Chapter 1
Examining the Public Perception of Law Enforcement:
A Twitter User Engagement Analysis With the Dallas Police Department

Tereza Raquel Merlo
ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2042-5415
University of North Texas, USA

Nayana Madali M. Pampapura
University of North Texas, USA

Jason M. Merlo
ⓘ https://orcid.org/0009-0007-4281-7755
Texas DPS, USA

ABSTRACT

The emergence of social media platforms has revolutionized communication and interaction across various domains, including law enforcement, and users have increasingly utilized these platforms to express their opinions and consume information. This research chapter focuses on evaluating user responses and behaviors on Twitter presenting an analysis of tweets mentioning the Dallas Police Department. Data analysis is performed to investigate tweet frequency and patterns related to the law enforcement agency. Additionally, sentiment analysis and topic modeling techniques are employed to gain deeper insights into the content and context of user tweets. The research findings reveal that users tend to increase their tweeting activity whenever there is an incident involving the agency. Moreover, the results indicate that users generally express a neutral sentiment towards the law enforcement agency, with their tweets largely reflecting personal opinions. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into user behavior and sentiments concerning the Dallas Police Department, demonstrating the significant role of social media platforms in shaping public perceptions and online interactions with the agency.

INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms are tools that enable individuals to actively create, share, and exchange various types of content, thoughts, interests, and information within virtual communities and networks. Social media use and popularity has significantly expanded over the past couple of decades (Abi-Jaoude Naylor, & Pignatiello, 2020). As reported by Pew Research Center in 2021, 72% of the U.S. public use some kind of social media, with usage being higher among young adults (ages 18-29) than among older people (Social Media Fact Sheet, 2021; Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). According to the latest reports, as of 2023 the U.S. has around 302.35 million social media users which is approximately 90% of the total US population (Ruby, 2023). Per reports, in 2023 Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram are the top three social media platforms (Iskiev, 2023; Ruby, 2023).

Social media often serves as a platform or channel for communication, aiding in forming relationships between people from diverse backgrounds (Kapoor et al., 2018). People mostly rely on social media to share their opinion, exchange their views, and share news/information (Vrontis et al., 2021). Because of its capacity to facilitate interaction with others, social media has a large impact on people's lives. While social media has improved people's lives in certain ways it also has its disadvantages, as some individuals engage in undesirable social media behavior such as committing crimes, spreading false information, and fabricating news. Social media serves various purposes, one of those being for users to voice their thoughts and opinions. Social media users actively participate/engage in conversations that are of public interest and express their opinions (Barisione et.al., 2019; Yang & Su, 2020).

Many law enforcement agencies understand the importance of social media and its use for various purposes. Law enforcement use of social media can include gathering intelligence, investigating leads, identifying suspects, engaging with the public, etc. Almost all law enforcement agencies in the U.S. have social media accounts across the various available platforms. These pages are used to post useful information as well as to make important announcements. Many social media users follow these pages to stay informed and actively participate by responding to the posts made by law enforcement.

Although law enforcement uses social media in many ways, there is not much research related to the social media users' sentiments and responses towards law enforcement agencies or understanding the social media user behavior. This study attempts to bridge this gap by analyzing public response, behavior, and sentiment toward law enforcement. This study is guided by the question "What is the behavior and sentiment of social media users towards law enforcement?".

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Over the last decade, social media channels have become a popular source of communication among members of communities across the globe. Law enforcement agencies worldwide are increasingly leveraging the power of social media to communicate directly and in a timely manner with the communities their serve, whether seeking support in crime solving, crisis mediation, crime prevention, or the overall increase in community engagement. Akar and Mardikyan (2014) conducted a study on the proliferation of technology and the increasing use of the internet defending that those are some of the factors that have contributed to the expansion of social media use by citizens. Law enforcement is using social media to go beyond simple communication, they seek to build relationships. Crump (2012) examined social media and public engagement as used to increase public trust and confidence in the ability of the police

Related Content

Collaborative MOOC Content Design and Automatic Assessment Based on ODALA Approach
Nacera Hammid, Lynda Haddadiand Farida Bouarab-Dahmani (2017). *Journal of Information Technology Research (pp. 19-39).*
www.irma-international.org/article/collaborative-mooc-content-design-and-automatic-assessment-based-on-odala-approach/178572

Using an Architecture Approach to ManageBusiness Processes
Shuk Ying Ho (2009). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, Second Edition (pp. 3940-3946).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/using-architecture-approach-managebusiness-processes/14165

Bridging the Growing Digital Divide
Ioannis Tarnanasand Vassilios Kikis (2005). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, First Edition (pp. 284-291).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/bridging-growing-digital-divide/14251

High Sierra Industries: IS Gridlock
Stephen G. Kerr, Janna M. Crewsand Simon Jooste (2007). *Journal of Cases on Information Technology (pp. 1-14).*
www.irma-international.org/article/high-sierra-industries/3203

Classification Method for Learning Morpheme Analysis
László Kovács (2012). *Journal of Information Technology Research (pp. 85-98).*
www.irma-international.org/article/classification-method-learning-morpheme-analysis/76391