



Social & News Media's Effects on Law Enforcement

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Abstract

This investigation indicates that social and news media's fake news threatens law enforcement officers. Law enforcement is experiencing escalations in resisting arrest, physical assaults, and murders by subjects targeting the police. These increases in criminal behaviors have law enforcement de-policing within the communities, and the catalysts are social and news media's false reports that all police officers are racist. A content analysis was used to investigate the literature on social and news media's effect on law enforcement and criminal behavior. The data focused on articles in peer-reviewed journals, published research articles, and social and news media reports. The results are societies perceptions are influenced by false statements (fake news) by social and news media outlets. Individuals who react to fake news use threats of violence, commit assault, or murder police officers. In return, law enforcement's workplace environment becomes more dangerous causing de-policing as criminal behavior increases as well as more violence.

Keywords: Social media; Law enforcement; Fake news; Murders of police officers; Racism

Introduction

Violent crime rates in the United States are escalating as law enforcement is de-policing (Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Several cases involving law enforcement officers shooting of black males afford the media opportunities to report the facts. However, this study investigates false narratives of these crisis events by the media leading to numerous protests as well as increases in violence that are negatively affecting law enforcement. Police officer's shootings of African Americans since 2014 have challenged the legitimacy of law enforcement (Wolfe & Nix, 2016).

When crisis situations such as the Michael Brown case in Ferguson, Missouri, a falsified report of "hands up don't shoot" are amplified by social and news media inciting citizens to overreact with violence toward their communities by stimulating comments of "burn this mother fucker down" and targeting of police officers throughout America. Individuals and groups use social and news media to stream movies, media platforms, and the news on current events (Thongjeen & Wormeli, 2017). Social and news media outlets such as CNN, Fox News, Facebook, and Twitter have platforms where news and people post information on current events. Citizens are increasing the use and adoption of the social and news media to participate in events as never before [1]. "Little is known, however, about the dynamics of the life cycle of a social

media rumor" (Zubiaga, Liakata, Procter, Wong Sak, & Tolmie, 2016).

As media outlets occupy people with reports of events, there is evidence of increasing criminal behavior, lack of personal responsibilities, and tolerance towards others. These false reports are triggering more individuals and groups to commit criminal behavior targeting law enforcement. Targeting of law enforcement consists of increased resisting arrest, assaults using bottles and rocks, to murder by assassination. Of the last ten years 1,512 law enforcement officers have died, an average of one death every 63 hours or 151 deaths per year in the line of duty (National Law Enforcement Officer Memorial Fund, 2017). These reports have correlated to on-line outcries and revenge attacks on police officers (MacDonald, 2016). Data collected from the FBI reports 86 Officers killed, and 50, 212 officers assaulted in the line of duty in 2015 [2].

Targeting of police officers is just one part of the phenomenon. Social and news media false reports affect officers as well as criminal behavior. "Violent crimes are increasing as criminals reassert themselves due to the Ferguson effect and de-policing of law enforcement (MacDonald, 2016). MacDonald (2016) states, "de-policing and crime in the wake of Ferguson: Racialized changes in the quantity and quality of policing among Missouri police

departments.” Instead of racial profiling citizens, police officers are the ones targeted. Before the Ferguson effect homicides were at a twenty-two-year low. Homicides spiked nationally 17 percent across 50 of the most significant cities in 2015. Furthermore, larger cities had a 12 percent increase in homicides and cities of less than ten thousand in populations had an increase of 7 percent.

Murders of police officers also increased to 135 in 2016 due to reports of officer’s shootings of Black males. (Shjarback, Pyrooz, Wolfe, & Decker, 2017). Americans already distrust government as the media provides 24 hours a day coverage focusing on crisis events where citizens become emotional lashing out through protest or worse, more violence. The media continue speculation on the numbers of casualties, their injuries, and types of weapons used during these events. The false news further damages trust, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors of individuals and groups among our communities (Green & Clark, 2013). For example, the individuals who protested for days destroying their community over the Michael Brown case in Ferguson, Missouri found the reports by the social and news media were false (MacDonald, 2016).

Recently, a considerable number of protests turned violent injuring participants, vandalized city blocks, looting of businesses, and burned down buildings within the communities [3]. Social and news media outlets no longer report unbiased news. Media’s false narratives of events not only increased distrust but also are increasing the criminal behavior (MacDonald, 2016). Media reporting of news stories based on ratings; therefore, reports of events are quickly published without fact checking, nor providing the reference to have a higher emotional impact on the potential audience [4]. Examples range from a police officer involved shootings of a black male, hate crimes involving homosexuality, or reports of a political leader accused of sexual assault [5]. Social and news media report speculation on events and citizens believe every word to be right. “Much of what we know and think we know comes not from personal experience but from the stories we hear” (Dirikx & Bulck, 2014). One of the main challenges is individuals act out against those falsely accused by the media’s untrue reports.

There is evidence that supports media’s false reporting increases individual’s negative attitudes as well as actions toward law enforcement across America. Police officers are among those being falsely targeted, attacked, and killed by individuals as well as groups acting out based on media reports. July 2016 an individual ambushed the Dallas Police Department killing five officers and injuring nine. The motive of the assassinations correlated with crisis events reported by the media of police officer-involved shootings of black males. Police officer’s jobs are to protect and serve to provide for safer communities, and yet they are the ones needing protection. (MacDonald, 2016).

For this study, action research was used to investigate a social phenomenon, consults with stakeholders input on the situation, and implement positive change. This study addresses two questions:

1. How does social and news media false reporting of events affect law enforcement?

2. How does social and news media false reporting of events affect criminal behaviors?

The purpose for this study is to conduct action research to gather a greater understanding of the phenomenon of how social and news media’s fake news effect law enforcement to offer solutions reducing false reporting by the media, decrease criminal behavior, and decrease the dangers law enforcement are facing every day.

Method

Literature investigation process

Literature for this research obtained by searching the Angelo State University Library, Google Scholar, Goolge.com, and PEW Research Center databases. Review for literature completed searching articles published since 2013. The year 2013 is correlated to the current trend of increased violence toward police officers as social and news media outlets report false narratives. The focused of this research was uncovering articles on social and news media’s reporting of fake news and its effect on law enforcement. The author will not focus on social media posts written by the general public.

That topic will be another article published in the future. This study investigates outlets for social and news media reporting of events in order to analyze, how people reacted after receiving false narratives toward the law enforcement as well as criminal behavior. Relevant keyword search for this study includes social influences, news influences, media influences, effects on law enforcement, fake news, and false reporting. Social media’s impact on criminal behavior as well as police officer shootings websites (Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, Instagram) provides information to this study. The preliminary search for articles totaled 1,084. Two hundred and eleven articles have relevance to social and news media in society. Much uncertainty is still apparent on social and news media’s effect on law enforcement as well as criminal behavior. Gaps were apparent in most of the literature over social and news media’s false narratives and how they affect law enforcement. The literature consisted of 211 articles on research topics ranging from; individuals using the Internet determining guilt or innocence behind the keyboard, On-line gossiping of famous actors and actresses, and social media outlets such as Twitter used during major disasters.

Media’s actions must be investigated to understand the scope of reporting fake news and the damage that occurs to law enforcement. Social and news media outlets surpass fact-checking the legitimacy of reports to be first (Andrews, Fichet, Ding, Spiro, & Starbird, 2016). Reporting first on significant news stories produces ratings. Technology advancements in mobile devices virtually allow anyone to report the news through social media platforms. Podcast, YouTubers, Facebook personalities or other social media platforms bring society information non-stop.

The virtual media environment continues changing the way Americans learn about the news. Social and news media outlets have complicated reporting the news as they try to stay in control

of what people hear, see, or listen to around the world. This study used a critical action research methodology to investigate, gain greater understanding, and to provide solutions to decrease fake news, violence and to save lives.

Literature analysis

Previous criminological studies used both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide more significant knowledge on social and news media. Narrowing down of articles relevant provided literature over the following themes; perceptions of the community, how media frames an event and comparing Twitter to mass media watched on television when disasters strike. The quantitative methods provide numerical data to analyze causation of crime as well as make predictions of behaviors using social media, and the qualitative research provided insight on methods and data strategies to use on social media, but the literature review did not justify the gap on how fake news affects law enforcement. "Regardless of the size of the dataset or the number of variables contained within it, quantitative data can only represent abstractions from complex interactions, and as Bottomley and Pease (1986) remind us, 'we should not allow statistics to make us forget the people behind the numbers'"(Wincup, 2017).

Framing news reports

Fragmenting factual evidence on events such as a police officer shooting of a black male by the media increases criminal behavior and violence [6]. Framing signifies the approach social and news media use to report events. When the media frames the facts falsely on an event the law enforcement officers are targeted with threats of violence, assault, and murdered. The media mediates their reports controlling the narrative of events. The public consumes the news reports as truthful information. Researchers Tool & Fondacaro (2017) state, "the media depicts young offenders as subhuman" for the community to understand juvenile criminal behaviors. The framing of juveniles in this event negatively labels them. Tool & Fondacaro (2017) state, "Journalist, are beginning to engage in conversations about their contribution to American crime culture." The media knowingly and intentionally reports fake news allowing the dehumanizing of juveniles, misrepresenting facts, and increasing criminal behavior as well as targeting of police officers. However, we still need to understand why. Another research study was on 12-year-old boy Tamir Rice who was shot and killed by police and framing by the media was crucial on how society reacted [4]. Where does the media place blame when police shoot a 12-year-old boy playing with a toy gun? Social and news media framing of reports blamed the police officers that deployed the use of force without knowing the facts.

Stone R, Socii KM [4] states, scholars have identified stereotypical frames used for news to promote general hostility toward African Americans". Stone & Socia go on saying the stereotypical response occurs to fulfill the audience expectations and reinforce negative stereotypes [4]. The social and news media framing of facts to satisfy the stereotypical expectations of the audience could be a manipulation of the truth as well as a violation of the law.

Twitter post disasters

Research on social and news media has provided platforms for individuals to communicate during disasters. Subjects could post information on weather conditions, devastation, number of injuries, and other medical conditions. Researchers Huang, Starbird, Orand, Stanek, & Pedersen (2015) states, "Widespread adoption of social media has enabled members of the public to participate in disaster events as never before." Investigating individuals' use of social and news media during disasters provides information in real time for those in authority to respond. The reliability to analyze the data was a key variable with social media users.

Gathering data during a live disaster to respond to emergency services relies on the validity of the person sending the information. Numerous research studies have investigated the use of Twitter during disasters, elections, sporting events, and cases involving police officer shootings of black males. The research on the use of Twitter identifies the quickness people cluster, use of hashtags #'s, and themes versus specific current events. Twitter leads media platforms for individuals engaging on-line when events occur (Smith, Rainie, Himelboim, Shneiderman, 2014). Barthel, Mitchell, & Holcomb (2016) research shows 71% of Americans have witnessed fake news reports online such as Twitter, and 100% of the individuals stated they shared the fake news. [7].

Individuals and groups believe what the media reports causing further distrust as well as criminal behavior toward law enforcement. After reviewing the literature, there is still a gap of knowledge on the effects of fake news on police officers. False reports by the media and its effects on law enforcement warranted a qualitative study. Action research method was used to understand how social and news media's fake news affects law enforcement, criminal behavior, and to create potential solutions saving lives while decreasing crime.

Results

Participation in social and news media in America consist of over 320 million users [8]. The criminal justice system can no longer ignore social and news media outlets as 56 % of the U.S. population carries a video-enabled smartphone, and 65% of those are adults using the mobile devices to get their news [8]. Misinformation is a regular occurrence based on the fast-paced environment of news reporting process. Although information on social media was repeatedly unverified, the social and news media outlets are trying to report stories across the world for ratings. Nonwhites and the less educated increasingly say they get news on social media by 74% [9]. Fake news from social and news media causes confusion and anger on the basic facts on events.

Although 32% of people think social and news media is made up, 84% of them are confident in their abilities to recognize fabricated news [9]. "Americans are much more likely to see posts related to race or race relations than they are to personally post or share race-related content" [10]. Blacks account for 13.3% or 43,320,000 of the 325, 719,178 in population in the United States population

as of July 2017. Researching social media comparing whites, and Blacks; 28% of Blacks social media users state, most or some of what they post is about race or race relations and 8% of whites say the same. Interestingly, there are over 500 million tweets each day, and 0.04% mention race, but the news media reports as if 99% of America reacted to a crisis on race [10]. Comparing Twitter posting to the television news outlets generates the headlines deciding what events reported, and how that event framed for consumption.

In the Michael Brown case in Ferguson, Missouri; a friend of Brown's gave an interview stating Brown's hands were up, and the officer shot Brown. Reaction to Twitter was a spike in tweets to over three point five million tweets, but the television news outlet only reported the event an average of 98 minutes in the same 24-hour time [11]. On-line social and news media platforms are taking the lead compared to the news on the TV. Law enforcement agencies in America do not have the resources to police the Internet at a local, state, or federal levels. As social and news media outlets increase demand and technology so does the dangers.

Researchers Stone & Socia [4] state, "members of the Online News Association found that members concerned that the growth in the online news was threatening to the fundamental values of journalism, citing loosening journalist standards, declining accuracy, and increased emphasis on speed." Internet sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, or YouTube provide global platforms for individuals to a network as they consume information that is open source. When social and news media sites report events such as a police officer involved shooting, they lack checks and balances and at times report fake news (MacDonald, 2016). Social and news media current trend of growing online also provides implications for the ability to report more events, but less follow up stories. The lack of follow up stories in the news decreases for facts to verified or corrections to be published [4].

Outrage from the community many times begins with social media. The fake news in the Michael Brown case with "Hands Up Don't Shoot" was a total falsified report. Social and news media quickly ran with that portion of the story focusing on a young black male unarmed was shot to death by a racist police officer even when Brown had his hands in the air. However, that was not factual, and after a federal investigation, several witnesses stated that Brown did not listen to the officer and continue to act violently. The falsified report of Brown's hands was up and saying don't shoot lead to massive protest as well as riots broke out in Ferguson, over 25 buildings burned, over 150 shots fired by rioters, patrol cars burned completely, 13 individuals injured, 80 individuals arrested, and one fatality. That is not the complete story. Michael Brown protests turned violent across the country from Los Angeles to New York all from one falsified report. (Hitlin & Vogt, 2017).

Targeting of Cops

Fake news reports on events resembling police officer shooting of black male subjects by social and news media are escalating tensions as well as reactions by the public. Media's false narratives have affected targeting of police officers by increasing the number

of attacks, and the number of ambushes killing officers. After the media publishes the fake news; individuals respond using Twitter with negative comments, or threats of violence. As the falsified reports spread people begin to act first through social media campaigns with hashtags, then participate in "death in's" lying face down in the street and protesting blocking police stations. As tensions continued to rise so did the use of the social and news media reporting of speculation.

Citizens believe the fake news is sowing confusion as events occur (Barthel, Mitchell, & Holcomb, 2016). August 9th, 2014 police officer Darren Wilson shot Michael Brown in Ferguson Missouri that triggered tensions and protests within the community. Social and news media reported false facts and witnesses' accounts. The abuse of reporting fake news by the media turned a protest into violent riots and looting. The riots turned into terroristic acts when rioters began burning of buildings within the community to attain political goals through instilling fear. The acts of terrorism were said to justify the shooting of a black male by police. Social and news media were used to escalate the tensions as well as the reaction of the public. As social and news media continue reporting false narratives criminal behaviors will continue to increase.

Individuals among American society retaliate against others where the media places the blame. FBI released a statement warning people making threatening comments using social and news media "to watch those social media post or face the consequences" [12]. The FBI gathers data on police officers killed in the line of duty. The data over targeting police officers steadily increased from 5 officers ambushed in 2013 to 21 officers ambushed in 2016. The FBI data goes on giving unprovoked killing of officers in 2013 was 0, and in 2015 there were seven officers unprovoked but were murdered. Comparing data between the shootings, committed by either police or by subjects, there are more deaths by police officers committing the act.

However, to understand the data we must look at the totality of the facts. Each year the law enforcement community has over 50,000 on duty officers physical assaulted. October 2016, 57,180 police officers were victims of the line-of-duty assaults (FBI, 2017). Since 2014 FBI has documented 40 ambush cases of police officers murdered (Hjelmgaard, 2016). In 2016; 21 ambush-style attacks occurred, and 20 of them ensued in November. Conducting an examination of social and news media around the time when a police officer killed, there had been racially charged events that lead to the targeting of the officers. Cases involving police officers ambushed:

- 1) Douglas County Sheriff's Office one officer killed & 4 injured Dec 2017.
- 2) Dallas Police 5 officers killed & 9 injured in July 2017.
- 3) Des Moines Police 2 officers killed November 2016.
- 4) New York Police 2 officers killed December 2014.
- 5) Las Vegas Police 1 officer shot November 2015.

6) Ferguson Police Department 2 officers shot March 2015.

As social and news media continues reporting false narratives violence toward law enforcement continues to climb [13]. As individuals use their devices non-stop, they become cyber-intolerant targeting others accused. Fake news reports are used for political and business agendas as well as justification for individuals who commit criminal behaviors. There are more questions than answers when researching fake news reports in the media.

Discussion & Conclusion

Law enforcement officers are serving across America under enormous pressure to maintain peace while protecting the law. Peace Officer's lives are in increased dangers as individuals' make threats or attacks increases. Social and news media outlets use platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat to inform the people of current news as it occurs. That same media falsely reports information speculating on what is right while racing to be first in reporting current events as they unfold. The media fails, in fact, check information continuing to release fake news for individuals to consume, and the media does not care how people react toward those wrongfully accused.

Once the falsified information is released people react by posting negative comments on socials and news media platforms, make threats, protest, and attack causing injuries to murder. The media rarely remedies fake news when facts are finally apparent. The research literature continues to give evidence on why mass media reports false narratives. The evidence points to the social and news media outlet's agendas are creating the rating, therefore; the media caters to the demographics [4]. Either way, when we analyze the fake news from social and news media, we must hold them accountable for the damage that occurs. False reported information is a crime, and fake news causes individuals and groups to react in negative ways increasing criminal behaviors.

As the nature and volume of crimes evolves, the criminal justice system must advance their abilities in cyber intelligence. Forensic criminology of today's society with advances in technology the criminal justice system lacks the resources and funding. The criminal justice system needs resources including people, training, and equipment to fight back the abilities of social and news media outlets to manipulate the facts of the events. Over 5 million tweets posted of comments as well as information on the shooting of Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson. The Ferguson Police Department could not have the ability to investigate the Twitter data on the case. Individuals connected by tweeting each other on Twitter about where and when to protest, riot, or loot, and yet law enforcement did not have any idea this was occurring.

At this time there is no way to monitor all activities on social and news media observing reactions posted by individuals who post. The criminal justice system needs as up-to-date as possible the resources equipped mentally and physically. Repetition develops efficiency and police officers are a part of authority as well as first responders that need this training the most. Force on force will

not remedy the issues between law enforcement and the people. Building communication communities could begin the healing of the division of our society.

Communication communities are defined as people of the community take ownership within their community working with local government, as well as law enforcement to become better stewards of society. The government, law enforcement, and other organizations would bond together with all people in the community creating a partnership. This partnership would spread out personal and professional responsibilities starting with communicating with each other of needs, wants, and future outcomes.

One component in creating the communication communities would be to educate citizens on falsified reports and how responding negatively damages themselves by potentially breaking the law, or causing riots destroying their own communities. Expectations, as well as the rule of law, need to be clear on how each partner will act. Citizens and media outlets should both demand accountability for the reporting of falsified information. Individuals or media who falsify a report or target police officers will be dealt with swiftly and harshly. The Criminal Justice System must be held accountable as well, as they are the authority serving and protecting citizens in American.

There is a culture within the social and news media organizations, government agencies, political parties, groups, and individuals that are underneath dishonesty of justice as they continue to report the fake news. In recent past, America's last presidents used fake news to bend the blame to win reelection in 2012. Most recently the 2016 Presidential Elections had enormous amounts of fake news trying to change voting outcomes. When social and news media stories are fake people, accept the information as fact. At the same time, individuals, as well as groups that usually marginalized, are no longer. Social and news media platforms have opened the door for social change to occur by those marginalized. One marginalized person could use a hashtag #, comment, post, video, or a picture that could change the world.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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