lionshire force. The use of video and audio was less common, which I assume was because Twitter is a social platform based on text sharing rather than video and audio sharing. Users of Twitter are more likely to read messages rather than spend extra time watching or listening. Ninety-three posts from Lionshire Police attached links to other institutions or websites, mostly to other social media accounts of theirs, such as Flickr (78 posts) and YouTube (10 posts).

Diagram 5 Different forms of attachment employed by Hawshire and Lionshire Police Forces



Among all the collected tweets of Hawshire and Lionshire, those with media attachment presented an average higher engagement level than those with no media attachment (see Table 8 and 9). In particular, the average engagement level of Hawshire Police tweets was 0.9 on Comments, 13.3 on Retweets and 14.1 on Likes, and posts with media attachment showed a higher score of 1.0; 16.8 and 17.7, respectively. This pattern seemed even more evident in the Lionshire posts that tweets attached with media demonstrated an apparent higher level of engagement (4.1; 25.4; 56.9) than that of posts without media attachment (1.7; 8.6; 14.8).

Table 8 Mean Engagement of Hawshire Police Twitter Account

		Comments	Retweets	Likes
<b>Mean of tweet with media attached</b>		<b>1.0</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>17.7</b>
Image attached		0.9	16.6	16.0
Gif attached		3.5	44.5	122
Video attached		4.3	20.3	120.5
Links of other institutions		0	0	0
<b>Mean of tweet without media attached</b>		<b>0.8</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>11.1</b>
Plain text		0.8	10.5	11.0
Retweeted tweet		0.7	7.9	13.5
<b>Mean of posted tweet</b>		<b>0.9</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>14.1</b>

Table 9 Mean Engagement of Lionshire Police Twitter Account

		Comments	Retweets	Likes
<b>Mean of tweet with media attached</b>		<b>4.1</b>	<b>25.4</b>	<b>56.9</b>
Image attached		3.8	27.3	51.3
Gif attached		3.4	11.5	18.1
Video attached		14.2	54.4	250.1
Audio attached		69	152	200
Links of other institutions		3.6	9.7	56.2
<b>Mean of tweet without media attached</b>		<b>1.7</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>14.8</b>
Plain text		1.7	8.5	14.8
Retweeted tweet		0.7	12.1	11.6
<b>Mean of posted tweet</b>		<b>2.7</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>32.1</b>

This finding was consistent with many interviewees' viewpoints that the different forms of media attached in a tweet could attract audience attention and increased the chance of getting feedback and engagement (IN1, IN3, IN11, and FG3). Their experience, as well as the statistics above, combined to verify that the use of media attachment in a tweet could increase its engagement level.

One startling statistic in Table 9 is the engagement of a tweet attached with audio, which accounted for 69 comments; 152 retweets; and 200 likes. It was the only tweet with audio attachment, and it received very positive levels of engagement. This tweet was about a phone recording from the 999 operation centre, complaining that the local KFC restaurant was closed (see Picture 12). The police made this recording public via social media, to clarify boundaries of policing services through sending the public a signal of *please do not do this* (Goffman, 1959). The intensive views and high level of engagement of this post reflect the public's interest in viewing/listening to 999 calls, which is, perhaps, unusual material for ordinary people. Comments and the numbers of *likes* suggested that the public generally does not approve of this non-emergency reporting behaviour, indicating their understanding and support to the police. With this respect, by presenting this invisible policing work frontstage to the public, police could

increase the public's interest in engaging and also enhance their legitimacy through the increased transparency (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015).

Picture 12 An example of audio attachment of a tweet from Lionshire Police



### 6.7.2 Use of Images in Social Media Posts: Unspoken Messages

As discussed in the previous section, Communication Officers in both police forces actively used images to generate public engagement and image construction. The image attachments helped illustrate or explain the tweet context, enhancing the credibility of the content. For example, the image of police operation is more persuasive to the public that the police are working and serving them, rather than a paragraph of texts (IN1). On the other hand, images are more attractive due to the

sentiment they are conveying, and the meanings they are contained to describe the posts, as sentiments are found to affect the popularity of a posted tweet (Bae & Lee, 2012). Data in this study suggested that images attached in police tweets covered a wide range of topics from people and animals to the weather and scenery. The following sections will give a further discussion on the patterns of police use of image attachment. Based on the characters and the purpose of the image used, I classified eight categories of images use in this research (see Table 10).



Table 10 Content of image used in these two police forces

Image Content	Main Character(s)	Description
<b>Personnel</b>	Photograph of a police officer(s) or members from police family (police staff, PCSOs, volunteer, and cadet)	Presenting police achievements, including being awarded, passing training or introducing police recruits
	Police officers on patrol or in a policing operation	Presenting the police are “on the beat”
	Police personnel participated in social event, such as charity or football match	Presenting police engaging with the community
	Partners whom from other partner organizations	Partners promote campaigns, participate in activities or events.
	Photograph from the police, CCTV footage, or families of the missing people	Suggesting the police targets, including missing people, wanted people; people who were arrested, or put in jail
	Others: victims of an incident	Pay tribute
<b>Operation</b>	Templated pictures with force logo; Police equipment: police car, police technologies (e.g., alcohol tester)	Showing that police officers are conducting an operation
<b>Campaign</b>	Templated pictures for a specific campaign	Promoting a campaign
	Templated pictures for a specific event, e.g., hiking, group walking	Raise awareness of specific events
	Templated pictures for a specific time, e.g., festivals of certain regions	Connecting with the community
	Pictures with memento, such as remembrance campaign or flowers	Paying tribute and remembrance
<b>Animals</b>	Animals, such as dog, cat, horse, fish, and others	Promoting campaigns, introducing police animals and police operations involving animals
<b>Police Statement</b>	Briefing of an incident (in a jpg. Form of context)	Worded description of an incident
	Flow chart or cartoon	Describing a solved case or a police operation
<b>Symbolic Makers</b>	Unique markers of the police, such as police cars, police hats, police lights and the chief constable of the force	Introducing a police operation or making a statement
<b>Recruitment</b>	Job position with force logo	Suggesting job opportunities
<b>Scenery Pictures</b>	Pictures of city views or scenery views within the jurisdiction	Making connections with the public

### **6.7.2.1 The Image of Female Officers: the WOMAN officer or the Woman OFFICER**

One pattern of image use found in this study was the image of female officers. Both Hawshire and Lionshire Police used female officers' images in their posts: 27 out of 371 have been identified in Hawshire (7.3 per cent) while 28 out of 506 were found from Lionshire account (5.5 per cent). As a wealth of research has shown, masculinity is one of the most prominent characteristics of police occupational culture (Crank, 2004; Loftus, 2009; Martin, 1980; Smith & Gray, 1983). Female officers were historically considered to deal with less confrontational work, engaging with the community and seemingly presenting the soft side of police (Brown & Langan, 2001; Loftus, 2010; Rabe-Hemp, 2008, 2009).

However, in this study, I found that both the researched forces used image of female officers, but in a way that seemed contrary to the traditional gender stereotype. For example, Picture 13 showed a tweet from Hawshire Police on 8 March – the International Women's Day, on which the force posted a series of tweets introducing female police officers who work at Hawshire, expressing gratitude to, and recognition of, female officers. This picture presented a 'fully equipped' female officer holding a dog's leash and preparing for training or practice. Unlike the traditional perception that female police officers are more engaged in community policing, the presentation of female police officers in these tweets were professional with fewer feminine characteristics. Similarly, Lionshire Police posted the image of an armed female officer with a rifle, with the caption of "More armed officers will be out on patrol at public events..." (see Picture 14). Moreover, Lionshire Police normalized this concept by sending this tweet on a typical day, rather than a specific date with meaning attached, which potentially symbolizes a change in police culture that – at least in the virtual world – the image of female officers has been shifted from the traditionally soft and gentle, to the side of officers showing a more 'macho' image of the police.

Picture 13 Screenshot of a tweet from the Hawshire corporate account



Picture 14 Screenshot of a tweet from the Lionshire corporate account



According to these examples, I suggest that the police may have intended to weaken the stereotypical characteristics of female officers. Both forces demonstrated female officers' images as women POLICE that they enforced the law with their professional skills, fulfilled the fundamental role of police as crime fighters, and protected and served the citizens in equal parts to their male colleagues (Rabe-Hemp, 2009; Smith & Gray, 1983). Contrasted to the long-existed stereotype of gendering in the police that female officers are typically deal with the soft side of policing, such as community engagement, the police were found to post tweets that showed male officers



conducting work that was traditionally viewed as more feminine work, such as engaging with the communities and participating in community activities. Rather than presenting the traditional role as crime fighters that implies toughness and a risk of violence, male officers in the picture are delivering a less confrontational side of policing (Morris & Heal, 1981). For example, the post (Picture 15) below presented to the public that a male officer from Hawshire Police is smiling and showing support for women riders while a Lionshire male officer is holding teddy bears that were donated to young people who had suffered from traffic collisions (see Picture 16).

Picture 15 Screenshot of a tweet includes a male officer picturing with women riders



Picture 16 Screenshot of a tweet includes a male officer holding teddy bears



Picture 15 and 16 collected from Hawshire and Lionshire Police corporate accounts once again demonstrated that the police organizations have been, from my perspective, trying to weaken the gendered stereotypes of police officers and show their full support of changing roles. However, this kind of posts was arguable merely presenting images, possibly indicating superficial concerns of the force about gender issues. Reiner (1992) reminded us that police culture should not be read as 'monolithic', but has been transforming with the development of external policing environment (Chan, 1997; Loftus, 2009, 2010; McCarthy, 2012). Silvestri (2017) suggested a *time* dimension to investigate the gendered nature of policing and of police culture. That is, the representation of police culture cannot simply be reflected by the gender of the police officers, which requires a more complicated conception of how the gendered police culture is being represented. As one interviewee commented during the

interview, *“Not all of our female police are soft (laugh)... I know some very tough female officers (laugh), and there are some very soft male officers. It is not necessary, it is not about gender, it is about the characteristics of the person.”* (FG3).

Despite that these two police forces may have attempted to weaken the gender stereotype in police via social media representation, the concept that female officers are more fitted as the approachable figures in terms of community engagement has been commonly adopted by some district account operators. As it has been discussed in Chapter Four that the corporate account is perceived as more *“formal, have wider influences, and focus on bigger issues”* (IN3 and IN15). In other words, there was less personalized expressions on the corporate accounts that contrast the district accounts with a vivid personality. Although it is not in the scope of this research, police district accounts are more likely to construct an account with a “personal twist”. An example from my fieldwork can be addressed here to demonstrate this contrast. PIN2, a female Sergeant from Hawshire who has been working in for the police for more than twenty years and was in charge of one district account of Hawshire at the time. She referred to the strategy used in social media operation as “pink and fluffy”, which involved actively engaging with the public via posting pictures that contain smiley young female officers – the *pink* elements (see examples as Picture 17 and 18). Based on her experience in operating the police Twitter account, this strategy made the district police tweets more approachable and thus increasing the engagement level of the account. In this respect, the police account with an approachable character could have more engaging, and support from the citizens.

Picture 17 Screenshot of a pink-and-fluffy tweet from the interviewee's account



Picture 18 Screenshot of a pink-and-fluffy tweet from the interviewee's account





The above pictures were screenshotted from the *district account* that PIN2 operated. One was the picture of young female officers sitting in a pink car and smiling, while the other was a female police dancing with cartoon dolls (PC Hug) to the public (the audience were women and children). In my view, although gender stereotype may have been deliberately weakened by the corporate accounts, police district accounts make good use of it and even making it a selling point to connect with the community. It was the symbolic meaning of the PC Hug, rather than a PC Punch, showing an approachable image of the police and reducing distance from the public. By building up a close relationship with citizens, which is founded in the Peelian principles, the police strategically adopted this method to enhance legitimacy.

#### **6.7.2.2 Use of Animal Pictures**

This study also noted that animal images in police tweets received relatively high levels of public engagement. The following screenshot ([Picture 19](#)) was an example of the police using animal images in their corporate account, which triggered a large amount of public engagement (143 comments; 91 retweets and 518 likes) and further following *direct messages* from the force (see the discussion of *Direct Messages*). Communication Officers of the Lionshire presented four different kinds of animals in a post, inviting the public to share their pets' pictures via Twitter. To make this post more police-related, a police cap was placed on a dog's head, and an emoji of a police car has also been added at the end of the post following the animal emoji. However, one could argue that tweets containing animal images have nothing to do with police work, which means the purpose of sending such tweets was only to obtain interaction and engagement numbers, and it has nothing to do with police professionalism. Arguably, there is a big difference between meaningful engagement and having a presence, as chasing numbers makes the police focus more on attention-grabbing content, rather than sending meaningful messages. Nevertheless, the reason for such 'please like me' posts was, at least, partially due to the assessment criteria embedded in individual

police forces (see the discussion of “Evaluation” of social media in Chapter Four). As long as the police organization recognizes the *engagement numbers* as one of the measures to evaluate account operation, and the use of such tweets with animal images can get a lot of interactions and likes, Communication Officers would carry on using this strategy. After all, police Twitter accounts are like any other social media accounts, relying heavily on a personal approach that obtains followers and public attention, and using animal images in posts can effectively fulfil this purpose.

Picture 19 Screenshot of a tweet with the animal attachment from Lionshire Police



However, the total numbers of posts with animal pictures attached were limited and only 8 out of 371 posts were identified from Hawshire and 21 out of 516 posts were from Lionshire force (see Table 11). The mean engagement of the comment of tweets with animal images was as nearly three times as that of the average level of engagement (2.4 to 0.9), while the mean of retweet and likes were more than double that of the average numbers (27.3 to 13.3; 37.6 to 14.1 respectively). Likewise, tweets with the animal images in Lionshire posts presented even more persuading results that the average engagement of the tweets with animal images is significantly higher than that of all tweets (19.9; 64.0; 297.9 to the 2.7; 15.5; 32.1 on the comment, retweet, and likes respectively).

Table 11 Engagement level of different image attachment

Engagement of Tweets with Different Forms of Attachment						
Themes		Animals	Nostalgia	Symbolic Markers		Mean engagement of posts by police force
Subthemes				Symbolic signs included Chief	Chief Constable of the Force	
Hawshire Police	No. of posts	8	2	177	3	840
	Mean of Engagement (by Comment Retweet Likes)	2.4 27.3 37.6	2 9.5 52.5	0.8 7.9 10.9	6 17 85	0.9 13.3 14.1
Lionshire Police	No. of posts	21	35	128	14	1521
	Mean of Engagement (by Comment Retweet Likes)	19.9 64.0 297.9	3.1 5.7 30.2	5.0 44.3 84.0	11.9 49.2 97.3	2.7 15.5 32.1

The high engagement of tweets with animal image attachment echoed the experience of many Communication Officers from both researched forces (IN11, IN1, IN3 and FG3). It reflected that people are more likely to respond to tweets with animal pictures attached. Some Communication Officers mentioned that using images of puppies was effective in attracting interactions because *“puppies will break down barriers”* (FG3). Nevertheless, it does not have to be a puppy or dog that makes a post popular; any posts with animal images attached could achieve that engagement goal. Thus, one Communication Officer has questioned this phenomenon during the interview that:

*I am surprised sometimes, that I put a picture out on Facebook about a Buji, the parrot, it floated from one place to another, and I got like 13,000 likes. And then I put out a message about somebody who has been a victim of a crime, and it gets looked up by five people. It sorts of a shock to me as well, what are people really interested in? (IN7)*

We could rationalize that animals' cute and innocent nature enabled the social media user to generate compassion and tenderness, which invoked the viewers' positive emotions and pro-social behaviours (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Miesler et al., 2011; Sherman et al., 2009). Alternatively, it may speak to a unique British trait here – the British love animals. People click *like*, *retweet* or comment on tweets with animal pictures to show that they are animal lovers, which is also the essence of social media that allows people to self-present (Zheng et al., 2020). This may partially be the reason why the dog incident on the highway of Hawshire Police aroused public outrage and widespread criticism. By providing the audience with materials that can make them feel positive emotions, rather than the opposite, the police are likely to gain the favour of the audience, thus strengthening the relationship with the public.

#### **6.7.2.3 Use of Symbolic Markers: The Image of Police-related Markers and the Chief Constable of the Force**

Many researchers suggested that policing in the UK has been as much as a matter of image as of substance (Manning, 1997; Mawby, 2010; Mawby & Reiner, 1998). In this context, the police's positive reputation and image are crucial not only for maintaining police legitimacy, but also to enhance the engagement between police and the public (Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Mawby, 2002b). Bernays (1928, p. 3) pointed out that the core of police engaging with the public is the "meaning management" of the police: with a presentation of meanings and symbols in the police and policing related events, the police can create an image with multiple meanings attached (Manning, 1997). The

police deal with various events every day, such as crimes, incidents or minor community inquiries and, through discretion, selectively attended to some of them, encoded as “police-relevant” (Manning, 1982, p. 231). Police communications further act as a “screen” to select and present certain events to the public, representing different sides of the police work, such as the crime-fighting, community serving and charity organizing.

In police online communication, Communication Officers proactively and selectively present police-relevant stories and images to the public, with an attachment of some particular markers to tie the information to policing work. These particular markers usually have special meanings to society, acting as signals of the police or a police-related incident or emergency. Innes (2004) suggested that public perceptions of crime are not a simple result of the overall statistic crime level but influenced by both minor anti-social incidences and disorderly acts. And it could be seen as the control responses to these that signal to people how threats are distributed. In the context of police communication, how, when, and how often police broadcast unlawful acts and incidents signal the distribution of such social risks. In this research, these particular signs are termed “symbolic markers” in the Table 10 and identified into two types: 1) police-related symbolic markers, suggesting objects or events related to the police, such as police lights, police hats, police badges and the like (see Picture 20); and 2) the chief constable of the police force.

Picture 20 Screenshot of “symbolic markers of police” tweet from Lionshire corporate account



There were many posts from Hawshire and Lionshire force using these symbolic markers (177 out of 840 in Hawshire posts (21%) and 128 out of 1521 (8.4%) in Lionshire posts). Most of these tweets were used for *pushing* messages to the public. There are three forms of pictures used most by Hawshire Police:

1. Templated images with the force logo, aiming for updating news about incidents, weather and traffic condition, or saying thanks to the public (see Picture 21).
2. Recruitment information with the force logo on a plain background, presenting job opportunities (see Picture 22).
3. Particular markers in a picture concerning the police or policing work, for example, the police blue light, police car, police hat, or the force logo, usually used for appeals, promoting a campaign or updating on incidents (see Picture 23).

Furthermore, there were three posts from Hawshire using the image of the force's chief constable during the researched period (six months). One was a selfie of the chief constable, the other two were his ID photos in the police uniform, which were attached to the tweets announcing his achievements and retirement, respectively. In comparison, Lionshire Police referenced their chief constable thirteen times during the same period, either photos of him with the newly recruited police officers, or the official ID photos of him making an announcement, or from posted or retweeted statements in his name.

Symbolic markers of police used by Lionshire Police were categorized into three types as well:

1. Templated images with the force logo, usually for publishing appeals or updating news
2. The force logo is shown in campaign pictures or statements, for promoting campaigns or posting a statement.
3. Markers relating to police or policing work (police hat, police light, police car or the force logo), serving as campaign promotion, news updating or safety reminding



Picture 21: Screenshot of category 1 of “symbolic marker” tweet from Hawshire corporate account



Picture 22: Screenshot of category 2 of “symbolic marker” tweet from Hawshire corporate account





Picture 23: Screenshot of category 3 of “symbolic marker” tweet from Hawshire corporate account



Data suggested a paradoxical result between the Hawshire Police and Lionshire Police regarding the engagement level of posts with symbolic markers. Hawshire Police posted 21.1 per cent of tweets (177 posts) with a symbolic marker but received a lower engagement level compared to the average engagement (0.8 comments; 7.9 retweets; 10.9 likes to 0.9 comments; 13.3 retweets; 14.1 likes). In comparison, 128 tweets with symbolic marker images have been posted by Lionshire Police (8.4 per cent) and received a higher engagement level with all the indicators (5.0 comments; 44.3 retweets; 84.0 likes to 2.7 comments; 15.5 retweets; 32.1 likes). One similarity shared was the use of the image of the force’s chief constable as an attachment, where a significantly higher level of engagement could be found following this category. Although the number of the chief constable’s images were rare among the posts (3 and 13 from the two police tweets respectively), the average engagement generated was significantly higher than that of the rest of “symbolic marker image” tweets and that of the rest of image attached tweets (see Table 10). Despite that the public may

not recognize the chief constable of a police force due to the social distance, the presentation of the chief constable could be seen as a symbol of official and corporate identity of the force, which helped increase the credibility of the message posted.

It is noted that these pictures with symbolic markers were mostly used in the “Push” communication model, with a small number shown in the “Networking” and “Pull” models. Police tended to add these markers when broadcasting news and updates, clarifying rumours or making statements to the public as the everyday rituals of police practice can reinforce the belief that the police is legitimized to intervene and solve social problems (Bittner, 1990). The work of the police is not only task-oriented, but also has the meaning of communicating coercive power and authority (Loader & Mulcahy, 2003; Loader, 1997). Thus, the police-related symbols and markers served as the medium of meaning expression, which has practical and social effects on the public to decode the practice of policing. Furthermore, the objects surrounding and representing the identities and activities of policing, such as the police car and police uniforms took the majority of the “symbolic markers” that represent policing.

This study also suggested that the image of the force’s chief constable has extra meaning to the police communication on Twitter. Firstly, the official photograph of the chief constable in a tweet can serve similar functions as the symbolic markers of police, enhancing the credibility of the posted information as well as drawing attention. Second, the photos of the chief constable and recruits of Lionshire Police officers frequently appeared in the corporate posts. Mostly in the ‘introducing police personnel’ categories of ‘Push’ model, the chief constable usually wears a warm, smiling face with the new police officer, showing an encouraging atmosphere of the police organization and approval to the recruits. It has the potentials to support the public’s confidence and trust in individual police officers and the police as an entity as a chief constable usually represents the highest position of a police organization, with accordingly legitimacy. Third, the gesture of posing the chief constable or the chief constable participating in policing work echoed the notion of communication internally with police officers. It may

send messages to the police employees of organizational concerns to the rank-and-file officers through joint working between the higher-rank officers – chief constable, and the PCs. In this respect, the police corporate tweets with their chief constable selfies communicate inwardly with police officers to deliver positive recognition of the police work and alleviate police cynicism, to some extent, and to increase the sense of satisfaction of policing work – officers’ self-legitimacy.

#### **6.7.2.4 Pictures of Nostalgia: Back to The Good Old Days**

The relationship between the police and the public in England has experienced tremendous changes (Emsley, 2008; Mawby, 2002a; Reiner, 1995b, 2000b). Over the decades, police have swung from being resented to revered, from the civilian English ‘bobby’ to a prime symbol of freedom and justice, a beloved national symbol that has turned to represent the core of ‘Englishness’ (Bayley, 2005; Ignatieff, 2006; Mark, 1978; McLaughlin, 2007, p. 3; Reiner, 1995a). In the orthodox view, the ‘golden age’ of policing in England is the post-war period (1945-1955), during which police and public have had mutual respect, collaboratively working together following the law (Reiner, 2000b). Thus, images of police officers and policing decades ago have the special meaning of the myths of ‘traditional British policing,’ which hopes to evoke the public’s positive feelings and responses to policing today (Loader, 1997, p. 4). As one of the CMI officers in Lionshire Police answered the question, “*what kinds of objects do you usually put in the photography?*” He commented that “*we put operations on, we put some of our archives that date back to the 1950s, and the 1970s, and these are hugely popular with the public because they are classic, everyone likes the old things.*” (FG3) Thus, to post old pictures of police and policing in tweets may serve the purposes to recall and deploy the public memory of “hallowed traditions of British policing” and trigger the public’s engagement and support (ibid, p. 5). Both Hawshire and Lionshire Police were found to post tweets with this type of old pictures attached (see an example of Picture 24).

Picture 24 Screenshot of “good old time” tweet from Lionshire corporate account



The example above was a picture of a smiling police officer, looking happy at that moment in the 1950s. It was used as an annotation of a song “The Laughing Policeman” and an emblem of the concept of a jolly police officer. The nostalgic posts in Lionshire covered varied aspects of the police ranging from police personnel to police equipment decades ago, such as ancient police vehicles and police technologies. It was partially because Lionshire Police also used tweets to introduce and promote the police museum they were in charge of, which benefited the advertisement of historical archives of police history. However, the numbers of “nostalgic tweets” were small that only two posts (less than 0.1%) were found from Hawshire, and thirty-five tweets (6.9%) were posted from Lionshire. The distinct difference in the number of tweets might be the result of the age of Communication Officers. The three digital and development officers in Hawshire were relatively new recruits to the police service, each of them had worked for the police for 6, 9, and 1 year respectively, estimated thirty to forty

years old. Comparatively, officers in Lionshire Police, especially those working in the CMI unit, have had a much longer time serving in the force that they served more than thirty years in Lionshire, with an estimated age around the middle fifties. They were more likely to have profound feelings attached to the force and bought into the idea of the “golden ages” of the police. Besides, while police technology has made significant progress insofar, they have to make great efforts to learn these new technologies, which could be frustrating compared with younger colleagues who may be savvier with IT. This frustration, in turn, may enhance the nostalgic feelings of policing. With this respect, they were likely to post images representing old times, even if they are irrelevant to the police or policing (see Picture 25).

Picture 25 Screenshot of “good old times” tweet without policing related from the corporate account



Beetham (1991, p. 99) noted that pictures and campaigns related to historic policing and police image helps to “reproduce and consolidate” police legitimacy. Although Reiner (1990) has argued that the historical characteristics of British policing have few reflections and influence in the current policing in the UK, the application of historical pictures of police and policing could send messages of memorizing and honouring the tradition of British bobby. This reflected that the police and some general citizens also have nostalgic feelings of the good old times in British history. Rather than the

simplistic reason of “people like old stuff” (FG4), the acceptance and widespread of this nostalgia to the bobby was partial because the British police have a “special ethos” (FG3), which made them “*distinguished from any other police and policing in the world*” (IN5). Interviewees reported in this study that they believed the British bobby was more physically fitted and properly dressed in the uniforms compared to the ‘overweight’ American police (IN5). The English police were believed proponent to interact and protect the citizens, rather than the army-like style of policing in France or Spain (FG3). And the British police were more popular with the policed because they work *with* the public rather than use force *at* the public (FG3 and FG5). In short, the police ethos reflects the concept of conducting police work with minimal force and treating citizens with respect and fairness, which is one of the core elements in enhancing police legitimacy.

## 6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has identified various themes among the collected tweets from the two corporate accounts. Ranging from police-relevant information to direct messages with no specific topic, the police employed different communication methods to increase the engagement level, namely (i) use of multiple forms of media attachment to a tweet, and (ii) the selective choice of images. I found that police using different forms of media attachment is efficient in promoting public responses while less than half of the posts were found without media attachment. Furthermore, there were five categories of media attachments identified in this study, namely, (i) image, (ii) gif, (iii) video, (iv) audio, and (v) links to other institutions or websites. Image was the most commonly used form of attachment, covering a wide range of themes including *Personnel, Operation, Campaign, Animals, Police Statement, Symbolic Makers, Recruitment, and Scenery Pictures*, and facilitated the police’s efforts to portray a vivid online communication image. It is noted that the police selected different types of images to present various sides of the police. In particular, while many still view the female officers as the specialists participating in community activities, the picture of female

officers is used by the corporate communication to highlight the professionalism of the police, rather than JUST for a community engaging purpose. The corporate police account did not emphasise a connection between the gender of police officers and the content of their work, which contrasted with what the district accounts had emphasized. Furthermore, animal images were used to break down barriers with citizens due to animals' innocent and cute nature can encourage positive emotion (Lee et al., 2015). Pictures about police personnel or policing work dated back to the 1950s to some extent, resonated with the traditional ideas of the police, harking back to the British bobby in the golden age. Police symbolic markers were frequently used in posts. These icons contain and seek to convey important symbolic meanings to the public, as it represents the police identity and emergency in society, thus empowering the accountability of a post and secures public's trust towards the police (Loader, 1997).

## Chapter Seven. Conclusions and Discussion

### 7.1 Introduction

Effective communication with the public has been an integral part of policing since the establishment of the New Police in 1829 through to the technology-dominated systems of today. In the current policing context, the content and range of police communication has reached way beyond ordinary policing tasks and operational boundaries (Crawford & Hucklesby, 2012; Loader, 2000; Mawby & Worthington, 2002). Communication, as Hohl and colleagues (Hohl et al., 2010, p. 497) suggested. "...lies at the heart of any relationships between the police and the public". Over twenty years ago, Wright (2000) pointed out that communication would be the key issue of policing in the early decades of the twenty-first century. Today, police forces have made momentous efforts to develop online communication strategies via social media including *Expectation/impression management*, *Marketization* and *Risk Management*.

In this thesis, I have endeavoured to produce a contemporary account of police communication through social media. In particular, I have tried to explore, document, and make sense of how the police both understand and operate corporate twitter accounts and, moreover, how police use Twitter to reclaim and enhance legitimacy. This research was prompted by important developments in broader society – the 'field' of policing – where a number of significant social and technological changes have taken place, fundamentally altering the way the police communicate with the public (Chan, 1996). It is within this context that the police are trying to adapt Twitter, one of many social media tools, into their communication strategies with the aim of enhancing police legitimacy.

This thesis provides a comparative analysis of policing communication via social media, in particularly Twitter, conducted in two state police forces in England and Wales, respectively. The mixed-methods research design I employed enabled a more comprehensive picture of the phenomena of police communication via Twitter. The



qualitative phase revealed an account of police use of Twitter to perform varied tasks such as increasing transparency, boosting engagement and managing communication risk. The interviews and focus groups focused on the impact of social media, particularly Twitter, has on their routine work, and the changes, benefits and challenges that accompany it. Observation of communication training for Communication Officers explored how the police force interprets police communication and what expectation and policies they have for their Communication Officers. Patrol with the undercover team opened up puzzles on how Communication Officer select and phase information to keep a balance between being informative as well as keeping the “back-stage” of policing out of the audience gaze (Goffman, 1959). The quantitative phase produced a complementary account of police strategic operation of the corporate Twitter account to boost public engagement as well as to construct a public image and respond to criticisms due to the new visibility. Through counting and analysing tweets posted by the two researched forces in diverse topics and themes, this study digs deeper into why and how the police distributed tweets in such way, arguing that police occupation culture has been influenced by social media communication. These diverse research methods all explored police efforts in enhancing legitimacy at different sides of police communication via social media, but it is a contention of this thesis that they are all linked by the idea of police employing Twitter to facilitate legitimacy enhancement that is related to police communication in the information era.

Based on the research undertaken in two police forces, Twitter is one of the main communicational channels that enables the police to engage with the audience. It brought opportunities for the police to conduct *image management* such as limiting the access numbers of social media accounts, using a script when communicating, and developing coping and response strategies when the intended image has been criticised. However, potential risks have come with the wide use of social media. The new visibility (Thompson, 2005) of police on social media can also harm individual officers and the police organization due to the misconduct of some officers (Bullock,

2018a; Lipschultz, 2015). The nature of decentralized communication empowered the civilian professions who operate accounts on behalf of the police organization, albeit under the supervision of the management officers. This decentralized approach, can to some extent, give off the wrong impression (Goffman, 1959) when officers misuse the corporate account during the off-duty time or post debatable content via their personal social media accounts.

In this concluding chapter, I will first provide a summary of the findings from the different phases of fieldwork, along with a discussion about their implications. After discussing *Police Communication* and *Image Work* (see Chapter One) via social media, I will try to answer the key research question: How do Lionshire and Hawshire Police use Twitter to enhance police legitimacy? Following an overview of the findings from my research, a discussion of limitations and future research direction will be addressed. My analysis is guided by the following overlapping sub-questions of this thesis:

- How do police Communication Officers in Hawshire and Lionshire Police differently view and understand the use of social media?
- How are Communication Officers trained by their organizations to operate online communication?
- How do police Communication Officers use the corporate account?
- Are there differences in the way different forces communicate with the public via twitter?
- What is the role of police online communication in the structuration of police legitimacy?

## 7.2 Summary of Research Findings

### 7.2.1 Police View of the Use of Twitter Engagement: New Visibility with Risks

In order to address the question *How do police Communication Officers in Hawshire and Lionshire Police differently view and understand the use of social media?* one needs to interpret the research data under the social background of the rapid development of communication technology. The police are expected to maintain the social order, protect the citizens, and fight against the criminals while engaging with varied individuals and organizations actively and transparently via social media. From a perspective of risk management, Ericson and Haggerty (1997) have redefined the police role as *communicating risk* and *policing communications about risk*. This reflected a new conceptualization of policing because it involves different forms of communication between the police and citizens, many of which relate to means for dealing with potential risks. In this context, the police are the primary institution that stands at the forefront of public connection that receives and responds to communication about risks from the public. Although the idea of *policing communication about risk* was brought up in the 1990s, it turns out to be well fitted in today's policing environment, especially within the context of communication via social media.

First, police are “first and foremost knowledge workers who think and act within the risk-communication systems of other institutions” (Ericson and Haggerty, 1997 p. 9). Social media brings an extra channel for the police to receive and collect information about risk. With the omnipresent impact of social media, increasing growth of public demands for the attention of the police has been noticed. In particular, citizens are getting used to engaging and communicating with companies and businesses 24/7 via social media and feel that they can reasonably expect the same behaviour from the police (Heverin & Zach, 2010). However, this raised concerns that (1) the police do not operate social media in the same way as companies do 24/7 (Fernandez, 2017); (2) police use social media only for engaging and responding to non-emergency incidents.

Nevertheless, other risks arise with the social development and technology advances, for example, the focus of policing roles has changed remarkably since the new managerialist management model resulted in subsequent policing reform (McLaughlin & Murji, 2012). Shifting – at least at the level of rhetoric – from a *force* to a *service*, the police now pay more attention to their response in dealing with the public's concerns, emphasizing the function of reassurance and demonstrating that they represent the interests of different communities (McLaughlin & Levi, 1995). The Communication Officers, many of whom are civilian staff, are aware of these changes in policing fields and are alert to the fact that their communication practices need to adapt to the social media environment to meet these requirements – the image management. Reflected in this study, Lionshire Police's communication policy directs the digital Communication Officer to reply to every piece of information generated from the public, presenting an image that the police are always available to provide care. Both forces post celebratory tweets to mark the holidays of different social groups to, at least, try to appeal to a wider public. Even front-line officers are aware of this change brought by social media so that their policing behaviour and procedures have altered accordingly. For example, some officers or PCSOs in Hawshire take photos of any interesting events during their patrols in order to 1) provide the public (and senior officers) with 'evidence' of working on the beat, or as part of a sort of mentality that is used to diffusing responsibility for one's actions as a form of insurance against possible future negative repercussions; 2) engage with community members at local activities; and 3) reassure the public through the symbolic gesture of 'serve and protect'. Likewise, any Communication Officer in Lionshire will receive training in police public communication and acquire knowledge about media law and guidance before starting using the corporate account. The adoption of, and adaptation to, social media has altered policing work in many ways, not just in terms of police communication.

Several new dynamics emerge in relation to how officers perceive the impacts brought about by Twitter. In particular, the new visibility of police on social media brings both opportunities and challenges, turning the tables onto the police by the public (Brown,

2016; Goldsmith, 2010; Thompson, 2005). For instance, the police have always been reliant to a considerable extent on members of the public to collect information and identify suspects; social media fuels this connection by extending the likelihood that requests for any information the police need can reach more citizens and making it quick and convenient for citizens to inform the police of the information needed. Social media has accelerated the effectiveness of spreading appeals for information by allowing more users to see the information; it is assumed that the more people view the information, the more likely it is that someone will tip off the police. Meanwhile, social media provides the members of the public with opportunities to observe and gain knowledge about crime and law directly from the police, rather than through media reports as before, as information about *crime and criminal justice* is one of the main topics in police tweets thus influencing how people perceive policing work and the criminal justice system (Castells, 2009; Greer & McLaughlin, 2012; Greer & McLaughlin, 2011; Reiner & Greer, 2012; Sparks, 2001). Through strategically self (re)presenting and interpreting policing activity, the police are strategically conducting image work, making efforts to widen their influence by interacting with citizens and constructing a sense of “order” online (Bullock, 2018a).

Furthermore, many researchers have pointed out that police tend to hire civilian professionals, such as journalists and media people, to work in the communication department (Mawby, 2002b; McIntee, 2016). This was particularly true in my research and important for understanding the question; *How are Communication Officers trained by their organizations to operate online communication?* In order to properly conduct police communication and maintain a reputation, police forces hired civilian staff, including professional journalists and media people, to work in the corporate communication team as Communication Officers. These civilian police staff worked in different units of the Corporate Communication department, namely the press unit, marketing unit and digital and social communication unit. They are more experienced in coping with communication risks and storytelling. One such manifestation is that the police conduct impression management via social media, defending themselves and

communicating risks with the wider public (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997). On the other hand, senior police officers in the corporate communication branch are still the decision-makers regarding the communication policies, guidelines, and strategies of the force in the long run.

Through the organizational perspective, social media undoubtedly brings new tools for the police to intentionally “*give an impression*” via presenting visible routine work and encouraging citizen engagement (Bullock, 2018a; Goffman, 1959, pp. 75–76; Manning, 1992a). Conversely, they also offer channels that can threaten the image of individual police officers and the police organization (Lipschultz, 2015). Usually, new technologies in the police, including social media, are introduced in a top-down way, by management, to increase effectiveness and maintain control over rank-and-file officers and their policing process (Chan, 2001). Since the 1990s, use of information technology has been shaping and being shaped by the police organization and structures (Manning, 1992a, 1996). While management posits that the power and authority relations will remain unchanged, the ways of working and relationships between the management and the rank-and-file are bound to be affected by new technologies (Thomas, 1994). In particular, social media has changed police communication practices that used to be hierarchal and strictly controlled by empowering the lower-level Communication Officers to select and post information on behalf of the police, rather than the management (Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Lee & McGovern, 2013c), although they do have to follow the rules and communication regulations of the force that are designed by management officers. As is reflected in both Hawshire and Lionshire Police, it is the digital and Communication Officers who post tweets directly to the public. These officers are not occupying the senior level of the occupational hierarchy in terms of rank and status, and they directly operate police communication via different social media, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr and many others, to construct the police image without the involvement of senior management (Bullock, 2014).

However, this could lead to exposure and career threats if Communications Officers “give off” the wrong impression of the police on social media or misconduct (Bullock, 2018a; Goffman, 1959, pp. 75–76). In other words, Communication Officers would have the organisation’s support and trust when using corporate social media, yet are at the same time subject to being banned from the account or even fired if they breach the communication law and guidance. The severe consequences of misconduct on social media can thus hinder officers who wholeheartedly embrace social media or proactively operate it for strategic use. As Bullock (2018a) observed, proactive monitoring of corporate social media accounts would be unusual, while constabularies are more likely to react to negative audience reviews and improvisations. Senior police managers are more likely to monitor the *overall* performance of the corporate account, evaluating the behaviour of different accounts. Thus, social media also enable the management of the police organization to conduct surveillance internally towards Communication Officers (Trottier, 2012).

There are, I argue, two scenarios that bring threats to police legitimacy within this context. First is the misuse of police corporate accounts by officers during off-duty time. Due to the sense of mission, the thirst for ‘results’ or the unfinished workload, some Communication Officers log in and reply to the public via the police corporate account *after* working hours (Loftus, 2009; Reiner, 2000b). Although one motivation behind this practice is the sense of achievement, officers may face additional risks during the off-duty period, in particular, first, Communication Officers have no obligation to respond to public requirements after working hours, nor should they assume corresponding responsibilities. If there are inappropriate remarks or performances during the use of the corporate account during the off-duty time, the retrospective attribution of responsibilities is a dilemma. Secondly, due to the complexity of police work, the situation may change at any time, involving personnel information, policing processes and results, and a Communication Officer may not be able to trace these changes during the non-working period, which can lead to inaccurate or exposed communication information, namely *breach of trust or confidence*, or *bringing discredit*

on the police service. These are two of the five categorized risks of using the Internet and social media identified by ACPO (2013), and are possible risks of police communication, especially during off-duty periods. In this respect, Communication Officers are required to keep the “back-stage” (Goffman, 1959) of policing away from, and unseen by, the public by not interacting with the public during off-hours, to maintain reputation of the police and avoid exposing the private information of anyone involved in the ongoing policing investigation, and jeopardizing the security of the policing operation.

The second scenario is that of police officers making improper use of their private Twitter accounts, which can be identified by the symbolic markers, contents or images. Whether on or off duty, a police officer’s conduct reflects on the force, and the police integrity and credibility could be jeopardized if there is any inappropriate content posted by the police on their private social media accounts. This is because the inappropriate posts would function to *give off* negative impression of the police. Social media, in this respect, brings significant risk for police organizations (Brown, 1996; Bullock, 2018a).

Moreover, with the rapid development of communications technology, younger generations generally adapt and learn new skills more quickly, including digital technologies and social media communication. This is due to the prevalent use of smartphone access and social media: nine-in-ten teenagers go online at least multiple times per day (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). There is, however, a link between *youthful indiscretion* and social media use, indicating that young adults (aged 18-29) were notably more likely to express regrets about their past postings (Chander, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2012). In this context, it is likely that young police officers who have personal social media accounts or less experienced officers who operate the social media at an earlier point may feel regrets for their past posts. As a response, specific regulations from ACPO (2013) and from individual police forces, such as the latest version of regulations of social media use from Lionshire Police in 2018, have been released to guide and advise officers on social media.



### 7.2.2 Different Police Images: Varied Communication Strategies in the Two Forces

*“[Image work means] all the activities in which police forces engage and which construct and project images and meanings of policing. These include overt and intended image-management activities, but also the less obvious, the unintended, the mundane practices of police work which communicate images of policing. “*

– Mawby 2002, p. 5

A wealth of studies have documented the importance of police image work (Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Ericson et al., 1991; Loader, 1999; Manning, 1978, 1992a; Mawby, 2002b; Punch, 2010). Police engage in image management to promote the characters and identity of the police institution, manipulate its external performance to the public and impact the response from its audience, thereby emphasizing its authority and legitimacy (Manning, 1992a). The news media used to be the central partner and means to shaping police image, but have now been gradually side-lined by the Internet and, in particular, social media (Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Ericson et al., 1987, 1991; Ericson & Haggerty, 1997; Lee & McGovern, 2013a; Mawby, 2002b, 2010b). Police in England and Wales, as in other parts of the world, are using social media to construct and reconstruct the institutional ‘brand’ and police image to enhance their legitimacy. Building on the needs of engagement and image management, this section will discuss *How do police Communication Officers use the corporate account? And Are there differences in the way different forces communicate with the publics via twitter?*

Delivering successful image management on social media is not easy as it creates a platform where the police cannot fully retain dominance in “encounters” with the public, which in this context, is a conversation between the police and the social media users (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). This conversation can be initiated either by the police or the general public. The assessment of the police performance is likely to depend on the timely, polite and effective responses to the public, which is similar to the factors from the traditional *procedural justice model* that police increase public satisfaction and

trust by treating those they encounter with respect and making fair decisions (Tyler, 1990). One salient difference between the online and practical encounters is that the police-initiated conversation usually does not have a particular subject, but a targeted group or community such as football fans, or the general public. As a result, there will be more “audience” watching the police in every “encounter” on a social media platform like Twitter. This shift in the engagement landscape increases the risks of the police’s new visibility (Goldsmith, 2010). With the potential ubiquitous risks of scrutiny by the public, misconduct and threats to careers, individual police forces have employed different communication strategies to construct police images, including controlling the access to corporate accounts, providing a script and ‘saving face’.

First of all, Communication Officers are consciously selected to operate corporate social media accounts. With a limited number of people who can access corporate accounts, police forces maintain institutional control primarily over social media content and presentation (Bullock, 2018a). Restricting access is due to the need for institutional management and financial concerns. As individual police forces employ varied third-party management tools to manage corporate communication, there is a limited volume/number of active accounts, which is related to the contract signed by the police and the software company. Excessive numbers of accounts may impose extra budgets on the operation. Therefore, officers must apply and attend training on police communication before they can access an institutional account.

As Deephouse (1999) suggested, organizational legitimacy is likely to be enhanced by isomorphism with its peers, whereas reputation is more dependent on the differentiated performance of each individual. A police account needs to maintain some similarities with its peers (other police accounts) in order to guarantee its own legitimacy, such as tweets about police work and crime preventions of different kinds. At the same time, it also needs to discover and maintain its own uniqueness to gain brand independence and recognition from the markets and audience (citizens). With acceptance and recognition towards a brand, the public is more likely to engage and

grant its legitimacy (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). In the context of police communication, individual police forces like to share *good stories* of the force and police personnel, which can enhance the police's perceived positive image and reputation (Lee & McGovern, 2013). Meanwhile, each force is trying to differentiate itself from the others, to be recognized as a distinct, independent police account. In this respect, police forces maintain their legitimacy through presenting similarities as police accounts, while presenting the uniqueness to be recognized and enhance the corporate reputation. Furthermore, the two forces tend to shape the police's vivid *brand personality* via Twitter communication. While both emphasized a "legitimate" and "approachable" characteristic, attempts to differentiate brand personalities were found in each separate police force. It is through the unique personality that the individual police force can be distinguished and recognized by the public (Biel, 1993; Sung & Kim, 2010). These images and reputation will, in turn, influence the police legitimacy as a whole.

In terms of image management, I found that the police image on the corporate account varied significantly from that on district accounts and personal accounts. Partly because the operational people are different and at different levels of the organization, the corporate account was found to be less engaging, while the personal account has a more *human side*. Bullock (2018a) suggested this interactivity of personal accounts and district accounts is because operators are closer to the communities they represent. In contrast, the police officers who operate corporate accounts are more concerned about the force image. Indeed, given the 'open' nature of social media, individual officers are more likely to post tweets experimentally in order to attract followers and maintain a good level of engagement. In order to reduce the likelihood of individual improvisation, the police organization provides training to the Communication Officers at different levels, from PCs who post actively on social media to corporate Communication Officers. Training, one important form of image-management, has been employed in both forces researched to regulate corporate social media performances (Bullock, 2018a). Trainees can obtain necessary

information on social media use, media law regulations, and tailored communication rules and guidance of the force. However, such an approach might lead to the criticism that corporate communication is monotonous and too “corporate”, which makes the posts tedious and always the same, serving to distance – rather than engage – the followers. To counter this tediousness, both forces encourage Communication Officers to put their personalities, or personal twists, into posts, such as using the first-person tone instead of the third person. Thus, the police can to some extent, control and monitor their social media performance, so as not to cause negative repercussions while avoiding being too “corporate”.

Nevertheless, given that social media performance can be observed by anyone with an internet connection, the online audience is diverse and has varied and conflicting interests and values. Social media has exposed and exaggerated different standards of values and interests due to the “echo chamber” effect (El-Bermawy, 2016), audiences with different backgrounds, from different social groups may expect the police to represent and act according to their different needs and expectations. Alternatively, as Bullock (2018a, p. 9) described, this unbounded nature of the audience generates tensions because it is hard for the police to “adjust the pitch of a performance to fit the expectations of the multiple social contexts and/or social groups that might be observing it”. It is suggested that Communication Officers have only a vague understanding of who exactly the audience on social media are. Police communication needs to adapt to a more communicative tone, to be more approachable, and make efforts to deliver a message that is representative, such as posting celebratory tweets on different religious holidays. Moreover, if there are criticisms regarding their posts, which can happen often, the officers must be prepared to expect that the users and expressions on social media cannot be predicted nor controlled (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). There are always police ‘haters’ who will criticise whatever the police say and do. Apart from that, Communication Officers would sometimes stand by what had been posted initially despite some disapproving comments. By sticking to the posted tweets, which may be interpreted in opposite ways,

the police can demonstrate their standpoint, or save face. Therefore, creating a 'thick skin', or sticking to the original standpoint as a way of saving face, forms part of image management practices.

### **7.2.3 The Attempts of the Police to Enhance Legitimacy Through Social Media Communication**

In order to understand the structuration of police legitimacy, it is helpful to draw on the structuration theory proposed by Anthony Giddens (1979). Structure is described as the set of enacted rules and resources that mediate an actor's cognition and behaviour as well as the diffusion of practices. In the context of policing, the police activity is a structured phenomenon that is being drawn on by the police and citizens in their actions, and police legitimacy acts as the 'norms' in this phenomenon that mediates relations between the rights and obligations expected by those who participate in a series of interactive contexts. Through engagement – online social media communication in this study, the notion of police are lawful authority and have public support and consent is re-enforced and reproduced during each encounter with the individual agent, and equally subject to be destroyed if the production process is in contrast to the structure. In this respect, police communication is the dynamic medium that embodies the police power through everyday engagement with the public. In this section, I seek to conceptualize the role that police communication plays in shaping the everyday rituals of police practice through which their symbolic power and legitimacy is reproduced (Loader, 1997, p. 9).

Giddens (1979, 1984) identifies three dimensions of structure, which he describes as *signification*, *domination* and *legitimation*. "These are seen as interacting through modalities of, respectively, interpretative schemes, resources and norms, with human action of communication, power and sanctions" (Currie et al., 1999, p. 104). The "interpretation schemes" are the typical models integrated in one's knowledge stocks, and are applied reflectively in the sustaining of communication. As Roschelle & Teasley (1995) argued, the interpretation schemes are standardized in general, and

becomes the shared knowledge that humans use to analyse behaviours and events. Furthermore, the intersection of interpretative schemes and norms can affect individual actors through providing reasons for actions and the normative grounds whereby they may be justified. As the members of the public are able to use their knowledge to analyse what the police should and are capable of doing, they could expect the police to keep to their mandate when in need. While police communication regarding the content and boundaries of policing can readjust this knowledge (see discussion of *Expectation Management below*), the structure of signification will be produced and reproduced through the interaction process.

Secondly, “norms” are organizational rules or social conventions that regulate legitimate conduct. The normative component of interaction is about relations between the rights and obligations expected by people participating in the interactive situations. Thus, the normative dimension of social systems is the *de facto* claim that needs to be sustained and functionalized through effective mobilization of sanctions under actual circumstances. In the context of police communication, the police activities presented through social media are following formal regulations and rules, with the main sources of power here vested by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the Police Act 1996. The abuse of power or violation of rules, such as misconduct or failing to uphold the standards of behaviour expected of them, will subject to punishment and a misconduct hearing, in serious cases, officers will be discharged and subject to judicial investigation. An example can be found in the tweets of the Metropolitan Police that posted the outcomes of a misconduct hearing for five officers as they had “exchanged a series of text messages which contained offensive references to people with disabilities, sexism, paedophilia, racism and homophobia” (Metropolitan Police, 2020). The social media thus, as the findings of this study suggest, acts as the role that makes these punishments public, telling citizens that if the police breach the norms, they will be punished. While one may argue that the police violation of rules may jeopardize their legitimacy, the tweets post about sanctioning of police officers who breach the law can assure the citizens that police activities are regulated and supervised by law

and the Independent Office for Police Conduct. From this perspective, presenting the sanctions of police who committed misconducted behaviour via social media can protect and reproduce police legitimacy and integrity by clarifying the punishment or dismissal of “bad apples”.

In addition, there are certain rules and policies for the use of social media, and behaviours ensuring that breaches of laws would subject to sanctions and punishment, such as in the extreme case, the dismissal of Communication Officers, which will also be posted via social media. Therefore, the production and reproduction of the legitimation structure of the police is induced by this process. While the relationships among those who are nominally constrained may be various (such as extending from senior officers to civilian staff), due to the structural asymmetries of domination, the public can use social media to monitor whether these norms are enforced as expressed, thereby influencing the dialogic nature of legitimation (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012). In this way, the legitimation structures of the police are produced, reproduced and enhanced.

Thirdly, “resources” are structural elements that form the organizational structures of domination. Domination depends on the mobilization of two different types of resources: authoritative resources and allocated resources (Currie, Galliers, & Galliers, 1999). Reflected in police communication, the police resources are categorized into concrete and symbolic resources (Lerner & Clayton, 2011). The former refers to police resources that can be observed – the visibility of the police, such as police patrols, police personnel and policing activities online in the context of communication via social media – while the latter describes resources that have symbolic meanings of the police but cannot be quantified, such as ethical policing, police virtue and police reputation. In order to structure the domination layer of the police, it is important to articulate both types of resources in communication, through police visibility on social media and conveying symbolic meanings when releasing information. Therefore, the domination structure of the police can be produced and reproduced through the

mobilization of police visibility and meaningful engagement with audience via social media.

Police legitimacy is, in this respect, an aspect of the authoritative resources of the police, as legitimacy is the foundation of police authority (Kochel et al., 2013; Tyler, 2011). A legitimate police force demonstrates to people why it is justified to obtain and exercise power, and why those who subject to the power have a corresponding obligation of obedience (Tyler, 2006). For the police in the England and Wales, *policing by consent* is the key to police legitimation and thus acquiring citizens' obedience. Through constantly communicating with the public, via social media, showing that the police perform appropriate behaviour authorized by authorities such as the Home Office and numerous legal Acts, the police are reproducing their resources with endorsement by higher authorizations (Tyler & Huo, 2002). This explains why the police sometimes re-tweet posts or information from government, the Home Office or other legal public agencies. In addition, everyday policing activities are visible to the public and have symbolic meanings of the police actions. Through presenting this visibility online, and conducting meaningful interactions with citizens, the allocated resources are producing and re-enhancing the domination of the police. Police communication, as a form of policing activity, implies exercising police power via social media through engaging with citizens. It is through this process that the police legitimacy is being reproduced.

To answer the question "*What is the role of police online communication in the structuration of police legitimacy?*" we can draw on the duality of structure that police legitimacy is produced and reproduced in the process of engaging with members of the public. Social media, Twitter in particular in this research, acts as the medium that influence the *traces in the mind* (Giddens, 1979). For instance, the structures of signification which tell us that the police are using Twitter to post messages (tweets) about things that are relevant to them, and we are capable of talking to them with the same tool. The interpretative schemes allow us to translate texts and pictures of the



tweets into an idea of what are they trying to express. Similarly, the structures of domination can be drawn on to understand that social media gives us the “right” to observe, even ‘surveille’ the policing practice, through the tweets posted by them, and expect the police to perform in ways that accord with the law and regulation. There are also structures of legitimation which define the appropriate norms and conventions of policing in the particular cultural context – in Britain, it is the policing by consent – and would expect to receive sanctions if the laws are breached, or social conventions broken. This is the inductive way of producing the existing structures, for instance, in viewing the police tweets we reproduce the structure of signification; in responding to appeals in police tweets, such as appeals for missing people or wanted people, the structure of domination is reproduced; in trusting and recognizing police tweets we reinforce the structure of legitimation. Of course, we may fail to reproduce the structures in different stances and put different impacts on the police communication, such as not responding, as we are active agents (Giddens, 1979). For instance, some negative feedback on social media regarding a particular tweet could impact how the police produce further posts. It may bring changes in the structure of police communication – the reproduction of social systems (Giddens, 1979; Currie, Galliers, & Galliers, 1999), it is likely that the police would change the topics of tweets or employ different methods to communication.

### **7.3 Further Reflections and Implications**

#### **7.3.1 Visual Signalling: Enhancing police legitimacy from within**

Social media has been widely adopted by individual police forces to facilitate image work and reputation (re)construction, though in different manners (Mawby, 2002b). As Barnett et al. (2006) suggested, a corporate image is the result of strategically demonstrating corporate identity by selecting and presenting a collection of symbols. Different forces present various symbols and images of the police based on their interpretation of the police and responsive to their distinct socio-environmental

contexts. Many researchers have pointed out that the police in England and Wales use social media to conduct image work, thus enhancing police legitimacy (Crump, 2011; Bullock, 2018b), and the recruitment of specialized civilian Communication Officers to operate social media accounts and deal with the media is evidence of police self-consciousness of enhancing legitimacy through external communication. Building upon this, I argue that the police not only use Twitter strategically for enhancing legitimacy as perceived by the members of the public, but also see the posted information as a medium to enhance the internal legitimacy of the police (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012).

From an empirical perspective, Tyler (2011) and others (Bradford et al., 2009; Jackson & Bradford, 2009; Tyler et al., 2014) suggested that citizens' perceptions and beliefs in the rightfulness of police conduct are heavily dependent on the treatment they receive during encounters with the police. This treatment, also termed the "teachable moment", enables the police to conduct symbolic policing that cultivates public trust and confidence from the encountered individuals (Skinns et al., 2017, p. 603). In the context of police communication, each tweet posted for the purpose of image management by the police is the "teachable moment", or the visual signalling, that demonstrate a varnished impression of police work to the audience, both the public *and the police themselves*. These communications not only affect citizens' perception of the police, but also "teach" the police officers themselves in a direct way what the kind of projected and ideal images are (Mawby, 2014). The image management on social media works not only externally, tailored for external audience, forming a desired character of the police. I argue that equally important, it also has implications for the internal audience as well, teaching their own police officers how to think about the legitimate role of the police and enhance their sense of belonging to the police organization, thus enhancing their legitimacy internally (Mawby & Worthington, 2002). The manifestation of *teaching internally* is found in the following aspects: First, individual police force strategically uses social media to depict a police image that is genuine and desirable. As noted in this study, different methods have been employed,

attempting to make the police appear an image of trustworthy, approachable, professional and having a personal twist such as humour. While this ideal police image can indeed appeal to citizens and enhance police legitimacy externally, although to a limited content (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015), it sends signals from the police corporate communication branch internally, to the police officers and staff within the police organization. Through deliberately presenting the police officer as a character with the above-mentioned virtue, it is likely to impact on perceptions of self-legitimacy of the employees, making the officers feel that they are more legitimate as a sworn police officer when they encounter members of the public (Mawby & Worthington, 2002; Varey & Lewis, 1999).

Second, the visual signalling has potential impacts on certain groups of police officers, such as officers who are from minority backgrounds. This study noted that both Hawshire and Lionshire Police, for example, post tweets about holidays, or religious festivals or key campaigns for ethnic minorities and other minority social groups, showing affection and respect towards the values and beliefs of different groups. By highlighting the symbolic festivals for minority ethnic groups, these two forces are, or are at least showing the attempt to, build a better relationship with local communities and influence their perceptions of the police. More importantly, in their tweets, police employees will also appear in these campaigns, such as police officers participating in LGBT parades, or the Black Lives Matter campaign. Although one may argue that these attempts are more of a gesture of police concerns about public issues, rather than conducting real police work, such as fighting crimes or enforce the law (Reiner, 1990), it is an effective way to show support, from the organizational level, to people of those groups, including police officers who are themselves from minority backgrounds. In the context of policing, a police officer from a non-white background or gay and lesbian officers, may regard the signals – tweets about ethnic and other minority campaigns – as showing the support and championing from the police organization, thus extending the sense of belongings to the police organization, which as Mawby & Worthington (2002) suggested, is crucial for increasing self-legitimacy.

For instance, posts about female officers, including the image and stories of female officers may have similar effects on self-perceived legitimacy. Both Hawshire and Lionshire Police posted a series of stories and achievements of female officers within each force on International Women's Day, demonstrating that the police organization acknowledges and values their work and contributions. It is suggested that through signifying certain groups of the police personnel that are traditionally excluded from the majority, the police are today using tweets to demonstrate the concerns and support from the organization, with an attempt to enhance the perceptions of self-legitimacy of police officers.

However, the intended police image on social media carries risks as the new visibility increased the surveillance from the public (Goldsmith, 2015; Mann, 2004, 2016). Any criticism a police corporate account receives would function as signalling to the Communication Officers to re-assess and re-adjust the communication strategies. Drawn from the negative social response, the Communication Officers are able to have a better understanding of the extent to which the public gives consent to policing, and how the services should be delivered. Thus, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the 'unsuccessful' tweets in terms of image work could also contribute to the cultivation of perceptions of the police work and impact the internal teaching process.

### **7.3.2 Marketization of Police Communication**

#### **7.3.2.1 Internal Marketization: Self-legitimacy Enhancement**

Evolved from the notion of 'selling a job' to the employee, internal marketing is employed to increase employee satisfaction towards the organization, thus contributing to the organization's effectiveness as a whole (Christopher et al., 1991; Sasser & Arbeit, 1976). While some argued that the concept of internal marketing might be too superficial in understanding its real value, the core principle that underpins this strategy is to win the hearts and acceptance of employees (police officers and staff) towards the (police) organization (Mawby & Worthington, 2002; Varey & Lewis, 1999).

It is of great importance for the police to employ internal marketing not only because it functions as a precursor to successful external marketing performance by the police (Mawby & Worthington, 2002), but also, in the dialogic perspective, the satisfaction of the job and confidence in the rightfulness to exercise power can enhance the sense of collective identity of the police officers, which facilitates recognition of the police organization as a rightful authority, and enhances police self-legitimacy (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012; Tankebe, 2014b). Police officer's recognition of their legitimacy is essential, as "unless those who exercise power are convinced that there is an adequate moral justification for their continuation in office, they are unlikely to be effective" (ibid. p. 153).

Reflecting on the findings from the study it was suggested that both police forces used internal marketing approaches to promote the police occupation and to increase the job satisfaction of officers. Notably, both forces delivered services towards police officers to increase the positive recognitions of the occupation. While the Internal Communication Officer in Hawshire adopted one-to-one communication with officers in need, Lionshire Police employed surveys to explore the employees' attitudes and expectations from the organization. From the dialogic perspective, the increased sense of achievement and satisfaction towards the job can, to some extent, contribute to enhanced self-legitimacy of police personnel (Bottoms and Tankebe 2012). Social media have been adopted to facilitate the internal communication to "sell the job" to police officers. In particular, Communication Officers post *good stories* of policing practices and police officers, and occupational moral virtue the police, such as the code of ethics via Twitter, to inform the external audience and *internal* police officers how valuable this job is. To this end, it is hopeful that the internal police employee's job recognition and satisfaction can be enhanced, which benefits the sense of self-legitimacy.

### **7.3.2.2 External Marketization: Promotion of Organizational Legitimacy**

Organizational reputation and legitimacy are essential to organizations but presented in ways that are fundamentally distinct (Deephouse, 1999; Rindova et al., 2006, 2007). In particular, organizational reputation originates from the public's judgment and perception of the organization's identity, which is crucial to guarantee a company's survival among its competitive peers (Deephouse, 1999). In contrast, the organization's legitimacy is a multidisciplinary concept that received a considerable amount of attention (Deephouse, 2000; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). Through the marketing perspective, legitimacy has historically been highlighted to determine an organization's survival, while reputation received less attention (Oliver, 1991; Suchman, 1995). This was noticed by Fombrun and Van Riel (1997, p. 5) who commented that "... reputations are seldom noticed until they are threatened." In general, corporate reputation and legitimacy are changing social statuses of a firm based on observers' evaluations and judgments (Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Elsbach, 2006; Lawrence, 1998). They are regarded as the intangible asset that an organization relies on to develop and manage performance (Oliver, 1997; Rindova et al., 2006). Although the public policing, which is distinguished from private policing and security services, is far away from a business (Reiner, 2010), I found that the language of marketing has been extended to the police organizations. In this context, the importance of corporate reputation and legitimacy lies in efficiently enhancing an organization's marketing performance; more importantly, it is interdependently connected to influence its operation. While there are clear differences between the police institution and business corporations in that the former not only functions as a public service in society, but also a representation of the power of state. Police reputation and legitimacy is rooted closely to the ideology of the state, and the effective ways of maintaining the social statuses are gaining public consent and support (Emsley, 1996; Reiner, 2010). Drawn from a marketing perspective, there are strategies and tactics that may help the police, as a public organization, in enhancing its reputation and legitimacy.

For a public organization, corporate reputation and legitimacy are complementary and interrelated to each other (King & Whetten, 2008). In other words, reputation and legitimacy are related through the particular social identity of the organization – if the reputation is damaged, this then threatens the broader legitimacy of an organization (the police). We might also stretch it further to argue that if the reputation of the police is threatened, this can also by association threaten the legitimacy of the criminal justice system and the state itself (Reiner, 1985, 2010). In the context of the networked society, the '24-7' media sphere and the omnipresence of social media has made police misconduct or deviance more visible to citizens, which poses threats to the police reputation (Goldsmith, 2015; Greer & McLaughlin, 2012). For example, images and footage from private video recording devices of the death of Ian Tomlinson<sup>21</sup> have painted the police as abusive and challenges the police reputation significantly, triggering complaints from the public and throwing up huge risks and questions for police legitimacy (Goldsmith, 2010).

Hence, the police need to employ strategies for reputation management. In the context of police communication via social media, one salient response is to hire civilians with journalism and public relations expertise to help build the brand and “sell” the organization (Lee & McGovern, 2013c). Since 1987, police have been recruiting external professional civilians to manage police communication and deal with the media (Hodges, 1987; Mawby, 2002b; Mawby & Gisby, 2009; Surette, 2001). The changes of department names from “Press Office”, “Public Relations” to “Corporate Communication” reflects the changing of responsibilities and activities of these department (Ericson, 2006; Ericson & Haggerty, 1997; Morgan & Newburn, 1997). From a “press agency/publicity model” to a “Two-way Asymmetrical” model (Grunig, 1989), policing communication with the public has shifted from reactively answering media questions and responding to media broadcasts of police stories, to proactively communicating with different, often competing, audiences in order to negotiate the

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<sup>21</sup> The death of Ian Tomlinson: A 47-year-old man who was videoed being apprehended by a police officer and died in the midst of a G20-related protest. Video footage and images were recorded by individual device and published by news media organization such as *The Guardian and Observer*.

operation, maintenance and survival of the organization and brand (Broom & Sha, 2013). With social media, officers in the Marketing Department and Public Relations Unit are capable of engaging with individuals directly and can interact with the audiences in a real-time dialogue (Zerfass & Schramm, 2013). Supporting evidence for this can be found in that there is now a permanent *Marketing* role inside the communication department of Hawshire and a dedicated *Public Relations Unit* in the corporate communication branch of Lionshire Police. The essence of the job of both positions includes proactively contacting members of the public and media via designated campaigns, online discussion and online community events, which are in accordance with the marketing work in a business organization. Since the image of the police presented through communication is essential to influence people's perceptions of police and policing work (Mawby, 2002a, 2014a), the police's professional and strategic presentation has been vitally important (Castells, 2009). Experts in roles like Marketing and Public Relations Unit can help enforce this construction process by knowing the media industry and seizing opportunities to form a particular image of the police in the face of public/media critique.

Furthermore, I found that there are two more strategies used regarding police use of Twitter for the purpose of marketization of police communication, which manifested in the form of expectation management and visual management.

### **- Expectation Management**

"Expectation" affects us in the process of everyday reasoning, helping individuals to make assessments about current circumstances and the future (Gardenfors, 1993; Roese & Sherman, 2007). It has often linked public relations in theory and practice in that it enables the corporate organizations to better identify and respond to changing preferences, claims and interests from their publics (Olkkonen & Luoma-aho, 2014). It is also important from the perspective of reputation management that the capability of responding to expectations of competence, success, responsibility and attractiveness affects a corporate reputation (Eisenegger, 2009; Fombrun & Rindova, 1998).



Therefore, effective reputation management requires the skill and ability to negotiate expectations with its publics (Olkkonen & Luoma-aho, 2011).

In the context of policing, people can have varied and conflicting expectations towards the police and policing services (Ericson & Haggerty, 2002). Given the complexity of socioeconomic and demographic variations in society, people in separate social groups can often have shared values and concerns that may differ from those which emerge from other social groups (Goldsmith, 2005). Naturally, views on policing services and police issues may be equally likely to be differentiated. For example, the expectations can vary because of the demographic characteristics. Norman (2009) found that young people under 18 expect more police presence on the streets to improve their sense of safety. As a response, a tailored approach to engage with young people and young adults (18 to 25) is recommended by The Police Foundation (2018), including enhancing multi-level engagement, such as communication via social media.

More importantly, the expectation expressed by the public may not represent their actual demands for the policing service, for example, the motivation behind the demand for more police patrols on the street is the need for an increased visibility of police and their response to the fear of crime, which could bring more PCSOs on street and in community (Cosgrove & Ramshaw, 2015; Manning, 1982). It is of importance that the police can unravel the real motivation behind the expressed demand through communication. Lionshire Force, for instance, organizes online, and off-line campaigns based on different topics, such as providing crime prevention suggestions or sharing knowledge about certain types of crime. In the online campaign, individuals can talk directly to higher rank officers, such as the Chief Constable, who members of the public usually have no avenue to communicate with and can influence how policing will be delivered. Off-line campaigns are organized in the form of community meetings. Community Officers and PCSOs engage with residents to identify and negotiate their expectations, involving communicating the policing priorities and services, adjusting their expectations to the police and maintaining balance between the expected policing

service and the actual policing practices (Fielding, 2005). Although community meetings have long been criticised as superficial, dominated by the police rather than the public, and occupied by only *certain* members of the public and with no practical effects on neighbourhood policing, it is arguably, still a valuable method to communicate and generate opinions from the residents (Fielding, 1995; Greig-Midlane, 2019; Grimshaw & Jefferson, 1987; Myhill, Yarrow, Dalglish, & Docking, 2003; Stratta, 1993).

However, the police are under criticism for not addressing and responding to issues and concerns of certain social groups, such as young people and ethnic minorities (Bradley, 1998). To impact the expectations of the disaffected groups, police need to address and concentrate on their concerns particularly to develop a good relationship with them. It is suggested that the police are capable of influencing the demand and views of policing if they have a good relationship with different social groups. Developing good relationships with diverse audiences thus becomes prioritized in expectation management. Since a large number of teenagers in the UK use social media, it is feasible for the police to maintain and increase engagement with this group via social media use, responding to their queries and building up good relationships, thus increasing the perceived legitimacy of the police. For instance, the Communication Officer in Hawshire Police posts tweets with multi-forms of media attachments, such as images, video, audio, Gifs and animation emojis, hoping to gain teenagers' attention – and affections – by communicating 'like' young people, or "getting down with the kids". With a similar conversation with the police, the targeted group are more likely to have better understandings of police functions and responsibilities, and thus increasing the sense of security and police legitimacy.

Furthermore, segmented policing can be employed to deal with different social groups' needs and issues from the perspective of marketing. Since the police and policing are far more than a monolithic entity (Reiner, 1990), the policing responses to the public can be segmented, according to its diverse demands and concerns. However, many

expectations of the police have been based on an unrealistic or naive understanding of the policing responsibilities and police service's capacities (Bradley, 1998), also termed as an "impossible mandate" by Manning (1977). Generally, police were expected to fight against crimes as well as acting as the "guardian" of citizens in the community they serve (Manning, 1977). Therefore, increasing transparency of the police is one of the solutions to manage the expectations from various groups in society. Through actively engaging with the citizens and presenting them with a picture of policing work, such as enforcing the law or participating in community activities, the police can, to some extent, influence the public's expectations for police work (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015; Smulders et al., 2017), reflecting the philosophy of *policing by consent*. In other words, the public would know, from the police tweets, what the policing work involves, what are the prioritized concerns of the police, and how the police would react to queries. Therefore, citizens can have a clearer idea of what can be expected from the police and policing services. For example, both Hawshire and Lionshire forces would post tweets about recent work reviews and the ensuing plans, informing the citizens of policing work. By enhancing the transparency of the policing service to the public, police legitimacy can be increased, though to a limited extent (Bullock, 2018b; Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015). Citizens should have a clear understanding of how to interact with the police service and re-adjust their expectations from the police, thus maintaining a fair assessment of policing work.

## **Visual Marketing**

Visual messages form a key component of marketing that involves using eye-catching and visual elements of a product to facilitate more effective sales when a potential consumer has been identified (Wedel & Pieters, 2007). The importance of visual marketing is increasingly recognized in practice, and is generally defined as "the strategic utilization by firms of commercial and non-commercial visual signs and symbols to deliver desirable and/or useful messages and experiences to consumers." (ibid, p.1). In this respect, corporate organizations intentionally employ visual signs to

deploy desirable meanings to the targeted audience to promote product persuasion. In online police communication, utilizing visual elements has been identified as a communication technique to promote the organizational mission (Brucato, 2015).

Given that human perception is mostly visual, most people prefer short and mobile-optimized content (Taylor, 2014). Police add visual signs and symbols to their posts firstly, to be 'seen' among a large amount of information on social media sites. Since Twitter is mostly used for broadcasting and sharing information and the users' attention span can decrease significantly, an eye-catching picture can make the context of the post seen and read by others (Manic, 2015). Among collected tweets from Hawshire and Lionshire, it can be found that some visual attributes such as animations and vivid colours were employed in posts, which facilitates attracting consumers' attention (Lee & Ahn, 2012). Second, pictures can express emotions and meanings beyond cultural and linguistic barriers (Manic, 2015). In other words, some meanings conveyed by images can be decoded by people from different cultures and diverse backgrounds. One example has been given in this study, is the picture of police officers laughing together with several citizens, which suggests the bonding between police and the public, and a friendly and approachable face of the police. Third, posts with visual content are more likely to be shared since they have attention-grabbing and catchy components and impact people's emotions. As is found in this research, many interviewees often put images in a post and suggested that the image-attached tweets can increase engagement, especially with pictures including animals and 'vintage' elements.

In the context of using symbolic markers for police image construction, Manning (1992, p. 144) suggested that uses "ceremonies, visible daily activities, props and symbols, and special knowledge and techniques constitute resources by which police can mark, claim, display, defend, and reaffirm their mandate". In this study, a lot of visual components of the police including the police badge, force logo and signs were found in Hawshire and Lionshire posts. Visualizations of police symbols can, on the

one hand, increase police visibility on social media in a more digestible way; on the other hand, it depicted a police image that the police intended to create (Mawby, 2002a; Chermak & Weiss, 2005). Furthermore, the police attempt to make efforts to maximize their online visibility and influence by adding police elements into everyday life objects. For example, the signs and symbols of the police, such as police cars, police uniforms and hats are found in the mixture of merchandise such as football, candy and animals, like puppies, connecting the police to events that people are interested in, such as the World Cup Competition and Halloween. This way, the police are more likely to increase online visibility and take part in social events via edited pictures. Thus, the public can become more familiar with the police, reducing the social distance from them. In my research, multiple forms of media attachments have been identified in the posts from Hawshire and Lionshire Force. Both forces posted over half of tweets with at least one of these visual elements attached and these tweets also have a higher level of engagement compared with posts with other elements, such as a web link, and those without a visual component. This reflected the effectiveness of visualization in the marketization of police communication.

### **7.3.3 Brand Consistency of Police Organization: An Alternative pproach to Enhancing Police Legitimacy**

Much research on police communication suggest that engagement between the police and the public plays a crucial element in maintaining and enhancing police legitimacy (Bradford et al., 2013; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). In practice, police forces seem to leverage this importance of engagement by prioritizing public interaction against other attributes of social media operation. Reflected in this study, the level of engagement is, at least from interviews, the most important criteria when measuring and evaluating the use of a social media account. Communication Officers employ various methods to hook public response in the forms of comments, retweets and likes, including sending greeting messages on symbolic festivals of minority groups and posting cuddly puppy images. While some of the tweets with an intention to engaging, such as the festival tweets, were posted in a *Push* strategy (Meijer & Thaens, 2013), with no

intention to generate feedback or responses, some other methods are valid in practice in arousing public responses. This, however, raises further questions:

- First, are “likes” of a police tweet due to citizens’ affection towards cute animals, rather than towards the police, real engagement? If not, what is the significance of this so-called interaction? Do likes of a cute image somehow transform into affection towards the police, and to the support of the police as a whole?
- Second, given that the work of the corporate police is different from that of the district police organization, should the operating rules and evaluation measures of police corporate accounts be the same as that of the district accounts – emphasizing on *engagement*? And what can such differentiated goals of the corporate accounts and district accounts each facilitate, to enhance police legitimacy?

Furthermore, some tweets posted by the police aimed at improving public engagement have been found to be more of an “exhibition” of engagement wills, rather than actual engaging in a meaningful way, such as the Non-policing Related posts. The operation of police corporate accounts seems to fall into a dilemma: attempting to show the willingness of engaging, although this may not be the prioritized needs. The root of these issues is that the police overly emphasize the numbers of “engagement indicators” (Retweet, Comments and Likes), also known as social media tricks that deceive or confuse people by the false reality constructed by social media, while ignoring the nature of a meaningful engagement as “the process of enabling citizens and communities to participate in *policing* at their chosen level” (College of Policing, 2013). I would, therefore, challenge ideas that *all* police social media accounts should be engaging and suggest a functional division among police social media accounts.

As representatives of varied kinds of police on social media, different police Twitter accounts should have different functions, just like the distribution of police roles. For example, road and traffic police focus on road and weather information, while PCSOs are more concerned with community activities and neighbourhood security. The content of the tweets posted by traffic police should be distinguished from that of the PCSOs, so that the brand uniqueness of different police accounts can be established. In other words, not *every* police account needs to be interactive, just as not every police officer needs to deal directly with the public. Drawn from this study, I argue that one possible approach for the police to enhance legitimacy and public recognition is that try not to emphasize *each* corporate account's role in engaging, but to set up the functional goals of each account and develop corresponding communication strategies.

There is realistic basis for implementation of this proposal. First, there are the varied characteristics between the corporate police accounts and district police accounts, as has been highlighted in the findings of this research. While these are all official police organizational accounts set up by and under supervisions of the corporate communication team, they serve different goals with varied emphasize. As noted in this study, the contents of corporate posts are more general, and covering issues within the jurisdiction with a distant tone, whereas the district posts are more engaging and involve topics which are mostly locally relevant. Thus, two distinct police online images emerged, where one is more corporate and business-like, and the other is more interactive and approachable. The use of image of female officers can also be seen as an example of this that while the corporate account present on the professional side of female officers, the district accounts are using the "pink and fluffy" characteristics of women officer to highlight the soft-human side of the police. While most of the interviewees in this study suggested that the corporate account should transform into a more engaging style – like a district account – I argue that the "non-interactive" manner of police corporate accounts would do no harm to either the police image or police legitimacy. Since different accounts have varied goals and characteristics, it is acknowledged that the corporate account could remain 'corporate', firstly because

general members of the public are more concerned about local issues and if they want to know information regarding the local crimes and community events would prioritize following police district accounts. With an active engagement with local police forces via social media, most inquiries of citizens can be properly addressed. In this respect, the engaging characteristic of district police accounts and effectiveness of policing can facilitate to enhance the perceived police legitimacy (Bullock, 2018a; Grimmelikhuisen & Meijer, 2015; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Secondly, from the side of the police, the police at the corporate offices generally do not deal directly with the public as they are more office-based and acting in a supervisory role of other district police forces. The police corporate twitter accounts, as representatives of the corporate police on social media platforms, can reasonably maintain consistency with the characteristics of the group represented, that is, being corporate. Police responding to different requirements can re-enhance and extend the recognition and acceptance of police image and legitimacy (Schallehn et al., 2014).

Furthermore, as reflected in this study, the staff who operate police corporate social media accounts are predominantly civilian staff who have expertise and career experience to better deal with social media communication and journalists (Mawby, 2002a; McIntee, 2016). In contrast, many district accounts are operated by police officers or PCSOs. It is acknowledged that employing professional civilians is beneficial for police communicating and dealing with the media in a professional way. However, it can be seen as a move which betrays an 'organizational' consciousness or self-awareness about 'brand' and image. The intrusion of a marketing terminology into the police through these 'external' professional have a certain influence on debate about what is good for the image of the organization and what is good for the task of policing? Ideally, it should be the police themselves, either through the management people or the rank-and-file officers, who conduct corporate communication and create the image of the police. The widespread employment of civilians with professional backgrounds to take charge of the police image suggested (1) that what matters about the communication is *how* to present the police image, rather than *what* to present (Bullock,



2018a), and expert civilians are more experienced in this regard; (2) the 'marketization' of police communication, which has been discussed in 7.3.2, and (3) the need for trust in Communication Officers who are paid in the bureaucratic organization, to fulfil the communication roles of the police.

#### **7.4 Research Limitations**

This research examined how Twitter is used in two police forces in England and Wales and what this tells us about police communication and its role in enhancing police legitimacy. It revealed the impact of police communication and public engagement in terms of forming a police image, risk management and legitimacy enhancement, and included different methodological approaches which yielded different datasets. However, it naturally had limitations in its breadth and exploration of related issues.

This research, like many case-studies based investigations was potentially limited in its breadth. Although the justification for choosing two police forces based in England and Wales as the basis for this research was methodologically sound, it is important to acknowledge the differences in policies, practices, and experiences and composition of Communication Officers observed in the two participating forces suggesting differences across the forty-three police forces in England and Wales. While the police forces are designed and directed nationally by the Home Office, it is not a single unified service with common communication goals and tactics. Each force has its own interpretation of police communication and strategies for using social media based on the local circumstances, such as crime rates, crime patterns, community needs and residents' backgrounds. This can result in very different communication strategies and experiences with social media that make it difficult to draw conclusions on policing tactics and practices on communication via social media nationally. While these research findings may be partially applicable to other police forces, it would not be safe to assume the generality of these findings in the UK or elsewhere in the world.

As the fieldwork for this research took place in 2018, there have been many developments and changes in policing and society since. The focus on current police practices relating to communication via Twitter means that this research is naturally retrospective and thus can make only a limited contribution to the understanding of future demand in relation to the capability of the police to enforce laws in ways that have changed distinctly during the pandemic period of Covid-19 in 2020. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has created a range of unprecedented changes and challenges for police departments in the UK and elsewhere in the world, namely around the changing police-community relations, the mental health and wellbeing of officers and staffs, the intra-organisational challenges, and inter-agency cooperation (Caluori and Clements, 2020; Brooks and Lopez, 2020; Stogner et al., 2020). In the field of police communication, while some researchers have noted that police in the USA were widely using online communication tools to broadcast news, such as Covid-19 information, modifications to services, and other informing messages (Farmer and Copenhaver, 2021), Nikolovska and colleagues (2020) found that the UK police posted tweets about fraud, cybercrime and domestic abuse to mitigate crime during the first stages of the pandemic. However, the findings in this research are still relevant to developing an understanding of the issues facing policing in constructing police legitimacy via social media communication, any changes made in the external environment of the police, such as the upgraded technologies, changes in policies, and unpredictable changes in society, need to be taken into consideration in order to predict demands in terms of re-constructing police legitimacy in the future. Furthermore, this research analysed the influence of police communication on legitimacy from the perspective of the police, discussing what the police communication via Twitter looks like. It lacks the discussion and assessment from the other side of the communication – on how the public perceive police communication via social media. These considerations can be developed to fulfil the comprehensive understanding of police communication in the future research.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1. Information Leaflet

Coleg y Celfyddydau, Dyniaethau a Busnes, Prifysgol Bangor  
College of Arts, Humanities and Business, Bangor University  
Gwynedd LL57 2DG  
Ffôn/Tel: (01248) 388728  
Elusen Gofrestrig Rhif/Registered charity 1141565



#### **Police Use Social Media to Facilitate Enhancing Legitimacy in Hawshire and Lionshire Police Force** Information leaflet

##### **Introduction**

The research has been initiated as a PhD work from College of Arts, Humanities and Business, and School of History, Philosophy and Social Science, Bangor University. It is funded by the China Scholarship Council and is supported by Hawshire Police force and Lionshire Police force. It will explore staff perceptions about police use Twitter and its effects on the neighbourhood policing in the Hawshire and the Lionshire.

##### **About the study**

The prevalence of police use Twitter as one of the main communication platforms highlighted the important role of police tweets, which was depended heavily on police perception of Twitter usage and the evaluation of this job.

Thus it is essential to explore the views and perceptions of operating police Twitter from police who produce the tweets, and to hear the recommendations about how police tweets could be utilised to serve the neighbourhood policing better.

##### **How can you help?**

You are invited to participate in a one-off confidential focus group which will last about 90 minutes. I will organise the interview structure and guide discussion. The areas of interest to be discussed include:

- Views and perceptions of operating police tweet
- Priority of tweets content
- Received guidance, support and surveillance from work
- Evaluation of the job

We anticipate that the focus group will take up to 90 minutes to complete. The meeting will be recorded if everyone consents or alternatively, notes will be taken.

All information provided during the focus group is **strictly confidential**. We also ask you to respect what was said in the focus group and not share this with other people. You **will not** be asked to share confidential case details and we do not want you to talk about specific colleagues. You **will not** be identified in outputs arising from this

work. However, confidentiality may be broken in *exceptional circumstances* if information indicative of serious criminal behaviour or abuse is shared. In the unlikely event of this occurring, we will inform you of our concerns before passing the information on to the Professional Standards Department.

*It is up to you to decide* if you would like to participate. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. Non-participation will have no impact on your standing in your profession.

**What will happen to the results of the study?**

All the findings from this study will be reviewed and analysed confidentially. It will also be used as part of the PhD thesis and support further academic publication. You will receive feedback describing key findings.

**About the research supervisors:**

Professor Martina Feilzer from Bangor University is the first supervisor and Dr. Bethan Loftus is the second supervisor of the YaXian Qiu, who conduct this research and the fieldwork.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the College of Business, Law, Education and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

**Next steps:**

If you would like to participate in the research, please complete the consent to interview form and return it by email to: [sopa6d@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:sopa6d@bangor.ac.uk).

**Contact for further information**

If you would like any further information, please contact YaXian Qiu (07746449284) or email [sopa6d@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:sopa6d@bangor.ac.uk). I will then get in touch with you directly.

If you want to make a complaint about the research, please contact: Professor Martina Feilzer, Head of the Social Science School and the first supervisor, telephone: 01248-388171, email: [m.feilzer@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:m.feilzer@bangor.ac.uk), or Dr. Bethan Loftus, the second supervisor, email: [b.loftus@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:b.loftus@bangor.ac.uk).

**Thank you**

## Appendix 2. Consent Form

Coleg y Celfyddydau, Dyniaethau a Busnes, Prifysgol Bangor  
College of Arts, Humanities and Business, Bangor University  
Gwynedd LL57 2DG  
Ffon/Tel: (01248) 388728  
Elusen Gofrestrig Rhif/Registered charity 1141565



### Consent form

*Please tick the boxes that **apply to you**.*

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for this study ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason ☐

I understand that my contact details will be stored on a confidential database ☐

I understand that confidentiality may be broken in exceptional circumstances if information indicative of malpractice, neglect or abuse is shared ☐

I consent for anonymised quotations from the focus group to be used in publications ☐

I consent for anonymised quotations to be used for academic purposes ☐

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Designation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please email your completed form to: [sopa6d@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:sopa6d@bangor.ac.uk).  
Thank you**

## Appendix 3. Consent Form to Interview

Police Use Social Media to Facilitate Enhancing Legitimacy  
in Hawshire and Lionshire Police Force

**CONSENT TO INTERVIEW FORM**

Please tick the boxes that apply to you. ☐

☐ I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for this study.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

☐ I consent to be interviewed and for the information collected to be used in the ways outlined in the information sheet.

☐ I understand that my contact details will be stored on a **confidential database**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Post code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4. Interview Guide

Purpose of question/statement	Question/statement
Research issue	Police Use Social Media to Facilitate Enhancing Legitimacy in Hawshire and Lionshire Police Force
Thank you	I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today.
My name, purpose of the study, supervisor and funders	My name is YaXian Qiu and I am a student from College of Business, Social Sciences and Law, Bangor University. I am conducting research into the effects of police use twitter on the neighbourhood policing in Hawshire and Lionshire for the purpose of my Ph.D. research. My supervisors are Professor Martina Feilzer, head of the Social Science School and the first supervisor, telephone: 01248-388171, email: <a href="mailto:m.feilzer@bangor.ac.uk">m.feilzer@bangor.ac.uk</a> , and Dr. Bethan Loftus, the second supervisor, email: <a href="mailto:b.loftus@bangor.ac.uk">b.loftus@bangor.ac.uk</a> , from the School of Social Sciences, Bangor University, whom could be contacted If you have any questions or compliant about this study.
Confidentiality, Duration	This interview would take approximately one hour, as expected. I will be asking you questions about your views of using police twitter, the priority of producing tweets content, the support and guidance from work that you have received, and how your job being evaluated. I will be taping the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments, I will also take some notes during the session. Please be aware that you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.
How interview will be conducted	

<p>Views and perceptions of operating police tweet</p>	<p>Let's begin with the views of operating the Hawshire police tweet. As we know you are one of the team members of producing tweets to the public, so generally, what's your feeling about doing this job?</p> <p>What was your expectation before getting this job? Are there any different feelings now?</p> <p>With all kinds of tweets you tweeted, including traffic reminds, solved crimes, asking information about missing person,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What functions do you think the police tweets should achieve?</li> <li>- In your expectation, who is the target audience?</li> <li>- What's your view of tweets that are being re-tweeted? Are there any characteristics or features they share?</li> </ul> <p>I found some not-very-friendly comments of police tweets during the research, some may be cynicism, but some may be do not know what really happened.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What's your view of critic comments?</li> <li>- Do you intend to reply or explain to them?</li> </ul> <p>Do you say the number of 're-tweet' or the 'comments', or the 'likes' of a tweet are important? Will that bring any effects to you when you process the further tweets?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If yes, which one of them do you believe the most worthy attention? Why is that?</li> <li>- If not, what are the indicators for you or the evaluation system to view how the tweeting job is doing?</li> </ul> <p>What kinds of private chat via the Hawshire Twitter do you received the most? Any others?</p> <p>Do you receive report-crime private chat?</p>
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	<p>What's your opinion about report crime through private chat of Twitter?</p> <p>How do you view the credibility of the online crime report?</p> <p>Do you feel positive or negative about this scenario?</p> <p>Do you think the police tweets bring any positive influence to the police-public relations? Or negative?</p>
Priority of tweets content	<p>As we know, you browse many sources of news everyday, reading briefings, receiving colleges' messages and lots of information. So, in terms of making decisions of what to pick to tweet,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are there any rules or protocols for what information sources should be go through?</li> <li>- Is there a kind of news or information that you believe is more important or more interesting than others to go to tweets?</li> <li>- Will the public response of a tweet influence what content to be tweeted, like the number of re-tweet, comments and likes, influence what content to be tweeted?</li> <li>- How would police tweets serve the goals of facilitating police-public relations? through what kind of tweets can this goal be achieved?</li> </ul> <p>I understand that police officers have working hours, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What happened if the kind of important news you mentioned occurs in the off-duty hours? Would you put that on Twitter through the police Twitter account real-time or deal with it in the next working hours?</li> </ul>
Guidance, Support and Surveillance from Work	<p>According to previous research, some official guidance like the 'Engage' from National Policing Improvement Agency is made to give suggestions of how to manage police social media.</p> <p>Do we have our own guidance or protocols of such?</p> <p>When was your first time of receiving this guidance?</p> <p>Are there any other career trainings for managing social media, like Twitter?</p>

	<p>Usually, work colleague is supportive to each other, in terms of picking up news from other police departments,</p> <p>What kinds of support do you receive when producing tweets? Either directly or indirectly?</p> <p>What kinds of support do you wish to receive?</p> <p>How do you receive news or stories from other departments? Will you go live-chat with them, or read the briefing? or exchange information through some kind of information pool?</p> <p>Will you go to certain department for news or stories to be tweeted?</p> <p>And who is the one to decide what types of news to be passed?</p> <p>If you receive public's asking-for-help online,</p> <p>Will you pass the information to the in-charge department? and How?</p> <p>What about the crime-report via Twitter?</p> <p>Speaking of online surveillance, which means a third party or self-supervision of the online police tweets to monitor how is a police Twitter account doing, and deliver basic online social public media surveillance.</p> <p>Is there any group or organisation that supervise tweet? In particular, police tweet?</p> <p>What are their responsibility and capability?</p> <p>How is this surveillance work in the Internet era?</p>
Evaluation of Tweets	<p>In terms of evaluate how is this job being done, could you please describe the evaluation system first?</p> <p>Are there any regulations of job evaluation?</p> <p>How often would the tweets job been evaluated?</p>

	<p>Will any indicators of tweets be part of the evaluation, like the numbers of re-tweets, comments and likes?</p> <p>Will the evaluation include surveys of police's perception of police tweets?</p>
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## Appendix 5 Participant Information

Participants of Hawshire Police by Role		
The Manager of Digital and Social Communication Team	IN1	Interview
Digital and Social Development Officer	IN2	Interview
Digital and Social Development Officer	IN3	Interview
Marketing Officer	IN4	Interview
Public Relations Officer	IN5	Interview
Internal Communication Officer	IN6	Interview
Special Constable	IN7	Interview
PC1	FG1	Focus Group
PC2	FG2	
PCSO	PIN1	Pilot Interview
Sergeant	PIN2	Pilot Interview

## Participants of Lionshire Police by Role

The Manager of Digital Communication Team	IN10	Interview
Digital Developer	IN11	Interview
Digital Communication Officer	IN12	Interview/ Patrol with undercover team
Digital Communication Officer	IN13	Patrol with undercover team
Public Relations Officer	IN14	Interview
The Acting Manager of Press Officer Team	IN15	Interview
CMI Officer	FG3	Focus Group
CMI Officer	FG4	
CMI Officer	FG5	
Sergeant of Undercover Team	IN16	Non-participant Patrol
PC1 of Undercover Team		
PC2 of Undercover Team		
PC2 of Undercover Team		

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