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13 Freedom to express, professionalism, and public safety: Socio-political risks with social media for law enforcement agencies and practitioners

13.1 Introduction

Social media platforms have had a significant impact on our culture and created new forms of communication and relaying of information. Throughout the past few decades social media has expanded its definition. . “Social media refers to websites and applications that are designed to allow people to share content quickly, efficiently, and in real-time” (Hudson, 2020). What once began as *Facebook*, *Instagram* has morphed into microblogging, *Snap Chat* and *Group Me*. The evolution and use of social media has extended into the criminal justice system. Public agencies post notices, messages, policies, etc. As well, many law enforcement practitioners have on their own accord, established personal social media sites to maintain relationships with family, friends, and colleagues.

There have been consequences on the use of social media with law enforcement, both positive and negative. The initial purpose by police agencies has been to utilize (to help or assist) by creating a bridge for improving communications and community/police relationships via social media. Law enforcement agencies’ pages, Instagram accounts and Twitter “handles” have been used routinely to notify the community on routine issues, including traffic, to emergency messages due to weather, natural disasters, etc. (Bullock, 2018). Law enforcement has used social media tools to identify missing persons, provide alerts to communities on local criminal activity, tracking neighborhood crimes patterns, burglaries, thefts, and cybercrime. The public has used social media platforms (i.e., cell phone cameras/videos) to document interactions with police – both positive and negative. The George Floyd case (2020) is an example of how social media can indirectly and directly influence perceptions and belief systems of large swaths of society. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, George Floyd had been accused by a store clerk of using a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill. The ensuing police intervention resulted with Officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on Mr. Floyd’s neck for over nine minutes. This was all documented on cell phones and resulted in a wrongful death suit by the family who was awarded \$27 million. Derek Chauvin convicted in June 2021 of two counts of murder and one of manslaughter and was sentenced to 25 years in prison. The remaining officers at the scene will be facing trial in March of 2022 (Gile, 2021).

13.2 Risk management in law enforcement

Risk management is not a foreign subject to policing. According to Chief Matthias Wicks of Tulsa, Oklahoma, Public Schools stated, “Risk management protocol is one of the most important components in law enforcement and public safety, both in the daily administrative mayhem and operational duties” (Fritzvold, 2019). Risk-based modalities which need to be incorporated into educational training for police include, personal safety risks, external risks (gangs, pandemics, natural disasters), internal organizational risks, potential litigation (human rights violations, violations of due process, procedures, etc.) and technology risks (ransomware, drones, etc.) (Fritzvold, 2019). According to Rice & Zegart (2018), when examining political risks for law enforcement agencies, questions that should be asked include:

“How can we get good information about the political risks we face? How did we ensure rigorous analysis? How can we integrate political risks in business decisions?” (Rice and Zegart, 2018, 158). Senior management of agencies and organizations in the private, public, or nonprofit sectors must understand that organizational, social, or political risks must be specifically identified, and mitigation processes implemented to minimize potential negative outcomes and consequences. Concrete information and awareness of these risks include insights which originate from human behavior, emotions, knowledge, and perceptions of issues. Integrating these foundational sources is critical to the information gathering process. Reliable information and critical feedback can result by asking appropriate questions based on research, a thorough examination of possible problems and scenarios and strategizing resulting outcomes from the challenges agencies’ face (Rice & Zegart, 2018).

The risks associated with social media issues are not independent and the impact of social and political risks posed, can have a detrimental effects on police agencies. Before examining the link between social media and social and political risks, one must consider, why does political and social risk matter for law enforcement? These risks are regularly applied to private organizations, the corporate sector, and public agencies like hospitals and convalescent homes. Why and how does it impact law enforcement? Many law enforcement agencies do not have the necessary understanding of the impact of social media. In fact, law enforcement practitioners are encouraged not to use social media, especially through the hiring and vetting stages of employment. However, in recent years police agencies have come to better understand the influence of social media. There is an acknowledgement that social media is no longer a passive outlet rooted in observation and simply an alternative to gather information. It is an active outlet of personal opinions, passionate outcries, and a podium of expression of the First Amendment. The power and extensive growth of the internet and social media has contributed to the decline of traditional news outlets, like newspapers and its influence has skyrocketed (Bullock, 2018).

The concept and training of policing stems from a militaristic style and rank in file chain of command (Skolnick, 2010). There is a presumption that police respond and behave in a particular way in order to preserve the reputation and principles of the field. Early research has suggested that law enforcement officers have a specific working personality (Skolnick, 2010). Meaning that their training in the academy and cross over to the streets cultivates and encourages a personality based on suspicion, danger, social isolationism, and authority. In his research, Skolnick (2010) suggested that officers are trained in a way that they believe they are different from the general public. The police uniform, the inherent dangers of their work and constant public scrutiny, create a belief system that requires that police officers rely on each other and separate themselves from the general population. This is one reason why there is so much criticism and speculation on the “*blue wall of silence*”. The blue wall of silence is this unwritten code that prohibits law enforcement officers from providing negative information against other officers. The standard message given is that “cops don’t tell on cops” (Skolnick, 2010; Huq & McAdams, 2016). It is understood that this philosophy has led to damaging consequences for policing. Examples such as the Serpico case, that focused on corruption in the NYPD in the mid to late 1960’s, which led to the *Knapp Commission* investigation of 1970; The Rodney King case in 1991 with the Los Angeles Police Department in California; the Michael Dowd case in the 75 Precinct in Brooklyn, New York, which led to the *Mollen Commission* in 1993 and the Abner Louima incident in 1997, which resulted in criminal convictions of police officers and human rights violations (Rosenberg, 2021). The Mollen Commission “found disturbing patterns of police corruption and brutality, including stealing from drug dealers, engaging in unlawful searches, seizures, and car stops, dealing and using drugs, lying in order to justify unlawful searches and arrests and to forestall complaints of abuse, and indiscriminate beating of innocent and guilty alike.” (Cole, 1999). The “blue wall” philosophical context subtly has encouraged police to turn a blind eye to corruption, criminality, human violations, and violence among other officers (Serwer, 2021).

In recent years, senior law enforcement officials have crafted policies addressing the use of social media. However, while major concerns regarding the balance and expression surrounding free speech in connection to public safety have been addressed, not all current policies extend their focus past an agencies immediate response to protect their officers and staff. A limited number of agencies have introduced on-going education on social media issues to members of their organizations, specifically with regard to accountability and ethics (Kaplan & Haelein, 2010; IACP, 2021).

Instant access to unvetted or edited information via social media outlets present numerous points of risk for police. The public nature and qualities that are necessary for law enforcement to execute their jobs appropriately, leads to speculations and scrutiny. Increased exposure and combative and controversial occurrences involving law enforcement, has led to persistent analysis, and opened, unregulated discussions (PERF & COPS, 2013). The true nature and developing traits of officers that have been

shaped by their education and training, as well as by public perceptions has contributed to a confusing and unclear portrait of the role and responsibilities of police, not only in the United States, but globally (Bullock, 2018).

13.3 The sociopolitical risks for police with social media

The inherent nature of social media and the perception of police can make the link between the two entities unpredictable and explosive. Professional and personal credibility of police officers is paramount to carrying out the duties and responsibilities of the position. If an officer or an agency's reputation are at risk or dissected negatively, it can compromise existing investigations. Commentaries through social media can taint jury pools and damage individual reputations. "*Cop baiting* is when individuals intentionally create confrontational situations with officers to exploit them for personal or political motives" (Waters, 2012). Examples can range from efforts to antagonize police, actively interfering in a formal police action, or setting off false alarms to distract officers. An example occurred in Australia, when a motorcyclist went to the Springwood Police station near Brisbane, stopped in front of the stationhouse and revved his engine, resulting in a huge blast of exhaust clouding up the immediate area of the station, causing police confusion in and around the station (Coe, 2018). These types of actions by citizens are done to antagonize officers, and expend unnecessary time and resources with the goal of provoking the police and trying to have them react unprofessionally. *Cop Baiting* presents a serious predicament for law enforcement. Any resulting videos recorded and posted to Facebook, Twitter or YouTube can be damning for officers and may lead to a financial costs resulting from litigious action against the officer and agency (The Police Foundation, 2014). This phenomenon can severely impact an officer's credibility, as well as their agencies reputation in the community (Waters, 2012).

13.4 Positive instances of social media and law enforcement in both the United States and internationally

Before evaluating the sociopolitical risks for police, it is important to discuss how and when social media platforms have benefited law enforcement and when it has significantly increased risk levels that could negatively impact individual officers as well as the agency.

Toronto Police Services (TPS) has been one of the leading police agencies in managing social media platforms. Over two hundred officers have been trained on utilizing social media outlets for their departments to create positive steps with police community relationships (Waters, 2012; PERF & COPS, 2013). TPS enacted policies and training sessions to ensure quality control to mitigate risks for the agency. For example, a guide was circulated that included tips and advice for officers on social media. TPS acknowledged that officers' personal social media accounts should allow for a certain level of privacy, but as an employee and a member of Toronto Police, they ultimately represented the department. A reminder that "the Internet is forever" (Waters, 2012; IACP, 2021). Once an officer conducts an internet "search" or posts comments to a message board, it cannot be undone. With regard to any information sharing on social media on community or political issues, or expressing personal opinions, officers must be aware of general and legal privacy issues, not only for themselves and their families, but for the department. Finally, officers need to "treat others as they want to be treated" (IACP, 2021).

In a 2013 study, over 92% of law enforcement agencies utilized social media platforms to connect with their communities (Siner, 2013). The stated goals of agencies include connecting with their communities, assisting victims of crime and information sharing of pertinent community issues (i.e., weather announcements, incidents of crime, missing persons).

Social media has created some positive impact for the public in regard to certain situations involving law enforcement. Having instant access to information is helpful to convey important information to the public in regard to natural disasters, traffic accidents, or crime updates. Police departments are obligated to be the bearer of bad news and must report on tragic events and respond to public concerns. However, police departments are also using social media platforms to convey messages that help build community trust and improve relations as well as humanize officers and the department as a whole.

Police departments have developed social media pages for self-promotion purposes as well as to encourage public engagement. Departments have chosen to create optimistic posts pertaining to community events and positive police interactions with the public to further this goal. Public relations officers have begun to create posts and updates that consist of police appointments, promotions, and acts of kindness by members of their departments to engage the community (Ruddell & Jones, 2013). Many departments use social media platforms to create posts asking for the community's help to locate the owners of a lost pet or property. The community as a whole is now engaged and feels a sense of pride helping a fellow neighbor. Departments also take advantage of the platforms to advertise police sponsored functions that allow community members to meet and interact with officers helping to build relationships.

Westchester County, New York, located about 20 miles north of New York City, tends to have smaller police departments, with less members that varies based on

location and population. The Village of Pelham, a small one square mile hamlet, has capitalized on the use of social media to engage the community and involve citizens not only with law enforcement oriented joint events, but community-wide events (Facebook.com/PelhamPDNY, 2021). The department's social media account has been used to create constructive social media posts which have helped improve public relations. One of the goals of their administration is to strengthen bonds with events such as "Coffee with a Cop" or *National Night Out*, which is held across the United States every year that brings together police, emergency personnel (including fire and emergency management services) with their communities to educate about local crime, personal and public safety, crime prevention, and forming neighborhood watch groups. This is done specifically in an enjoyable venue (IACP, 2021). These national initiatives are aimed at bridging gaps between law enforcement and the community with open conversations in a relaxed environment amongst police officers. Events such as this along with inspirational online posts illustrating the department's dedication to serving the community and reinforce their general concern for their citizens. Local departments, like the Village of Pelham, where resources are limited and they are faced with intense public scrutiny, tries to ensure the police are involved in as many public positive events possible, including parades, public gatherings, and youth organizations. Social media not only to advertise and promotes pro-social events but allow community feedback on posts. The goal is to highlight this partnership and reassure the dedication that the members of law enforcement have to the community.

Many administrations have assigned officers to monitor social media sites and posts created by the public. This has become a significant investigative tool leading to the apprehension of suspects and solving crimes. In 2013, the Palm Beach Sheriff's Office used social media to monitor the posts of an individual suspected of several robberies and burglaries in the Palm Beach County area. Officers were able to uncover numerous photos of suspect Dupress Johnson, a 19-year-old male, with guns, drugs, and large quantities of cash on his social media account (Moye, 2017). The continuing investigation led officers to his Lake Worth home where they discovered guns and proceeds from previous crimes. This individual was believed to be the ringleader of a burglary ring responsible for stealing over \$250,000 worth of valuables throughout the county (Moye, 2017).

The Wilkes-Barre Township Police Department of Pennsylvania have developed a new social media program that has created a positive reactions not just for the department, but for the township. The police have taken a humorous approach by using comical memes, gifs, and pictures to supplement notifications. By creating a more relaxed and humorous image themselves, it has drastically reduced the potential of social and political risk not only for the department, but for individual officers. The goal to have the public give feedback, comments and possibly identify with issues and situations posted. The initial hope was to use humor to reflect on non-dangerous situations in the community. During the early experimental phase,

the comments and memes received a mixed response by citizens. However, the reaction to these notifications have become more positive. According to one officer, “If anyone anywhere does anything, somewhere, someone is going to be offended. As long as our supporters outnumber our naysayers, I don’t see any reason for us to change” (Scinto, 2017).

Since the start of this experiment with humor on their Facebook page this program has started to gain more solid traction. Although Wilkes-Barre township has only 2,000 residents, the police department’s page has over 55,000 “likes”. It has generated comments from individuals who are interesting in visiting the areas to reconnecting with former community members. One example of a post targeted seeking the owner of a bag of contraband. The department posted a humorous tag with the police trying to “reunite” the owner over with their \$1,600 worth of crack cocaine. These posts have led to more serious posts, emails, and phone calls regarding criminal activity in the area. The Wilkes-Barre police department also created “*The Law of the Day*”, which was done in a proactive effort to educate the community on current and new laws and legislation. This initiative has been positively received (Scinto, 2017). By presenting information in a positive and lighthearted manner, the department has developed a model program allowing officers to utilize social media platforms to further the goals of bridging the gap between the police and the community.

13.5 Negative instances of social media and law enforcement in the United States and internationally

With new avenues of communications for police and new advanced technologies, comes new challenges, and problems. Social media is an outlet here to stay and must be viewed as an additional tool for law enforcement, not only in establishing community relationships, but for investigations and solving crimes. In June of 2019, seventy-two Philadelphia officers were removed from their current assignment and remanded to desk duty pending investigations. *Plainview Project*, a social media database monitoring organization created by Emily Baker-White, discovered over 300 sexist, racist, and prejudicial comments on posts on Facebook. They were all posted by current and retired Philadelphia police officers. According to Baker -White, “We found a very high and concerning number of posts that appear to endorse, celebrate or glorify violent vigilantism. We included posts that we thought could effect public trust and policing” (Allen, 2019).

In July of 2019, the United States Department of Homeland Security disciplined and sanctioned members of United States Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) for

posting racially offensive and sexually vulgar messages on social media accounts targeting known democratic party members and migrants from Central and South America (Parison & Owen, 2019). According to documents, Border Agents created a private Facebook group called, “I’m 10–15”, in reference to a code used to broadcast that an illegal immigrant has been placed into custody. During the investigation, it was determined that Customs and Border Patrol officials had known these posts existed since early 2018 (Parison & Owen, 2019).

In July 2021, New York Police Department’s Sergeant Ed Mullins, who is also president of the NYPD Seargent’s Benevolent Association, was remanded for trial after he posted on social media comments using offensive and profane language. Seargeant Mullins post on twitter referred to a New York City Council member as a “first class whore” and referred to the NYC Health Commissioner as a “b**ch” on twitter responding to a negative comment she made about police officers. Mullins is facing three internal charges and disciplinary hearings for use of offensive language and abuse of authority. Mullins sued to prevent the internal disciplinary process arguing his tweets were protected by the First Amendment. The judge disagreed (Rosenberg, 2021).

Six officers in Northern Ireland were disciplined for “unprofessional” comments posted on their social media pages. One posted homophobic comments and one revealed the details of a security threat briefing. In another incident, after police assisted a mentally ill person found naked and, in a ditch, an officer posted multiple hashtags, including, #hideandstreak. The individual’s mother accused the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) of “cyberbullying” an emotionally disturbed person. In a formal statement, the PSNI said that officers’ ability to post on social media platforms can be revoked if “they bring the service into disrepute” (Bell, 2019).

In the United Kingdom, over 800 cases of police officers were investigated for violating social media guidelines including, “friending” victims and posting racist comments. This research was found through the Freedom of Information requests between 2009–2014 in England and Wales (College of Policing, 2014a). The College of Policing stated that there was “no place for officers who abuse trust placed in us by the public”, and penalties included written warnings, disciplinary hearings, and resignations (9% of cases) (College of Policing, 2014a).

The world was shocked after the January 6th Capitol riot in Washington, DC. The events at the Capitol, which the Federal Bureau of Investigation classified as an act of domestic terrorism, resulted in four civilians and one United States Capitol Police officer dead and over 140 other officers injured (Ziegler, 2021). An additional four officers died by suicide (Breuninger & Mangan, 2021). After a thorough investigation, it was found that many participants had served in the United States military (active or retired), police or been employed by the government (Rubin, 2021). A distressing example is from former New York Police Department officer Thomas Webster. Although in his prior career he protected government officials and other officers, during the January 6th riot, he allegedly assaulted a Capitol police officer with a metal flag-pole (Rubin, 2021). Two other current officers from Virginia’s Rocky Mountain

Police Department posted a “selfie” on social media with their middle fingers extended in front of the statue of an American Revolutionary hero. The two were fired (Rubin, 2021). *Tik Tok*, *Facebook*, and other social media outlets were used to recruit and organize participants for the capitol riot on January 6th, ignoring the policies on these sites that disallow use of their platforms to threaten or invite violent activity (Rubin, 2021). The ongoing debate in the United States around the events of January 6th, 2021, have been exacerbated and complicated by the confusing partisan interpretations of the event by government officials and the media. In particular, how did communication on social media contribute to the recruitment of participants and the influence of the Far Right’s message using messages and posts focused on anti-liberal, pro-QAnon verbiage and negative comments about the 2020 election results. One example is of the Sheriff’s office Lieutenant Roxanne Mathai, of Bexar County, Texas. Mathai posted a video of herself saying, “We’re going in, tear gas and all”. The FBI was alerted to this post that resulted in an investigation and she was immediately terminated. Arrested individuals have claimed that their posts are protected by the First Amendment (free speech) rights (So, Januta, & Berens, 2021). However, many participants were confronted with criticism, anger and even arrests due to their own social media posts (So, Januta, & Berens, 2021). Lauren Boebert, a Republican representative from Colorado tweeted on the January 6th, “Today is 1776”. She was called to resign. Her response was to tweet, “WE’RE NOT GOING TO SHUT UP” (So, Januta, & Berens, 2021).

Although the First Amendment offers broad safeguards for American citizens, it does not apply to criminal actions and activity. According to attorney David Snyder, Executive Director of the First Amendment Coalition, “You don’t get to throw a trash can through a store window because the store window was along a demonstration path” (So, Januta, & Berens, 2021).

13.6 Law enforcement’s impression about social media and its impact on their public perception

The expansion of social media platforms has opened extensive lines of communication between law enforcement agencies and their communities. It has provided a pathway for creating a new for departments and officers. Posting and information sharing to their community for day-to-day events with additional uses of videos, pictures, memes, etc., provides a way for police departments projecting, monitoring, and maintaining a positive image (Bullock, 2018; Lipshultz, 2018; Slater, 2013). Social media provides positive reinforcement for agencies and has been a valuable resource for officers identifying specific issues that need addressing in their community (Bullock, 2018; Lipshultz, 2018).

The effective use of social media has not been an easy transition for law enforcement. Even though police officers often have regular exposure to news crews and television cameras, the increased, ongoing exposure has created apprehension and concern. According to the Pew Center for Research (2017), 29% of senior law enforcement officials and high-ranking administrators believe the media, as a whole, treats officers unfairly. This is in contrast to 42% of rank in file officers who strongly agree that the media treats them unfairly. According to Gramlich and Parker (2017), this has resulted in a disconnect between officers and their communities. High-level managers who believe that the media treats police unfairly, base this opinion on the public's misunderstanding of the day-to-day tasks and stress of policing (Gramlich & Parker, 2017). This highlights a disengagement of senior officials understanding of the perceptions and needs of their officers. This can lead to significant risk factors, regarding social public perception, and way officers perceive their administrators and the public. This can contribute to officers experiencing low morale, job dissatisfaction and compassion fatigue (Grant, Lavery & DeCarlo).

According to McNamara & Zefass (2012), there is a conflict for police and senior management between balancing the organizational needs, understanding the risks posed for using social media and how significant a role social media platforms play within law enforcement communications. (Bullock, 2018). Social media, for better or worse, has permanently altered the human form of communication. For an occupation fueled by social isolationism due to their position and public accessibility as well as being deeply rooted in human services and focusing on public safety – entrenching social media as a normal part of policing is a challenge, not only for organizational change but as a transformative toll for reforming police-community relations (Loader, Vromen & Xenos, 2014).

13.7 Recommendations for law enforcement agencies to mitigate sociopolitical risks and utilize responsible social media platforms

“It takes twenty years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things differently” Warren Buffet (Rice & Zegart, 2018, 137). That quote resonates throughout most professions but should be taken under serious advisement for law enforcement when it comes to using social media platforms. In order to mitigate social and political risks for officers and agencies, senior leadership needs to consider three points when constructing and monitoring their own sites or when training their officers to meet the challenges and risks associated with social media (The Police Foundation, 2014). The first requires getting the tone of the messages right. Information sharing via social media is standard in our global society.

However, the tone in the statements, tweets, and comments presented to the public directly influences how the information will be read, processed, and interpreted. Senior management needs to gauge the tone of the messages and take accountability for any negative feedback. Agencies need to experiment with social media platforms using a formal versus an informal approach and measure responses of the community (Police Foundation, 2014). Besides conveying messages in the proper way, police agencies must use tools to engage the public and build positive relationships with their community. The patterning throughout Europe is to relay information to the public in a professional manner, which some interpret as impersonal and very formal (Denef, et al., 2013). Finally, using twitter, Facebook, etc. has been shown to be a good method for intelligence gathering, conducting investigations, and involving community members to increase trust levels (Ruddell & Jones, 2013).

Leadership must understand the social risks that have a significant impact on how the public and any available information is perceived and interpreted. Some community policing initiatives via social media may have good intentions and negative outcomes. For example, in 2014, the New York Police Department asked the public to tweet pictures of themselves with officers. However, some of these pictures and videos showing interactions between officers and the public were negative (Police Foundation, 2014). Some risks law enforcement agencies face includes posting information with mistakes (spelling, verbiage, or poor grammar) and not vetting information properly so that inappropriate details are posted (victim's name, details of crime scenes which should not be for public consumption, etc.).

It is recommended that agencies create a strong policy and set specific procedures and protocols on how information is posted and the possible interpretations of the posts by their community members. In the United States, research has shown using Twitter can lead to a slight reduction of crime rates and an increase of tips for current investigations (PERF & COPS, 2013). It has been documented that law enforcement monitoring of social media accounts and applying investigative analyses has been a successful tool with regard to particular crimes, including child sex trafficking, human trafficking, and illegal narcotics distribution (Police Foundation, 2014).

Taking steps to mitigate social and political risks for police officers and their agencies can prevent many challenges that can negatively impact the perception and reputation of the agency. On-going training and monitoring of social media outlets used by the agency and linking accounts with officers, will help ensure some activities and commentaries will not be posted. Training for officers on monitoring should extend not only to how posts are perceived by the public, how to elicit tips on criminal activity in the area, and also assist officers by promoting department sponsored events, awards given to officers and highlight activities and affirmative interactions with the community. Better for a member of the department to intercept online posts containing possible extremist opinions, negative commentary, or prejudicial language of an officer before identified by a member of the public. It will also support officers by educating them on best practices with online

postings and social media platforms. This can eliminate future behavior, rather than punishing officers after the damage is done. It is important for leadership to confirm that any social media platforms used by officers and the agency does not use offensive language and profanity. Officers in particular should never make public comments on police protocols, open investigations, or victims. Officers should never make openly negative comments about their work, their community, or express extreme political or social views for the public to see. Although some law enforcement practitioners are divided relating to the concept of free speech, free press, and expression, it must be emphasized that such views may violate other individuals' or officers' rights and may increase the sociopolitical risks potentially hurting the agency and putting lives in danger. Although discussed and encouraged in academies and in their specific agencies, law enforcement needs to understand that they are held to a higher standard. When assessing law enforcement in the United States, it is crucial to understand the job stressors experienced each day by officers, and the inherent disconnect between police and communities. If stronger policies are in place and senior management and officers are given ongoing training in areas like social media and balancing freedom of expression, the reduction of social and political risks will be evident.

The generations of millennials and Generation Z have been raised with social media, "apps," and a dependency on smart phones. Many rely on social media as their continuous flow and acceptable form of communication and news. In contrast, the members of law enforcement range from remaining Baby Boomers and Gen Xers, all of whom have been present since the introduction of community policing (1984), the use of videos to film police actions, and through periods of social, political, and economic reforms of policing (Hansen, 2011). Their personal knowledge base and understanding of social media has resulted with sporadic use, parental control, and a level of discomfort using social media outlets like Snap Chat, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (Hansen, 2011). Another recommendation would be to bring in outside trainers rather than conducting in-service training within the department. This can result in many positive outcomes for police officers. This will not only make officers feel more comfortable with the use of social media platforms but help them understand their own level of responsibility regarding personal use of social media. This can be accomplished without having the judgement of their superiors or feeling compelled to change their personal protocols, which could result with some resentment.

According to Stuart (2013), *The Institute for Criminal Justice Education* found in a 2011 survey that less than 40 percent of responding agencies had policies regarding social media use, and less than 15 percent provided training on what is appropriate to post (ICJE, 2011). This points to the critical importance of developing a comprehensive policy for all law enforcement agencies on social media. There should be an understanding given to protect the free speech rights and of any off-duty officers who use personal computers, but there needs to be an integrated and

systemic awareness of the consequences. Senior administrators must establish appropriate and fair controls over the use of social media. This could not only increase its benefits while reducing incidents of misuse by officers. On-going training can be established and accomplished. By taking certain necessary steps not only mitigates any social or political risks but can “create a presence on social media sites which opens a new door of communication with the general public.” (Stuart, 2013).

The nature of policing around the world have been under scrutiny for years. Recently, in the United States, the 2021 Derek Chauvin trial, the 2020 death of Kentucky’s Breonna Taylor, and the 2015 case of Freddie Gray, Jr of Baltimore, Maryland sparked outrage and protests seen internationally. These incidents have forced policing agencies to reexamine their tactics and use of force. Unfortunately, many instances of their current practices have been caught on video and posted globally sparking anger and negative attention. Social media can be an effective tool to recreate trust and bridging initiatives with their communities. Steven White (2013), chairman of the *Police Federation of England and Wales*, stated, “(Police) Forces must ensure officers are effectively trained and aware of the latest social media protocols. It is important to acknowledge that the majority of police officers perform their duties with the utmost integrity, discretion and in accordance with the high standards of behavior rightly expected of them by the public” (Siner, 2013). It is imperative that policing agencies establish protocols and policies for all employees on using social media for both the agency and private use. With the amount of information sharing, misinformation and the reliance on social media platforms for communicating, this is an issue that must be a priority of concern for police agencies.

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