

Effects Of Media On Policing Activities In Nairobi County, Kenya

Gilbert Masengeli¹, Anita W. Wachira² and Lilian K. M. Mwenda²

¹ Administration Police Service, Kenya

² Dedan Kimathi University of Technology, Kenya

ABSTRACT: The purpose of the research was to explore the effects of media on policing activities in Nairobi County. Based on the normative theory, the research adopted a descriptive survey design where questionnaires were administered to 150 police officers within the Nairobi Central Police Division. Respondents were drawn from the General Duty Department, Traffic Department, the Administrative Police and Criminal Investigation in Nairobi County. The results show that the Kenya Police Service had adopted the use of media in policing with social media being the most commonly used. However, police culture is a major limiting factor in the use of the media and the lack of a media strategy and framework in Kenya also inhibits the impact of media on policing.

Keywords: Internet, Policing, Print Media, Social Media

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of the conventional media, such as radio, newspapers, and the new media, such as the Internet and social media platforms helps to increase vigilance among community members. Current trends around the world indicate that law enforcement is embracing social media including Facebook and Twitter to facilitate the fight against crime (Trottier & Fuchs, 2014). Globally, the media has become an intelligence-gathering tool, enabling the police departments to collect intelligence and use it to stop crimes. The media has played a crucial role in crime prevention whereby the police are using the media to sensitize the public about security matters and improve relations with the public. Use of media tools is gaining momentum as technologies continue to advance and become more sophisticated. Consequently, there is an increase of research in this area as a means of determining effective ways of using the media in improving policing activities.

The growth of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the country has facilitated media usage trends. In the African setup, this is a huge improvement in providing connectivity in the country for complementing police work (Mudhai, Tettey & Banda, 2009). Government institutions in East Africa that are, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, use the media to share information, especially regarding the security threats of terror groups. In Kenya, the National Police Service (NPS) has foiled criminal activities through the use of the media. For instance, the Inspector General of Police has a Twitter account through which he issues media statements highlighting what the NPS is doing in crime prevention and policing (National Police Service, 2016). Today, the NPS has a Twitter account that it uses to sensitize the public allowing citizens

to follow the NPS for a regular update on security matters. Additionally, use of the media has also facilitated community policing and the promotion of road safety.

1.1 Problem Statement

Currently, the society depends heavily on technology to pass and processes information. Moreover, the modern day criminals use technology to perpetrate criminal activities. With the ubiquity of the Internet, an increased online usage and the spread of social network usage throughout all age groups, cybercrimes, such as bullying and cyber stalking have become increasingly common, especially among teenagers. As the ICT sector landscape evolves, Kenya has seen the shift of traditional crimes to digital crimes. Moreover, Kenya has witnessed communication services, which are being driven by the rise of social media, the Internet and other media services. Criminal and unethical activities are also shifting to online. Thus, with the aim of suggesting to the police department the best strategy to use to combat crime in Nairobi County - Kenya, the research study specifically sought to:

1. Assess the effects of print media on policing.
2. Analyze the effects of social media on policing.
3. Explore the effects of Internet on policing.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Crimes are evolving alongside technology; therefore, by highlighting the importance of incorporating the media as well as the Internet in policing activities, the study's findings if adopted will help security agencies adopt technologies that will facilitate better crime prevention efforts. The findings will also help the government come up with better policies about the use of the media to improve security for Kenyan with the added benefit of drawing up appropriate tools and strategies to safeguard the public. Additionally, the study will greatly benefit the community by fostering better relations with the police service and increased collaborations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research was based on the normative theory and is concerned with what the role of media is meant to be in society rather than what it does (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009). The normative theory is relevant to the study because it explains the role that the media has in the observance of the values in a given society. The media plays a significant role in informing the masses of the events and occurrences in the society locally, nationally and internationally.

Print media is widely used as a tool for crime prevention. Print media refers to newspapers, which media houses use to print information that may be vital in crime prevention. For instance, print media sources may be used to sensitize or warn the public against wanted criminals on the loose (Nyabunga, 2008). Print media is an important disseminator of knowledge because people can read at their own free time; hence, it is rare for vital information to go unnoticed.

Social media also plays a fundamental role in policing activities in Kenya. Social media is vital during emerging situations. During the terror attack in Westgate Mall, in Nairobi, the only source of information was through social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter (Were, 2013). The police service through its Twitter handle ensured that the citizens were well aware of the

situation. Online media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter promote community policing. Community policing refers to social responsibility in a particular community whereby the residents of a particular locality work in collaboration with the police to help curb crime. Community policing is effective because the residents in a particular community are in a better position of knowing what is happening in their locality. In this regard, the National Police Service advocates for the use of media platforms whereby community members can report any unlawful activities going on their locality (Ruteere, 2013).

Internet policing is on the rise in Kenya with the National Police service taking on the monitoring of the Internet with the aim of maintaining law and order. Some of the transgressions committed over the Internet include harassment, hate speech, abuse, and racism. Disseminating abusive content and graphic images is a crime, which the National Police Service in the country monitor and arrest the offenders. The use of these three media platforms has significantly improved security in the country. The National Police Service has taken the responsibility of ensuring that communities are safe through the media platform. The use of intelligence and tracking of criminal activities has helped the police to stop criminals. It shows that police officers in the country are keeping up with the trend of seeking information from media sources to aid their work (Atagana, 2013).

This relationship between the independent variables (print media, social media and the internet) and the dependent variable, policing is depicted by the conceptual framework.

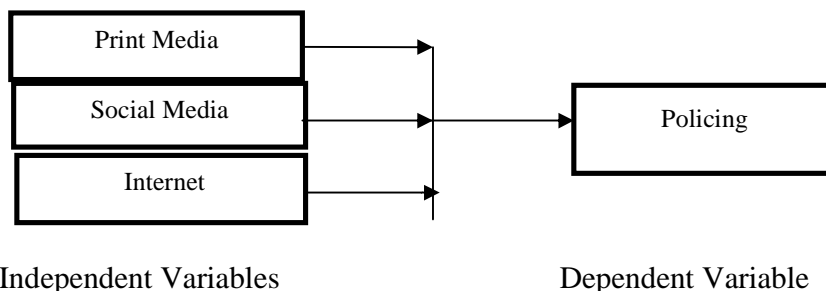


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Knowledge Gap

The scope of the use of the old media, new media and the Internet platforms by the Kenyan law enforcement to detect and prevent crime remains undefined. Additionally, the new media, particularly the social media is a new aspect that the law enforcement agencies is grasping to understand its' full potential as a tool for committing a crime as well as curbing crime. Therefore, the research study undertook to evaluate the way the adaptation of media and the Internet is influencing policing efforts in Kenya so as to identify opportunities and challenges in the fight against crime.

3. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive study design was adopted so as to draw out the characteristics and assess the phenomenon of the variables. A stratified sampling design was used to categorize the police officers into the Kenya Police Service, Administration Police, Traffic Department, and Criminal Investigation Department which all constitute the Nairobi Central Police Division. Data was obtained from 150 police officers using a semi-structured questionnaire. Consent was sought

from the participants before conducting the research and confidentiality of the collected data was ensured. Some of the data that were collected using the questionnaire included the type of media the police officers used, the frequency of use, what the media was used for, and the most preferred media among others. Completed questionnaires were then coded and entered into Microsoft Excel for analysis. Various statistics were computed, including measures of central tendency. Data were represented using graphs, pie charts, and tables.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The key findings from the study were social media were the commonly used media used by police officers in Kenya (Figure 2), but most officers used the media for personal purposes, including internment and keeping up-to-date with current affairs. Facebook and Twitter were the commonest media used by individual police.

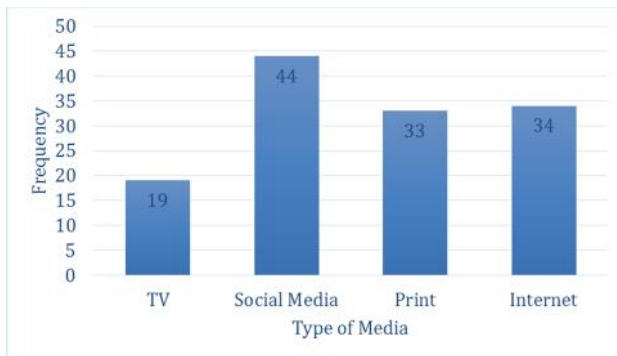


Figure 2: Various types of media used in duty stations

WhatsApp as the most preferred media of communication. The availability of the medium and the ease of use of the media were the commonest reasons police officers in Kenya used the media. As a result, most police officers in Kenya held that the media did not influence their policing efforts (Figure 3).

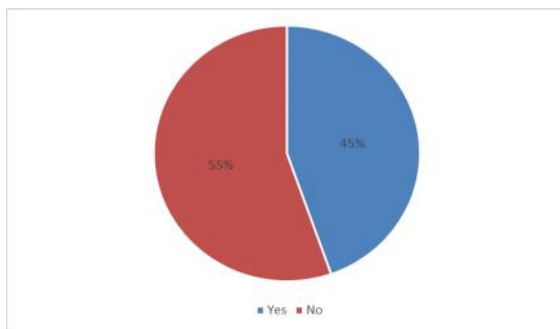


Figure 3: Views of officers on the influence of the media on policing efforts

The participants that held that the media influenced their policing efforts used the media to sensitize the public about the security issue. The media were identified as effective policing tool media with the participant that held this view considering that they reached the masses. The

response that the media did not influence Kenyan police officers policing efforts was reinforced by the findings that despite witnessing various forms of crime on the media, the officers did not act to avert the crimes or arrest the offenders. The majority of the police officers were of the opinion that the National Police Service needs to adopt a digital media communication strategy to boost the use of the media in policing efforts (Figure 4).

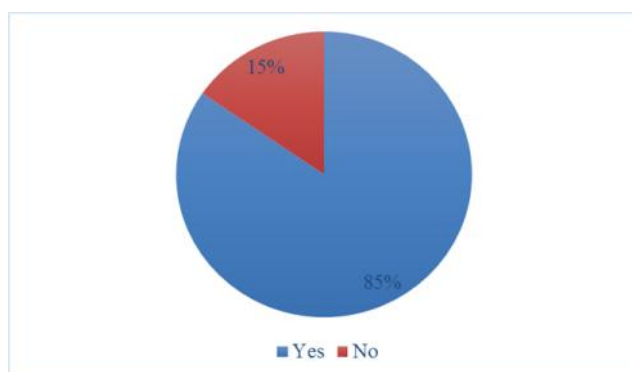


Figure 4: Thought on the Kenyan police force embracing the media in policing

Many of the officers in Kenya are on social media like Facebook, Twitters, and WhatsApp. The largest effect of social media on policing was towards community policing by sensitizing the public and assisting crime prevention efforts in Nairobi County. A review of the various social media platforms showed that the National Police Service has a Twitter handle, @PoliceKE, and a Facebook account. The current Inspector General of Police has a Twitter handle, @JBoinnet, that he use to sensitize the public and issue press statements. Other researches done to show that the law enforcement bodies in Kenya have adopted the use of social media in policing. Simon, et al. (2014) found out that during the Nairobi Wastage Mall, social media played a very important role in providing information to the public. The police and other security agencies mainly used social media (Twitter) to sensitive the public, give status updates, and other communications to the citizens. Most police officers asserted that social media are effective policing tools because they reach very many people and many people in Nairobi County are on social media and are easy to use. The position is supported by a study done in the U.K that showed that social media reinforce the existing means of police communication (Crump, 2011). The use of social media by the police is minimal as only a few participants said they used social media for policing activities. The challenge could be because of the constraints of the police culture, which have meant that official communication, can only come from the relevant agencies and authorizes. The study findings also showed that despite many officers being on social media and witnessing various wrongdoings, they rarely used the information from these media to apprehend wrongdoers. The reason might be the constraints of the police culture. The findings are supported by finding from research by Kumbuti (2013) that showed that Kenya police force hardly uses soft technologies that enable the strategic use of information to prevent crime. In Kenya, as noted from the findings, social media is not widely used due to poor technology penetration in rural areas, which requires some improvement. A comparison of the use of social media in policing in the United States shows a significant disparity. According to Noble (2015), a survey conducted in police departments in the United States showed that four of five police officers make use of social media in policing.

Most police departments in the world have embraced the use of this messaging tool, which facilitates interaction with members of the public. As noted, Facebook is the second most popular tool used in crime prevention by the police. The social media platform offers a large scope that can be used to monitor any criminal activities. There are Facebook pages that are used for reporting a crime; hence, enabling the police to follow up useful leads. It is a form of community policing that is quite prominent around the world due to its ease of use. Broussard (2015) observed that police officers around the world are taking up this social media platform to curb crime. In Kenya, advancement in the Internet connectivity has led to a considerable number of crimes being conducted over internet platforms. Fatih and Bekir (2015) observed that most police departments in the world are adopting new technologies that rely on the internet used to help them in fighting crime. Garicano and Heaton (2010) in their study found out that the use of information technology especially the internet improves police productivity.

5. CONCLUSION

In Kenya, it is quite evident that the police rely too much on traditional methods or approaches to fighting crime. Currently, there are improvements in technology, which the police force should adopt to help them in curbing criminal activities. It is necessary for the police to embrace these new technologies because many criminal activities are occurring over technological platforms for these platforms increase effectiveness and efficiency in fighting crime.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDY

6.1 Recommendations

The research study recommends that:

1. The police department should shift its reliance on television news, newspapers, and radio and fully embrace the social media. Social media platforms are easy to use and they operate in real time. Additionally, the information found on social media platforms is difficult to find elsewhere. Therefore, it is necessary to educate police officers in the country on appropriate uses of social media in crime prevention. The training and education on the use of social media entail the application of analytics, which can be used to detect and prevent criminal activities. There are a number of police officers using social media platforms such as Twitter to improve communication with the immediate communities. For instance, information obtained from the public can be used to compliment a particular investigation: thus, solving a crime.
2. Establish partnerships with the community so as for at a low-cost approach but effective way that can be taken up by the police department instead of sending out investigating teams under the budget of the police department. Training of the police in finding hidden messages conveyed through social media is also important for the purpose of uncovering criminal activities. One approach that can be used is training the police of advanced analytics. Text language used in social media is quite different from that of spoken language; hence, the police should have the ability to decipher the intended meaning. An analysis of social networks may also be used to identify criminal networks as well as gangs.
3. Training on ontology management may also be used whereby the relationship between different words is established. Such analytic technologies are used to improve the efficiency in policing over social media because social media platforms represent a new frontier for fighting crime. The police in Kenya should embrace the use of social media

platforms to further policing in the country. It is the current trend around the world because more and more police departments around the world are making use of this vital tool.

4. Concerning print media source, it would be beneficial for the police to collaborate with the journalist to facilitate a better approach for fighting crime. Currently, print media sources such as newspapers are not widely used by the police due to the poor understanding with the journalist. There needs to be an increased number of reporting opportunities for criminals of the newspaper because such news can remain in the public sphere for quite some time.

The above four recommendations can only be implemented if the Kenyan government can not only play a supportive role, but also develop media strategies for promoting better policing efforts.

6.2 Suggestion for Further Study

There is the need for design and implementation of a common reporting template or database upon which the security players can update data in real time from various locations on wanted persons and vehicles, recovered vehicles and assets as well as arrested suspected criminals for the other partners to be aware of the progress made in policing the Country. The developed standardize police records will ease co-operation and data change between different policing agencies as well as the Interpol.

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