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POSSIBILITIES AND OBSTACLES OF POLICE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION WITH CITIZENS AND THE COMMUNITY

Communication via digital communication channels has been present in police work for a long time. In the period between 2010 and 2014, the European Commission financed a scientific research project with the aim of understanding organizational changes of the police in different European countries, including changes related to the introduction of new information and communication technologies into police practice. That research showed that the police use social media to detect crimes and their perpetrators, as well as to establish quality relations with citizens and the community. As a follow-up to that study, the goal of this qualitative research is to identify the possibilities and obstacles of police digital communication with citizens and the community in order to achieve a relationship of cooperation and trust between the police and the community. Four focus groups were conducted in two police administrations in the eastern Croatia. The research was conducted on a sample of 40 participants, mostly officers of the regular police, including community policing officers, and the rest are criminal police officers dealing with general criminal matters. The obtained results show, just like the results of numerous foreign studies, that such an approach can be effective in providing transparency of police work and increasing trust between the police and citizens, but with adaptation of the selection of channels and content of communication to the target audience.

Key words: police; digital communication channels; cooperation between police and citizens; Croatia

INTRODUCTION

For many years, numerous studies have shown that successful communication is an essential component for the success of any organization (Pološki Vokić, Rimac Bilušić and Najjar 2020; Quinn and Hargie 2004; Ruck and Welch 2012; Robson and Tourish 2005; Snyder and Morris 1984; Tkalac Verčič 2021; Tkalac Verčič, Pološki Vokić and Sinčić Ćorić 2009). Throughout history, communication has changed and adapted to current societal trends, and digital technology is certainly characteristic of our age. According to Horst and Miller (2012), digital is everything that can be reduced to a binary code and serves for any further use.

Communication via digital communication channels is increasingly present in police work (O'Connor and Zaidi 2021), thus certain authors talk about the digital transformation of the police (Montasari, Carpenter and Masys 2023). In the period between 2010 and 2014, the European Commission financed a scientific research project whose main goal was a better understanding of organizational changes in the police in different European countries. One section of that project was focused on organizational changes of the police related to the introduction of new information and communication technologies into police practice (Denef, Kaptein, Bayerl and Ramirez 2012). The results showed, among other things, that social media are a relevant component of organizational changes in police services in European countries. The wide use of social media by citizens, and especially the vast scale of the repercussions of this phenomenon on policing, required police organizations across Europe to develop and implement strategies for adapting the police to communication via social media in their daily operations in different lines of work, i.e. different branches of the police. The research results showed that, although all police organizations in Europe were equally faced with the need to use social media, the modalities and dynamics of integration of social media into police activities differ significantly from one country to another (Denef, Kaptein, Bayerl and Ramirez 2012). The best practices of integrating social media into police activities were also identified, i.e. it was determined how the police could use social media to obtain information on criminal acts, present the police to the general public, provide information to citizens, use the “wisdom of crowds”, interact with the public, community policing, showing the human side of police work, supporting the existing police IT infrastructure and increasing the level of police efficiency. If we wanted to summarize the aforementioned into key areas of application of social media by the police, we could state that the police use social media to detect crimes and their perpetrators on the one hand, and for the establish-

ment of quality relations with citizens and the community on the other hand.

Not all European countries participated in the aforementioned research (Denef, Kaptein, Bayerl and Ramirez 2012), including Croatia, so it is worth investigating the situation in our country ten years later when the use of social media has intensified and has become almost imperative in different spheres of personal and social life. Accordingly, and bearing in mind the main areas of application of social media in everyday police work, the aim of this study is to identify the possibilities and obstacles of police digital communication with citizens and the community to achieve a relationship of cooperation and trust between the police and the community.

REVIEW OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES CONCERNING POLICE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Studies from various parts of the world show how police organizations have integrated digital communication modes into their daily operations. Since 2014, the Boston Police Department has been actively using social media, primarily Twitter¹, which has proven to be extremely useful for crisis communication (Heverin and Zach 2011; Sullivan 2012; Shemberger 2017; Nikolovska, Johnson and Ekblom 2020). At that time, there were 2,800 active Facebook profiles of police stations in America, and this social media was actively used to inform the public about the current stages of investigations in important police cases (Davis, Alves and Sklansky 2014). The police did this to correct errors in local media publications and reduce negative impacts caused by bad reporting and incorrect interpretation by the journalists. It has been noticed that this approach reduces citizens' nervousness regarding current topics, and citizens are mostly happy to respond to calls for help issued by the police. Posts by the Boston Police Department on Twitter have quickly become a relevant source of information. Depending on the case, citizens reposted and retweeted the posts tens of thousands of times in a very short time. This enabled the police to reach users on social media in an extraordinarily large and fast way.

The communication of the police with the wider community using social media must have a defined mission, as is the case with the police in New York, which categorizes everything they post on their social channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat) into groups with the first largest aimed at protection (keeping people safe), and the other aimed at connection (strengthening relations with the community).

1 The social network was named Twitter at the time of the research; today it is called X.

In their posts, they use dedicated hashtags to promote these goals (#NYPDProtecting and #NYPDConnecting), and the hashtag #NYPDTips, which asks for information about the perpetrators and offers rewards, is also important. Using social media in order to publish images and video materials to ask for help from the public that would lead to the identification and arrest of suspects for criminal offenses or misdemeanours is an already established police practice (Colbran 2020; Ruddell and Jones 2013).

In Great Britain, direct police communication via social media is made possible by direct inquiries to police chiefs, for example, on Twitter or Facebook, using a specific hashtag, for example, #AskTheChief. Citizens who click on the hashtag can see what other users say or ask (Scholes-Fogg 2015).

Social media campaigns are often planned by targeting a demographic group that is likely to receive the desired message (Ruddell and Jones 2013), thus reaching a younger and more educated population as they are most present on social media.

There are other interesting approaches in the application of social media related to the publication of police content. As an example, the Australian approach can be highlighted, which was based on increasing the presence on social media by publishing content from the so-called meme domains. A new communication strategy of the police was implemented in 2017 with the aim of increasing the number of post followers on Facebook. To stimulate Facebook's algorithm to show the posts, the posts contained humour and cute extras such as pictures of police dogs. The goal of the strategy was to demystify and humanize the police force and facilitate communicating important announcements to a large number of people (Wood 2019), i.e. reach millions of users.

A large number of studies confirm the effectiveness of police communication via social media for informing the public about crime and police activities (Procter, Crump, Karstedt, Voss and Cantijoch 2013; Lieberman, Koetzle and Sakiyama 2013) as well as for creating a positive image and managing public attitudes on policing (Schneider 2016; O'Connor 2017; Walby and Gumieny 2020; Walby and Joshua 2021; Walby and Wilkinson 2022).

However, there are also negative aspects of using social media. The negative effect of social media was felt, for example, by the police in Kensington (Ross 2016) when they tried to connect drivers who violated traffic regulations and listening to the music of a certain band on the official Facebook page through a humorous post and the use of (#)hashtag. This resulted in a public apology from the author of that controversial post. Since the post was quickly picked up by news organizations worldwide, it spread

widely, and many citizens did not find it humorous. In other words, an attempt to approach the community ended in a negative reaction due to misinterpretation. Although the use of social media has great potential due to its two-way communication in public relations, it also brings potential problems. Therefore, before any activity, it is necessary to think critically, plan wisely, and establish a communication plan in order to immediately and strategically respond to a problem.

Gilkerson and Tusinski Berg (2017) explain the term Hashtag Hijacking by warning how the use of a hashtag (#) as a tool used to tag and organize conversations on social media sites can easily become a vehicle for ridicule and negative criticism. Hashtag Hijacking has become a strategic tool for individuals and activist groups who use it to publicly call out and try to influence an organization. Furthermore, the importance of the high-quality reaction of the police to the information obtained via digital means should be emphasized, but the research conducted in the top 10 most populated American cities showed that was not achieved (Brainard and Edlins 2015). Without this reaction, the basic meaning of communication via social media is lost, and it is necessary to clearly define the steps to be followed when obtaining useful information from citizens.

CURRENT STUDY

From the overview of the literature on police digital communication modalities, it is clear that most of the research is conducted in large urban areas. However, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the use of digital communication channels in various spheres of personal, professional and social life, not only in highly urbanized but also in suburban and rural areas, since people everywhere were equally obliged to comply with the measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 infection, which necessarily included strong restrictions or bans on in-person contacts. This study is based on data collected in two police departments in Croatia whose areas of local jurisdiction have predominantly suburban and rural characteristics.

In order to obtain as many details as possible on the use of digital communication channels by the police in these areas, qualitative research was conducted based on four focus groups held: three in the Osijek-Baranja Police Administration and one in the Požega-Slavonia Police Administration.

METHODS

Sample

The overall number of focus group participants is 40, 30 from the Osijek-Baranja Police Administration and 10 from the Požega-Slavonia Police Administration, in proportion to the number of officers in each Police Administration.

In terms of police officers' composition in both police administrations, two thirds of the research participants are employees of the regular police, followed in equal proportions by community policing officers, criminal police officers who work on general criminal matters, police officers who work in the operational-communication centre and police officers working on public relations. Most of them have a secondary school diploma, while their professional experience varies from two to 20 years. Three quarters of the research participants are men, which also corresponds to the gender structure of the target population.

Instrument

The focus group protocol includes a semi-structured interview. The aforementioned study conducted by the European Commission (Denef, Kaptein, Bayerl and Ramirez 2012) identifies two main areas of application of digital communication channels by the police, one of which is the subject of this research. Therefore, we formulated specific activities of the police within that area as the following questions in the structured part of the interview:

1. Can digital communication channels be used to present the police to the general public? Examples of good practice? Perceived opportunities? (*comments on specific current events, greetings on religious and similar holidays, etc.*)
2. Can digital communication channels be used to provide information to citizens? Examples of good practice? Perceived opportunities? (*missing persons, traffic controls, new forms of criminal activities, searching for perpetrators of criminal acts, etc.*)
3. Can digital communication channels be used to interact with the public? Examples of good practice? Perceived opportunities? (*answers to citizens' questions, offering explanations and clarifications, etc.*)
4. Can digital communication channels be used for community policing purposes? Examples of good practice? Perceived opportunities? (*faster and more direct*)

communication with residents and key stakeholders in a given area, for example with a school, health centre, etc.)

5. Can digital communication channels be used to show the human side of police work? Examples of good practice? Perceived opportunities? (*official statements are often cold and even irritate citizens*)
6. Can digital communication channels be used to increase police efficiency? Examples of good practice? Perceived opportunities? (*how fast information is spread, developing citizens' trust, etc.*)

The open part of the interview referred to topics that the research participants themselves initiated in relation to the research subject.

Data collection and processing

The focus group in the Požega-Slavonia Police Administration was conducted on 28 December 2022, and the focus groups in the Osijek-Baranja Police Administration were conducted on 11 January 2023. Each focus group lasted between an hour and an hour and a half, i.e. the shortest lasted for an hour and 10 minutes, and the longest lasted for an hour and 30 minutes. All focus groups were conducted during the working hours of the research participants, in agreement with their superiors, so as not to interfere with the participants' work schedule. Two people moderated each focus group.

At the beginning of each focus group, the moderator explained the research goal and what is included in digital communication channels: SMS message, video call, e-mail, website, chat (video), chatbot, interactive portal with national missing persons records, platforms for direct content sharing (WhatsApp, Viber, Twitter, Telegram, Reddit, Discord, etc.), social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, etc.) and various apps (e.g. „Ministry of the Interior – Safety and Trust“, an app for e-reporting suspicious events). A moderator pointed out that we all use some of these digital communication channels in our personal lives, but the topic of conversation is using these channels in police work.

Moderator explained that research participation is voluntary and anonymous and that the obtained data will be used without any details that could indicate the participants' identity.

It was also explained that the interview would be recorded and that the recordings would be available to the research team only.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of all four focus groups are collectively presented below.

Firstly, it is worth noting that focus groups participants see a lot of room for improving interaction with the public using digital communication channels and provide certain ideas in the form of a YouTube channel or a chat through which citizens could obtain answers to their queries, stressing that communication via email is already somewhat outdated, as well as searching for information on the websites of institutions. However, at the same time, they point out that for years the main official digital channel intended for communication with citizens has been E-mail. However, since this form of communication is already a bit outdated, the growing attitude is that the police should place chat in the foreground of interaction, through which citizens would obtain answers to their queries, since searching for information on the institutions' websites is no longer sufficiently efficient. The conclusion is that there is a lot of room for improving interaction with the public, but that it is necessary to update the methods of accessibility to citizens and harmonize them with the age in which we live.

Perhaps it would be wise to create some kind of chat or something where people can send an inquiry related to the driver's license, for anything really, and receive an answer and have officers who work only on that...

In general, the research participants believe that having a presence on more social platforms enables greater efficiency in terms of wider information availability. One of the possible ideas for improving communication with the public that the participants mention is the introduction of the already mentioned chat using artificial intelligence. Especially during the pandemic, but also before it, a large number of inquiries concerning the competence of the police led to the conclusion that the police are not the most successful in communicating with citizens, according to one of the police managers.

If we have to search for information for somebody else, then that information is not available. Or it is not easily available. It exists, but it is not clear to everyone.

As a good example, it is stated that citizens in some other police administrations have the option of booking an appointment to submit a request or collect personal documents via redomat.mup.hr app. This method of reducing waiting time at the counters is extremely commendable from the citizens' perspective. Although this is a good example of how virtual space can be a great help to both police officers and

citizens who need their services, people still often do not have the will, knowledge or ability to search for information on the Internet, it is easier for them to make a phone call. In this case, we are speaking predominantly about the elderly population. However, the shortcoming is that these citizens mostly call the number 192, which is used for emergencies, instead of calling a number to ask for information, and in this way, they hinder the work of emergency police services.

These are mostly older people... They call us on the phone to check certain information. These are the individuals who do not have any communication via the Internet or do not understand it... Clearly. In reality, they have no other choice.

Furthermore, it is obvious that research participants associate the use of digital communication channels in their daily work with the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, research participants claim that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the police had the opportunity to strengthen their relationship with the community, which many police officers succeeded in accomplishing. They state that they used digital channels to give feedback on the duration of isolation, possible movement between counties and other crisis-specific information.

Research participants state that police officers often go out into the field without knowing that a reported problem is not in their jurisdiction at all, which was especially present during the COVID-19 pandemic. Namely, citizens do not differentiate between jurisdictions of individual subjects of society and contact the police for most of their problems, which could be significant vast of the police officers' time. As a potential solution, one of the community policing officers mentions the networking of state institutions using digital channels.

But the citizens, in my opinion, are generally calling the police for basically everything. They do not distinguish between stationary traffic situations, situations in green spaces, etc. And we do not allow ourselves the luxury of refusing to react. In our country, our Operational-Communication Centre has no defined police response priorities, as the Americans have. We have always been somewhat connected, but when we need something, there is no network. For example, we do not know now if a given person is in prison. We have no insight into that anywhere. At least I, as a community policing officer who has cases to hand over and field checks, have no such insight. And at no point can I check that information except to call a prison and ask if a person is serving a sentence there. And I lose time making calls. I call all around Croatia, asking where a certain person is, searching. Just to finally find the prison in which that individual is incarcerated in.

In addition, numerous foreign studies show that the cooperation between emergency services in the field especially finds its place in the digital space. Institutions counterpart to the police (fire-fighters, Mountain Rescue Service, etc.) often transmit police announcements, but the police also transmit announcements from counterpart services (Fernandez, Dickinson and Alani 2017). The transmission of information to citizens is certainly one of the very common reasons for the use of digital communication channels by the police.

Discussing the potential of how to perform certain tasks faster via digital communication channels, one of the police managers cites an example of an online seminar held by international organizations that monitor their reach using tweets. Namely, when tweets from all over the world are posted, the organizer of educational activities that are carried out (for example, with the aim of increasing traffic safety) receives feedback in the form of clicks/support. The same manager also states that the Ministry of the Interior has a Twitter profile and a YouTube channel, but some police departments do not, which could be a good source of service information in addition to the website.

In the manager's opinion, the police is late with the digitalization of work processes, and when certain positive developments do occur, certain employees need time to accept those changes.

To launch something we want. Why should someone have to communicate with you and ask for something from you, if a person needs, for example, a certificate? That person must know how to reach us. There is no need to come in person. Especially nowadays, when we have e-signatures, official communication, etc. but we are still lagging behind. And today, we commented on the introduction of internet banking. You pay a fee and our officers wonder how you paid and ask you for papers. We should not lag behind in this sense, we should embrace technological solutions.

Research participants recognize the possibility of using digital communication channels for the purpose of presenting the human side of police work. Police officers, especially those who receive reports, in some cases quickly realize that some problems do not require police action and that it is necessary to show compassion and try to solve the problem, either by contacting other services or just listening about the problem.

People should be listened to. A simple call to be listened to. I have conducted countless such conversations because some people live alone. We have a lady who says everyone is against

her... I calm her down and she apologizes to me. Some people want to speak more than they want to ask questions and obtain information.

In general, to bring the police closer to the public, it is important to design and present announcements in a way that will be understandable to citizens. For this reason, positions of police officers in charge of public relations have been established in the Ministry of the Interior, who will ensure that announcements are appropriately formulated and adapted to different target groups.

But we write some text, and they further correct it if we made a mistake or used some other words so that it is comprehensible to the citizens as well, not only to our officials.

Since each social media platform has its rules and requirements, it is important to understand how particular content is displayed on different social media. For example, when certain content is posted on TikTok, it may differ from when the same content is posted on Instagram or Facebook. The participants were asked about the need to post such content from a central location, which they recognize as a desirable solution, and they also agreed that the Public Relations Department should be responsible for posting information.

It was also mentioned that TikTok users are mostly young people aged 16 to 24, who are inclined to short videos on different topics. Therefore, it is important to tailor the content displayed on TikTok to capture their attention and interest. On the other hand, material posted via Facebook can also reach older users.

I think it was on TikTok where our motorcyclists recorded a specific popular dance. That was interesting, and responses were positive, and we reached a particular population again, showed we are not uptight, that there is more to us than meets the eye, that we have a human side.

The effectiveness of informal communication via posts on police social media has also been confirmed in the results of scientific research (Hu and Lovrich 2019). Some authors have dealt with the modalities of police communication via social media. Thus, for example, Davis, Alves and Sklansky (2014) suggest an informal tone when communicating on social media, but with maximum professionalism and the supervision of experts in communication via digital channels. They note that when defining such a specific communication strategy, one should not only count followers and “social engagement” such as retweets, likes, shares, etc., but also look at the outcome, i.e. improving community safety and other contributions.

Therefore, the research participants recognize the value of digital communication channels and believe they enable faster and more targeted transmission of information. They believe that using digital channels can increase the effectiveness of the police since certain age groups of citizens use certain social media more often. This is why police officers for prevention and public relations must consider the target group's preferences when preparing and publishing preventive messages on social media.

Maybe we could connect prevention with public relations more and then go targeted. If we are interested in the 13-year-old age group, we should target TikTok preventive programs. Let's implement it that way. If we are interested in targeting Instagram, Twitter, we present the police in the best light on these platforms, but we have to take targeted actions...

The free app for citizens (Ministry of the Interior – Safety and Trust) is a big step forward in achieving digital contact between citizens and police officers. Unfortunately, although citizens want to help by reporting suspicious behaviour via the mentioned app, the largest number of reports are related to illegal parking, which is not an event of high security importance. Considering the fact that the option of determining the priority of action has not yet been introduced and there is no possibility of postponing or even rejecting the procedure based on the above-mentioned report, the police must check every report immediately and as soon as possible and, if necessary, initiate the official procedure.

Most reports refer to illegal parking when citizens take pictures and send them.

Our regulations are such that we have to respond, go out and check every report. There is perhaps the rigidity of our regulations that, at some point, we can refuse an e-report. Officers are afraid to refuse even something insignificant because others could question them and their work. There should be some flexibility to allow a shift chief to say that particular report is negligible at this point, so we are not going to send police officer there. So that if we are working in some operational actions, such frivolous reports do not drag our patrols away from some route where they are doing more important work.

Although citizens generally use the aforementioned app out of good intentions, members of the focus groups point out that individuals knowingly abuse the e-notification records because they report events that are not a serious threat, and some may also file reports out of personal interest. The police believe that in most such cases, they are dealing with the same whistle-blowers because, despite the fact that

the reports are anonymous, similar reports are often reported from the same locations. Given that the police should respond to every report, they cite the proposal to charge for “unnecessary” interventions if the applicant is known as the most effective possible measure to combat such cases.

It is a disaster. They are overloading us. In addition to all this, we also have those e-observations. From an 8-year-old child to 88-year-old adults. And you do not know who is sending the observation. They take pictures, pure abuse, they generally do not endanger anyone. Somebody takes out a dog for a walk in the evening and then someone takes a picture. Even last night, there were nine reports within an hour from one suburban area. And we have to respond to each report.

We had a report that someone parked in a handicapped spot at 2 in the morning. Two parking spots, one free. The second spot is not reserved for handicapped drivers. So a person wakes up at 2 in the morning and takes a photo. We have to respond and issue a ticket.

Just to see what will happen. People want to take revenge on someone. I got a ticket today, then tomorrow I will go and take pictures of five other violations, because I got a ticket last night... We are probably talking about twenty people who send the same thing all the time. Because they are mostly from the same locations. We have received hundreds of reports from the same location. Someone is always taking photos there.

We could introduce something similar we see in other countries, to charge for every police intervention if a report was unjustified, regardless of whether we know who called or the call has been made anonymously. In other countries, if you do something stupid like that, you will be charged for police intervention.

I am actually sure that is how they do it in Germany, that means people in Germany will not frivolously call the police. Basically, if someone makes a frivolous report... they will be charged for that intervention... it means you called the police unnecessarily. I am sure such practice is used in Germany, probably in some other countries too.

In addition to the above, the research participants identified another serious obstacle to the effective use of digital communication channels in everyday work, i.e. an approach towards work that is often irrational, especially in circumstances of employee shortages. This is especially true for community policing officers who, due to understaffing, cannot fully devote themselves to their work, but must also participate in police interventions. It would be especially useful for them to apply the possibilities

of modern technologies so that they can be as efficient as possible despite the fact that they are not only doing their own work, but taking on other responsibilities as well. This is exactly what the next research participant, a community policing officer, is talking about.

Every day we contact people in the field and explain that they need to lock their house and provide other advice, and then we write it down on a paper... Wouldn't it be easier to make one show every day on the radio and play it to people for three months?

Although they are aware that the presence of the police on social media is an important item for communicating with citizens and informing them, police officers are simultaneously cautious about whether they would use, for example, Twitter on a business level. Namely, they are aware that using a digital channel like Twitter requires a certain level of expertise and a 24-hour presence.

Well, I do not know, I honestly do not know, it is a bit extensive. They put all sorts of things on there. It is not easy to follow. Children can think of anything. An expert should constantly watch the content. Notifications are coming non-stop, it is not limited to particular times when content can be published and posted. Someone should always monitor the content if possible.

Research participants recognize the positive and negative sides of both digital communication channels and in-person communication with citizens, and it can be concluded that the combination of both methods would have an optimal effect on the effectiveness of police work.

This is what we can arrange in the field, no one else can.

It is less and less possible to communicate with the police in person...I have the feeling that talking stops when you go on a coffee break in a cafe. I do not know, but I used to hear in a cafe what is happening in the community... That is not the case anymore, we can not go to a cafe to get information.

In the open part of the interview, focus group participants expressed their interest in the use of data and their contribution to the research, which indicates their interest in the application of police digital communication.

CONCLUSION

From the literature overview presented in this study, it is clear that the possibility of using digital communication channels to present the police to the general public has long been recognized at the international level. The results of the qualitative research conducted in two police administrations, which are presented in detail in this paper, show that the Croatian police partially implemented this process through public relations officers who are assigned tasks related to various communication channels, including digital ones.

Given the fact that we live in a time when the quality of life in communities, and thus community safety, depends on the level of application of modern technologies, it is clear that police effectiveness also largely depends on how well the latest communication technologies and media are integrated into all segments of police work. Therefore, it is not surprising that the information obtained in this study shows that regular police officers, especially community policing officers, after the COVID-19 pandemic, increasingly use digital communication channels for the purpose of informing citizens not only about important security events but also about their own work. The results obtained in this study, as well as the results of the aforementioned studies, show that such an approach can be effective in providing police transparency and increasing trust between the police and citizens. However, the obtained results also confirm the findings of the related mentioned research, which warn of the importance of using the correct communication channels and adapting the content to the target audience to achieve the maximum effect in the presentation of the police and their work.

The main limitation of this research in terms of the possibility of generalizing its results is also the main advantage of this research in terms of its practical implications from the perspective of creating public policies and services based on facts. It lies in the fact that the research was conducted in a part of Croatia dominated by suburban and rural settlements and characterized by numerous historical and current peculiarities. As a result, the possibilities of generalization may be limited to a certain extent, but not significantly, because the results of this research are fully compatible with the results of studies conducted in different countries and mostly in large urban areas.

A far more significant limitation of this study is the fact that the research sample consists only of police officers. It is undoubtedly necessary to conduct research on samples of citizens to find out what kind of digital communication they expect from the police.

The perspective of applied scientific research also opens up in relation to negative aspects of the use of digital communication channels in police practice. The results of this research showed that such negative aspects could put a lot of burden on police officers, and have a demotivating effect on them in terms of further application of digital communication in their daily work. Research participants warned that just one failure or clumsiness in communication via digital channels could cause far-reaching and long-term consequences for the police. They also expressed awareness of the possibility of misuse of digital communication by not only the criminal milieu, but also other citizens. All of these are risks that are already very well recognized in professional and scientific literature, so the next step for scientists and researchers should be taken in the direction of identifying the modality of mitigating these risks, so that the application of digital and other technologies means for the police a maximum of good opportunities and a minimum of threats in the performance of their work.

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MOGUĆNOSTI I PREPREKE DIGITALNE KOMUNIKACIJE POLICIJE S GRAĐANIMA I ZAJEDNICOM

Sažetak

Komunikacija putem digitalnih kanala komunikacije već je dugo prisutna u radu policije. U razdoblju između 2010. i 2014. godine Europska komisija je financirala znanstveno-istraživački projekt sa ciljem razumijevanja organizacijskih promjena policije u različitim europskim državama, uključujući i one koje su vezane uz uvođenje novih informacijskih i komunikacijskih tehnologija u policijsku praksu. To istraživanje je pokazalo da policija koristi društvene mreže za otkrivanje kaznenih djela i njihovih počinitelja, kao i za uspostavljanje kvalitetnih relacija s građanima i zajednicom. Nastavno na tu studiju, cilj ovog kvalitativnog istraživanja je identificirati mogućnosti i prepreke digitalne komunikacije policije s građanima i zajednicom u svrhu ostvarivanja odnosa suradnje i povjerenja između policije i zajednice. U istraživanje su uključene četiri fokus grupe u dvije policijske uprave u istočnoj Hrvatskoj. Ukupno 40 sudionika istraživanja većinom su policijski službenici temeljne policije, uključujući i kontakt policajce, a ostalo su policijski službenici kriminalističke policije koji rade na poslovima općeg kriminaliteta. Dobiveni rezultati pokazuju, jednako kao i rezultati brojnih inozemnih studija, da takav pristup može biti učinkovit u pružanju transparentnosti rada policije i povećanju povjerenja između policije i građana, ali uz prilagodbu odabira kanala i sadržaja komunikacije ciljnoj publici.

Ključne riječi: policija; digitalni kanali komunikacije; suradnja policije i građana; Hrvatska

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