



NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**TURNING THE CORNER: IMPROVING LAW
ENFORCEMENT PERCEPTION THROUGH MEDIA**

by

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March 2023

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC, 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE March 2023	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE TURNING THE CORNER: IMPROVING LAW ENFORCEMENT PERCEPTION THROUGH MEDIA			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Christopher Dorsey				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE A	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) Over the last several years, law enforcement's image in the United States has been tarnished by the unlawful acts of a number of bad actors. These actions have negatively influenced the perception of law enforcement, particularly within some minority communities located in metropolitan cities nationwide. To strengthen its public profile, law enforcement is exploring methods to improve its image. This thesis investigates how law enforcement can develop positive social media exposure to improve police-community relations in the current social climate. Using qualitative and quantitative research, this thesis examined the different methods the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, DC, the Boston Police Department, and the Portland Police Bureau used to develop positive social media exposure on Twitter directly before and after the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. To assess the departments' methods, this research analyzed their respective tweets by their frequency, method of posting, and the number of reactions they generated within this timeframe. As a result, this thesis finds that nationwide protests created significant exposure opportunities for law enforcement. This thesis concludes that to improve its image, law enforcement should continuously promote positive messaging on Twitter by highlighting positive work, conveying solidarity with the community, and exhibiting a willingness to work with the public.				
14. SUBJECT TERMS law enforcement, social media, police-community relations, Twitter, Metropolitan Police Department, Portland Police Bureau, Boston Police Department, riots, protest			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 141	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39-18

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**TURNING THE CORNER: IMPROVING LAW ENFORCEMENT PERCEPTION
THROUGH MEDIA**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

Over the last several years, law enforcement's image in the United States has been tarnished by the unlawful acts of a number of bad actors. These actions have negatively influenced the perception of law enforcement, particularly within some minority communities located in metropolitan cities nationwide. To strengthen its public profile, law enforcement is exploring methods to improve its image. This thesis investigates how law enforcement can develop positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations in the current social climate.

Using qualitative and quantitative research, this thesis examined the different methods the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, DC, the Boston Police Department, and the Portland Police Bureau used to develop positive social media exposure on Twitter directly before and after the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. To assess the departments' methods, this research analyzed their respective tweets by their frequency, method of posting, and the number of reactions they generated within this timeframe. As a result, this thesis finds that nationwide protests created significant exposure opportunities for law enforcement. This thesis concludes that to improve its image, law enforcement should continuously promote positive messaging on Twitter by highlighting positive work, conveying solidarity with the community, and exhibiting a willingness to work with the public.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CHDS	Center for Homeland Defense and Security
CNT	Crisis Negotiation Team
BPD	Boston Police Department
IACP	International Association of Chiefs of Police
MPD	Metropolitan Police Department
PPB	Portland Police Bureau
SERT	Special Emergency Reaction Team

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Law enforcement continuously strives to maintain its public image to provide better service and establish meaningful community relations. Over the years, the law enforcement community has been adversely affected by the wayward actions of a number of individuals. These actions have had a snowball effect and have led to negative public perception for some community members. To combat this image, several law enforcement entities have begun utilizing social media to promote their image.

The research question is: How can law enforcement develop positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations? To answer this question, I examined Twitter data from the Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, DC; the Portland Police Bureau; and the Boston Police Department. During the timeframe of my analysis, I studied the week immediately before and after the murder of George Floyd. This timeframe allowed me to analyze the social media strategies of large-scale police departments during normal operations and times of civil unrest.

The research for this thesis required a comparative analysis of all the tweets sent by each organization during this time. This analysis consisted of categorizing and separating the tweets by subject, delivery style, and reactions they generated from their Twitter audience. After categorizing and separating these tweets, I examined the factors contributing to the tweet’s “success” and exposure level. In addition to analyzing the tweets during this timeframe, the number of crimes reported were compared to the number of positive messages displayed on Twitter to determine any correlation.

By conducting this research and analyzing the data, I found that the protest-related activities increased the exposure level of any related tweets. This trend remained consistent among all three case studies and was illustrated by the number of likes, retweets, and comments generated. Additionally, this increased level of exposure for all protest-related tweets was constant, even though each agency had its own delivery style, tone, and cadence. When evaluating these tweets to determine which were the most successful in developing positive social media exposure, I found that the Boston Police

Department had the single most “successful” tweet. This tweet conveyed a sense of solidarity between the city of Boston and its police department.

During the analysis of the tweets unconnected to protest-related activities, there was no conclusive determination of the best practice for developing positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations. Some well-received examples, however, involved the police departments’ highlighting positive interactions with the community, recognizing individuals and organizations, and soliciting help from the community. These tweets were often accompanied by embedded media that provided pictures of these uplifting moments. Another consistent theme observed between each agency was their commitment to delivering updates relaying pertinent details and information that would benefit the community.

In summary, the law enforcement organizations studied had varying methods in which they attempted to develop positive social media exposure. These variations were found in the frequency, delivery style, and categories posted. One consistent trend revealed that each organization did not have community policing as one of the top three categories tweeted. This thesis concludes there is a substantial opportunity for growth in this arena. Highlighting these actions on a more regular basis may create a better chance to improve police–community relations and bolster the reputation of the department in the eyes of many.

As a result of this research, I recommend law enforcement leverage Twitter to improve its police–community relations due to its ability to reach many people quickly. The relayed messaging should be frequent and utilize all available tools, including embedding videos and creating hashtags for consistent themes. Furthermore, law enforcement should dedicate resources to measure and evaluate the current success of their tactics within social media. By doing so, law enforcement organizations increase their likelihood of developing positive messaging that resonates with the community and strengthens future relations.

As this research was limited in scope and size, subsequent research can build on this data through several different means. One form of research could explore how law

enforcement utilizes other social media platforms besides Twitter to develop positive social media exposure. These platforms, which are constantly evolving and being created, can potentially reach different audiences. Another avenue in which future research could be conducted is examining a period when no significant nationwide protests are occurring. This method would provide a better opportunity to determine the best practices for creating positive social media exposure during normal operations.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over the last 18 months, there have been countless sacrifices made by family and friends to help me succeed. This help was invaluable to me, and for that, I am genuinely thankful.

First, I thank my wife, Stacie, and our three amazing kids: Layla, Nate, and Natalya. Their support in this process really made a difference. In addition to the multiple weeks that I was away in California, I missed a fair portion of quality time that I intend to make up! I would also like to thank my parents and my mother-in-law, Mrs. Smith. I am truly blessed to have such a great support system to rely on.

I would also like to thank the Metropolitan Police Department for affording me this opportunity. In particular, I would like to thank Chief Contee, Assistant Chief Parsons, Commander Kyle, Commander Conboy, and Commander Haines. The support and encouragement provided to me before and during this process made this all possible. Additionally, I would like to thank Captain Zachary Perron, who took the time to help me on this process, as well as Portland Police Bureau and the Boston Police Department, whose assistance provided meaningful contributions to this research.

Finally, I would like to thank my advisors, Dr. Nadav Morag and Dr. Tristan Mabry, for their suggestions, responsiveness, and positive encouragement. The guidance and patience that I received from both of them were invaluable.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Since its inception, the law enforcement field in the United States has continuously attempted to portray itself as a positive influence within the community. These efforts have included community engagements, press releases, and increased dedication to transparency in its operations. When successful in this mission, law enforcement gains the support of the public and benefits from this positive relationship. As Tom Tyler noted, “the police need public support and cooperation to be effective in their order-maintenance role.”¹ In this way, law enforcement must maintain that positive image to do its work.

Nonetheless, several infamous events have recently tarnished the reputation of U.S. law enforcement. Some of these high-profile events, including the murder of George Floyd, have markedly changed the perception of law enforcement within the minority community. A 2020 Pew survey found a decline in the public’s opinion of law enforcement’s performance along several dimensions.² These dimensions include using force, treating racial and minority groups fairly, and holding officers accountable.³ This erosion in public trust concerns law enforcement personnel and the community because it threatens police legitimacy.

Although not the only factor, social media coverage of law enforcement and social media’s roles in specific incidents have certainly shaped these opinions. Despite several available forms of media sources, the public increasingly uses social media to obtain information. In this context, the Congressional Research Service of the Library of

¹ Tom R. Tyler, “Enhancing Police Legitimacy,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 593 (May 2004): 84–99, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4127668>.

² Pew Research Center, “Majority of Public Favors Giving Civilians the Power to Sue Police Officers for Misconduct,” July 9, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/07/09/majority-of-public-favors-giving-civilians-the-power-to-sue-police-officers-for-misconduct/>.

³ Pew Research Center.

Congress reported that over 70% of U.S. adults used social media in 2021.⁴ This increase in the public's social media usage provides ample opportunities to affect community members' opinions on law enforcement.

Moreover, although advanced technology is often a welcome addition to the modern world, scholars are still making sense of its effects on the perception of law enforcement.⁵ The availability of cell phone video and officers' body-worn camera video enable any interaction between law enforcement and a citizen to be broadcast nationally. Consequently, police must always be ready to respond to "viral" videos on social media that may alter public perception.

Negative public perception can have a lasting impact on the law enforcement community. It could lead to calls for defunding, riots, less motivated officers, and a decline in the number of police applicants. A recent study indicated that negative attention toward police reduced college students' motivation to join law enforcement.⁶ Such adverse effects can strain the law enforcement community and hamper its ability to protect and serve.

Given the swift and dramatic shift in the public's perception in recent years, law enforcement's previous efforts to establish a strong foundation for positive attitudes on social media left room for improvement. This thesis aims to determine what kind of law enforcement efforts to shape public judgments through social media succeed and what efforts could be implemented to enhance their current strategy. The findings may allow police executives to decide which policies to modify.

⁴ Kristin Finklea, *Law Enforcement and Technology: Using Social Media*, CRS Report No. R47008 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2022), <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=863583>.

⁵ Brian A. Jackson, *Strengthening Trust between Police and the Public in an Era of Increasing Transparency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT440.html>.

⁶ Weston J Morrow et al., "Examining a Ferguson Effect on College Students' Motivation to Become Police Officers," *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* 30, no. 4 (December 2019): 585–605, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2019.1619793>.

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

How can law enforcement develop positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations?

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review discusses scholarly studies on law enforcement’s various strategies for social media. Due to the increasing number of social networking sites, scholars have shifted from focusing on a specific platform to examining all platforms. This platform proliferation forced emerging literature to differentiate law enforcement’s uses for each. Numerous law enforcement agencies accept platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube; consequently, more research is available. Other social media, such as Instagram and TikTok, are much less established, so the scholarly work is still sparse.

Because of social media’s competitive nature, outlets continuously develop to increase their functionality and relevance. This spurs law enforcement agencies to change their methods to harness social media’s power. Consequently, much scholarly work has attempted to capture this progression in case studies. Other scholars instead focus on the effectiveness of law enforcement’s use of social media. This literature review discusses law enforcement’s engagement on social media and highlights the existing research gaps.

1. Initial Struggles to Harness Social Media

Social media usage has exploded since its creation. Unsurprisingly, law enforcement has adopted social media in its regular operations worldwide. Joel Lieberman, Deborah Koetzle, and Mari Sakiyama reported that law enforcement’s use of social media is now prevalent within the United States.⁷ It is evident that social media’s ease in communicating with the public accounts for this increased popularity. Furthermore, agencies use it to provide crime updates, transmit information about crises,

⁷ Joel D. Lieberman, Deborah Koetzle, and Mari Sakiyama, “Police Departments’ Use of Facebook: Patterns and Policy Issues,” *Police Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (2013): 438–62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611113495049>.

advertise community events, and promote public safety tips. Scholars in the field concur that these are potential benefits.

However, law enforcement agencies have struggled to find an appropriate level of engagement within social media. Jeremy Crump reported that early research on social media use by law enforcement compares it to older online discussion groups.⁸ These comparisons focused on the challenge of law enforcement agencies to create genuine engagement with their target audience. Lori Brainard and John McNutt's research detailed this challenge, concluding that expecting law enforcement professionals to act as facilitators online and authoritarians on the street sets up a difficult challenge.⁹ Crump further corroborated these findings, determining that "An enthusiastic and bottom-up model of development is intrinsic to how social networking technology has an impact."¹⁰ The "ideal" model for social technology directly opposes law enforcement's traditional top-down model.

Crump stands out as a foundational author, having written academic papers cited by many others. Scholars such as Rick Rudell and Nicholas Jones, who attempted to ascertain the usefulness of social media in policing, build on his work.¹¹ Crump detailed the expansion of social media's use by law enforcement.¹² In his study, Crump examined tweets from UK police accounts early in the country's use of social media.¹³ His conclusion that law enforcement's use of Twitter failed to transform the force has influenced the field.¹⁴ He identified law enforcement as primarily using Twitter as a tool to deliver messages, which may account for its limited utility.

⁸ Jeremy Crump, "What Are the Police Doing on Twitter? Social Media, the Police and the Public," *Policy & Internet* 3, no. 4 (2011): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.2202/1944-2866.1130>.

⁹ Lori A. Brainard and John G. McNutt, "Virtual Government–Citizen Relations: Informational, Transactional, or Collaborative?," *Administration & Society* 42, no. 7 (2010): 836–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399710386308>.

¹⁰ Crump, "What Are the Police Doing on Twitter?," 24.

¹¹ Rick Ruddell and Nicholas Jones, "Social Media and Policing: Matching the Message to the Audience," *Safer Communities* 12, no. 2 (2012): 64–71, <https://doi.org/10.1108/17578041311315030>.

¹² Crump, "What Are the Police Doing on Twitter?"

¹³ Crump.

¹⁴ Crump.

On the other hand, Ruddell and Jones's research examined the gaps in research about who receives social media messages.¹⁵ By doing so, Ruddell and Jones confirmed that targeted social media campaigns could be ineffective. They hypothesized that targeting specific demographics' usage of social media platforms accounts for this inadequacy.¹⁶ In particular, their study theorized that social media campaigns directed toward elderly citizens would be unsuccessful because of senior citizens' indifference to social media.¹⁷ The early research of Ruddell, Jones, and Crump suggests that a successful social media campaign requires a strategy that matches its targets.

With the advent of social media, some departments developed strategies for its use. Consequently, departments willing to embrace social media became a focal point for scholars attempting to define law enforcement's role within the social media universe. Studying these early front-runners revealed that social media methods differ widely.¹⁸ For example, Albert Meijer and Marcel Thaens's study compared three different police departments in North America.¹⁹ This study ultimately proved valuable as it illustrated how these departments used three established strategies for social media use.²⁰ These three main strategies, which were discussed at length by Ines Mergel, are the push strategy, the push and pull strategy, and the networking strategy.²¹ Meijer and Thaens's research demonstrated how the push strategy used social media communication to reduce the role of the mass media.²² The study went on to illustrate how the push and pull strategy provided and received information from the community, while the networking

¹⁵ Ruddell and Jones, "Social Media and Policing."

¹⁶ Ruddell and Jones.

¹⁷ Ruddell and Jones.

¹⁸ Albert Meijer and Marcel Thaens, "Social Media Strategies: Understanding the Differences between North American Police Departments," *Government Information Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (October 2013): 343–50, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2013.05.023>.

¹⁹ Meijer and Thaens.

²⁰ Meijer and Thaens.

²¹ Ines Mergel, "Government 2.0 Revisited: Social Media Strategies in the Public Sector," *PA Times* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 7,10.

²² Mergel, 346.

strategy fostered improved relationships between police and citizens.²³ This research built upon Mergel’s previous work detailing how the public sector can use social media to “promote transparency, participation, and collaboration.”²⁴ However, one of the drawbacks of focusing on the front-runners is a failure to study other law enforcement departments that do not have the high usage common to Meijer and Thaens’s study participants.

Another relevant study that diverged from Meijer and Thaens’s work was by Lieberman, Koetzle, and Sakiyama in 2010. This study examined the 23 largest U.S. police departments and their use of Facebook, separated the departments into two groups based on the number of postings on the platform.²⁵ By dividing the groups by frequency, Lieberman, Koetzle, and Sakiyama determined that departments infrequently posting on Facebook are more likely to focus on public relations.²⁶ Conversely, regular posters tend to focus their messages on crime.²⁷ Further analysis reveals that slightly more than half of the posts by high-frequency groups are crime related or incident related.²⁸ Although this literature provides solid research on how police departments initially used Facebook, it focused on large police departments. Consequently, this research may not capture the systematic differences between small-to-midsize police departments’ use of Facebook.

2. Understanding Social Media Dynamics

Francis Boateng and Joselyne Chenane’s study addressed this potential limitation by using a mixed-method study of a small, college-town police department.²⁹ They chose this case since small- and college-town police departments make up the bulk of

²³ Meijer and Thaens, “Social Media Strategies,” 347.

²⁴ Mergel, “Government 2.0 Revisited.”

²⁵ Lieberman, Koetzle, and Sakiyama, “Police Departments’ Use of Facebook.”

²⁶ Lieberman, Koetzle, and Sakiyama.

²⁷ Lieberman, Koetzle, and Sakiyama.

²⁸ Lieberman, Koetzle, and Sakiyama.

²⁹ Francis D. Boateng and Joselyne Chenane, “Policing and Social Media: A Mixed-Method Investigation of Social Media Use by a Small-Town Police Department,” *International Journal of Police Science & Management* 22, no. 3 (2020): 263–73, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461355720927429>.

departments nationwide. This study suggested that small-town departments, like their large-city counterparts, use social media to improve their image and achieve greater efficiency. By making this argument, Boateng, and Chenane concur with other scholars such as Meijer, Thaens, Lee, and McGovern. Notably, this study covers only a single U.S. college town, and the results do not generalize to tiny police departments without further research.

One key goal of social media messaging is to strengthen legitimacy. In furthering this discussion, Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen and Albert Meijer studied the effects of Twitter on Dutch citizens. This study explicitly determined that Twitter does increase perceived police legitimacy.³⁰ This finding contradicts Crump's original conclusion that Twitter does not transform relations. Although this study helps determine the effects of social media, the number of citizens participating on Twitter might limit its generalizability. In the same vein, "Does Police Use of Twitter Align with and Enhance Community Policing Objectives?" recognizes that Twitter's reach may favor a pro-police audience.³¹ Thomas, Hatten, and Connealy's response to this limitation suggested that "police may have to change their tweet style, their tweet content, and their profile identity to reach new groups."³² These studies advise that law enforcement agencies must continue exploring alternative ways to use social media to effectively connect with different audiences.

Other scholarly studies attempt to identify deviations from "normal" methods to increase user engagement with their posts. Mark Wood's study captured how law enforcement began to change strategy to align with Facebook's News Feed Algorithm.³³

³⁰ Stephan G. Grimmelikhuijsen and Albert J. Meijer, "Does Twitter Increase Perceived Police Legitimacy?," *Public Administration Review* 75, no. 4 (2015): 598–607, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24757820>.

³¹ Amanda L. Thomas, David N. Hatten, and Nathan T. Connealy, "Does Police Use of Twitter Align with and Enhance Community Policing Objectives? An Analysis of the New York City Police Department's Twitter Activity," *Police Quarterly* 0, no. 0 (2022): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10986111211043875>.

³² Thomas, Hatten, and Connealy, 19.

³³ Mark A. Wood, "Policing's 'Meme Strategy': Understanding the Rise of Police Social Media Engagement Work," *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 32, no. 1 (February 2020): 40–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10345329.2019.1658695>.

This strategy to increase user engagement highlights a marked difference for scholars focused on police social media engagement. Scholars such as Daniel Kudla and Patrick Parnaby reported that merely sharing or liking a police post does not signify meaningful engagement.³⁴ Other scholars such as Rob Procter et al. generalized engagement and promoted a “broadcast” strategy that maximizes the number of followers.³⁵ These varying viewpoints demonstrate that further research is needed to determine what quantifies meaningful engagement.

3. Conclusion

Most researchers agree that social media offers benefits to law enforcement. However, scholars struggle to gauge its effectiveness. The ever-changing state of social media, coupled with the wide range of law enforcement’s size, organizational structure, and purpose, has generated scholarly reports that reach a broad agreement. These reports often conclude that despite the primary differences within police organizations, the same core goals exist, which cause departments to behave similarly. Although social media presents a high ceiling for social media engagement between law enforcement and the community, its potential remains unrealized. Scholars continually seek to identify and measure its effects to maximize these efforts. As stated by Wood, “New media contexts call for new police strategies.”³⁶ For meaningful progress to occur, this statement must reverberate with law enforcement agencies, and law enforcement leaders and executives must continuously seek best practices and implement them within their agencies.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis focuses on how law enforcement agencies can develop positive social media coverage to improve police–community relations. To accomplish this goal, I analyzed three case studies of social media strategies used by three law enforcement

³⁴ Daniel Kudla and Patrick Parnaby, “To Serve and to Tweet: An Examination of Police-Related Twitter Activity in Toronto,” *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 3 (2018): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118787520>.

³⁵ Rob Procter et al., “Reading the Riots: What Were the Police Doing on Twitter?,” *Policing and Society* 23, no. 4 (2013): 413–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2013.780223>.

³⁶ Wood, “Policing’s ‘Meme Strategy.’”

agencies on Twitter. The analysis focused on the actions taken by the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) in Washington, DC, (hereinafter called MPD); the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) in Portland, Oregon; and the Boston Police Department (BPD) in Boston, Massachusetts. This study employed qualitative and quantitative research to determine which practices increased positive media coverage.

I chose MPD, PPB, and BPD to capture comparable law enforcement agencies that also reflect notable differences. In this case, the law enforcement agencies from each city served a similar population, had active Twitter accounts, and received national attention for their actions during the summer of 2020. Conversely, the law enforcement agencies diverged from one another because of their geographic locations, city demographics, and agency size. In this research, I included all three law enforcement organizations in determining if the cities mirrored one another or differed in their attempts to generate positive police–community relations.

The period for this study encompassed May 18, 2020, to June 1, 2020. These dates allowed me to examine the Twitter strategies of the organizations directly before and after the murder of George Floyd. This period represents a high point of tension in the history of U.S. law enforcement and the communities it serves. This hostility ultimately resulted in civil unrest, which sparked varying types of protests throughout the country. During this time, law enforcement agencies were under intense scrutiny, and the general public watched law enforcement’s actions warily.

I chose Twitter as the medium for this analysis because of its data accessibility. Since this information is publicly available, I obtained open-source data from social media. Additionally, I retrieved analytics of the tweets from Tweet Binder, a company that provides real-time and historical Twitter reports, as well as Twitter. Coordinators of the respective agencies’ Twitter accounts provided access to each agency’s Twitter analytics. The qualitative methods employed evaluated the content of the tweets from each agency’s Twitter account. This evaluation separated the tweets into categories such as community policing, positive accomplishments, and helpful information provided by the police department that will assist the day-to-day lives of community members. A quantitative analysis complemented the qualitative method to examine the number of

tweets, followers, and comments. This analysis helped determine how each agency promoted positive police–community relations and the strategies employed.

The choice of the specific data set limited this thesis. One such limitation was the number of Twitter accounts examined and the date range. This limitation does not consider the thousands of other states and local and federal law enforcement agencies operating nationwide. This study also excludes international law enforcement efforts to promote positive community relations. Finally, the very nature of social media limited this study. The social media ecosystem is ever-changing, and consequently, law enforcement agencies will have to reinvent future strategies to stay relevant.

This thesis has practical implications for law enforcement agencies nationally regarding social media communication strategies. By conducting this case study, I identified successful strategies for promoting positive social media coverage used by MPD, PPB, and BPD. By identifying these strategies, this thesis may assist law enforcement agencies in engaging with their communities during future complex and dynamic situations.

E. THESIS OUTLINE

This chapter provides the foundational background of law enforcement’s efforts to harness social media, a literature review, and research design. Chapter II then delivers the background for policing and community relations. Within this chapter, I examine media’s impact, rioting, and the police use of social media. This chapter provides the framework for several of the prevalent concepts currently in use. Chapter III, Chapter IV, and Chapter V are each dedicated to presenting case studies for MPD, PPB, and BPD, respectively. The case studies present and analyze the data from Twitter. Chapter VI then compares all three case studies against one another, and detail the practices that appear to impact the tweets’ success. The thesis concludes with Chapter VII, which presents the recommendations, limitations, and conclusion.

II. POLICING AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Chapter II explains how the media shapes public opinion, examines how media coverage of riots affects police–community relations, and scrutinizes law enforcement’s use of social media. To accomplish these objectives, this chapter addresses three topics: media impact, rioting, and police use of social media. It first examines current theories involving media impact. Then, it overviews how the coverage of riots affected community relations. Finally, it provides statistics on how police currently use social media. Within this chapter, I found that the media has substantially impacted society over the last several decades. This impact has been especially apparent through high-profile events such as riots. Furthermore, recent technological advancements have increased the media’s reach and allowed it to reach more people.

A. THE MEDIA’S IMPACT ON PUBLIC OPINION

The media’s growth over the last several years has increased its power in influencing individuals’ opinions on varying topics and populations. Over the last couple of decades, multiple social media platforms have exploded in popularity.³⁷ Previous research has indicated that the media plays a substantial role in providing individuals with information on crime.³⁸ The analysis also revealed that the media shapes citizens’ perceptions of officers’ actions.³⁹ Due to the wide breadth of the media’s influence, examining its potential impact on policing and community relations is essential. Maxwell McCombs suggested that these media effects align with agenda setting, including established concepts such as status conferral, stereotyping, image building, transfer of

³⁷ Liam Ralph, “The Dynamic Nature of Police Legitimacy on Social Media,” *Policing and Society* 0, no. 0 (2021): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2021.1956493>.

³⁸ Xiaochen Hu, “Moving toward the Electronic Community-Oriented Policing Era: Content and Strategies of Police Use of Social Media” (PhD diss., Sam Houston State University, 2016), ProQuest.

³⁹ Roxann Marie Fisk, “Society’s Views of Law Enforcement Use of Force” (PhD diss., Walden University, 2017), <https://www.hSDL.org/?abstract&did=840243>.

salience, and gatekeeping.⁴⁰ I examine these concepts in detail in subsequent paragraphs to further this discussion and provide a clearer understanding of the media's role.

Researchers have stressed the importance of the agenda-setting theory for decades.⁴¹ This theory proposes that what is important to the media becomes important to the public.⁴² Furthermore, agenda-setting effects encompass a “transfer of salience,” which is an important initial step in creating public opinion.⁴³ In plain terms, this level of reporting can also influence how the audience thinks about a current situation.⁴⁴

Status conferral has also been discussed at length for the last several decades. Status conferral hypothesizes that mass media provides prestige by recognizing or singling out individuals from large groups.⁴⁵ Examples of status conferral can be found throughout the media as individuals are boosted in notability by being singled out. While this theory emphasizes that this status conferral can occur with individuals, Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton expand the scope and states that the media can confer status on “public issues, persons, organizations, and social movements.”⁴⁶ This concept is crucial because it allows the recognized recipients to become more influential to the recipients of the media they are broadcasting to.

Gatekeeping outlines the power of the media to cover some items while excluding others.⁴⁷ This is particularly significant because it has the potential to be used as a tool

⁴⁰ Maxwell McCombs, “A Look at Agenda-Setting: Past, Present and Future,” *Journalism Studies* 6, no. 4 (2005): 546, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700500250438>.

⁴¹ Richard R. Lau, Kathleen Rogers, and Jamel Love, “Media Effects in the Viewer's Choice Era: Testing Revised Agenda-Setting and Priming Hypotheses,” *Political Communication* 38, no. 3 (2021): 199, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1763526>.

⁴² McCombs, “A Look at Agenda-Setting,” 546.

⁴³ McCombs, 544.

⁴⁴ McCombs, 546.

⁴⁵ Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton, “Mass Communication, Popular Taste, and Organized Social Action,” *Journal of Communication Theory and Research*, no. 24 (2007): 229–50, <https://www.academia.edu/download/6448800/13.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Lazarsfeld and Merton, 235.

⁴⁷ Kasper Welbers and Michaël Opgenhaffen, “Social Media Gatekeeping: An Analysis of the Gatekeeping Influence of Newspapers' Public Facebook Pages,” *New Media & Society* 20, no. 12 (2018): 4728–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818784302>.

for highlighting specific issues.⁴⁸ In 2018, Kasper Welbers and Michaël Opgenhaffen published an article detailing how much impact social media editors had by studying the Facebook pages of several newspapers.⁴⁹ This study eventually concluded that social media editors wield tremendous power by having the ability to push content to an enormous number of people.⁵⁰ This is particularly relevant as the media has been moving into the digital era.

Newsworthiness is of particular importance to the media. Events that are unexpected or extraordinary will frequently be newsworthy.⁵¹ Additionally, other stories that have a specific news value may also be determined as noteworthy. Yvonne Jewkes proposed that some of these news values include violence, high-status persons, graphic imagery, or children.⁵² These values can be deciding factors in the selection of stories to present.⁵³ Consequently, the media acts as gatekeepers in this aspect as they determine what stories to elevate.

Researchers can find agenda-setting at all levels of the media. A study conducted by Kimberly Gross and Sean Aday indicated that local news exposure on television had an agenda-setting effect.⁵⁴ This study, which examined the impact of local television on agenda setting and cultivation within Washington, DC, concluded that people who consumed broadcast news were more likely to rate crime as the city's most important problem.⁵⁵ This effect is not just limited to local television; it carries over to newer forms

⁴⁸ Pamela J. Shoemaker, "News and Newsworthiness: A Commentary," *Communications* 31, no. 1 (2006): 109, <https://doi.org/10.1515/COMMUN.2006.007>.

⁴⁹ Welbers and Opgenhaffen, "Social Media Gatekeeping."

⁵⁰ Welbers and Opgenhaffen.

⁵¹ Yvonne Jewkes, *Media and Crime* (London: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2004), 42.

⁵² Jewkes, 40.

⁵³ Jewkes, vii.

⁵⁴ Kimberly Gross and Sean Aday, "The Scary World in Your Living Room and Neighborhood: Using Local Broadcast News, Neighborhood Crime Rates, and Personal Experience to Test Agenda Setting and Cultivation," *Journal of Communication* 53, no. 3 (2003): 411–26, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2003.tb02599.x>.

⁵⁵ Gross and Aday.

of media, such as social media.⁵⁶ This effect demonstrates that the media's potential impact on the community affects multiple delivery channels. Additionally, it reveals that if the media reports disproportionately on crime, then crime would be at the forefront of the minds of the consumers. Furthermore, the wide variance of media sources guarantees that numerous agendas would be available for consumption.⁵⁷ Consequently, this study shows that agenda-setting effects can influence the audience's opinions on the crime.

Another example of agenda-setting within the media was conducted by Joanne Miller. Her study, which examined media content, added to the previous research that primarily focused on accessibility.⁵⁸ One of her studies involved having some students read newspaper articles on crime while others did not.⁵⁹ For the students who read articles concerning crimes, some of the students read a specific article that reported increasing crime rates, while the other students read a specific article that said crime rates were decreasing.⁶⁰ The study results revealed that both groups who read about crime were more inclined to believe crime was a significant issue than the students who read alternative articles.⁶¹ However, one distinction among the groups that read about crimes was that the students who read the articles that reported high crime were likelier to list crime as an important matter.⁶² In her overall conclusion, Miller proposes that when the media elicits feelings of sadness or fear, citizens are more likely to consider the subject as significant.⁶³ This finding is especially noteworthy because it demonstrates that in addition to accessibility, media content is also a factor.

⁵⁶ Gary Copitch and Chris Fox, "Using Social Media as a Means of Improving Public Confidence," *Safer Communities* 9, no. 2 (2010): 42–48, <https://doi.org/10.5042/sc.2010.0226>.

⁵⁷ McCombs, "A Look at Agenda-Setting."

⁵⁸ Joanne Miller, "Examining the Mediators of Agenda Setting: A New Experimental Paradigm Reveals the Role of Emotions," *Political Psychology* 28, no. 6 (2007): 712, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20447084>.

⁵⁹ Miller, 695.

⁶⁰ Miller.

⁶¹ Miller, 698.

⁶² Miller, 698.

⁶³ Miller, 712.

The media's capacity to directly shape societal agenda is pivotal. The press not only highlights specific topics but can also affect how people think about a current situation. For instance, Sara Beale discovered that crime was dramatically reduced during the 1990s; however, public opinion still believed it was rising.⁶⁴ Within this timeframe, news coverage of crime, including television news and newspapers, increased substantially.⁶⁵ Americans reported receiving vital information about crime from the media at this time.⁶⁶ During this study, Beale reported that the media's emphasis on crime results makes the audience view crime as a bigger problem than statistics indicate.⁶⁷ These circumstances demonstrate that media can influence citizens' opinion of police efficiency.

Another potential impact the media may have contributed to during this time was the introduction of punitive laws. These punitive laws led to an increase in the level of incarceration.⁶⁸ Although it would be inaccurate to suggest that the media was the only contributing factor, Beale's research supported the claim that the media news played a part in boosting the public's support for harsh policies.⁶⁹ Currently, the United States has the highest incarceration rates in the world.⁷⁰ This high incarceration rate may have been aided by some of the punitive laws and policies created during a time that imposed prison time as punishment. These punitive laws came about as Stefaan Walgrave, Stuart Soroka, and Michiel Nuytemans concluded, "Mass media clearly plays an independent role in

⁶⁴ Sara Sun Beale, "The News Media's Influence on Criminal Justice Policy: How Market-Driven News Promotes Punitiveness," *William and Mary Law Review* 48, no. 2 (2006): 397–481, <https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/wmlr/vol48/iss2/2>.

⁶⁵ Beale, 422.

⁶⁶ Beale.

⁶⁷ Beale, 422.

⁶⁸ Beale, 406.

⁶⁹ Beale, 477.

⁷⁰ Christopher J. Marier and John K. Cochran, "Ethnic Diversity, Ethnic Polarization, and Incarceration Rates: A Cross-National Study," *Justice Quarterly* 0, no. 0 (April 20, 2022): 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2022.2063753>.

determining policy makers' attentiveness to issues.”⁷¹ This potential influence is significant because policymakers can directly influence how police and citizens interact.

Public opinion on specific organizations is particularly important during critical events or crises. During a crisis, people have a reason to think negatively about an organization.⁷² When this occurs, the audience may change their views of the police agency's reputation. This shift is important because it can change how stakeholders interact with the organization.⁷³ An example of this would be the Rodney King incident in 1991. In this incident, Rodney King fled from officers in a car. After the pursuit ended, Rodney King resisted officers' attempts to take him into custody. This resistance resulted in officers striking him approximately 56 times with batons.⁷⁴ This apprehension was captured on a video camera and subsequently televised nationwide. As a result of this incident, many Los Angeles residents were angered, and they associated indiscriminate racism with the Los Angeles Police Department.⁷⁵ The subsequent fallout from this video and the acquittal decision led to significant rioting around the country and the appearance that the police were not in control of the events. Ultimately, the chief of the Los Angeles Police Department was replaced, and the Los Angeles Police Department began its journey to repair its community relations.⁷⁶ This incident prominently displayed on news media demonstrates that specific images can exacerbate tensions within the community and have lasting ramifications.⁷⁷ Furthermore, these images can

⁷¹ Stefaan Walgrave, Stuart Soroka, and Michiel Nuytemans, “The Mass Media’s Political Agenda-Setting Power: A Longitudinal Analysis of Media, Parliament, and Government in Belgium (1993 to 2000),” *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 6 (June 2008): 832, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414006299098>.

⁷² W. Timothy Coombs, “Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory,” *Corporate Reputation Review* 10, no. 3 (September 2007): 163–76, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550049>.

⁷³ Coombs.

⁷⁴ LaVerle Bennette Berry, Amanda Jones, and Terence Powers, *Media Interaction with the Public in Emergency Situations: Four Case Studies* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress. Federal Research Division, 1999), 17, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=3802>.

⁷⁵ Berry, Jones, and Powers.

⁷⁶ Berry, Jones, and Powers.

⁷⁷ Marc Lacey and Shawn Hubler, “Rioters Set Fires, Loot Stores; 4 Reported Dead : Rampage: 106 Are Wounded or Injured and More than 150 Blazes Are Ignited. Bradley Considers a Curfew.,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 1992, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-04-30-mn-1893-story.html>.

force extensive changes to the organization's structure and how the community interacts with them.

The media, like society, has evolved since its creation. These advancements often have an immediate impact on messaging speed and delivery. This fact has been demonstrated repeatedly throughout history through several different iterations. Each advancement allowed media to reach more consumers quickly, whether it be the advent of mass production, radio, television, or the internet. In 2021, approximately 48% of people reported receiving news from social media.⁷⁸ This is especially important as social media news feeds influence what society considers necessary.⁷⁹ Now that the media news cycle has become 24/7, the media can quickly display images and inform the public about what is essential. Furthermore, private citizens have now provided extensive coverage that was previously unavailable.⁸⁰ Social media can influence individuals about current events. A 2020 Pew Research study indicated that 23% of adult social media users reported changing their views because of something they saw online.⁸¹ These advancements presented substantial opportunities for law enforcement to influence the community's viewpoint on police operations.

The media's impact is not just regulated by consumers of media but by third parties who encounter consumers of media. Jin Yang and Gerald Stone reported, "Almost everyone inculcates the same media agenda either directly or through interpersonal

⁷⁸ Mason Walker and Katerina Eva Matsa, "News Consumption Across Social Media in 2021," Pew Research Center, September 20, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2021/09/20/news-consumption-across-social-media-in-2021/>.

⁷⁹ Jessica T. Feezell, "Agenda Setting through Social Media: The Importance of Incidental News Exposure and Social Filtering in the Digital Era," *Political Research Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (2018): 482–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912917744895>.

⁸⁰ "The Rise of Digital Journalism: Past, Present, and Future," *Maryville Online* (blog), March 15, 2021, <https://online.maryville.edu/blog/digital-journalism/>.

⁸¹ Andrew Perrin, "23% of Users in U.S. Say Social Media Led Them to Change Views on an Issue; Some Cite Black Lives Matter," *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed August 14, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/15/23-of-users-in-us-say-social-media-led-them-to-change-views-on-issue-some-cite-black-lives-matter/>.

communication.”⁸² With the advent of social media, influencers have played an essential role in the perceptions of companies.⁸³ The advancement of social media has indisputably aided social movements. The media is crucial in projecting a civil rights leader’s message.⁸⁴ Hashtags and memes highlight specific causes for society’s interest.⁸⁵ These hashtags can become a call to action and negatively depict organizations, impacting relations with the community. These media-level effects demonstrate that the media impact extends beyond its immediate consumers. Consequently, organizations, including law enforcement agencies, must be aware of the potential effects.

The rise of citizen journalists has had a profound effect on the coverage of police interactions and, ultimately, the accountability of police departments for their actions. Due to this new dynamic, news media are focusing on accounts from demonstrators.⁸⁶ By focusing on these accounts, journalists now take a more complete view of the public safety atmosphere.⁸⁷ These viewpoints have brought the attention of law enforcement tactics and have led police departments to be held accountable for violating the use of force policies.⁸⁸ An example of this occurred in Chicago in the summer of 2020. During this instance, a non-profit group solicited the public to provide accounts of police

⁸² Jin Yang and Gerald Stone, “The Powerful Role of Interpersonal Communication in Agenda Setting,” *Mass Communication and Society* 6, no. 1 (February 2003): 16, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0601_5.

⁸³ Norman Booth and Julie Ann Matic, “Mapping and Leveraging Influencers in Social Media to Shape Corporate Brand Perceptions,” ed. Michael B. Goodman, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 16, no. 3 (January 1, 2011): 184–91, <https://doi.org/10.1108/13563281111156853>.

⁸⁴ Tiffany Dyan Kuniko Monroy and Daniel J. Myers, “Fanning the Flames? Riot Commissions and the Mass Media,” *Race, Gender & Class* 11, no. 1 (2004): 136–57, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41675117>.

⁸⁵ Lynda Chinenye Iroulo, “A Weapon of the Weak: Fighting Police Brutality through Social Media,” *GIGA Focus*, no. 6 (October 2021): 1–12, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep37816>.

⁸⁶ Adeshina Emmanuel, “Spurred by Black Lives Matter, Coverage of Police Violence Is Changing,” *Injustice Watch*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.injusticewatch.org/longreads/2021/nieman-reports-police-violence-coverage-is-changing/>.

⁸⁷ Emmanuel.

⁸⁸ Laurie O. Robinson, “Five Years after Ferguson: Reflecting on Police Reform and What’s Ahead,” *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 687, no. 1 (2020): 228–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716219887372>.

violence.⁸⁹ This solicitation led to numerous videos being provided and the Chicago Police Department issuing a statement stating that officers would be held accountable for violations.⁹⁰ These circumstances can influence the community to demand significant changes from their police department.

The media affects police officers, too. The results from a survey conducted in 2016 showed that most police officers from departments of more than 100 believe that the press mistreats them.⁹¹ This result is relevant because it could depress the influx of recruits into the law enforcement profession. After George Floyd's death, a significant amount of hostile rhetoric about the law enforcement profession entered public discourse. Perhaps associated with this rhetoric was an increase in resignations and retirements. One example is the San Francisco Police Department, which reported that members were leaving the department in record numbers.⁹² The potential impact of attrition is substantial because it could lead to an increase in crime, lack of institutional knowledge, and the inability of the force to overcome challenges that law enforcement faces from society.

How the media frames arguments, opinions, and statistics can create public concern over specific matters. This power is profound because it can potentially influence political results, create a groundswell of public support or scorn, or sway individuals to provide resources to organizations. Furthermore, individuals' opinions of organizations can influence how they interact. This development is especially relevant within the law enforcement atmosphere, as the police need public support to maintain order effectively.⁹³ Without support and cooperation, the police may be less likely to have

⁸⁹ Andrew Fan and Dana Brozost-Kelleher, "Cops Appear to Violate Use-of-Force Rules Dozens of Times at Protests," *Chicago Reader*, June 23, 2020, <http://chicagoreader.com/news-politics/cops-appear-to-violate-use-of-force-rules-dozens-of-times-at-protests/>.

⁹⁰ Fan and Brozost-Kelleher.

⁹¹ John Gramlich and Kim Parker, "Most Officers Say the Media Treat Police Unfairly," Pew Research Center, January 25, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/25/most-officers-say-the-media-treat-police-unfairly/>.

⁹² Emma Colton, "'Just the Beginning': San Francisco Police Officers Leaving Department in Record Numbers," *Washington Examiner*, August 19, 2020, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/just-the-beginning-san-francisco-police-officers-leaving-department-in-record-numbers>.

⁹³ Tyler, "Enhancing Police Legitimacy," 84.

people comply with the law. As media power increases, the average citizen will continue to be exposed to several new media forms. These new media could have the same influence on individuals' opinions and can lead to demands for changes in policies and personnel if a significant backlash is created.

B. RIOTING

America's long history of civil unrest and riots has shaped police–community relations. These riots have occurred over decades and can frequently be attributed to police brutality, racial discrimination, and unfair practices by government entities.⁹⁴ When examining history, researchers can find examples of riots throughout the country during different historical periods. Although the recent protests of 2020 are at the forefront of media attention, past riots are worth exploring due to their impact on society, law enforcement, and protesters. Researchers can find common themes in the protests' birth and development by examining these riots.

The 1960s were a tumultuous time in American history due to many events, including riots throughout the country. These riots occurred regularly as citizens protested the black community's unfair circumstances.⁹⁵ The situation included issues on civil rights and blacks being drafted at a disproportionate rate to their white counterparts.⁹⁶ Throughout this decade, violent encounters took place in cities of every size and geographic location. Cities such as Birmingham, Cleveland, Tampa Bay, and New York City had such riots.⁹⁷ These riots were noteworthy because they represented a regular expression of frustration with the current society and led to frequent clashes with the police.

⁹⁴ Michael Bowman, "Repeating History: Has the Media Changed Since The Kerner Commission?," *Race, Gender & Class* 25, no. 1–2 (2018): 18, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26649531>.

⁹⁵ Bowman, "Repeating History."

⁹⁶ Paul T. Murray, "Blacks and the Draft: A History of Institutional Racism," *Journal of Black Studies* 2, no. 1 (September 1971): 57–76, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2783700>.

⁹⁷ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States, *National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Report*, NCJ No. 8073 (Rockville, MD: National Institute of Justice, 1967).

Because of the nature of the riots, the federal government attempted to ascertain the media's role. To achieve this goal, President Lyndon Johnson established a commission.⁹⁸ This commission, known as the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, also known as the Kerner Commission, primarily focused on understanding the reason behind the riots and finding ways to prevent future riots.⁹⁹ The commission reached the conclusion that the cause of the nationwide civil disorder was white racism.¹⁰⁰ Its report judged that the media had failed to report on race relations.¹⁰¹ Additionally, instances of sensationalism were reflected in the media's messages.¹⁰² These frequent messages alienated numerous members of the black community who felt that the media failed to explore the background leading to the disturbances and neglected to report examples of law enforcement being assisted by African Americans during the disorders.¹⁰³ This feedback reveals that media reports engage multiple audiences, and their interpretation of their reporting can alienate a section of the population.

The media's role at this time inflamed rather than calmed unrest in the country. The media's use of "scare headlines" and inadequate reporting contributed to the violence experienced.¹⁰⁴ An examination of this time revealed that the nation was moving toward two separate Americas.¹⁰⁵ Some of the more violent encounters occurred in Birmingham.¹⁰⁶ The violence included police officers using dogs and firehoses on

⁹⁸ Bowman, "Repeating History," 18.

⁹⁹ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States, *National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Report*, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Susan T. Gooden and Samuel L. Myers, Jr., "The Kerner Commission Report Fifty Years Later: Revisiting the American Dream," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 4, no. 6 (2018): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2018.4.6.01>.

¹⁰¹ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States, *National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Report*.

¹⁰² National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States.

¹⁰³ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States.

¹⁰⁴ Shannon Campbell et al., "Remote Control: How Mass Media Delegitimize Rioting as Social Protest," *Race, Gender & Class* 11, no. 1 (2004): 158–76, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41675118>.

¹⁰⁵ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States, *National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Report*.

¹⁰⁶ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States.

protesters.¹⁰⁷ The violent images presented by the media resonated with countless people and served as a reminder of the adversity faced by individuals demanding change. Additionally, the images captured have lasted decades as a clear illustration of what occurred and the hardships specific communities faced when dealing with law enforcement.

The relationship between the police and the community played a considerable role in their interactions during this time. In line with specific communities' hardships, the report cited the relationship between the police and the community as one of the driving factors for hostilities.¹⁰⁸ This relationship was strained since the primary contact between the two parties was adversarial.¹⁰⁹ The commission recommended that to overcome this obstacle, police agencies must develop programs to boost police–community relations.¹¹⁰ These recommendations were based on the belief that non-adversarial contacts will positively influence relationships between police officers and the community they serve. Consequently, law enforcement must continuously invest in community relations throughout their interactions to improve their relationship with the public.

Another key takeaway from the report was the role of law enforcement during media coverage. One persistent problem highlighted was the absence of cooperation between police officers and reporters.¹¹¹ Often, out-of-town news reporters did not care about maintaining the image of the local neighborhood.¹¹² The recommendation to resolve this issue was to plan to work together with local officials.¹¹³ This recommendation demonstrates that law enforcement plays a crucial role in media coverage during riots.

¹⁰⁷ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States.

¹⁰⁸ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States, 165.

¹⁰⁹ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States, 165.

¹¹⁰ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States, 167.

¹¹¹ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States.

¹¹² National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States, 209.

¹¹³ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders United States, 209.

Although the 1960s were a significant time in the nation, riots and media coverage did not stop there. Continuing further down American history brings the 1992 riots in Los Angeles. These riots started because of the not guilty verdict of excessive force on Rodney King despite video evidence.¹¹⁴ This video evidence concretely proved some of the injustices faced by African Americans.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the media played a role in sparking the riots by serving as a prosecutor and jury before the trial even ended.¹¹⁶ The resulting riot included violence, looting, and arson. This riot lasted five days and caused close to \$1 billion in damage.¹¹⁷ The media, which regularly depicted the beating of Rodney King, reached a broad audience and contributed to the public's sentiment about the officers' guilt.¹¹⁸ This lasting public sentiment reveals that ongoing media coverage contributes to public opinion.

One of the more pivotal cases that demonstrated a lack of police–community relations occurred in Ferguson, Missouri. In this case, a white police officer shot Michael Brown on August 9, 2014. This event again highlighted the excessive use of force against African Americans. This shooting caused several waves of protests that included acts of vandalism and looting of businesses. An investigation into the Ferguson Police Department revealed several factors that exacerbated the situation. Some of these factors include moving away from community policing efforts and reducing opportunities for positive police–community interactions.¹¹⁹ During the protests, police officers utilized police dogs, which added to the tension between police officers and the community.¹²⁰ Furthermore, the after-action report indicated the absence of communication with community members to provide them with information concerning their questions and

¹¹⁴ Berry, Jones, and Powers, Media Interaction with the Public in Emergency Situations.

¹¹⁵ Berry, Jones, and Powers.

¹¹⁶ Berry, Jones, and Powers, 18.

¹¹⁷ Berry, Jones, and Powers, 25.

¹¹⁸ Berry, Jones, and Powers, 56.

¹¹⁹ Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, *Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department* (Washington, DC: Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2015), 6.

¹²⁰ Institute for Intergovernmental Research, *After-Action Assessment of the Police Response to the August 2014 Demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015).

concerns. This lack of communication reflected a lack of trust between the police department and the community.¹²¹ This lesson indicates the importance of building community relations before a critical event occurs.

The subsequent coverage of the riots depicted a shift in the framing of the protests. The focus went from violence to more thematic ideas of the protestors.¹²² The coverage of the Ferguson case flooded the world with news coverage.¹²³ By August 14, 2014, over three million tweets concerned Ferguson.¹²⁴ This unprecedented amount of Twitter attention forced national politicians to respond.¹²⁵ Politicians at every level, including the president of the United States, gave statements. When the verdict was provided, President Obama issued a statement requesting that the protests remain peaceful. In his remarks, President Obama directly appealed to the police to work with the community when he stated, “As they do their jobs in the coming days, they need to work with the community, not against the community, to distinguish the handful of people who may use the grand jury’s decision as an excuse for violence.”¹²⁶ By taking this stance, the president of the United States reaffirmed that police must consistently maintain a partnership with the community.

In 2020, the substantial number of protests due to the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers led to negative interactions with the police. These protests, which were covered by the media at an unprecedented level, had a noticeable effect on

¹²¹ Institute for Intergovernmental Research, 87.

¹²² Rachel R. Mourão, Danielle K. Brown, and George Sylvie, “Framing Ferguson: The Interplay of Advocacy and Journalistic Frames in Local and National Newspaper Coverage of Michael Brown,” *Journalism* 22, no. 2 (2021): 335, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918778722>.

¹²³ Bowman, “Repeating History.”

¹²⁴ Paul Hitlin and Nancy Vogt, “Cable, Twitter Picked up Ferguson Story at a Similar Clip,” Pew Research Center, August 20, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/08/20/cable-twitter-picked-up-ferguson-story-at-a-similar-clip/>.

¹²⁵ Hitlin and Vogt.

¹²⁶ Lindsay Holst, “President Obama Delivers a Statement on the Ferguson Grand Jury’s Decision,” White House President Barack Obama, November 24, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2014/11/24/president-obama-delivers-statement-ferguson-grand-jurys-decision>.

the public's attitudes toward the police.¹²⁷ The protests varied in size and scope, with some of the largest protests exceeding 60,000 individuals. Although most of these protests were peaceful, several hundred protests involved violence.¹²⁸ According to the Major Cities Chiefs Association report on the 2020 Protests and Civil Unrest, approximately 7% of the demonstrations involved violent acts.¹²⁹ Differing ideologies motivated these violent protesters.¹³⁰ Law enforcement engaged in various forms of force in response to protestors, including tear gas, pepper spray, and devices capable of launching non-lethal projectiles. This response, authorized in certain instances, may have impacted citizens' views of the police. To add to the contention, several agencies reported that the media directed its attention to police use of force, and the media inaccurately reported that the police agencies were unbalanced in their response.¹³¹ Such an imbalance could have adverse consequences as police responsibilities in the physical world help shape police legitimacy online.¹³² If the public determined that police actions during a protest were illegitimate, it might damage community relations.

As demonstrated by United States history within the last 60 years, Americans have experienced numerous incidents of civil unrest and riots that directly influenced community relations with police. Recent riots have resulted from multiple factors, including police brutality, racial discrimination, and lack of trust. The media's coverage often amplified and highlighted these problems. These riots, while not ideal, force society to look at the heart of the matter. As Tiffany Monroy and Daniel Meyers stated, "Rioting draws attention to inequality and abhorrent conditions and provides hope that something will be done to make things better."¹³³ Learning from decades of American history

¹²⁷ Tyler T. Reny and Benjamin J. Newman, "The Opinion-Mobilizing Effect of Social Protest against Police Violence: Evidence from the 2020 George Floyd Protests," *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 4 (November 2021): 1499–1507, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000460>.

¹²⁸ Major Cities Chiefs Association, *Report on the 2020 Protests and Civil Unrest* (Salt Lake City, UT: Major Cities Chiefs Association, 2020).

¹²⁹ Major Cities Chiefs Association.

¹³⁰ Major Cities Chiefs Association.

¹³¹ Major Cities Chiefs Association.

¹³² Ralph, "The Dynamic Nature of Police Legitimacy on Social Media."

¹³³ Monroy and Myers, "Fanning the Flames?," 20.

requires a concentrated effort from law enforcement to display legitimate and positive police interactions with the community.

C. POLICE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Over the years, law enforcement has used social media to distribute information, highlight positive accomplishments, and communicate timely messages about significant events. By focusing on these goals, law enforcement tries to maintain its legitimacy and provide quality service to the citizens that it serves. Conventionally, police departments have relied on traditional news media to convey their message. Although conventional news media still plays a significant role, social media has now afforded police departments the ability to connect with citizens directly. This ability allows law enforcement to engage with citizens by asking for assistance with investigations, responding to inquiries, and providing information on its schedule.

Society has demanded changes in law enforcement in recent years. In 2015, the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing recommended that law enforcement organizations improve in several areas.¹³⁴ One of these areas included community relations and how law enforcement must focus on becoming more transparent.¹³⁵ To achieve this goal, it was recommended that technology be incorporated to improve community relations.¹³⁶ The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) was surveyed to identify the social media practices nationwide. Figure 1 provides a snapshot of how law enforcement agencies use social media.

¹³⁴ President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015).

¹³⁵ President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, *The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing Implementation Guide: Moving from Recommendations to Action* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015).

¹³⁶ KiDeuk Kim, Ashlin Oglesby-Neal, and Edward Mohr, *2016 Law Enforcement Use of Social Media Survey* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2017).

What Does Your Agency Use Social Media For?



Figure 1. Snapshot from IACP Survey on Police Use of Social Media¹³⁷

This report comprised 539 law enforcement agencies throughout 48 states and Washington, DC.¹³⁸ The wide range of uses reported by the various law enforcement agencies illustrates social media's many functions. Since the publication of this report, social media has continued to expand, with its reach only growing. This rise in popularity provides police departments with a more extensive base to reach.

As social media has grown, specific social media platforms have displayed their usefulness in filling certain roles. For instance, Twitter's design provides police departments with the ability to reach a multitude of followers instantaneously. This ability proved advantageous in several critical circumstances. One such situation that demonstrated the effectiveness of police use of social media involved the Boston Marathon Bombing. In this situation, BPD became the primary news source for the calamity. By providing pertinent information in a timely fashion, the news media quickly realized that BPD had the most accurate information available.¹³⁹ This realization was pivotal because it demonstrated how social media could assist with navigating a crisis and boost a department's credibility.

¹³⁷ Source: Kim, Oglesby-Neal, and Mohr, 12.

¹³⁸ Kim, Oglesby-Neal, and Mohr.

¹³⁹ Jessica Mulholland, "Social Media: Big Lessons from the Boston Marathon Bombing," Government Technology, September 24, 2014, <https://www.govtech.com/public-safety/Social-Media-Big-Lessons-from-the-Boston-Marathon-Bombing.html>.

Not all police use of social media is as well-received as the previously mentioned example. For example, the Ferguson incident represented a communication failure because of the lack of timely information. This lack of communication intensified the community's mistrust of law enforcement.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, by not taking a proactive stance, cable news and social media began to generate their own stories. Consequently, social media started to play a substantial role in the events of Ferguson because it became the main driver of information and viewpoints.¹⁴¹ By August 14, 2014 over 3.5 million Ferguson-related tweets addressed events.¹⁴² These tweets dwarfed the local Ferguson Police Department, which had only light activity, and the Missouri State Highway Patrol, which did not have any Twitter activity.¹⁴³ This activity, or lack thereof, negatively affected police–community relations.

The strategies used by police agencies during riots have had varying degrees of success. One of the strategies was the broadcasting method.¹⁴⁴ This strategy allowed police officers to disseminate information to a large contingency of people.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, it quickly provided substantive updates that kept the audience informed. However, some police agencies did not provide updates as frequently. This lack of communication, however, could have been affected by the heavy demand on the communication team during the riots.¹⁴⁶ This burden demonstrates that police organizations' operational efficiency during extreme situations can be adversely affected without adequate resources to continuously provide meaningful updates.

Outside of riots, law enforcement agencies found several different ways to use social media to communicate with media corporations, community stakeholders, protest organizers, or citizens within the community. This progression has led to a multitude of messaging

¹⁴⁰ Institute for Intergovernmental Research, After-Action Assessment of the Police Response to the August 2014 Demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri.

¹⁴¹ Institute for Intergovernmental Research, 131.

¹⁴² Hitlin and Vogt, "Cable, Twitter Picked up Ferguson Story at a Similar Clip."

¹⁴³ Institute for Intergovernmental Research, After-Action Assessment of the Police Response to the August 2014 Demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri, 100.

¹⁴⁴ Crump, "What Are the Police Doing on Twitter?"

¹⁴⁵ Crump.

¹⁴⁶ Procter et al., "Reading the Riots," 434.

strategies.¹⁴⁷ For instance, some police organizations use social media to share their stories and information. This information can vary from providing basic information about patrol functions to updating the public on the results of a case.¹⁴⁸ Other organizations have explored engaging with individuals through direct communication.¹⁴⁹ This communication strategy involved self-initiating reply tweets. During an analysis of this method, Zachary Perron noted that agencies that employed such techniques received more new followers than agencies that did not.¹⁵⁰ This method promotes communication that fosters meaningful engagement with the community.

One of the primary goals of police organizations when using social media is to ensure that their social media activity increases or maintains the organizational reputation. This goal is not unlike the plans of other corporations within society. Within these organizations, companies routinely develop tools for monitoring and communicating messages.¹⁵¹ Law enforcement agencies have begun to see the benefits of these messages, and some have promoted a framework to boost the public's opinions of their legitimacy.¹⁵² Kevin Walby and Crystal Gumieny noted that police have used social media to promote philanthropic work to improve relations over the long term.¹⁵³ These images regularly displayed officers involved in community events and positive interactions with the community. This level of engagement fits with Crump's caveat that engagement should be open and avoid reputational risk.¹⁵⁴ Social media strategies using this method can evoke emotion and gain the support of audiences.

¹⁴⁷ Crump, "What Are the Police Doing on Twitter?"

¹⁴⁸ Crump.

¹⁴⁹ Zachary P. Perron, "Becoming More Than a Digital Bullhorn: Two-Way Engagement on Twitter for Law Enforcement" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2016), <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=792227>.

¹⁵⁰ Perron.

¹⁵¹ Asha Kaul et al., "Social Media: The New Mantra for Managing Reputation," *Vikalpa* 40, no. 4 (2015): 455–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0256090915618029>.

¹⁵² Kevin Walby and Crystal Gumieny, "Public Police's Philanthropy and Twitter Communications in Canada," *Policing: An International Journal* 43, no. 5 (January 1, 2020): 755–68, <https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-03-2020-0041>.

¹⁵³ Walby and Gumieny.

¹⁵⁴ Crump, "What Are the Police Doing on Twitter?"

Social media allows the government to increase its transparency and openness.¹⁵⁵ Police organizations could recognize this and seize opportunities that may enable them to further their agenda. Within the current climate, law enforcement agencies routinely face attention-grabbing headlines presented by various forms of media that cause citizens to look for the agencies' official statement. When police organizations take advantage of this situation, they can provide factual information, take control of the narrative, and engage with the community. These situations are routinely found in officer-involved shootings that require police organizations to provide answers and ensure that their officers are held accountable. Furthermore, these types of engagements allow law enforcement organizations to influence attitudes and develop relationships that can lead to healthy dialogue.¹⁵⁶ Accordingly, law enforcement agencies should take advantage of this social media environment and capitalize on its capabilities.

D. CONCLUSION

Chapter II demonstrates that the media plays a considerable role in influencing public opinion. This influence is particularly notable during civil unrest due to interactions between law enforcement and the public. The implications of these findings are particularly relevant within today's environment, as law enforcement must be cognizant that missteps can have lasting ramifications. These factors, including the impact of media, riots, and the police's use of social media, are all interconnected in their ability to increase law enforcement's exposure to social media. As time has progressed, the mechanisms for media exposure have grown exponentially, and consequently, it now has the ability to reach more people instantaneously. To harness this new reality, law enforcement must recognize the missteps of the past while simultaneously identifying strategies that positively reinforce its messaging and solidify its reputation. The next chapter is a case study of MPD and its use of Twitter during the week before and after George Floyd was killed, to determine its strategy.

¹⁵⁵ Kim, Oglesby-Neal, and Mohr, 2016 Law Enforcement Use of Social Media Survey.

¹⁵⁶ Copitch and Fox, "Using Social Media as a Means of Improving Public Confidence," 48.

III. CASE STUDY #1: METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chapter III examines MPD's Twitter data from May 18, 2020, until June 1, 2020, to determine what successful strategies the department incorporated to promote positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations. To assess its system, I analyzed its tweets by frequency, method of posting, and the number of reactions the department generated during this time. Furthermore, I also looked at the number of crimes that occurred within these dates to see if there was any correlation between the number of crimes reported compared to the amount of positive messaging through the department's tweet. By examining these two statistics, I found a negative correlation between the crime reported and the number of positive tweets. This negative correlation was particularly pronounced after civil unrest began in the city after the death of George Floyd. While I did find a negative correlation between the two, I also determined that MPD maintained a consistent strategy in terms of messaging that occurred. The department continued pushing out a substantial number of tweets that directly involved police–community relations.

A. BACKGROUND

The MPD is a well-established law enforcement agency that is committed to providing the citizens and visitors of the District of Columbia with quality service. This department serves as the primary law enforcement organization for Washington, DC.¹⁵⁷ The department was established in 1861 and currently serves a population of over 600,000.¹⁵⁸ To effectively serve this population, MPD attempts to infuse modern practices with “a community policing philosophy” to establish a strong relationship between the community and the police department.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, one of MPD's fundamental values is to “instill a sense of transparency in operations with regular reports

¹⁵⁷ “About MPD,” Metropolitan Police Department, accessed July 15, 2022, <https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/about-mpd>.

¹⁵⁸ “2020 Census Data Shows DC's Population Growth Nearly Tripled Compared to Previous Decade,” DC Government, April 26, 2021, <https://dc.gov/release/2020-census-data-shows-dcs-population-growth-nearly-tripled-compared-previous-decade>.

¹⁵⁹ Metropolitan Police Department, “About MPD.”

and outreach on critical events and community concerns.”¹⁶⁰ To accomplish this mission, MPD has social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. For this thesis, only messages that MPD released on its Twitter account are examined.

MPD frequently utilizes its Twitter handle to communicate various messages to the public. Currently, MPD uses @DCPoliceDept as its official Twitter handle.¹⁶¹ MPD has been active on Twitter since 2011 and now has over 250,000 followers.¹⁶² These followers include community stakeholders, media outlets, and other police departments. During the time of this dataset collection, MPD had sent the most tweets of the three departments studied and had the second-largest following. Furthermore, MPD has the largest police force of the three departments studied, with approximately 3,500 members.

To conduct this study, I used the same methodology and metrics as each of the other case studies. This methodology consisted of examining each tweet individually to separate them into a specific category. These categories included Community Policing, Safety Messages, Assistance Requests, Alerts, Protest Related, Recognition, COVID Related, and Informational Updates. The purpose of examining these categories is to determine if these messages promoted positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations. When separating the tweets, I utilized subjective assessments to determine which category to place the tweets. The most dominant category exhibited in the tweet was used for tweets that could be put into several different categories. To further assist in categorizing the tweet, I examined the time it was posted, read the associated comments, and examined surrounding tweets sent by the department or bureau to gain context. Following are the primary definitions for determining the category in which each respective tweet should be placed.

- **Community Policing:** Tweets that contained information concerning community events or joint activities with police officers.

¹⁶⁰ “MPDC: Mission and Value Statement,” Metropolitan Police Department, accessed August 21, 2022, <https://mpdc.dc.gov/node/132982>.

¹⁶¹ DC Police Department (@DCPoliceDept), Twitter, accessed July 16, 2022, <https://twitter.com/DCPoliceDept>.

¹⁶² DC Police Department.

- **Safety Messages:** Tweets that provided safety tips to the community.
- **Assistance Requests:** Tweets that involved a request for the community to assist the police. This request could be tied to a posted flier that requests assistance with identifying a suspect or locating a missing person.
- **Alerts:** Tweets that provided information about a recent crime or situation.
- **Protest Related:** Tweets that were primarily about protests, civil disorders, riots, or associated criminal activity related to those events.
- **Recognition:** Tweets that provided thanks or appreciation to individuals, organizations, or agencies.
- **COVID Related:** Tweets that provided information concerning resources to assist the community during COVID. These resources can include free testing, groceries, and mental health assistance.
- **Informational Updates:** Tweets that provided updates on situations that were resolved. These updates can include tweets on arrests or gun recoveries.

Figure 2 displays MPD's header photo.



Figure 2. MPD Twitter Header Photo on July 16, 2022¹⁶³

B. EXAMINATION OF TWEETS

In line with their stated values, MPD was active on its Twitter account from May 18, 2020, to June 1, 2020. During this period, MPD posted 226 tweets. Of these 226 tweets, only three were a reply. Within this timeframe, MPD used Twitter to promote various messages, with a portion of these messages directly seeking to improve police–community relations. For instance, MPD posted numerous tweets that publicized community events, solicited tips for crimes, and provided safety messages for the citizens. In addition to these types of messages, MPD also utilized its Twitter account to keep its audience informed of local crimes as well as updates on protest-related activities. These messages were transmitted in different methods with varying degrees of success. For instance, some Twitter messages incorporated pictures while some embedded video. Other tweets attempted to expand their reach by utilizing hashtags. Overall, the tweets posted by MPD were varied, frequent, and were received with a range of reactions from the general public.

¹⁶³ Source: DC Police Department.

The following sections give the breakdown of these tweets. The purpose of breaking down these tweets by category and type is to identify common trends that MPD utilized. This breakdown identified the tweets with the most likes, retweets, replies, and new followers. These tweets were recognized to identify best practices for developing positive social media exposure that may improve police–community relations. In addition to breaking down the tweets, I divided the tweets into two separate weeks. This separation was created to determine if MPD’s strategy changed at all when faced with a significant event that caused national outrage and protests.

1. Total Tweet Breakdown by Category and Type (226 Tweets)

Listed in Table 1 is the full complement of tweets from May 18, 2020, to June 1, 2020. These tweets encompass the entirety of MPD’s tweets and demonstrate that this agency prioritizes providing alerts to the community and soliciting assistance.

Table 1. MPD Categories of Tweets¹⁶⁴

Category	N	% of Tweets
Community Policing	14	6.2
Safety Messages	7	3.1
Assistance Requests	47	20.8
Alerts	83	36.7
Protest Related	10	4.4
Recognition	14	6.2
COVID Related	11	4.9
Informational Updates	40	17.7

As previously discussed, the subsequent examination involves separating the tweets into two distinctive weeks. These weeks are divided into May 18, 2020–May 24, 2020, in Table 2, and May 26, 2020–June 1, 2020, in Table 3. The reason behind dividing the tweets into two separate weeks is to determine if the category of tweets dramatically changes after the death of George Floyd. This is particularly relevant as his death eventually spurred much debate, demonstrations, and protests throughout the nation.

¹⁶⁴ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

These reactions forced law enforcement agencies to respond directly to many situations involving community members influenced by George Floyd’s murder. Additionally, this increased engagement from society led to increased social media exposure for law enforcement within Washington, DC, and the nation.

After dividing the dataset into two separate weeks, it is clear that MPD provided fewer tweets that promoted positive social media exposure, such as community policing, assistance requests, and acts of recognition during the second week. Instead, MPD provided more tweets surrounding the protests. The first week had no protest-related tweets, while the second had 10. Furthermore, it appeared that MPD increased the number of tweets regarding alerts for crime within the community during this period.

Table 2. MPD Categories of Tweets from May 18–May 24 (110 Tweets)¹⁶⁵

Category	N	% of Tweet
Community Policing	9	8.2
Safety Messages	5	4.5
Assistance Requests	25	22.7
Alerts	34	30.9
Protest Related	0	0
Recognition	9	8.2
COVID Related	9	8.2
Informational Updates	19	17.3

Table 3. MPD Categories of Tweets from May 26–June 1 (108 Tweets)¹⁶⁶

Category	N	% of Tweet
Community Policing	5	4.6
Safety Messages	0	0
Assistance Requests	21	19.4
Alerts	47	43.5
Protest Related	10	9.6
Recognition	4	3.7
COVID Related	3	2.8
Informational Updates	18	16.7

¹⁶⁵ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

¹⁶⁶ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

After examining the category of tweets that MPD utilized, it is essential to study how the tweet was delivered. This examination is crucial as it may directly influence the exposure of each tweet. These methods can be offered in a myriad of ways, including pictures, embedded videos, and links. The examination of the types of tweets for the two-week period is contained in Table 4.

After inspecting the types of tweets that MPD utilized, it appears the agency primarily uses text only when conveying its message. This method of delivery paired well, with it mostly tweeting concerning alerts from within the city. This style allowed MPD to quickly relay pertinent information concerning crimes within the confines of the city to its followers. These messages routinely provided the lookout of suspects for the crime and advised the community to call 911. By taking this stance, MPD provided the community with meaningful, real-time information that could directly impact their day-to-day operations.

Table 4. MPD Types of Tweets Utilized May 18–June 1, 2020¹⁶⁷

Type of Tweet	N	% of Tweet
Text Only	88	38.9
Text and Video	5	2.2
Text, Link, Bulletin	7	3.1
Text, Bulletin	56	24.8
Text and Picture	31	13.7
Text, Link, and Picture	14	6.2
Text, Link, and Video	9	4.0
Text and Link	15	6.6
Video Only	1	.4

2. Reactions to Tweets by the Public

In determining the reception of tweets by the public, it is necessary to examine whether a tweet is liked, retweeted, or if it generated comments. By creating reactions, the department increases its level of exposure and, by extension, its likelihood of

¹⁶⁷ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

impacting police–community relations.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, a focused look at the reactions generated can provide a snapshot of which tweets resonated with the audience. This concentrated look must take into consideration the nature of the tweet and its delivery method. Tables 5–7 capture the top-10 tweets that generated retweets, likes, and replies. Included in these tables are the type of delivery methods. Finally, the tweets that generated the most followers are contained in Table 8.

When examining the top retweets, several different patterns become apparent. The most evident is that half of the retweets involve protest-related events. This pattern is significant because it suggests that significant events may increase the likelihood of retweets, which boosts the exposure level. Additionally, most of the top retweets use a combination of text and media (pictures, bulletins, etc.) Only three of the top-10 retweets utilize text only. Of note, none of the top retweets from MPD involve primarily community-related tweets or provide safety-related material. Assistance requests are one category that actively promotes positive social media exposure that may improve police–community relations. These requests exclusively called for the community members to assist with locating missing persons varying from 11 to 61 year olds. These tweets utilized a bulletin and hashtags to increase their exposure. By analyzing these patterns, it is apparent that protest-related activities weighed heavily on retweet potential for the department’s messaging. This reality limited the department’s ability to develop other social media coverage to improve police–community relations.

Table 5. MPD Top Retweets from May 18–June 1, 2020¹⁶⁹

Ranking	Date / Time	Category	# of Retweets	Type of Tweet
1	6/1/20–0136	Protest Related	422	Text, Link, Picture
2	6/1/20–0320	Protest Related	286	Text Only
3	6/1/20–0208	Alerts	150	Text Only
4	6/1/20–0136	Protest Related	112	Text and Picture
5	5/27/20–1352	Assistance Requests	77	Text and Bulletin
6	6/1/20–0332	Protest Related	75	Text Only

¹⁶⁸ Depending on the tweet, reactions can also be associated with negative framing.

¹⁶⁹ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

Ranking	Date / Time	Category	# of Retweets	Type of Tweet
7	5/23/20–2122	Assistance Requests	65	Text and Bulletin
8	5/31/20–2324	Protest Related	49	Text and Picture
9	5/22/20–2153	Assistance Requests	47	Text and Bulletin
10	5/24/20–1610	Assistance Requests	43	Text and Bulletin

A closer inspection of the department’s top tweets also indicates that protest-related tweets played a prominent role in the probability of it generating likes. Seven of the top-10 tweets directly involved protest-related events. In regard to community-related tweets, there was only one tweet that ranked within the top 10. This tweet involved an elderly citizen celebrating her birthday with the department’s help. Another tweet that did not involve protest-related activity was about recognizing a member who retired from the department. This tweet was instrumental because it highlighted the member’s rise from the ranks of a cadet to a prominent position within the department. This fact reveals that specific storylines can still generate positive social media exposure to “compete” with items of national significance.

Table 6. MPD Top Tweets that Generated Likes May 18–June 1, 2020¹⁷⁰

Ranking	Date / Time	Category	# of Likes	Type of Tweet
1	6/1/20–0136	Protest Related	573	Text, Link, Picture
2	6/1/20–0320	Protest Related	395	Text Only
3	6/1/20–0208	Alerts	347	Text Only
4	5/30/20–2044	Community Related	342	Text and Picture
5	6/1/20–0332	Protest Related	209	Text Only
6	5/31/20–2324	Protest Related	161	Text and Picture
7	6/1/20–1928	Protest Related	129	Text and Picture
8	5/31/20–1734	Protest Related	124	Text and Picture
9	5/22/20–1510	Recognition	111	Text and Picture
10	6/1/20–0136	Protest Related	104	Text and Picture

When examining the top tweets that generated replies, protest-related tweets again overshadowed all other tweets. These tweets represented seven of the top 10 spots. The

¹⁷⁰ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

two tweets that were not protest-related involved alerts and community relations. This fact demonstrates that most of MPD tweets that were not protest related did not create as many comments as tweets that were protest related. This lack of representation of non-protested related tweets makes it especially important for the tweets that generate numerous comments to be pivotal in improving police–community relations.

Table 7. MPD Top Tweets that Generated Replies¹⁷¹

Ranking	Date–Time	Category	Replies	Type of Tweet
1	6/1/20–0136	Protest Related	104	Text, Link, Picture
2	6/1/20–0332	Protest Related	61	Text Only
3	6/1/20–0320	Protest Related	59	Text Only
4	6/1/20–1039	Alerts	50	Text Only
5	6/1/20–0136	Protest Related	45	Text and Picture
6	5/31/20–2324	Protest Related	38	Text and Picture
7	6/1/20 -1928	Protest Related	32	Text and Picture
8	6/1/20–0208	Alerts	23	Text Only
9	5/30/20–2044	Community Related	19	Text and Picture
10	5/31/20–1734	Protest Related	16	Text and Picture

The final table again demonstrates that protest-related activities play a pivotal factor in the impact of the tweets. This table captures which tweets resulted in the most new followers. In Table 8, three of the top five tweets were protest related. The remaining two tweets were alerts that gave the community members instantaneous updates on crimes within the area. The importance of recognizing the tweets that result in new followers is that it broadens the audience base of the department.

¹⁷¹ Adapted from MPD Twitter Analytics downloaded July 12, 2022.

Table 8. MPD Top Tweets that Resulted in New Followers¹⁷²

Ranking	Date-Time	Category	New Followers
1	6/1/20 -0320	Protest Related	6
2	6/1/20-0208	Alerts	4
3	6/1/20-0136	Protest Related	2
4	6/1/20-0332	Protest Related	2
5	6/1/20-1039	Alerts	1

When examining the tweets, it quickly becomes apparent that protest-related activities were a common factor in a significant portion of the categories, including the tweets that generated the most likes, replies, and new followers. This demonstrates that the protest-related tweets represent a considerable opportunity to improve police–community relations due to the increased exposure protest-related tweets receive. While protest-related tweets dominated the reactions, a couple of tweets broke the barrier and generated a strong reaction from the audience. These tweets had varying subjects and methods of delivery.

3. Engagement

To identify the level of engagement that MPD utilized, I examined the frequency of tweets. The results of this examination are included in Figure 3. Hashtag usage was also examined, as hashtags help members filter information and can draw attention to a particular topic or keyword. This filter ability allows Twitter users interested in the specific keyword to locate tweets they would not typically view. The results of this data are captured in Table 9. Both of these examinations are significant because the frequency and use of hashtags influence the exposure MPD generates within social media.

In examining the level of engagement that MPD used, it remained relatively consistent throughout the period analyzed. The most notable outlier was the number of tweets on May 25, 2020; I do not know why there was a significant dip. Overall, the most commonly used hashtag involved #MISSINGPERSON. This hashtag was employed considerably more than all other hashtags.

¹⁷² Adapted from MPD Twitter Analytics downloaded July 12, 2022.

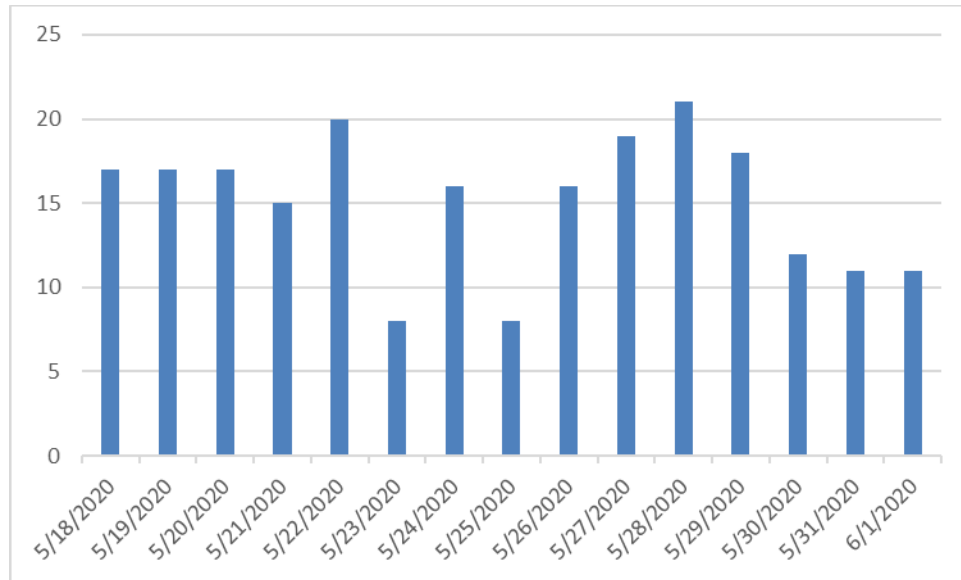


Figure 3. Number of Tweets Per Day by MPD between May 18 and June 1, 2020¹⁷³

Table 9. MPD Top Hashtags¹⁷⁴

Ranking	Hashtag	Frequency
1	#MISSINGPERSON	26
2	#HERETO HELP	8
3	#STAYHOMEDC	6
4	#DCPOLICE	5
5	#STAYHOME	3
6	#FIREARMSFLASHBACK	2
7	#MPD	2
8	#DC	2
9	#HAPPYBIRTHDAY	2
10	#DCVALUES	1

C. ANALYSIS OF TWITTER USAGE

When analyzing MPD’s Twitter usage during the survey period, it is clear that the department primarily utilized its Twitter account to provide its followers with alerts and

¹⁷³ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

¹⁷⁴ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

situational awareness of crimes that occurred within the city. These tweets were comprised mainly of updates on such crimes as shootings and robberies. Over one-third of the tweets generated during this period were dedicated to this task. These tweets were primarily delivered utilizing text only. Additionally, this delivery method was short, to the point, and only informed the public with usable information. These tweets represent a broadcast strategy and would align with the department's mission to be transparent on critical events. This transparency can improve police–community relations but might not necessarily develop positive social media exposure.

After the George Floyd murder, MPD slightly altered its Twitter strategy to address the current events. This strategic change was best encapsulated by the decrease in tweets focused on safety messages, recognition, and community-related events. Conversely, the number of tweets that provided alerts increased during this time. During these alerts, several tweets appeared to be centered on crimes that may have resulted from protests. While the number of alerts increased during this period, only one alert tweet fell within the top 10 in generating likes. This tweet, shown in Figure 4, provided specific locations concerning crime and police response. Compared to the other alerts, the popularity of this tweet indicates that tweets centered on the potential impact of national protests may generate more positive reactions than tweets that alert the public to daily crimes.

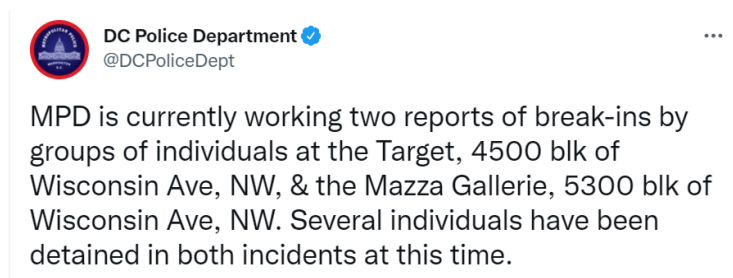


Figure 4. Tweet from MPD on June 1, 2020 (UTC) Depicting an Alert¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Source: DC Police Department (@DCPoliceDept), “MPD is currently working two reports of break-ins by groups of individuals at the Target,” Twitter June 1, 2020, <https://twitter.com/DCPoliceDept/status/1267276888495591425>.

The following two categories primarily utilized by MPD directly relate to improving police–community relations through social media exposure. These categories were Assistance Requests and Informational Updates. An examination of the assistance tweets revealed that the department primarily utilized them to request the public’s help them solve cases. These requests would involve anything from missing persons to felony cases in which the suspects were still outstanding. In addition to requesting assistance, the department provided the public with numbers to text and call. While none of these tweets were in the top 10 for likes, three were within the top 10 for retweets. Upon further examination, all three of these tweets were marked with the hashtag #MISSINGPERSON. While MPD did not utilize hashtags in all of its tweets, most of its usage was associated with missing persons. When examining the Informational Updates category, none of the tweets appeared in the top 10 for retweets, likes, or replies.

During the time surveyed, MPD took several actions through Twitter to connect with the public. These efforts included birthday posts, food giveaways, fitness activities, and celebrations of Asian-Pacific American Heritage. The mode of delivery for all of these tweets except for one involved a form of video or picture. Additionally, only one of these tweets was in the top 10 for likes. This tweet, displayed below in Figure 5, garnered over 300 likes and portrayed an older woman celebrating a birthday.

Today, MPD officers helped ensure that one of our residents celebrated a memorable 96th birthday 🎉🎉🎉
🎉 #HereToHelp



Figure 5. Tweet from MPD on May 30, 2020 (UTC) Depicting a Birthday Celebration¹⁷⁶

While protest related tweets represented only a tiny portion of the tweets with only 10 tweets, they represented a disproportionate number of tweets that generated likes, retweets, and comments. In the number of tweets that generated likes, protest-related tweets represented seven of the top 10. In regard to retweets, it comprised five retweets within the top 10. Finally, in relation to comments, they contained eight out of the top 10. How MPD tweeted about protest-related activities ranged greatly. MPD tweets involved a combination of text, links, and pictures. The tweet with the most likes involved a tweet with texts, pictures, and a link. Furthermore, this tweet supplied the public with information about what was accomplished by MPD and requested the public's assistance by displaying a number to call and text. This tweet, pictured in Figure 6, acknowledges that riots have occurred and reveals several suspects that need to be identified.

¹⁷⁶ Source: DC Police Department (@DCPoliceDept), "Today, MPD officers helped ensure that one of our residents celebrated a memorable 96th birthday," Twitter, May 30, 2020, <https://twitter.com/DCPoliceDept/status/1266832857055494145>.

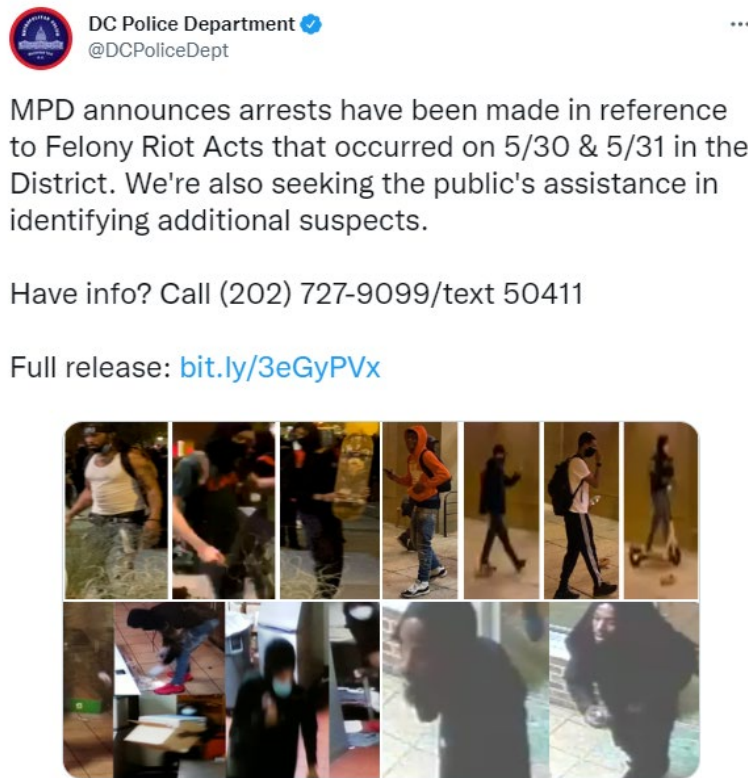


Figure 6. Tweet from MPD on June 1, 2020 (UTC) Seeking Public Assistance¹⁷⁷

Surprisingly, the following two protest-related tweets within the top 10 did not include any pictures. However, their similarity was that they tagged another entity within the tweet: the mayor and DC Fire and EMS Departments. Both tweets also requested that the public avoid the areas due to the activity.

One outlier from examining the tweets from MPD was the small number of tweets they responded to. In total, the agency only replied to three tweets between May 18 and June 1, 2020. These reply tweets were sent to three separate Twitter accounts and spread out over time. Moreover, the tweets they responded to varied in their category but had only marginal positive reception in the form of likes. Two of the tweets received three likes, and the last one received zero likes.

¹⁷⁷ DC Police Department (@DCPoliceDept), "MPD announces arrests have been made in reference to felony riot acts," Twitter, June 1, 2020, <https://twitter.com/DCPoliceDept/status/1267268726828785668>.

Upon closer examination, one of the three reply tweets was associated with a protest-related tweet by MPD. This reply was in response to a direct inquiry from a citizen that thanked MPD for their protection and asked how many arrests occurred. The original tweet advised that several officers were injured due to thrown objects. Within this tweet (Figure 7) were several images that displayed the severity of the circumstances the officers experienced.

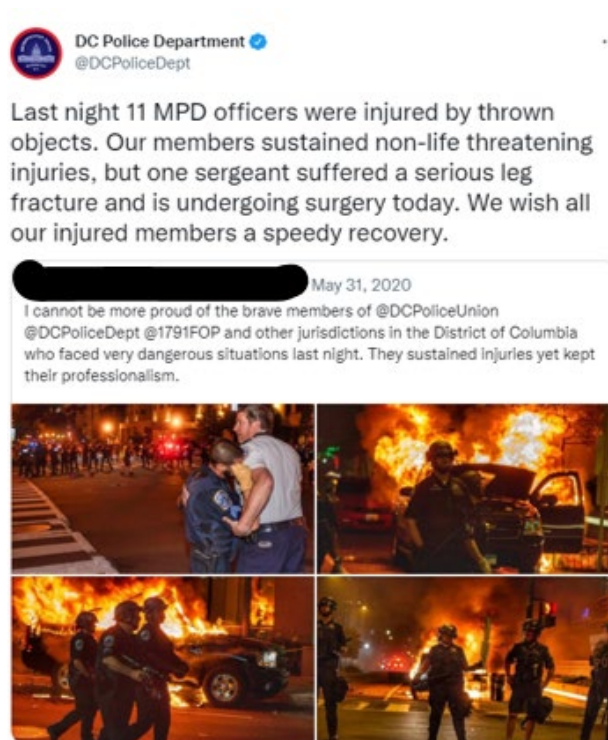


Figure 7. Tweet from MPD on May 31, 2020 (UTC) with an Embedded Image¹⁷⁸

When examining the tweet with zero likes to which the department replied, the original tweet appears to have been deleted. However, the tweet in which the reply tweet was embedded was associated with MPD videotaping a birthday song for a four-year-old. This video had over 2,700 views and 46 likes.

¹⁷⁸ Source: DC Police Department (@DCPoliceDept), “Last night 11 MPD officers were injured by thrown objects, Twitter, May 31, 2020, <https://twitter.com/DCPoliceDept/status/1267147342265946113>.

Overall, MPD appeared to promote positive engagements by advertising the department's work. This work included pictures of citizens, officers, and interactions between the two. Furthermore, the agency appeared to solicit help from the community by displaying bulletins of Missing Persons and images of suspects that needed to be identified. This effort was further bolstered by the regular use of hashtags within their missing person investigations. After George Floyd was murdered and the protests started, the public reacted more to the agency's tweets. This was evidenced by most of the likes, retweets, and replies generated after May 25.

D. ANALYSIS OF CRIME DATA

To further examine the potential impact positive social media exposure had on police–community relations, the number of crimes reported during this period was compared to the amount of positive messaging that occurred through the department's message on Twitter. To determine if a Twitter message relayed positive messages, I identified Twitter messages that conveyed accomplishments, solicitation for help from the public, community events, complimentary recognition, thanks, and opportunities for free resources. The purpose of this comparison was to determine if there was any correlation between the two datasets. To take into consideration the death of George Floyd and the protest-related activities that occurred throughout the nation, the data was compared cumulatively and then separated into the week before George Floyd's death and the week after George Floyd's death.

Within this period, MPD reported 1,118 crimes, including crimes such as arson, assault with a dangerous weapons, burglary, homicide, motor vehicle theft, robbery, sex abuse, theft from auto, and thefts.¹⁷⁹ The crimes reported remained relatively consistent until May 31, 2020. It was at this time that a noticeable uptick in crimes was displayed. This spike in crime can be partly attributed to the number of burglaries reported between May 31, 2020, and June 1, 2020. This dramatic spike was due in part to a substantial number of businesses ransacked during the aftermath of protest-related events.

¹⁷⁹ Adapted from DC Crime Data. Unpublished, January 18, 2023.

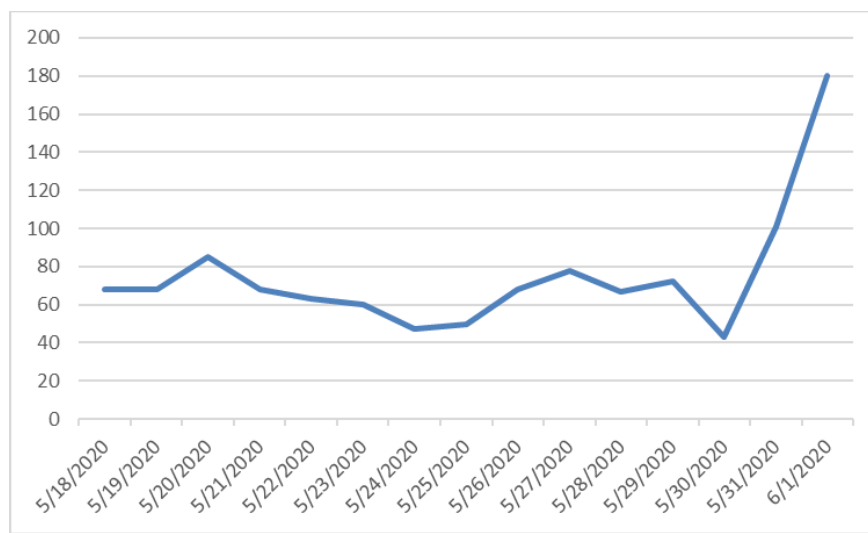


Figure 8. DC Crimes Reported ¹⁸⁰

After examining the two datasets, it was determined that MPD had a slight negative correlation between the crimes reported with the number of positive tweets. This negative correlation, however, varied substantially when compared from the first week to the second week. The first week had a positive correlation between crimes reported with the number of positive messages. The second week saw the amount of crime spike and the amount of positive messaging decline. This shift coincided with the uptick of protest-related tweets from MPD and increased protest-related activities within Washington, DC.

As a whole, the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent protest-related activity played a substantial role in MPD's development of positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations. After George Floyd's murder, MPD became increasingly focused on covering protest-related events. In fact, the week after the death of George Floyd, MPD produced 22% fewer positive tweets than it did the previous week. This fact, coupled with the surge in crime and the increased attention Protest-Related tweets received, led to less positive social media exposure for the department. This occurrence highlights the importance for law enforcement agencies to be aware of the increased exposure of national protests and ensure that related tweets paint the department in the best possible light.

¹⁸⁰ Adapted from DC Crime Data, unpublished, January 18, 2023.

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IV. CASE STUDY #2: PORTLAND POLICE BUREAU

This chapter studies PPB's Twitter data from May 18, 2020, until June 1, 2020. This method was done to ascertain successful strategies they incorporated to promote positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations. To assess their strategy, I analyzed their tweets by frequency, method of posting, and the number of reactions they generated over these two weeks. Furthermore, I also looked at the number of crimes that occurred within these dates to see if any correlation could be discovered between the number of crimes reported compared to the amount of positive messaging that occurred through the department's Twitter feed.

During the study, I discovered that the murder of George Floyd had a substantial impact on the PPB's Twitter strategy. This impact was most apparent with the dramatic increase in tweets publicized by the organization in response to protest-related activity. This study also found a positive correlation between the crime reported and the number of positive tweets. This positive correlation became less pronounced during the second week. Taken as a whole, the PPB's Twitter content became dominated by Protest Related tweets after George Floyd's murder. During this time, exclusive community-related tweets were infrequent.

A. BACKGROUND

PPB was established in 1870 and consisted of six patrolmen, one lieutenant, and a chief.¹⁸¹ Since its early origins, the city of Portland, Oregon, and PPB have swelled in size. Currently, the city of Portland has a population of over 600,000.¹⁸² This city is served by approximately 800 sworn members of PPB.¹⁸³ Like other police agencies, PPB emphasizes crime reduction and promotes a healthy collaboration with the community.

¹⁸¹ Portland Police Bureau, "History of the Police Bureau," Chief's Office, accessed September 3, 2022, <https://www.portland.gov/police/chiefs-office/ppb-history>.

¹⁸² Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: Portland City, Oregon," QuickFacts, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/portlandcityoregon>.

¹⁸³ Portland Police Bureau, "Police Staffing Numbers," PPB Open Data, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.portland.gov/police/open-data/ppb-staffing-report>.

Within its mission statement, PPB reports that its mission is “to reduce crime and the fear of crime by working with citizens to preserve life, maintain human rights, protect property and promote individual responsibility and community commitment.”¹⁸⁴ Separate from its mission statement, PPB makes a point to emphasize that one of its primary goals is to enhance the community and police relationship.¹⁸⁵ This chapter examines the PPB’s Twitter strategy.

The social media platforms that PPB has invested in include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.¹⁸⁶ Within its website, the agency committed to providing updates to all Special Emergency Reaction Team callouts, critical incidents, and other large-scale emergencies via Twitter.¹⁸⁷ Additionally, PPB reported that it would try to release as much information as possible as early as it could.¹⁸⁸ PPB currently uses @PortlandPolice as its main police Twitter handle.¹⁸⁹ PPB has been active on Twitter since 2008 and has over 248,000 followers.¹⁹⁰ During this dataset collection, PPB sent the second most tweets and currently has the fewest followers. Furthermore, PPB has the lowest number of sworn members within its agency.

To complete this study, I used the same methodology and metrics as each of the other case studies. This methodology consisted of examining each tweet individually to separate them into a specific categories. These categories included Community Policing, Safety Messages, Assistance Requests, Alerts, Protest Related, Recognition, COVID Related, and Informational Updates. To categorize the tweets, subjective assessments were made to place the tweets into the most appropriate category. To determine the primary category, this researcher examined each tweet separately. If the tweet was not

¹⁸⁴ Portland Police Bureau, “About PPB / Contact Info,” Chief’s Office, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.portland.gov/police/chiefs-office/about-ppb>.

¹⁸⁵ Portland Police Bureau.

¹⁸⁶ Portland Police Bureau, “Police Social Media Channels,” Strategic Communications Unit, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.portland.gov/police/divisions/public-information-office/social-media>.

¹⁸⁷ Portland Police Bureau.

¹⁸⁸ Portland Police Bureau.

¹⁸⁹ Portland Police Bureau.

¹⁹⁰ Portland Police (@PortlandPolice), Twitter, January 28, 2023, <https://twitter.com/PortlandPolice>.

exclusive to a specific category, it was placed in the most dominant category of the tweet. To decide the most relevant category to place the tweet in, the researcher examined the time the tweet was posted, read the associated comments, and examined surrounding tweets sent by the bureau to gain context. Following are the primary definitions for determining the category in which each separate tweet should be placed.

- **Community Policing:** Tweets that contained information concerning community events or joint activities with police officers.
- **Safety Messages:** Tweets that provided safety tips to the community.
- **Assistance Requests:** Tweets that involved a request for the community to assist the police. This request could be tied to a posted flier that requests assistance with identifying a suspect or locating a missing person.
- **Alerts:** Tweets that provided information about a recent crime or situation.
- **Protest Related:** Tweets that were primarily about protests, civil disorders, riots, or associated criminal activity related to those events.
- **Recognition:** Tweets that provided thanks or appreciation to individuals, organizations, or agencies.
- **COVID Related:** Tweets that provided information concerning resources to assist the community during COVID. These resources can include free testing, groceries, and mental health assistance.
- **Informational Updates:** Tweets that provided updates on situations that were resolved. These updates can include tweets on arrests or gun recoveries.

Figure 9 displays PPD's header photo.



Figure 9. PPB Twitter Header Photo on January 28, 2023¹⁹¹

B. EXAMINATION OF TWEETS

This thesis collected tweets between May 18, 2020, and June 1, 2020. During this period, PPB sent 127 tweets. Of these 127 tweets, 12 were replies. During this period, PPB used Twitter to provide information on protest-related events, advertise achievements, and alert its audience to crimes. Perhaps the most striking trend observed during this time was the dramatic increase in tweets that began on May 30, 2022, and continued into the conclusion of the study period. Furthermore, this increase was directly related to the protest-related activity experienced within Portland. In fact, throughout the cumulative period, 60% of the tweets were related to protest-related events. These tweets varied between informing the public of riot declarations to providing maps that illustrated street closures. While most of these tweets were communicated via text only, a portion of these tweets involved incorporating links to an alternative website or a bulletin. This strategy was also reflected in other tweets, as PPB primarily used texts only to convey their messages.

¹⁹¹ Source: Portland Police (@PortlandPolice).

The proceeding sections of the chapter give the breakdown of these tweets. The purpose of breaking down these tweets by category and type is to identify common trends that PPB utilized. This breakdown identified the tweets with the most likes, retweets, replies, and new followers. These tweets were recognized to identify best practices for developing positive social media exposure that may improve police–community relations. In addition to breaking down the tweets, I divided the tweets into two separate weeks. This separation was created to determine if the strategy of PPB changed at all when faced with a significant event that caused national outrage and protests.

1. Total Tweet Breakdown by Category and Type (127 Tweets)

Analyzing the full complement of tweets from May 18, 2020, to June 1, 2020, demonstrate that the primary purpose that PPB used its Twitter account was to provide information on protest-related activities and provide informational updates regarding static news. The breakdown of the tweets is contained in Table 10.

Table 10. PPB Categories of Tweets¹⁹²

Category	N	% of Tweet
Community Policing	4	3.1
Safety Messages	5	3.9
Assistance Requests	4	3.1
Alerts	14	11
Protest Related	78	61.4
Recognition	1	.8
COVID Related	0	0
Informational Updates	21	16.5

Following the examination of the cumulative breakdown of tweets was the breakdown of tweets into two distinctive weeks. These weeks are divided into May 18, 2020–May 24, 2020, in Table 11, and May 26, 2020–June 1, 2020, in Table 12. By separating the tweets into two separate weeks, I noticed a discernible difference in the frequency of tweets broadcasted by PPB. This increased frequency observed in the

¹⁹² Adapted from Tweet Binder Report obtained July 15, 2022.

second week directly dealt with the flood of protest-related events that occurred during that week. By examining these tweets, it was apparent that Portland was dealing with significant events that resulted in vandalism, assaults, and the declaration of riots. These events led to many confrontations between PPB and individuals within the city. Within its tweets, PPB messaging to its audience varied between commands, warnings, and encouragement for demonstrations to remain peaceful.

Table 11. PPB Categories of Tweets from May 18–May 24 (21 Tweets)¹⁹³

Category	N	% of Tweet
Community Policing	1	4.8
Safety Messages	3	14.3
Assistance Requests	1	4.8
Alerts	4	19
Protest Related	0	0
Recognition	0	0
COVID Related	0	0
Informational Updates	12	57.1

Table 12. PPB Categories of Tweets from May 26–June 1 (102 Tweets)¹⁹⁴

Category	N	% of Tweet
Community Policing	3	2.9
Safety Messages	1	1
Assistance Requests	3	2.9
Alerts	9	8.8
Protest Related	78	76.5
Recognition	0	0
COVID Related	0	0
Informational Updates	8	7.8

After scrutinizing the category of tweets that PPB used, I studied the method by which the tweet was delivered. This examination was necessary as it could affect each

¹⁹³ Adapted from Tweet Binder Report obtained July 15, 2022.

¹⁹⁴ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

tweet's exposure level. The results demonstrated that PPB used texts, pictures, and bulletins. The examination of the types of tweets is contained in Table 13.

An analysis of Table 13 revealed that PPB primarily relied on texts only when conveying their message. This delivery method matched well with the number of tweets they completed regarding the protest-related activities, which were dynamic, fluid, and rapidly evolving. Additionally, during heightened protest-related activities, PPB began to rapidly tweet information that appeared to provide a timeline of warnings by the police department and actions taken by the crowd to include assaults on the police. By taking this position, PPB provided the community with instantaneous information that conveyed relations between the police and protestors.

Table 13. PPB Types of Tweets Utilized May 18–June 1, 2020¹⁹⁵

Type of Tweet	N	% of Tweet
Text only	79	62.2
Text and Video	0	0
Text, Link, Infographic	0	0
Text, Bulletin	0	0
Text and Picture	5	3.9
Text, Link, Picture	22	17.3
Text, Link, and Video	0	0
Text, Link, and Bulletin	20	15.7
Text and Link	0	0
Video Only	1	.8

2. Reactions to Tweets by the Public

In determining the reception of tweets by the public, I reviewed the number of times a tweet was liked, retweeted, or resulted in reactions from the public. These tweets were then identified due to their potential to increase exposure within social media and consequently influence police–community relations.¹⁹⁶ Tables 14–16 capture the top10 tweets that generated retweets, likes, and comments. Within these tables, the delivery

¹⁹⁵ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

¹⁹⁶ Depending on the tweet, reactions can also be associated with negative framing.

methods are also captured. Lastly, the tweets that created the most followers are included in Table 17.

During the examination of the top retweets, an overwhelming pattern became evident: the entirety of the top retweets involved protest-related events. This is meaningful because it demonstrates that significant events may increase the probability of the tweet being retweeted. Consequently, the other categories, such as community policing, safety messages, and assistance requests, were not represented. This lack of representation from different categories essentially limited the PPB's ability to promote other types of social media coverage that could progress police–community relations.

Table 14. PPB Top Retweets from May 18–June 1, 2020¹⁹⁷

Ranking	Date–Time	Category	# of Retweets	Type of Tweet
1	5/30/20–0742	Protest Related	709	Text Only
2	6/1/20–0308	Protest Related	403	Text Only
3	5/30/20–0705	Protest Related	393	Text Only
4	5/30/20–0613	Protest Related	324	Text Only
5	5/30/20–0457	Protest Related	216	Text Only
6	6/1/20–0548	Protest Related	197	Text Only
7	5/31/20–0214	Protest Related	157	Text Only
8	5/30/20–0549	Protest Related	157	Text Only
9	6/1/20–0713	Protest Related	151	Text Only
10	5/30/20–0649	Protest Related	145	Text Only

Examining PPB's most liked tweets continued the trend of protest-related tweets generating reactions. In this case, nine out of the top 10 most liked tweets were protest related. The only tweet that was not exclusively protest related involved PPB announcing that they were making arrests. This tweet occurred during a time of increased protest-related activity, and several of these arrests were likely involved in this activity. By announcing these arrests, PPB publicized the actions of their members. This tweet demonstrated that PPB was still functioning even during a volatile time. A closer look at the other tweets within the top 10 exhibited some tweets that appeared to be an attempt to

¹⁹⁷ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

improve police–community relations. One example included a tweet that announced that PPB appreciated peaceful demonstrators and asked that they not damage property. This tweet appeared helpful because it was not antagonistic and did not discourage peaceful protests. This tweet makes it evident that it is possible to develop positive social media exposure even in circumstances where national storylines dominate the spotlight.

Table 15. PPB Top Tweets that Generated Likes May 18–June 1, 2020¹⁹⁸

Ranking	Date–Time	Category	Likes	Type of Tweet
1	6/1/20–0308	Protest Related	2755	Text Only
2	5/30/20–0742	Protest Related	2051	Text Only
3	5/30/20–0457	Protest Related	1508	Text Only
4	5/30/20–0705	Protest Related	880	Text Only
5	5/31/20–0620	Informational Updates	766	Text Only
6	6/1/20–0319	Protest Related	684	Text Only
7	5/30/20–0613	Protest Related	530	Text Only
8	6/1/20–0552	Protest Related	523	Text Only
9	5/31/20–0214	Protest Related	495	Text Only
10	6/1/20–0713	Protest Related	490	Text Only

When inspecting the PPB’s top tweets that generated replies, protest-related tweets yet again eclipsed all other categories. The top tweet that caused replies involved PPB announcing the dangerous conditions of downtown Portland at the time of the riots and ordering all persons to leave the area. This candid statement about the perils of the city, coupled with the direct demands for the individuals to leave the city, produced the most comments. The circumstances that led to the lack of non–protest-related tweets within the top 10 are more than likely influenced by several factors. These factors could include the sparse number of tweets focused on community relations, safety messages, and assistance requests. Furthermore, the amount of attention the protest-related activities created throughout the nation probably played a role.

¹⁹⁸ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

Table 16. PPB Top Tweets that Generated Replies¹⁹⁹

Ranking	Date–Time	Category	Replies	Type of Tweet
1	5/30/20–0742	Protest Related	471	Text Only
2	5/30/20–0457	Protest Related	357	Text Only
3	5/30/20–0913	Protest Related	278	Text Only
4	6/1/20–0713	Protest Related	242	Text Only
5	6/1/20–0308	Protest Related	241	Text Only
6	6/1/20–0319	Protest Related	234	Text Only
7	5/30/20–0705	Protest Related	207	Text Only
8	6/1/20–0635	Protest Related	175	Text Only
9	5/31/20–0620	Informational Update	166	Text Only
10	5/31/20–0214	Protest Related	155	Text Only

Table 17 is wholly comprised of protest-related tweets. This information highlights that protest-related activity presented an opportunity for PPB to increase its exposure by growing its Twitter base audience. Furthermore, the absence of any other category of tweets demonstrates that PPB has room for growth in increasing its positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations.

Table 17. PPB Top Tweets that Resulted in New Followers²⁰⁰

Ranking	Date–Time	Category	New Followers
1	5/30/20–0742	Protest Related	6
2	5/31/20–0214	Protest Related	5
3	6/1/20–0308	Protest Related	3
4	5/30/20–0705	Protest Related	3
5	5/30/20–0613	Protest Related	3

In looking at the tweets by PPB, protest-related tweets dominated all categories in tweets that resulted in the most likes, replies, and new followers. This statistical evidence shows that protest-related tweets involving national storylines present a significant opportunity to advance police–community relations due to increased exposure.

¹⁹⁹ Adapted from PPB Twitter Analytics downloaded August 2, 2022.

²⁰⁰ Adapted from PPB Twitter Analytics downloaded August 2, 2022.

Furthermore, PPB did not have any tweets directly involving police–community relations that generated a top-10 reaction in any category.

3. Engagement

I examined the frequency of tweets to determine the level of engagement PPB employed. The results of this examination are included in Figure 10. Furthermore, hashtags were reviewed because they act as a tool for members to filter information and call attention to a particular keyword or topic. This filter ability permits Twitter users to locate tweets they are interested in by searching for a specific keyword. Both types of engagement are important because it influences the exposure level of PPB. It also provides insight into how the PPB attempted to engage with the public through Twitter.

During the examination of the PPB’s activity on Twitter, I observed a striking change in activity. The Twitter account had relatively few daily tweets until May 30, 2020. At that time, the number of tweets continuously increased during the survey period. In fact, more tweets were disseminated on the study’s final day than during the entire first week.

During the study, it appeared that PPB attempted to utilize hashtags to promote police–community relations. These hashtags almost exclusively dealt with creating positive social media exposure and the most frequent hashtag used was #LETSCHALKABOUTIT. This message involved promoting messages of hope during Mental Health Awareness Month. This hashtag was used in conjunction with #BUILDINGHOPEVERYDAY in two instances.

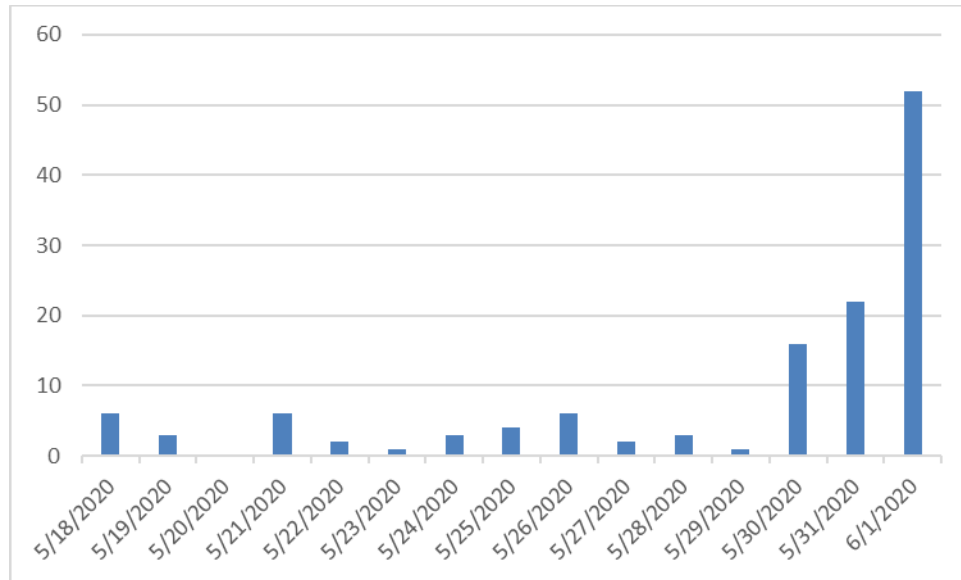


Figure 10. Number of Tweets Per Day by PPB between May 18 and June 1, 2020²⁰¹

Table 18. PPB Top Hashtags²⁰²

Ranking	Hashtag	Frequency
1	#LETSCHALKABOUTIT	3
2	#BUILDINGHOPEEVERYDAY	2
3	#MEMORIALDAY2020	2
4	#DUCKSAFETY	1

C. ANALYSIS OF TWITTER USAGE

When analyzing the PPB’s Twitter usage during the survey period, it is evident that their use of Twitter increased dramatically after May 25. This increased usage appeared to be a result of the protest-related activity. Consequently, the entirety of the tweets that generated the most reactions occurred after the protest-related activity began. When examining their activity on Twitter, I determined that over 80% of PPB’s total Tweets occurred after George Floyd’s death. Furthermore, PPB primarily used the broadcast method to deliver a wide range of instructions, including directives for the

²⁰¹ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

²⁰² Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, July 15, 2022.

public to leave the area, warnings that force would be utilized, and declarations of unlawful assemblies. These broadcasted messages appeared to influence their social media exposure, as many were within the top 10 in likes, replies, and retweets.

Before George Floyd's death, PPB primarily focused on providing public updates on crimes and events. These tweets generally supported PPB's goal of providing the community with updates on critical incidents and Special Emergency Team Callouts. When I further examined a couple of their tweets, it appeared that PPB utilized a strategy that caused them to use two different types of tweets to complement the other. For example, the first tweet that was sent provided a live video that involved an official from the agency providing an update on the circumstances that required a Special Emergency Reaction Team (SERT) callout. This video was viewed over 11,000 times. During the briefing, the official assured the public that there was no longer a risk to the community. After posting this video, PPB immediately followed up their post with a separate tweet that provided a summary and context for the recently published video. An example of this is in Figure 11.

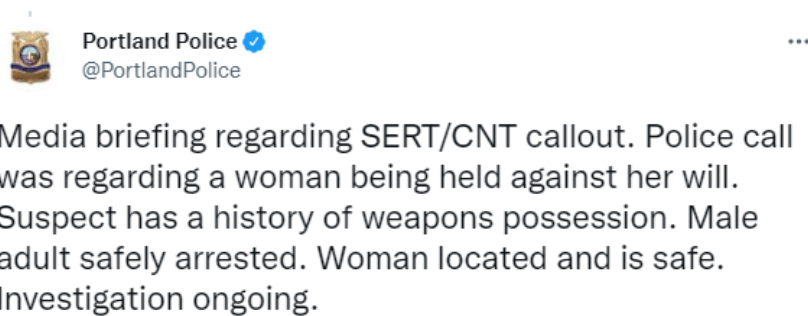


Figure 11. Tweet from PPB on May 26, 2020 (UTC) Depicting SERT Callout²⁰³

Another notable method that PPB utilized during their tweets was to post the arrested suspect's picture on Twitter. The suspects depicted were arrested for crimes such as robberies, shootings, and theft. Furthermore, the tweets routinely provided a link to

²⁰³ Source: Portland Police (@PortlandPolice), "Media briefing regarding SERT/CNT callout, Twitter, May 26, 2020, <https://twitter.com/PortlandPolice/status/1265409043499122688>.

PPB website. These tweets often combined texts, pictures, and a link. Out of the updates that PPB provided, only one of them was in the top 10 for liked tweets; this tweet occurred on May 31 and utilized text only as its delivery method. Within the tweet, PPB provided general information advising that officers were processing 31 individuals and continued to make arrests.

Protest-related activity dominated the public's reaction involving PPB tweets. Out of the top-10 retweets, nine involved protest-related activity. The top retweeted tweet sent on May 30 informed the citizens that there was rioting in downtown Portland and that it was dangerous. Furthermore, this tweet also directed individuals to leave the area. This tweet, depicted in Figure 12, was also the second most liked tweet during this period.



Figure 12. Tweet from PPB on May 30, 2020 (UTC) during Rioting²⁰⁴

The tweet that generated the most likes during this time, shown in Figure 13, shared many similarities with the tweet depicted in Figure 12. Both tweets informed the public of the presence of the protests, advised dangerous conditions, and instructed people to leave the area. What separates the tweet in Figure 13 is that PPB announced specific actions against the police. Doing so provided several contrasting matters that made it difficult to determine what portion of the Tweet was liked. The first portion of the tweet described the actions of individuals against the police; the second portion is the declaration of an unlawful assembly; the third portion advised that police would take

²⁰⁴ Portland Police (@PortlandPolice), "All persons in downtown Portland: It is not safe, it is dangerous, Twitter, May 30, 2020, <https://twitter.com/PortlandPolice/status/1266636110387572737>.

action; finally, the last part of the tweet advised individuals to leave. The multifaceted statements within the tweet allowed parties on both sides of the spectrum to like the tweet. Consequently, these types of tweets may not develop positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations.



Figure 13. Tweet from PPB on June 1, 2020 (UTC) Conveying Numerous Messages²⁰⁵

During the survey period, it appeared there were limited times that PPB tried to connect with the public. These attempts involved the agency raising awareness of increased patrols within the area, well wishes for a safe weekend, and providing positive images of officers doing their jobs. While these outreach attempts were varied, the most frequent attempts involved behavior health officers and clinicians providing messaging to further mental health awareness. These tweets were delivered using text, a link, and a picture. Furthermore, these tweets involved the hashtag #LETSCHALKABOUTIT. Out of the seven times in which PPB utilized a hashtag, three of these instances involved this outreach campaign. Additionally, PPB utilized reply tweets several times. A closer examination of these replies showed that these replies were to their own Twitter handle and were used to provide an update to the initial tweet.

One unique outlier within PPB tweets was in one of their four assistance requests. This assistance request differed from the other three because it did not involve an attempt

²⁰⁵ Source: Portland Police (@PortlandPolice), “Demonstrators downtown are throwing glass water bottles at police,” Twitter, June 1, 2020, <https://twitter.com/PortlandPolice/status/1267292023884640256>.

to identify a vehicle or suspect or locate a missing person. Instead, this assistance request asked the public to provide input on their existing directives. This request came after several days of social unrest in which force was used. By making this request, PPB demonstrated that collaboration with the public is welcomed and encouraged.

Overall, PPB attempted to promote positive media imaging by advertising notable arrests and demonstrating some of the department's services to the community. While tweeting, PPB regularly conveyed the importance of safety. Regarding tweets involving protest-related activity, PPB was forceful in its messaging as it frequently directed individuals to leave the area and warned of the possibility of the use of force by officers. Most of the reactions to the tweets from PPB occurred after May 25.

D. ANALYSIS OF CRIME DATA

To further discover the potential impact of positive social media exposure on police–community relations, the number of crimes reported during this period was compared to the number of positive messages that occurred through the department's message on Twitter. To identify if Twitter messages relayed positive messages, I identified Twitter messages that communicated accomplishments, assistance requests to the public, community events, complimentary recognition, thanks, and opportunities for resources. This comparison was intended to determine if there was any correlation between the two datasets. To account for the death of George Floyd and the protest related activity, the figures were compared cumulatively and then separated into the week before George Floyd's death and the week after George Floyd's death.

In this period, PPB reported 2,388 crimes, including aggravated assaults, arson, burglary, kidnapping, motor vehicle thefts, murder, rape, robbery, simple assault, and theft.²⁰⁶ These crimes remained consistent until May 30, 2020. On this day, PPB had a 34% increase in crime. This spike can be attributed to an influx of burglaries reported on May 30, 2020.

²⁰⁶ Adapted from Portland Crime Data, unpublished.

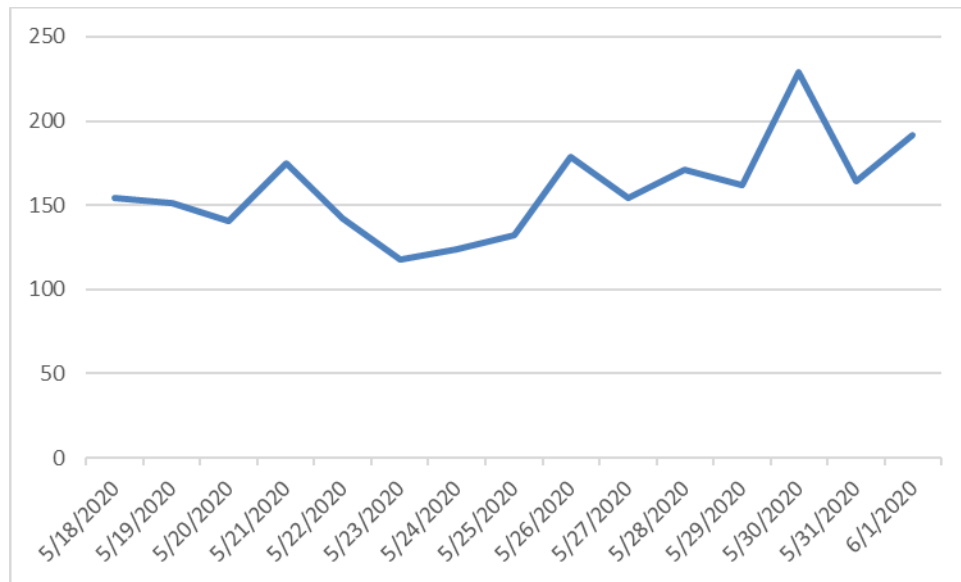


Figure 14. Portland Crimes Reported²⁰⁷

After looking at two datasets, I determined that PPB had a positive correlation between the crimes reported with the number of positive tweets on Twitter. This positive correlation did vary between the first week and the second week. The second week, while still displaying a positive correlation, had a weak positive correlation. This number corresponded with the increase in protest-related tweets and the surge of protest-related activity within Portland.

The murder of George Floyd and the following protest-related activity dramatically altered the PPB's strategy within the social media atmosphere. This activity elevated their exposure level and did not necessarily improve police–community relations. Before the protest-related activity, the PPB's activity on Twitter was relatively sparse and focused primarily on providing updates to the community. These updates included advertising positive accomplishments such as gun seizures, stolen property recoveries, and notable arrests. After the protest-related activities occurred, PPB was heavily invested in regularly updating Twitter; consequently, the number of positive tweets went up. To further examine law enforcement strategy during this period, the next chapter examines BPD.

²⁰⁷ Adapted from Portland Crime Data, unpublished.

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V. CASE STUDY #3: BOSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

This chapter covers the Twitter usage of BPD between May 18, 2020, and June 1, 2020, to ascertain what successful strategies they incorporated to promote positive social media exposure to improve their police–community relations. When I looked at their approach, I analyzed their tweets by frequency, method of posting, and the number of reactions they generated over time. Furthermore, I identified different elements of the tweet, such as the inclusion of pictures, links, and hashtags, in hopes of identifying effective methods that contributed to the “success” of the tweet. Finally, I looked at the number of crimes that occurred within these dates to see if any correlation could be discovered between the number of crimes reported compared to the number of positive messages disseminated through the department’s message on Twitter.

After examining this data, I found that the murder of George Floyd and the protest-related activity had a moderate impact on the BPD’s Twitter strategy. Additionally, there appeared to be a weak positive correlation between the crimes reported and the number of positive tweets. While there did appear to be a weak positive correlation when the two weeks were compared cumulatively, there was a difference between the week before George Floyd’s murder and the week after. The first week had a moderate positive correlation while the second did not have any correlation. During the research period, BPD primarily used its Twitter platform to provide updates to the community. These updates would include positive accomplishments such as firearm recoveries and notable arrests. Within its strategy, the department did not regularly push out tweets about community policing.

A. BACKGROUND

America’s law enforcement origins began in Boston with the establishment of a “night watch.”²⁰⁸ This night watch was eventually replaced with BPD, with

²⁰⁸ “Brief History of the Boston Police,” City of Boston, June 29, 2017, <https://www.boston.gov/departments/police/brief-history-boston-police>.

approximately 250 members.²⁰⁹ Over the years, both the police force and the city expanded substantially. Currently, BPD has about 2,100 members.²¹⁰ Similarly, the city of Boston has grown to a population of over 650,000.²¹¹ To accommodate a city of this size, BPD has established several goals, of which one is to maintain a partnership with the community. BPD asserts in its mission statement: “Our Mission is Community Policing.”²¹² To help achieve this goal, BPD has leveraged technology to connect with the community.²¹³ Part of this technology includes establishing one of the more popular law enforcement Twitter feeds within the United States.²¹⁴ This Twitter account is examined as a case study for this thesis chapter.

The history and past actions of the BPD’s official Twitter account, @BostonPolice, have lent credibility to the department. These actions included serving as a conduit for providing messages to the community, media outlets, and other police departments during significant events such as the Boston Marathon Bombing.²¹⁵ Since its inception in 2009, the BPD’s Twitter account has grown to around 530,000 followers.²¹⁶ Within the period studied, BPD sent the fewest tweets and had the largest following compared to MPD and PPB. Additionally, when compared to the other two police departments, BPD had the second-largest police force.²¹⁷

²⁰⁹ City of Boston.

²¹⁰ National Policing Institute, “Boston, Massachusetts Police,” Police Data Initiative, April 6, 2017, <https://www.policedatainitiative.org/participating-agencies/boston-massachusetts-police/>.

²¹¹ Census Bureau, “QuickFacts: Boston City, Massachusetts,” QuickFacts, accessed September 3, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/bostoncitymassachusetts>.

²¹² Boston Police Department, “Mission Statement,” bpdnews, accessed September 3, 2022, <https://bpdnews.com/mission-and-objectives>.

²¹³ Boston Police Department, “The Boston Police Department Reaches 10,000 Followers on Twitter,” *bpdnews* (blog), January 6, 2010, https://bpdnews.com/blog/2010/01/the_boston_police_department_r.html.

²¹⁴ Boston Police Department.

²¹⁵ Edward F. Davis, III, Alejandro A. Alves, and David Alan Sklansky, *Social Media and Police Leadership: Lessons From Boston*, New Perspectives in Policing (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2014).

²¹⁶ Boston Police Dept. (@bostonpolice), Twitter, accessed September 3, 2022, <https://twitter.com/bostonpolice>.

²¹⁷ National Policing Institute, “Boston, Massachusetts Police.”

To further this study, I used the same methodology and metrics as each of the other case studies. This methodology consisted of examining each tweet individually to separate them into a specific categories. These categories included Community Policing, Safety Messages, Assistance Requests, Alerts, Protest Related, Recognition, COVID Related, and Informational Updates. The most dominant tweet category displayed in the tweet was used for tweets that could be put into several categories. To further assist in categorizing the tweet, I examined the time it was posted, read the associated comments, and examined surrounding tweets sent by the department to gain context. Following are the primary definitions for determining the category in which each separate tweet should be placed.

- **Community Policing:** Tweets that contained information concerning community events or joint activities with police officers.
- **Safety Messages:** Tweets that provided safety tips to the community.
- **Assistance Requests:** Tweets that involved a request for the community to assist the police. This request could be tied to a posted flier that requests assistance with identifying a suspect or locating a missing person.
- **Alerts:** Tweets that provided information about a recent crime or situation.
- **Protest Related:** Tweets that were primarily about protests, civil disorders, riots, or associated criminal activity related to those events.
- **Recognition:** Tweets that provided thanks or appreciation to individuals, organizations, or agencies.
- **COVID Related:** Tweets that provided information concerning resources to assist the community during COVID. These resources can include free testing, groceries, and mental health assistance.

- **Informational Updates:** Tweets that provided updates on situations that were resolved. These updates can include tweets on arrests or gun recoveries.

Figure 15 displays BPD's header photo.



Figure 15. BPD Twitter Header Photo on September 3, 2020²¹⁸

B. EXAMINATION OF TWEETS

I collected and examined tweets between May 18, 2020, and June 1, 2020. During this period, BPD sent 65 tweets.²¹⁹ Of these 65 tweets, there were no replies.²²⁰ During this period, BPD primarily used Twitter to update the community. These updates included brief event summaries with links to their BPD news website, which provided a more comprehensive summary that included specific facts and circumstances.

²¹⁸ Source: Boston Police Dept., Twitter.

²¹⁹ Tweet Binder, unpublished data, August 14, 2022.

²²⁰ Tweet Binder, unpublished data, August 14, 2022.

Furthermore, BPD also used Twitter to recognize and applaud different entities, including businesses, the military, and members of its police force. Perhaps the dominant characteristics of the tweets in this dataset were the BPD’s utilization of other bulletins, links, and pictures within their tweets. They included some combination of these delivery methods in over 87% of their tweets. The frequency of their postings remained relatively consistent, with only a couple of additional tweets in the second week.

The following sections give the breakdown of these tweets. The purpose of breaking down these tweets by category and type is to identify common trends that BPD utilized. This breakdown identified the tweets with the most likes, retweets, replies and new followers. These tweets were recognized to identify best practices for developing positive social media exposure that may improve police–community relations. In addition to breaking down the tweets, I divided the tweets into two separate weeks. I created this separation to determine if the strategy of BPD changed at all when faced with a significant event that caused national outrage and protests.

1. Total Tweet Breakdown by Category and Type (65 Tweets)

The breakdown of the total tweets from May 18, 2020, to June 1, 2020, is contained in Table 19. This breakdown illustrates that BPD focused on providing the community with information about public safety news and recognizing organizations, people, and employees.

Table 19. BPD Categories of Tweets²²¹

Category	N	% of Tweet
Community Policing	2	3
Safety Messages	1	1.5
Assistance Requests	0	0
Alerts	1	1.5
Protest Related	12	18.5
Recognition	12	18.5
COVID Related	0	0
Informational Updates	37	56.9

²²¹ Adapted from Tweet binder report obtained on August 14, 2022.

After examining the cumulative tweets disseminated throughout the two weeks, I separated the tweets between the weeks of May 18, 2020–May 24, 2020, contained in Table 20, and May 26, 2020–June 1, 2020, displayed in Table 21. The purpose of separating these tweets was to discover if the category of tweets substantially changed after George Floyd’s death on May 25, 2020. Once these tweets were separated, there appeared to be a noticeable dip in the number of informational updates provided to the community in the second week. This decrease in informational updates was replaced with tweets concerning protest-related activities. Of significance, several protest-related tweets appeared to be designed to defuse negative attitudes toward the police while simultaneously promoting positive images of the police.

Table 20. BPD Categories of Tweets from May 18–May 24 (29 Tweets)²²²

Category	N	% of Tweets
Community Policing	0	0
Safety Messages	0	0
Assistance Requests	0	0
Alerts	1	3.4
Protest Related	0	0
Recognition	6	20.7
COVID Related	0	0
Informational Updates	22	75.9

Table 21. BPD Categories of Tweets from May 26–June 1 (32 Tweets)²²³

Category	N	% of Tweets
Community Policing	2	6.3
Safety Messages	1	3.1
Assistance Requests	0	0
Alerts	0	0
Protest Related	12	37.5
Recognition	3	9.4
COVID Related	0	0
Informational Updates	14	43.8

²²² Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, August 14, 2022.

²²³ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, August 14, 2022.

After examining the category of tweets that BPD utilized, I compared the method in which the tweet was delivered. This examination is vital because delivery methods may influence the exposure level of each tweet. The breakdown of the types of tweets is contained in Table 22.

Once I compared the types of tweets, it became evident that BPD primarily delivered tweets with a combination of texts, pictures, bulletins, or links. One consistent theme was to incorporate a link within their tweets. This link would take the user to a particular page of BPDnews.com, which would provide further information related to the tweet. In addition to providing detailed information, the link served as a gateway to the BPD’s main page, which had links to public record requests, media relations, and requests for assistance. This strategy to consistently direct its users to this webpage suggests a concentrated effort for BPD to improve community relations by providing its audience a full-service website.

Table 22. BPD Types of Tweets Utilized May 18–June 1, 2020²²⁴

Type of Tweet	N	% of Tweets
Text only	8	12.3
Text and Video	0	0
Text, Link, Infographic	0	0
Text, Bulletin	3	4.6
Text and Picture	4	6.2
Text, Link, and Picture	21	32.3
Text, Link, and Video	0	0
Text, Link, Bulletin	1	1.5
Text and Link	28	43.1
Video Only	0	0

2. Reactions to Tweets by the Public

In establishing which tweets resonated the most with the public, it was essential to determine if a tweet was liked, retweeted, or generated comments. This identification is

²²⁴ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, August 14, 2022.

consequential because reactions increase the exposure level on social media and could influence police–community relations.²²⁵ Besides potentially increasing the exposure level, identifying the tweets that generate the most reactions is important because it allows the opportunity to begin understanding what created the reactions. This understanding is especially important because it can enable law enforcement to publicize actions that promote positive social media exposure. Tables 23–25 capture the top-10 tweets that generated retweets, likes, and comments. Included in these tables are the types of delivery methods. This section concludes by revealing the tweets that generated the most followers in Table 26. Recognizing these tweets is crucial because understanding successful strategies and duplicating them could increase the number of new followers, which would expand BPD’s reach on Twitter.

After separating the top-10 retweets, a distinct pattern emerged: all the top retweets were associated with protest-related activities. This pattern is interesting because BPD only provided 12 protest-related tweets during this time. Furthermore, despite utilizing text only in its delivery method a small portion of the time, a disproportionate number of them appeared within the top 10. In fact, seven of the top-10 retweets were text only. The remainder of the top-10 retweets consisted of a text coupled with a bulletin. These bulletins, embedded within the tweet, were labeled with a “Community Alert” and appeared to encourage peaceful interactions from the protestors. Notably absent from the top-10 retweets were tweets categorized as community-related, safety-related, or requests for assistance. The absence of these categories places additional weight on protest-related tweets to develop positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations.

Table 23. BPD Top Retweets from May 18–June 1, 2020²²⁶

Ranking	Date–Time	Category	# of Retweets	Type of Tweet
1	6/1/20–0232	Protest Related	1470	Text Only
2	5/31/20–2232	Protest Related	365	Text and Bulletin

²²⁵ Depending on the tweet, reactions can also be associated with negative framing.

²²⁶ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, August 14, 2022.

Ranking	Date–Time	Category	# of Retweets	Type of Tweet
3	6/1/20–0348	Protest Related	300	Text Only
4	6/1/20–0237	Protest Related	296	Text Only
5	6/1/20–0140	Protest Related	242	Text Only
6	6/1/20–0159	Protest Related	235	Text Only
7	6/1/20–0132	Protest Related	220	Text Only
8	6/1/20–0657	Protest Related	209	Text and Bulletin
9	5/31/20–2202	Protest Related	153	Text and Bulletin
10	6/1/20–0114	Protest Related	145	Text Only

An examination of the top tweets that generated likes revealed the same pattern in which protest-related tweets encompassed the entirety of the top-10 list. A look at the top tweet that generated likes, however, showed that within the protest-related tweet, BPD attempted to build police–community relations. This tweet clearly stated that the department’s members were “fighting to protect our city.” By taking this stance, BPD created an ingroup with the Boston community while implying that outside individuals came to Boston to disrupt a peaceful protest. During this tweet, BPD promoted positive social media exposure by highlighting that officers were putting their safety on the line by fighting against those who wanted to cause disruptions. This tweet gained substantial exposure as it had the most likes, retweets, and replies in response to it.

Table 24. BPD Top Tweets that Generated Likes May 18–June 1, 2020²²⁷

Ranking	Date–Time	Category	Likes	Type of Tweet
1	6/1/20–232	Protest Related	9262	Text Only
2	6/1/20–0348	Protest Related	2176	Text Only
3	5/31/20–2232	Protest Related	1995	Text and Bulletin
4	6/1/20–237	Protest Related	1748	Text Only
5	6/1/20–0159	Protest Related	920	Text Only
6	5/31/20–2202	Protest Related	877	Text and Bulletin
7	6/1/20–0140	Protest Related	811	Text Only
8	6/1/20–0132	Protest Related	618	Text Only
9	6/1/20–0114	Protest Related	556	Text Only
10	6/1/20–0657	Protest Related	436	Text and Bulletin

²²⁷ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, August 14, 2022.

When looking at the top tweets that resulted in replies, protest-related tweets represented the entire top-10 list. The most notable difference between the previous tables was that only one tweet from May 31, 2020, made the list. This tweet was labeled as a “Community Alert” and was the second tweet that Boston made about the protests. The tweet advised its audience that its number-one priority was to maintain the safety of everyone and declared that while everyone had a right to free speech, nobody had the right to harm people or property.²²⁸ This stance gave the impression that BPD prioritized the community’s safety and well-being.

Table 25. BPD Top Tweets that Generated Replies²²⁹

Ranking	Date-Time	Category	Replies	Type of Tweet
1	06/01/20–0232	Protest Related	668	Text Only
2	06/01/20–0237	Protest Related	475	Text Only
3	06/01/20–0159	Protest Related	304	Text Only
4	06/01/20–0348	Protest Related	288	Text Only
5	06/01/20–0657	Protest Related	154	Text and Bulletin
6	05/31/20–2232	Protest Related	122	Text and Bulletin
7	06/01/20–0132	Protest Related	107	Text Only
8	06/01/20–0140	Protest Related	96	Text Only
9	06/01/20–0114	Protest Related	73	Text Only
10	05/31/20–2202	Protest Related	59	Text and Bulletin

The final table again demonstrates that protest-related tweets resulted in the most new followers. By understanding this pattern, BPD can recognize that protest-related tweets have the potential to expand its audience. This expansion would increase the exposure level of BPD, which could be used to promote positive social media exposure in the future.

²²⁸ Boston Police Dept. (@bostonpolice), “If you’re protesting in Boston this evening, please know our #1 priority is to keep everybody safe. Twitter,” accessed December 18, 2022, <https://twitter.com/bostonpolice/status/1267214813547151366>.

²²⁹ Adapted from BPD Twitter analytics, unpublished data, August 30, 2022.

Table 26. BPD Top Tweets that Resulted in New Followers²³⁰

Ranking	Date-Time	Category	New Followers
1	6/1/20 -0232	Protest Related	13
2	6/1/20-0237	Protest Related	4
3	6/1/20-0348	Protest Related	4
4	6/1/20-0159	Protest Related	3
5	5/31/20-2232	Protest Related	2

3. Engagement

I examined the frequency of tweets to determine the level of engagement that BPD attempted on Twitter. The results of this examination are included in Figure 16. Furthermore, the use of hashtags was examined and are captured in Table 27. The purpose of identifying these levels of engagement was to determine how BPD attempted to increase its exposure level within social media. If successful methods are identified, they can be leveraged to improve police–community relations.

After examining the results, it was determined that BPD tweeted daily. The greatest increase in the frequency of tweets occurred on 6/1/20. On this day, their tweets were dedicated to protest-related tweets. This focus ultimately led to several tweets that generated the most reactions in terms of retweets, likes, and comments. By creating tweets that generated strong positive reactions, BPD increased its exposure level within the social media atmosphere. Furthermore, BPD regularly used hashtags within its Twitter strategy. This hashtag was observed in a wide range of tweets, from protest-related tweets to informational updates that boasted gun recoveries and arrests.

²³⁰ Adapted from BPD Twitter analytics, unpublished data, August 30, 2022.

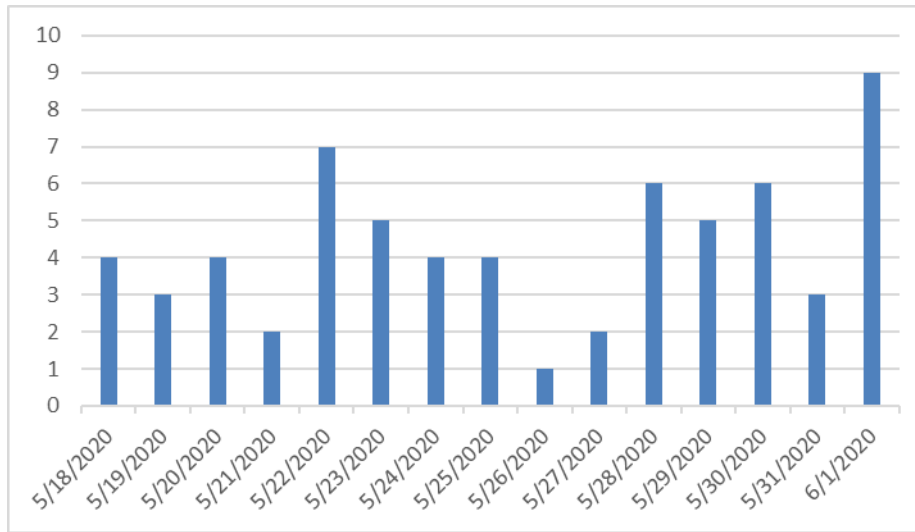


Figure 16. Number of Tweets Per Day by BPD between May 18 and June 1, 2020²³¹

Table 27. BPD Top Hashtags²³²

Ranking	Hashtag	Frequency
1	#BPD	14
2	#ONELESSGUN	7
3	#BPDREMEMBERS	2
4	#BPDCOMMUNITYADVISORY	1
5	#SAFERBOSTON	1
6	#INVESTIGATIONUPDATE	1
7	#BPDTRAFFICADVISORY	1
8	#SAVETHEDATE	1
9	#NATIONALEMSWEEK	1

C. ANALYSIS OF TWITTER USAGE

When analyzing BPD Twitter usage during the survey, it is clear that the department primarily utilized its Twitter account to update its followers. While these represented most of their Twitter activity, their tweets involving protest-related activities dominated their top tweets regarding likes, retweets, and replies. Furthermore, this trend

²³¹ Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, August 14, 2022.

²³² Adapted from Tweet Binder report, unpublished data, August 14, 2022.

carried over to their top tweets, which resulted in new followers. The analysis showed that 100% of the top-10 tweets within these categories were related to protest-related activities. This fact indicates that notable events that spur a call to action nationwide can transcend previous efforts to build community relations. Consequently, the nature in which BPD provided its Twitter messaging on protest-related activities within this period can be seen as the most significant opportunity for exposure on Twitter. This level of exposure could play a part in developing positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations.

The most liked tweet by BPD was in direct response to the civil unrest occurring throughout the city. This tweet garnered over 9,000 likes and was retweeted over 1,400 times. This public reaction exceeded all tweets during this period by a significant margin. Within this tweet, BPD appealed to the citizens of Boston for their support. Additionally, the tweet clearly advised that members of the Boston police force were fighting for the city. This tweet is displayed in Figure 17.

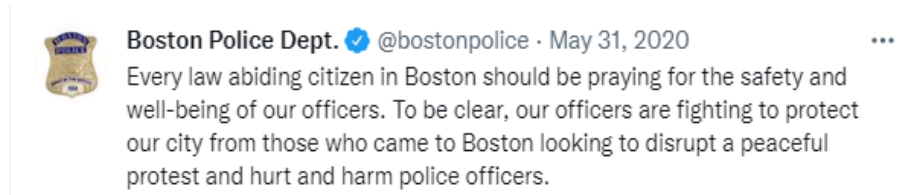


Figure 17. Tweet from BPD on June 1, 2020 (UTC) during Protests ²³³

Although the previously mentioned tweet generated a significant number of reactions, the tweet that was the second most retweeted catered explicitly to the community. This tweet represented one of the few times that BPD utilized a bulletin within its tweet. This bulletin expressly labeled the tweet as a Community Alert. The tweet, depicted in Figure 18, encouraged protesters to exercise their right to free speech safely and respectfully. By doing so, BPD did not take an adversarial stance against the

²³³ Boston Police Dept. (@bostonpolice), “Every law abiding citizen in Boston should be praying for the safety and well-being of our officers, Twitter, June 1, 2020, <https://twitter.com/bostonpolice/status/1267282825881010176>.

people who wanted to express themselves within the confines of the law. Furthermore, BPD utilized a hashtag within this tweet. This hashtag allowed easier access for individuals to follow BPD.



Figure 18. Tweet from BPD on May 31, 2020 (UTC) Utilizing Bulletin Format²³⁴

BPD's tweets routinely highlighted positive accomplishments. These positive accomplishments would frequently be about notable arrests within the community and would be accompanied by a link to the BPDnews.com website. This website would provide a more detailed account of what occurred as it was not limited to Twitter's character limit. In total, BPD provided a link to this website in over 70% of their tweets. This method represents a concentrated effort to funnel individuals to their website. Within this website, BPD provides numerous ways to provide tips on crime as well as alternative methods to interact with the agency. Furthermore, in at least one detailed account of a homicide, BPD provided means for the public to receive emotional support

²³⁴ Source: Boston Police Dept. (@bostonpolice), "If you're protesting in Boston this evening," Twitter, May 31, 2020, <https://twitter.com/bostonpolice/status/1267222510145323008>.

services. This proactive stance demonstrated a commitment to maintaining the well-being of its citizens.

BPD did not frequently make posts exclusively about the community. Their most liked community-related tweet not related to the protests was in direct response to a seven-alarm fire. This tweet offered prayers to the individuals who were affected by the fire. Furthermore, this tweet tagged the Boston Fire Department's Twitter account, which may have contributed to its positive reception. This tweet is displayed in Figure 19.



Figure 19. Tweet from BPD on May 30, 2020 (UTC) Offering Well Wishes²³⁵

One aspect of BPD Twitter feed was distinct was the number of times the department provided recognition to individuals, other entities, and members of the police force. These tweets would call attention to entities that provided donations to the department. Another unique tweet captured during this study was when BPD recognized that a local news anchor had retired. This tweet showed the agency's willingness to

²³⁵ Source: Boston Police Dept. (@bostonpolice), "Our prayers are with all impacted by the 7-alarm fire near 1428 Columbia Road in South Boston early this morning, Twitter, May 30, 2020, <https://twitter.com/bostonpolice/status/1266873554626281479>.

acknowledge a media member. These examples of recognition reveal that BPD made a conscious effort to foster goodwill toward the traditional news media and community organizations that would likely improve relations.

Overall, BPD generated a substantial amount of positive reception for their tweets during protest-related activities. These tweets consistently conveyed a respectful tone when requesting compliance with the ongoing protests. Furthermore, these tweets often expressed the officers' perilous situation and reminded the public that BPD was committed to safeguarding the city and protecting people's rights.

D. ANALYSIS OF CRIME DATA

To further examine the potential impact positive social media exposure had on police–community relations, the number of crimes reported during this period was compared to the amount of positive messaging that occurred through the department's message on Twitter. To determine if a Twitter message relayed positive messages, I identified Twitter messages that conveyed accomplishments, solicitation for help from the public, community events, complimentary recognition, thanks, and opportunities for free resources. The purpose of this comparison was to determine if there was any correlation between the two datasets. To take into consideration the death of George Floyd and the protest-related activities that occurred throughout the nation, the data was compared cumulatively and then separated into the week before George Floyd's death and the week after George Floyd's death.

Within this time, 1,578 crimes occurred in Boston.²³⁶ These crimes included assaults, burglaries, larceny, murders, robberies, and vandalism. An analysis of the crime revealed no big swings until May 30, when a steady incline can be seen until the conclusion of this study period. This spike was partially attributed to the number of burglaries between May 31 and June 1. This spike matches the trend experienced throughout the nation during nationwide demonstrations. The fluctuations on crime is shown in Figure 20.

²³⁶ Adapted from BPD crime data, unpublished, December 17, 2022.

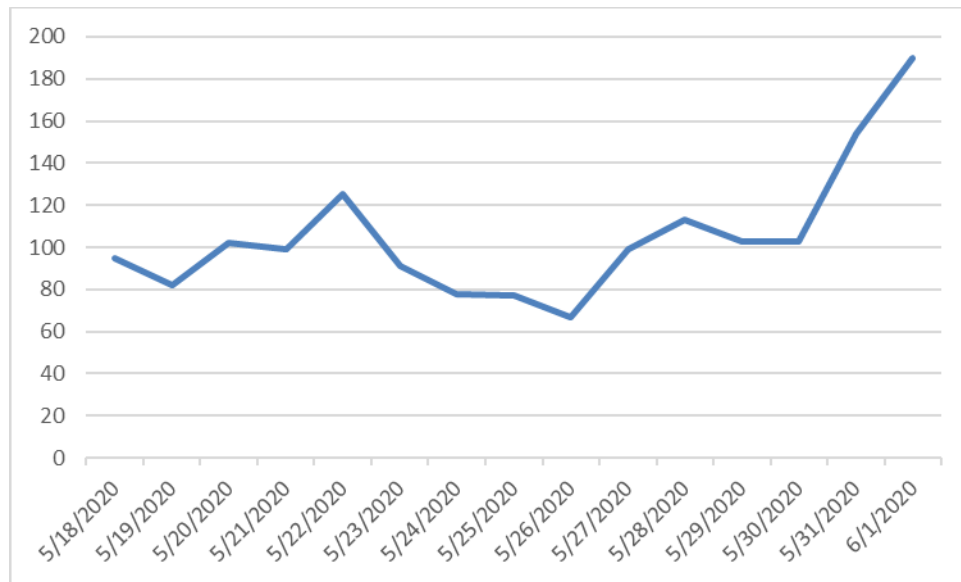


Figure 20. Boston Crime Reported²³⁷

A detailed look at the datasets revealed a weak positive correlation between the number of crimes and the number of positive tweets on Twitter. This correlation, however, fluctuated when the first week was compared to the second week. For instance, the first week had a moderate positive correlation, whereas the second week revealed no correlation. This change from week to week corresponded with the increase in protest-related tweets and activity during the second week.

In sum, the BPD's social media exposure substantially increased due to the protest-related activity. To improve police–community relations and mitigate adverse reactions, BPD appeared to cater its message to both the city of Boston and the protesters. These messages routinely stressed the importance of safety while advising that they understood the importance of free speech. While BPD did have the fewest number of tweets compared to MPD and PPB, their Twitter message consisted of recognition and informational updates that highlighted the department's positive accomplishments

²³⁷ Adapted from BPD crime data, unpublished, December 17, 2022.

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VI. ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES

This chapter provides a comparative analysis of the data obtained from MPD, PPB, and BPD. Within this chapter, I compare the data obtained for each organization. During the assessment, I highlight deviations in strategy and identify factors that appear to contribute to social media exposure. After determining the factors that contributed to exposure, I recognized social media that furthered police–community relations.

Throughout this study, each law enforcement organization utilized a wide array of tweets to develop positive social media exposure to improve police relations. These categories included tweets that offered resources, highlighted accomplishments, drew attention to community policing events, and solicited assistance to solve crimes. While these tweets did receive positive feedback and exposure in some situations, most of these tweets did not reach the level of as did attention protest-related tweets.

After comparing the different variables that contributed to increasing social media exposure, I determined that tweets pertaining to the nationwide protest-related activities at the time created the most exposure. This conclusion was reached after observing the disparity in attention that protest-related tweets had over all other tweets. As such, it is recommended that when organizations face dominant national storylines about protest-related activities, they should recognize that all associated social media messaging will have a greater probability of exposure than other tweets. This exposure can influence the perception of the respective law enforcement organization and the relations between the police and the community. Consequently, law enforcement organizations must ensure that all associated social media activity incorporates positive messaging to improve police–community relations.

Outside of the protest-related tweets that dominated this study, I recognized that tweets promoting positive events such as community services, uplifting interactions between law enforcement individuals and the community, and highlighting notable accomplishments represented efforts to improve police–community relations. Additionally, these organizations upheld their respective mission statements of

maintaining a partnership with the community by broadcasting alerts about events within their respective cities and requesting community assistance to solve crimes.

A. TWITTER STRATEGY COMPARISON

The organizations studied in this thesis had varying strategies for operating their social media account on Twitter. During this study, these varying strategies were displayed through the types of tweets, method of deliveries, and frequency of postings. Although these strategies varied, each organization had to address the protest-related activity occurring throughout the country. These responses led to tweets that generated social media reactions captured by likes, retweets, and comments. These protest-related tweets overshadowed most other tweets that the organizations made.

While each organization had an active Twitter account, they had distinct differences. The first main difference that was evident was the relative size of each organization's Twitter followers. This comparison, displayed in Figure 21, demonstrates that BPD had a significant size advantage over the other two departments. While not studied directly, I did note that within the top-10 likes and retweets for tweets, BPD had the highest average engagement. This information suggests that the BPD's larger audience was a factor. This larger audience provided BPD with a higher capacity for directly reaching audience members during their initial tweets. Consequently, understanding the size of each organization's Twitter following is essential because it helps to understand each organization's initial scope.

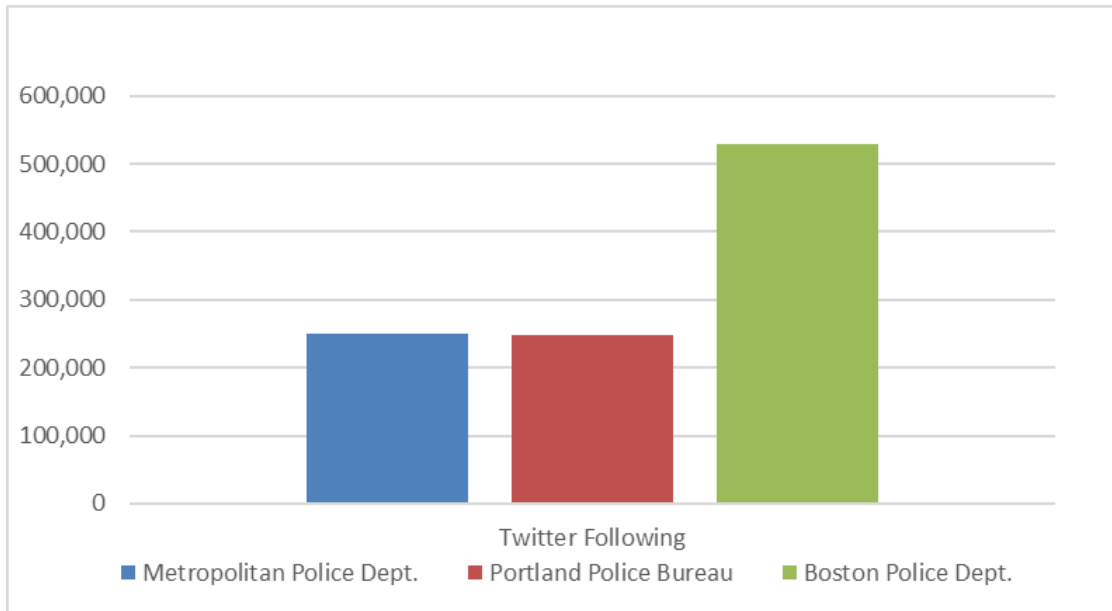


Figure 21. Twitter Following Breakdown²³⁸

To further examine the differences in their Twitter strategies, the following sections compare how each organization composed and disseminated its Twitter messages during this research period. These sections look at the breakdown of the departments' tweets by category and type, the reactions that the tweets generated, and the level of engagement each organization used. This comparison is helpful as it gives insight into effective tactics for developing positive social media exposure and enhancing police–community relations.

1. Total Tweet Breakdown by Category and Type

Each organization had a distinct method by which it operated its Twitter account. These differences were displayed by examining the category of posting within their Twitter feeds. By comparing the three organizations, it was revealed that each organization favored a specific tweet category. For instance, MPD used its account to provide its audience with alerts in approximately 37% of their tweets, PPB primarily used protest-related tweets in 61% of their tweets, and BPD used its Twitter feed for informational updates in approximately 57% of their tweets (Figure 22). Although the

²³⁸ Adapted from Tweet Binder, unpublished data.

variations were apparent, each department provided its audience with information on events happening or that had taken place within the community. By taking this approach, the organizations actively tried to be transparent and utilize social media to broadcast their message.

One of the most striking aspects that became apparent when studying the Twitter feeds was the frequency in which each organization tweeted about accomplishments, solicitation for help, safety messages, or community policing. Surprisingly, none of the organizations had community policing or safety messages within their top three categories in which they tweeted. Instead, all three utilized informational updates regularly. These informational updates allowed the organization to highlight positive accomplishments to its audience. These positive accomplishments included closures for offenses such as homicides, robberies, or carjackings. This category also allowed the organizations with the ability to provide updates on less severe situations about which the community would likely be concerned. These informational updates include gun recoveries, the successful location of a missing person, or the arrest of street racing individuals. MPD had the most retweeted informational update from this period. This tweet was unique as it had an embedded video in which one of the chief of police provided an interview relaying that a suspect was in custody following a barricade.

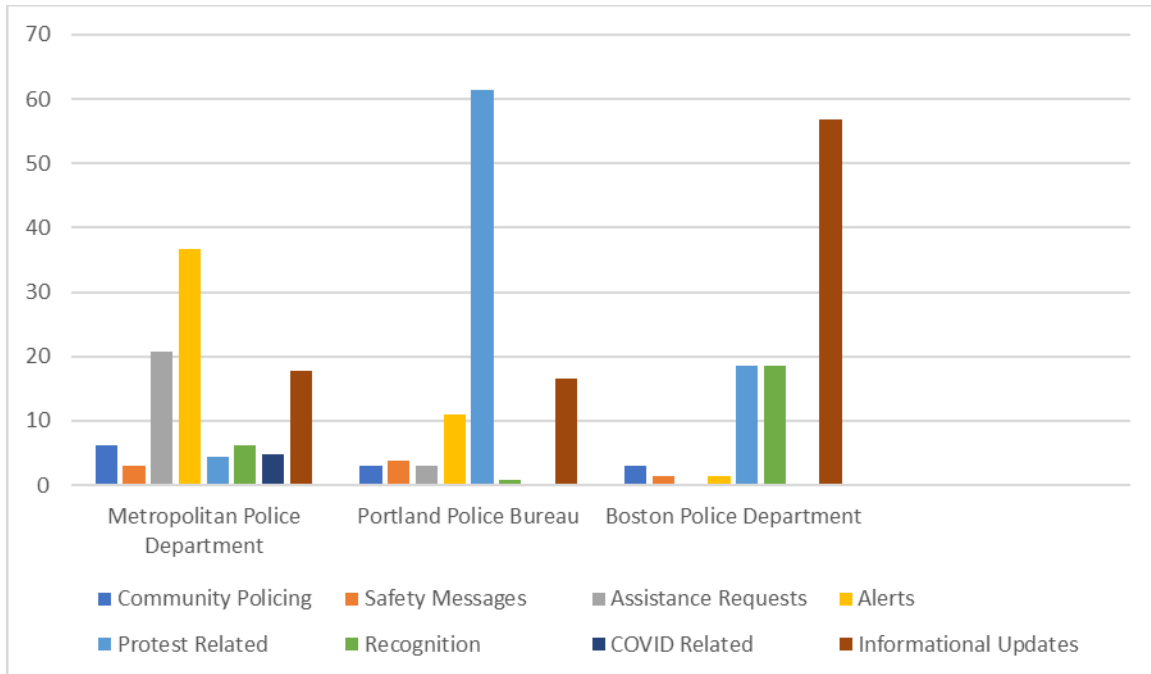


Figure 22. Breakdown of Twitter Categories by Agency²³⁹

The method of delivery that each organization employed was diverse. MPD and PPB primarily used text when communicating their Twitter messages, while BPD favored tweets composed of a text and links. While MPD primarily used text only when writing their tweets, they did change their delivery method when requesting. This change in style was captured by sending tweets out with text and a bulletin. This delivery style was primarily used when broadcasting their missing persons cases. This delivery style had moderate success, as several of these tweets were within the top 10 for retweets.

During a further examination of the delivery method for the tweets, the category of the tweet played the most prominent role in determining the exposure level of the posting. Within this study period, protest-related tweets consistently represented the top tweets that generated reactions regardless of the delivery method. This pattern was most readily displayed in the BPD case study. Within the research period, BPD utilized text-only tweets in approximately 12% of their tweets. Furthermore, they used text and bulletins in roughly 5% of their tweets. Despite the limited number of tweets that

²³⁹ Adapted from Tweet Binder, unpublished data.

employed these delivery styles, text-only tweets represented 70% of the top-10 tweets that generated reactions, and the text and bulletin delivery style represented the remaining 30%. The important distinction concerning these figures is that 100% of these tweets were protest related.

When studying the delivery methods for protest-related tweets, it became apparent that delivery methods that utilized text-only tweets were primarily used. While useful in rapidly providing updates for developing situations, this method limited the ability to create positive social media exposure through images. Instead, some of these tweets attempted to improve police–community relations through their tone of delivery. These types of tweets would frequently acknowledge the importance of free speech while simultaneously asking for protests to remain peaceful. BPD provided the most well-received tweet, as it had significantly more likes and retweets than any other tweet within this study period. This tweet conveyed a sense of unity by advertising that BPD officers were actively fighting to protect the city.

One deviation from the primary text-only method of delivery was used by MPD. This tweet, displayed in Figure 23, used an image of the chief of police engaged in a dialogue with protestors. By producing this image, MPD demonstrated a willingness for amicable conversation between peaceful protestors and the police department. This tweet and image were one of the tweets that generated more reactions from MPD Twitter audience.



Figure 23. Tweet from MPD on May 31, 2020 (UTC) Illustrating Dialogue with Protestors²⁴⁰

2. Reaction to Tweets by the Public

Tweets about the protest-related activity dominated the reactions generated by each organization. These tweets routinely provided the organization with increased exposure as they consistently resulted in the most likes, retweets, and replies. While these tweets generated the most reactions from each organization’s followers, their delivery style differed. An example of this variance was found in the most liked tweet for each organization. When comparing the most liked tweet, each organization appeared to have a different strategy for conveying its message.

The first two tweets examined are the most liked tweets from BPD and PPB, respectively. These tweets illustrate each organization’s different styles when attempting to convey a rapidly developing situation. The first tweet by BPD, displayed in Figure 24, appeared to foster police–community relations. The department did so by aligning the members of BPD with members of the community. Within the tweet, BPD emphasized

²⁴⁰ Source: DC Police Department (@DCPoliceDept), “Live: @ChiefNewsham at 16th and I (Eye) Street,” Twitter, May 31, 2020, <https://twitter.com/DCPoliceDept/status/1267235413879599110>.

that officers are trying to “protect our city” and asked citizens to pray for the officers’ well-being. The second tweet, issued by PPB and displayed in Figure 25, takes a much different approach. This tweet conveys several different messages. These messages include orders to leave the area, specific actions of violence against the officers, and announcing that police will disperse the crowd. Consequently, this tweet can be interpreted and liked for various reasons. This representation makes it hard to determine if the likes associated with these tweets are because the police are being attacked or because the police will begin efforts to disperse the demonstrators.

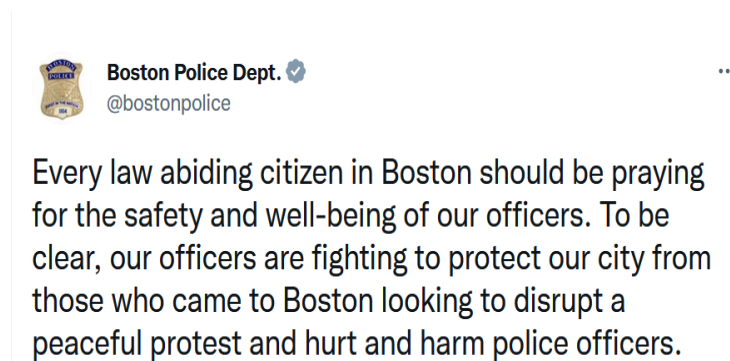


Figure 24. Tweet from BPD on June 1, 2020 (UTC) ²⁴¹

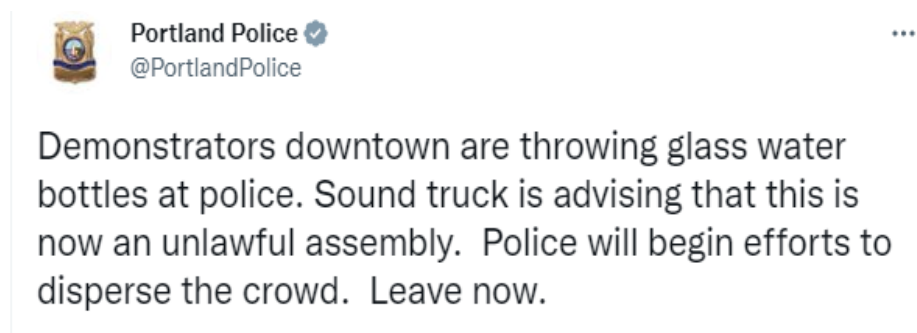


Figure 25. Tweet from PPB on June 1, 2020 (UTC)²⁴²

²⁴¹ Source: Boston Police Dept., “Every law abiding citizen in Boston.”

²⁴² Source: Portland Police, “Demonstrators downtown are throwing glass water bottles at police.”

The final tweet examined is the most liked tweet from MPD. This tweet, shown in Figure 26, takes a different approach from the previously mentioned tweets as it directly requests assistance from community members to identify suspects that participated in the Felony Riot Acts. Additionally, this tweet advised that several arrests were made and provided a link to the full release. Lastly, this tweet provided a central phone number for any information. By incorporating several different methods, MPD sought the community's cooperation and attempted to improve police–community relations.

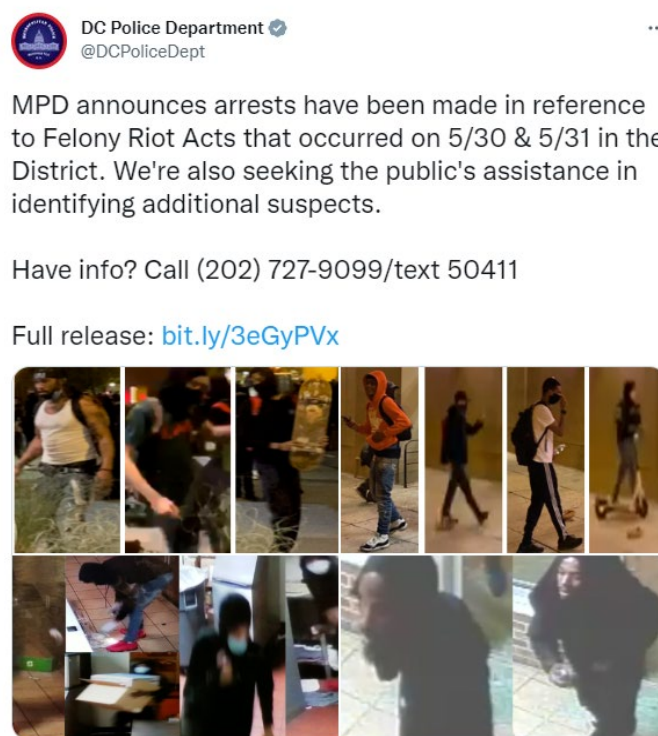


Figure 26. Tweet from MPD on June 1, 2020 (UTC) ²⁴³

When examining the top retweets for each organization, the tweets for MPD, and BPD remained consistent with the most liked tweet. PPB's top retweet was different from their most liked tweet. While this tweet, displayed in Figure 27, succinctly expressed the gravity of the situation, it did not necessarily develop positive social media exposure.

²⁴³ Source: DC Police Department, "MPD announces arrests have been made in reference to felony riot acts."

However, this tweet supplied pertinent formation to community members within the downtown Portland area.

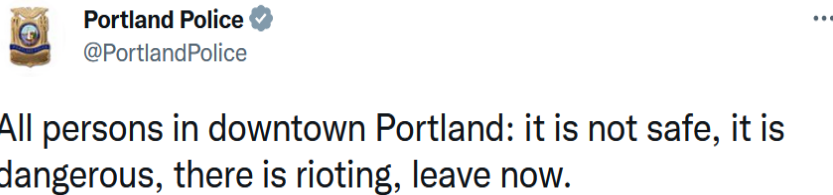


Figure 27. Tweet from PPB on May 30, 2020 (UTC) Providing Pertinent Information²⁴⁴

During this research, it appeared that PPB’s frequent postings about protest-related activities provided it the most new followers out of the three law enforcement organizations studied. The number of new followers was significantly more than the other two entities. These new followers can be primarily attributed to the copious number of protest-related tweets sent during this time. This discovery suggests that protest-related activities that generate national interest provide substantial opportunities for increased exposure for law enforcement organizations.

3. Engagement

The organizations had varying degrees of engagement within their Twitter activity. The differences can be found in their frequency in texts and their use of hashtags. The consistent theme that each organization utilized was their effort to use hashtags to promote positive efforts and actions, including community activity, significant seizures, and availability of resources. These hashtags consisted of wording such as #MISSINGPERSON, #LETSCHALKABOUTIT, and #BPD. While there did not appear to be a link between the use of hashtags and the number of likes generated, all the hashtags represented attempts by the organizations to develop positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations. Additionally, the #MISSINGPERSON

²⁴⁴ Source: Portland Police (@PortlandPolice), “All Persons in Downtown Portland.”

hashtag appeared to have moderate success in its ability to be retweeted, as several of the tweets associated with this hashtag were within the top-10 retweeted category for MPD.

The frequency in which each organization tweeted varied substantially. For instance, BPD only tweeted 65 times during this study period, while MPD tweeted 226. PPB, on the other hand, tweeted 127 times during this time. However, a closer inspection of PPB tweets revealed that they dramatically increased the number of tweets once the protests started. This assortment of strategies showed that each agency had its method of engaging with the community through Twitter. Figure 28 displays the Twitter frequency for each organization on a day-to-day basis.

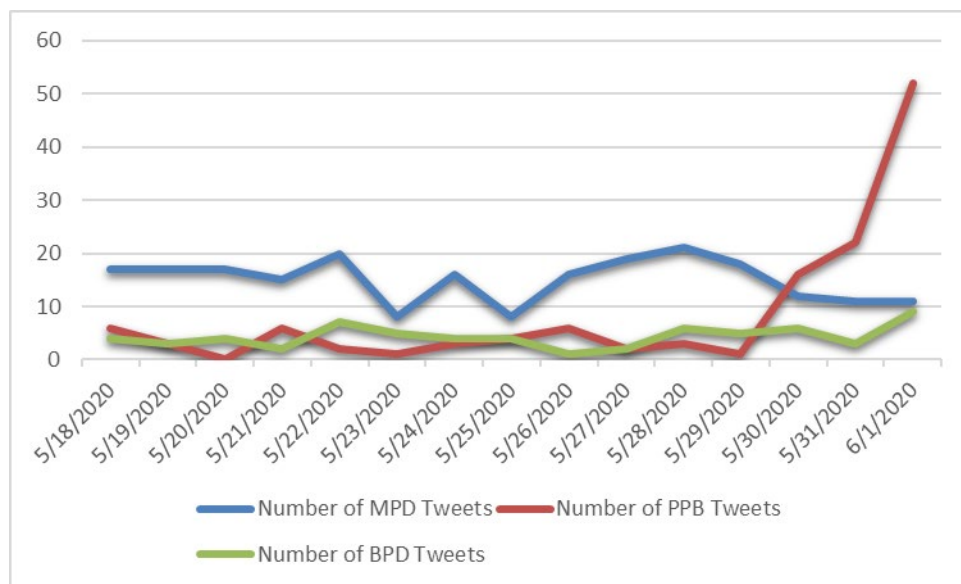


Figure 28. Tweets Per Day by Organization²⁴⁵

B. ANALYSIS OF TWITTER USAGE

The three case studies illustrated each organization's areas of emphasis on Twitter. This differentiation was evident by some organizations focusing more on tweets that directly contributed to positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations. In contrast, others were more aligned with furthering the organization's mission

²⁴⁵ Adapted by Tweet Binder Report, unpublished data.

of providing regular updates to the community. Within this study period, there appeared to be a significant opportunity for the organizations to post more tweets that directly attempted to connect with the public and improve police–community relations.

While there was a differentiation between the three organizations studied, there were also common trends. For instance, informational updates appeared to translate well for positive social media exposure. These efforts highlighted positive accomplishments while also providing law enforcement organizations with the opportunity to address localized problems specifically. Furthermore, these efforts also offered chances to bring attention to the organization, specific actions, or themes. An example of this would include BPD’s use of the #BPD hashtag to market its brand. BPD utilized this tactic several times and frequently used this hashtag when referencing itself. This usage allowed for the opportunity for more exposure as hashtags allows for tweets to be more discoverable. An example of this type of tweet is shown in Figure 29.



Figure 29. Tweet from BPD on May 20, 2020 (UTC) Utilizing #BPD Hashtag²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Source: Boston Police Dept. (@bostonpolice), “#BPD officers recover thirty illegal recreational vehicles and arrest 18 individuals.” Twitter, May 20, 2020, <https://twitter.com/bostonpolice/status/1263229995641643009>.

While each law enforcement organization studied attempted to improve police–community relations through various methods, some unique ways were exhibited. An example of this was the BPD’s tweet that recognized the retirement of a local news anchor. This tweet was unique because it recognized a member of the traditional news media that was not affiliated with BPD. This deliberate act was efficient as it both developed positive social media exposure and improved police–community relations. Another unique strategy used by PPB was when they posted an image of an officer escorting ducks off a busy highway while relaying the message that reminded people to slow down. This tweet, while not receiving as much attention as the protest-related tweets, was well-received and appeared to have positive reception from the community.

One key pattern highlighted during this study was the impact of the nationwide protest-related activity on messages posted on Twitter. To address these activities, all three organizations utilized the broadcast method to update the community. What was noticeable in their approach was that the delivery tone was different from one another in comparison to some tweets. This tone may have contributed to the positive reception of the tweet. For example, the tweet that generated the most likes during this study period was produced by BPD. This tweet, created at a time in which there was significant protest-related activity, had components that attempted to defuse negative attitudes toward police and attempted to promote the BPD’s image. The tone of their tweet conveyed a sense of relatability.

Due to the increased attention to protest-related activity, the three organizations gained numerous followers. The increase in PPB’s followers was the most significant. This aspect of gaining new followers is essential because it increases the exposure level of an organization. As Liangjie Hong, Ovidiu Dan, and Brian Davison suggested, “the likelihood that some of a user’s followers will retweet a new message depends on how many followers a user has.”²⁴⁷ This is a critical component within the social media atmosphere as it presents more opportunities to influence police–community relations.

²⁴⁷ Liangjie Hong, Ovidiu Dan, and Brian Davison, “Predicting Popular Messages in Twitter,” in *Proceedings of the 20th International Conference Companion on World Wide Web, WWW 2011* (WWW 2011 20th International World Wide Web Conference, March 28 - April 1, 2011, Hyderabad, India, New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2011), 58, <https://doi.org/10.1145/1963192.1963222>.

During this research, it became apparent that having a consistent presence on Twitter is critical for police–community relations. By maintaining a steady presence, the organizations studied were able to provide timely information concerning alerts and other rapidly developing situations. Furthermore, this presence allowed numerous positive media tweets to reach community members who may have yet to see these messages without the Twitter platform. Overall, the increased exposure on Twitter allowed law enforcement agencies to influence public perception.

C. ANALYSIS OF CRIME DATA

Within each data set, there was an increase in crime at the end of the second week. This increase in crime corresponded with the national scene in which multiple cities throughout the country reported crime during the protests. Within this study, a significant amount of this crime was associated with burglaries. These offenses forced the organizations to provide timely updates about the events that were transpiring in the city.

To further explore the potential impact of positive social media exposure on police–community relations, the number of crimes reported during the period was compared to the number of positive messages on Twitter. These positive messages included tweets that conveyed accomplishments, solicitations for help from the public, community events, complimentary recognition, thanks, and opportunities for free resources. This comparison revealed that the correlation between the two dipped in the second week for each entity. Another recurring trend observed was that all three organizations showed a positive correlation between the number of crimes reported and positive tweets for the first week.

Overall, the protest-related activity appeared to have a noticeable effect on the correlation between the number of crimes reported and the number of positive tweets generated (Figure 30). This was demonstrated by the consistent dip shown by all three organizations within this period. This revelation illustrates an opportunity for law enforcement organizations to maintain their positive media exposure, especially in such circumstances.

A closer examination of both the crime and the tweets revealed differences in the organizational approaches to posting positive tweets during the second week. One comparison between MPD and PPB demonstrated this difference. In this example, PPB had a noticeable uptick in their frequency of positive tweets, while MPD dropped significantly after May 29, 2020 (Figure 31). The correlation between the two data sets varied within each organization during the second week. During this week, PPB had a weak positive correlation, BPD had no correlation, and MPD had a slight negative correlation.

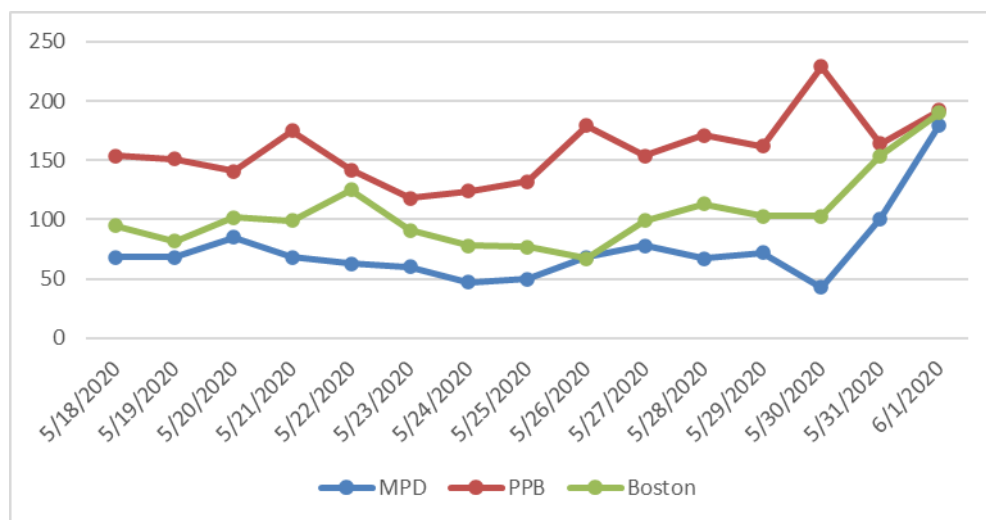


Figure 30. Crimes Reported²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ Adapted from DC, Portland and Boston Crime Data.

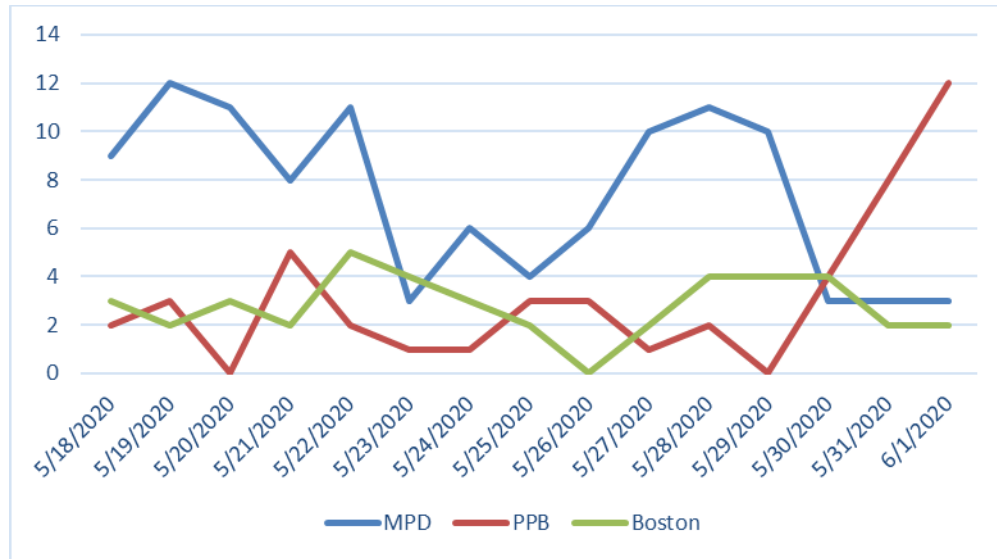


Figure 31. Positive Tweets²⁴⁹

D. CONCLUSION

When comparing the strategies incorporated by each organization, a definitive conclusion cannot be determined on how law enforcement can best develop positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations. However, there were several practices utilized by the organizations studied that appeared to both represent positive social media exposure and improved police–community relations. These practices included frequently posting stories highlighting positive interactions with law enforcement, requesting assistance with cases, and providing informational updates and alerts. Some of the more well-received tweets within the study involved law enforcement organizations recognizing community members and organizations. These efforts demonstrated that it is possible to leverage social media to generate positive engagement from the community.

One conclusion is that national protests create significantly more exposure for law enforcement organizations. This exposure allows law enforcement to improve police–community relations in the long and short term. Due to this, any images or messages within these tweets must be presented in such a way as to improve police–community

²⁴⁹ Adapted from Tweet Binder, unpublished data.

relations. This requires organizations to create carefully crafted messages that convey professionalism, create a sense of community, and are relevant. By harnessing this opportunity, law enforcement organizations can enhance their credibility, increasing the likelihood of improved police–community relations with current and future community members and increasing their chances of creating a broader audience base.

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VII. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Perception of organizations plays a pivotal role in law enforcement's effectiveness.²⁵⁰ This effectiveness can be achieved through increased support and trust from community members and displayed through daily interactions. Conversely, negative perceptions can have the opposite impact and cause adversarial interactions between law enforcement organizations and the community. While public perception can be influenced in numerous ways, social media represents an opportunity for law enforcement to increase its exposure and influence public perception. Consequently, developing positive social media exposure at every opportunity is essential. This strategy would increase the likelihood of improved police–community relations, which could lead to more efficient partnerships between the two parties.

The case studies demonstrated that law enforcement had increased exposure during significant nationwide events. These events provided the studied organizations the chance to increase their followers, foster relations with the community, and gain national recognition for their actions. Consequently, this study illustrated that such circumstances offer prime opportunities to enhance an organization's reputation. Furthermore, it is also essential to recognize that within these situations, organizations must take calculated steps to avoid damaging missteps that would fracture police–community relations and hinder law enforcement effectiveness.

To develop positive social media exposure to improve police–community relations, it is recommended that the following actions be implemented within each law enforcement agency's strategy.

²⁵⁰ Edward R. Maguire and Devon Johnson, "Measuring Public Perceptions of the Police," *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management* 33, no. 4 (2010): 706, <https://doi.org/10.1108/13639511011085097>.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) Recommendation #1: Police organizations should capitalize on developing positive messages during events with significant nationwide attention.

Throughout this research, tweets related to protest-related events had the most exposure; these tweets generated the most reactions for each organization. These reactions were captured by individuals liking, retweeting, or commenting on the tweets. By creating more reactions and consequently getting more exposure, law enforcement organizations have an opportunity to get more followers and connect with the community.

Within this study, BPD created the tweet that caused the most reactions. These reactions, which were substantially more than those made by the other tweets, may have been aided by the delivery style that BPD utilized. As such, it is recommended that law enforcement organizations emulate this style in future similar situations. Specifically, law enforcement organizations should create tweets that display professionalism and foster a sense of solidarity with the community. These types of tweets appear to increase the likelihood of being more well-received by the Twitter audience.

(2) Recommendation #2: Law enforcement organizations should increase the frequency of tweets that strengthen police–community relations.

In this study, community policing or safety messages were not represented in the top three categories tweeted. These categories represent direct efforts to strengthen police–community relations. Furthermore, these types of tweets offer opportunities to illustrate genuine connections with the community that add to the respective law enforcement’s reputation. This was exhibited by MPD when they showed officers celebrating an older woman’s birthday. This tweet received several hundred likes and represented positive media exposure.

In addition to community policing and safety messages, several other categories fostered positive community relations. These positive community relations, displayed through informational updates, solicitations for help, and messages that applauded individuals, were shown to be well-received by the number of likes they generated. While some of the organizations studied did provide tweets from within these categories, no one

organization consistently created tweets that touched on each category. By increasing the frequency of these types of tweets, law enforcement organizations increase the possibility of positive social media exposure. Furthermore, these types of tweets frequently reflect genuine connections through the images. These examples were illustrated in this study as each organization posted pictures that reflected these connections. These tweets included law enforcement officers wishing an elderly citizen a happy birthday, recognizing an organization's contributions to society, and providing needed resources to the community.

(3) Recommendation #3: Law enforcement organizations should utilize hashtags for consistent themes.

To capitalize on the current available technology, law enforcement agencies should integrate hashtags within tweets that have consistent messages. By incorporating hashtags, users of platforms such as Twitter have a better opportunity to find specific topics or events, increase their visibility, and engage with the community. Furthermore, hashtags represent an opportunity to contribute to law enforcement organizations' overall strategic marketing techniques.

MPD demonstrated an example of the successful use of a hashtag. In this study, MPD consistently used the #MISSINGPERSON hashtag to draw attention to their efforts. As a result, several of these tweets were within their top-10 retweets during this timeframe. This was particularly noteworthy as the other organizations did not have any tweets that were not protest-related within their top-10 retweets. By duplicating this strategy, law enforcement organizations can emphasize issues that are important to the community and law enforcement.

(4) Recommendation #4: Law enforcement organizations should consistently measure and evaluate the success of current law enforcement tactics within social media.

To complete this study, this researcher utilized Twitter and Tweet Binder data. This data was enlightening as it quickly highlighted well-received and effective tweets. Through this data, the number of likes, retweets, new followers, and replies could immediately be determined. These metrics represent only a portion of the measurable categories. To replicate this process, law enforcement should take advantage of the host of analytical tools

and companies that can perform these functions and assist law enforcement with evaluating successful tactics concerning social media. In addition to acting as a force multiplier, these services allow law enforcement agencies to get real-time feedback on their efforts on social media so that successful strategies can be duplicated and unsuccessful ones avoided.

While using analytical tools is an important concept, it is also vital that law enforcement organizations foster connections with other law enforcement agencies. These connections would allow current best practices to be shared and implemented within their respective organizations. During this study, I was able to identify best practices by analyzing data. Partnerships with other law enforcement organizations would be beneficial to expedite the identification of successful strategies. These partnerships would allow real-time adjustments to be made within each respective organization. These adjustments would be beneficial in dynamic and fluid situations where creating relevant and timely messages is essential.

B. LIMITATIONS

This study exclusively examined the Twitter strategy for three large police organizations in the United States within a small timeframe. Due to this format, the results were limited. These limitations, which follow, primarily dealt with the audience studied, the sample collected, and the platform used for this study. Due to these limitations, the results of this study may not be applicable across all law enforcement agencies and all situations. Instead, the results of this study should be used as a reference point for national media event responding to a police video.

(1) Limitation #1: This research only studied three large law enforcement organizations within the United States.

Within the United States, there are over 18,000 law enforcement organizations.²⁵¹ These law enforcement agencies serve local, state, federal, and college communities.

²⁵¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Crime/Law Enforcement Stats (UCR Program),” How We Can Help You, accessed January 18, 2023, <https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/more-fbi-services-and-information/ucr>.

Furthermore, these organizations vary in size, scope, and purpose. As such, this study does not account for social media strategies that are utilized by these types of organizations.

(2) Limitation #2. The timeframe of this study provided a small sample size and occurred when nationwide protests were happening.

Within this research, the nationwide protests significantly impacted this study. Consequently, additional research should be conducted to determine the best law enforcement practices to develop positive social media exposure during “normal” operations. A longer timeframe will provide more samples and data to draw conclusions.

(3) Limitation # 3. This research only studied the Twitter platform.

By exclusively focusing on Twitter, this study did not account for other platforms that could have been used to foster police–community relations within this time. By not considering the other accounts, each organization’s overall social media strategy cannot be determined. To further elaborate, it is possible that other social media platforms were primarily used to improve police–community relations, while the Twitter platform was used to broadcast messages relating to alerts and situational updates.

C. FUTURE RESEARCH

To further this discussion, studies should be conducted that account for other social media platforms in addition to Twitter. Researchers can identify alternative strategies that develop positive social media exposure and improve police–community relations by looking at different platforms. Furthermore, these platforms may offer an opportunity to connect with different audiences. These studies are essential because new technologies and platforms are continuously being introduced. To maintain the ability to utilize these technologies, law enforcement must regularly look for new opportunities to connect with the public.

Another option for future research is to compare law enforcement communication strategies during various times of civil unrest. By comparing multiple situations such as these, law enforcement organizations may be able to identify specific practices that have proved beneficial over the years. This research may be instrumental as law enforcement

responses to civil unrest generate significant attention and can bolster or damage police–community relations.

D. CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, BPD, PPB, and MPD displayed varying methods of developing positive media exposure to improve police–community relations. While no one strategy established itself as the best practice, several methods were well-received and appeared to improve police–community relations. These methods included posting images of positive interactions with community members, recognizing individuals and organizations, and soliciting help from the community. Furthermore, frequently providing the community with positive accomplishments, including events that provided solutions to community problems, was well received.

During this research, the nationwide protests had a significant impact on the exposure levels of each organization. This exposure level led many of the tweets sent at this time to receive more attention than those sent previously. As such, providing messages that improved police–community relations during such a significant period became especially critical. The most well-received messages during this research conveyed a sense of solidarity with the community while also providing relevant information concerning the events that were transpiring.

In sum, social media allows law enforcement organizations to quickly reach a large audience while disseminating messages relating to their organization. This ability should be leveraged as it can improve police–community relations and strengthen organizational reputation. As technology continues to evolve, it is imperative that law enforcement organizations continuously adapt their strategy to ensure they are providing the communities with the best possible service.

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