

**GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM**

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF GHANA POLICE SERVICE**

**BY**

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## **DECLARATION**

I, Isaac Aboagye, do hereby declare that this work is the result of my own research and has not been presented by anyone for any academic award in this or any other Universitys. All references used in the work have been fully acknowledged.

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Date

## **CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this long essay proposal was supervised in accordance with procedures laid down by the Institute.

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Dr Ebo Afful  
**(Supervisor)**

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Date

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <b>BLM</b>  | Black Lives Matter                      |
| <b>CID</b>  | Criminal Investigations Department      |
| <b>CSI</b>  | Crime Scene Investigation               |
| <b>MTTD</b> | Motor Traffic and Transport Directorate |
| <b>PAD</b>  | Public Affairs Directorate              |
| <b>PR</b>   | Public Relation                         |
| <b>UGC</b>  | User-Generated Content                  |

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Research Background**

Citizens interact with the police either directly (i.e., face-to-face) or indirectly regularly (Mazerolle and Terrill, 2018). However, each citizen perceives these interactions differently. Whereas some may perceive the police as trustworthy and competent to protect them (Simpson, 2017), others view the police with scepticism about the officers' motives and/or abilities to realize their duties in either a legal or a publicly acceptable manner (Bankoson, Chaiyooatham and Ayudhya, 2018). Securing public confidence in the police is an important challenge for Police management (Albrecht, 2019). Not only is public support fundamental to the legitimacy of the police, but it is also important for enlisting the public in efforts to reduce crime (Hamm, Trinkner, and Carr, 2017). Negative perception could engender a lack of trust which can have dire consequences such as citizens not reporting crimes or asking the police for help (Tyler and Wakslak, 2004). This is important because citizens failing to seek assistance from the police prevents the police from successfully executing their mandate which includes: solving and preventing crime as well as maintaining law and order in communities (Kappeler and Schaefer, 2018).

There are many possible influences on public opinion regarding law enforcement agencies (Callanan, and Rosenberger, 2011; Nix and Wolfe, 2017). One of these possible influences is indirect police-public contacts (Lim, 2015). It seems possible that police behaviour in routine encounters could affect community opinions of the police through a ripple effect, as persons who have encounters with the police retell their stories to families, friends, and neighbours (Schuck, Rosenbaum and Hawkins, 2008). There is also traditional media reportage on radio, newspapers and televisions (Miller and Davis, 2008). Indeed, traditional media coverage of negative police-public interactions, tend to amplify and disproportionately impact more people

than the positive interactions (Intravia, Wolff, and Piquero, 2018). Finally, there is the possible influence of social media which combines the experiences digitalized media, bloggers and opinions of people within one's social circle online (Denef, Bayerl, and Kaptein, 2013).

The promise that social media platforms hold for policing and law enforcement duties is increasingly being recognized globally (Bartlett, Miller, Crump, and Middleton, 2013; Davis, Alves, and Sklansky, 2014). Although technology has always been an integral component of police operations and strategies (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer, 2015), social media tools constitute a group of information and communication technology (ICT) resource that has recently been impacting law enforcement practice in many countries (Van De Velde, Meijer, and Homburg, 2015). Social media, however, is a double-edged sword with the ability to empower the police and the potential for misinformation and negative review which can diminish public opinion (Bergquist *et al.*, 2015).

The ripple effect of social media is vast and unending with the potential to significantly damage police reputation in the age of fake news and cyberattacks (Ireton and Posetti, 2018). While this notion seems plausible it has received limited attention in academic literature. This long essay seeks to unearth the potential of social media to impact public opinion of the Ghana Police Service.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

Social media use by the police and law enforcement agencies is still budding with limited scholarly attention (Cohen, 2018). Ghana police service, for instance, launched its website and social media channels recently in February 2018 (Ghana Police, 2018). Although there is increasing national discourse on the role of social media in law enforcement extant research

tend to focus on the determinants of social media use in law enforcement (Weitzer and Tuch, 2005), challenges with police social media adoption (Dekker, Van den Brink, and Meijer, 2020), or impact of social media on policing (Denef, Bayerl and Kaptein, 2013). Also, many researchers have focused on the influence of citizens' direct contacts with police (Hinds, 2009; Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2005) they have not systematically explored the possible influences of social media on public opinion. Hence this study seeks to fill this knowledge gap.

Worthy to note that, much of the available literature, although mostly informal or journalistic, has suggested that social media has tremendous potential in modern-day policing. However, most of these studies tend to focus on the developed economies such as the United States (Ince, Rojas and Davis, 2017; Miller, 2005), United Kingdom (Awan, Brookes, Powell, and Stanwell, 2019) and Australia (Ellis and McGovern, 2016). For instance, Ince, Rojas, and Davis, (2017) in their paper focuses on the social media presence of Black Lives Matter (BLM). Specifically, they examine how social media users interact with BLM by using hashtags and thus modify the framing of the movement which originated from USA police brutality. The authors illustrated this notion with an analysis of 66,159 tweets that mention #BlackLivesMatter, #BLMUSA among others in 2014. Again, a study by Miller (2005) reports on the outcome of a pilot study that used time-series data to examine both the indirect effects on community opinion of police-public contacts as citizens recount their experiences to friends and family and the effects of negative news coverage of the police on public opinion. Developing countries like Ghana, have received little attention with regards to the impact on social media on public opinion of the police. Therefore, based on the gaps identified this study will examine for the Ghanaian developing economy context the influence of social media on the public perception of the police in Ghana.

### **1.3 Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of social media on the public perception of the police in Ghana.

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

1. Explore particular social media platforms that give more coverage to the Ghana Police Service.
2. Examine the tone of coverage of the Ghana Police Service.
3. Discuss the attitude of the public towards the Ghana Police Service.

### **1.5 Scope of Research**

This research will be conducted in Accra, the capital city of the Republic of Ghana. The setting is deemed ideal by the researcher due to the high diversity across the city with people from the different demographic background. The research will focus on the general populace in Accra who utilises various social media services as well as opinion leaders in the region. This scope is feasible for the author due to the ease of access to respondents for data collection given time and resource constraints.

### **1.6 Significance of The Study**

This study holds some significance to research, practice and policy. For research, the study strives to go beyond existing police sentiments literature that is largely focused on developed economies to consider developing economy context. This research further contributes to arguably limited literature in the area of technology adoption and its impact on police perception.

Although social media usage is widespread in Ghana, the police involvement is very novel, this research is pegged to be constructive to the Ghana police service on how to leverage social media platforms to not only inform the public but to debunk negative remarks on their operations and improve their reputation as law enforcers. Therefore, as a contribution to practice, this study will inform other state institutions considering the adoption of social media on how to design their processes to improve stakeholder trust and positive perceptions.

For policy, the study will provide decision-makers, government and other stakeholders with additional information to enable them to develop the appropriate social media policies, towards advancing trustworthy and positive sentiment for the Ghana Police service.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Social Media**

The term social media as defined by Dewing (2010) refers to a wide range of internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content, or join online communities. Taprial and Kanwar (2012) further explain that ‘social media’ could be in the form of Social Networking Sites (Facebook, Friendster, Google plus), Blogs, Internet Forums, Bookmarking Sites, Online Community Sites and QandA Sites. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) in an attempt to advance Dewing’s definition, developed their working definition of social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (UGC).

Social media Content must meet three basic requirements to qualify as UGC: (1) It must be published to all Web users or to a select group (which might exclude emails or instant messages); (2) It should demonstrate some creative effort and not simply replicate the work of another; (3) It must be created outside of professional routines and practices and not for a commercial market.

##### **2.1.1 Benefits of Social Media**

Benefits in terms of social media are defined as providing advantages through social media usage that promote and enhance well-being. This study through the literature review considers benefits in terms of social connectivity, social involvement, information attainment, and entertainment.

**Social connectivity:** The evolution of these new Internet media has become an important means of maintaining work and social connections in everyday life, crossing the social worlds of work, home, and geography (Haythornthwaite, 2005). Due to this benefit, people use social media as a medium to meet old friends, maintain relationships, or even meet new friends, strengthening overall social connectivity among social media users.

**Information attainment:** Information attainment in the social media context is defined as the act of attaining and finding interesting and unique information easily on social media (Khan, Swar and Lee, 2014). This interesting and unique information can also be shared among social media users. Information attainment helps to build multiple weak ties, which reduces social costs and extends the pool of information searching and enhances trust among people (Shu and Chuang, 2011).

**Entertainment:** Entertainment is defined as the act of providing amusement, enjoyment, fun, and relaxation (Wirth, Hofer, and Schramm, 2012). Entertainment in the virtual community can be derived through playing or interacting with others (Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo, 2004). Whitty and McLaughlin (2007) reveal three forms of online entertainment using the Internet (a) computer-based entertainment, (b) to facilitate offline entertainment, and (c) to obtain information about the entertainment world (Whitty and McLaughlin, 2007). All these forms of entertainment are well supported by social media.

### **2.1.2 Risk of Social Media**

Risk is defined as a “combination of uncertainty plus seriousness of outcome involved” (Bauer, 1967, p. 23), and according to Featherman and Pavlou (2003) risk is defined as a common thought of uncertain feeling regarding the possible negative consequences of using a

product or service. This study specifically focuses on the risks factors that apply to social media.

**Time risk:** Social media possess a wide variety of addictive activities toward which people tend to engage and devote considerable time (Khan, Swar and Lee, 2014). This is potentially a concern in workplaces causing employees to be unproductive in their work. According to research released by Ipsos (2013), social network users spend on average 3.6 hr per day socializing online (Ipsos, 2013). The uses of social media that can cause a lack of productivity in the workplace can be considered a waste of time. This tends to influence negatively the satisfaction level of social media usage.

**Psychological risk:** Featherman and Pavlou (2003, p. 455) cite Mitchell's (1992) psychological risk as, "the risk that the selection or performance of the producer will impact negatively on consumers' peace of mind or self-perception." In the context of social media, psychological risk can be defined as the concern or uncertainty by a user of social media that the usage of social media results in loss of self-esteem contributing to a negative effect on feelings and peace of mind.

**Social risk:** Social risk is defined as "a potential loss of one's social group as a result of adopting or using service in social media, looking foolish or untrendy" (Featherman and Pavlou, 2003, p. 455). According to Go *et al.* (2011), social media users are viewed as having an individualistic character pending more time interacting online than meeting people face to face. This kind of behaviour by social media users might lead to them losing out socially.

**Privacy risk:** Privacy is defined as “the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how and to what extent information about them is communicated to others”(Westin, 1967, p. 7). Privacy risk can be defined as a “potential loss of control over personal information, such as when information about you is used without your knowledge or permission” (Featherman and Pavlou, 2003, p.455). Privacy risk in the social media context is associated with identity fraud and the disclosure of personal data of users by social media platforms to third parties (i.e., information privacy) of the social media users (Acquisti and Gross, 2006; Young and Quan Haase, 2009).

## **2.2 The Use of Social Media in Ghana**

In a survey conducted by Cliqfrica (2017) on the use of the internet and social media, it was reported that there are currently over 3,424,971,237 internet users globally, with an internet penetration of about 46% of the global population, a growth difference of three per cent (3%) from 2015. Facebook was recorded as the largest and most active social media channel with a user base of 1.79 billion and 1.09 active users on mobile. The trend showed that one to two (1-2) out of three (3) persons found online was using Facebook probably using mobile to access. It was also reported that the trend is not different in Ghana because, the 7,958,675 of the populations can be found online (28.4%), ranking the country the 47th highest in internet user base, closely following that of the United Arab Emirates in the global internet user base ranking.

This goes to confirm the fact that the community has now moved on to the cyberspace. Kemp (2017) posits that the entire world records 18 new social media users every second. This implies that more than 100 new users are likely to sign up to mobile social media in the next one minute of which Ghanaians are no exemption. Concerning this, one can emphatically say that law

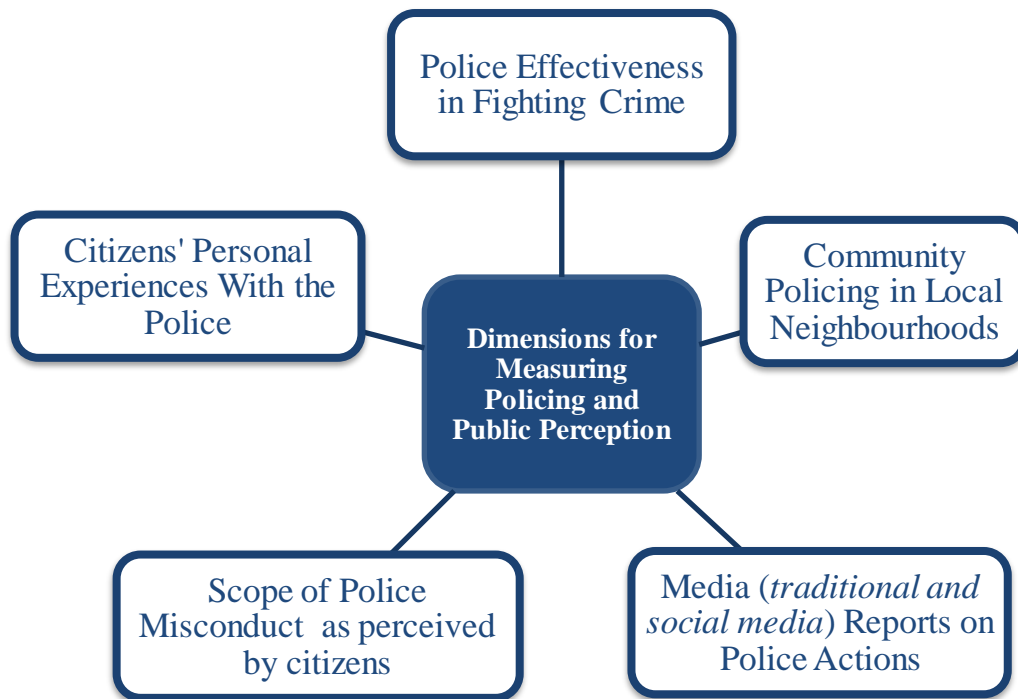
enforcement agencies are not taking advantage of the numerous benefits provided by the social media platforms for the execution of their duties. Social media has already reached its sophisticated stage but brands (such as the Ghana Police Service) and some businesses in Ghana and West Africa are yet to understand how each network performs and how to capitalize on the specific purposes of these networks in reaching their brands or business goals as well as communicating with their audiences (Cliqfrica, 2017).

There is no qualm nowadays, that we are seeing a huge shift in media. People are drifting to the use of smartphones and social media thereby rendering social media as the most engaging and interactive form of communication. According to Ahmad (2016), Social media has grown tremendously in the last few years. From 2006 onwards, the growth rate is unexpectedly very high. Especially Facebook and Twitter have grown much faster and captured millions of users in just a few years. Besides, social media has also negatively affected society. Just like anything which can be used for both good and bad, social media platforms have also provided negative and positive ways for people. Criminals have now advanced technologically in their endeavours due to the prevalence of social media.

### **2.3 Dimensions for Measuring Policing and Public Perception**

Police practices may affect public opinion either directly (via police contacts with citizens) or indirectly (via perceived police job performance, media coverage of incidents involving the police, etc.). The literature reveals five (5) factors related to police activity than can be perceived as a yardstick to measure public perception of the police. These include (a) police effectiveness in fighting crime, (b) community policing in local neighbourhoods, (c) media reports on police actions, (d) the scope of police misconduct as perceived by citizens, and (e) personal and vicarious experiences with police officers. Figure 2.1 illustrates these dimensions.

**Figure 2.1: Dimensions for Measuring Policing and Public Perception**



Source: Author's Construct

### **2.3.1 Police Effectiveness in Fighting Crime**

Many people evaluate the police primarily in terms of their performance, or perceived performance, concerning fighting crime because citizens regard crime-control as the principal function of the police (Reisig, Tankebe, and Meško, 2012). If the police in a particular city are viewed as doing a poor job of dealing with crime, this perception may have a strong negative influence on their overall opinion of the city police department and vice versa for those who believe the police are doing a good job with crime-control.

### **2.3.2 Community Policing in Local Neighbourhood**

Neighbourhoods with community policing might have better relations with the police than areas lacking community policing. In theory, community policing involves residents and police

officers working together to identify problems and solutions to crime, which should foster improved relations between the two parties and, thus, reduce the incidence of police abuse of citizens (Segrave, and Ratcliffe, 2017). Whether relations with residents of such neighbourhoods are indeed better than areas where traditional policing pre-dominates is a question that has rarely been examined, and the limited literature offers mixed support for this notion (Rukus, Warner, and Zhang 2018; Stein, and Griffith, 2017; Kappeler, and Gaines, 2012).

### **2.3.3 The Scope of Police Misconduct as Perceived by Citizens**

Police misconduct has remained a topic of interest to both police administrators and scholars over the few decades research at this level has focused on the relationship between individual officer characteristics and the frequency of allegations of police misconduct. These studies included officer characteristics such as sex, age, race, education and years of service (Brandl *et al.*, 2001; Kappeler *et al.*, 1992) People who believe that officers are frequently involved in wrongdoing, or who believe that police misconduct is wide-spread in their city, maybe less satisfied with their city's police. More recently, studies have included variables measuring officer productivity levels to determine whether citizen complaints are a measure of police misconduct or an increase in productivity by officers (Brandl *et al.*, 2001; Lersch, 2002)

### **2.3.4 Citizens' Personal Experiences with the Police**

Research indicates that citizens' contacts with police officers have at least some influence on general satisfaction with the police. Unpleasant experiences tend to have a stronger effect than positive contacts, with the former increasing negative opinions of the police. When police treat individuals in a discourteous, brusque, or unfair manner, this experience colours not only their assessments of the immediate encounter but also their overall opinion of the police (Tyler,

1990; Tyler and Huo, 2002; Wortley, Hagan, and Macmillan, 1997). Racial variation is also evident, with Blacks more likely than Whites to report negative experiences with and to feel that they have not received fair treatment from the police (Dean, 1980; Tyler and Huo, 2002).

### **2.3.5 Media (Traditional and Social Media) reports on police actions**

It is reasonable to expect citizen perceptions of the police to be influenced by traditional and social media reports on police actions. Unfortunately, researchers have given little attention to media influences on citizens' views of the police. On the positive side, it does appear that watching police reality shows, such as Crime Scene Investigation (CSI), increase viewers' satisfaction with the police, though this effect has been found to impact more positively on Whites but not for Blacks (Eschholz, Blackwell, Gertz, and Chiricos, 2002). A few studies have found that attitudes toward police appear to be influenced by media coverage of incidents of police misconduct: Negative views of the police rise during or immediately after news coverage of brutality incidents, corruption scandals, or other abuses (Chaney and Robertson, 2013; Desmond, Papachristos and Kirk, 2016; Pollack, and Allern, 2014).

Also, if exposure to either traditional or social media reports on one incident of abuse lowers public approval of the police, it is logical to predict that cumulative exposure to media coverage of separate instances of police misconduct will have an even stronger effect on citizens' opinions of the police (Kane and White, 2012). Therefore, frequent exposure to media coverage of misconduct (i.e., police corruption, excessive force, verbal abuse) increased citizens' beliefs that police misconduct is widespread in their locality (Gauthier, and Graziano, 2018). It is also possible that such exposure has the same effect on overall satisfaction with the police.

## **2.4 Social Media and Policing**

New technologies provide valuable resources in an era of countervailing demands for fiscal restraint, community engagement, and operational efficiency (Borge, Falch, and Tovmo, 2008;

Taylor Griffiths, Pollard, and Stamatakis, 2015). Virtually non-existent a decade ago, social media platforms have become entrenched in law enforcement (Walsh, and O'Connor, 2019). In the broadest sense, social media expand opportunities for surveillance and communication, providing tools for systematically gathering and disseminating information. While, in certain circumstances, social media use and adoption reinforce established practices, in others, it produces foundational transformations.

#### **2.4.1 The Use of Social Media for Law enforcement**

As social media use becomes more prevalent, there remain many questions regarding how exactly it is utilized to optimal effect in criminal investigations (De Choudhury, Jhaver, Sugar, and Weber, 2016). Henton (2012) asserts that agencies have become increasingly involved in the use of social media to push information out to their communities. A benefit to this medium is that it has minimised the traditional reliance on another entity, such as the press, to get their message relayed. Over the years, law enforcement agencies have been carrying out their jobs manually. This is so because the laws have not appreciably caught up with technology (Miguel, 2014). The increase in the use of real-time interactive social media has dramatically changed how many people live their lives in recent times. People use their smartphones to let others know their location, tell friends what they are doing and post photos in real-time. Henton (2012) queries that if law enforcement were to fully engage the segment of society using real-time interactive social media, how could it benefit both the police department and the community?

This implies that the Ghana Police service can gradually bridge the evident communication gap with its publics through constant interactions via social media. Musteen (2013) argues that social media is detrimental to law enforcement agencies since people post defamatory information on Facebook to make a mockery of the police. It is very common to see videos of

people confronting the police in a very harsh manner on social media, exhibiting their rigorous notoriety in the community (Musteen, 2013). Henton (2012) on the other hand, argues that the benefits provided by social media tools would rather help law enforcement agencies to succeed in their duties.

Similarly, Tormeti (2017) indicates that the Geographic Position System (GPS) attached to social media is an enormous feature that could help law enforcement agencies in their community patrols. The most effective law enforcement agencies recognise and promote partnerships with their citizens to prevent crime. Citizens who are engaged and empowered to be responsible for their communities are valuable assets to the work of any police department (Musso *et al.*, 2007). As the popularity of social media rises, these tools provide opportunities for law enforcement agencies to proactively reach out and connect with citizens and promote crime prevention in their communities (Crawford and Evans, 2017).

## **2.5 The Ghana Police Service**

The Ghana Police Service is the major law enforcement agency in Ghana. There is, however, some controversy as to when formal policing started in Ghana. Boateng and Darko (2016) argue that policing in the Gold Coast started in 1831 when Captain George MacLean formed a body of one hundred and twenty-nine men to maintain and enforce the provisions of the “Treaty of Peace” which he signed with the coastal chiefs and the King of Ashanti. Pokoo-Aikins (2009) argues that the work of the Ghana Police Service started during the Second World War. Whatever the case may be, there are indications that some sort of law enforcement was in existence in the colonial era. The first men recruited in 1831 were trained and deployed to perform civil police duties until their activities were made official in 1873 when an ‘ordinance to provide for the better regulations and discipline of the armed police force’ was enacted.

As the force grew and expanded, other improvements were initiated. Anane–Appiah (2011) argues that some of the developments seen by the Ghana Police Service included the establishment of an Escort Unit, Railway Unit, Marine Police and Criminal Investigations Department. The Ghana Police Service saw the advent of a new unit in September 2006 called the Research and Planning Unit. This unit, according to Pokoo-Aikins (2009), was mandated to research into police methods, operational strategies of policing, and crime trends among others. The Research and Planning Unit was restructured as Research, Planning and Information Technology (RPandIT) to help uplift the Ghana Police Service to be abreast of technology (Pokoo-Aikins, 2009).

As indicated on the official website of the Ghana Police Service ([www. Police.gov.gh](http://www.Police.gov.gh)), the police formation is made up of many different departments working together to ensure the safety of the country. These units among others include the Criminal Investigations Department (CID), Public Affairs Directorate (PAD), Estates Department, Motor Traffic and Transport Directorate (MTTD), Medical, Community Policing, The Police College, Marine Ports and Railways, Other Training Institutions, and Projects.

## **2.6 Related Studies**

Several studies have been done on the relationship between social media and the public perception of police from different contexts. Table 2.1 presents some studies that have been done on the police, social media and public perception.

**Table 2.1: Related Studies**

| No | Author  | Research Title   | Research Focus  | Research Theory and Method              |
|----|---|--|---|---|
| 1  | Conkling, 2019                                      | How Social Media Affects College Students' Perceptions of Police Brutality   | This study seeks to find if there is a correlation between social media consumption and how college students view the issue of police brutality.  | Conceptual<br>-<br>Quantitative         |
| 2  | Nix and Pickett, (2017).                            | Third-Person Perceptions, Hostile Media Effects, and Policing: Developing a Theoretical Framework for Assessing the Ferguson       | The study outlined a theoretical framework that illuminates how media coverage of policing affects public perception.   | Conceptual<br>-<br>Quantitative         |
| 3  | Williams, and Fedorowicz, (2019).                   | Does social media promote the public's perception of the police: Survey results on trust cultivation.                              | This paper updates the cultivation theory to examine public perceptions of police and their use of social media.  | Cultivation Theory<br>-<br>Quantitative |
| 4  | Oglesby-Neal, Tiry, and Kim (2019)                  | Public Perceptions of Police on Social Media   | This study explores the feasibility and utility of Twitter data for measuring public sentiment toward police.   | Conceptual<br>-<br>Quantitative         |
| 5  | Miller, Davis, Henderson, Markovic, and Ortiz, 2004 | Public opinions of the police: The influence of friends, family and news media   | This study seeks to explore the impact of police treatment of citizens on the broader public opinion of the police, as citizens impart these experiences to family, friends, and neighbours.  | Conceptual<br>-<br>Quantitative         |
| 6  | Gonzalez. 2016                                      | Exposure to Video Media and its Effects on Attitudes Towards Law Enforcement.  | This study aimed to examine the effects of social media video exposure on attitudes towards law enforcement.  | Conceptual<br>-<br>Quantitative         |
| 7  | Franklin, Perkins, Kirby, and Richmond, (2019)      | The Influence of Police Related Media, Victimization, and Satisfaction on African American College Students' Perceptions of Police | This study explored the roles of police-related television programming and satisfaction with most recent police contact in predicting perceptions of law enforcement performance and treatment of minorities for students with no police victimization experiences. | Conceptual<br>-<br>Quantitative         |

| No | Author                   | Research Title   | Research Focus  | Research Theory and Method      |
|----|--------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------|
| 8  | Claxton, 2018            | Student Perceptions of Police  | With an emphasis on the news and social media regarding police misconduct or police brutality, this research seeks to inquire about college students' perceptions of law enforcement and racial injustice within the criminal justice system.                         | Conceptual<br>-<br>Quantitative |
| 9  | Brown, 2019              | Do college students' perceptions of the police differ by education level and major?                        | This study examines perceptions of the police among college students at Illinois State University.  | Conceptual<br>-<br>Mixed-Method |
| 10 | Brown and Benedict, 2002 | Perceptions of the police: Past findings, methodological issues, conceptual issues and policy implications | This research updates and expands upon Decker's article "Citizen attitudes toward the police: a review of past findings and suggestions for future policy" by summarizing the findings from more than 100 articles on perceptions of and attitudes toward the police. | Conceptual<br>-<br>Qualitative  |

Conkling (2009) conducted a study to determine if social media usage and consumption of traditional news sources affected how people perceived the issue of police brutality. The findings revealed that college students spend significantly more time using social media than consuming traditional news sources which in the past would have been how the public was informed about police brutality (Conkling, 2009). Also, Nix and Pickett (2017) in their paper on Third-person perceptions, hostile media effects, and policing found that at a descriptive level, over 80% of the officers in our sample believed that unfavourable media coverage of the police greatly increases or increases crime. They implied is that third-person perceptions among officers lead them to believe that the way the media chooses to report on policing can be quite consequential for society. Again, the results revealed that the relationship between officers' perceptions of hostile media and crime is primarily mediated by judgments of changes in civilians' attitudes toward police and, to a lesser extent, by fear of false accusations.

Another related study was conducted on how the frequency of viewing and interacting with social media affects, or cultivates, evaluations of police (Williams, and Fedorowicz, 2019). This study leveraging the cultivation theory as a theoretical lens confirms the direction, though not the strength (the coefficients were not significant) of the predicted relationship. On the other hand, follower interaction itself does seem to have long-reaching benefits, as those who look favourably upon social media also are more inclined to rate their police department more highly, which advances the goal of cultivation –increasing positive perceptions.

Oglesby-Neal, Tiry and Kim (2019) conducted a study on the public perceptions of police on social media. They found that law enforcement agencies are increasingly interested in using social media to learn from and engage with the public, to enhance police-community relations. They further demonstrated through the analysis of twitter data that public sentiment toward

police can be measured using publicly available social media data and that these data can be a resource for law enforcement agencies.

With an emphasis on the news and social media regarding police misconduct or police brutality, Claxton (2018) conducted a study to inquire about college students' perceptions of law enforcement and racial injustice within the criminal justice system. Findings for this study indicate that variables other than standard demographics, contact with law enforcement, and media consumption had a significant impact on student perceptions of police. Brown (2019) in his study revealed that people with more education did not have significantly different contact with police officers than those with less education, however; they were significantly more likely to report negative attitudes towards the police. Using the mixed method approach where the qualitative data was used to support the quantitative results, the findings indicated that those with higher education levels displayed a more positive view and outlook of the police. Also, the results showed that criminal justice major students expressed more favourable views of police than other majors.

## **2.7 Theoretical Framework**

This section outlined the theoretical framework that will serve as an analytical lens for this study.

### **2.7.1 Agenda Setting Theory**

Agenda setting theory offers a useful lens for understanding and evaluating the formation and effectiveness of police social media strategies. Agenda setting refers to the process of identifying, recognizing and defining certain issues, problems or opportunities are such that

messages prompt leaders to generate and consider solutions or alternatives (Liu, Lindquist, Vedlitz, and Vincent, 2010). Traditionally, the domain and siting of agenda-setting research directed attention to the transfer of issue salience from the mass media agenda to the public agenda, as manifest in the discussions and decisions of rule-making bodies such as legislatures or city councils. For example, agenda-setting research described and explained how the placement and amount of coverage accorded news stories shape public opinion about which issues and topics of the day become important (McCombs, 2014; McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Some later studies focused on how the repetition of a story or message on mass media would translate into the policy agenda of legislators (e.g., Birkland, 2007; Liu et al., 2010).

There are two levels of agenda-setting. While the first level of agenda setting focuses on getting an object gaining attention, the second level is when this object appears on the public agenda as it will have gained minimum exposure and attention. However, McCombs notes that in most cases, the first and second level agenda setting go hand in hand since objects and attributes can be combined in media messages and public thoughts and conversation (McCombs, 2014). This study is positioned within both the first and second levels, and expand the early conception of who sets the agenda from news media to other actors and the realm of local politics and governance. Whereas before research could focus on news disseminated by radio, television, or print media, the advent of the Internet has led to a myriad of new communication channels and sources that inform decision-makers and thought leaders who set public agendas (McCombs, 2005).

Indeed, at the local level, information disseminated across Internet channels by local leaders, government actors and interest groups may be more influential than mass media (Liu et al., 2010). For example, informal or social communication found on social media platforms such

as Facebook or Twitter functionally operate as alternative channels of information to traditional media that can reinforce or dissipate concerns about issues such as fake news, immigration, and more (Erbring, Goldenberg, and Miller, 1980; Sayre, Bode, Shah, Wilcox, and Shah, 2010). The expansion of communication channels has relaxed the constraint of studying large scale distribution of identical messages on mass media and afforded opportunities to direct attention to understanding how local actors, such as police departments, set agendas, or themes, through tailored or focused messages that they share with stakeholders (McCombs, 2014).

In this new environment, agenda-setting theory helps us frame our investigation of how the Ghana Police Service uses social media to set agendas, where agendas are set, and how to the perception of the public in response to such agendas. McCombs et al. (2014) suggest that in this vastly expanded communication environment, people balance the agendas of the civic community with their valued reference communities or social networks through a process they define as agenda-melding. Social media allow reaching out vertically to broad general audiences such as newspapers, radio and television; media like magazines, blogs, websites and Twitter that reach out horizontally to audiences with special interests; and individuals' values. The agendas of the horizontal and vertical media each have an independent influence on the public whose personal values serve to moderate their influence and maintain balance. Because police converse in a special-interest community concerned with many aspects of public safety, this study of social media exemplifies horizontal media influence. By applying agenda-setting theory, we develop a rich explanation for how local police departments leverage social media to direct public perception of their agenda, and for how the public perceives and talks about public safety issues in their community.

Besides, this study offers a means to evaluate the effectiveness of this engagement with stakeholders. Social media offers local police departments many opportunities to set the agenda on issues that affect their ability to serve the community, whether that agenda aims to establish credibility or trust, to communicate important public safety information, or to source information from recipients of a message. Research has discovered many issue characteristics that can mediate agenda-setting effects (Meraz, 2009). These effects are stronger with unobtrusive or unfamiliar issues (Winter, Eyal, and Rogers, 1982), with more concrete issues (Yagade and Dozier, 1990), with events that involve drama and conflict (Wanta and Hu, 1993) or partisan framing (Cornfield, Carson, Kalis, and Simon, 2005), and a short time frame (Zucker, 1978). Some evidence shows that online media can set the agenda for traditional media (Cornfield et al., 2005; Sayre et al., 2010; Schudson, 2009) and users of online media (Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo, 2002). Thus, it appears that new media can change both the way information is delivered and how it is received by users (Simmons, 2008). Social media is a particularly rich source of un-obtrusive measures of the public agenda (McCombs (2014). Indeed, feedback from the messages and signals sent back to policymakers is one of the most important ways problems or opportunities gain their attention.

This study analyses this user-generated content on social media as a means to assess issue salience, that is, the attention its audience accords to specific topics. With these data, we can assess whether and how effective police online presence is for setting and communicating their agenda. To understand the police social media agenda and the public's reaction to that agenda, we examine which types of issues are salient to each. Categorizing their content allows us to compare the two and assess the achievement of policy goals if there is a match between police messaging and positive reaction to those messages. As an initial step toward establishing this match, we seek to answer specific questions that collectively contribute to the assessment and

achievement of the policy agenda. These include: When members of the public communicate about the police, do they emphasize the same or different topics and hence the priority of concerns? Do certain types of characteristics of police-generated messages elicit stronger reactions (e.g., through “liking,” “sharing” and “commenting”) by the audience? These behaviours signal an evaluative judgment that particular content strikes a chord with the public. Audience reactions to police messages suggest the public is responsive to the subject in the police posts, and a match between message intention and reaction would contribute to the aims of the social media agenda.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

To accomplish the purpose of this study, a content analysis methodology was utilized. According to Neuendorf (2001) content analysis can be described as the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of the characteristics of a message. However, Krippendorff (2004) argues all content analysis is qualitative stating, —all reading of the text is qualitative even when certain characteristics are later converted into numbers (p. 16). Content analysis involves a thorough examination of any piece of written or visual human communication such as those that appear in magazines, newspapers, television commercials, social media, speeches, novels, and many others. Similarly, Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) define content analysis as a technique that enables researchers to study human behaviour indirectly, through an analysis of their communications (p. 483).

The purpose of content analysis is to study the written communication of humans unobtrusively. Content analysis allows the researcher to study social behaviour without influencing it. Rather than present the details of a message set, the methodology allows a researcher to generate conclusions that can be generalized to other situations (Neuendorf, 2001). By extension content analysis allows for a researcher to decipher what is being communicated, why it is being communicated, and with what effects (Babbie, 2004). Content analysis can be recognized by the appearance of the codification process, which involves placing coded data into key categories. Once data is converted into key categories a random sample is selected and analysed. The random sample formed the basis for the content analysis study. Ordinarily, in content analysis studies, researchers represent their findings in the format of tables or charts. Various statistical analysis tools are utilized to illustrate specific trends and patterns.

Qualitative approaches to content analysis have their genesis in literary theory, the social sciences, and critical theory (Creswell, 2003). Besides, qualitative approaches have several characteristics in common: (a) they require a thorough reading of small amounts of textual material, (b) they require the interpretation of texts into new narratives, and (c) analysts acknowledge they are working within particular hermeneutic contexts that parallel their socially and culturally understanding of texts.

Content analysis was chosen for its ability to examine and identify sentiments and tones on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram by scraping relevant posts, comments and interactions for analysis as well as discover a data-context relationship among different variables. Content analysis was also chosen as the method for this study because content analysis allows for the study, analysis and inference of social media communication in a quantitative, objective and systematic way (Kerlinger, 1986).

### **3.2 Data Collection Methods**

Creswell and Clark (2019) describe data collection as a process of collecting useful data and information to enable answering the research questions of the study. The adoption of explorative content analysis approach encouraged the use of a triangulated data source. Triangulation is the use of more than one approach to address research with the aim of better explaining a phenomenon and ensure accuracy and confidence in findings (Walsham, 2006; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The sources include documentation, social media records, interviews, direct observation, and physical artefacts (Yin, 1994).

### **3.2.1 Pilot Study and Instrumentation**

A pilot study was conducted by the researcher to become familiar with the use of the methodology and provide insight into any ambiguities of the coding instrument. The pilot study also helped the researcher to establish both content validity of the instrument and to improve research questions, format, and the scales. The researcher utilized a content analysis methodology to code the data collected from multiple sources for data transformation and to establish intercoder reliability.

### **3.2.2 Unit of Analysis**

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), a unit of analysis in a content analysis can be defined as the smallest item that the researcher counts as he or she comes across it. For this study, the unit of analysis was Facebook and Twitter posts, number of 'likes,' shares and comments with a thematic focus on police engagements, incidence and other law enforcement activities. For instance, posts on the social media pages of the Ghana Police services were assessed by focusing on the interactions of the public and the sentiments expressed.

### **3.2.3 Document Analysis**

Document review a major data collection method employed in the inquiry. Bowen (2009) defines document analysis as a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. The researcher reviewed a variety of existing sources on social media and its impact on the public perception of police intending to collect independently verifiable data and information. The documents reviewed both physical and online documentation and news articles concerning the research objective. Again, the researcher followed interactions and activities on Ghana police social media channels and website for patterns and insights

### **3.3 Ethical Considerations**

Resnik (2015) asserted that professional ethics relate to the willingness of a profession to self-regulate the actions of its members to protect the interests of the public. Research ethics focuses on doing what is morally and legally right in research; by obeying actual norms of conduct that distinguish between right and wrong, and acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (Golder, Ahmed, Norman, and Booth, 2017). The researcher ensured that all ethical issues under the conduct of the research study were followed strictly. Respondents to the questionnaire were duly assured of strict confidentiality and anonymity. Therefore, a person's identity was not linked to the questionnaire and all answers provided willingly. Questions asked were done in simple and understandable languages without any ambiguity.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **4.1 The Originality of the Study**

Prior studies have continuously emphasized the importance of cooperation and engagement between police and the public to enhance effectiveness in crime-fighting and the preventive functions of policing. With the proliferation of innovative technologies such as social media in everyday living, it is critical for studies explore the platforms used by the police, the tone of their engagements as well as the perception of the public about their activities. This study will be one of the few studies to fill this gap by examining the influence of social media on the public perception of the police in the Ghanaian context.

#### **4.2 Implications of the Study**

This research will make some contributions to knowledge (research) and practice. These are outlined as follows.

##### **4.2.1 Implications to Knowledge**

For research, the study strives to go beyond existing police sentiments literature that is largely focused on developed economies to consider developing economy context. This research further contributes to arguably limited literature in the area of technology adoption and its impact on police perception. The body of knowledge on police adoption of social media and how this impacts public perception will provide relevant insights for future research endeavours.

#### **4.2.2 Implications to Practice**

Although social media usage is widespread in Ghana, the police involvement is very novel, this research is pegged to be constructive to the Ghana police service on how to leverage social media platforms to not only inform the public but to debunk negative remarks on their operations and improve their reputation as law enforcers. Therefore, as a contribution to practice, this study will inform other state institutions considering the adoption of social media on how to design their processes to improve stakeholder trust and public reputation.

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