



# Possibilities and Limitations of the Croatian Police in Communication via Social Networks

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**Abstract.** There is a large amount of research on the application of social networks in companies' business activities. Still, their application and usefulness in the business activities of the public sector are much less researched. Their application for police purposes poses significant challenges because there are substantial risks that can cause great damage to the reputation and work of the police and police officers. There are currently no systematic guidelines and forms of social media use regarding the police in the Republic of Croatia, and this research is one of the first to provide a basis for further work in this area.

The research aims to identify and describe the possibilities and limitations of the Croatian police in communication via social networks. Also, the study aims to determine the current forms of communications of the Croatian police with the public through social networks and the level of preparedness for managing digital communication channels regarding human, organizational and technological resources.

The research was approached by a qualitative focus group research procedure, given that no research on police communication through social networks has been conducted in Croatia yet.

**Keywords:** Croatian police · Social networks · Focus group

## 1 Introduction

The speed of development of social network technology, its reach and impact on humanity is the subject of many scientific articles. We are seeing a large number of users and that number is growing significantly. As technology is becoming cheaper, the Internet is more accessible, and apps are easier to use, social networks are becoming available to a large number of people no matter the age group they belong to. This “Era of the Internet”, recently hit by a global pandemic as a catalyst, has significantly influenced the transition of much of communication into virtual space. It should be noted that in addition to providing opportunities to improve communication, social networks can also cause problems if used without a prepared communication strategy. Despite possible

problems, police forces around the globe provide security to their residents by using social networks as one of the channels of communication. Social networks have become a strong communication channel between the police and the community, as well as a daily means of collecting data from the field.

This paper presents a study of the Croatian police communication with the public via social networks. The research was conducted using a qualitative focus group research process, given that no research on police communication via social networks has been conducted in Croatia thus far, and in order to start the research, it was necessary to encourage in-depth discussion of police public relations officers on this topic.

## 2 Social Networks and Their Significance for Society

Research has shown that 53.6% of the world's population use social media for an average of 2 h and 25 min a day (DataReportal 2021). According to the latest Eurostat research, the largest portion of citizens using social networks is in Denmark, approximately 87% (Eurostat 2021). The European average presence on social networks is 57% (research on a sample of people aged 16 to 74), and this also includes citizens of the Republic of Croatia.

The Internet in Croatia, in addition to collecting information on products and services (93%), reading daily news (91%), collecting health information (79%), using e-mail (74%), sending messages via phone apps (87%), is largely used for access to social networks, in 73% of cases (Croatian Bureau of Statistics 2019). According to data provided by DataReportal (2021b), 68.4% of the total population of Croatia use social networks, and most of them use Facebook 50.2% (population 13+), YouTube 70.5% (18+), Instagram 36.3% (13+), Facebook Messenger 39.1% (13+), LinkedIn 20.1% (18+), Snapchat 14.6% (13+) and Twitter 3.6% (13+).

Over time, Croatian social networks were created and shut down: for example Iskrlica, Tulumarka, Trosjed, Teen and Zrikku. However, the number of their users has always been negligible compared to the number of users of global social networks in Croatia (Grbavac and Grbavac 2014).

Speaking of apps used for accessing certain social networks, the latest research for the first quarter of 2021 shows that 36.6 billion downloads of apps in the “social network” category were recorded worldwide. This is an increase of 8.7% over the same period last year. Figure 1 shows how TikTok was again the most successful mobile app in terms of downloads worldwide. Telegram is in second place in Europe, with a 40% increase compared to the same period last year, achieving approximately 27.3 million downloads in the first quarter. Due to the pandemic, Zoom and Microsoft Teams reached highest download numbers (SensorTower 2021). The primary reason for this are online activities related to teaching, business meetings and work from home.

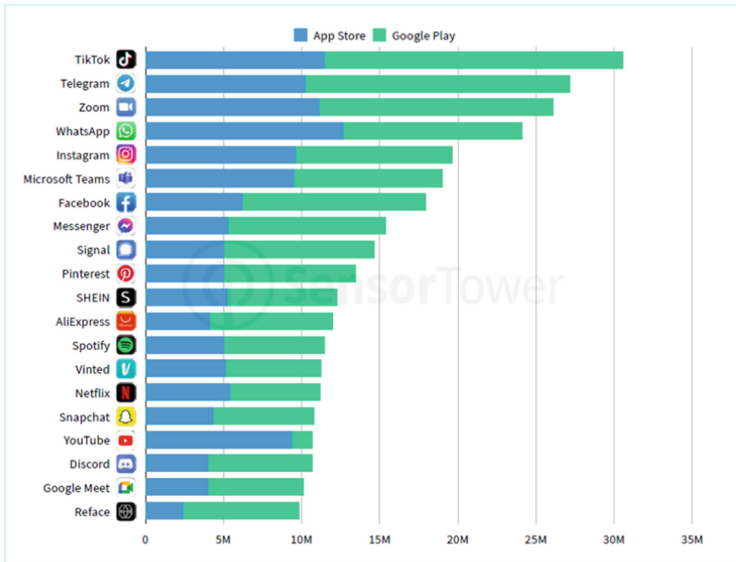


Fig. 1. App downloads in Europe during the 1st quarter of 2021 (SensorTower 2021)

### 3 Application of Social Networks as a Communication Channel for Policing

Certain authors cite social networks as one of the modern technologies that will have a strong impact and application in policing (O'Connor and Zaidi 2020), and the importance of social networks in policing is best shown by a fact from September 2021. At the American Conference of the most influential International Association of Police Chiefs (IACP), which has more than 30,000 members from 165 countries, several presentations spoke about the possibilities of using social networks during mass protests. The presentations emphasized the need for establishing a system of best practices in the use of social networks, the need to clarify legal norms related to social networks, instructions on what to do when well-intentioned posts are wrongly accepted by the public and the like (IACP 2021).

Police communication with the wider community via social media must have a defined mission, as is the case with the New York Police Department (NYPD), which categorize all of their social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat) into groups, with two distinct larger categories of posts, the first with the goal of protection (keeping people safe) and the second with the goal of connecting (strengthening relationships with the community). In their posts, they use dedicated hashtags to promote these goals (#NYPDProtecting and #NYPDConnecting), and the hashtag #NYPDTips is also important, which is used for seeking information about perpetrators and offering rewards. It is already a well-established practice of the police to use social media to post pictures and videos in order to seek public help that would lead to the identification and arrest of suspects in criminal or misdemeanour cases (Ruddell and Jones 2013; Colbran 2020). In the UK, direct police communication via social media is made possible by

direct inquiries to police officers, for example on Twitter or Facebook, using a specific hashtag, such as #AskTheChief. Citizens who click on this hashtag can see what other users are saying or asking (Scholes-Fogg 2015).

Social media campaigns are often planned with targeting the demographic group that is likely to receive the desired message (Ruddell and Jones 2013), which can mostly include younger and more educated residents as they are most present on social media.

There are other interesting approaches in the application of social networks related to the publication of police content. An example is the Australian approach, which was based on increasing the presence on social networks by publishing contents from the so-called meme domain. A new police communication strategy was implemented in 2017 with the aim of increasing the number of post followers on Facebook. In order to boost Facebook's algorithm for displaying posts, the posts featured humour and amicable additions such as pictures of police dogs. The goal of the strategy was to demystify and humanize the police force and enable important announcements to a large number of people (Wood 2019), i.e. to reach millions of users, which would be more than 850 thousand people who follow the NYPD's Facebook profile, the most famous example of the application of social networks within the police.

The cooperation of emergency services in the field is also moving into the digital space. Institutions close to the police (fire-fighters, Mountain Rescue Service, etc.) often post police announcements, and the police also post announcements by the emergency services (Fernandez et al. 2017). By researching police communication via social media, in a small town in the southern region of the United States, Boateng and Chenane (2020) discovered that there are no defined rules and regulations that would specify what and how to post and there is a lack of defined responsibility for reading and removing inappropriate comments. Research dealing with defining the strategy and rules of conduct (Meijer and Thaens 2013; Meijer and Torenvlied 2016; Coomber 2018; Jungblut and Jungblut 2021) is increasing in proportion to the increase in the use of social networks.

Recent research shows that social networks have enabled the police to bypass the media and thus take their "gatekeeping" function away, i.e. it enabled the police to bypass the media's thorough checks of police communications prior to presenting them to the public (Grygiel and Lysak 2020). Recent research also address the strengths and weaknesses of proactive police communication via the Internet (Williams et al. 2019), the need to form inter-agency collaborations to make better use of information and resources (Fallik et al. 2020) and treating users as co-development operators from which the organization learns (Dekker et al. 2020).

Certain scientists such as Davis, Alves and Sklansky (2014) suggest using an informal tone when communicating on social networks, but with maximum professionalism and supervision by experts in the field of communication via digital channels. They note that in defining the strategy of such specific communication, one should not only count followers and "social engagement" such as retweets, likes, shares, etc., but also observe the outcome, i.e. improving community safety and other contributions. The effectiveness of informal expressions in posts on social media networks in the United States has been confirmed through research (Hu and Lovrich 2019a, 2019b).

Furthermore, it should also be emphasized that the quality of the police response to digitally obtained information is important, which has not been achieved according

to research conducted in the 10 most populous US cities (Brainard and Edlins 2015). Without this reaction, the basic purpose of communication via social media is lost, and it is necessary to clearly define the steps to be taken when useful information from the citizens is obtained.

The negative effect of social networks was also felt by the police in Kensington (Ross 2016) when on their official Facebook page they tried to associate the drivers who violate traffic regulations to listening to the music of a certain band using a funny post and using a hashtag. This resulted in a public apology from the police officer, the author of the controversial post. Since the post was quickly picked up by news organizations around the world, it spread widely and many citizens did not find it witty. In other words, the attempt to get closer to the community ended in a negative reaction due to misinterpretation. Although the use of social networks has great potential due to its two-way communication in public relations, it also brings potential problems. Therefore, before any activity, it is necessary to think critically and plan wisely, and to establish a communication plan in order to be able to strategically respond to a problem without delay.

Gilkerson and Tusinski Berg (2017) explain the term “Hashtag Hijacking” by warning that using a hashtag (#) as a tool used to tag and organize conversations on social media pages can easily become a means of ridicule and negative criticism. Hashtag Hijacking has become a strategic tool for individuals and activist groups that use hashtags to publicly name and try to influence a certain organization.

Research conducted approximately ten years ago (Deneff et al. 2012) shows that the application of new information and communication technologies in the police is an inevitable step in adapting to new trends.

## 4 Research Objective and Research Questions

The aim of the research is to determine the current forms and characteristics of the Croatian police communication with the public via social networks and the level of preparedness for managing digital communication channels with regard to human, organizational and technological resources.

Accordingly, the following research questions have been defined:

- Q1.** To what extent is the Croatian police organizationally prepared to manage digital communication channels on social networks?
- Q2.** To what extent is the Croatian police prepared to manage digital communication channels on social networks with regard to human resources?
- Q3.** To what extent is the Croatian police technologically ready to manage digital communication channels via social networks?
- Q4.** How to overcome problems when adopting the document Police Communication Strategy on Social Networks?

## 5 Methods

### 5.1 Sample

The sample of participants in this research is based on the principle of homogeneity, i.e. belonging to a group with common interests, and in this case that is professional public relations in the police and the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia.

The Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia is structurally divided into several organizational units. Thus, the Police Directorate was established for performing police work, as an administrative organization within the Ministry, while police administrations operate at the local level. One of the organizational units of the Ministry of the Interior is the Civil Protection Directorate, whose activities are also directly related to the protection and rescue of life and property. The Central Public Relations Service is structurally defined in the Cabinet of the Minister, along with several individuals in other organizational units. Since it is difficult to separate the communication of the police from the communication of other components of the Ministry of the Interior, this paper uses and analyses the experiences of communication with the public of all organizational units and uniformly applies the terms “police public relations” and “public relations of the Ministry of the Interior”. Accordingly, the target population for this survey is 57 public relations officers of the police and the Ministry of the Interior.

The research was conducted on one focus group consisting of six participants, which is 10% of the overall target population. This number is optimal because it allows each member to express their own views and opinions, and is also sufficiently big to allow the development of group dynamics (Onwuegbuzie and Collins 2007), especially considering that communication takes place at a distance.

One individual in the focus group is male, which is proportional to the share of male individuals in the target population. The Civil Protection Directorate, the Police Directorate, the Public Relations Service of the Cabinet of the Minister and the Police Administration of various categories are represented. All participants are long-term employees of the Ministry of the Interior and individuals who contact the public on a daily basis via various communication channels. It should be noted that some of the participants know each other superficially, which did not affect the relations between the participants, i.e. the introduction of external dynamics (Skoko and Benković 2009).

### 5.2 Instrument

For the needs of the research, a Protocol for a semi-structured interview was prepared, developed from the aspect of Communication Theory and Shannon–Weaver’s communication model. The interview is thematically divided into five parts:

#### 1. Problems of communication in general (four questions)

The topic of this group of questions aims to create preconditions for quality and open communication of participants. Four issues sparked a discussion on the changes that digital technology brings to everyday life. At the same time, a particular focus is placed on digital communication, for both private and professional purposes.

2. Problems of police communication via social networks (five questions)

The topics of the second group of questions were prepared in a way that would enable the collection of information on the current attitude of each individual participant regarding the digital communication of the police with citizens. In doing so, the emphasis was on researching their attitude towards social networks and the usefulness of social networks in the work of the police in general.

3. Problems of organizational, technological and human readiness of the Ministry of the Interior to communicate via social networks (eleven questions)

Most of the questions are dedicated to the analysis of the current state of the Croatian police and the state of their readiness to introduce additional communication channels with citizens. In doing so, the focus was placed on social media presence. An important aspect of the observation is focused on the issues of how educated and ready police officers are for new forms of communication. Several questions examined the attitudes of focus group participants on the possibility of adapting the police considering the current work positions and the regulations within which the police operate. The idea of this thematic unit is to collect and then analyse the experiences of individuals already involved in public relations and determine what would need to be adopted or changed in order to increase the required level of readiness for new forms of digital communication.

4. The problem of the impact of the police presence on social networks on the community in terms of police legitimacy, citizens' trust in the police and procedural justice (seven questions).

Having in mind the possibility of solving specific business problems, the topic of this group of questions is related to understanding the area of possible applications of digital communication between the Croatian police and citizens. Participants should share their ideas regarding in which cases the use of social networks is justified, when such communication is applicable and how often (and in what way) can social networks be used to create a positive climate and socially responsible business from a community perspective.

5. Concrete suggestions for improving communication and other issues that need to be mentioned (two questions).

Two open-ended questions allow the participants to clarify concepts, ideas, or critiques that they did not have the opportunity to express during the interview. Through this topic, they are able to further argue their views, point out problems and make suggestions based on their many years of experience in policing or participation in public services.

### 5.3 Data Collection and Processing Methods

At the very beginning of the focus group discussion, a verbal consent of the participants for the recording was requested, emphasizing that the complete protection of the participants' identities will be respected in result processing and presentation. Two moderators, based on a pre-prepared protocol for a semi-structured interview, conducted a group discussion for 90 min in accordance with the recommendations for conducting interviews (Skoko and Benković 2009). In addition to the moderators, the participants

encouraged each other to get involved in the conversation and thus enabled the collection of additional information during the interview.

In accordance with the mechanisms proposed in Grounded Theory (Corbin and Strauss 1990/2015; Strauss 1987/2003; Willig 2008), notes were kept during the empirical research of the focus group. They were used to record areas that need to be further analysed in order to identify ideas that could be a potential source of information in the preparation of proposals for the Croatian police communication models on social networks.

The recorded material was transcribed and the transcript was used for further analysis of the results. A constant comparative analysis was applied, according to the Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), as a result of which the results were coded and compared. The data were analysed by systematizing the answers according to the questions, by monitoring non-verbal communication and by using notes taken during the focus group.

Based on the processed and analysed data, a transcript and a narrative report of the focus group were drafted (Krueger and Casey 2000).

#### **5.4 Ethical Aspect of the Research**

Participation in the focus group was voluntary and anonymous.

First, the consent for the implementation of this research was requested and obtained in writing from the competent persons of the Ministry of the Interior, the Public Relations Service and the Police Directorate. Consent for research participation was then requested and obtained from selected members of the target population.

At the very beginning of the focus group discussion, a verbal consent of the participants for the recording was requested, emphasizing that the complete protection of the participants' identities will be respected in result processing and presentation. The participants were then presented with the goal and method of work as well as the rules of conduct during this form of research. Each participant was made aware of the possibility to withdraw from the research at any time.

Focus group participants are marked with abbreviations P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and P6 and there is no possibility of their identification.

#### **5.5 Research Limitations**

Based on the interview, it can be concluded that focus group members are well selected since they represent people who actively use modern information and communication tools and are well aware of the current situation, needs and problems in public reporting on police work. However, the results obtained should be viewed in the context of research limitations that are primarily related to the fact that only one focus group with six participants was held. The limitation of the research is to some extent the disproportion between the topicality and scope of the research topic on the one hand and the time frame of the focus group interview on the other.



## 6 Results

The results were determined by analysing the transcript of the focus group, which clearly show how the participants perceive police communication via social networks as an important segment of communication. There is a growing tendency for this form of communication to be present in everyday business processes.

### 6.1 Communication Problems in General

The focus group started with general questions on communication in order to introduce the participants to the conversation, but also to acquaint them with the issues covered by the research.

Participants believe that the change in the way of communication in the past ten years represents mostly positive developments. They immediately state that these changes are especially visible in police work and the presence of the police in the media as well as on social networks.

*P4: "We have brought the speech closer to the citizens, we no longer speak in a way that no one understands us. We have simplified our official speech."*

*P2: "At the beginning of the Corona crisis, everything was urgently opened (social network profiles), so that we could be as accessible to the public as possible, which in many segments proved to be very good, like the great earthquake in Zagreb. Everyone is mobile, they are not sitting at home in front of the TV, because they are running away from a real life danger."*

Regarding everyday private and business communication, participants state that they use a number of applications for social networks, which shows that it is necessary to accept changes and adopt new knowledge in the field of communication, especially in the segment of digital communication. They also point out that an essential feature of today's communication is the feedback "speed" and the transition to new forms, noting that new generations do not distinguish messages sent via SMS compared to other communication tools such as Messenger, Viber etc.

*P1: "WhatsApp, Viber and Telegram are used internally, because it is the fastest method to share something important. Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn are used in official communication with citizens."*

*P1: "When people ask questions through these channels and media, they want an answer immediately, not in two days, but in twenty minutes. They have a concrete problem and expect an answer immediately."*

Discussing whether the mass media tends to sensationalism, the discussion moved in the direction of practical examples, noting the importance of the type of content that is posted. Namely, the participants commented on the quality of media reporting based on the information provided by the police, and it is possible to conclude that certain media strive for sensationalism. That reduces the quality of information passed on to citizens and can sometimes lead to unnecessary problems in the work of the police.

Respondents believe that with more frequent and better information through digital channels, the police can provide accurate information to citizens. In doing so, it can avoid potential noise in communication. That can reduce the quality of information placed on citizens and can sometimes lead to unnecessary problems in the work of the police.

*P1: "If we talk about placing some kind of press release in terms of preventive matters, such as fraud on the Internet and such, in almost 99% of cases the message is transmitted the same way as it was sent."*

*P5: "Official information must go out as soon as possible, since in fact they create their stories (journalists), especially if we are speaking about some smaller rural areas... in the latest case of an attempted robbery, two or three slightly larger media that are followed by the national media managed to obtain video surveillance and recordings within half an hour or an hour after the said incident. They were already announcing the identities of possible suspects."*

## 6.2 Problems of Police Communication via Social Networks

This was followed by the topic of police communication via social networks, i.e. issues related to the communication of the Ministry of the Interior employees with the public, which encompasses the tasks of the participants.

The discussion defined how all organizational units of the Ministry of the Interior use e-mail to communicate with citizens and social networks to a lesser extent. However, that information about the work of the police ends up on social networks, as various media report them. It was noted that different social networks target different groups of people who are divided mainly by age. For example, Facebook is more aimed at the middle-aged and older generations of people, while young people and children use other social networks such as TikTok and Instagram. Accordingly, it is necessary to prepare materials for social network posts depending on the target group, but also to include as many social networks as possible. The participants understand the issue of preparing texts and visuals for posting on various social networks, but are not familiar with the possibilities offered by tools for central and uniform publishing such as HootSuite and Contentino.

*P2: "As far as Facebook is concerned, I think it is used by older populations. I see it in my kids who say 'mom you have Facebook, you are old'. Twitter is something newer. Teenagers at the age of 14 used Instagram, Snap... you need several different networks at various points of time in order to cover everything."*

Talking about whether posts on social networks can negatively affect the perception of the police, the problem of comments on social networks arose. Nevertheless, the common position of the focus group is that with the help of a quality presence on social networks, one can increase the reputation and favourable public opinion about the police. The participants state that "uniformed" and "cold" announcements often provoke negative comments from citizens, while, for example, announcements about the search dog were positively accepted. In addition to negative comments, there are also positive comments on social networks that can influence public opinion about the

police, and some of them result in operationally interesting information. As an important segment, it was emphasized that the police communicate with the public on topics such as: completed criminal investigations related to crimes and misdemeanours, missing and wanted persons and other illegal forms of behaviour, which can also ensure helpful feedback.

*P6: "There will always be someone who will write something in a negative context."*

*P2: "Civil Protection Directorate, our Gizmo, our search dog, the most famous paw of Croatia. Earthquake in Albania, what were we recognized by? By his fantastic photo of rescuing people from the ruins taken from a plane."*

*P5: "Sometimes maybe certain comments within these Facebook posts bring us some new knowledge and we can react based on these comments and messages."*

### **6.3 Problems of Organizational, Technological and Personnel Readiness of the Ministry of the Interior to Communicate via Social Networks**

The next block of questions discussed the findings, but also the thoughts, of the participants related to the level of preparedness for digital channel management with regard to personnel, organizational and technological resources in the Ministry of the Interior.

Since it was previously determined that posts can negatively affect public opinion, which certainly needs to be reduced to the lowest level, the participants see additional training of public relations personnel to work with social networks as one possible solutions. They also believe that it is necessary to develop and actively use agreed standards (e.g. book of standards for graphic design) and have clear instructions on how to post and draft social network contents. The current situation, according to the participants, requires the definition of a comprehensive strategy for police communication via social networks.

*P1: "The Ministry does not have any handbook, as far as the book of standards is concerned, for the visual presentation of anything..."*

Discussing which social networks the police should post on, the participants concluded that it was important to initially define the content and determine on which social network posting would be "most profitable" given the age of its users. The role of influencers as relevant representatives of a certain demography and through which the information sent can reach a larger audience was also mentioned.

*P1: "If there is a preventive operation in traffic, we should definitely use Instagram to reach young high-flying drivers who like to take pictures while driving 230 km/h on a highway."*

All participants believe that among their own employees they have the personnel with the necessary knowledge to create content and post on social networks, noting that any additional form of education would be desirable. Some of the focus group participants believe that more intensive use of social networks is needed at the level of Police Directorates, and that they might already be falling behind in this segment.

*P3: “We even had a proposal ten years ago for launching a pilot project of the Police Directorate Facebook...”*

When discussing whether it is necessary to keep statistics on posts, post reach, and social engagement of posts made on social networks, the participants have a divided opinion. They agreed that analyses and statistics should be done, but that the basic measures of the effectiveness of such posts should not be valorised and measured in the same way in the public sector (police) as in the real sector in which advertising is mainly done. Metrics exist, but their application is questionable.

All participants agreed that it would be helpful to establish a central team for managing the presence on social networks and a list of all public profiles of organizational units of the Ministry of the Interior on social networks. That statement opened the question of lack of personnel. Namely, as a definite problem, the participants state the lack of human resources for deeper acceptance of social networks in terms of communication channels. Introduction of so-called two-way communication, in which the police would answer questions and comments asked via social networks, is seen as a process that cannot be achieved with the current distribution of tasks and number of people and without significant changes in the functioning of public relations services.

There was also talk of inappropriate communication via social networks, about which the participants have a divided opinion. Namely, some of them think that it is common knowledge what the appropriate way of communication is, while others think that it is necessary to define the rules in this area as well.

*P5: “I think that the Code of Ethics says it all... whether it is a cadet at the Police Academy or an officer who has been in the police for 10 years...”*

#### **6.4 The Problem of the Impact of the Police Presence on Social Networks on the Community in Terms of Police Legitimacy, Citizens’ Trust in the Police and Procedural Justice**

This was followed by questions on how police communication on social networks could/should reflect on the legitimacy of the police, citizens’ trust in the police and procedural justice with regard to improving communication via social networks.

The discussion on improving police communication via social networks through an increased number of contacts reopens the issue of lack of personnel and other components of successful communication.

*I2: “We lack resources, we lack technology, we lack humanity, we lack knowledge... we always have some limitations, inability to access something, finances and lack of personnel. I think that there would be more will if there were some incentives and opportunities for people to be educated a little more.”*

The participants agreed that police use social media to respond quickly to emergencies such as earthquakes, apprehending criminals and searching for missing persons with the announcement of new technologies in the area such as the introduction of Facebook’s AMBER warning for missing children. They also agreed that the contact of citizens with

the police via social networks enables equal treatment of different social groups. Discussing whether improving police communication via social media can heighten people's sense of obligation to act in accordance with police instructions has imposed the importance of two-way communication. The possibility of using social networks to explain certain decisions and reasons for some actions was also accepted as desirable. What certain participants find unacceptable is the reporting of criminal offenses and misdemeanours via social networks, emphasizing that direct contact is more useful in such situations.

*P6: "It is better to personally go to a Police Station and file a criminal complaint and say everything you have and provide more information than you would by sending an e-mail, etc."*

Through various preventive activities and cooperation with institutions, associations and other organizations, the police is involved in solving social problems, news of which is also published via social networks. Often, social networks and communication via them are a source of information about social problems, but also about the possibilities of solving them.

*P3: "Organizing humanitarian actions... collecting books for the Association that cares for children with developmental disabilities.... in this way we get involved in community work."*

## **6.5 Suggestions for Improving Communication**

At the end of the discussion, the participants were invited to make concrete suggestions for improving communication, but also other facts that could be relevant to the focus group topic.

A discussion followed on whether individual organizational units should have their own social network profiles, on which opinions were divided. The participants are aware that communication via social networks would bring the police closer to the community, but they also point out a number of limitations that currently arise when thinking about intensifying this form of communication. They agree that in this situation it would be desirable to have a centre (e.g. in Zagreb) that would be the starting point for new forms of communication with citizens. This centre should run complete administration of police public profiles on social networks in one place, have an advisory role and provide the technology and knowledge (education) needed for quality public relations.

*P2: "Social networks are an engagement practically 24 h a day. There is no delay."*

*P3: "We should somehow define the whole procedure in order to ensure that this communication via social networks is of good quality. However, even though it may be a slightly more informal way of communication, we would still communicate as an institution, so it should be within a certain policy framework."*

## 7 Discussion and Conclusion

The implementation of this empirical focus group research gathered information, ideas and attitudes of selected participants dealing with public relations of the police and other organizational units of the Ministry of the Interior.

Since the aim of the research was to determine the current forms and characteristics of the Croatian police communication with the public, with particular emphasis on modern digital communication channels and social networks, the information collected is the basis and a motive for further research on this topic. The conclusions drawn through the analysis of available literature, interviews with the participants and analysis of their formed attitudes on this topic indicate that the selected research area is engaging, relevant and insufficiently researched in the Republic of Croatia. The results of the focus group's conclusions show that, at the moment, the presence of the police and other components of the Ministry of the Interior on social networks is not given sufficient attention. It is interesting to find out how the participants identify opportunities and problems that may arise from a stronger application of new digital channels in communication with the community.

Bearing in mind that police administrations in other countries have been actively trying to master the methodology and technology of using social networks for many years, it is unquestionable that this topic deserves appropriate attention in the Republic of Croatia. However, unlike the approaches that are already well known in the business environment, the police approach towards the community via social networks should differ significantly both in the metrics for measuring performance and in the way of addressing, i.e. posting information.

Given the broad scope of issues and the susceptible area in which public sector institutions, especially the police, operate, additional efforts are required for developing procedural guidelines and methodologies that are simple and applicable. It is also necessary to focus on additional training of public information personnel, describe procedures and instructions for the preparation and publication of information, and adopt a joint position of all police services regarding the configuration and subject matter of posted information. In addition, there is a need to adjust the current regulations in order to carry out these activities without hindrance. This includes the development of the necessary methodological framework that would define competencies, processes and procedures, organization and technological infrastructure through which the Croatian police could manage their presence on social networks and new digital channels.

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