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SSHA 2024 paper proposal

### “Following the Police: How English Police Fight Crime on Social Media”

In the age of social media, policing by consent means that police forces need to interact with the public where the public spends its time. Police appeals for information is an old practice, including posting notices and radio alerts. As communication technology changes, so do police practices. Police can use social media to get information out and the public can share this information quickly with others. This paper explores how police forces use various social media platforms to help fight crime. Common appeals include asking for witnesses to road accidents and to crimes, asking for help identifying criminal offenders (often holding up shops) and for help identifying recovered stolen or lost property. They also ask for help to find lost children, missing teens, and lost adults. Police forces post follow-ups, so that the public knows how the story turned out and that they helped solve a crime or find a lost person. The police also use social media to keep the public updated on developing situations, such as disturbances, riots, and extreme weather. For example, during unrest in East Leicester in 2022 between Hindus and Muslims, the Leicestershire Police continuously gave updates and status reports, using of Twitter and Facebook to get information out quickly. They used a combination of official statements, videos from senior officers on the scene, and detailed updates. They explicitly responded to rumors spreading on social media about the unrest, in an attempt to deescalate tensions. This paper explores what is perhaps the most effective police use of social media – providing and receiving information on criminal activity and public safety.

This paper is part of a larger study that explores how English police authorities use social media as part of their public order and public relations practices. It places current practices into their historical contexts, linking how social media is used now with how police authorities have used media (newspapers, radio, television) in the past.