

I. **Premise**

Which role can social media fulfil in the field of crime prevention?

- a. What are the advantages and disadvantages of social media in the communication towards the citizens?
 - i. Which impact does social media have on preventive behaviour? Should this be investigated academically?
 - ii. Which social media should be used?
- b. What are the advantages and disadvantages of social media for the communication between security and prevention partners?
 - i. Which social media should be used?
- c. What is the role of the Federal Government Service Internal Affairs regarding social media in the field of crime prevention?
- d. What is the role of the various partners in relation to social media?

« Social media cannot replace the classical channels, it is an and/or story »

II. **Discussions**

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Advantages and disadvantages of the use of social media towards the citizen

- Advantages

An advantage of social media is that it is not boring, and it can be funny. Social media should be appealing from the very first moment on, because otherwise, it is disregarded right away. Prevention movies usually take too long and start too slow.

Another advantage is that the information can be easily shared.

- Disadvantages

A disadvantage of social media is that it is limited. Not everyone participates. Not every target audience will be reached. With social media, people must be able to find you to see the message.

There are doubts if social media changes people's behaviour. Social media have a very short and limited effect on crime prevention. However, testimonies of victims and offenders may well have an effect. As long as one has not become a victim, one does not feel involved in the phenomenon.

Recommendations for the use of social media

- One of the dangers of social media is that things can be interpreted the wrong way, causing fear instead of the desired effect. Movie clips that are too shocking will not be credible.
- The citizen should not be overloaded with messages. It is better to post a quality message now and then, instead of a continuous stream (quality is more important than quantity).
- Social media should be complemented with classical means of communication, such as posters. These can reach target audiences that do not use Facebook, and they have a bigger range. They can draw attention and be the link to other channels.
- Social media are a good medium to draw attention, and could be coupled to something or somebody popular (since prevention is not an attractive subject). Because of the limited budget, there is a danger to be perceived as being amateurish.
- After some time, everybody becomes saturated. We should take into account that the form/use of social media will change.
- It is proposed to make a cost/benefit analysis, since the use of social media takes lots of time and energy, and it is a volatile medium.

Type of social media per target audience

Citizen	Security partners
Facebook (targeted to a wider audience, and has the advantage that links and movie clips can be posted)	Less social media
YouTube movie clips	Closed communication, no open forum
Twitter (young audience)	Email preferred
Other media such as TV, teletext	

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The role of social media should not be overestimated. It is a channel just like any other.

The choice of a social medium depends on the target audience. One needs to be aware of which target audience should be reached. The various target audiences should also still be supported and informed, making use of the classical channels.

There is fear for panic reactions.

Twitter

Little is known about the effect. It cannot be checked if the link has been clicked on.

Twitter is more used by people in the field. It is more volatile and limited.

Twitter is not suited for distributing prevention messages. 140 characters is too short, click-through to a website.

Twitter is good to announce events.

Twitter is not yet established with a large part of the population. It is interesting to see professionally what happens.

We should be aware of its importance to young people. We should adapt to the target audience: be attractive to the target audience, such as with funny cartoons, movie clips, etc.

Challenges

A lot of information reaches us, and it is difficult to process all of it.

It is a challenge to watch over the message yourself; we have less control over the messages that are distributed ('everyone's a journalist'). It is important for the authorities to control this. We need to draft a strategy beforehand to determine how to react to certain messages. It is difficult to follow everything and to react to everything.

Use of social media among professionals

Certain messages can be distributed via Twitter, instead of via email. However, this cannot replace the normal communication. It is an and/or story.

Impact of social media on prevention

People handle them superficially. Only victims are interested. One wonders to which extent messages on social media can influence the behaviour of people. When there are too many messages, one disregards them.

A shock effect should be looked for. It is better to have one striking campaign than to have many messages.

Role of Internal Affairs

- Supporting role.
- Launch of a social media campaign, adapted to the social media: how do we deal with Twitter/Facebook regarding training, starters kit, etc.
- It would be interesting if someone investigated for his or her bachelor's degree which target audience can be reached with social media.
- See how it is done in The Netherlands.

Use of social media with the Dutch police

The Dutch police intensely uses social media, but in a controlled way.

All community police officers use Twitter, and have received training for this. The same messages are being sent all over The Netherlands. Lots of thought is given about what is being sent into the world. The community police officers receive useful reactions from the citizens. This info is processed and used.

In addition, Facebook is also used (per community police officer or service), as well as WhatsApp.

This is also an and/or story: older citizens are reached via other channels.

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Advantages and disadvantages of social media

- Advantages
 - o Reactions are received.
 - o One can distribute his message in a very short time.
 - o Lots of people can be reached in a short timespan.
 - o With a certain tweet, the community police officer can put residents at ease, and thus reduce the feeling of insecurity.
 - o Social media is related to the 'new way of working': the time we worked from nine to five at a fixed location is over. People can do their job wherever they are, as well as tweet the whole day from wherever they are.
- Disadvantages
 - o Certain groups are not reached (but these are reached via other channels).
 - o There are few disadvantages when one knows how to handle it.
 - o Danger of signalling things via direct messaging. This does not replace the emergency numbers.

Recommendations

- We should evolve together with the trends in society: many young people as well as adults are present on social media.
- It is important to post positive messages.
- We should take care not to create unrest with our messages.
- Use of different channels depending on the target audience.
- One should deal consciously with these, keeping in mind that criminals can also follow the police (for example, with a digital neighbourhood investigation, not too much info should be given, in case the offenders also see this).

- With municipal prevention services: this must be fed from the police policy. The prevention service can cooperate herein. It is too narrow to tweet only from the prevention service.

Role of Internal Affairs

- Government participation.
- Provide guidance (attach a disclaimer).
- Drafting of a communication plan: what should this contain?
- Making sure that all community police officers have their proper email address.
- Making sure police officers have access to Twitter and Facebook.
- Purchasing quality material.

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- In favour of the use of social media.

Recommendations for the use of social media towards the citizen

- The message is important, not the channel.
- It is important to distribute the prevention message via as many channels as possible.
- Choice of channel: see what is popular, and anticipate on this.
- Not putting too much energy in it: there is a chance that social media will look completely different in a couple of years, or does not exist anymore.
- Danger: messages on Facebook cannot be deleted anymore.
- Taking care that this does not increase anxiety.
- When the prevention service does not have a lot to tell: surf along on social media of the police zones.
- Disadvantage: the public receives a forum to criticize. The threshold is indeed low. Someone is needed for follow-up. Moderation is important.

Use of social media among professionals

- Making Intranet available to the security partners: here, questions can be asked, and information can be posted.

Role of Internal Affairs

- Making available of tools (toolbox): all possible things can be placed here, so that our partners can consult it.
- This is also an and/or story: messages sent from federal as well as local level.

III. Conclusions

Use of social media towards the citizens

- Advantages

- With social media, many people can be reached in a short amount of time.
- Information is easily shared.
- It is an attractive and interactive medium (especially for young people), thanks to the use of movie clips and links.

- Disadvantages

- Social media has a light, short and limited effect on crime prevention.
- Social media does not reach all target audiences: only a part of the people one wishes to reach are actually reached, e.g. the elderly are not reached. With social media, people need to know where to find you in order to read the message.

- Recommendations

- Social media cannot replace the classical communication channels. It is an and/or story: we need to complement this with other communication channels. It is important to send the prevention message via as many channels as possible, and to use those channels that are the most popular at that moment.
- Per target audience, it needs to be decided which channel will be used. There is a preference to use Facebook as the communication channel to the citizen. With this, a wider public can be reached. Twitter is more directed towards a younger audience.
- The citizen should not be overloaded with messages. It is better to send a quality message from time to time, instead of a continuous stream (quality is more important than quantity).
- It is important to post positive messages. We need to take care that we do not increase anxiety with our messages.

Use of social media with the partners

- There is a preference to communicate more privately via other channels, such as email or intranet.
- Possibly use Twitter to announce events.

Role of Internal Affairs

- Supporting role for our partners: provide training, elaborate a starters kit.
- Launch social media campaign.
- Carry out a study on the effect of social media on crime prevention, and which target audiences we effectively reach.

- Provide a site (intranet or website) where our partners can find all tools.
- It is important as government, to watch over the messages that are distributed. Beforehand, a strategy needs to be drafted on how we will react to certain messages. Someone needs to follow up the messages and act as moderator.

IV. Action points

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