Social Media Policy for Policing in India (Working Draft)

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Online Social Media Policy for policing in India

Introduction: Police departments across the globe are increasingly connecting with citizens using Online Social Media (OSM) pages and profiles to use it for law and order related issues. For instance, the Boston Police Department started updating people about Boston bombing on Twitter more than 10 minutes before the national media started reporting about it [1]. OSM has also helped citizens to connect and provide timely information to police. Thousands of citizens in developed countries post content and follow police departments such as Boston police, Spanish police, Seattle police, UK police and Chicago police. Citizens provide useful content to police, e.g., current situation from affected area, identify victims / accused, identify missing people; identify lost or stolen vehicles and online beats programs [2]. Unlike other organizations, prime objective of OSM use by the police is not to transform policing or increase the work but to provide effective communication and connectivity with citizens [6]. Previous research suggests that OSM should not only be restricted to public relations exercise but be used for community building [3]. However, strong legal restrictions on public disclosures and lack of policies make it difficult to use OSM effectively for policing [4]. Previous events show that police has misunderstood the citizen’s expectation for use of OSM. For instance, New York Police Department (NYPD) started a Twitter campaign #myNYPD (see figure 1) asking users to upload photos of themselves with NYPD members to get closer to the citizen community [5]. However, soon, citizens posted pictures of police brutality with hashtag #myNYPD, backfiring the department’s strategy to improve public relations. This also spread to other states in the US like citizens in Los Angeles posted pictures of police brutality with #myLAPD [5].

Figure1: NYPD backlash. NYPD expected people to post feel good images whereas citizens ended up posting negative pictures of the department.

Online social media policy can help departments secure use of OSM to enhance communication, collaboration, information exchange, intelligence building and increasing productivity. The policy should help department establish the its view on
utility and management of OSM, and help supervise OSM management, and administration by policing departments. The policy so developed is meant for OSM in general and will be applicable to future new tools as OSM landscape continues to evolve.

**Background:**
This policy was formulated as an outcome of multifaceted aimed at understanding how police can appropriately use OSM for policing. First, to explore users’ practices and expectations, we conducted 37 semi-structured, in-depth interviews { 17 with citizens in Delhi, India and 20 with Indian Police Service officers across the country. Next, we designed an online survey to gain insights about mass opinions about police on OSM. We developed a survey protocol and used it to collect 445 policemen responses and 204 citizen responses. Finally, we conducted a workshop with senior IPS officers to understand the expectations and needs from the OSM policy.

![Figure 2: Methodology followed for developing the OSM policy for policing.](image)
Broad Model Policy

1. Encourage two-way communication between people and police service. Allow people to post on your page
2. Decide / strategize specific services for which pages should be used. e.g. Traffic, Criminal activities, Services e.g. passport verification etc. Content for these pages can be planned and posted according to the page.
3. Mention the broad intention for creating this social profile on your page, e.g. description of the Facebook page or the profile information in Twitter.
4. Include necessary Advisories (e.g. “Please don’t report crime on Facebook.”) and House Rules (e.g. https://www.facebook.com/metpoliceuk?v=app_190322544333196) wherever appropriate.
5. Make technological arrangements to take a copy of the posts into a local server / machine to avoid future problems. Multiple tools are available for doing this.
6. Identify the most popular social media services and use the same. e.g. Most of the Indian audience might prefer Facebook over Twitter.
7. Have a legal advice while preparing the strategy for posting on social media services.
8. Synchronize your offline and online world actions e.g. focus on any important events rather than some silly updates by an app like Consider privacy and information leakages of the information posted on the OSM, e.g. disclosing or not disclosing about a current case being investigated.
9. Create a brand for yourself using online social media.

Detailed Guidelines

Engagement Strategy:
1) Encourage two-way communication between people and police service: allow people to post on your page
   a) What your comments can say:
      • You can express a general statement.
      • Thank people for their comments.
      • Offer guidance on how the case can be handled in offline world.
      • Get real world authentication of the work.
      • Equally value criticism and appreciation on Social Media.
   b) What your post should avoid?
      • Should not give away your ideas / tactics which are not to be disclosed.
      • Should not present anybody’s personal views.
      • Should not hurt sentiments of any community.
      • Should not show any political motivation.

2) Mention the broad intention for creating this social profile on your page.
Create content suitable for your audience:

1) Know who is your target audience. Across the world various OSM initiatives have been successful because they targeted whom they wanted the information to go to. E.g. If all your audience is young population then running a campaign to protect old citizens should consist of information which young people can use to help you.

2) Ask your audience to spread a word about your initiative, only if it is really necessary. Be selective about what content you want to spread as the generated content gets worldwide presence.

3) Do not post messages that may be: prejudicial to court proceedings; abusive; defamatory; harassing; harmful; libelous; obscene; profane; racially offensive; sexually offensive; unlawful

Synchronize your online and offline world:

1) Plan events / social campaigns well before hand on online social media as in offline world.

2) Know about the offline world conditions when posting information in online world. According to participants this was situation dependent
   Keep a control on whom to follow in case of twitter.

3) Disable applications which can post on your behalf or any other application which takes are data / access your account.

4) Do not post the same or similar messages more than once. This will be viewed as spam.

5) Do not publicize your own, or anyone else's personal information.

6) Do not advertise your own or other peoples products or services.

7) Do not pretend to be someone else.

8) Decide and strategize broad reactions to be given for information posted / content generated by citizens (Table below suggests some replies).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Post</th>
<th>Reply</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Positive feedback about your work by citizens</td>
<td>Thank them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Complaints.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Specific Complaints.</td>
<td>Give the offline world contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) In general complaints</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Negative comments about the policies</td>
<td>If you are still finalizing on strategy, you may want to take a feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you have / are taken any action you may like to give a general public announcement about that</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If a topic goes viral related to you.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A Question for you seeking information 1) If you have an answer, can you post it? 2) If you don’t have an answer? 3) If the question is not relevant.. Can you remove that content?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Incorrect information posted on your page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Negative / flaming message e.g. during riots people tagging police.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Advisories 1) How much specific do you want to be in the advisories issues. For e.g. in Muzaffarnagar riots UPPolice just tweeted not to trust messages and videos on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Privacy Implications**

1) Posts containing issues under investigation should not be made public etc.
2) If a citizen posts sensitive information, inform them if it violates any of the rules [You might want to issue general Advisory asking citizens not to post sensitive personal details]
3) Anonymize the content, which includes personal details of someone, if at you may have to share such information on official pages.
4) Do not reveal your personal contacts like email or phone numbers on the Facebook page.
5) Avoid connecting personal Facebook / Twitter accounts of officers with the official city pages.

**Create a brand for yourself using online social media**

1) Connect the social media pages with your website and other credible media to confirm your presence
2) Try to get your account verified.
3) Think of other mediums to popularize your presence
4) Put your official address on the page.
5) Put your working hours on the page.
6) Use your logo / official identities as pictures to make them look credible.
7) Frequently interact with people
8) Set a time frame and make it clear by when somebody should expect a reply to a request?
9) Have a plan for keeping your content fresh, relevant and up-to-date. Strive for continuous improvement and innovation.

Training
1) Train the officials about using social profiles and pages.
2) Make a clear conduct strategy for other officers about how to react / comment / spread the posts on the official state police profile.
3) Familiarize the officers with the privacy settings and other account settings on the page.

Some open questions to think before joining OSM:
1) How to use OSM for better policing?
2) How to make OSM usage more structural, and institutional? There is hesitation with OSM at higher level, is it going to sustain?
3) Common man wants to write something but doesn't want to be on the wrong side of law. How to strike a balance where people can write just anything but not get in trouble?
4) How best can we use the OSM, post event?
5) How will we face criticism?
6) What are the necessary safeguards to be placed before getting on to OSM, given that OSM can be misused, e.g. rules for citizens, guidelines for citizens, and guidelines for police employees?
7) How should we train our field officers? How can they operate within the policy and execute what their primary purpose is? Need to train field officers to interact with micro-communities - in geographical locations as well as virtual world.
8) What if the content is abusive? Citizens might get violent while complaining about issues, how to censor such content? What are the appropriate house keeping rules / consumer use policy for police?
9) How traditional means can be supported by OSM? How is public space being used? How can we raise red flags to on field officers and take actions?
10) What kind of audience / people to be approached through OSM in India? What is the relationship between the economic status and the mobile OSM users? Can police offers better services based on this knowledge?

References:
2. GMP on social media. http://www.gmp.polic.uk/content/section.html?readform &s=BF065D29498499728025796100424FED.


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Please contact pk@iiitd.ac.in for any queries and suggestions on OSM policy for policing in India.