

Exploring Social Media's Impact on Societal Perceptions of Police Legitimacy and Cooperation

Debranique Mensah^{1,*}, James R. Jones² & Veronica L. Ford³

¹USA

²Fairleigh Dickinson University, USA

³Revive Counseling and Wellness Services, LLC, USA

*Corresponding author: E-mail: ldebranique@yahoo.com

Received: July 12, 2023 Accepted: September 6, 2023 Published: September 29, 2023

doi:10.5296/jsr.v15i1.21154 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/jsr.v15i1.21154>

Abstract

Since the 2014 killing of Eric Garner, the number of social media posts involving police officers engaging in unethical behavior has increased, and the videos and images posted have had a strong influence on the public's perception of law enforcement officers. This paper explores the associations between the variables of social media usage, police legitimacy, and police cooperation while discussing how they intersect. In addition, this paper investigates whether these variables are still associated, after controlling for age, gender, and education. This research was conducted using a multiple regression analysis of the data collected from a quantitative survey completed by 80 participants. The participants were aged 18 and older, had an active social media account, lived in the United States, and were not former military or police officers.

Keywords: perceptions of police, police legitimacy, cooperation, social media, societal perceptions of police, and perceptions of police legitimacy

1. Introduction

One of the ways citizens' perceptions of law enforcement are developed is through secondary or vicarious experiences. These experiences consist of information acquired from many external sources and are often unrelated to personal experiences. While most people do not have direct contact with police officers, the media plays an essential role in shaping people's perceptions of police (Graziano & Gauthier, 2017). Videos of law enforcement found on the news and social media can portray law enforcement behaviors negatively or positively and viewing these videos may indirectly change public behaviors and attitudes toward law enforcement. These indirect experiences shape perceptions of law enforcement. Individuals utilize vicariously gathered information to evaluate law enforcement legitimacy (Perry et al., 2019). Therefore, citizens who do not have contact with courts, the criminal justice system, or law enforcement must consider what other factors might influence their confidence in the criminal justice system (Boateng & Kaiser, 2019). People who never or rarely engage with law enforcement officers can shape their perspectives of police from what they have seen in the media. Furthermore, people who do not frequently encounter law enforcement officers may experience police-citizen interactions through media consumption (Boivin et al., 2017).

People gain their knowledge of social reality from four sources: social groups or institutions (schools or churches), the media, significant others (family and friends), and personal experiences (Alitavoli & Kaveh, 2018; Boateng & Kaiser, 2019). However, studies examining the relationship between media consumption and the perceptions of police have focused almost solely on the consumption of traditional media (e.g., reading newspapers, watching television news) or entertainment media (watching crime-related television). The primarily overlooked area in this research is analyzing contemporary types of media like the internet and social media (Intravia et al., 2017). This study explores the associations between the variables of social media usage, police legitimacy, and police cooperation while including relevant interactions between them. In addition, the research examines whether these variables are still associated after controlling for age, gender, and education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media and Its Usage

As the use and abilities of social media platforms grow and develop, there is little research that examines how social media use influences different aspects of the users' lives. Prior research examining the relationship between law enforcement attitudes and media consumption has not paid attention to the role of online media habits like social media and the internet (Intravia et al., 2020). In fact, the number of social media platforms and users continues to grow rapidly, making communication between people worldwide easier. Social media sites have sporadically become popular and have increased in number (Olufadi, 2015). People who use social media can share and post a wide variety of information in seconds to millions of people. By definition, social media sites are third-party platforms that allow users to create a digital profile and share information by distributing content in the form of photos,

text, and videos. They allow users to connect with one another (Isett et al., 2017).

Many social media users' comment, post, or repost photos or videos of significant news events that could contain law enforcement engaging in misconduct. Fifty percent of social media users reported reposting news stories, 46% talked about events from the news, 14% posted photos, and 12% posted videos from news events (Intravia et al., 2018). Many posts shared on social media can be edited to show just a fraction of the event being portrayed. These platforms allow users to post videos that may be edited, with personal comments attached. The main feature of social media platforms is user-generated content, making social media a method of creating and disseminating ideas (Ince et al., 2017). The public tends to gather most of their insights regarding current affairs and the criminal justice system through social media consumption (Fallik et al., 2020). Many of these posts are not from official sources, but social media users look to these unofficial posts for information. Contributors to social media sites have been less reliant on official sources than traditional media, concentrating more on non-official online sources (Miranda et al., 2016).

Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are among the most popular. In June 2015, Facebook reported 1.31 billion active mobile users and Twitter, in December 2015, reported 320 million users (Hackin & Brunson, 2018; Hu et al., 2018). As the use of social media grows, more people may turn to it as their primary news source, more than television news media. Researchers have been slow in analyzing the role of the internet and social media consumption, even though social media is the second most prominent and the internet the fourth most prominent platform (Rosenberger & Dierenfeldt, 2020). The degree to which media's representation of specific ideas can shape what is socially acceptable should be examined. Such developments influence how issues are perceived and constructed (Walsh & O'Connor, 2019). These ideas make the knowledge of social media usage vital, as its use is growing (Choi et al., 2019). Social media has changed the way people communicate and provides people with instant access to news and other information. Social media platforms have captured hundreds of millions of users across the globe, changing communication with others and giving users almost instant access to information, options, and images from all around the world (Fitzpatrick, 2018).

Stories that involve police misconduct are highly publicized on social media platforms. Such stories posted online can shape the minds of those who watch them. Across media platforms, topics of the criminal justice system and crime-related stories are topics with content that can influence citizens' attitudes toward legal actors (Intravia et al., 2018). With this in mind, many community members do not have direct experience with the police but still have negative views of them. The Bureau of Justice Statistics survey (2018) stated that only 21% of U.S. residents had contact (even minor incidents) with law enforcement over a year (Rosenberger & Dierenfeldt, 2020). Despite most of the community not having personal experiences with law enforcement, they still have opinions about the police. Many citizens are not directly exposed to severe crimes or the consequences of committing a crime as either the offender or the victim. Instead, citizens ostensibly depend on things they see in the media to learn about crime and other information. Sadly, the information posted on social media sites is not statistically correct (Shi et al., 2018). This suggests that citizens' opinions and

perceptions are formed independently of real-world experiences (Chio et al., 2019). The media often shows authorities in the criminal justice system as being unable to address essential crime issues (Shi et al., 2018). It appears that there are more negative videos of police being posted on social media than positive ones. Not only has the coverage of negative police shootings and other negative events increased, but so has the coverage of these stories on all media sources (Intravia et al., 2020). Both news and social media tend to show or share stories where law enforcement has used deadly force on an unarmed person.

2.2 Video Editing and Its Influence on Viewer Perception

It is possible for the people who post online to only share clips of a police encounter that paint the police in a negative light, keeping the actions that led to the police action hidden. A social media user can create a ten-second video from the original that could have been longer—showing only the section of the video for which they wished to be viewed. In addition, users can also narrate videos, which in essence, gives the public the ability to create news, share it on social media, and interact with others in real-time (Hu et al., 2018).

In many cases, videos posted on social media platforms are the only interactions people have with law enforcement. As citizens' personal experiences with crime and law enforcement are limited, the media can serve as a social agent providing them with vicarious experiences (Choi, 2019). Many people do not interact directly with police, so the videos and images they see shape the perceptions they hold. Since most people do not engage directly with law enforcement officers, the media plays an essential role in shaping their perceptions of officers (Graziano & Gauthier, 2017). Citizens do not need their interactions with the police to determine their opinions on police legitimacy or procedural fairness when media influence is preset (Gray, 2015). For example, cell phones and other mobile devices can capture photos and record videos that can go viral quickly on social media and increase citizens' exposure to negative police encounters with other citizens (Intravia et al., 2020). If videos of negative police encounters are all people are exposed to, they can shape people's perceptions of the police even when they have not had face-to-face interactions with them.

2.3 Social Media and Citizens Perceptions

While social media can show positive images of law enforcement, it can also show them in a negative light. Depending on the amount of positive and negative posts about the police, social media users can be influenced by the posts they are exposed to the most. Media exposure can inflate positive views of law enforcement. As a result, it can also lead to respondents overestimating the misconduct and the amount of force police use (Boivin et al., 2017). The controversial images of police interventions are most likely to be reported and go viral, as they are rapidly and widely circulated throughout various media outlets. These videos are distributed from person to person, with the most shocking images or videos reaching the widest audience (Boivin et al., 2017). Each video or image shared can arouse fear in the viewers, although the posted images may have been taken out of context. Furthermore, these shared stories can include anxieties about criminal justice incidents and are condensed into short stories that are decontextualized (Roche et al., 2015a).

2.4 Social Media and User Content

There is no limit to what can be found, said, posted, and shared when exploring the internet. Users are becoming journalists, posting and sharing news with their added comments and opinions of the situation. However, what they post is not subjected to as many filters as is the case with a real journalist. Neither social media users nor the platforms are subject to journalistic accountability standards (Reisach, 2021). Consequently, users can share things with minimal restrictions for determining whether the post is factual. The internet is host to a collection of news/information that does not have filters, subjecting users to uncensored views of reality, particularly regarding negative police actions captured by surveillance and cellphone footage (Graziano & Gauthier, 2017). The videos or other images shared on social media about police may play a role in how police are viewed by those who watch. The representation in the media may mediate the relationship between institutions of justice and the public perceptions thereof (Boda & Szabo, 2011). Social media platforms have become outlets for citizens to express their views on issues more quickly, effectively, and directly than in other traditional ways (Bunting & Stamatel, 2019). Therefore, it can be assumed that most people who post about police policies, police actions, or any other topic may have little to no knowledge of the issues being discussed. Thus, citizens are providing their views and opinions about the subject that are not fact-checked. Social media sites allow users to bypass those with knowledge and information on current issues, impacting the language used and what the public knows. Anyone with access to social media can share their narratives, attempting to explain how they view a wide range of social events (Hockin & Brunson, 2018).

Citizens can access information about significant news events anywhere at any time. Since technology has become more mobile, accessing news and other information on the internet and social media sites has influenced how users acquire, learn, and transmit content (Intravia et al., 2017). The internet is becoming a significant source of information about crime within the community and local news. Theoretically, one might assume that exposure to internet news can play a unique role in the social construction of people's attitudes and beliefs (Roche et al., 2016a).

2.5 Citizens' Perceptions of Police Legitimacy

Madon et al. (2017) argued that legitimacy had been conceptualized as reflecting three different judgments. First, the public's confidence and trust that the police are trying to do their jobs efficiently, that police are honest, and that law enforcement can protect the community it serves. The second judgment is that the public views of police legitimacy reflect their willingness to defer to the police. Lastly, legitimacy involves the belief that the actions taken by the police are appropriate and morally correct (Madon et al., 2017). These critical elements influence the public perception of law enforcement as legitimate. Citizens constantly and actively evaluate the behavior of law enforcement and the views of legitimacy citizens hold of the police may be withdrawn if police behavior ceases to conform to the widely accepted norms of fairness (Milani & Jackson, 2017).

Lee and Lee (2021) listed four stages of police legitimacy: (1) interaction, (2) evaluation, (3)

internalization, and (4) reaction. The evaluation of police legitimacy starts with interaction, which leads to evaluation. Next, would be to internalize the evaluation, and lastly, the judgment is made based on the reaction to a citizen's direct or indirect experiences with police. If the public views law enforcement as legitimate, then the outcome of their behavior and interactions could be different from those who do not consider the police legitimate. Legitimacy has been connected to an important outcome measure for the police (White et al., 2016). The views citizens hold of police officers are turning unfavorable due to the increased coverage of police shootings of unarmed people. Many researchers have alluded to a "legitimacy crisis" occurring in the United States after several high-profile incidents of police misconduct and deadly force were captured on video (Intravia et al., 2020). A 2015 national poll by Gallup Inc. recorded the lowest support for police since the 1993 Rodney King incident (Kochel & Skogan, 2021). The way police engage with the community is being questioned, and a new set of guidelines should be created to improve police-community interactions and citizens' perceptions of law enforcement. When police and community relationships are strained, and the legitimacy of the police is under a cloud due to the high visibility of use-of-force incidents, there is a need to establish a new set of metrics that assess the quality of police-community interactions (Rosenbaum et al., 2016).

Citizens have been posting encounters they have witnessed or have been a part of at a higher rate than in previous years. Issues of police brutality have gained renewed attention in the USA over the past few years due to the increased number of recorded and violent police-citizen encounters (Parry et al., 2019). Some of the videos posted come from police body cameras, while bystanders generate others. The videos posted directly from police cameras make any misconduct more serious, with more severe implications. Many posts come from police departments directly and are later uploaded to social media to be viewed by people worldwide (Parry et al., 2019). These videos depict law enforcement officers shooting, killing, or assaulting people who seem to pose no threat to them at the time, calling into question the legitimacy of police officers.

2.6 The Legitimacy of Law Enforcement

Legitimacy is the public's confidence and trust that law enforcement will do its job well and serve the public's interest fairly and impartially (Rosenbaum et al., 2016). The legitimacy of law enforcement is gained or lost during law enforcement's interactions with citizens. Citizens who view officers acting lawfully are more likely to consider the police legitimate (Parry et al., 2019). Legitimacy is conferred on the police organization and institutions when the public sees law enforcement operating in a fair, decent, neutral, open, and respectful manner (Milani & Jackson, 2017). Therefore, the amount of negative news coverage of law enforcement officers at a rate disproportionate to any positive law enforcement videos can cause lower perceptions of legitimacy in the public. It has been suggested that the "legitimacy crisis" may be caused mostly by the number of adverse police-community incidents captured on video (Intravia et al., 2020).

Police officers have more contact with the public than other members of the criminal justice system, making them more vulnerable to being judged by the public. Law enforcement

officers are the most visible members of the criminal justice system. Citizens are more likely to encounter a police officer for various community events, traffic violations, or just on the streets than correctional officers (Reynolds et al., 2018). Law enforcement officers are the first contact on a person's journey through the criminal justice system. Hence, how law enforcement engages with members of the community influences the perceptions citizens hold of the police. As the most visible government agents, police officers' treatment of community members influences public perceptions of their legitimacy and the community's solidarity with them (Kwak et al., 2019). Law enforcement officers' use of authority influences the community's perceptions of their legitimacy in both negative and positive ways (Duck, 2017).

Key elements that shape citizens' perceptions of police legitimacy are: (1) officers show neutrality when making decisions (i.e., unbiased); (2) a sense that respect and dignity were given to the citizens, and (3) officers hold a perception of trustworthiness, and citizens could express themselves during the interaction (i.e., use their voice) (Henry & Franklin, 2019). When citizens perceive the treatment and decisions by police as fair and reasonable, they will see law enforcement as legitimate (Madon et al., 2017; Nix, 2017a; Nix, 2017b). Those who believe that they have been treated with respect and equality by law enforcement officers are more likely to view police departments as reliable and legitimate government agents (Bolger & Walters, 2019). How individuals feel, think, and act toward law enforcement is due to their views of police legitimacy (Moule et al., 2019). The research reviewed has shown that when police engage in acceptable moral behaviors, they are viewed by the public as a legitimate authority.

2.7 Citizens' Cooperation with Law Enforcement

There are many reasons for people cooperating with law enforcement officers. Some cooperate out of fear of jail, and others cooperate because they see them as legitimate. Lee and Lee (2021) argue that citizens cooperate with the police for normative and instrumental reasons. Normative concerns include personal views (how a person feels they should behave) and legitimacy (views of whether police have authority over them) influence cooperation (p. 1108). The instrumental concerns include how police perform (how effectively they do their job), risk and deterrence (perception of risk of sanctions), and distributive justice (if justice is meted out fairly). People of the community are assets of the criminal justice system. Without community members, the work of all departments in the criminal justice system cannot be carried out effectively.

The primary purpose of the criminal justice system is to maintain social order and ensure that citizens comply with the police diktats. To do this effectively, law enforcement officers and court systems need citizens to cooperate with and obey law enforcement. Citizens must also be willing to assist the police with criminal investigations and report crimes to the police (Boateng & Kaiser, 2019). Police officers cannot be present everywhere simultaneously, so they will not be able to catch every offender engaging in a criminal act. The community reports crimes and provides information so that police can investigate and apprehend criminals, and the help police receive from the public is indispensable, as citizens act as the

eyes and ears of law enforcement officers (Kwak et al., 2019). Community members assist law enforcement officers in many areas that help police do their jobs effectively. The cooperation citizens provide to law enforcement officers significantly affects how effective law enforcement is at performing its duties. With no cooperation from citizens, suspects disappear, arrest rates plummet, cases fail to materialize, and leads unravel (Bolger & Walters, 2019).

Without assistance from the community, police officers would be working with very little information on most crimes. Cooperation from citizens is imperative for routine tasks to be carried out by law enforcement officers. The public's willingness to work with the police to solve crimes in their communities is essential to ensure the proper functioning of any law enforcement agency (Henry & Franklin, 2019). Whether it is citizens volunteering information about a crime or not obeying direct orders, their actions have an essential role in implementing or facilitating laws within the criminal justice system (Hamm et al., 2017). If community members do not want to come forward with information on a crime they have seen or been victims of, police will not be able to effectively solve that crime.

2.8 Synthesis of Literature Review

Research has connected police legitimacy to the important work-related outcome for law enforcement. Citizens' compliance with commands, obedience to laws, and cooperation with authority (White et al., 2016) are essential outcomes law enforcement needs from citizens. Sustaining legitimacy is essential to law enforcement because it increases citizens' chances of compliance and cooperation (Nix, 2017a; Schreurs et al., 2018); these are voluntary, and law enforcement needs both from citizens to aid in the day-to-day performance of their duties (Parry et al., 2019). Without voluntary cooperation from citizens, law enforcement becomes overwhelmed and cannot adequately do their jobs (Graham et al., 2019). With the increase of negative stories shared on social media nationwide, understanding social media's impact on various areas is essential to comprehend the theoretical model. Many studies have linked police legitimacy and cooperation but have not focused on the correlations they may have with the frequency of social media usage.

3. Method

3.1 Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study examined the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Is there an association between perception of police legitimacy and cooperation?

Research Question 2: Is there an association between social media usage, and perception of police legitimacy?

Research Question 3: Is there an association between social media usage and cooperation?

Research Question 4: Is there an association between age, gender, and education, and

perceptions of police legitimacy, and cooperation?

Hypothesis 1: There is no association between perceptions of police legitimacy and cooperation.

Hypothesis 2: There is no association between social media usage and perception of police legitimacy.

Hypothesis 3: There is no association between social media usage and cooperation.

Hypothesis 4: There is no association between the study's independent variables (age, gender, and education) and perceptions of police legitimacy, and cooperation.

The independent variables in this study were identified as age, gender, and education. The dependent variables were perceptions of police legitimacy, and cooperation. A regression analysis was run to determine if there was an association between the study's variables.

Table 1. Equation Abbreviations

Name	Abbreviation
Social Media Usage	SMU
Citizen Cooperation	CC
Police Legitimacy	PL
Age	A
Gender	G
Education	E
Constant	b_0

3.2 Study Terminology

Cooperation is defined as the preserved willingness to cooperate, the willingness of citizens to call the police to report crimes, and their willingness to provide information to law enforcement to help find a suspect or solve cases (Nix, 2017b)

Legitimacy is defined as the belief that an authority figure or institution is acting lawfully and is concerned with the citizens' best interest, resulting in compliance with that authority's instructions (Reynolds et al., 2018)

Media Consumption is defined as the public dependency on and the use of media to meet diverse individual information needs (Niu et al., 2020).

Media Exposure is the extent to which people are exposed to a message or content on a media platform, whether the message is noticed or remembered (Shah et al., 2019).

Media Usage is defined as the frequency of public media use. It is measured by the number of days media is used and the number of hours spent on social media per day (Niu et al., 2020).

Perception is defined as how individuals use their environment to structure representations of events that shape their life (Johnson, 2018).

A **photograph (Photo)** is defined as an illustration of a person, scene, object, etc., that comes in the form of a print or slide documented by a camera on photosensitive material. This word is often abbreviated to photo (Dictionary.com 2021).

Police Legitimacy is defined as the authority given by individuals who agree to the rules set, and who see these rules as acceptable beliefs shared by both the police and citizens. It is also seen as the citizen's approval of police authority (Harkin, 2015).

Police Misconduct is defined as the illegal or corrupt actions or the violation of peoples' constitutional rights by law enforcement officers while conducting their duties (The Innocence Project. 2016).

Social Media is defined as an internet-based platform to share, co-create, discuss, or modify user-generated content. These include electronic communication (i.e., Facebook and LinkedIn) through which users can share information, personal messages, ideas, and other content (Hockin & Brunson, 2018; Ward, 2016).

Use of Force is defined as the behavior of people who deliberately threaten or inflict physical injury on others. It is seen as the extent of strength used by police to enforce compliance by a reluctant individual (Bolger, 2015; International Association of the Chiefs of Police, 2001).

The Use of Force Continuum escalates actions by a law enforcement officer to resolve an issue. The continuum can have many levels. Police officers are trained to respond with force appropriate to their current situation. Law enforcement officers do not have to start at the minimum level of force before reaching a higher level. Officers can move from one continuum level to another within seconds (National Institute of Justice, 2016).

Video is defined as a broadcast, movie, or other forms of visual media production displaying moving images that can be played with or without audio; these images can be recorded and saved digitally or on videotape (Dictionary.com 2021).

3.3 Description of the Sample

The sample for this study was drawn from United States Citizens over 18 years old with an active social media account who were not former or active military or police officers. The researcher assumed the alpha of .05, POWER= .8, and medium effect size. Using the G-POWER program (Faul et al., 2013), the minimum desired sample size was determined to be 55. However, the research received 80 responses to the survey.

3.4 Data Collection

The survey was administered to participants via a web-based platform used for the purposes of data collection (Qualtrics). This survey was uploaded to the Qualtrics website, where an anonymous link was input into the online software Prolific. The Prolific company then used that link to distribute the survey. Participants clicked the link and completed the 10-minute survey. Once completed, the survey was reviewed for missing data. Participants were

compensated with five dollars for their participation if the survey was completed fully without missing data. Once study participants completed the survey, all data was sent back to the Qualtrics website. From there, the data was exported to a flash drive and stored in a password-protected safe, where it will stay for seven years.

The latest version of the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 26 (SPSS) software was used to analyze the data set. All data exported from Qualtrics to the flash drive were imported into SPSS. Once uploaded to SPSS, the answer set was displayed for each respondent. The variable section displayed variable labels, values, and data measurements. The data collected for this research was comprised of basic demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity, etc.), and questions on cooperation with police, social media usage, and citizens' views of police legitimacy.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed to ascertain whether there was a significant association between the variables of social media usage, citizens' views of police legitimacy, citizens' willingness to cooperate in criminal investigations, age, gender, and education. Next, a reliability test was run on the new scales created. The reliability test was conducted by inputting the new scales into the SPSS database. Having an alpha $> .7$ is considered to be reliable. All scales showed strong reliability. After creating the variable scales and checking the scales' reliability, descriptive statistics were run on the scales. Next, the normality test was also run on the legitimacy and cooperation scales, for which the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used. Both tests found legitimacy normally distributed. A visual examination of the histogram showed a standard curve. Normality was also found for cooperation by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The histogram presented a normal curve. Social media usage was not shown to be normal by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. Lastly, a multiple regression analysis was run to answer the quantitative research questions. The following table shows the normality test that was run on the variables of this study.

Table 2. Normality Test

	Kolmogorov Smirnov	Shapiro-Wilk
PL	Normal ($p > .05$)	Normal ($p > .05$)
CC	Violates Normality ($p < .05$)	Normal ($p > .05$)
SMU	Violates Normality ($p < .05$)	Violates Normality ($p < .05$)

4. Results

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

The following section shows the results of the hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis 1 Answer:

This model is not a significant predictor of social media usage (the DV/Predicted Variable) since $p > .05$. ($F(3, 72) = .364$, $P = .779$). Therefore, the details of this model will not be further reported.

Hypothesis 2 Answer:

The model is a significant predictor of police legitimacy since the p-value is $< .05$ ($F(3, 72) = 9.265$, $p < .001$). This model predicts 27.9% of the variance of police legitimacy since $R^2 = .279$. None of the coefficients are significant in the model. It is unusual to have a significant model with coefficients that are not significant. The equation for this model is police legitimacy = $1.192 + (\text{social media usage} \times -.029) + (\text{citizen cooperation} \times .817) + (\text{citizen cooperation} \times \text{social media usage} \times .010)$. The model having no significant coefficients seems to be due to the high collinearity between the interaction term and the independent variables. Therefore, the model was rerun without the interaction term.

The second model run without the interaction is a significant predictor of police legitimacy since the p-value is $< .05$ ($F(2,73) = 13.929$, $p = .001$). This model predicts 27.6% legitimacy since $R^2 = .276$. Cooperation significantly contributes to the model since $p < .05$ ($t = 5.249$, $p = .001$). Social media is not a statistically significant contributor to the model since $p > .05$ for this model. The equation for this model is police legitimacy = $.153 + (\text{social media usage} \times -.001) + (\text{citizen cooperation} \times 1.185)$. This model predicts that for every increase of 1 for cooperation, police legitimacy increases by 1.185.

Hypothesis 3 Answer:

This model is a significant predictor of citizen cooperation since the p-value is $< .05$ ($F(3, 72) = 10.082$, $p < .001$). This model explains 29.6% of the variance of citizen cooperation ($R^2 = .296$). Police legitimacy significantly contributes to the model since $p < .05$ ($t = 2.539$, $p = .013$). Social media usage and the interaction (social media usage \times police legitimacy) are not statistically significant contributors to the model since $p > .05$.

The equation for this model is citizen cooperation = $1.338 + (\text{social media usage} \times .014) + (\text{police legitimacy} \times .449) + (\text{police legitimacy} \times \text{social media usage} \times -.005)$. This model predicts that for every increase of 1 in police legitimacy, cooperation increases by .449.

Hypothesis 4 Answer:

The first model (with only the control variables) is not significant since the p change $> .05$ (F change (3, 72) = 2.168, p change = .099). The second model (which added the 2 IV/predictor variables) does add a significant explanation of variance, even considering the controlling variables since p change $< .05$ (F change (2, 70) = 11.452, p change $< .001$). Since the second

model has a significant R² change, the variables are significant above and beyond the controlling variables (social media usage and police legitimacy). The only significant coefficient in the second model is CC since p-value < .05 ($t = 4.786$, $p < .001$). Social media does not significantly contribute to the prediction of legitimacy (the DV/predicted variable). When controlled for demographic variables, this model predicts that for every increase of 1 in cooperation, police legitimacy increases by 1.118.

5. Discussion

Three main conclusions resulted from this study. The main finding that came through consistently is that police legitimacy and cooperation are significantly associated, as seen in the regressions, in predicting police legitimacy or cooperation. When predicting police legitimacy (Ho2, Ho4), cooperation was the only significant predictor. When predicting cooperation (Ho3), police legitimacy was the only significant predictor. Secondly, police legitimacy was significantly predicted by cooperation (Ho4), even after controlling for age, gender, and education. Further, age, gender, and education were not significant predictors of police legitimacy. Finally, social media usage did not predict police legitimacy or cooperation in the regressions for (Ho2, Ho3, or Ho4), and social media usage was not predicted significantly by police legitimacy and cooperation or their interactions (Ho1).

This study examined the associations between the variables of social media usage, police legitimacy, and police cooperation, while including relevant interactions between these variables, and whether these variables were still associated after controlling for age, gender, and education. Social media can create a single message that combines sound, print, and visual information. The information it holds can be quickly disseminated to a large audience (Hu et al., 2018). With media depicting police officers as being unable to address essential crime issues and the recorded videos from citizens creating and bolstering negative perceptions of law enforcement, knowing the effects of exposure to these videos on social media is essential (Parry et al., 2019; Shi et al., 2018). Social media has seen numerous videos or images of police indulging in misconduct or using deadly force being shared online. These images can either support the idea that police are efficient or lead to the questioning of law enforcement's accountability or effectiveness (Boateng & Kaiser, 2019).

Current research argues that videos present viewers with a unique point of view, providing distinct pieces of information that can influence perceptions differently. Given the impact of recordings on perceptions of the police, legitimacy is an important topic to address (Parry et al., 2019). Other studies have found that people were more willing to cooperate with police when they believed the officers behaved appropriately, ethically, and procedurally (Kwak et al., 2019). Recent research found that legitimacy appeared to be an anchor for citizens' evaluation of police. When officers were not viewed as legitimate, their actions were challenged, their decisions not accepted, and their directives ignored by citizens (Moule et al., 2019).

5.1 Limitations

This research has a few limitations. The first is external validity, the degree to which the research results are generalizable to study participants, settings, and materials beyond what was included in the study (Warner, 2013). This study broadly analyzed social media usage by analyzing various platforms. Not all social media sites can be considered the same, as they may not be able to load or post videos or images of police misconduct. Focusing on one particular social media site could bring forth different results. The study also does not analyze how many videos of police misconduct have been seen on their platforms. The failure to analyze the number of videos that citizens see can impact the results of social media usage and how it impacts police legitimacy and cooperation.

5.2 Recommendations for Further Research

This research did not ask study participants how many videos of police misconduct they saw on social media platforms. In the future, researchers should measure in some way how many videos of police misconduct the study participants have seen. Knowing how often a person has seen or shared these videos can also play a significant role in how they view police and cooperate with them. Researchers can also analyze how many of these citizens with negative perceptions of the police have had face-to-face encounters with law enforcement that helped shape their views.

5.3 Conclusion

This study examined the associations between social media usage, police legitimacy, and police cooperation, and whether these variables are still associated after controlling for age, gender, and education. This research found no evidence that social media usage was associated with cooperation or citizens' views of police legitimacy, but it did find a statistically significant association between citizen cooperation and citizens' views of police legitimacy. Given the results of this study, it can be assumed that negative views of legitimacy can lead to lower levels of cooperation, and positive perceptions can lead to higher cooperation. Based on these results, police should investigate ways to increase their legitimacy to improve citizens' cooperation. The police can improve their legitimacy by having ongoing community partnerships and dialog that can help them gauge the community's perception and foster trust between the police and the community they serve (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). Positive results can be achieved by the police improving their legitimacy. This study shows that citizens who see police as legitimate will be more willing to cooperate with law enforcement by reporting crimes, acting as witnesses, and testifying in court, which would assist police manage crime more effectively.

References

- Alitavoli, R., & Kaveh, E. (2018). The U.S. Media's effect on public's crime expectations: A cycle of cultivation and agenda-setting theory. *Societies*, 8(3), 58. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8030058>

- Boateng, F. D., & Kaiser, K. (2019). Trust and confidence in media and criminal justice institutions. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 63(12), 2213-2233. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X19845784>
- Boivin, R., Gendron, A., Faubert, C., & Poulin, B. (2017). The malleability of attitudes toward the police: Immediate effects of the viewing of police use of force videos. *Police Practice & Research*, 18(4), 366-375. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2016.1230063>
- Bolger, P. C. (2015). Just following orders: A meta-analysis of the correlates of American police officer use of force decisions. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 40(3), 466-492. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-014-9278-y>
- Bolger, P., & Walters, G. D. (2019). The relationship between police procedural justice, police legitimacy, and people's willingness to cooperate with law enforcement: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 60, 93-99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2019.01.001>
- Choi, J. (2019). Elaborating differential impact of media exposure on perceptions of police between criminal justice majors and non-criminal justice majors. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 30(4), 567-584. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2019.1617324>
- Lee, S., & Lee, J. (2021). Impact of propensity to trust on the perception of police: An integrated framework of legitimacy perspective. *Policing*, 44(6), 1108-1122. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-03-2021-0036>
- Madon, N. S., Murphy, K., & Sargeant, E. (2017). Promoting police legitimacy among disengaged minority groups: Does procedural justice matter more? *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 17(5), 624-642. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895817692849>
- Moule, R. K., Burruss, G. W., Parry, M. M., & Fox, B. (2019). Assessing the direct and indirect effects of legitimacy on public empowerment of police: A study of public support for police militarization in America. *Law & Society Review*, 53(1), 77-107. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12379>
- National Institute of Justice. (2016). Police use of force. Retrieved from <https://www.nij.gov/topics/law-enforcement/officer-safety/use-offorce/pages/welcome.a.spx>
- Niu, C., Jiang, Z., Liu, H., Yang, K., Song, X., & Li, Z. (2020). The influence of media consumption on public risk perception: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Risk Research*, 25(1), 21-47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2020.1819385>
- Nix, J. (2017a). Do the police believe that legitimacy promotes cooperation from the public? *Crime & Delinquency*, 63(8), 951-975. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128715597696>
- Nix, J. (2017b). Police perceptions of their external legitimacy in high and low crime areas of the community. *Crime and Delinquency*, 63(10), 1250-1278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128715620627>

- Perry, M. M., Moule, R. K., & Dario, L. M. (2019). Technology-mediated exposure to police-citizen encounters: A quasi-experimental assessment of consequences for citizen perceptions. *Justice Quarterly*, 36(3), 412-436. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2017.1374435>
- Reynolds, J. J., Estrada-Reynolds, V., & Nunez, N. (2018). Development and validation of the Attitudes towards Police Legitimacy Scale. *Law and Human Behavior*, 42(2), 119-134. <https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000281>
- Rosenberger, J. S., & Dierenfeldt, R. (2020). Media and confidence in the police: Differences across race/ethnicity. *American Journal of Criminal Justice: AJCJ*, 47(3), 589-613. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09603-8>
- Roche, S. P., Pickett, J. T., & Gertz, M. (2015). The scary world of online news? Internet news exposure and public attitudes toward crime and justice. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 32(2), 215-236. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-015-9261-x>
- Schreurs, W., Kerstholt, J. H., de Vries, P. W., & Giebels, E. (2018). Citizen participation in the police domain: The role of citizens' attitude and morality. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 46(6), 775-789. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.21972>
- Shah, Z., Chu, J., Ghani, U., Qaisar, S., & Hassan, Z. (2019). Media and altruistic behaviors: The mediating role of fear of victimization in cultivation theory perspective. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 42, 101336. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2019.101336>
- Shi, L., Roche, S. P., & McKenna, R. M. (2018). Media consumption and crime trend perceptions: A longitudinal analysis. *Deviant Behavior*, 40(12), 1480-1492. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2018.1519129>
- U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. (2009). Building Trust between the police and the citizens they serve: An internal affairs promising practices guide for local law enforcement. Building Trust between the Police and the Citizens They Serve (usdoj.gov)
- Walsh, J. P., & O'Connor, C. (2019). Social media and policing: A review of recent research. *Sociology Compass*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12648>
- Warner, R. M. (2013). *Applied statistics*. SAGE publications.
- White, M. D., Mulvey, P., & Dario, L. M. (2016). Arrestees' perceptions of the police: Exploring procedural justice, legitimacy, and willingness to cooperate with police across offender types. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 43(3), 343-364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854815602501>

Acknowledgments

Not Applicable

Authors contributions

Not Applicable

Funding

Not Applicable

Competing interests

Not Applicable

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Macrothink Institute.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)