

# Social media and crime prevention: Exploring the social mediatisation of justice

## 13th United Nations Convention on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

### Presented by

Associate Professor Murray Lee

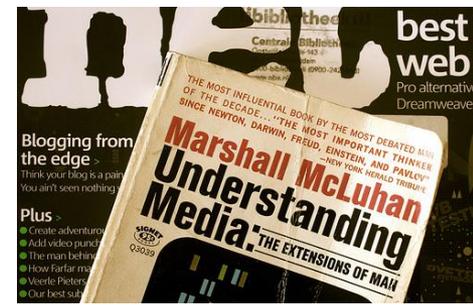
Faculty of Law, Institute of Criminology



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SYDNEY



# Social Media



- “...a new way in which software developers and end-users started to utilize the World Wide Web... content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion. (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).
- “...highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. Given the tremendous exposure of social media in the popular press today, it would seem that we are in the midst of an altogether new communication landscape” (Kietzmann et al 2011).

# The Social mediatisation of Crime and Justice

- Famous notion of ‘the medium is the message’ (McLuhan 1964).
- Technology and is not neutral. The smart phone according to McLuhan would not be important in terms of the message received – but the new capacities it provides and how these shape us.
- ‘A [network society] is structured in its dominant function and process around networks’ (Castells 1997:66).
- ‘The Internet provides the police with many useful opportunities to promote their activities, not least in terms of updating press releases and “controlling the context” of such information’ (Leishman and Mason 2003: 41).

# The Social-Mediatisation of Crime and Justice



Such platforms can democratize knowledge even as they also produce new capacities for regulation and social control.

They create new opportunities for traditional crime, and new types of offending and categories of crime altogether

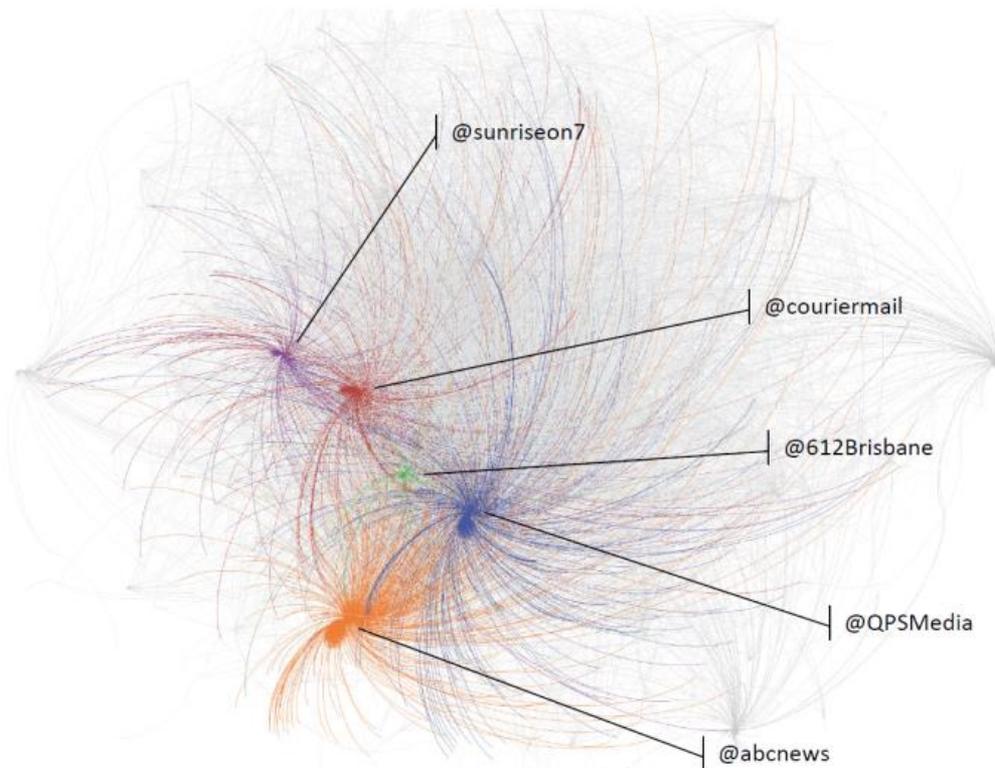
They also provide significant opportunity to regulate, prevent, and detect crime to reduce a range risks to community safety.

To ignore this last point is to forgo one of the most effective tools of crime prevention and community safety of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## QPS Head of Police Media

- It was with considerable trepidation that I pressed ‘publish’ on the QBS Facebook Page in 2010 - I had heard all the horror stories about social media - but I had faith that the service needed to be in social media, so we could talk directly with you. Thanks to your support, the page has gone from strength to strength, and remains a safe place to get and share public safety information. We presently have nearly 363,500 ‘likes’ and last week we reached 1.15 million people on here.
- Robert Peel, when he spoke of the Principles of Policing in 1829, could have had little idea how the principle of ‘the police are the public, and the public are the police’ would be brought to life through social media.
- On here, you’ve helped us solve crime, find missing people, and keep each other safe. We’ve laughed and cried, and proven that social media is a place where great good can happen. [...]. I hope we have given you the chance to get to know the service, and our officers, in a way you may not have previously, and gain a little insight into the challenges our officers face every day [...] Kym (QPS Facebook 2013).

# Twitter and the Queensland Floods 2010



Twitter users sent more than 35,000 tweets using the #qldfloods hashtag between January 10 and January 16 2011, with official police media accounts and media outlets the most influential voices on the social media network.



NSW Police Force is on Facebook.  
To connect with NSW Police Force, sign up for Facebook today.  
Sign Up Log In



NSW Police Force  
Government Organization

Timeline About Photos Help us More

PEOPLE

403,599 likes

ABOUT

Welcome to the official Facebook page of the NSW Police Force. Please do NOT report crime here. We encourage contributions to the page, however content is...  
READ MORE  
<http://www.police.nsw.gov.au/>

PHOTOS



APPS



NSW Police Force  
about an hour ago

A man has been charged with murder after a woman's body was discovered in Griffith last month.  
  
On Friday morning (28 November 2014), police located the body of a 47-year-old Griffith woman in a unit on Canal Street, near Ulong Street, following concerns by her family for her welfare.  
  
Officers attached to Griffith Local Area Command, State Crime Command's Homicide Squad, and Forensic Services Group... See More

Like Comment 1 Share

Evan Palmer, Frances Early, Julie Seymour and 30 others like this.

View 2 more comments

**Nikki Sloggett** Where can I inbox you guys?  
New Police force or next time?  
I've just seen this video. It's horrible! Can someone explain the bat happy of car?  
<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=1022836411066185>  
  
I strongly believe police put up with more crap than anyone.  
But the female police officer on the right with the bat isn't stopping! Even when she hits her work partner IN THE FACE  
The young girl is clearly drunk!  
2 female officers should have been able to control & arrest her.  
There was minimal interference from the public.  
And you can hear them say don't step in.  
AFTER the girl friend was KICKED in the face. Then a 3rd Male officer is holding the female down.  
Does it really take 3 officers to Arendt a drunk female?  
And did she need to be hit 50 many times?  
Thanks for all the hard work you guys do!  
14 minutes ago

**Tori Wright** Theresa Wright  
2 minutes ago

NSW Police Force  
about an hour ago

Police from Campsie Local Area Command are investigating the circumstances that led to a truck crashing into a power pole before crashing into the front yard of a home in Greenacre last night.

About 10pm (Wednesday 4 December 2014), a small truck heading south on Roberts Road, crashed into a power pole, after the intersection of Koala Road.

## Facebook as Neighbourhood Watch: Operation Eyewatch

- Eyewatch was said to be:
- ‘...about empowering residents with the ability to participate in crime prevention activities to ensure community safety... [and giving] community members the opportunity to participate in active crime prevention activities online in their own homes 24 hours a day, 7 days a week’.
- NSW Police Force (2013) explains, there are five key reasons why individuals should feel compelled to become involved:
  - Find out about crimes in your area
  - Get emergency alerts and warnings
  - Help us solve and prevent crime
  - Ask us for advice or assistance
  - Attend Eyewatch meetings (the online version of Neighbourhood Watch).

## Identifying Suspects on YouTube

- As well as the fostering of closer police-public relations, and perhaps because of closer relations, social media is also increasingly seen as an investigative tool for police.
- “We put on YouTube not just our successes but we’ll put on appeals. We’ve got crime prevention tips and if there’s a statement by police to be put out we put it up through that... I look at the number of views we get- we’re into the many thousands of views, it’s equivalent of LAPD (NSW Police PR Respondent 2)”.
- “The YouTube channel has been a good success for us as well... we use lots of CCTV and we’ve had some great successes right across our social media in terms of actually helping solve crimes; great successes in terms of pushing out the CCTV and people ringing up Crimestoppers and actually identifying people (SA Police PR Respondent 1)”.

## *Policing with the public: Engaging social media*

- these communications platforms can and are being used to enhance the professional status and institutional legitimacy of police organizations, as well as their claims of transparency and public accountability (Chan et al 2010: 656).
- *Public Trust and Legitimacy in Institutions*
- As one of our respondents stated:
- “We recognise well in terms of all the social media that’s there that it does assist us to reach particularly a younger audience and it allows us to reach them in real time, which is why I love the iPads going down to some of the big sporting events or the big operations and the tweets going out because it’s instant and we are reaching people that don’t necessarily read the Herald Sun or listen to the ABC. So I think it’s an extremely powerful tool” (Vic Police PR Respondent 2).

## ***More coverage, less cost: Simulated Policing***

- These new platforms enable police and their media units greater efficiency.
- The world wide web is something provides the perfect environment for policing - where the bobby is always present on the beat, even in their absence.
- These cyber bobbies demonstrate to the public that police are not only doing their job, but they are doing it well.
- Indeed, there is the capacity here for a reorganisation of the spatial and temporal aspects of crime prevention – a change in time space distancing (Giddens 1991).

## *To control or roll*

- The NSW Police Force, for example, unexpectedly entered the ‘Twittersphere’ when a marketing company established a fake NSW Police Twitter account in an apparent attempt to demonstrate to the police the effectiveness of social networking tools (Moses 2009).
- Project Eyewatch potentially entails something more akin to a two-way conversation, whereby the public can ‘speak’ with the police online.

## Concerns

- social media platforms generally require more regular surveillance and maintenance than traditional media activities.
- For smaller organizations, however, the decision to engage in social media communications is one not taken lightly. As one interviewee stated:
- ‘The other downside about new media is that it's very hard to get additional resources to do these things so we're very hesitant about starting up new means of communication that are going to be a resource drain’ (WA Police PR Respondent 1).

## Need for clear policy

- Policy for Facebook page:
- ...we have to really try our SOP (standard operating procedures) around what we do and don't allow. We only allow fans, we don't allow friends; we don't allow anyone to post randomly on our wall, we only allow people to respond to the posts that we put up there. We've also disabled our discussion wall. Now I'm not saying that is a perfect formula on how to proceed because obviously it is about having a two-way conversation and listening to what people want from us, but it comes down to being realistic about what you need to achieve from a legal perspective [and] the staff numbers you have to be able to sit there and moderate a Facebook site. ... So ideally it would be great to obviously be able to have enough staff to moderate 24 hours a day and allow people to leave comments on anything that they would like and start a discussion, but we think this is a really, really good strong step into the social media space (SA Police PR Respondent 1).

## Conclusion

- ‘[y]oung people ... see technologies (especially the internet) as a vital part of their social life and the building of their identity’ (McGrath 2009).
- Indeed, as one young person suggested to us during the focus group research, ‘if its not on Facebook its not real’.

The social media is just another way of getting our message out and *in many respects it's bypassing the formal media and in some respects it's bypassing the filters that the normal traditional media can put on our information*. Absolutely the traditional media is still the most powerful thing in terms of reaching eyeballs and ears and the million so of people watching the nightly news but obviously that, the number of people seeing these via websites and Facebook and Twitter and getting their information that way is absolutely increasing and absolutely vital and who knows how much the volume of people and the way they get their news, how that's going to change in the future but social media will grow and some might say traditional media will decline (NSW Police PR Respondent 1).

# Conclusions

- Social media provides an invaluable tool for crime prevention and criminal justice
- There is a need to engage social media, particularly in terms of connection with younger publics
- There are now a range of well tested paths for institutions to engage social media as a CP CJ tool
- Engagement with social media in CP should be more than a one-way information deliver service – public need to be engaged with the ‘social’ element of social media.